

CORE COMPETENCES

for

INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CAREERS

**Vol. 1 : A roadmap from general careers skills
to EU-Focused expertise**

Directed and edited by

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1st ed. (2026)



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de TOULOUSE**

CORE COMPETENCES FOR INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CAREERS

A roadmap from general careers skills to EU-Focused expertise

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Directors

Pierre Jean THIL and Oana Andreea MACOVEI

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Introduction

PIERRE-JEAN THIL

(Lawyer, Academic entrepreneur, Researcher)

Since the creation of the European School of Law (ESL) in 2014, every year, hundreds of students dream of working in the International and European sphere. Throughout their academic journey, they have the opportunity to discover new cultures and different legal systems. The uniqueness of its programs reflects the ESL's ambition to promote excellence and new opportunities through internationalization and multilingualism. In this context, helping students to navigate the fascinating professional environment is essential. Indeed, the different paths they can take and the countless opportunities available to them remain often unclear after graduation.

In response to this specific challenge, multiple ESL projects were created as part of the professionalization pillar to which I contributed proactively for several years. These include large-scale initiatives, such as forums on European and international careers, as well as more targeted, individual actions carried out as a European Personnel Selection Office Ambassador, or supervised projects conducted with private and institutional partners in recent years. The objective was clear: to familiarise students with professional practice and the everyday reality of working in European and international affairs, helping them to make informed choices while developing their skills. Subsequently, specific course modules were introduced within the Master's programs at the European School of Law under the leadership of its directors, Prof. Lukas Rass-Masson and Associate Prof. Oana Andreea Macovei. I had the privilege of coordinating these modules from 2022 to 2025. These 'core' skill-oriented courses were designed to stimulate students' curiosity and critical thinking while raising their awareness of European and International career opportunities. More specifically, I adapted the Core Competencies Module to address two specific needs: access to information and guidance to anticipate their future career opportunities.

Firstly, there is nothing more inspiring for a student than meeting a professional who shares their dreams, fears, doubts, and failures. This transfer of practical knowledge and experience differs profoundly from the 'theoretical knowledge' traditionally taught at university. Yet it is equally essential, particularly at the Master's level, and provides fertile ground for learning. The students discovered entirely new professions, they developed an interest in defending a cause, or they even realised that their initial career plans did not correspond at all to what they truly wanted to achieve in life. Encounters with representatives of European and UN institutions, business lawyers, in-house counsel, and lobbyists from diverse backgrounds provided invaluable opportunities. Students were also encouraged to reflect on the notion of European and international careers, which helped to dispel

common misconceptions. This human dimension was at the heart of these modules, which consistently put students at the center.

In the same vein, the second underlying objective of these courses was to expose students to the everyday reality of such professions — to gain practical experience — beyond the 'walls of Academia'. The goal was to ensure that they acquired the necessary understanding and skills to successfully navigate future internships and professional careers. Within this framework, they were invited to put themselves in the shoes of prospective candidates preparing for EU competitions, parliamentary assistants, legal advisers, or international negotiators. Realism was emphasized in the projects. These activities were also guided and supervised by representatives of the relevant professional communities. Students were directly confronted with the feedback and advice of professionals through activities such as mock job interviews, drafting briefings, amendments, or advocacy notes, and simulating the demanding assessment center of former EU recruitment competitions.

Working, advancing, and building a career in an international or European environment is the very purpose of the course module that served as a foundation for this Guide on European and international careers. This Project started in 2022, in the MADIC Module, Core Competencies for International careers, with a specific demand from my students. They underlined the need for an accessible source of information on European and international careers. After carefully weighing two compelling options—drafting an informational corpus summarizing the various exchanges and presentations delivered by professionals or entrusting the students with compiling it themselves under my supervision, I decided to choose the latter. And this choice ultimately led to the first Volume of the Guide, currently available.

Providing information on European and International careers could take the form of a static work outlining the different types of existing professions. Alternatively, it could adopt a more dynamic approach, firmly anchored in the reality and functioning of the professional world—that is, through the prism of competencies. The approach proposed here is an intermediate one. The volumes are structured thematically, without seeking to produce a functional catalogue of all possible career paths. This collaborative project follows an empirical method aimed at systematising skills by career field, to guide the choices of junior graduates interested in European and International careers. It is a student-driven project, carefully reviewed and amended by its pedagogical coordinators. Moreover, it constitutes a valuable source of information, providing ready-to-use insights for those wishing to evolve in an international environment. This volume, now in your possession, represents the first set of material designed to guide you within the promising and fascinating world of International and European careers.

OANA ANDREEA MACOVEI

(Associate Professor Toulouse Capitole University)

Core competences for International and European careers represents one of the key projects developed in the framework of the European School of Law (ESL). With the constant support of the ESL Director, Prof. Zoé Jacquemin, this rewarding experience, started several years ago, bears its fruits, in the format of a printed Guide for junior graduates.

As a training Module proposed initially in the MADIC Masters, it was a major component of the professional pillar envisioned by Prof. Lukas Rass-Masson, during his mandate as the ESL Director. And as a Deputy Director, in charge of the professional orientation, I initiated the training sessions in 2021. Despite an exclusively online format, during the COVID-19, on both sides of the screen, students and professionals were eager to meet and explore concretely the requirements to develop a legal profession in an International and European format. The Module was thus becoming the necessary bridge between the Academic and the Professional world. Starting 2022, Pierre-Jean Thil upgraded the Module introducing more developed training sessions and direct interviews conducted by students with International and European professionals from both the public and private sector. This effort of the MADIC students led to an original document of more than a hundred pages-thoroughly gathering precise guidelines on writing a CV, preparing a Cover letter or discussing in depth about the daily responsibilities of a Civil servant in the European Commission.

The decision was taken to consolidate this foundation and make the project visible to all students, as a necessary road map to discover, before entering the professional world. The idea of an accessible Guide developed rapidly, encompassing specific Volumes structured around the competences required in the vast professional area of International and European careers. In this endeavour, new cohorts were associated from other ESL Masters, namely MINTEC and CEPIL. The legacy of the first draft was preserved in an effort to clarify the structure and enhance its coherence. Moreover, the initial contributors, now ESL Alumni, continued to support the work of their colleagues, completing the content with the fresh insights from their professional experiences.

The Guide you are about to read is therefore the result of a collective effort made during several years, by multiple generations of ESL students and represents, hopefully, the start of a long-lasting tradition among them.

It is not an Academic memoir and it is not an internship report. Its goal is to initiate and accompany junior graduates in the early steps of their professional careers. And the first Volume lays the blue print for achieving this goal.

Following a funnel approach, it was essential to initially identify the general competences required in the spectrum of International and European careers (Chapter 1). And afterwards, an in-depth presentation concerns the specificities of the EU career (Chapter 2). This choice aligns with the ESL students' preferences to be exploring one of the chosen professional pathways, at the end of their legal studies.

However, this is one of the multiple career paths available for junior graduates of Law Programs. In the following Volumes, other specific professions in the public and private sector shall be explored, as well as the options to navigate from one sector to the other. There is indeed no univocal pathway to develop an International and European career. Also, the Guide did not develop a descriptive approach on all career types. Its scope is precisely to underline this dynamic dimension, with a focus on developing and training one's competences for the most suitable job position.

Moreover, the Guide is not an analytical study as it focuses exclusively on the practical dimension of legal professions. Indeed, it includes concrete illustrations, for example in the first Volume, of the responsibilities linked to working in EU institutions, the skills and aptitudes required or the do's and don'ts of passing an interview during the EPSO procedure to become an EU civil servant. Without establishing an exhaustive list of competences, the Guide focuses on the core ones, that are adapted to the specificities of the legal professions in the International and European field.

Last but not least important, the Guide is written by the ESL students with the help of Alumni and based on the direct meetings with the professionals. As pedagogical coordinators, we imposed a specific formal and substantive structure, constantly reviewing the general coherence of the project. As it gathered, during the years, a significant number of contributors, a major challenge was to preserve their original input, while ensuring the project's cohesion, in terms of vocabulary, the style of writing, the clarity and verification of sources. All errors, misprints or inconsistencies are therefore incumbent solely on the coordinators.

Congratulations to the entire team of authors for an amazing effort to directly accompany the future generations of young graduates in making the first steps in the exciting world of International and European careers!

The feedback of the professionals associated to this project is vital and we wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who accepted to meet with the students and accompany them in the project.

Thank you to the ESL team for their constant support!

Chapter 1. The Competences *lato sensu* to develop International and European careers

A European or International career is a diverse and rewarding experience that offers excellent opportunities, as it is encouraged by a large number of companies and institutions. Contrary to working locally or in one's home country, such a career presents more often intercultural and multilingual aspects that can be enriching, personally and professionally, and it is usually synonymous with expatriation or secondment. This path, however, also requires a certain level of open-mindedness and adaptability.

It is indeed a chance for people speaking multiple languages and looking to travel, and a way to achieve career development in a wider geographical setup. Joining a European or International institution allows you to work on a broad spectrum of areas that transcend national policies, providing any fresh graduate or professional with an exhilarating career path.

Nevertheless, working in a European or International institution can be challenging, starting from the application process, which requires a lot of forethought and preparation. These positions involve intensive work, and recruiters will always seek competent, hard-working candidates who are willing to demonstrate they fit the job description. Such posts interest graduates and professionals; one must have a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the competences that recruiters look for, to be able to develop the suited skillset for the requested positions.

Yet, the notion of an ideal candidate does not exist, since through the shared experience of many professionals, working in these institutions, who were once candidates, it becomes clear that each candidate has several competences that create a unique profile with its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, different people from distinct backgrounds and with specific competences can seek such a career, but some common requirements remain necessary. They can include a minimum level of study, usually set at the Masters, a path with a certain link to Law, and sometimes a multilingual proficiency, including at least English, in addition to the mother tongue.

Although this presentation is available to whoever wishes to pursue a career in a European or International organization, a distinct portfolio of competences needs to align with those required to work in such an environment. Consolidating these competences, mobilizing them adequately and effectively, and highlighting them to recruiters can go a long way in making you stand out from the crowd.

The following chapter will therefore explore the different competences required by these institutions and will provide you with pointers on what they may be, how to identify which ones a candidate has

or should be working on developing, to create a profile that would fit such careers (Section 1). Furthermore, it will provide you with advice on how to enhance and promote one's competencies to their advantage during interviews, in their CVs, and through the entire recruitment process (Section 2).

SECTION 1. THE CANDIDATE AS A "CORE" OF COMPETENCES

A candidate is a person applying to a position or job offer, through a process that tests their competences, as a way to determine whether they have what it takes for a job. Employers will usually also look for the added value of the candidate for the institution, as regards their particular experience, how they will contribute to its growth, for example, thanks to a specific proficiency that is lacking or needed in that organization.

This person is therefore more than just an academic record of accomplishment; a candidate is also an individual, represented by a bundle of competencies that make them unique and allow them to distinguish themselves in the recruitment process. Access to a variety of International and European carriers is possible through a multitude of pathways at your disposal that you may follow. Indeed, depending on what you are proficient in, you might not be a match for a position, but can be better suited for another.

This first Section will illustrate that there are more competences evaluated than the ones usually mentioned, thus allowing you to understand better how to identify and hone them (§1). Moreover, as a candidate in a recruitment process, you should properly understand it to be equipped to participate (§2).

PARAGRAPH §1. IDENTIFYING THE COMPETENCES

To identify them, it is important to understand what they are. Competence/competency (these terms will have an equivalent meaning hereunder) is different from just the knowledge a person has or the skills they acquire while completing a degree. They represent all types of abilities, as well as the attitude or behaviour that is required for a job, including both individual and organizational competencies¹. This could be your team management skills, for example, your affinity for public speaking, or your critical thinking.

When it comes to the application process, organizations will usually create a framework in which they will determine what you, as a candidate, should bring to the table to be accepted. Usually, in public

¹ Hoffmann, T. (1999), "The meanings of competency", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 23 n°. 6, pp. 275-286.

institutions, the process varies from one organization to another, and can be more strenuous, including multiple steps and different forms of evaluation, like an interview, a case study, or even a group role-play presentation, such as the ones within the application process at the European Commission.

The core competencies include not only those essential to the job, but also those that make the difference between you and other applicants, thus providing an advantage in the selection process.

You have probably heard of hard skills and soft skills, the most common framework, which distinguishes between what you learn at school or through training, and the more interpersonal abilities, like social skills. As a candidate, however, it is more relevant to consider the specific categories of competences, so you can determine the ones you will hone and highlight for your application. It is important to focus on personal characteristics that will make a person better at a specific job, and therefore more likely to be hired. For example, if you want to work at the European Commission, an affinity for problem-solving or a result-oriented way of working can help you face complex situations by finding creative solutions. Your adaptability and quick learning can also give you a competitive edge in the selection process. Keep in mind that life or job experiences are the proper tools to illustrate the competencies brought forward.

A common distinction between competencies exists concerning technical skills, transferable skills (therefore useful in multiple situations and jobs), and social skills. However, there is another way to separate those, while being more concerned with what recruiters might target. This classification, based on the experience of previous candidates currently working in those organizations, will help you understand how to separate competences and have a better approach during the process of recruitment.

- **Learning skills:** could include listening, the ability to be independent, curiosity, perseverance, and openness to change and evolve. The willingness to listen and watch to learn is highly appreciated by recruiters because it usually entails that the candidate can adapt easily and work efficiently.
- **Action/reaction skills:** refer to problem-solving skills and flexibility, but also leadership competency in certain situations. Specifically, situational awareness includes knowing the job and the risks that may arise in a particular project, therefore enhancing anticipation and rapid reaction skills. Moreover, it entails adapting the initiative and communication to the specific context.
- **Interaction skills:** include all the competencies showing that you can interact and work with your peers, such as communication, teamwork, or sociability. Depending on the circumstances, leadership could also be placed in this last category.

The first step in preparing for job or internship interviews is to identify your skills, which will also help you determine whether this type of job is right for you. You then need to link your skills to the keywords in the job offer to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role.

This presentation of the relevant competencies required for an International or European career helps you identify and distinguish them in a recruitment process, for further development. It is also important to follow their constant evolution, depending on societal demand and labour market needs, and always be open to adapting your skillset, if necessary.

PARAGRAPH §2. CONSOLIDATING THE COMPETENCES

Access to an International or a European career depends on more than academic knowledge. Additional skills are necessary to find suitable opportunities in this specific environment. It is therefore crucial to be aware of its requirements, actively seeking opportunities to develop the competences. The International and European arena is indeed an extensive network of practitioners and academics. The ability to forge connections that span across professional and cultural dimensions alike in this multi-lingual environment is crucial. Networking (A) and Language and Communication skills (B) can therefore be refined through various methods, not only as a young professional, but also during your studies.

A. Networking

Establishing and developing professional relationships is an invaluable career skill, specifically for an International and European one, as it focuses on a wider network than the domestic labor market. Networking is instrumental in identifying career opportunities and can provide invaluable support, guidance, and contacts during the application process, and subsequently, it helps to secure a potential internship or employment. This might seem a difficult skill to attain, especially in the early days of your professional life.

First, as a young professional, LinkedIn and Networking events are generally the main tools to develop your network. These are the main tools needed to develop an effective networking strategy. The first one is a fundamental platform to find suitable connections and to display significant achievements in your field. The latter encompasses a wide range of events, from conferences and workshops to seminars, which offer excellent opportunities to meet new people that can be invaluable for your future career. Specifically for an International and European career, you can apply to renowned programs that have proven to be a springboard to launch your professional career. For example, the French VIE “Volontariat International en Entreprise” (International Corporate Volunteering) and VIA

“Volontariat International en Administration” (International Administrative Volunteering)² have consistently helped EU citizens to network and to learn new skills. These programs are a French Government initiative that allows individuals, between 18 to 28 years old, to gain international work experience in either French companies abroad, or public administrations. While they are only available for European citizens, they provide participants with the opportunity to strengthen specific competences such as adaptability and cross-cultural communication. They also develop a well-structured global mindset that is indispensable for any experience in the International and European setup. These programs foster international mobility and can provide with remarkable global exposure that is significantly valued in both International and European institutions.

Second, as a student, multiple tools help you build a professional network. You can enhance this skill, on the one hand, abroad, through the Erasmus+³. This program, funded by the EU, offers multiple mobility opportunities, including internships and study semesters. By spending some time away from your home country, you would be opening up to people from other cultures, in addition to the unique chance to learn a new language. On the other hand, in your home University, participate in the different programs and events proposed, such as:

- **Joining student associations and extracurricular activities**

The Moot Court competitions offer an excellent framework to train and test the competences required for an International and European career. Participating, for example, in Model United Nations⁴, Jessup⁵, or Vis Moot⁶ provides you with an opportunity to not only dive deep into the world of international relations and diplomacy across countries, but it also allows you to extensively enhance your knowledge of the different legal systems worldwide. You can gain hands-on experience in the functioning of the specific international institutions involved, such as the different United Nations Committees, the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, etc. These activities are highly appreciated by recruiters in International Organizations as they illustrate the candidate’s motivation and interest in tackling cross-border challenges. Finally, your participation will also reflect your

² Business France, Mon Vie Via — International Mobility Platform, available at: <https://mon-vie-via.businessfrance.fr/en>.

³ European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme, available at: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>.

⁴ United Nations, Model United Nations (MUN), available at: <https://www.un.org/en/mun>.

⁵ International Law Students Association (ILSA), Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, available at: <https://www.ilsa.org/about-jessup/>.

⁶ Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot, available at: <https://www.vismoot.org/>.

aptitude for research, analysis, and argumentation, which is greatly valued in such environments. It is also the first step in building a network.

- **Talking to your professors to foster new connections**

Building a positive relationship with your instructors can allow you to gain additional insight into your field of study and benefit from personalized guidance. They can also assist you in connecting with practitioners who might help you reach your professional goals. This type of networking is also important to secure letters of recommendation for potential opportunities.

Third and independent of your professional (in)experience, here are some tips and tricks to ensure that you benefit from your networking opportunities:

- **Update regularly your CV in multiple languages**
- **Prepare your elevator pitch:** A rich, concise, 30-second personal presentation based on your academic and professional path, your skills, and your aims and values, highlighting the elements that separate you from the pack. Crafting such a pitch will allow you to leave a memorable mark on the professionals you meet.
- **Conduct post-meeting follow-ups:** Always send a LinkedIn message or an email to the new contacts you make. This shows that you are proactive and interested in getting to know them further. You could thank them for connecting with you and express your enthusiasm about potential collaborations or discussions, thereby establishing a distinct presence and actively promoting your profile.

B. Languages

The International and European institutions are multi-lingual environments in which it is crucial to develop a strong language portfolio to effectively communicate and collaborate with colleagues and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. Proficiency in more than one language highlights your cultural knowledge, adaptability, and global outlook, which are specifically valued in such institutions. Various methods allow you to improve your language competences:

- **Language Courses:** Universities generally offer this opportunity that can prove beneficial, as well as online courses or downloadable language applications to provide an easy and affordable way to develop your skills in multiple languages.
- **Language cafés:** You can both enhance your linguistic abilities and develop your network.
- **International mobility programs:** It is specifically appreciated in International and European institutions and illustrates your experience and willingness to engage in cross-cultural interactions and collaborations.

Whatever your choice may be, developing your language skillset requires constant and dedicated practice. Regular training can allow you to become more comfortable with the language, improve your pronunciation, and expand your vocabulary.

PARAGRAPH §3. ALIGNING THE COMPETENCES WITH THE OPPORTUNITIES

Having well consolidated your competences, the following paragraph will outline the different ways in which you can find potential internships or job opportunities in International and European institutions. Finding offers requires proactivity on both online platforms (A) and by making use of your professional network (B).

A. The Online Job Hunting

Start by using search engines and specific keywords to narrow down your search results. You can opt for general queries such as “European Institutions Internship” or “Summer Trainings International Organizations” or search for specific internships in institutions you are interested in, such as “EU Commission Blue Book Program” or “WTO Internship Program”.

Job-seeking platforms provide you with many different opportunities and openings you can apply to. Job boards such as LinkedIn, Monster, Glassdoor compile all the different offers that you can subsequently filter out, thereby simplifying the entire process.

If you have a specific institution in mind, you should regularly keep an eye on their websites for any openings. This is highly important considering that other candidates, who tend to apply as soon as the offer is posted, can quickly fill the positions in notable institutions. Other jobs can also be subject to a stringent deadline. For instance, the EU Commission publishes a calendar containing all relevant dates for its upcoming Blue Book Program sessions. This includes application deadlines, pre-selection and selection phases, as well as the starting date for upcoming traineeships.

It is essential to remain informed by recurrently checking the respective institutions website or by subscribing to their newsletter. Do not hesitate to send an email! By taking the initiative of sending your CV and a letter of motivation to the institution directly, they might recruit you even if they were not seeking anyone to begin with. Moreover, the recruiter might decide to reach out to you if any potential openings come up. Nevertheless, you should always keep in mind the competences required for this particular institution, and make them stand out either in your resume or in your cover letter.

Moreover, your university might have a job board where Alumni post potential internship or job opportunities. There may even be departments within your school that assist you in integrating International and European careers. In France, for example, there are over 80 orientation services

known as “Service universitaire d’information et d’orientation (SUIO)” that can offer valuable assistance to search for and secure professional opportunities.

B. Harnessing your Professional Network

The most efficient way to find suitable opportunities is to reach out to the connections you have. Talking to the professionals you have met along the way, including your professors, can go a long way in landing amazing positions. In any scenario, they can always refer you to other professionals who might be better suited to your needs. Do not hesitate to contact your family and friends. Even if they work in different fields, they might always know people who can help you out.

Do not miss job fairs! Whether your university or other institutions organize them, they gather people looking for new recruits who might fit their needs. Print your CV, prepare your elevator pitch, and try to ask around as much as you can.

Also, don't forget to maintain your network by regularly checking in with your contacts or involving them in your projects.



To sum up, improving your competences and adequately mobilizing them is essential. By consolidating your skills, you not only establish a well-structured profile, but you will be able to distinguish yourself from the rest of the candidates. Developing all these aspects will allow you to go a long way in your search for an International and European career. It is also important to understand that a perfect profile does not exist for a candidate. The recruitment process in itself can differ depending on the organization, the recruiter, and the position. What can be considered crucial in one context can be entirely irrelevant in another. This does not only require you to look at the role description of the position you are targeting, but also to dive deep into the organization’s culture, objectives, and the specific challenges the job aims to address. Evaluating the needed skills and competences required for each opportunity, and articulating them suitably and coherently, goes a long way in securing the job or internship you are seeking.

In essence, the journey towards an International and European career is dynamic, marked by proactive adaptation and continuous learning.

SECTION 2: THE STANDARD FORMATS TO SHOWCASE THE COMPETENCES

As important as it is to develop your competences, it is also necessary to know how to articulate them for a proper job application. The motivation to work in a European or International organization is the

necessary but not the sufficient tool; a well-prepared candidacy is essential to maximise the applicant's chances for a positive response from any organization. Even though the recruitment process is specific to each employer, it generally relies on three main elements: the Curriculum Vitae-CV (§1), the cover letter (§2), and the interview (§3).

Of course, there are other documents to focus on as a candidate, such as reference letters, language certificates, and additional degrees. It is essential to have these documents on hand and to revise them at all times, to ensure that there are no formatting or spelling errors. A recruiter may not be as forgiving as a university professor, who extends a deadline or overlooks a small mistake. An individual who aims for a European or International career must be aware of the strict standards for candidates and their applications: for example, inconsistencies between a CV and a cover letter could lead a recruiter to dismiss a candidate. Retrospective regret will not help!

PARAGRAPH §1. THE CURRICULUM VITAE

Holding a perfect CV is a myth. Depending on the recruitment area, the criteria are different, which entails the necessary adaptation of the CV to what is expected of the candidate in that specific position. Thousands of candidates apply each year for jobs in International or European organizations. Known for being very selective, recruiters in this professional environment pay particular attention to the profile of their candidate.

The CV is intended to be a professional ID of the candidate. It presents the applicant's academic profile, language skills, and professional experiences and should leave no room for assumptions. The information provided must be accurate, specifically on achievements, as the potential plans for the future should be reserved for the cover letter.

The general presentation of a CV is particularly important. Given the number of candidates, it is usually read very quickly by recruiters and might not even reach them. Because of the demand, many companies opt for software/AI that will scan CVs for specific elements. It is therefore essential to propose a synthetic but effective presentation for the recruiter (or program) to judge whether or not the candidate corresponds to the proposed position, in an average of a minute and a half.

Lastly, it goes without saying that a candidate should never lie on their CV. Including erroneous information to correspond to the profile sought is only a waste of time, both for the recruiter and for the candidate. Any skills and even academic and professional experience are likely to be verified during an interview or even by contacting former institutions and/or employers listed by the candidate, meaning that any inaccuracy can be easily identified.

A. The content of a CV for International and European careers

CVs are usually required to contain the same basic information that can identify the candidate, as well as skills, experiences, and any other information that might come across as relevant for the desired position. The order in which the information is presented may depend on the layout chosen to construct the CV and should also vary accordingly to the application and the candidate's profile (e.g., if the applicant does not have relevant experience for the desired position, it is appropriate to place the education section first). Find below, the three main questions you should clarify while writing your CV.

What are the usual components of a CV?

- Personal information: Surname, first name, age, current address, telephone number (do not forget the area code), link to professional accounts, and e-mail address;
- Work experience: Employer, duration of experience, tasks assigned, and skills acquired;
- Academic training: Diploma obtained/aimed, university/institution, year, and honours, if applicable;
- Languages spoken: the level should be mentioned only if certified by an organization, usually following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (e.g., TOEFL, TOEIC, DALF, Goethe-Zertifikat; CELI, CAPLE, DELE);
- Voluntary work and other projects;
- Sport and hobbies (if appropriate for the situation);
- Academic and professional recognitions.

As a young student, you might feel you lack professional experience. However, it is important to emphasize your participation in clubs, volunteer projects, and other extracurricular activities. For instance, you may have organized events, led teams, or managed emergency situations. Be sure to describe these experiences with two or three bullet points, using clear, engaging sentences and including relevant keywords and skills.

Relevant experience outside the legal field may also be useful. Don't be afraid to mention summer jobs; if you think in terms of skills, you will see the connections between all sectors of activity. Simply consider how the skills you've gained are practically useful.

When listing your education, emphasize the technical knowledge relevant to the position. Include any publications, group projects, or blog articles you have written, as these showcase your writing skills. It is not always necessary to add your LinkedIn profile, since it may direct others to information you prefer not to share.

In the current globalised labour-market, recruiters receive hundreds of applications for the same offer, making the candidate screening part of the recruiting job more time-consuming than ever. The solution found to choose the suitable person for the job proposed was Artificial Intelligence and other ATS (Application Tracking Software), such as Affinda and Vervoe. They select the CVs containing terms that match the job description through the identification of keywords and sentences. A CV that does not have the right wording might not even reach the recruiter in the first place, as is the case, for example, in organizations like the EU, which receives a high number of applications for each new vacancy.

One might distribute numerous job applications using the same CV, neglecting the importance of both tailoring it for a particular job position and incorporating the key skills and keywords outlined in the job description. However, those words must be seen as the minimum expected by the recruiter, and using them undoubtedly raises a candidate's chances of being chosen.

Therefore, the words used in the CV's skills and competences sections are central in the selection process. Some general rules must be considered when choosing the appropriate wording:

- Is this term too general and/or common?
- Is this term used in the job description (or similar to the ones used), and does it fit the job requirements?
- Can the candidate explain how those terms fit into their previous experiences?
- Can the candidate explain how these words will fit into the desired role?

Reading the job application thoroughly and customizing the CV to its profile characteristics will not only increase the chances of passing a first screening, but it also shows the recruiter the applicant's genuine interest by the proper terms utilized. Use the terms and keywords from the job offer.

How to personalize your CV?

A resume is read linearly, so it must be organized from the perspective of the recruiter looking for a specific profile. You therefore need to reverse your thinking and put yourself in the recruiter's shoes, asking yourself what information they are looking for, as the time spent reading a resume can be less than 50 seconds.

The resume complements the cover letter; you need to select information wisely to avoid redundancy. To do this, you need to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the job posting.

To prepare a resume and cover letter, you will need to do some preparatory work. In a separate document, list all your experience and qualifications, everything that contours your profile. Provide details and as much information as possible about the projects you have worked on, your experience,

and the tasks you have performed. You can then use this document to select information based on the job offer and the profile sought. You can keep this document for future applications by filling it in overtime with your new experiences and completed projects.

This will allow you to create a personalized CV tailored to each job application. “Different” does not mean entirely new; it entails that certain experiences or minor details should be adjusted accordingly. This means that not all experience gained through associations or other organizations is valuable, nor should all of it be included in a CV; some details might be better suited for your cover letter. The important thing is to spark the recruiter’s interest while staying precise. When listing extracurricular activities avoid just mentioning, for example, theatre or boxing, instead, specify the duration of these activities (number of years) and your current level. Such information is valuable as it can engage the recruiter and serve as potential discussion points in interviews, creating connections between you and the recruiter. These details can also help the recruiter better understand your personality.

What terms should I utilize in my CV?

The choice of words can easily make a CV too common and uninteresting for the recruiter. On top of being overused, the usual expressions “detail-oriented”, “motivated”, “independent”, and “hard worker” will not necessarily help the candidate stand out. Paying attention to detail, working hard, and demonstrating motivation and independence during work are the bare minimum expected in any job, including in International and European careers. The added value of a candidate relies on elements that differentiate him/her from other applicants. You have to find the right terms to give an accurate picture of your skills and personality. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between hard and soft skills: a language is not a skill in itself. However, should you choose these terms, it is better to explain them in detail and provide concrete examples of:

- How did your motivation lead to a positive result at work?
- How is your independence an advantage for the job?
- How do you manage your ability to be a multi-tasker?

Two types of terms should be present in the candidate’s CV: keywords and action words that match the job description. The presence of both enhances chances to pass the first screening, making sure that once the application reaches the recruiter, it is perceived as a fitting one.

First, the use of keywords relies on the incorporation of the terms mentioned or similar to those mentioned in the job posting, and helps the candidates to describe themselves or their professional and/or academic experience. This description is valuable for the way they are perceived by recruiters.

Second, action verbs should be used in the description of work and academic experiences to demonstrate proactivity and enhance a candidate's CV. By using verbs such as "improved", "attained", "completed", "created", and "led" instead of simply "participated in" or "responsible for" puts the focus on the candidate's actions and presents them as a fit choice for the job. It also shows, with concrete examples, that the applicant is motivated, innovative, proactive, and reliable without actually using these expressions that are so often found in applications. As an example, the presentation page for the Bluebook Traineeship⁷ states that an eligible candidate has "a very good knowledge of languages" and an "international profile", making these interesting words to describe the candidate applying for this position. It also describes the trainee's job with terms like "translating", "organising", "researching", and "drafting". The candidate should try using these words to describe previous experience.

In both cases, keywords and action verbs should be explained in a context coming from the candidate's different experiences. Examples of how these skills have come to play will most likely be asked during the job interview. Therefore, preparing them directly in the CV shows that the answers are not random, but are thought through and genuine, because the applicant is well-prepared for the job.

To sum up, all experiences and personal information are important. Nevertheless, they must be put forward in such a manner that constitutes a real added value for the candidate. The recruiter should be able to find the most relevant data at first sight: the information should reveal to the recruiter rather than have to be discovered by them. Therefore, the format is also important and should not be disregarded.

B. The format of a CV for International and European careers

Adequate formatting is essential for a CV and should not be seen as ancillary to the content. In other words, the candidate should not try to fit as much information as they can in the CV just because there is space. It is better to carefully pick the relevant data and insert proper formatting than to overcrowd the CV to make it "impressive".

It is important to consider the country and organization to which you are applying, since formal requirements may differ, particularly between the public and private sectors. An American resume, for example, is usually a one-column list type of document that starts with a header containing personal information and no photo, followed by work experience, education, and lastly, additional skills. This is significantly different from the standard European CV (see below, The Europass CV), which is required

⁷ The EU offers both Administrative Traineeships and Translation Traineeships with the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT).

for European institutions. This format is best avoided for sectors such as law firms, which generally prefer personalised CVs.

It may be useful to prepare a CV in Europass format, as this encourages you to provide detailed information about your experience and select keywords. It also contains a comprehensive list of skills that allows you to personalize your CV. However, the layout is less customizable, and the CV can end up being quite long.

Despite these distinctions, some general rules are still valid for all applications:

- Candidate's photo: the photo must be professional and a good quality. Informal photos, black and white photos, and/or photos with a filter must be avoided. It is important that the candidate checks the specific requirements of the employer, as some organizations, such as the United Nations, ask that the CV have no photo to avoid any form of discrimination
- If the CV uses colours, neutral colours should be preferred over strong ones. For example, in legal professions, it is important to avoid overly bright colours and keep the layout fairly simple
- The position to which the candidate is applying should be indicated in the title
- Only professional fonts should be used (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial)
- Professional experience should come before academic experience
- The CV should not exceed the length of one page (in France, for instance) or 2 pages in the European sphere
- You can include a short bio at the beginning of your resume (but it must be tailored to the job offer)
- Language Proficiency Reference: be careful when using the Council of Europe's reference system, a C1 or C2 may not be understood outside of Europe. Avoid using stars or bars to indicate your level
- As you apply to enter the professional world, it is preferable to reference your professional experience first, before your academic background
- You can include a tab for projects or extracurricular experiences. This should not be as long as your professional experience, nor should it be empty (i.e., just a list). Keep in mind to include a maximum of 2 to 3 bullet points
- Always include the dates of your experience: maintain a certain consistency, at least by section, year, and month
- Be careful not to use a font that is too small
- A hobby cannot come before an experience

- For degrees: include the name/title of the degree, university, and location of the university or school, and dates
- For professional experience: include details (duration of internship, job title, etc.)

Information must be properly prioritized, which means that there will be several levels of reading in your resume: adjust font sizes, underline elements, and use italics or bold type.

To make sure that their CVs are nicely presented, the candidates can use different programs and platforms to find a template that best suits their goals. While they may not always be free, universities might have a subscription for their use, or free trial periods might be available. Some examples of websites and software are: Adobe Creative Cloud (InDesign, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Express); Google Doc (online), Microsoft Word (templates); Canva or CV designer.

As mentioned, a specific CV format was established with the Europass CV. It was developed by the European Commission to standardise applications and is described on its own website as “one of the best-known CV formats in Europe”. This format allows candidates to create as many CVs as they wish and to choose what categories will appear on that document with various levels of detail (experience, formation, language level, hobbies, competences, driving license, etc.). It is available in 29 different languages, using three different templates, and also allows the candidate to upload a photo of themselves. It is a free, simple, and user-friendly template that makes information easy for the recruiter to find.

Despite the name, the Europass format is not exclusive to Europe: it can be used by non-EU citizens and also to apply for jobs outside the EU. Its use is also not mandatory, unless specified in a job offer. Therefore, the candidate can choose to simply draw inspiration from the format and edit it to their own preferences, as it contains standard essential elements one should find in most CVs.

In conclusion, the appropriate CV will not necessarily guarantee a place for the candidate. On the other hand, an inadequate one might prove to be an impediment. Moreover, the CV is not the only document required during the first steps of an application, as in many cases, a cover letter is also mandatory.

PARAGRAPH §2. THE COVER LETTER

The very essence of the cover letter is to convince the recruiter that the candidate is the ideal person for the job, and it allows the latter to further elaborate on their profile and on their skills.

Unlike the CV, where the visual elements play a significant role, there is no real need to use programs to write a cover letter; Microsoft Word or Pages should suffice. However, if desired, most websites and software used in CV-making also allow candidates to elaborate a cover letter, including Europass.

Independent of the way the candidate chooses to design the cover letter, there are certain rules, both substantive and formal, you should follow to make the best of this crucial part of the recruiting process. As we illustrate them through the format of a cover letter for an EU institution, all of these tips will also be useful for application letters in an international environment. Below, you will find the five cardinal points of the cover letter for a European institution⁸.

- **The presentation of the letter**

Like in the CV, the cover letter should contain the applicant's information (name, phone number, e-mail address, and home address, along with the recipient's information. The desired role should also be informed. For example, the header of a motivation letter should look as follows:

Candidate's name
E-mail
Phone number
Address
Recipient's name
Address
SUBJECT: Application to (job title)

- **The recipient of the letter**

It should be addressed to the HR Manager if known and, if not, generic wording such as "To whom it may concern" may be used.

- **The font of the letter**

It should be simple and easy to read, sized between 10 and 12 points, with line spacing of either 1,0 or 1,5 points.

- **Spelling, grammar, and syntax**

Errors should be thoroughly revised, especially if the candidate boasts about their written communication skills or attention to details. The cover letter must be written in a formal tone, using professional language. It is recommended that the candidates take their time to write and revise the

⁸ European Youth Portal, "Tips to write a motivation letter for traineeships at the EU institutions", 2021, available at: https://youth.europa.eu/go-abroad/traineeships/tips-write-motivation-letter-traineeships-eu-institutions_en; Europass, "Create your Europass Cover Letter", available at: <https://europass.europa.eu/en/create-europass/cv>.

letter, and also proofread it. This is of the utmost importance, as the selection process begins with a careful examination of the format.

- **The information selected**

Cover letters should not be longer than one page. They should not be a mere repetition of the CV but a complement. It should be concise with a focus on the relevant aspects, preferably in around three paragraphs that will explain: the candidate's reasons to apply for the position; why they are suited for the position and how they can contribute to it, and why they fit into the employer's professional culture. All information mentioned in the letter should be constructed in a way that can be linked to the position the candidate is applying for. For each experience or activity mentioned in the cover letter, concrete examples should be provided, thus indicating the relevant competence for the requested job. There is no reason to mention information that is not relevant to the job application, simply to show that the applicant has an extensive list of experiences or skills. In the case of European or International careers, the experience in multicultural and multilingual environments or relevant research in the field is worth mentioning. On the other hand, an unrelated hobby is better left out – unless, of course, the candidate can associate it with the desired position and provide pertinent justification for this reference.

Last but not least important, avoid listing everything and select the three most important skills for the position. This means you need to have studied the job posting carefully or, in the case of a spontaneous application, have a good understanding of the position to demonstrate that you have grasped the skills required. This method will help you avoid writing a letter that is too linear. It will be more dynamic, rhythmic, and impactful, and will make an impression on the recruiter. You will need to choose the right situation, related to your academic projects, your experience with associations, or your internships. You can draw from your skills guide or your skills CV. It is also important to show the recruiter that you understand the work and the types of situations you will potentially face. This will allow them to visualize you in the position.

- **The content is adapted to the specific job offer**

The candidate should not use the same template for all positions; generic cover letters are easily identifiable and do not have a high success rate. Instead, it is preferable to research relevant information about the employer, the current projects of the organization receiving the application. It is indeed helpful to link the candidate's skills and previous experiences to their contribution in the desired position. Research on the general culture and structure of the organization is also useful. For example, to justify its motivation to fill a position within the European Commission, the candidate could associate an activity they have taken part in with one or more of the EU values, e.g., linking

relevant voluntary humanitarian work to the values of human dignity, human rights, and/or equality. This is where a skills-based CV will come in handy, as it will enable you to select the most relevant information for each application, ensuring that your cover letters are unique.

- **Key words on competences**

Similar to the CV, using keywords demonstrates that the candidates have taken their time to get to know the employer and personalise their motivation letter for that specific position. These words can be found in the job description and linked to previous experience that the candidate finds appropriate to mention in their cover letter. It is also interesting to incorporate jargon that is commonly used in that organization, as a way for the candidate to naturally demonstrate that they know the environment. Specifically for the EU institutional framework, some of the terms suggested are “cooperation, fairness, development, integration, solidarity, diversity, sustainability, growth, or potential”⁹. More generally, here are some examples of key words used in cover letters for International careers: adaptable, good writing skills, good team player, ability to adapt to new environments, ability to understand complex processes and translate them into simple language, resilience, communication in a foreign language, strong analytical and synthesis skills (oral and written) in foreign languages, strong sense of responsibility and commitment.

In conclusion, the importance of the cover letter in the application process should not be disregarded. As for the CV, these suggestions help improve not only the quality of the candidacy but also the visibility of the candidate, especially pending the job interviews.

PARAGRAPH §3. THE JOB INTERVIEWS

After a favourable preliminary evaluation of a candidate’s CV, in the recruitment process, the job interview is of cardinal importance. Whether the candidate is seeking a role within the private or public sphere, an interview will probably be conducted involving the Human Resources Manager (HR manager), the job position’s supervisor, or potentially both. Interviews can take many forms in the public and the private sector, aiming nevertheless to assess the same requirements, above all, the candidate’s skills. Focusing on the example of European institutions, here are some guidelines (A) and standard questions (B) you should follow for a successful job interview.

A. Guidelines for a successful job interview

The general setting of job interviews may vary depending on the position the candidate has applied to, the hierarchical level of the role, and the hiring party. If the applicant is seeking a position at the

⁹ European Youth Portal, op. cit.

European Commission, for instance, they can expect a particularly formal and technical process, while in other circumstances, specific procedures exist. Despite the particularities of each recruiting process, some rules are generally applicable before (1), during (2), and after the interview (3).

1. Before the interview

It is essential to maintain a professional relationship with the recruiter, responding quickly and formally to any requests. For example, if the HR manager suggests a date for an interview, the applicant must do their best to try and accommodate this suggestion, even if it means rescheduling other events in their agenda. If the candidate cannot attend the interview due to unforeseen circumstances, such as sickness, they should make sure to let the HR manager know as soon as possible and kindly ask to reschedule.

A good candidate is a prepared candidate. As in the motivation letter, demonstrating knowledge about the employer and the position one is applying for is highly appreciated. For example, the candidate should gather information on the current or previous projects other people in that post have worked on, to underline relevant personal experience for the job and highlight how they can contribute to the organization.

The candidate can use platforms such as LinkedIn to learn more about the interviewers to identify common points (e.g., having attended the same university) that can be brought up and emphasized during the process, increasing the chances that the HR manager remembers them.

Networking is also part of recruitment. A candidate can contact the current employees of the place they are applying to work at and learn more about the hiring process, the organization's culture, and what is expected from an applicant. It is highly recommended that you look for former trainees through LinkedIn, networking groups, and Alumni groups.

While preparing for the interview, to maximise your chances of success, practise by simulating the interview as realistically as possible. You could record yourself to identify any issues with your body language or verbal tics. Alternatively, you could simulate an interview with a friend or colleague, asking them to play the role of the recruiter. This will help you to feel more prepared and develop better stress management and responsiveness skills. Conduct the simulation online or in person, using the same format as the final interview.

2. During the interview

Appearance matters, and the candidate must make sure to look professional. It is essential to respect the hiring place's dress code. This applies even if the interview takes place online. If the interview is held remotely, the candidate must pay attention to their profile on the platform being used. The candidate needs to make sure that their profile picture is neutral and appropriate, that their name is

correctly spelled on the screen, and that they are in a clear and calm background. The background should also be neutral. Your room background is not something the recruiter needs to see.

Body language is just as important as what is being said. Throughout the interview, the applicant should maintain a calm and friendly facial expression, good eye contact, and a correct posture, sitting upright and making sure not to slouch. Avoid shaking the legs and/or playing with nearby objects.

- **Attitude:** Be polite and remain respectful. The candidate may not always be happy or comfortable with the questions asked by the recruiter. However, it is important not to look annoyed or bothered by the subject, but to remain neutral and reply politely. Even if the opportunity presents itself, the candidate should never speak badly of their current or former employer. Instead, if asked, the candidate should give an educated answer and, although compliments are not necessary, negative comments should also be avoided.
- **Answers:** The candidate should master their storytelling abilities, meaning the capacity to answer the recruiter's questions by giving examples of situations they have been through and linking them to the competencies demanded by the job posting or by the question asked. Storytelling ensures the candidate gives the interviewer a captivating answer that does not stray from the focus of the question and highlights competences and experiences that are relevant for that position.
- **The final questions:** Most interviews end with a question-and-answer session. It is important to prepare your own questions, as this demonstrates your motivation and allows you to find out more about the role, the company, and the nature of the tasks involved. This will help you decide whether the position is right for you. Asking what the next steps are in the process is appreciated. This demonstrates the candidate's interest in the position and may serve as reassurance if the recruiter does not provide a reply in the immediately following days. Do not hesitate to ask for feedback when you receive a response, whether it is positive or negative.

To sum up, a job interview is not (just) a presentation in front of a judging panel. Rather than an oral exam, it is an opportunity to present yourself and your skills. It is also an opportunity to learn more about the organization by observing the attitude of the recruiters. This can help you realise that the "corporate culture" or the type of assignments offered may not be right for you after all.

3. After the interview

Recruiters are very busy professionals and might take their time before responding to an interview or simply forget to do so. Once a certain period has passed (after the indicated date or after about ten days), since the interview took place and no feedback has been provided, the candidate should feel comfortable contacting the recruiter for a follow-up, always being careful not to come out as pushy.

This, of course, applies only if the recruiter did not explicitly request the candidate not to contact them and/or if the employer's policy does not imply otherwise.

When following up, the candidate should be concise in their communication. A follow-up is not an opportunity to bring up new information that might have been forgotten during the interview. Instead, it should be a short message along the following lines:

Dear Ms/Mr (interviewer name),

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me on (date) and discuss my application for position X. Our conversation has truly reaffirmed my ambition to work at company Y, and I am excited about the possibility of doing so.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to reach out at any time.

Best regards,

(Your Name)

As hard as it might be, the candidate must also be prepared to deal with rejection. In this case, some things are important to keep in mind.

- **A rejection does not mean a closed door and should not be taken personally**

Recruiters do not evaluate an individual's personality or character, but only their professional profile. Just because this was not the right opportunity for that employer, it does not mean that other opportunities will not appear there. In fact, rejection does not necessarily mean a lack of qualification of the candidate; sometimes, a position might have been filled internally or is no longer needed. In this sense, it is important to reply to the recruiter even in the event of a negative answer, remaining polite and leaving a good impression.

- **A negative answer is also an opportunity to receive feedback and improve oneself**

This must be done politely and not in a manner that might be perceived as a desperate attempt to change the recruiter's mind or question their decision. An example can be found below:

Dear Ms/Mr (interviewer name),

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process and for informing me of your decision.

I would kindly ask you to let me know what was lacking in my performance at this time and what could be improved for future opportunities.

Any honest feedback would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks for your time,

(Your Name)

Knowing how to receive feedback is as important as knowing how to ask for it. Even if the candidate disagrees with the recruiter's impressions, they should not respond impolitely or try to convince them otherwise. Any feedback should be accepted politely and used for reflection for further self-improvement. There may be an opportunity within the same institution, so do not be rude! The standard interview questions also represent a relevant training reference.

B. Common interview questions

The candidate must be ready to answer difficult questions, both in the technical and in the personal domains. For example, when applying to a job within the EU, one can expect to be asked about EU institutions, their competences, and functioning. In general, the answer should contain real situations the candidate has experienced (storytelling, as seen previously in § 3, A, 2) and be formulated in a manner that demonstrates three main points: how the candidate dealt with a situation; what was the takeaway from this experience; how this relates to the position sought. As there are several ways to phrase these questions, you need to know how to read and interpret them. This is why it is important to prepare in advance.

- What can you tell us about yourself?

This is typically the first question any recruiter will ask. What is expected is that the candidate synthesises their academic and professional paths (as well as any other relevant experience) in a short presentation that is no longer than two minutes. This should not be a challenge, and the candidate must remember: no one knows your journey and your CV better than yourself!

It is a good idea to practise your elevator speech here. Prepare different types of presentations to help you make a good first impression. Introduce yourself, but avoid just reading out your CV, as they already have a copy. This is something you should avoid at all costs. Your presentation should be

prepared in advance with a focus on: a brief introduction; your academic and professional background and your skills. Be selective and focus on what is relevant to the position you are applying for!

The recruiter should start thinking that you meet the requirements of the position. Avoid revealing everything here, in case you pre-empt any questions the recruiter may have prepared. You need to make an impact from the outset. Prepare 3–5 minutes presentations, as sometimes the recruiter will give you a time limit for your introduction, and you may be interrupted during your presentation. Therefore, you need to know how to maintain your pace. This is also your first opportunity to demonstrate your ability to summarise information effectively.

- **What would you say are your biggest flaws?**

Every candidate wishes to paint the perfect image, but every candidate has its one weakness, and it is natural that the recruiter wants to know yours. While always remaining truthful, it is necessary to adapt your answers to the desired job opening, avoiding flaws that would make you inherently inapt for the position. For example, someone applying for a job in the EU should not underline the difficulties in self-managing, as it is one of the competencies sought by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO). Whatever the answer, it should be followed by an example of how the candidate manages this weakness, preferably with concrete examples. Answers such as "not confident", "messy", "lazy", and "difficulty working in groups" should be avoided overall, despite the coveted position. Try not to present yourself negatively!

- **Where do you see yourself in X years?**

The expected answer must be precise enough to explain how the desired position would play a role in whatever one would like to become in X years. It is important to find balance and not appear pretentious or overly confident, while also showing motivation and determination.

- **How do you stand out from other candidates?**

The answer to this question highly depends on the position that the candidate has applied for. In the case of international carriers, being able to speak various languages and having experience abroad are qualities that are appreciated and might be a decisive point for a recruiter to pick one candidate over the other. In the EU, having a good command of more than two official EU languages, demonstrating an affinity for international environments, confirmed by experience, and having a rare field of study, all count as additional points.

- **Do you work well in teams?**

Most jobs, especially in international organizations, require group work. For instance, when applying for a job or internship in the EU, a candidate's capacity to work well in teams is a skill evaluated during the EPSO test, as it is required that candidates partner up and come up with a solution to the problem

as a group. This ability can be demonstrated during an interview through examples of group projects the candidate has taken on and volunteering activities.

- **Why did you decide to apply to this position/ why do you want to work here?**

It is expected that the candidate has a clear idea of why they have chosen this position/company to apply for a job. This question is directly related to the previous ones: "how do you stand out as a candidate?" and "where do you see yourself in X years?". Hence, establishing a link between those questions demonstrates that the candidates have a clear vision of what they want. It is also likely that a recruiter will ask candidates specific questions regarding their motivation to work in that particular place, and their knowledge about it. This confirms the importance of getting to know the employer, its culture, and its functioning. For example, in the case of the EU institutions, questions on the following themes may be asked:

- The EU's commitments to its values
- Threats and challenges to the future of the EU
- How the EU has benefited the candidate as a citizen (if applicable)
- Knowledge of the EU's history, institutions, and main policies and procedures

In the end, preparation is the key to a successful interview. It starts with the elaboration of the candidate's CV and cover letter, which includes the skills they want to highlight and research about the career they aim for. Also, practice makes perfect: a candidate should not be afraid to practice (even if that means talking to themselves following the questions above), as it will help their confidence on their big day!



After discussing the general competences to develop an International and European career, we will focus specifically on the competences relevant for an EU career.

Chapter 2. The Competences to develop EU careers

stricto sensu

Following a strict approach, an EU career is essentially developed within its framework, gathering the main institutions, but also the many organs, bodies, and agencies. In a nutshell, an EU career refers concretely to being part of the EU bureaucracy. While it is not the focal point in this Chapter, it is relevant to acknowledge the existence of a broader approach to the topic. From a substantive point of view, an EU career refers to a certain expertise in EU matters and responsibilities in this area, which are not necessarily limited to being exercised in EU's institutional framework. Indeed, professionals engage every day in EU affairs, whether it is by working in relation with these institutions in Brussels (for example, in lobbies or national representations of Member States) or from the domestic level (for example, as national civil servants or in NGOs).

The EU career in this Chapter is analyzed as a finality, to become an EU civil servant, with a focus on the selection process and the competences required to this end. It is thus necessary to understand the specificity of working in EU's institutions (Section 1), before exploring the EPSO selection process (Section 3). To reach this finality, multiple pathways are available after graduation; with the exception of the framework of the CJEU, concerning the Law graduates, there is indeed no pre-determined background to work within EU institutions. And as this study is addressed primarily to junior graduates, we shall explore the preliminary steps they can take in order to gain experience within the EU's institutional framework and before passing the EPSO selection process (Section 2).

SECTION 1. THE FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING IN EU'S INSTITUTIONS

Independent of the formal conditions to apply or to be selected, EU's institutions seek candidates with certain competencies. With a constant emphasis on the official EU websites on relevant education, the support and promotion of EU's project and European values, the ability to work in a multicultural and multilingual environment, it is worth enquiring into the existence of an "EU profile" to develop an EU career (§1). Moreover, understanding the status of the EU civil servant requires to address the limits of the EU citizenship condition in accessing this career path (§2).

PARAGRAPH §1. THE EXPECTED COMPETENCIES FOR AN "EU PROFILE"?

As confirmed by professionals working in different EU institutions, recruiters search for specific competencies in candidates. As an "ideal EU profile" does not formally exist, its contours are nevertheless established through numerous elements, common to all EU institutions, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Having completed relevant education, a master's degree, or a double degree is much appreciated. For example, for roles related to Law and policy, a Master's degree in Law

reflecting a solid grasp of EU law is crucial. This includes knowledge of specific areas such as competition law, trade law, environmental law, and human rights law. In addition, having done a thesis on very specific subjects is deemed to be of considerable significance.

- Showcasing that the applicant identifies with the ‘European dream’. Indeed, the applicant must be a strong supporter of the European Union’s project and its values.
- An ability to live and work in a multinational and multilingual organization. This entails the ability to speak different languages, those of EU member states being the most relevant. The English language is indeed essential in such an international environment, but it is not enough to guarantee an applicant’s entry into EU institutions. In fact, speaking the less commonly used and spoken EU languages is considered a greater asset.
- The willingness to go the extra mile, the eagerness to learn, and the motivation to develop your skills, such as those related to communication and networking.
- Research and Data analysis excellence, which means the ability to effectively gather, interpret, and present data. This is a critical competency for anyone aspiring to enter EU institutions as it ensures the crafting of evidence-based, data-driven EU policies.
- Clear and effective communication that goes beyond conveying information; it serves as a conduit to share ideas, influence decisions, foster meaningful connections, and, in general, it stands as an essential tool for advocacy. Whether interacting with policymakers, experts, or citizens, good communicators establish connections and build bridges across diverse perspectives.
- Proficiency in digital tools since technology continues to reshape every facet of society. Digital literacy means the ability to effectively use computers and digital tools as well as harness data analytics to uncover insights, detect trends, and shape policy development.

These appear to be some of the common characteristics of a fit candidate for an EU career that were highlighted in numerous exchanges with EU civil servants. Of course, the selection tests (see Section 3) serve to verify additional skills adapted also to specific requirements of a job in EU’s bureaucracy. The contours of the “EU profile” previously illustrated are adapted to the requirements and responsibilities of an EU civil servant. For a complete understanding of the framework of working in EU’s institutions, it is therefore essential to clarify further this status.

PARAGRAPH §2. THE STATUS OF THE EU CIVIL SERVANT

The presentation of this status cannot be limited to assessing the balance of rights and obligations of an EU civil servant. It is not the purpose of this Guide to analyse in depth the provisions concerning the

EU civil servants¹⁰ but to underline its specificity (if any) essentially as regards the responsibilities and competences requires. A comparison with the national civil servants is thus indispensable for at least two reasons. First, to better understand its degree of originality, is it linked with the tasks performed and the competences attached, or with the benefits and responsibilities, or all of the above (A)? On the other hand, the nationality criterion cannot be ignored, as EU citizenship conditions the access to this status (B).

A. The difference(s) as regards a national civil servant

On one hand, national civil servants are individuals who work for any department of the State, be it the government, a central or local administration, or any other public institution. The main task is to deliver public services, whether their job contributes to that directly or indirectly¹¹. Thus, working for a public department to provide public services is what ultimately differentiates public servants from other employees, and this status comes with several rights and obligations. In fact, the bundle of rights and obligations imposed on civil servants depends mainly on the policy and the ethical and political standards adopted within that State. Independent of each State specificity, common features define the status of national civil servants in European States. They mainly concern a pattern of conduct involving transparency, impartiality, equal treatment while providing the public service, and loyalty to the State's goals. Additionally, different bodies are traditionally established to regulate the recruitment of civil servants, to inspect and monitor their conduct, and, when needed, to impose sanctions on those who misbehave or violate the conduct standards.

On the other hand, an EU civil servant is a person who has been appointed to an established post on the staff in one of the EU institutions according to the framework of the appointing authority of that institution. This status has been given great importance due to the vital role civil servants play in achieving EU's major goals and in contributing to face upcoming crises, through collective work. This is visible in the establishment of the European Ombudsman¹², an institution that investigates complaints about poor administration by EU institutions or other EU bodies. These complaints may be lodged by citizens or residents of EU countries or by EU-based associations or businesses. The European Ombudsman helps prevent and sanction any unfair conduct, discrimination, abuse of power,

¹⁰ For further details, consult the status of EU civil servants Regulation No 31 (EEC), 11 (EAEC), laying down the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01962R0031-20250513>.

¹¹ Citizens Information (Ireland), "The Civil Service", available at: <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government-in-ireland/how-government-works/national-government/the-civil-service/>.

¹² European Ombudsman, Impact, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/impact>.

refusal to provide information, and any other behavior that proves to be in contradiction with the principal rules of conduct. Indeed, EU civil servants are obliged to act in accordance with specific rules and requirements codified in the “Public Service Principles for the EU civil service”¹³. This Ombudsman guide details the five main conduct principles to follow by EU civil servants:

1-Commitment to the European Union and its citizens

2-Integrity

3-Objectivity

4-Respect for others

5-Transparency

The guide also provides further explanation for each principle to clarify the expected behaviour of each civil servant within the EU.

Balancing these obligations, multiple advantages are attached to EU civil servant’s status. To begin with, alongside the base salary, Cash and In-kind benefits are both provided for EU civil servants for them to cope with the demanding environment within the EU, due to the high importance of the tasks at hand. For instance, depending on their personal situation, EU civil servants can be granted allowances for their expatriation, family, dependent children, and their education, installation, and travel expenses. Additionally, their salaries and allowances are not subject to national tax laws, but only to a Community Tax set by the EU and part of the EU budget. The salary remuneration ranges from € 3 196,06 € 25 229,29¹⁴, depending on the function and the grade. Outside financial benefits, EU civil servants have a flexible schedule regarding their working hours and their teleworking arrangements, allowing them to maintain a healthy work/life balance. Additional benefits are provided to ensure their well-being and improvement, such as personal development courses and an inclusive working culture¹⁵. The pursuit of a career as an EU civil servant presents significant challenges, as the tasks assigned require specific cooperation between several bodies and agencies within EU. On the other hand, they benefit from a wide variety of financial and personal advantages.

¹³ European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), Public Service Principles for the EU Civil Service, available at: <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/about-enisa/procedures-and-policies/public-service-principles-for-the-eu-civil-service>.

¹⁴ EUR-Lex, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025XC02153>.

By comparison with the national civil servants, an additional specificity appears as regards EU civil servants. While the former's occupation allows them to handle important tasks within the State department and to benefit from several advantages granted by the State, being an EU civil servant is an all-in package that is well designed to fit all of the individual's needs in a manner that helps to focus entirely on the challenging tasks at hand and perform at their best.

Finally, a relevant common point between the two categories of civil servant concerns access to EU careers. As previously mentioned in this Chapter, an EU career *stricto sensu* is attached to the status of an EU civil servant, thus becoming part of the permanent staff. Nevertheless, in a broad perspective, an EU career is not exclusively reserved for civil servants within the Union encompassing temporary staff, contract agents or seconded national experts (SNE). Specifically, as a national civil servant, you can work in European affairs, as part of the administration of one of the 27 Member States, or as part of a European body or agency, by being a SNE. The recruiting EU institutions (including bodies, agencies) are responsible of their selection process.

On one hand, working in national institutions is a way towards an EU career in the fields concerning European matters that require domestic representation and protection of national interests. In the necessary coordination between national and EU institutions, national civil servants can specialize in multiple EU policy areas. Multiple career opportunities exist within the Ministries of European affairs or domestic administration involved in implementing EU Law, for example.

On the other hand, the Seconded National Experts (SNE) are national or international civil servants or public sector employees working temporarily for an EU institution. Usually, this secondment in an EU institution is based on the particular and urgent needs requiring domestic expertise. The rules and conditions of the SNE depend on each EU body or agency (for example, see *infra*, Section 3 on the domestic agents working temporarily for the European External Affairs Service-EEAS). Despite these differences, here are some common conditions to benefit from a SNE:

- To be employed in the public sector of a Member State
- To have significant experience before the secondment, e.g., at least 3 years
- To be proficient in one of the official EU languages (Depending on the agency, the proficiency condition may concern a second language)

As for the duration of the secondment, usually, the assignment covers a pre-set period of time that can be extended based on the given circumstances to a maximum period of 4 years. Similar to the conditions and the period, the remuneration is also defined by each agency itself, depending on the mission, expertise, and several other factors under the discretion of the agency or body. That is why

we highly recommend checking the official websites of each agency to know more about the specific regulations and offers that govern the secondment¹⁶. To sum up, you can also pursue an EU career as a national civil servant by applying to the National Secondment Experts opportunities within the EU framework, which would allow you to transpose your knowledge and experience from a national dimension to a European one, boosting your professional profile significantly.

To this extended perspective on EU careers, a significant limit needs to be addressed-the nationality criterion. Indeed, only nationals from Member States can become EU civil servants and thus integrate into its institutional framework. In other words, the EU citizenship is a significant filter in the, process.

B. A nationality criterion-the EU citizenship filter

EU citizenship has been considered a General Eligibility Requirement in order to apply for a job within the EU institutions (see *infra*, Section 2 on EPSO). This status is automatically held by any person holding the nationality of an EU State. It does not replace it but rather provides an additional layer of rights and obligations for the concerned person as an EU citizen. Among the multiple rights (mobility and residency within the 27 Member states, vote and eligibility in the European Parliament and municipal elections, or consular protection) as EU citizens, nationals of the Member States also have the right to equal access to EU Civil Service. The non-discrimination principle based on nationality thus applies to all EU citizens, as they shall benefit from equal treatment throughout the process of joining this service.

Nevertheless, what is the extent of the EU citizenship filter as a limit to work within EU institutions? The requirements differ from one position to another, and some positions are sometimes available for non-EU citizens, depending on the required competencies and the international background sought for. Therefore, even if you are not an EU citizen, you might find your way into the EU institutions through the available vacancies offered within (see *infra*, Section 2). The key difference concerns the status of an EU civil servant, which is exclusively reserved for EU citizens, as nationals of one of the Member States. To sum up, what constitutes a formal limit to becoming an EU civil servant and developing the EU career *stricto sensu*, is not always an impediment to developing a career in relation to EU institutions and concerning EU matters. Moreover, reaching this finality is a progressive process, that you can initiate as a junior graduate through multiple preliminary paths.

SECTION 2. THE PRELIMINARY PATHS TO EU CAREERS

Successfully passing the EPSO tests requires thorough preparation, and becoming an EU civil servant can take several years. As the EPSO selection contours the general features of an EU profile, additional skills and attributes may be required depending on the specificity of each institution. Practice illustrates their preference for a very diverse set of competences that a fit candidate should possess¹⁷. For junior graduates, this selection may appear as a daunting challenge due mainly to their lack of professional experience or training in this area. Developing an EU career is indeed a step-by-step progression, but the first one could be engaged directly in EU institutions and already by the end of your studies.

Multiple traineeships are thus available for junior graduates directly in EU's institutions (§1). The examples selected represent the common preliminary paths junior graduates can take, as a first experience within the EU. This process can also start within specialized EU organs. Less known perhaps by junior graduates, they offer multiple initial professional opportunities. Indeed, as illustrated by the EEAS example (§2), they can constitute an ideal entry point within EU's institutional framework for a progressive internal evolution towards the Civil servant status, after passing the EPSO selection process.

PARAGRAPH §1. THE TRAINEESHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN EU'S INSTITUTIONS

Unlike the CV, where the visual elements play a significant role, there is no real need to use programs to write a cover letter; Microsoft Word or Pages should suffice. However, if desired, most websites and software used in CV-making also allow candidates to elaborate a cover letter, including Europass. Currently, all EU institutions involved in the elaboration and implementation of EU Law propose a wide palette of traineeships opportunities, the most known being the internship. As a first common path for graduates who wish to develop an EU career, the internships provide a direct exposure to each institution specificity and represent a relevant training for a future EPSO evaluation. To this end, two main institutions consolidated their general framework for internships, namely the Blue Book, at the European Commission (A) and the Schuman Traineeship at the European Parliament (B). More specific requirements as regards Law graduates concern professional opportunities within the Court of Justice of the European Union (C).

A. The Blue Book Program at the European Commission

Among the multiple tasks assigned in EU's institutional framework, the European Commission has the monopoly to initiate legislation, it is also the executive body, monitoring the implementation of EU Law and taking actions against Member States that do not comply with these norms. Moreover, the Commission prepares the EU budget and controls the efficient allocation of the budget throughout the European territory. Finally, the Commission also has competence in external relations, in the defence and representation of EU's interest in the international arena. The European Commission is therefore an essential institution for the proper functioning of the European Union. Depending on each Commissioner's portfolio, the Directorates-General (DG) are organized as policy departments responsible for their specific area. Moreover, multiple Service departments and executive agencies deal with administrative issues and manage the programs defined by the Commission.

As regards its specific areas of action and its significant bureaucratic structure, the European Commission proposes 2 types of traineeships: an Administrative one and a Translation Traineeship with the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT).

Concerning the eligibility criteria, to be selected as a trainee, essential requirements need to be met by the candidates:

- Completion of a standard 3-year higher education degree corresponding to a complete Bachelor's cycle, or equivalent.
- No prior work experience of any kind of more than six weeks in any EU institution, body or agency, delegation, with Members of the European Parliament, or Advocates General at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).
- For the administrative traineeship, the candidates must have at least a C1 level of one procedural language, specifically English, French, or German. Candidates shall also have a good knowledge of a second EU official language at a B2 level. For non-EU nationals, only one procedural language is required. For the translation traineeship, you must be able to translate into your main language, from two other official languages (at least one of them must be French, German, or English).

Concerning the selection process, it starts with the application, which means registering on the European Commission Authentication Service (which can be found on the Blue Book traineeship program). The application period is twice a year. For traineeships beginning in October, applications open in January of the same year. For traineeships beginning in March, applications open between July and August of the previous year.

First, candidates must complete an application form indicating their education, internships, and skills. All information provided must be supported by appropriate documents when applying. Pay close attention to every detail: an error of just a few days in your graduation date could result in rejection. After several weeks, you will be notified of your acceptance or rejection on the Blue Book. Note that an internship is not yet guaranteed at this stage.

The second phase generally lasts three weeks and is organized on a dedicated portal, where you can find internship offers from various units. You must apply by submitting a resume and a tailored cover letter. If not selected, you still have two more chances to apply. If, after the process, you do not secure an internship, you remain listed in the Blue Book. In rare cases, if an intern withdraws before the internship period begins, a unit may contact you to offer you a position.

Finally, specific quotas exist as regards EU citizens, meaning that the selection of nationals from a certain EU State is determined using a weighting mechanism. You can consult the Virtual Blue Book (VBB) containing the highest-scoring applicants (about 3,000 successful candidates). Interviews are usually performed online, and the Traineeships Office makes the placement offer, if selected. And then, it is up to you to accept it or reject it. At the end of the internship, it is rare to be offered a contract position, and certain candidates interested in an EU career take the time to gain more experience before passing the EPSO test. Other junior graduates may opt for a completely different path towards EU careers, starting with the Schuman Traineeship Program.

B. The Schuman traineeship in the European Parliament

The Schuman Program offers a unique opportunity for university graduates to engage in immersive internships and gain first-hand experience within the heart of one of the key political institutions in shaping EU legislation and ensuring democratic representation of EU citizens. Indeed, as a co-legislator, alongside the Council, the European Parliament (EP) has extensive power to review, amend, and adopt legislative proposals put forth by the European Commission. Through multiple control instruments over this executive body (motion of censure-vote of no-confidence, annual report of activities, and oversight on the implementation of EU acts), the EP is also competent in the election of the European Commission members. Additional powers of control are exercised through parliamentary questions and committees of inquiry on all other political institutions (Council and European Council) and also democratic oversight on States and non-EU Members (candidates, for example).

In the light of these extensive areas of action of the EP, a wider palette of opportunities for traineeships exists for junior graduates. They can explore a wide range of disciplines, including law, political science, or international relations. Successful applicants are assigned to work in the Parliament's departments,

services, or political groups. They assist with research, drafting reports, event organization, meeting attendance, and administrative support. Also, these traineeships are proposed for EU citizens, but also nationals from candidate countries, and from other non-EU countries. Moreover, they can extend from 1 up to 5 months, with a monthly allowance of around 1.300€ to cover living expenses.

Concerning the selection process, candidates should apply through the EP's online system, where they can find the application timeline with a clear indication of specific deadlines to respect. A meticulous evaluation of applications is conducted, which might further entail interviews or aptitude tests.

After the internship, there are several career opportunities offered by this institution. For example, as a Committee Administrator, you organize meetings, coordinate agendas, draft minutes, and manage critical documents that form the backbone of committee operations. There are also available positions as translators and interpreters, communication officers, and legal advisors who provide legal expertise and guidance on legislative matters. The legal advisors analyse and assess legal documents, draft legal opinions, and provide advice on EU law.

The Schuman and the Blue Book traineeships are two major professional opportunities for a student to take the first steps towards the development of an EU career. Aside from these notorious internships, other specific entry points in EU's institutional framework exist, for example, within the Court of Justice of the European Union.

C. The specific access for jurists in the Court of justice of the European Union

Comprising two principal courts, the Court of Justice and the General Court, the CJEU holds a unique position in the European institutional landscape. Through a complete system of legal remedies, this European jurisdiction ensures, as main functions, the uniform and effective implementation of EU law by Member States' authorities, verifies the acts and actions of the EU institutions, and maintains a continuous dialogue with domestic judges on the interpretation of EU Law.

The CJEU presents, therefore, a plethora of enticing professional opportunities mainly for legal positions.

This is the reason why the existing internship program is addressed to university graduates or students who have completed at least four semesters of a Law degree. The traineeships last five months. Applications are typically submitted online through the CJEU's official website during specific application periods. The selection is based on academic qualifications, language skills, and motivation. Trainees receive a monthly grant and may be eligible for reimbursement of travel expenses to join Luxembourg. They are assigned to specific legal departments or administrative units

within the CJEU. Proficiency in at least two official EU languages (including French or English) is mandatory. Trainees may have the chance to attend hearings and conferences and contribute to legal research and drafting.

After the traineeship, it is important to differentiate between the two distinct career paths within the CJEU. On the one hand, there are the positions of judges and Advocates-General, which will not be discussed in this Guide, because they do not concern junior graduates. Indeed, these positions are addressed to professionals with an extensive legal experience and involve a competitive nomination process by common agreement of the Government of EU Member States. Also, the majority of the staff personnel is recruited via the EPSO format as indicated on the official website. We focus, therefore, only on the positions involving the institution's recruitment process, namely the legal researchers and jurist linguists/translators.

The legal researchers, also known as “référéndaires” or “legal secretaries”, assist judges and Advocates-General in their work. They conduct legal research, draft legal opinions, and provide support throughout the decision-making process. Qualifications generally include a Law degree (commonly starting at the Masters level), strong analytical skills, and in-depth knowledge of EU law. Positions are typically filled through competitive selection procedures organized by the CJEU. The CJEU also relies on Linguists and Translators to ensure accurate and timely translation of legal documents and judgments. They work with multiple official EU languages, ensuring linguistic diversity and precision in communication.

Among the common misconceptions about developing an EU career is also the idea that it should always start in Brussels, in the top four institutions (Commission, Council, CJEU, and EP). The EU bureaucracy counts a myriad of agencies and bodies all over the territory of Member States and abroad. Lesser-known organs by junior graduates, they offer very diverse professional opportunities, ensuring a durable entry point in EU's structure, as shown below by the European External Action Service (EEAS).

PARAGRAPH §2. THE PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EU'S ORGANS-THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL

ACTION SERVICE EXAMPLE

As the new diplomatic organ, the EEAS has a clear objective of ensuring a coherent representation and enhancing the EU's international visibility. It gathers staff from national diplomatic services, alongside European officials from the Council and the Commission, in Brussels and in 144 EU delegations around the world. It works closely with the foreign ministries of the Member States, while

reporting to the High Representative. In his dual role as Vice-President of the Commission and President of the Foreign Affairs Council, the High Representative must maintain a balance between the integrative and intergovernmental components that have traditionally characterised the Union's external relations

Therefore, the EEAS staff includes a significant number of nationals from all Member States, with more than 4,000 employees, almost half of whom are based in Brussels' Head Quarters (HQ) and the other half, in its delegations abroad. Each delegation is headed by a Head of Delegation who is responsible for the overall management of the delegation's work and for coordinating all EU actions in their area.

EEAS international dimension opens multiple career paths for junior graduates starting in their home countries or in Brussels or even outside the EU, such as the Traineeship in EU's delegations (A), the Junior Professionals in Delegations Program (B), or the Contract Agents (C).

A. The Traineeship in EU Delegations

This program¹⁸ is designed to benefit students and young graduates, serving as an educational initiative without establishing any contractual or employment relationship with the Delegation. Its primary goals are to provide trainees with a unique first-hand experience of the day-to-day operations of an EU Delegation, while fostering an understanding of how the EU represents its interests and values beyond its borders. Additionally, the program aims to form a group of young people with direct experience in the work of the EU abroad who could become future collaborators of the EEAS or other EU Institutions. Trainees have the possibility to apply the knowledge they have acquired during their studies or early professional life, while immersing themselves in the multicultural, multilingual, and multi-ethnic work environment of a Delegation.

Four categories of traineeships exist:

- Funded traineeship for young graduates with less than one year of professional experience
- Unfunded compulsory traineeship for students already residing and studying in the host country
- Traineeship for students at national administration schools of Member States
- Traineeship for trainee civil servants of an administration in a Member State as part of their compulsory professional training

¹⁸ Traineeships in the Delegations are offered in accordance with Decision ADMIN (2017) 28 of 22.12.2017, which outlines the Rules related to Traineeships in the Delegations of the European Union, and Decision ADMIN (2022) 69 of 02.12.2022.

Depending on the specific area, the traineeships in EU Delegations are available to: EU Citizens, nationals from candidate countries that have signed an accession agreement with the EU, or Citizens from the host country of the EU Delegation.

To ensure that trainees can fully benefit from the experience, actively participate in meetings, and perform adequately, candidates are expected to possess the ability to communicate in the working language of the EU Delegation. However, knowledge of the official language of the host country would be considered advantageous.

In addition to these traineeships, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission (EC) have established a program that gives the opportunity to highly qualified junior professionals from the EU Member States to work in the EU Delegations worldwide.

B. The Junior Professionals in Delegation (JPD) Program¹⁹

Every 24 months, the EEAS and the European Commission open a call for the JPD Programme, thus providing junior graduates with first-hand experience in EU Delegations and an in-depth understanding of their role in the implementation of EU external policies.

Eligible candidates for this high-level traineeship program should:

- Be EU citizens
- By the closing date for applications, hold at least a university degree equivalent to a Master's degree in a field relevant to the activities of the EU Delegations
- Have excellent proficiency in English and/or French (knowledge of other languages is an asset)
- By the closing date for applications, you have no more than 1 year of professional experience with the EEAS, the Commission, or another EU institution or body
- Demonstrate a great interest and motivation to work in an EU Delegation

No professional experience is required to apply for this program. However, professional experience and extracurricular activities, such as volunteering or publications, are valuable assets. According to the JPD rules, preference shall be given to candidates up to 4 years of professional experience relevant to the program, by the closing date for applications.

The EU Member States handle the pre-selection of candidates, while the final selection is carried out jointly by the EEAS and the European Commission. Following the pre-selection process, the EU

Member States provide the EEAS and the European Commission with the short-listed candidates. Both institutions then select one candidate from each Member State.

Finally, the EEAS and the European Commission identify a list of priority EU Delegations to allocate among JPDs. And, once the lists are finalised, they conduct the matching process, which is based on the priorities of each EU Delegation and candidates' profiles, knowledge of languages, and preferences indicated in the application form.

JPDs can work in one of the EU Delegations. Those involved in political, press, and information functions are assigned to sections within the EEAS. For areas such as development policy, program/project management, humanitarian affairs, and others, JPDs are placed in sections within the European Commission. The selected candidates for the next two-year round will receive a fixed-term traineeship agreement for 12 months, with the possibility of renewal for an additional 12 months after a positive mid-term evaluation.

JPDs are entitled to a monthly remuneration package composed of a monthly grant of € 2,000, an accommodation contribution set at € 1,500, and a hardship contribution ranging from 10% to 30%, depending on the Living Conditions Allowance in the specific Delegation.

In addition, JPDs will receive an installation contribution of €2,340 at the beginning of the programme, a contribution of €2,926 to cover travel expenses for each 12 months of the programme, and a contribution of €1,800 to cover insurance costs for each 12 months of the programme.

Last but not least important, as it concerns more experienced candidates, the EEAS also recruits contract agents.

C. The Contract Agents

Certain vacant posts are filled within the EEAS mobility process, with contract agents who are already jobholders in a Delegation or at EEAS HQ. Candidates must send their application and CV to the contact point mentioned in the vacancy announcement. For posts at HQ, the selection procedure is organised by the Division concerned. For posts in Delegations, the selection procedure is organised by the Delegation concerned, except for Regional Security Advisers (RSA) and Regional Security Officers (RSO), as well as administrative assistants and Heads of Administration posts, for which the selection process is organised at HQ. For all posts in Delegations and some posts at EEAS Headquarters, successful candidates are then required to undergo security vetting if they do not already hold security clearance to an appropriate level, in accordance with the relevant security provisions. The example of the EEAS

contract agents is also relevant in the general framework of internal evolution towards the status of a civil servant. It is indeed a first step for junior graduates that ensures experience for further professional opportunities within the ESPO process, and specifically through the CAST procedure.

Before presenting these elements in Section 3, it is essential to draw conclusions on the preliminary steps towards the EU career. Based on the examples presented in this Section and despite the specific requirements of each EU institution, it appears that from the first steps towards an EU career, junior graduates should focus on a common set of skills involving:

- **Language proficiency**-English plus another European language may be sufficient. However, when applying, it is important to know that languages such as German and French may be an important, if not fundamental, asset to be considered in the recruitment process. For example, in the framework of the CJEU, the procedural language is French. Also, in the framework of the EP, for a Parliamentary assistant position, it is necessary to be able to speak the same language as the MEP or to have the same nationality. In the application process, candidates need to highlight their language proficiency and provide examples of how they have used their language skills in academic or professional settings.
- **Experience and publications**-the lack of professional experience often appears as a fundamental barrier to an EU career for students and junior graduates. The examples of traineeship dismiss this preconception, as for the traineeships, the first requirement is to hold at least a bachelor's degree. But, of course, due to the high competition, having a previous experience related to the main tasks in the institutions (internship in the Home State or abroad, working with Associations, NGOs, doing voluntary work or Moot Competitions in EU Law etc.), or a previous publication (for example Master's thesis) related to the subject, is an additional asset in order to succeed. The sum of all these experiences helps you illustrate the understanding of the EU's institutions, policies, and relevant topics, thus demonstrating your ability to work in this environment. Note that specifically for contract agents, experience is nevertheless required.
- **Academic journey**-If there is no specific indication of an Academic path (not every candidate is supposed to follow the College of Europe), there are certain fields of study prevailing, such as Law, Political Science studies, International Relations, or Economy. Nevertheless, all other fields of study can be relevant to join the EU institutions, as long as they concern the area of expertise or field of action of the EU. Furthermore, even though a bachelor's degree is sufficient in theory, most interns hold a Master's degree and already have some professional experience.

- **Teamwork and communication skills**-Because these institutions are a collaborative environment, applicants are advised to highlight their ability to work effectively in teams and communicate clearly and concisely, providing examples of projects or experiences where they demonstrated strong interpersonal and communication skills.

In addition, here are some guidelines from former interns concerning your skills and the application process.

First, you should develop your profile from an operational perspective and emphasizing your skills to boost your chances of success. Each of these skills shall be used in practice, and it is crucial to underline them both at the time of the application and at the time of the choice of a certain position, in order to reach the interview stage and possibly receive an offer to work in the mentioned institutions.

Second, it is essential to remember that the applications are online, and due to the high number of applicants, they will be assessed by an AI system. Therefore, the use of certain keywords in the form can be a really important tool to be selected. The keywords must be related to the tasks and the work of the institution the candidate is applying to. Lastly, it is crucial to have a genuine goal to achieve by working in these institutions and establish a direct link between the practical experiences and the Academic degrees.

The preliminary pathways towards an EU career offer essential training which is valuable for a future EU civil servant. Indeed, the unique professional experience in the EU institutional framework is underlined by the specific recruitment procedures and guidelines to enrol in the European selection process, as illustrated by the activity of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO).

SECTION 3. THE ACCESS TO EU CAREERS THROUGH EPSO

The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) has been created to regulate the selection process and guarantee the continuity of EU careers²⁰. Specifically, it is an inter-institutional office with a core mission to meet the EU institutions' recruitment needs by selecting talented candidates through generalist and specialist competitions. Each year, EPSO oversees competitions for permanent and non-permanent positions, attracting multiple applications for a limited number of positions. As we focus on accessing EU careers strictly from the point of view of becoming an EU civil servant, it is therefore relevant to underline one of EPSO specificities. It not only represents the framework to test the

competences of the future EU civil servants (§1), but it is also the entry gate for non-permanent personnel employed through the Contract Agents Selection Tool Procedure (CAST) (§2).

PARAGRAPH §1. EPSO'S SELECTION PROCESS

This selection process is a relevant illustration of a certain EU profile searched in candidates who wish to develop an EU career. Acting as a trusted matchmaker between the EU institutions and high-performing professionals and graduates, EPSO tries to meet all of the recruitment needs through generalist and specialist competitions.

To this end, it regularly reviews, on one hand, the competencies that EU civil servants are expected to demonstrate throughout their careers (referred to as the “Competency Framework”) and on the other hand, its selection methods, to continuously improve and ensure that the selection remains fair and agile. As an entry procedure in EU’s institutional framework, the EPSO test is a competition based not only on the evaluation of specific competences (A), but also on the advancing mandatory steps in the selection process (B).

A. The evaluation of specific competences

The most recent Competency Framework was developed by EPSO in 2022 and started being used in 2023²¹. It defines the essential competencies required for effective job performance and provides transparent information for the selection process, outlining the qualities candidates need to demonstrate during competition tests. Among the competencies EU civil servants are expected to demonstrate, eight general competencies are specifically underlined:

- **Critical thinking, analysing & creative problem-solving:** Effectively prioritizing essential elements while integrating diverse sources and considering various perspectives. Having an innovative mindset, the applicant should be able to generate original ideas.
- **Decision-making & getting results:** Applicants must excel in decision-making by evaluating options thoroughly and selecting the best course of action. Their flexibility allows them to adapt to situations and suggest solutions proactively.
- **Information management (digital and data literacy):** Individuals must excel in managing information using digital tools. They must also be able to assess the credibility of digital content and sources.
- **Self-management:** Effectively organizing their work, taking ownership of outcomes, and showing full commitment to their objectives, these individuals are known for their self-

management. They should demonstrate an outstanding ability in anticipating challenges while also showing seamless adaptability skills for changing circumstances.

- **Working together:** Known for their teamwork efforts, applicants must be able to embrace cross-functional cooperation and engage in discussions and debates while actively seeking common ground. These individuals have to be willing to share expertise and knowledge with colleagues as well as offer assistance to them.
- **Learning as a skill:** Applicants must actively guide their own growth and self-improvement journey. They engage in ongoing learning to cultivate their skills. Additionally, they should welcome constructive feedback positively.
- **Communication:** Applicants must be able to convey information and viewpoints with remarkable clarity. Their message is tailored to meet the needs of their audience. Their ability to understand others' perspectives enhances the effectiveness of their communication.
- **Intrapreneurship:** Individuals must be the driving forces behind transformation, inspiring and motivating their colleagues to embark on change. They serve as mentors, providing guidance for growth while setting an example for their department.

In the light of these complex standards, the interested candidates to embark on a EU career should explore opportunities on the EPSO website and register, dedicating ample time to complete their profile before the application deadline, since this procedure is possibly going to take up to a few hours. Candidates will be notified of the start and end dates of the booking period for their tests via their EPSO account. A link to the contractor's booking system will be active in the EPSO account only during this booking period. When the booking link is activated, applicants will be able to choose the date and time for their test according to availability. Full instructions for the booking will be available in the invitation letter. If no appointment was scheduled during the booking period, the application will be considered withdrawn. As a piece of advice for applicants, check your EPSO account regularly, as you will not receive a notification email once the booking link is activated. The deadline for applications is usually 20 to 30 days after applications open.

Hence, read carefully the notice of competition as it contains all the relevant and specific information for each competition. Indeed, for each job position, distinct tests assess the unique skill set and competencies required. The EPSO tests are tailored for the following positions:

1. Administrators (AD-Generalists)
2. Administrators (AD-Specialists)
3. Assistants (AST-Generalists)
4. Assistants (AST-Specialists)
5. Assistants (AST-SC)

6. Lawyer-linguists (AD)
7. Lawyer-linguists (AD)
8. Translators (AD)

The exams aim to identify candidates for various EU institutions, including the European Parliament, European Commission, Court of Justice of the European Union, and more. Therefore, the competitions are conducted in the 24 official languages for the first phase. Depending on the needs of the institutions and the candidates' responses regarding the languages they master, EPSO, in coordination with the European Commission, draws up a list of the five most requested languages for the second phase.

Once candidates have successfully passed the EPSO exams specific to their profile, their EU career as a civil servant has multiple possible evolutions. For example, if they desire to pursue other positions within the European Institutions, they can transition to new posts without retaking the EPSO tests. Furthermore, they can also temporarily leave their positions in EU institutions to pursue other projects (such as a Ph.D. or working in the private sector), with a guaranteed post for a maximum of 15 years, allowing for a seamless return to the EU Institutions, if desired.

B. The mandatory steps in the selection process

Until 2022, the EPSO selection process included the following steps:

- **Eligibility assessment:** The Selection Board evaluates candidates' eligibility criteria and minimum requirements
- **Talent Screener:** It is applicable only for Specialist Competitions and requires candidates to detail their professional skills, experience, and qualifications in their application
- **Computer-based multiple-choice tests:** They include verbal, numerical, and abstract reasoning tests. Some specialist competitions also include field-related competency tests
- **Assessment Centre Phase:** As the final phase in the former competition model, it is meant to test general and field competencies, namely problem-solving, communication, prioritization, organization, and more (conducted online on different dates)

Since 2023, the new competition model of EPSO²² includes several modifications. The Eligibility assessment was completed by the competition's Selection Board. In this phase, the Board assesses the conditions that candidates need to meet to apply for a job within the EU institutions. These

requirements differ based on the type of position, whether it is for a permanent staff member, a temporary or contract agent. Eligibility criteria may be added by EU institutions, agencies, or bodies. However, at least three general eligibility criteria should be met by all applicants:

- Being a citizen of an EU Member State with full rights
- Fulfilling all obligations related to military service as required by national laws
- Meeting the character requirements for the duties of the position

In addition, specific eligibility requirements mentioned in the job announcement documents can include:

- Language proficiency in at least two EU official languages based on the defined language levels
- Educational background, depending on the position sought, with non-graduate positions typically requiring completion of secondary education and graduate positions requiring completion of university education
- Professional experience requirements

The tests also present different stages. All computer-based tests are organised exclusively online and remotely proctored²³ due to the strategic choice endorsed by EPSO's Management Board following the COVID-19 pandemic. This differs from the previous practice, where tests were typically conducted in person at designated test centres. As a result of this change, the overall process has become significantly faster than it was before. Additionally, there are some IT requirements to be respected to pass EPSO's remotely proctored tests²⁴. All tests are now held on a single day, and candidates will have to take several tests.

First, the reasoning skills compound of three specific tests (multiple choice questionnaire) evaluates:

- **Verbal reasoning:** Candidates analyse short paragraphs and select the option that matches the situation presented
- **Numerical reasoning:** Candidates need to answer ten questions within 20 minutes, utilising tables with semi-complex data and requiring basic calculations and sometimes percentage calculations
- **Abstract reasoning:** Candidates complete ten abstract reasoning questions in ten minutes, identifying the logical sequence between a series of images

After the reasoning skills tests, the second stage will depend on the job position sought for. For generalists, the tests would be focused on highlighting the candidate's EU knowledge through a multiple-choice questionnaire on specific EU law and EU policies. For a specialist position, on the other hand, the knowledge tested focuses on their field of expertise. If necessary, a digital skills test might also be introduced. Finally, the candidate will have to complete a case study, which aims to test their written and communication skills. It focuses on a relevant scenario, in which the candidate could be facing various problems and he is asked to solve or react to, relying solely on the material provided. It is essential to consult the notice of competition, the only legally binding document, to know if the test will be marked or ranked.

Finally, the Selection Board compiles a list of successful candidates, which does not guarantee immediate recruitment. The list is, in principle, valid for one year, but the validity can be extended. Because the institutions are responsible for the recruitment of their own staff, they have access to the list and may call candidates for job interviews. This is why it is important that the latter be proactive and contact the former. Under the EPSO's new competition model, the entire selection process, from the date of application till the date of release of the list, should not take more than 6 months, with an average recruitment rate of around 50%.

Embarking on the EPSO journey represents a complex process to access an EU career for future Civil Servants. In addition, the EPSO framework offers a relevant entry point for contract personnel, via the CAST Permanent Selection Process.

PARAGRAPH §2. THE CAST PERMANENT SELECTION PROCESS

The CAST selection process allows EU institutions, bodies, and agencies to recruit contract agents for various professional fields. The term CAST stands for Contract Agents Selection Tool, and the procedure is open indefinitely, allowing candidates to submit applications at any time. Contract agents are a segment of the EU workforce engaged under fixed-term contracts, for a period of a maximum 6 years, even if some exceptions exist that might lead to contract of permanent positions. They usually perform various manual and administrative tasks or address specific needs. The contract staff positions are categorised into four functional groups:

- Manual and administrative support service tasks
- Clerical or secretarial tasks, office management, and equivalent tasks
- Executive tasks, drafting, accountancy, and equivalent technical tasks
- Administrative, advisory, linguistic, and equivalent technical tasks

Candidates can choose to apply for one or more function groups based on their eligibility. The eligibility conditions, including language skills, educational qualifications, and professional experience, vary for each profile and function group. It is important to refer to the specific requirements mentioned in the Call for Expressions of Interest.

Moreover, the selection process is distinct from the one applicable to Candidates who wish to pursue an EU career and become Civil servants.

The application process involves, first of all, creating an EPSO account and providing personal, professional, and educational information in the CAST application database. Pre-selected applicants are then invited to undergo a series of computer-based, multiple-choice tests, which are remotely proctored.

Successful candidates proceed to the second phase, which may involve interviews or other evaluation methods. Those who pass all selection stages may receive employment offers. It is also important to note that you apply for a profile rather than a specific job position. Therefore, depending on the profile needed, the educational background of applicants differs accordingly, which leads to the fact that, unlike common belief, a legal background is not always necessary to apply for one or more of these function groups. In all cases, candidates are advised to choose profiles and function groups that align with their relevant education and experience.



This Chapter underlined the opportunities within EU institutions by describing the unique recruitment process used by EPSO, whose tests are designed to assess candidates' skills. It also highlighted the importance of the preliminary steps before passing the EPSO selection, and the competencies junior graduates should train for or develop further. Despite a *strico sensu* approach of the EU career, the pathways towards becoming an EU civil servant are diverse and challenging but also rewarding. On this foundation, a broader approach shall be explored as regards the development of a European career, particularly in the private sector, which may appeal to those drawn to multicultural and dynamic work environments. These elements will be addressed in the upcoming Volumes.

Conclusion-The skill set package

This First Volume illustrated the general competencies required in an International and European environment, with an emphasis on the specificities of an EU career. To sum up our work, find below a skill set package based on the guidelines from the professionals featured in the Course Module, along with insights from the experience of ESL Alumni who contributed to this volume.

TEN STEPS TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CAREER

1. There is no univocal path towards an International or European Career, as there is no ideal profile.

Follow your own path and aspirations, rather than imitate others. Ask yourself where you feel most comfortable, how you envision your future, and what impact you wish to make.

2. A European or international career is a multifaceted concept that encompasses more than just working in the European or International civil service.

3. Think outside the box. Stay open to new opportunities and cultivate a strong sense of curiosity and creativity. Remember, you can take on multiple roles.

4. Focus on networking starting as early as higher education. A chance encounter or brief conversation can be pivotal for your career. Life is full of unexpected meetings, and your success can depend on the effort you invest in being creative. Foster workplace relationships built on respect and take the initiative to get to know people.

6. Develop practical experience. From summer jobs in the beginning of your studies to internships, from involvement in students' associations or volunteering, every experience is a stepping stone.

7. Commit to lifelong learning. As the job market continually evolves, it is crucial to develop new skills and expand your knowledge. Learn to accept negative criticism and build resilience. Regularly seek feedback to support your continuous improvement. Avoid limiting yourself to just one area of expertise. Learn how to learn: show your willingness to grow and develop your skills from the start. Gaining a diverse range of experiences is vital for understanding and engaging with different industries and bridging the gap between theory and practice.

8. Be proactive. During internships or professional assignments, don't hesitate to ask for clarification if you don't understand a task. Show initiative, for example, by asking if you can take notes during meetings. After an internship, stay in touch and ask for a letter of recommendation, if it is not provided spontaneously.

9. Be rigorous. Demonstrate strong analytical, synthesis, and critical thinking skills.

10. Be curious. To avoid cultural clashes, familiarize yourself with the culture of the company, institution, or country in which you are working. For example, in a diplomatic environment, show that you are familiar with protocol, maintain a certain distance from your superiors, and do not compete with other interns (especially in the European and International civil service).

TEN TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RESUME-COVER LETTER-INTERVIEW

- 1. Be unforgettable**-Throughout the recruitment process, from your CV to the job interview, ask yourself what you want the interviewer to remember about you.
- 2. Do your homework**-When searching for a job, analyze the job market and, more importantly, understand it.
- 3. Be honest**-Throughout the entire recruiting process, stay genuine about your skills and experience.
- 4. Be Prepared**-Update your resume, which should be neutral. Information should be listed in ascending order, starting with the most recent item.
- 5. Be selective**-For both cover letter and interview, avoid simply listing your experiences. Explicitly connect each point to the skills required for the job. While having specific knowledge is important, prioritizing relevant skills is crucial. Try to emphasize the uniqueness of your career path and your professional goals. At the same time, be clear about the qualities the employer is seeking and address what they want to learn about you.
- 6. Design the elevator speech before the interview**-Clearly state what you want and what you have to offer, being as specific as possible. Clearly explain why you want to work with the employer instead of choosing another company. Also, be mindful of your visual and body language.
- 7. Know your (future) employer**-During an interview, demonstrate a genuine long-term interest in the company you are applying to. Emphasize how your skills and experiences align with the job offer, and provide specific details. To do this, research the company using its website, annual and financial reports, and LinkedIn.
- 8. Anticipate**-When answering questions during an interview, avoid getting stuck, but don't fear brief silences. Always be prepared by anticipating common questions and practicing standard responses.
- 9. Follow-up**-Always prepare some final questions, for example: Is this position newly created, or is it a replacement? How is performance typically evaluated for this role?
- 10. Stay Professional**-Share positive stories from your experiences, focusing on providing high-quality, credible, and structured information tailored to the interviewer's interests. Highlight how you handled difficult situations, what you learned, and how you improved. This shows you've gained perspective. Avoid negative self-talk or discussing personal family matters.

