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ASSIGNMENT

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This document presents a fictitious scenario. It has been produced solely for the purpose of this exercise. All references to existing countries, international organisations, private companies, departments and their representatives, etc. have been invented purely as examples. Any views expressed should not be taken to represent the opinions of those bodies or persons. When dealing with the assignment, participants should therefore rely solely on the information presented in the exercise and not on any prior expertise in the field.

For this exercise, you will take on the role of an administrator who is asked to participate in an inter-institutional Working Group dealing with the Revision of the Employment Strategy (WGRES). The documentation you need is included in this booklet. It comprises a number of emails, reports and other information that you will have to analyse and digest in order to be able to deal properly with the assignment given to you. This is your first day in your new job.

It is important that you accept the scenario as it is presented. Although in real life you would have access to other sources of information and would be able to consult your colleagues, in this exercise you are limited to the information provided. You are, however, allowed to make logical assumptions where information is missing or incomplete. You may print the documents, rearrange them in any order you wish and add comments or make notes as necessary; these documents and your notes will remain available to you during the Oral Presentation.

This Oral Presentation aims at assessing the following competencies: Analysis & Problem Solving, Communication and Resilience. Your knowledge in the field will not be assessed; therefore, conducting additional research is unnecessary.

You are expected to prepare **a presentation** in which you give an overview of the current situation regarding employment in the European Union (EU). On the day of the Assessment Centre, you will have 5 minutes to give your presentation. This will be followed by a 15-minute question and answer session, during which the assessors will ask you specific **questions**.

**Please note:
Today is Wednesday, 7 June 20XX
Last year was 20XX-1, next year will be 20XX+1**

ABBREVIATIONS USED

ACP	Advancement Coaching Programme
ES	Employment Strategy
EU	European Union
MS	Member State(s)
WGRES	Working Group dealing with the Revision of the Employment Strategy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In an effort to create more and better jobs for all, the European Union (EU) follows a detailed multi-annual employment strategy (ES), which has been designed to help (a) create an accurate, up-to-date overview of the employment situation across the EU, (b) identify areas in need of improvement and (c) outline specific actions to introduce necessary changes. The ES is revised periodically, via a process in which the European Commission proposes a number of updates and refinements based on the outcome of repeated consultations with experts and stakeholders. Depending on their nature, ES proposals need the approval of the Council of the EU (and sometimes of the European Parliament) before they can be implemented. The most important stakeholders at local level within the Member States (MS) are the national governments and employment agencies, professional organisations, unions, non-governmental organisations, etc.

To assess the effects of actions carried out under the ES, the EU uses — among other data — social statistics gathered by the national statistical offices of the MS and collated by the EU's statistical office as partial indicators of progress. The current ES (20XX-5 to 20XX+1) is entering its final phase this year. Input for a new ES (covering the period 20XX+2 to 20XX+8 and based on the lessons learned from the current ES) is already being collected by an informal working group, the Working Group dealing with the Revision of the Employment Strategy (WGRES). This group is currently taking a close look at the current ES and all related feedback from the parties involved, and it is assessing all available information in order to gauge the potential political impact of the new ES. WGRES's proposals will be elaborated in greater detail by the competent services.

Stimulating employment opportunities will remain one of the top priorities for the next ES, which will continue to focus on ensuring equal access to employment for all citizens who are legally entitled to work in the EU and also on guaranteeing the equal treatment of all candidates in selection procedures, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, etc. Other goals of the ES include increasing employee access to more varied and flexible working arrangements and ensuring that every worker has equal opportunity for promotion and career advancement, regardless of their working arrangements. The current ES encourages MS to promote flexible working arrangements in order to optimise the work-life balance of citizens. Practical examples include promoting part-time work, flexible hours, teleworking, etc., all of which have been shown to boost productivity and enhance employee satisfaction, given that they accommodate people who might otherwise be unable to work at all.

Welcome Mail

From: Max Weinberg, Working Group Chair, WGRES
To: <Your name>, Administrator, WGRES
Date: 07/06/20XX
Subject: Welcome

Dear <Your name>,

Welcome to the Working Group and thank you for taking on your role so quickly.

In order to get you properly settled into your new job, I have already compiled and sent you some documents that might be useful for you.

I have also scheduled in a meeting for us to discuss some issues before the next WGRES meeting.

Kind regards,

Max

Strategy Excerpt

07/03/20XX-5

EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY 20XX-5 TO 20XX+1 (SUMMARY)

[...]

GOALS**• Encouraging part-time work**

The EU's goal for part-time work is to improve the availability of part-time jobs so that suitable working arrangements can be provided for employees who want to be able to work more flexibly. Actions to promote part-time work (i.e. any working arrangements covering fewer hours than a standard full-time schedule) include campaigns to (a) raise employee awareness of part-time work, (b) encourage companies to adopt part-time working arrangements and (c) promote inclusion of part-time workers.

• Promoting equal opportunities

One major goal is to reach the overall employment target (specifically, an employment rate of 60 % by 20XX+1). To guarantee equal opportunities, favouring certain applicants over others for reasons of gender should always be considered discrimination, except in exceptional and justifiable circumstances, which must be clearly set out and made known in advance.

[...]

Working conditions in EU MS

As part of our continued analysis of workforce trends, we examine the evolution of flexible working arrangements and the consequences thereof.

Finding work

Many unemployed people struggle to find work, with employment rates varying drastically according to education level. Employment rates are lower for less well-educated individuals, who often face difficulties forging a career as a result of their limited skill set. Moreover, both men and women find it more difficult to make a career change later in their working lives and very often need to undergo retraining to do so. In addition, many women have reported difficulties securing their first professional position. To give young women a boost at the start of their careers, companies could introduce separate selection procedures for men and women (certainly in the earlier phases of the process), as this will ensure that all candidates have an equal opportunity to progress.

More flexible working arrangements

Successful economies are based on using the talents of all citizens. Part-time working is an important tool for enabling labour participation for people who would otherwise not be able to work or who look for more flexibility in their professional life. Part-time work can thus contribute to the productivity of companies and can help employers to retain skilled and qualified employees who might have to leave if they had no access to part-time work.

However, part-time work is not equally common across all functions and increasing the number of part-time jobs is still proving quite difficult at times. For example, high-level jobs are simply too complex to reduce to one part-time function, especially if the part-time function holder does not receive any assistance. Additionally, people often find it difficult to share the responsibilities of a higher-level job, and conflicts can arise over who has final responsibility.

In a new development, some companies have begun implementing Advancement Coaching Programmes (ACPs); others, however, seem to have some reservations about doing so. Perhaps such companies could trial the use of ACPs at a lower level (for mid-level functions, for example) and introduce ACPs more widely if the pilot project proved to be successful. However, no practical guidelines currently exist for piloting ACPs for mid-level functions.

Stephen Katts

Published: 12.02.20XX

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

Equal Opportunities

In the past, many EU citizens had difficulty combining their jobs with family responsibilities. With the EU having invested heavily in this area, we take a look at the current state of the workforce in the EU.

Though championed by many, the increase in part-time jobs has inadvertently created an imbalance: the lack of suitable part-time jobs for people with post-secondary-level qualifications puts anyone who wishes to work part time in such a function at a considerable disadvantage. The EU should therefore encourage public bodies to set an example by making jobs at all levels available under both part and full-time arrangements, thereby enabling employees to share a position through complementary part-time arrangements.

To be able to offer more elaborate part-time working options and to stimulate internal mobility, some companies have introduced ACPs, in which employees spend part of their working time in a higher position to acquire the necessary skills for promotion.

Creative approaches have also been found for other situations: MS Libria recently implemented a system of government funding for paid internships, leading to beneficial arrangements for companies and interns alike.

Women still face difficulties in terms of general employment opportunities. One of our readers, 43-year-old Pat B., says that she has "been looking intensively for a new job" and that she is now becoming "very frustrated with the lack of opportunities for someone with a secondary school diploma". This underlines a distinct trend. While most female post-secondary-level degree holders over the age of 40 work in a high-level position, less well-educated women in this age group have much more difficulty climbing the corporate ladder or finding a suitable new job.

On the other hand, many highly educated women report that they had difficulty finding their first job at the start of their careers; they claim to receive fewer opportunities during selection processes than male candidates.

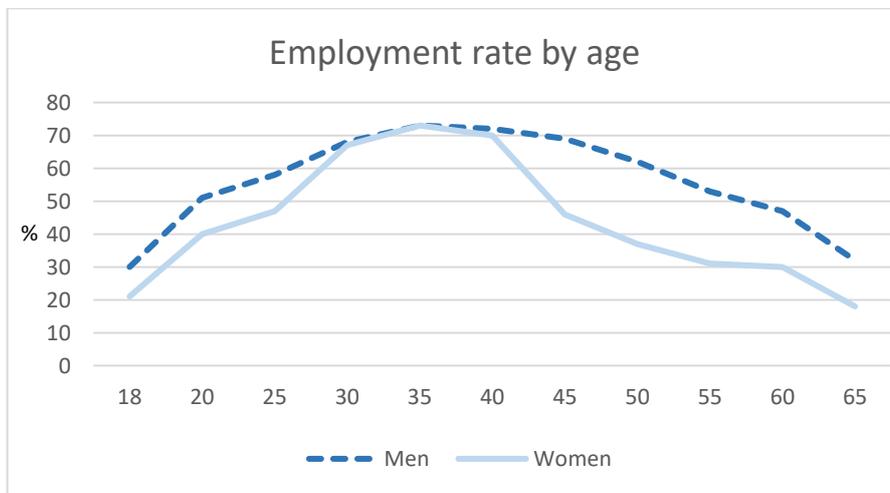


20/04/20XX

Review of figures from the EU’s statistical office related to the current ES

The average employment rate across the EU is currently 60.4 %: the figure for men is currently 62.4 %, while the average employment rate for women has increased from 51.4 % in 20XX-4 to the present level of 57.8 %.

[...]



[...]

**WGRES Meeting No 4****Suggestions for the new ES (excerpt):**

- Promoting professional development
 - Promoting ACPs on a large scale would stimulate the development of part-time working arrangements for higher-level employees, as it would allow them to delegate certain tasks while retaining final responsibility themselves. This would enable future leaders to familiarise themselves with the daily work in a high-level function, while final decisions would remain within the responsibility of the coaches.
 - Continuity in an ACP is guaranteed by having multiple coaches involved in the programme at all times and by always having someone available to start a new phase. This ensures that all coachees receive several years of thorough leadership training.

NEW INITIATIVES TO MAXIMISE OPPORTUNITIES

In this report we present the findings from our most recent annual analysis of the European labour market.

First and foremost, the number of people choosing to work part time has increased significantly in recent years, and combined they now make up around 24 % of all employees in the EU. However, anyone wishing to work part time faces a highly unbalanced labour market. Some workforce experts believe that the qualitative differences between part and full-time jobs can be reduced by encouraging companies to make a greater number of high-level jobs available under part-time working arrangements. Public bodies should lead by example and implement this practice first.

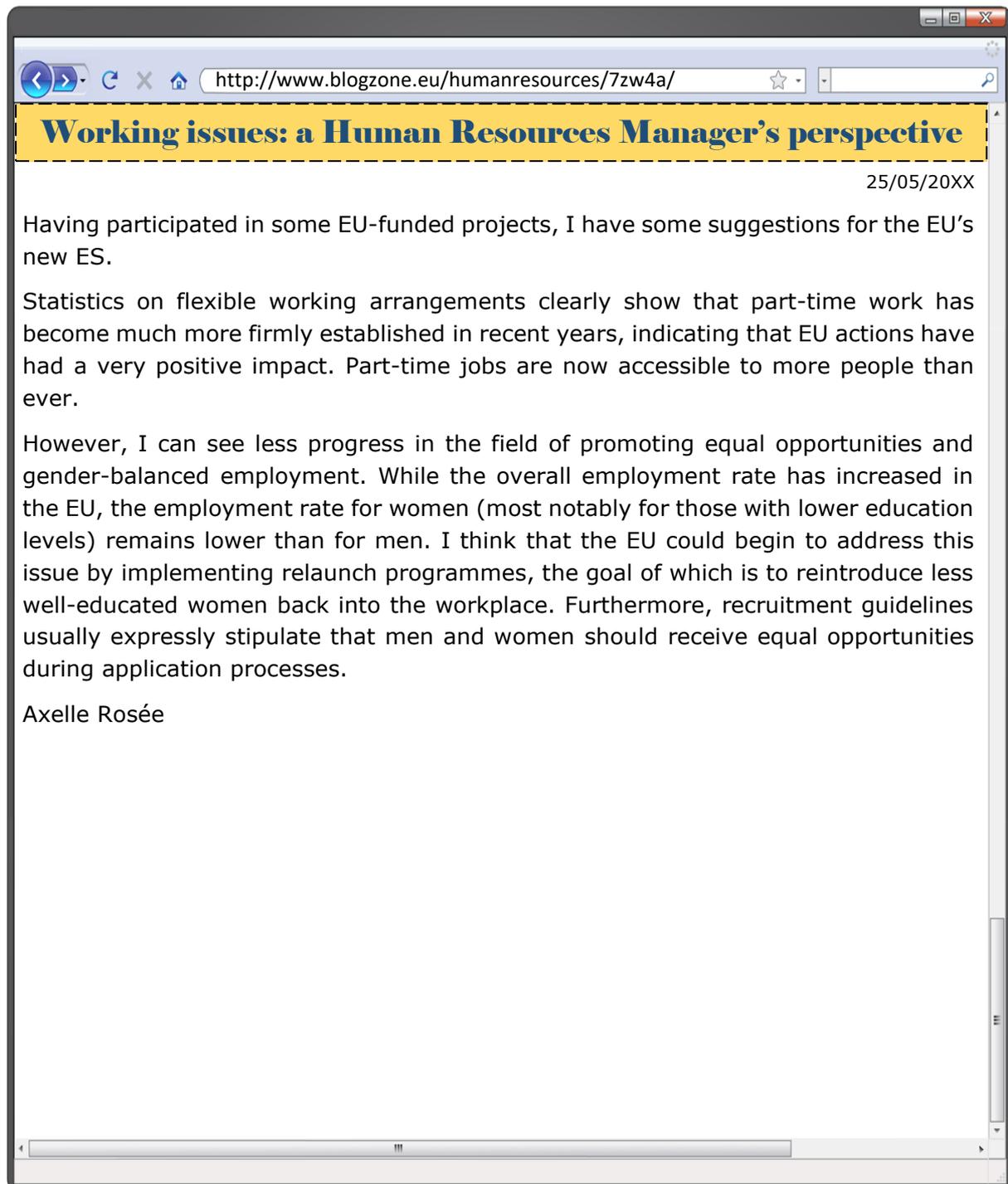
[...]

A number of companies have started implementing ACPs — a new leadership initiative whereby junior and middle-level employees are 'shown the ropes' of higher positions on the job. These programmes open up certain possibilities for an organisation, such as coachees providing back-up for the primary position holders — however, in order to be able to carry out their own tasks in addition to those of the person they are deputising for, all coachees are required to work full time. General decision-making responsibility naturally always remains with the primary position holder; however, it is worth noting that coachees in some of these companies are asked to provide their input on important decisions. They then discuss the pros and cons of their suggestions with their coaches, which helps them gradually learn the nuts and bolts of high-level decision making.

[...]

According to our 20XX research, the employment rate for women over 40 who did not acquire a secondary school certificate is just 42 %.

[...]



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar containing the URL <http://www.blogzone.eu/humanresources/7zw4a/>. The page title is "Working issues: a Human Resources Manager's perspective". The date "25/05/20XX" is displayed in the top right corner. The main content of the page is a text-based article discussing EU-funded projects and flexible working arrangements.

Working issues: a Human Resources Manager's perspective

25/05/20XX

Having participated in some EU-funded projects, I have some suggestions for the EU's new ES.

Statistics on flexible working arrangements clearly show that part-time work has become much more firmly established in recent years, indicating that EU actions have had a very positive impact. Part-time jobs are now accessible to more people than ever.

However, I can see less progress in the field of promoting equal opportunities and gender-balanced employment. While the overall employment rate has increased in the EU, the employment rate for women (most notably for those with lower education levels) remains lower than for men. I think that the EU could begin to address this issue by implementing relaunch programmes, the goal of which is to reintroduce less well-educated women back into the workplace. Furthermore, recruitment guidelines usually expressly stipulate that men and women should receive equal opportunities during application processes.

Axelle Rosée

Subject: Lack of part-time work options

Has anyone else noticed how tough it is to find a part-time job above a certain level? Since recently becoming a father, I have been looking into the available options to help me combine my family commitments with work. Personally, I feel that my career has ground to a halt because there are hardly any part-time jobs available that match my level or aspirations. I really believe that dividing higher-level functions into equal part-time roles would be the perfect way to allow more highly skilled staff to combine an ambitious career with a full home life.

Posted by Nick C. on 01/03/20XX

I fear that it is impossible to split some positions between two people, as it would be extremely difficult to ensure that certain tasks are consistently carried out by the person who is ultimately responsible for them. What do you think about ACPs? Maybe these could open up new options for promotion and part-time work.

Posted by Veronica E. on 03/03/20XX

I'm sorry to say this, but ACPs are not the answer to the problem of balancing part-time working arrangements, as there will always be an issue with accountability and responsibilities.

Posted by Frank Z. on 08/03/20XX

Subject: Relaunch programmes

I recently heard something about 'relaunch' programmes, which allow people to learn the relevant skills in a field, which can then help them to secure a permanent position within an organisation or at least to become better equipped for the current job market. Does anyone know any more about this?

Posted by Alice C. on 05/04/20XX

I have some doubts about such programmes. Returning people who have a lower-level education background to the work place will never be easy. Interns in such programmes cannot be asked to work for free, since they often have families to support.

Posted by Eric C. on 12/04/20XX



20/10/20XX-1

Internal Report on ES implementation in the MS

This report examines various improvements to employment and the workforce that have been made in the different MS under the ES.

- While all MS show improvements, detailed results reveal that there are still large differences in employment rates across the MS. The greatest employment rate increases have been achieved by the larger MS; however, it should be noted that, given their sizeable populations, these MS have a greater influence on the overall statistics and their positive results may be masking problems in smaller MS.
- Some smaller MS are still so far away from reaching the overall employment target that 60 % now seems an unrealistic and unachievable goal. Perhaps the bar should be lowered for them by setting a new employment target based on all available data and an assessment of economic and social trends.
- Many MS reported successful actions to promote part-time work and flexible working hours.

Email

From: Roisin Orbo, Social Affairs & Inclusion Unit, Directorate General for Employment
To: Max Weinberg, Working Group Chair, WGRES
Date: 10/05/20XX
Subject: Issues to address in the new ES

Dear Max,

I would like to share some thoughts on the new ES.

Thorough analysis reveals that the majority of available part-time jobs are intended for people with only a primary or secondary-level education. Some people believe that to address this issue all employers should be encouraged to ensure that the full-time jobs they offer can also be split up into a number of part-time equivalents. However, I would argue that many higher-level positions have associated responsibilities that simply cannot be divided among two or more individuals.

Online, many voices are heralding relaunch programmes as a way to engage individuals who have had a lower-level education. However, I do not believe that such initiatives are realistic, given that many companies will be unhappy about having to pay people whose skills are still rather limited while they are still training them to do the job.

Equal opportunities are always important, right from the start of someone's career. I personally feel that the first phase of selection procedures for junior positions in public organisations should be held separately for men and women (but using the same parameters). This would ensure that an equal number of top male and top female applicants proceeded to the next round, thereby guaranteeing equal opportunities for women.

Kind regards,

Roisin

Email

From: Chris Aysech, Member, WGRES
To: Max Weinberg, Working Group Chair, WGRES
Date: 03/06/20XX
Subject: Recommendations for next meeting

Dear Max,

As I will be unable to attend our next working group meeting, could you follow up this issue on my behalf?

The latest EU statistics indicate that female employment has increased to the point where it is now at the level required to help the EU achieve its overall employment target of 60 %. We can be proud of the actions taken in this area, and I would argue that they no longer require close attention, as we are well on the way to achieving this priority goal. We can focus on other issues when developing the new ES's priority list.

Kind regards,

Chris