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EPSO Competitions - Absolute Beginner's Guide





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Finding noteworthy careers in which an individual can feel as though they are truly making a difference in the world is difficult. However, with a career through the European Union, a person can feel as though their job is making a difference. Those who work for the EU often feel dignified in the position they hold, feel as if their work matters, and know that what they do is an opportunity of a lifetime that is found with no other company.

I. CONTRACT TYPES

There are several contract types in which a person can sign into upon deciding to join the workforce with the European Union. These include:

- Trainee/stagiaire
- Contract Agent
- Temporary Agent
- EU Official

A. Trainee/stagiaire

A Trainee contract is for a period of three to five months, in which the person is given tasks similar to a low grade official. Those who qualify to be trainees are those who have newly graduated from a post-secondary facility and hold a degree.

B. Contract Agent

A Contract Agent can be fulfilling several positions within the EU. They may be called in for administrative work or to work with particular officials within the institutions or agencies. The contract usually specifies a certain time period the person is to be employed for such as six to twelve months and even up to 6 years. However, every situation is slightly different and there are those who are hired on as a contract agent for an indefinite period of



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time within European Commission's Offices and Agencies.

C. Temporary Agent

A Temporary Agent is put on the job for a specific period of time. The contract will state the length of time, with the option of extending this contract once the time period has ended. Most contracts are extended once if there is a place for the person and the skills they bring to the table are an asset to the EU institution.

D. EU Official

The EU Official is divided into two categories, Assistants and Administrators. Assistants may take the position of being secretaries, administrative assistants, financial sector and the like. The entry levels are usually AST 1 and AST 3 depending on the profiles sought

The Administrators are going to be those who fulfill roles such as Policy Officers, Lawyers, Economists, Auditors, Communication Officers and others.

II. PROFILES

Currently there are over 40,000 positions within the EU Institutions. All of these positions are provided for temporary, permanent and contractual staff. There are several profiles one could fill within the EU institutions and these include:

- European Public Administration (police officer, etc)
- Law (lawyer and lawyer linguist)
- Audit
- Economics/Statistics
- Languages (proofreaders, translator, conference interpreter)
- Communication
- Information Technology
- Support Staff (secretary, human resource assistant, administrative assistant)
- External relations (policy officer)
- Finance (financial manager, financial assistant)

These job profiles are just meant to give a candidate an idea of what opportunities can be found with the EU.

III. RECRUITMENT PROCESS / EPSO EXAMS

The EU only wants those people who are the best at their job, and due to this there is a recruitment/application process that the person must go through to get short listed for the position they are interested in. The EPSO Exams are just another validation of getting employed with the EU. In order to apply, there are several criteria that must be met in order to be considered:

1. The person must be a citizen of an EU Member State
2. Be well versed in a EU language, as well as well versed in a second language, such as English, German or French.
3. Certain educational requirements must be met. Those who try for an assistant/entry level position must have proof of attending a secondary institution, while those who are going for an administrator contract need to have completed a university education.
4. The person must have fulfilled any and all military requirements, if the person was in the military.

A. CAST Exams

CAST Exams are those who are seeking a fixed term



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contract within the EU. This phase is not as hard as if the person were trying to get a permanent position. Those who try for these positions still have to fill out an application, and afterwards pass Computer Based Tests. Once they have obtained pass marks on those tests, they will be placed on a list of qualified candidates that could be called to employment.

B. Temporary Agents

Those who are temporary agents within the EU are offered a wide variety of highly specialized but temporary tasks. Selection and recruitment for temporary staff is generally run by the European Institutions or Agencies requiring such personnel. For spontaneous applications one must introduce his/her resume on EU CV Online website as this is where EU Heads of Unit or managers are looking for candidates for specific job openings.

C. Permanent Job Exams

In order to be eligible for a permanent position you need to pass an open competition and to be on a reserve list that the EU will look to when filling a position. Just because a person is on a reserve list does not mean they are guaranteed a position upon the time of completing the competition but usually at least 90% if not all people on the reserve lists will manage to get a job. The competition is mainly to select people to place on the reserve list for



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when permanent jobs are open and waiting on the reserve list could even take a couple of years.

There are two stages in the competition phase – the preselection and assessment center. The first phase is based on CBT exams – Computer Based Testing - where you will be faced with the toughest competition with generally one in ten candidates advancing to next phases of the competition. The preselection tests will sift a large amount of the candidates.

The assessment phase is a series of tests that are going to be based on specific skills related to the job profile the EPSO competition is launched and general skills EPSO has identified as mandatory for every EU official. The preselection tests are held at a Prometric center which is partner with EPSO while the assessment center is usually held at EPSO premises in Brussels. After passing the preselection tests and taking part in the Assessment Centre, candidates with the highest scores are going to be those who are placed on the list. This list is valid for a year but it is usually extended.

IV. TYPES OF TESTS

Individuals who want to work for the European Union Institutions must be able to pass several EPSO tests depending on the type of competition – Administrator, Assistants or Contract Agents. EPSO, or European Personnel Selection Office, is given the responsibility to screen applicants for various positions for the European Union institutions, including the European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union and the European Court of Justice among others. EPSO conducts competitive exams, also known as open competitions, to select the most qualified individuals to fill positions in the European Union institutions.

A. EPSO Preselection Tests

The preselection tests that you'll take during a competition are as follows:

Verbal Reasoning (AD/AST)

Verbal reasoning is based on text passages about various topics, including politics, science, and general information, among others. This test may be a bit tricky, as the test taker must rely on the information provided in the scenario, rather than the actual information in the real world. There are 20 standardized questions that must be answered in 35



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minutes.

Numerical Reasoning (AD/AST)

Numerical Reasoning is a 20-minute test made up of ten questions. The candidate can choose from any of the five possible answers, only one of which is correct. The question will be based on a chart or a table that includes the context of the presentation.

Abstract Reasoning (AD/AST)

Abstract Reasoning presents a series of five figures and a selection of five possible answers that will complete a series. There are ten questions that need to be answered within ten minutes. The patterns include mirroring, rotation, combination of mirroring and rotation, horizontal/vertical/diagonal movements, movements based on angular degrees, and colors (black/white).

Situational Judgment (SJT) (AD/AST)

The Situational Judgment Tests present real-life situations representing duties of an official in the European Union. It is a 30-minute test with 20 questions. There are four possible answers to each question, and the candidate is to choose which among the answers is "Most Effective" and which one is "Least Effective". Scores of up to two points can be achieved by correctly identifying both the most and least effective answers.



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Accuracy and Precision (AST)

Accuracy and Precision requires speed, as test takers are only given six minutes to answer 40 questions. The test taker needs to identify errors based on spelling, accuracy of numbers, and information, using numerical and text data, plus pictograms.

Organizing and Prioritizing (AST)

The test questions in Organizing and Prioritizing are based on real-world scenarios and problems. These are designed to measure the ability of the test taker in considering different factors in order to establish correct priorities and present relevant solution. The test has 24 questions that must be completed within 30 minutes. It is a type of logical reasoning exam that deals with numbers, texts, and timetables, like arrival and departure schedules.

E-Tray (AST)

E-Tray is a simulation exercise used to determine the test taker's ability to effectively provide actions to given scenarios. In this imaginary email inbox scenario, the test taker is given 50 minutes to peruse emails that include 20 different scenarios. There will be 60 potential actions, from which the tester will be asked how agreeable he is that the action is the most effective way of managing the given scenario.



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B. EPSO Assessment Centre

As a second part of the recruitment process for both Administrator and Assistant positions, individuals who succeed in preselection tests are asked to complete assessment exams within an Assessment Centre. Let's take a look at what these exams test, and why they are administered.

AD Assessment Centre

During the AD Assessment Centre candidates will usually be tested through a case study relevant to the field of exam, a group exercise, an oral presentation and a structured interview. The general competencies will each be tested twice during the Assessment Centre as follows:

AD 5/AD 7	Case study	Group exercise	Oral presentation	Structured interview
Analysis and problem-solving	x		x	
Communication	x		x	
Delivering quality and results	x		x	
Learning and development		x		x
Prioritising and organising	x	x		
Resilience			x	x
Working with others		x		x
Leadership		x		x



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AST Assessment Centre

During the AST Assessment Centre candidates will have to go through a case study relevant to the field of exam, an in-tray or e-tray exercise, a structured interview and a group exercise. The general competencies will each be tested twice during the Assessment Centre as follows:

	Case study	In-tray	Structured interview	Group exercise
Analysis and problem-solving	x	x		
Communicating	x		x	
Delivering quality and results	x	x		
Learning and development			x	x
Prioritising and organising		x	x	
Resilience			x	x
Working with others		x		x

The **Case Study** aims to test the competencies in the field of competition as well as the general ones as presented above. You will be presented several documents in the forms of emails between you and several stakeholders, statistics, articles and other relevant items on a specific



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subject. Based on the document received you will have to answer as precisely and as clear as possible 3-4 questions in 90 minutes.

Another Assessment Centre exam is called **Group Exercise**. Group Exercises challenge people to lead groups of others to complete a task by playing roles in a meeting where a real situation is simulated. Leadership and working with others qualities are highly valued, and problem solving skills are tested in this exam. You will also receive a set of documents supporting a meeting where you will have to play a previously assigned role. You may be asked to come up with new ideas, assign responsibility to other group members, and to make quality decisions while reaching a compromise.

Additionally, the EPSO tests individuals with an **Oral Presentation** exam. This exam tests for fluent vocabulary skills and articulation. People who are persuasive with their words will excel in this exam. The power of persuasion is important in situations which require you to make decisions quickly. You must be able to process information quickly, and then present it intelligently. The Oral Presentation exam is a critical component of the EpsO recruitment process, because you are expected to communicate with people of many different cultures while operating in this position.



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The **Structured Interview** assesses how well you answer questions under pressure. It also assesses body language and confidence. It is called structured as it takes you through each specific competency by asking examples of real situations from your previous experience to reflect these competencies. The seasoned interviewers can always tell when someone is not being honest with them.

In-tray or **e-tray** is an Assessment Centre exam specific only to Assistants. This test simulates an inbox where you'll receive several mails based on which you'll have to base your answers to the situations presented. The answers will range from "Least Effective" to "Most Effective" and you may change your answer anytime by just clicking on another box. There will be 50 minutes allotted to go through all the emails and give an answer to the proposed questions/situations.

MORE INFO?

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