

Update on new ways of working and conducting meetings

65th Meeting of the Management Board 29-30 March 2022

Key messages

From 22 March 2022, ECHA will commence its return to the office policy that entails a minimum of two days working in the office. The return represents a transition period between the pandemic period, during which full-time teleworking was the norm, and the adoption of new implementing rules on working time and flexible working, which are currently being finalised at the Commission. In addition, it is planned that physical meetings of ECHA's bodies will also resume.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ECHA's staff managed to work efficiently at home offices and learned new ways of contributing and delivering on our Work Programme. Simultaneously, informed by a dedicated management seminar and discussions in its working group on new ways of working, ECHA recognised the benefits of staff working in the office regularly. As we now hopefully emerge from the pandemic, and Finland has discontinued its general teleworking recommendation, ECHA decided to move to a hybrid work setting with effect from 22 March 2022. The driving factors for a return to the office, therefore, include social cohesion, teamwork and collaboration, and facilitating the onboarding of newcomers to the organisation. In parallel, ECHA is following the discussions on the new implementing rules on working time and flexible work currently being finalised at the Commission, through the Agencies' Standing Working Party, and will contribute to the potential development of a specific model decision of these rules for the Agencies.

ECHA has also carried out a follow-up to the initial report of its internal advisory group on meetings of ECHA's bodies ('Meet-ECHA 1' group) wherein it was concluded that the ECHA bodies were able to maintain momentum and social cohesion in the initial period of remote-only meetings (that is, from March to October 2020), with limited impact on output quality. The 'Meet-ECHA 2' group has made a number recommendations, to be implemented during 2022, with the over-arching recommendation being that, while virtual-only meetings are effective and have benefits in terms of flexibility, organisation and alignment with ECHA's climate neutrality pledge, a balanced approach to remote-only and in-person, or hybrid, meetings is necessary to restore working relationships after such a prolonged period of remote-only meetings, ensure that the high quality of decisions/opinions are maintained and that consensus building and agreement/adoption is achieved within the legal deadlines.

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