



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Between Policy Professionals and Assistants: Education and Competences of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in the European Parliament**

Kowalczyk, Maciej

### **Citation**

Kowalczyk, M. (2021). *Between Policy Professionals and Assistants: Education and Competences of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in the European Parliament*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3240080>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



# **MASTER THESIS**

## **Between Policy Professionals and Assistants**

Education and Competences of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in  
the European Parliament

**Maciej Kowalczyk**

S2685566

MSc of Public Administration (Economics & Governance)  
Leiden University  
Under the supervision of Dr Johan Christensen

6<sup>th</sup> August, 2021  
Word Count: 19 937

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Academic and Societal Relevance.....	3
1.1.1. Academic Relevance .....	3
1.1.2. Societal Relevance.....	4
1.2. Structure of the thesis .....	5
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework.....	6
2.1 Literature Review – Policy Professionals.....	6
2.2 Literature Review – European Parliament Administration and Accredited Parliamentary Assistants.....	12
2.2.1 Accredited Parliamentary Assistants .....	13
2.3 Hypotheses .....	15
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	19
3.1 Research design.....	19
3.2 Case Selection and Choice of Population.....	19
3.3 Operationalisation/Measurement.....	22
3.3.1 Dependent Variables .....	22
3.3.2. Independent Variables .....	24
3.3.3. Variables on the subject of demography, education and political background of APA’s Member .....	25
3.4 Data collection.....	29
3.5 Methods of Analysis.....	30
3.6 Discussion on reliability and validity .....	32
Chapter 4. Analysis .....	34
4.1 Descriptive statistics.....	34
4.2 Findings: Accredited Parliamentary Assistant knowledge expertise and provision of context-dependent knowledge based on education and previous experience of APA and MEP. ....	39
4.3 Discussion .....	58
Chapter 5. Conclusion .....	64
5.1 Contribution to existing scholarship.....	67
5.2 Limitations of the research .....	68
5.3 Suggestions for further research.....	69
References .....	70
Appendix A .....	75
Appendix B .....	75

## **List of Abbreviations**

APA – Accredited Parliamentary Assistants

Council – European Council

DG – Directorate-General

DG COMM – Directorate-General for Communication

EC – European Commission

ECR – European Conservatives and Reformists Group

EP – European Parliament

EPP – Group of the European People's Party

EPRS – European Parliament Research Service

EPSO – European Personnel Selection Office

EU – European Union

G/EFA – Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance

GUE/NGL – The Left group in the European Parliament

ID – Identity and Democracy Group

JSIC – Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme

NA – Non-attached Members

NGO – Non-Government Organization

Renew – Renew Europe Group

S&D – Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

EAEC – European Atomic Energy Community

CEOS – Conditions of Employment of Other Servants

EEAS – European External Action Service

## List of Tables and Figures

<b>Table 1.</b> Context dependent knowledge of policy professionals (Svallfors 2017b).....	9
<b>Table 2.</b> Theoretical Propositions.....	18
<b>Table 3.</b> Operationalization of dependent variables.....	26
<b>Table 4.</b> Operationalization of independent variables.....	27
<b>Table 5.</b> Operationalization of other variables.....	28
<b>Table 6.</b> Context-dependent knowledge and particular tasks (Svallfors 2020; Egeberg et al. 2012)	30
<b>Table 7.</b> Descriptive statistics: context-dependent knowledge & tasks.....	34
<b>Table 8.1.</b> Hypothesis 1.....	40
<b>Table 8.2.</b> Hypothesis 1.....	41
<b>Table 9.1.</b> Hypothesis 2.....	43
<b>Table 9.2.</b> Hypothesis 2.....	44
<b>Table 10.1.</b> Hypothesis 3.....	46
<b>Table 10.2.</b> Hypothesis 3.....	46
<b>Table 11.1.</b> Hypothesis 4.....	48
<b>Table 11.2.</b> Hypothesis 4.....	48
<b>Table 12.1.</b> Hypothesis 5.....	50
<b>Table 12.2.</b> Hypothesis 5.....	50
<b>Table 13.1.</b> Hypothesis 6.....	52
<b>Table 13.2.</b> Hypothesis 6.....	52
<b>Table 13.3.</b> Hypothesis 6.....	53
<b>Table 13.4.</b> Hypothesis 6.....	54
<b>Table 14.</b> Empirical Analysis of Theoretical Propositions.....	63
<b>Figure 1.</b> Age.....	35
<b>Figure 2.</b> Gender.....	35
<b>Figure 3.</b> Political groups.....	36
<b>Figure 4.</b> Education.....	36
<b>Figure 5.</b> Field of Education.....	37
<b>Figure 6.</b> EU languages spoken.....	38
<b>Figure 7.</b> College of Europe.....	38
<b>Figure 8.</b> Traineeship.....	39
<b>Figure 9.</b> Work for national administration.....	39

## Chapter 1. Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) has been recognized to be the biggest winner of the Lisbon Treaty (Dobbels & Neuhold 2013). The Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009 and put the Parliament on equal footing with the European Council (EC) in passing legislation on the EU level. Since then, the majority of policy areas has had to be consulted with the EP. Moreover, the '*ordinary legislative procedure*' (codecision) was introduced (Grau i Segú 2019, DG IPOL 2012, Russack 2019). New legislative competences increased the workload of the individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Although much has been written on the issues related to legitimacy of the Parliament in the face of decreasing turnout; further professionalisation of its work in parliamentary committees (Grau i Segú 2019; Winzen 2011, De Clerck-Sachsse & Kaczyński 2009); EP civil service which facilitates Parliament's work (Neunreither 2002) or administrative behaviour of Directorate-General staff (Egeberg et al. 2013, 2014), little attention has been given to the role of the Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs) who assist Members in their everyday duties.

The Accredited Parliamentary Assistants are 'eyes and ears' of the Members of the European Parliament (Busby & Belkacem 2013, p. 7). They organize their work, participate in official committee meetings and informal assistants' gatherings. Depending on the role of the MEP, APAs may be engaged in hearings, trialogues and in charge of being in contact with lobbyists. Moreover, they conduct research, draft reports, write speeches and guide parliamentarians, especially the newly elected ones, into the complexities of the supranational, parliamentary world. Another set of tasks is related to the administrative issues such as running offices in Brussels and Strasbourg, being responsible for the calendar, booking flights, running social media, media outreach and providing institutional *know-how* about the functioning of the EP itself. Apart from that, APAs may occasionally support local offices and MEPs' constituencies (2013).

APAs' position cannot be underestimated, yet their influence on MEPs and role as a backstage support has not been widely discussed by scholars. The scope of their tasks and employment status prevent unequivocal categorisation of these political actors. On the one hand, assistants have characteristic of policy professionals, that is political actors who nobody voted for, yet who have substantial political influence (Svallfors 2020, Ch. 2). On the other hand, parliamentary assistants can be classified as civil servants, as despite being hired by the MEP, they are subjected to the official EP Staff Regulation and their credentials are publicly

available in the archives and EP records (EP 2021). Furthermore, they represent relatively young group of professionals at the beginning of their professional career who perceive their job as a step into the EU's administration. Although assistants represent a homogenous group of political actors, the scope of their tasks differ. This depends on ambitions, experience and the number of terms served by their MEP.

This paper draws from the literature on unelected political agents called 'policy professionals'. One of the first to describe this group of political agents was Hecló in 1970' (1978 [1990]) who analysed the presence of policy professionals in the US Congress. Stefan Svallfors (2020, 2016a, Svallfors et al. 2017) describes their growing role among European democracies in XXI century.

Policy professionals are agents hired to do policy advocacy and to offer political advice. They can be employed in places such as government offices, political parties, but also think tanks and interest organizations. What makes them different from politicians is that they are hired and not elected.

What distinguishes them from civil servants is that they are neither appointed to any particular boards nor are assigned with any particular issue. Their work is about influencing politics and policies. Moreover, contrary to civil servants, they are appointed on a partisan basis. While civil servants are required to keep their political views to themselves and their personal opinions cannot influence their work, policy professionals are employed particularly for the reason to offer political advice and opinions. This usually implies that they have to share their client's values and beliefs (Svallfors 2020, Ch. 1). Although, on the example of the work in the EP Committees, Neunreither (2002) writes that civil servants' neutrality does not stop them from trying to pursue agenda based on their personal views, contrary to policy professionals, they always have to step back if a risk of conflict between MEPs and EP officials occurs.

For democracies, the most problematic issue related to policy professionals is the lack of transparency in assessing their numbers, tasks, and informal influence (OECD 2011, Ch. 3). Civil servants are subjected to official regulations and have defined responsibilities, while the set of tasks of policy professionals is blurred and hard to define, sometimes, even for themselves (Svallfors 2017).

In order to analyse and frame Assistants' role in the EP environment, the paper employs three characteristics used by Svallfors. The key resource of policy professionals is the "context

dependent, politically useful knowledge” that takes three forms. These are: problem formulation, process expertise and information access. (Svallfors 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Svallfors describes each of these characteristics as follows:

*“Problem formulation* involves highlighting and framing social problems and their possible solutions, using research and other relevant knowledge. *Process expertise* consists of ‘knowing the game’ and understanding the ‘where, how and why’ of the political and policy-making processes. *Information access* is the skill to find very fast and reliable relevant information” (Svallfors 2016c).

These three components benefit and add to the growing complexity of policy, policy making and this relatively new category of political actors.

The key resource of political professionals is their knowledge. The main aim of this study is to explore and obtain more detailed information regarding the educational background of Parliamentary Assistants and how it influences their work in the MEP office. To place Parliamentary Assistants on the map of political agents in the European Parliament the following research question is formed:

*What kinds of knowledge and expertise do APAs provide, and how does this depend on their education and career background?*

To answer the research question a questionnaire among Parliamentary Assistants was conducted, based on the Svallfors’ categorisation of *problem formulation*, *process expertise* and *information access* to categorise parliamentary assistants among other political actors. Moreover, the set of task that APAs fulfil was employed from the paper of Egeberg et al. (2013) and broadened by the author by adding four other tasks.

## **1.1. Academic and Societal Relevance**

### **1.1.1. Academic Relevance**

This paper contributes to the academic debate on a few levels. Drawing from the existing literature regarding the role and position of political professionals in Western democratic systems, it contributes to the topic by employing another set of actors into the debate (Svallfors 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017, 2020, Hecló 1978 [1990], OECD 2007, 2011). Analysing the role of Parliamentary Assistants in the European Parliament adds to the debate about changing nature of political actors in Western democracies and supranational organizations such as the European Union and its institutions. As denoted in the title of the



paper, as political actors, Accredited Parliamentary Assistants escape established definitions. Therefore, this thesis employs criteria from the literature on policy professionals in order to describe these political agents and place them in between policy professionals and civil servants. The paper is built upon the academic work of Steffen Svallfors who analyses the change in the performance of political actors in modern democracies.

Secondly, the paper analyses APAs in the context of the European Parliament's officials. It gives a closer look into their educational background, traineeship with the EU agencies, scope of tasks they are assigned with, role in the decision-making process and (in)formal influence on the decisions made by the EP elected Members. The existing literature on the APAs' ambiguous role is mostly based on interviews with assistants and MEPs and ethnographic research based on the limited time spent in MEPs offices (Pegan 2017, Busby & Belkacem 2013, Grmelová 2019). By collecting and analysing survey-based data, this paper adds a novel contribution to the existing scholarship on the EP. In that sense, this paper adds to the academic debate regarding EP officials, the status of Parliamentary Assistants and aims to offer another step in closing the gap of what has been called the "black box" of civil servant's competences in the EP. Lastly, on the most general level, this paper tries to reveal more information about the structure and staffing patterns of public administration (Egeberg 2020).

### **1.1.2. Societal Relevance**

The European Parliament is the only directly-elected institution of the European Union. The societal relevance of this research adds to the ongoing debate about the legitimacy of the European Parliament in the decision-making process and tries to shed more light on the relatively rarely studied aspect of internal working of the EP.

In 2020 EC Eurobarometer report *European Union Citizenship and Democracy* nearly 80% of respondents claimed that they would be more inclined to vote in the next European Parliament elections provided that they had more information about the political parties and the EU impact on their everyday lives (Eurobarometer 2020, p. 11). For that reason, this paper aims to bring more light and information about the EP – explain more thoroughly its politics, policy formulation and decision-making processes, by analysing Accredited Parliamentary Assistants – the missing group in the staff structure of the EP (Svallfors 2020, Winzen 2011, Bowler & Farrell 1995, p. 220).

Moreover, as Grmelová (2019) indicates, APAs in their later professional careers often hold top and middle level positions as the EU civil servants or become elected politicians on the

national and international level. Studying their role is of a great importance for citizens to trace skills and competences of the European political class and potential future politicians and policymakers. Thus, studying APAs, means studying the future of the European political class.

## **1.2. Structure of the thesis**

The academic debate about the development, role and influence of political advisors is presented in order to establish conceptual frames within which this paper operates. The concept of three levels of knowledge is further discussed in accordance with Svallfors typology. These are: problem formulation, process expertise and information access. Secondly, a brief discussion about the structure of the EP personnel is discussed to introduce differences among types different types of officials working the EP and scope of their tasks. Thirdly, the existing literature on APAs is presented to give an overview of what has been written about those political agents and in order to distinguish their key characteristics. Next, hypotheses are presented in accordance with the literature.

This is followed by a statistical analysis based on a survey conducted among Accredited Parliamentary Assistants working in the European Parliament of the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term (N=116). The survey explores key characteristics of assistants such as education, former traineeship and set of tasks they perform in their everyday work, but also asks them about statements formulated in accordance with the literature on policy professionals and typology on the context-dependent politically useful knowledge. The research examines relationship between variables so as to answer the research question.

The paper ends with the conclusion that assesses the results and puts them in the context of theoretical deliberations. Furthermore, contribution to academia is presented, limitations of the research are discussed. Finally, recommendations for further research are suggested.

## **Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework**

In the theory part of the thesis, in order to answer the research question, the theoretical framework will be presented and six hypotheses will be developed. Before this is done, the literature regarding policy professionals is presented to examine the development of the political agents called policy professionals and to establish their key characteristics. Further, the theory chapter describes environment of the European Parliament and its staff. This is done in order to differentiate between assistants and other civil servant working for the EP such as the Directorate-General (DG) officials and political groups staff. By describing each of the following sections in the theoretical framework, the paper validates the existence of the knowledge gap that had grown around the topic of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants. Finally, based on the following sub-sections and theoretical debates of various academics, the paper develops a scientifically testable hypotheses which will be tested in the following chapter.

### **2.1 Literature Review – Policy Professionals**

In his seminal work *Democracy and its Critics* Robert Dahl wrote about the emergence and growing popularity of a new group of political actors – political intellectuals – whom he described as a public policy specialists (1989, Ch. 23). They were a product of the growing complexity of democratic processes and democracy – or polyarchy – using Dahl’s famous typology. As the early example of this change, Dahl pointed at the United States (US) and the development of committees in the US Congress which were responsible for drafting legislation and became increasingly professionalized in their particular policy areas (Dahl 1989, p. 336). After the World War II committee staff and the office staff of senators added another stratum to the system which, as the prominent scholar wrote “was a heroic and generally speaking successful attempt to adapt democracy to the daunting complexity of public policies” (Dahl 1989, p 223).

Heclo (1978[1990] pp. 100,101) wrote about alike type of actors describing them as “policy professionals”. In doing so, he gave an example of the US capital and stated that policy professional’s emergence was the result of the growing complexity of Washington’s political environment. This intricate legislative ecosystem made capital’s bureaucrats knowledge a valuable commodity that could be monetized by private companies. Heclo also wrote that policy professionals escape easy categorization and cannot be classified as a part of the “conventional image of iron triangles tying together executive bureaus, interest groups, and

congressional committees in all-powerful alliances”. Instead, they exert more informal, thus harder to track, influence. Due to the lack of proper monitoring tools, these networks are hard to follow and assess.

Another change that occurred due to the growing complexity of the political arena was the fundamental change in how politics was done and perceived. In the past, the key problem of government was whether its decisions and policies *were* right. For public administration, policy knowledge that it possessed was enough to operate in this environment. Today, the primary concern of government is whether it *knows* what is right. For that reason, political administrators who are involved in policy-making on society’s behalf, seek political intermediators in that process. Since *knowing what is right* becomes crucial and no one knows anything for sure, the advice from those deemed as knowledgeable, becomes an inevitable part of the policy formulation. Hence, a perspective of decision-making has changed and policy professionals assembled in specific issue networks do not simply try to exert their influence – they rather seek influence that reflects their understanding of complex social choices being made (Hecló, pp. 102-103). Writing about policy professionals, Hecló focused and stressed the role of *issue networks* and their influence on the policy process (Svallfors, 2020, Ch.1).

Wedel (2011) writes about the more general phenomena and the existence of so called the *shadow government* of consulting firms, private companies and lobby groups in the US. The amounting public pressure to cut bureaucracy, that caused caps on employing civil servants and official governmental employees. This resulted in the substantial growth of contractor workers. The following led to the situation in which governments and bureaucracies were expected to be smaller in size, yet more productive in their outcomes. Wedel warns that in the holistic sense, this great administrative official and unofficial machinery can be referred to as the government, but it is also less visible and accountable (Wedel 2011 p. S120).

Svallfors (2020) adds that the emergence of policy professionals results from ‘mediatization’ of politics and bending politics into the media realities and continuous media spotlight. This accelerates growing demand for media and PR specialists and services that help politicians to adapt to mediatization and new realities. Another factor mentioned by the scholar is the declining party membership and demographic changes in the structure of modern democracies. To fill the gap in policy proposals and policy-generation processes, specialists such as policy professionals, become inevitable part of the policy formulation process.

Changes in the structure of policy landscape are not limited to the US. In his academic work Svallfors analyses Sweden, the archetypical social democratic welfare state (Svallfors 2020 Ch.1). The country, as a developed, capitalist democracy, is often used as the opposite of the US. In Sweden and the rest of Europe, political professionals also became an integral part of the political landscape. Svallfors describes them as actors whose main task is concerned with *influencing* or *affecting* politics and policies. They are neither elected to their offices, nor are civil servants. Their role differs from the latter group as the scope of their duties goes around promoting distinct values and groups. Moreover, list of their employers is not limited to any particular levels of political executive (Svallfors 2016c p. 508). Policy professionals can be found in parliaments, but also outside of them – in PR agencies and lobby firms. Svallfors denotes that until recently, little was known about this group's background and role in the policy process apart from the fact that in general, they do not want to interfere in politics as the elected officials (Svallfors 2016c p. 508).

Policy professionals are first and foremost a heterogenous group of political actors. They can be found working as political advisors in governmental offices, political support staff and policy experts in think tanks or interest groups. It is the heterogeneity of this group and elusiveness of the environment they operate within, that makes it hard to track the precise role they play within the political system. Svallfors defines them as actors that inhabit a “particular political field in which certain ‘rules of the game’ apply in the form of explicit and implicit expectations about how to act” (Svallfors 2020 p. 4). Professionals' work is diffused and it is hard, even for themselves, to unambiguously say to whom and for what they are accountable (Svallfors 2016c, Eichbaum & Shaw 2007). They are hired on the partisan basis, that is, they are expected to hold political and ideological views and use that knowledge to help their employers. Being partisan does not mean having particular political views, but rather being committed to promoting values and beliefs of an organization they work for. This is in contrast with civil servants and public administrators whose primary objective, apart from the smooth running of administration, is to remain neutral (Svallfors 2020 p. 3). Policy professionals do not have to have specialist knowledge or level of expertise about any specific area (which does not mean that they do not have one – as it will be later discussed, most policy professionals hold a university degree) – their role is to know how to exert influence and how make use of it. Moreover, their role is not only limited to promoting change – sometimes it is to slow it, stop it or affect small social groups and particular constituencies (Svallfors 2020 p. 3).

Their other key characteristic is that in order to influence politics and policies, policy professionals in their work utilize context-dependent knowledge. This is invaluable asset for lobbying companies who operate in the intricate, multilevel system of governance such as the European Union. Mahoney describes that lobbying requires great strategy and planning on each level of the advocacy process. Lobbyists have to select a proper strategy in order to be the most effective and act either on the national level – through Member States or on the international one – through the channels of the European Commission and European Parliament. That is why policy professionals are an important asset for lobbyist on the labour market – they thoroughly know the environment within which lobbyist work (Mahoney 2008, Ch. 2 & 9).

The key resource of policy professionals is the context dependent, politically useful knowledge which takes three forms: 1) problem formulation, 2) process expertise and 3) information access. Policy professionals function in in the particular professional set which is based on the “entrepreneurial ethos” which is often in contrast with the working ethos of politicians and civil servants (Svallfors 2016b, Selling & Svallfors 2019).

The entrepreneurial ethos sets innovation as its main objective. In the political environment this means not only bringing new political ideas and policy solutions, but also finding ways to present and sell them – firstly to politicians and secondly to the wider public. That needs to be done in a constant contact with the media who remain the most important arena for communication. (Svallfors 2017b pp. 66-67).

<b>Context-dependent knowledge composition of policy professionals</b>	
<b>Problem formulation</b>	Highlighting and framing social problems and their possible outcomes.
<b>Process expertise</b>	Understanding “where, how and why” of the political and policy-making processes.
<b>Information access</b>	Skill to find reliable and relevant information very fast

**Table 1.** Context dependent knowledge of policy professionals (Svallfors 2017b)

Problem formulation refers to contextualizing current problems and grounding them in facts. It is about presenting them in an attractive and understandable way to individuals, stakeholders, relevant groups of interest and suggesting possible policy solutions. The

constant effort to find and process new evidence is a crucial part of the policy professionals' work and it has to be done in a scientific and consistent way (Svallfors 2016b). For policy professionals, framing problems and supporting them with reliable evidence is a kind of a battleground in which they have to face similarly equipped rivals. Thus, it is important to present balanced data – the principal has to have access to reliable, tailored and unbiased information which can be effectively used to back his or her narration (Svallfors 2020 p. 41).

The second aspect in which knowledge is important for policy professionals is the process expertise. It manifests itself in *knowing the game* or as Svallfors writes, knowing *nooks and crannies* of politics and policymaking. Hence, it is the knowledge about *where* in the intricate environment decisions are made, *when* one has to act in the policy process in order to be the most efficient and successful and lastly, *how* political actors behave – that is – how they think and act. Knowing the process is equally important as knowing the people. This institutional know-how is an invaluable knowledge of the insider. The perspective is nearly impossible to acquire without being in the centre of the particular institution (Svallfors 2020 p. 42; 2016b pp. 15-16).

The last component of the knowledge provision is information access. In the world in which information travels fast and there is a growing demand for accurate and trustworthy data, policy professionals must rely on their private network of reliable contacts. Where information becomes political ammunition, human resources are limited and the demand for performance is high, personal network become an irreplaceable asset. This type of knowledge does not manifest itself in influencing behaviour of others, but in providing quick channels of reliable information. For instance, by working for the government, one might want to know the opinion of institutions outside of it. And contrary, if policy professional works for a think-tank he or she might want to learn about new policy proposals (Svallfors 2020 Ch. 3).

What is the educational background of policy professionals? As challenging as it is to frame the scope of tasks that policy professionals have to deal with, it is equally hard to describe their educational path. The only sure thing that can be said about them is that it is hard to work as a policy professional without former academic training. Skills acquired on universities such as conducting research, ability to immediately process information, turn long documents into one-page bullet point summaries and generally digest a great number of documents in a fast paste are hard to obtain outside universities (Svallfors 2020 Ch. 3).

Moreover, policy professionals apart from their academic education, need a significant amount of on-the-job training. Learning about hierarchy, evolution of the organization, formal and informal practices and behaviours cannot be simply acquired by an outsider or from textbooks. This has to be usually done through their own training, as there is no official instruction that could prepare them for their job (Svallfors 2020 Ch. 3).

The generic skills of policy professionals result in their peculiar situation on the labour market. If policy professional wants to change their job it becomes problematic to explain what their work is actually about. For that reason, policy professionals (but politicians as well) face the problem of the ‘golden cage’ – ‘golden’ because for people interested in politics, being a part of the political structure is exceptionally attractive. It is a ‘cage’ in the way that the skills and abilities can be monetarized most efficiently only in this specific segment of the labour market (Svallfors 2020 Ch. 5). Organizations which place themselves outside of the party politics and political landscape, find it hard to evaluate skills of policy professionals. One of few businesses for which these political actors’ skills are invaluable are PR agencies (Svallfors 2016a).

It is meaningful to summarize the abovementioned components of the profile of political professionals. Dahl (1989) and Hecló (1978 [1990]) tie the emergence of policy professionals with the growing complexity of politics and political world. Both of them describe the Washington’s political environment as the result of the post-World War Two political landscape. Wedel (2011) looks in different direction pointing at the growing public pressure on government to simultaneously cut expenses on the civil service and to remain equally efficient. The government, in order to maintain its efficiency and not lose appeal of the voters, employs unscrutinised contactor workers. Svallfors (2020) adds another component by referring to mediatization of political landscape. He argues that policy professionals are the response to the constant media exposure. Apart from this, Svallfors states that policy professionals are agents who are responsible for the policy-formulation processes. They inherited this role after political parties due to their declining membership. Moreover, Svallfors adds that policy professionals represent heterogenous group of actors and that their key resource is the context dependent, politically useful knowledge (2016b, 2016c, 2017b, 2020).

The research field of policy professionals is highly scattered. Concluding from the literature review, it is possible to acquire a cross-sectional view about policy professionals. However, the elusiveness and *shadow* within which they operate, makes it hard to track and describe



concrete institutional examples. Moreover, every institution and institutional environment produces its own policy professionals' microcosmos that is guided by the specific institutional arrangements – culture, language and patterns of behaviour. Every institution may put an emphasis on different aspects of the context-dependent knowledge. Therefore, the literature on policy professionals does not offer a definite answer to the questions – who policy professionals are? what does the policy professional do? and what kind of knowledge do they provide? The scientific literature rather constitute a guidebook that can be applied to each specific environment in which policy professionals operate. By applying Svallfors typology, this research examines different, supranational institutional field in which actors described by scholar operate. Given this, the research constitutes a novel contribution to topic in the academic realm.

## **2.2 Literature Review – European Parliament Administration and Accredited Parliamentary Assistants**

Academic literature about the European Parliament's administration has been relatively modest in comparison with the scholarly debate regarding other EU institutions – the European Commission and Council. Egeberg et al. explain this lacuna by pointing at the specific characteristic of the EP administration which falls in two distinct academic fields – public administration and legal studies (Egeberg et al. 2014). Marti Grau i Segu points at different aspect of this gap by referring to the legitimacy-building process of the European Parliament which has taken place since the first European elections (2019). Hix and Hoyland describe the codecision (ordinary legislative) procedure as the tool that gave the EP a real leverage in relationship with the Commission and the Council (Hix and Hoyland 2013). Thus, the increase in the EP legislative competences could be perceived as the momentum that accelerated interest about the administrative structure of the only directly elected EU institution.

Egeberg et al. (2013) in their study distinguish three principles of specialization in the EP: ideological; sectoral/functional; territorial. Although, scholars do not analyse APAs, they give an interesting insight into the specialisation's distribution of other political agents in the EP. Officials working for the Directorate-General represent sectorally/functionally arranged structure, while the political party groups' staff represents ideologically arranged one (Egeberg et al. 2013 p. 496).

Neuhold and Dobbles (2013, 2015) distinguish three other main roles that the EP officials play in the EP structure. Firstly, it is the *production role* which accounts for preparing meetings, agenda, voting lists, drafting reports and all technical issues that facilitate work of the MEPs. Secondly, *service role* which can be interpreted as providing input, advice and outlaying different policy options to the members on the substance of drafted reports. Lastly, they can perform a *steering role* by influencing shape of policy outcomes. However, their actions and decision may never violate official code of conduct or stand against decision taken by MEPs (Neuhold and Dobbles 2015 pp. 581-582).

### **2.2.1 Accredited Parliamentary Assistants**

If the EP officials are the least studied group from among civil servants in the Commission, Council and the EP – the Accredited Parliamentary Assistants are the least studied group of officials from among the Parliament’s staff. Although scholars distinguish APAs as one of the three pillars of the officials’ structure in the EP, they remain mostly ignored in the academic discourse or act as the background actors in describing processes occurring and the functioning of the EP committees (Egeberg et al. 2013, 2014). Indeed, as the research field of this group of actors is developing and scattered, in the scholarly debate, one can only find a limited number of information about the work of APAs (Pegan 2017). MEPs assistants perform three types of responsibilities. These are: secretarial tasks; legislative tasks and activities related to representing MEPs in their constituency (Pegan 2015 p. 80). The EP writes about this group of officials on their website in the following way:

“Accredited parliamentary assistants (APAs) are chosen by a Member or a group of Members and employed under a direct contract with the European Parliament. They are based on Parliament’s premises, in one of its three places of work – Brussels, Strasbourg or Luxembourg – and assist Members directly in their work, under their direction and authority and on a basis of mutual trust.”  
(EP 2021)

And this is the mutual trust that underpins APAs’ relationship with the Member. MEPs have a unique provision to hire their political staff on a political affinity criterion (EPSO CEOS). This is contrary to Secretariat officials and parliamentary group advisors.

Some attention is given to APAs by Winzen (2011) who touches upon EP officials’ role in the EP committees’ work. Scholar collected number of interviews from officials of different institutional backgrounds. By describing conflicts that occasionally occur across DGs officials, political groups staff and personal assistants, Winzen claims that Assistants’ work constitute neither the background of the policymaking in the EP, nor is merely technical – it is an important part of the legislative process. Neureither (2002) came to the same conclusion by

recognizing APAs influence as an important component of MEPs work during legislative processes in the EP committees (Neureither 2002). Although, Neureither noted that the workforce of MEPs personal assistant remained largely unused, trust between MEPs and APAs remains the essential factor during the legislative processes such as writing reports (2002, p. 57). Scholar gives an example of MEPs who are rapporteurs and are assigned with DG civil servants in order to facilitate their work. Although civil servants are virtually non-partisan, as individuals they hold certain political views. MEPs reliance on his or her parliamentary assistant is particularly important when drafting the most politically sensitive parts of the report (Neureither 2002 p.49). Moreover, by examining EP's mandate for dialogues, Rutter acknowledges the informal role of MEPs' assistants along with other EP officials, group advisors and representatives of the European Commission and the European Council. Furthermore, assistants are often involved in building compromises during dialogues, despite their contribution being constrained by specific interests and role of their Member (Rutter 2020). Pegan comes to conclusion that APAs' influence on Members' work is visible, significant and their role cannot be neglected. APAs' proximity to MEPs, the fact that they work with them in the same offices, on the regular basis, and very often have same nationality, puts accredited assistants on the position to seek out ways to realize MEPs political ambitions (Pegan 2017). Assistants enjoy stronger position in advising and coordinating MEPs compared to Secretariat officials. This, according to Pegan, shows the evolving nature of the parliamentary support and role of APAs. (2017 p. 312). Grmelova (2019) writes that although APAs are not required to be members of the same political party, similar value beliefs play an essential role in APAs contact with their MEP. Because APA – MEP relationship is based on trust and requires confidentiality, it is therefore hard to imagine a situation in which MEPs could put trust in their employee if he or she did not share their values.

The research field on APAs is modest and has to be investigated more profoundly. In the academic literature, APAs are often compared with other agents working for the EP. For that reason, assistants are mostly present in the literature regarding EP committee's work as this is the channel through which DG civil servants, political groups staff and assistants work closely to provide services to Members. There are number of studies which more closely examine the profile of Accredited Parliament Assistants, but those works are mostly based on interviews and ethnographic research. More empirical data should be gathered in order to validate and ground theoretical deliberations and existing knowledge about those actors.

## 2.3 Hypotheses

In the following subsection, based on the insight from the literature review on political professionals and Accredited Parliamentary Assistants hypotheses are formulated. They correspond and are underpinned by the overarching objective to answer the research question which is: what kinds of knowledge and expertise do APAs provide, and how does this depend on their education and career background? Hypotheses depict relationship between APAs and MEPs, answering what type of knowledge the first group provides, depending on MEPs' seniority and position within the EP (H1, H2,) and correlation between the type of knowledge APAs provide with their education, previous experience with the EP environment and length of service (H3, H4, H5, H6).

Busby and Belkacem (2013) write that in the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty, the information inflow increased significantly in the European Parliament. To cope with it and perform persuasive frontstage activities, MEPs have to rely even more on the information management provided by APAs (Busby & Belkacem 2013 p.1; Egeberg et al. 2014). Therefore, those hidden actors affect MEP's capacity to exert influence. This happens through acting as the 'gate-keepers' between the Member and stakeholders, and secondly by 'filtering' out unwanted communications and instead providing MEPs with a 'tailored' one (Busby and Belkacem 2013 p. 3). This is of particular importance with the increase of EP legislative powers and growing number of lobbyists in the European Parliament, because assistants are usually the first ones approached by lobbyists. That group recognizes APAs' key role in the long process of approaching MEPs. (Grmelova 2019 p. 5, Busby and Belkacem 2013 p. 11). The example illustrating this was brought by Earnshaw and Judge in 2002 (even though it was long before the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty) when the creation proposal of the European Food Agency in 2001 aggregated nearly 500 amendments, most notably coming from the lobbyists (2002 p. 64).

Secondly, contrary to the US Congress, the EP is characterized by a high turnover among its Members. In 2019 European elections 461 Members (62%) were newly elected ones (DG COMM 2019 p. 1). For that reason, assistants guide new MEPs in the European and EP environment (Busby & Belkacem 2013 p. 8). This leads to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** The more inexperienced the MEP is, APAs provide more context-dependent knowledge with regards to legislative and political issues.

Not only parliamentarians experience a relative freedom of choice over who to employ, but also on what terms and with what number of tasks their personnel will be assigned with (Egeberg et al. 2011). The scope of APAs' tasks depends on the role that *their* MEP plays within the Parliamentary structure and the number of terms served. If the MEP is a committee president or vice-president or is a rapporteur, the expected role and scope of tasks assigned to assistant is expected to increase (Grmelova 2019 p. 5). The role of assistants is visible during drafting committee reports. Weizman writes that no political group can adopt report single-handedly and often conciliation is required. All political actors – that is – rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs, group advisers and personal assistants are engaged in this practice. Occasionally, the key actors even compose an informal 'sub-committees' (Weizman 2011 p. 32). This leads to the second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** The higher position MEP holds in the EP structure, APAs provision of context-dependent knowledge is greater compared to APAs whose MEPs do not hold position in the EP structure.

The scope and multitude of responsibilities makes APAs powerful hidden actors. By selecting correspondence, knowing the agenda, reports and amendments and other backstage activities, assistants do not only *support* MEPs frontstage performances, but are also able to *influence* MEPs frontstage performance (Busby & Belkacem 2013 p. 14). While Secretariat holds information, APAs are responsible for adjusting this information and tailoring it to the demand of their MEPs' profile and agenda. This gives assistants the information management power vis-à-vis their employer (Busby & Belkacem 2013 p. 14).

Most APAs have excellent command of at least three official EU languages, experience with the EU institutions, either by completing a traineeship within the EU or to the MEPs. Higher education and university degree seems to be an essential components of assistants' characteristics (Grmelova 2019 p. 4). However, apart from that, assistant's role requires a master level of multi-tasking and a broad set of skills, as they are responsible for legislative work, following committee proceedings, secretarial issues, but also meeting lobbyists, giving tours in the EP or simply organizing events in the Parliament's venues (Busby & Belkacem 2013 p. 11). Moreover, having reflected upon the literature on education of policy professionals and the fact that, apart from on-the-job training, soft skills are the most important element of policy professionals' education (Svallfors 2020 Ch. 3), the following hypotheses are formulated:

**Hypothesis 3:** Hard knowledge such as type of a degree is less important to APA in everyday work than soft knowledge such as writing and research skills.

**Hypothesis 4:** University knowledge is less important to APAs in everyday work than the knowledge of the EP environment.

But these are not the only tasks that APAs are assigned with. They conduct research, prepare briefings, write articles and press releases and are partially responsible for maintaining good relationship with MEPs constituencies. Marcella et al. (1999) distinguish four levels of information that are important for Members. These are: constituency, party, European Parliament and international levels. On the constituency level, MEP's office has to be able to respond to constituents' questions. On the party level, they are accountable for all relevant policy areas. On the EP level, all work relevant to the MEPs parliamentary tasks. Finally, on the international level, information may be needed for MEP's work in delegations, sub-committees and groupings (1999, pp. 10-14).

Moreover, multiple researches have underlined the role of informal contacts in the process of knowledge and expertise gathering. Marcella, Carcary, and Baxter analyse information collection and research process among British MEPs. Majority of the UK Members relied on information provided by APAs, who in turn, rely on the internal, informal network of contacts (Marcella et al. 1999; Grau i Segú 2019, p. 408). British MEPs also noted that informal contacts play a crucial role in the information management process and were ranked the third most important source of information (behind MEPs' own files and European Parliament Library Service; Marcella et al. 1999 pp. 15-16). Conducting research, directly translates into legislative work. Assistants draft amendments, help write Own Initiative Reports and support political advisors in drawing up voting lists (Busby & Belkacem 2013 pp. 10).

Having reflected upon the abovementioned literature, the literature on policy professionals, their reliance on the informal network of contacts and training, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**Hypothesis 5:** APAs who completed traineeship with the EU institutions make better source of information for MEPs to APAs who have not completed internship with the EU institutions.

The environment of the European Parliament is characterised by two important factors – high level of absenteeism among MEPs and information overload. Due to the specific,

transnational nature of their mandate, MEPs are always in the rush (Wodak 2009 Ch. 4). They travel between Brussels, Strasbourg and their local constituencies. Therefore, assistants' work is crucial in order to maintain efficiency and continuity of the MEPs' offices (Busby & Belkacem 2013 pp. 7-8). This is why APAs follow work in committees of their MEPs and by the rule of thumb, the division of their work reflect seniority in the office. The longer assistant works, the higher is the chance that he or she will follow the most important committees from the point of their MEP. And contrary, junior staff will most likely be responsible for committees where their MEP serves as a substitute member (Busby & Belkacem 2013 pp. 10-11). Moreover, growing powers of the EP, re-election of MEPs and parliamentary assistants who *survived* shifts among Members, gradually started to form a group of policy experts in the field of the EP, creating its own ecosystem and institutional memory (Laurens 2017 p. 137). Reflecting on abovementioned academic debate and the literature on the knowledge provided by policy professionals (Svallfors 2017b) the last hypothesis is formulated:

**Hypothesis 6:** The longer APA serves, the greater is the provision of the context-dependent knowledge to MEP.

	<b>Propositions</b>
1)	Provision of the context-dependent knowledge by APAs to MEPs is positively related with MEPs' juniority in the EP.
2)	Provision of the context-dependent knowledge by APAs is positively related with MEPs position within the EP hierarchy.
3)	Hard knowledge, compared to soft knowledge, is negatively related to problem formulation performed by APAs
4)	University knowledge, compared to the knowledge of the EP environment, is negatively related to process expertise knowledge performed by APAs.
5)	Traineeship with the EU institutions is positively related to APA's provision of information to MEPs
6)	Provision of the context-dependent knowledge MEPs is positively related to APAs seniority in the EP

**Table 2.** Theoretical Propositions

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

The following part will discuss methodological framework applied to address the research question. Next, methodology of the research will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion on the case selection, choice of population and methods of data collection. Furthermore, the operationalization of concepts – the dependent and independent variables will be introduced. The chapter will end with the discussion on methods of analysis and on the validity and reliability of the research.

### **3.1 Research design**

The aim of the research is to look upon the knowledge that Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in the European Parliament provide Members of the European Parliament with and how it depends on their education. It focuses upon the association between X – Y. This means that the research investigates whether the independent variable has an impact on the dependent variable. In the following context, the influence of the individual APA on the performance and working of the MEP and his or her office. Dependent variables are kinds of the context-dependent knowledge APAs provide; particular tasks they are responsible for and set of statements on knowledge provision. Independent variables represent the number of terms served by the MEP, thus, MEPs experience in the EP; the MEP's position in the broader hierarchy of the EP – in other words – are they Chairs or Vice-chairs in any committees, delegation or political group; assistant's age; length of his or her service; their field of studies and traineeship with the EU agencies. The population of the research consists of 116 assistants (N=116) of Members of the European Parliament of the 9th term (2019-2024 EuropeElects.com 2021).

The descriptive part of the research distinguishes and outlines basic characteristics of the studied group i.e. educational background and previous experience with working for the EP. The aim of the explanatory part is to test hypotheses presented in the previous chapter. Statistical analysis is performed by using the Pearson's chi-square test, Yates' correction and Fisher's exact test. Firstly, the results are presented and hypotheses are either confirmed or rejected. The discussion about them will follow in the next subsection.

### **3.2 Case Selection and Choice of Population**

This paper aims to look at the specific kind of the European Parliament's staff – Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in order to fill the academic knowledge gap in the structure of the EP workforce – what the knowledge that assistants provide MEPs with is and how this depends



on their educational background. Moreover, by using the survey, the study aims to systematize existing knowledge and literature previously based mostly on the ethnographic research and interviews. Before this, a short illustration depicting administrative frame of the EP is explained which is followed by a brief explanation of components of the EP personnel. This is done in order to give a broader picture of the personnel structure in the institution.

Administrative structure in the EP resembles the structure of parliaments in the member states and is organized in a European Civil Service. What differs is that regulations regarding civil service are centralized. Hence, they are the same for the whole EU. This means that the EP officials are subjected to the same regulations as their colleagues in the European Commission and the European Council (Regulation No 31 (EEC), 11 (EAEC) 2020). Pegan distinguishes employment statuses in the EP that can be divided into two levels – officials can hold a permanent or temporary status of employment (Pegan 2011).

Egeberg et al. further divide administrative actors in the Parliament and organize them in three different categories: General Secretariat whose staff is employed on the permanent basis; temporary employees working in the secretariat of political groups and temporary officials who work as personal assistants in the MEPs offices (Egeberg et al. 2013). Despite differences in their recruitment and scope of tasks, all EP officials exhibit three common features. Firstly, EP official's role is to assist MEPs and relevant political actors in the EP. Secondly, they form an internal network which facilitates smooth running of information within the Parliament. This can be compared to external sources of information, which from the EP perspective, are EU institutions such as the Commission, Council and external groups such as think-tanks, NGOs, lobby groups or national governments. Thirdly, they are financed from the EP budget. Civil servants working in the Secretariat are recruited through competitions, while employment of assistants and party officials is subjected in the first case to the will of the MEP, and in the second one, to the political group (Pegan 2011).

One group of officials working in the EP are the General Secretariat officials. The General Secretariat remains in the centre of the Parliaments' administration. According to Corbett et al. (2011 p. 218) since it was established, the number of civil servants working there grew vastly – from 37 posts in 1952, 2000 in 1972 to nearly 6000 officials working in the Parliament's premises in 2011. The huge increase in the number of employed staff resulted not only from the expansion in policy areas the EP has to deal with, but also the increase in the number of MEPs and countries involved in the EU project. The Secretary-General consists of twelve Directorates-General which are responsible for the smooth running of the EP. Their

tasks vary – from ensuring efficient communication between citizens and the institution, to co-ordinating legislative process, facilitating expertise and providing translation (EP 2021). The Secretariat networks and scope of their tasks spreads around expert groups and sectoral issues (Egeberg 2013 p. 497). However, the rotation of officials between DGs and other EU institutions may additionally accelerate networking between other agencies and groups (Roederer - Rynning & Greenwood 2017).

Next group consists of the political groups' staff which amounts for approximately 900 positions. Their role is to provide services for their political group and to make sure that legislative aspects are in line with the party message. Political groups directly hire this category of the EP officials (Egeberg et al. 2013 p. 498).

Political group's staff is employed on a partisan basis (Egeberg et al. 2013 p. 501). In contrast with DGs officials, political group staff noticeably network in accordance with their party affiliation. Moreover, they are predominantly concerned about interests of their political group. (Hix 2013 p. 496). Every political group has a different ratio of civil servant per MEP. In 2011 the lowest ratio of staff worked for the European People's Party (EPP), while the highest ratio was noted among the left political groups (Dobbles & Neuhold 2012 p. 380).

Finally, there are Accredited Parliamentary Assistants whose role for many years have been marginal. In 1974, when the MEP staff allowance was introduced, it did not enable MEPs to hire university-educated policy support. Throughout the years, this has been gradually changing, but it was only in 2009 that the statute of personal MEPs' staff was adopted. Moreover, the 2009 Regulation 160/2009 amended the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Communities (CEOS) and distinguished between Accredited Parliamentary Assistants who work directly in the EP and local assistants who work in MEPs' local constituencies (Pegan 2017 p. 297). Michon (2015) noted that the average number of accredited assistants per MEP is 2.1.

Egeberg et al. (2011, 2013) write that APAs are often composed of the junior staff. Grmelova points that after serving one to two terms as an assistant to MEP, APAs decide to move on in their careers. After passing European Personnel Selection Office test (EPSO), they seek employment in other EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Council, EP Directorates, or move to national politics or private sector. For that reason, being Accredited Parliamentary Assistant may be perceived just as a step in their career. (Grmelova 2019 p. 5) Michon denotes that assistants represent subordinate and precarious group of

political agents who are political advisors. They actively help to build the EU and in the future will be employed in the EU institutions and interest groups. The position of the assistant is a step in their career-development trajectory that paths a way to a career in other EU institutions and on higher posts (Michon 2008 in Busby & Belkacem 2013 p. 9; Grmelova 2019). It is for that reason, that this particular group of actors is being analysed – they are an important, yet comparatively unstudied group of actors whose influence on European matters is hypothesised to be significant.

During the time of writing this paper – that is summer 2021 – there were 1923 Accredited Parliamentary Assistant working for 705 Members of the European Parliament (see: Appendix A). This gives an updated rate of 2,73 assistants per MEP. The population of assistants invited to participate in the survey consist only of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants working for the MEP in his or her offices in Brussels or Strasbourg. This group has to be distinguished from *grouping assistants* – particular type of APAs, employed by national delegations of MEPs to facilitate coordinating tasks between them and political groups. Grouping assistants are not included in the research.

Moreover, it has to be noted that some national delegations of MEPs employ a number of APAs who are not subjected to any particular MEP, but to the national delegation as a whole (i.e. the number of 20 Spanish MEPs from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats employs in total 44 grouping assistants who are not subordinate to any particular Member, but by sharing their tasks, work for the whole delegation. In the following case, grouping assistants are counted in; see: Appendix A). The abovementioned solution is not popular in the European Parliament, yet some MEPs, particularly from Spain, use it.

### **3.3 Operationalisation/Measurement**

#### **3.3.1 Dependent Variables**

Dependent variables examine components of the context-dependent knowledge provided; particular tasks assistants are responsible for and statements regarding provision of knowledge.

The first hypothesis consists of two subhypotheses. In the first one, the nominal variable **Context-dependent knowledge provision** is used and it takes three values – Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP (process expertise); knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information (information access) and knowledge expertise related to framing political message into the EP/EU language (problem

formulation). This typology is applied from Svallfors and his work on policy professionals (2020). The components of politically useful knowledge are rephrased and modified so that they could be better understood by respondents.

The second subhypothesis performs statistical analysis by using the dependent variable **Tasks** that maps different responsibilities performed by assistants. This variable takes values – Drafting documents for MEP; Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP; Giving political advice to MEP; Providing background information for MEPs; Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs; Facilitating compromises within the EP; Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council; Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies); Administrative tasks; Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants; Media Outreach and Other. This set is taken from Egeberg et al. (2013) and four last values are added by the author, based on the literature outlined in the previous chapter.

The second hypothesis examines relationship between position of the MEP in the EP and the provision of knowledge by APA. It is also divided into two subhypotheses. The first subhypothesis uses **Context-dependent knowledge provision** as the dependent variable, and the second one uses **Tasks** as the dependent variable.

Third hypothesis also consists of two subhypotheses and two dependent variables are required. In the first subhypothesis the ordinal variable **Hard knowledge less important** is used. The value can be represented in 5 forms – Definitely yes; Rather yes; Neither yes or no; Rather no; Definitely no. In the second subhypothesis, another ordinal variable is used – **Academic degree important in covering work of the committee etc.** which takes the same five values – Definitely yes; Rather yes; Neither yes or no; Rather no; Definitely no.

Further, the fourth hypothesis is likewise divided into two subhypotheses. For the first one, again, the ordinal variable **Hard knowledge less important** is applied and for the second one the same ordinal variable **Academic degree important in covering work of the committee etc.** is used. Both of them take the same values as in the third hypothesis.

The fifth hypothesis deals with the information access. In order to test hypothesis, also in that case, two subhypotheses were formulated. In the first case, ordinal variable **Being MEP's most important source of information** asks APAs how much do they agree with the statement that they constitute the most important source of information for their Member. The value is represented in 5 categories – Definitely yes; Rather yes; Neither yes or no; Rather no; Definitely no. The second subhypothesis uses ordinal variable **Relying on internal network**

**of contacts to obtain information** asks assistants to reflect on the statement that to obtain information about current affairs in the EP, they mostly rely on their own internal network of contacts. The answer takes five values – Definitely yes; Rather yes; Neither yes or no; Rather no; Definitely no.

The last, sixth hypothesis examines the relationship between seniority of APA and provision of the context-dependent knowledge. Moreover, it is further spilt into four subhypotheses. Dependent variable of the first and third subhypotheses, takes form of different components of the **Context-dependent knowledge provision**; the second and fourth subhypotheses use dependent variable **Tasks**.

### 3.3.2. Independent Variables

Independent variables depict conditions which influence the provision of APAs' knowledge.

As mentioned in the previous subsection, the first hypothesis is divided into two subhypotheses. Both of them use **Seniority of the MEP** as the independent variable. Here the value can take three forms – 1<sup>st</sup> term, 2<sup>nd</sup> term, 3<sup>rd</sup> term and more. The division is motivated by the assumption that the more inexperienced the MEP is, more context-dependent knowledge APA provides.

The binary variable **Position of the MEP** is used in the second hypothesis for both subhypotheses. It measures whether the MEP holds any higher position in the EP structure (Chair/Vicechair of the committee/delegation etc.). In the following case, the value takes two forms – Yes and No.

The third hypothesis is likewise divided into two subhypotheses, but only one independent variable is used – **Field of studies**. It is the binary variable that takes two values: political science and Other. The question in the survey distinguishes between political sciences and other educational fields. However, in order to perform statistical analysis, this was narrowed to only two options. The full set of answers is presented as the nominal non-binary variable in the next section 3.3.3.

Hypotheses four and five are also divided into two subhypotheses each of them applies the same independent binary variable **Traineeship with the EU institution**. The question in the survey distinguishes between different traineeship programmes offered by the EU institutions. However, for the purpose of the statistical analysis, this was narrowed down to only two

answers Yes and No. The full set of answers is presented as the nominal non-binary variable in the next section 3.3.3.

In the sixth hypothesis a nominal variable, **Age of APA** (at the moment of filling the survey), is used in order to test subhypotheses one and three. It takes values 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50<. Second and fourth subhypotheses use nominal variable **Seniority of APA** which takes values <1 year; 1-2 years; 3-5 years; 6-10 years and 10 years <. Two variables are applied in order to examine differences between age/length of service and provision of the knowledge.

### **3.3.3. Variables on the subject of demography, education and political background of APA's Member**

Variables that appear in this subsection are not included in the statistical analysis. However, they are important with regards to contributing to the descriptive aim of the research, that is – describing APAs and shedding more light on them as political actors in the EP.

The **Gender** is a nominal non-binary variable and takes form of four values – male, female, other and prefer not to answer.

The **Level of education** is a nominal non-binary variable measured by the highest level of education obtained by the assistant. Five options are possible – PhD; MD/MPhil; Masters (MBA, MA, MSc, JD); Bachelors; No academic degree.

The nominal variable, **Field of studies** of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants categorizes different field studied – 1) Legal Studies; 2) Economics; 3) Political Science; 4) Foreign Languages; 5) Journalism; 6) Translation; 7) Other.

The nominal variable, **Political group of the MEP** for whom the assistant works is also examined. They are classified according to the EP list of political groups – 1) Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); 2) Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; 3) Renew Europe Group; 4) Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; 5) Identity and Democracy Group; 6) European Conservatives and Reformists Group; 7) The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL; 8) Non-attached Members; 9) Prefer not to answer.

The **Languages spoken** nominal variable has value of 1 when APA speaks one language and respectively 2 and 3+ for two and three and more languages spoken.

The **Trainee with the EU institution** nominal variable holds the following value: 1) Yes, Schuman Traineeship; 2) Yes, Traineeships with the Member of the European Parliament; 3)

Yes, Blue Book Traineeship; 4) Yes, traineeship in political group; 5) Yes, other; 6) No, I have not completed traineeship.

The last binary variable **Previously worked for national administration** takes value Yes for those who have worked with national administration and in the other case No.

Dependent Variables	Operationalization and measurement	
	Operationalization	Measurement
<b>Context-dependent knowledge provision:</b>	What kind of context dependent knowledge does APA provide to MEP	Problem Formulation (1) Process Expertise (2) Information Access (3)
<b>Task</b>	What kind of tasks does APA perform	Drafting documents for MEP (1) Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP (2) Giving political advice to MEP (3) Providing background information for MEPs (4) Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs (5) Facilitating compromises within the EP (6) Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council (7) Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies) (8) Administrative tasks (9) Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants (10) Media Outreach (11) Other (12)
<b>Hard knowledge less important</b>	Hard knowledge is less important to APAs than soft knowledge	Yes (1) No (2) Neither yes or no (3)
<b>Academic degree important in covering work of the committee etc.</b>	Academic degree helpful in covering work of the assigned committee etc.	Yes (1) No (2) Neither yes or no (3)
<b>Being MEP's most important source of information</b>	APA is the main source of information for his or her MEP	Yes (1) No (2) Neither yes or no (3)
<b>Relying on internal network of contacts to obtain information</b>	APA relies mostly on his or her internal network of contacts rather than official EP sources	Yes (1) No (2) Neither yes or no (3)

**Table 3.** Operationalization of dependent variables

<b>Operationalization and measurement</b>		
<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>	<b>Measurement</b>
<b>Seniority of the MEP</b>	Number of terms served by the MEP	1 term (1) 2 terms (2) 3+ terms (3)
<b>Position of the MEP</b>	Chair/Vicechair of committee/delegation. Political group etc.	Yes / No
<b>Field of studies</b>	What is the field of APA's studies	Political Sciences (1) Other (2)
<b>Traineeship with the EU institution</b>	Has APA completed traineeship with the EU institution.	Yes (1) No (2)
<b>Age of APA</b>	How old APA is	20-29 (1) 30-39 (2) 40-49 (3) 50< (4)
<b>Seniority of APA</b>	What is the length of APA's service	< 1 year (1) 1-2 years (2) 3-5 years (3) 6-10 years (4) 10 years< (5)

**Table 4.** Operationalization of independent variables



<b>Operationalization and measurement</b>		
<b>Other variables</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>	<b>Measurement</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Gender of APA	Male (1) Female (2)
<b>Level of Education</b>	Highest level of education obtained by APA	PhD (1) MD/MPhil (2) Masters (MBA, MA, MSc, JD) (3) Bachelors (4) No academic degree (5)
<b>Field of studies</b>	Field of APAs education	Legal Studies (1) Economics (2) Political Science (3) Foreign Languages (4) Journalism (5) Translation (6) Other (7)
<b>Political Group of the MEP</b>	Political group of APA's MEP	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (1) Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (2) Renew Europe Group (3) Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (4) Identity and Democracy Group (5) European Conservatives and Reformists Group (6) The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL (7) Non-attached Members (8) Prefer not to answer (9)
<b>Languages spoken</b>	Languages spoken by APA	1 (1) 2(2) 3+ (3)
<b>Trainee with EU institution</b>	Traineeship with EU institution	Yes, Schuman Traineeship (1) Yes, Traineeships with Members of the European Parliament (2) Yes, Blue Book Traineeship (3) Yes, traineeship in political group (4) Yes, other (5) No traineeship (6)
<b>Previously worked for national administration</b>	Previous experience with working for national administration	Yes (1) No (2)

Table 5. Operationalization of other variables

### **3.4 Data collection**

The data that is used to answer hypotheses in this research was collected by conducting an online survey among Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (N = 116) working for MEPs during the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term (2019-2024; EuropeElects.com 2021). The data regarding basic information of assistants (name and surname) and their work email is a public information available on the official website of the European Parliament (EP 2021). The survey was conducted between 12-15 July 2021.

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter on policy professionals and APAs, the scope of their duties is wide and no single rule can be applied that could clearly categorize APAs' tasks. For that reason and due to assistants' busy schedule, the conducted survey asked respondents questions with pre-given set of answers with possibility to further express their thoughts on more complex issues or not included answers.

Individuals invited to participate in the survey are Accredited Parliament Assistants in the understanding of the Council Regulation No 160/2009 of amending the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Community (EC 23 February 2009). Given that, this means that they: "work in the premises of the European Parliament in a European, multilingual and multicultural environment and undertake tasks which are directly linked to the work carried out by one or several Members of the European Parliament in the exercise of their functions as Members of the European Parliament"( EC 23 February 2009).

Another important factor is that the questionnaire was conducted online and anonymously. This is a potential advantage over research methods previously used by other scholars who conducted interviews and ethnographic research (Busby & Belakcem 2013, Grmelova 2019) as it allows for purely anonymous contact, thus more authentic and unfettered reply.

In one aspect, this research employs Svallfors (2020) typology on context-dependent knowledge of policy professionals (problem formulation, process expertise, information access) and transforms it into question included in the survey (See: Appendix B, Question No. 16.). Moreover, the survey borrows and develops set on answers from the study conducted by Egeberg, Gornitzka, Trondal & Johannessen (2013; See: Appendix B, Question No. 18.). In their research, scholars examine behaviour of officials working in the EP and scope of their responsibilities. By doing so, Egeberg et al. analyse supportive role of assistants on MEPs' work compared to other EP personnel (2013).

Next, knowledge components described by Svallfors (2020) are linked with the set of tasks created by Egeberg et al. (2013) This led to construction of a table denoting this relationship. The results will be analysed also from this perspective as it additionally helps to map APAs knowledge provision to MEPs. The division is set out and pictured in the table presented below:

	<b>Svallfors (2020)</b>	<b>Egeberg et al. (2013)</b>
<b>Context-dependent knowledge</b>	<b>Problem Formulation</b> Highlighting and framing social problems and their possible outcomes.	Drafting documents for MEP
		Facilitating compromises within the EP
		Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council
		Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP
	<b>Process Expertise</b> Understanding “where, how and why” of the political and policy-making processes.	Giving political advice to MEP
		Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs
		Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)
	<b>Information Access</b> Skill to find reliable and relevant information very fast	Providing background information for MEPs
		Administrative tasks

**Table 6.** Context-dependent knowledge and particular tasks (Svallfors 2020; Egeberg et al. 2013)

### 3.5 Methods of Analysis

In the first empirical component of the paper, descriptive statistics is applied in order to lay out overall characteristics regarding studied population of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants of the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term. By doing so, the research sheds more light of those marginalized actors in the European Parliament’s officials structure.

The second empirical part, applies descriptive statistics in order to test hypotheses. All calculations were carried out using STATISTICA, StatSoft, Inc. ver. 12.0. statistical package (data analysis software system). Qualitative data expressed by counts and percentages were compared according to the number of cases in each compared category and/or their expected values the Pearson’s chi-square test, Yates’ correction, or Fisher’s exact test were used. In the statistical description of qualitative data percentages and proportions were used, and for quantitative data measures of location such as arithmetic mean and median, and measures of variation such as standard deviation and range were applied.

Pearson’s chi-square test and Fisher’s exact test are tests of categorical association among data arranged in crosstabs. They are based on the simple use of data analysis with simple 2 x 2 tables. Overall, Fisher’s exact test is preferred over Pearson’s chi-square as it is more exact.

However, Pearson's chi-square test is useful because, as Hess & Hess write, of its "computational and philosophic accessibility" (2017).

Pearson's chi-square test evaluates the differences between the observed and expected values in a crosstab, shows whether there is a relationship between categorical variables and is most commonly used as a test of independence (Hess & Hess 2017, Kremelberg 2011 Ch. 4). It explores evidence that "the distribution of instances of occurrence of one variable across levels of another is different than what would be expected by chance" (Hess & Hess 2017). In other words, it tests association concerning two categorical responses (Shih & Fay 2017). Pearson's chi-square test can be applied to a great variety of data written down in contingency tables. Apart from this, the test assumes that: firstly, the data constitutes a simple random sample; secondly, the data is of an adequate sample size so that there are satisfactory expected cell counts; finally, that the data is independent of each other (Hess & Hess 2017).

Fisher's exact test constitutes an alternative for assessing the allocation of counts in a contingency table. Again, Hess & Hess explain that "instead of asking *how different is our observation from expectation, given these marginal totals?* it asks *given these marginal totals, what is the probability of obtaining data as or more extreme than the data observed?*" (2017). Fisher's exact test is used generally to 2 x 2 tables with small cell counts, however, computer advancement made it simpler to utilize larger and more complex tables (Hess & Hess 2017).

Yates' correction is a "continuity correction applied to a chi-squared contingency table test" (Clapham & Nicholson 2014) and is often used in connection with 2 × 2 contingency tables to improve the precision of tables with small cell frequencies (Bryman 2011).

This thesis uses the indicator of statistical significance. In order to eliminate likelihood that the relationship between variables is based on coincidence, the results have to be statistically significant. In all the calculations the statistical significance level is set at the level of 5% as in the case of most scholarly papers ( $p < 0.05$ ; van der Velde 2020, p. 33).

### **3.6 Discussion on reliability and validity**

Both, external and internal validity, but also reliability are important aspects of every research. The same applies to this thesis. The previous discussion in this chapter on the research design, case selection, data, methods of data collection and operationalization of concepts has to be followed by explanation on reliability and validity and how they interplay with this work.

External validity refers to generalizability of conclusions beyond cases observed under the study, that is, whether the same cause-effect relationship could be achieved across different participants, settings and methods (Brewer & Crano, 2014, p.12). In other words, to what degree observations of the research can be transferred and applied to the larger population (Toshkov, 2016, p. 248). In case of the research, this could mean to what extent the knowledge expertise provided by APAs to elected members is consistent with the knowledge provision of assistants in other EU Member States or democracies. With this regards, the expected external reliability of this study is anticipated to be low as the European Parliament constitutes a unique agora for elected members of 27 countries. Because of its transnational nature, it makes a different microcosmos compared to national parliaments. However, generalization might not be the central aim of the research, which is the case for this study (Mohle 2019 after Toshkov 2016). As the literature on assistants is still modest, compared to other agents in the EP, the primary objective of this thesis is to offer an empirical contribution to the debate on APAs and the knowledge expertise they provide. On the other hand, this research contributes to the literature on policy professionals. Therefore, the discussion on external validity will be presented in the conclusion of the research.

Internal validity deals with the proper use of variables and has to be accounted for. The term refers to the truth value which, as Brewer & Crano write “can be assigned to the conclusion that a cause-effect relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable has been established within the context of the particular research setting” (2014, p. 12). The internal validity will be partially secured by using typology on policy professionals and the context-dependent knowledge described by Svallfors (2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017b, 2020; Selling & Svallfors 2019) and partially by importing set of tasks outlined in the article by Egeberg, Gornitzka, Trondal and Johannessen (2013) on mapping behaviour of officials in the European Parliament. By doing so, the paper adds to systematizing empirical methods used to measure behaviour of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants and other staff in the EP. Moreover, questions in the survey are formulated to answer hypotheses.

Reliability indicates that the use of the same measures and data by different scholars always results in the same values. As Toshkov puts it (2016) “reliability implies that if different researchers were to apply the same measurement approach (or the same researcher at different periods of time) they would get the same or at least very similar results”.

Another challenge for the reliability in this research is the data collection. The acquired data is based on the anonymous online survey conducted July 2021 among Accredited Parliament Assistants in the European Parliament. Online surveys are an effective tool to deal with closed populations as in the case of APAs (Sue & Ritter 2012, Ch. 9) and can be completed fast and with the minimum cost (Ball 2019). Moreover, anonymity offers possibility to reveal unconstrained opinion of the studied population about the scope of their tasks. On the other hand, the lack of interviewer, no face-to-face contact between researcher and respondent, thus no possibility to clarify the question or clarify an ambiguous term, may result in the biased results. Furthermore, there is a chance of the sample bias as assistants working for the same MEP or from the same political group, may share the survey among themselves leading to over-representation of a particular viewpoint (Ball 2019). Apart from this, the overload of multiple digital surveys may additionally discourage potential respondents from participating in the survey (Sue & Ritter 2012, Ch. 1). Finally, there is a risk of the survey fraud – in particular when respondents have strong feelings that they would like to see represented (Ball 2019). Therefore, anonymity is simultaneously an advantageous and disadvantageous method of data collection. All the risks related to conducting online survey may contribute to weakening of the reliability of this thesis.

## Chapter 4. Analysis

This section outlines and analyses empirical findings linking them with hypotheses and the research question. In order to do so, it is divided into two parts. Firstly, the descriptive statistics is presented based on the conducted survey. Then, the characteristics of the studied population are examined – assistants’ age, gender, educational background, political group their MEP represents and the length of service of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants. The explanatory part focuses upon results of the Pearson’s chi-square test, Yates’ correction, and Fisher’s exact test from the data obtained in the survey. They are later applied to previously created hypotheses.

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Due to the character of asked questions only two nominal variables could be formed in the table that identifies mean, standard deviation and median. However, a few observations can be made. With regards to the context-dependent provision of knowledge the median is 3,03 with standard deviation being 1,1. In the second row depicting tasks, the mean is 7,61 while standard deviation 2,36.

Variables	Observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Median	Min	Max
Context-dependent knowledge provision	115	3,0347826	1,1076325	3	0	5
Tasks	115	7,617391	2,364142	8	0	12

**Table. 7** Descriptive statistics: context-dependent knowledge & tasks

### Background information regarding Accredited Parliamentary Assistants

This subsection deals with the demographic data regarding age, gender, educational background of APAs and political affiliation of their employers – Members of the European Parliament.

#### Age and gender

Out of 116 assistants who participated in the survey, majority represents relatively young group of actors. 62 assistants (54%) are between 30-39 years of age. The second largest group

of assistants is in the range between 20-29 years old. They stand for 37 people (32%). Next, examined group represents assistants who are between 40-49 years of age. They make 10% of the surveyed population and account for 11 individuals. Later, 4 people are over 50 years old (3%). In the survey there was one person who decided not to reveal his or her age (<1%). With regards to gender, majority – 64 – of assistants are female (56%), 50 are male (46%). The variable was constructed as the nominal non-binary variable, but since all respondents indicated that they are either male or female, this variable will be treated as the nominal binary variable.

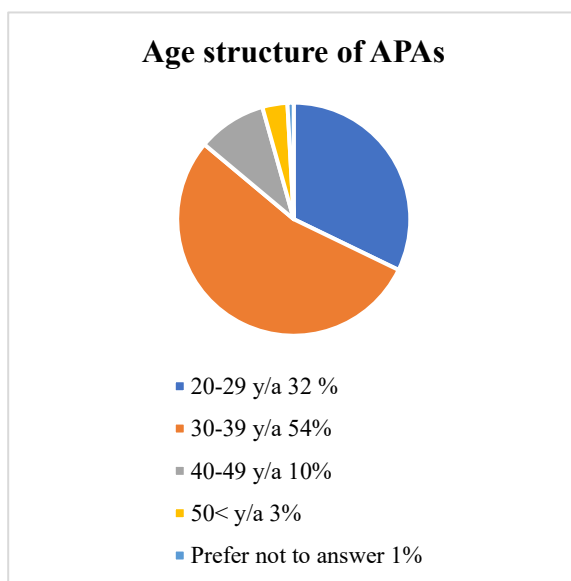


Figure 1. Age

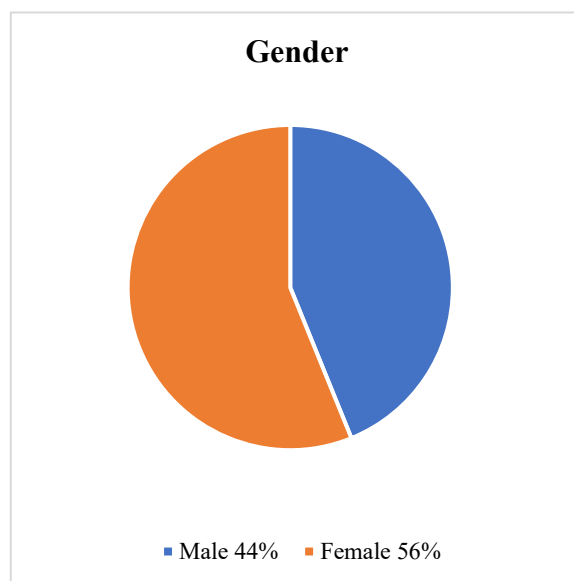


Figure 2. Gender

### Political groups of the Members of the European Parliament that assistants work for

The surveyed population works for Members who belong to all political groups in the EP or are non-attached Members. Majority of assistants work for the MEPs who belong to the EPP political group. They represent 32 individuals (28%). Second group consists of 30 assistants (26%) who work for members grouped in the Renew political group. Thirdly, 19 assistants (17%) represent MEPs in S&D group. Next, 14 assistants (12%) by the merit of working for their MEP, are grouped among those belonging to the G/EFA political group. The same amount of 6 assistants (5%) work for both the GUE/NGL and ECR (5%). Furthermore, 4 assistants (4%) work for the Non-attached Members. One assistant who participated in the



survey (<1%) works for the MEP from the Identity and Democracy Group. Lastly, 2 assistants (2%) preferred not to reveal their MEPs' political group.

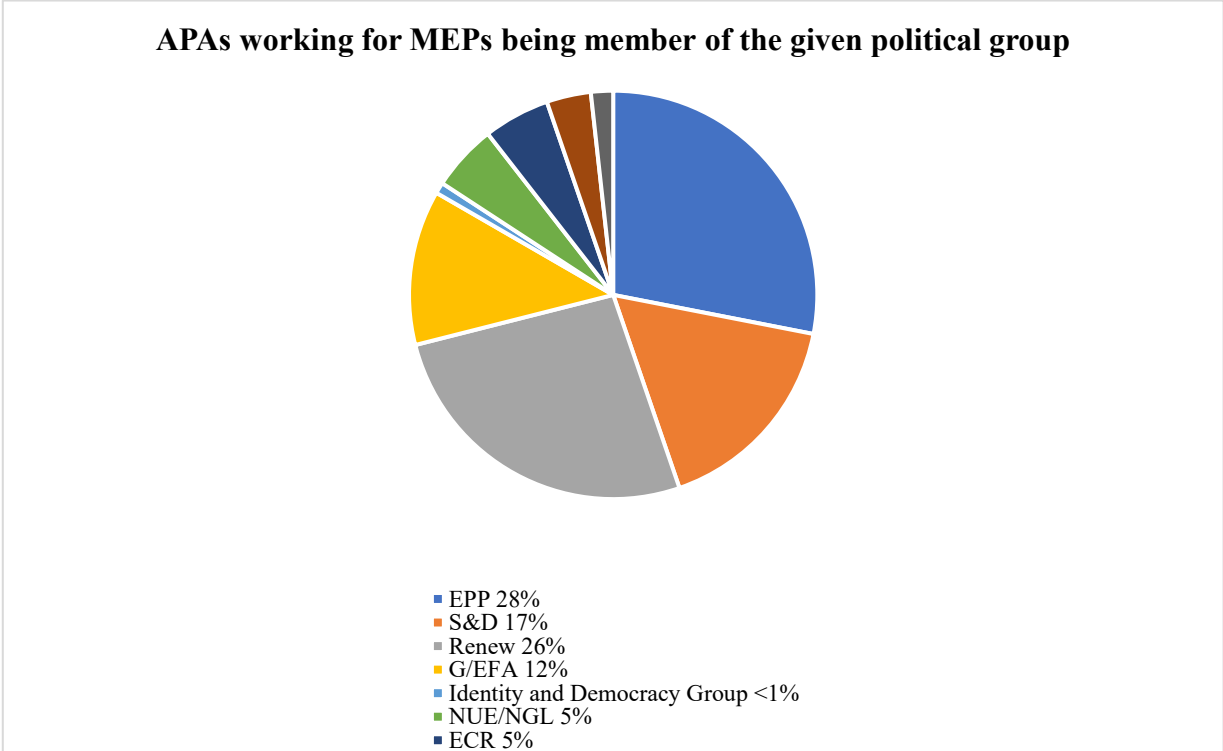


Figure 3. Political groups

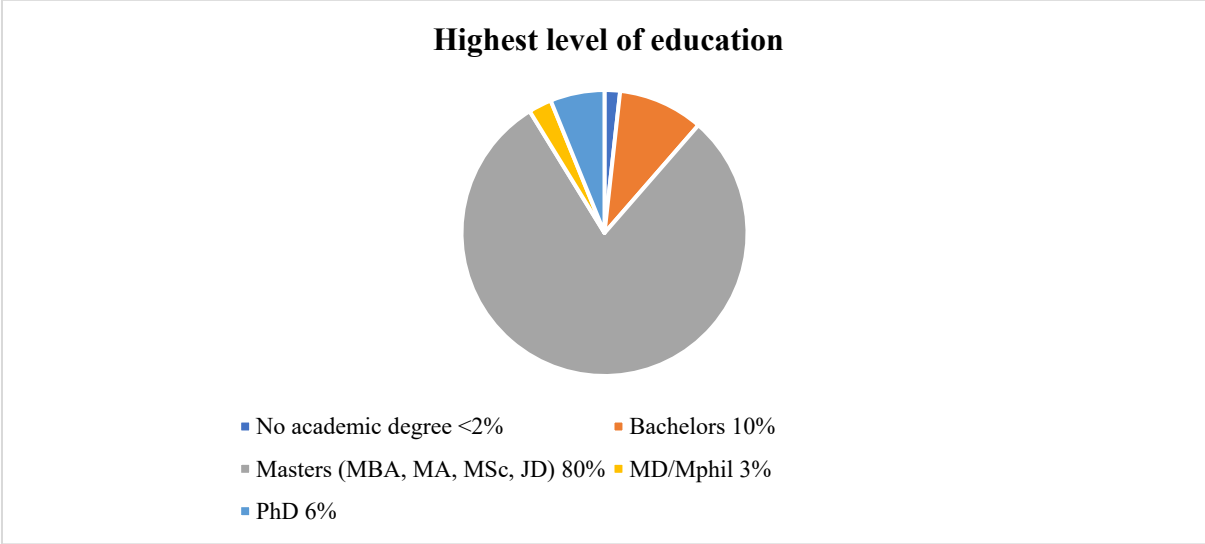


Figure 4. Education

## Education and previous work experience of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants

Striking majority of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants revealed that their highest educational level is the Master's degree (Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Business

Administration, Juris Doctor). 91 out of 114 (80%) individuals who responded to that question chose this answer. Next, 11 assistants (10%) hold Bachelor's degree; 7 assistants have PhD (6%). Next, 3 assistants (3%) hold MD (Medical Doctor) or MPhil (Medical Science) Degree and only 2 assistants (<2%) have no academic degree.

From among those who replied to the survey, the majority of assistants studied Political Sciences. They account for 63 people (55%). Second largest group is represented by 18 assistants (16%) who were educated in legal studies. Next educational path is marked by those who studied economics – 6 individuals (5%) and respectively foreign languages – 5 people (4%). There are 2 assistants who studied journalism (3%) and 19 people (17%) who chose option 'other' (when APA selected this option, he or she could type in the field of study in the next bracket that appeared below – assistants indicated that, among others, they studied agriculture, architecture, geography, education, history and computer sciences).

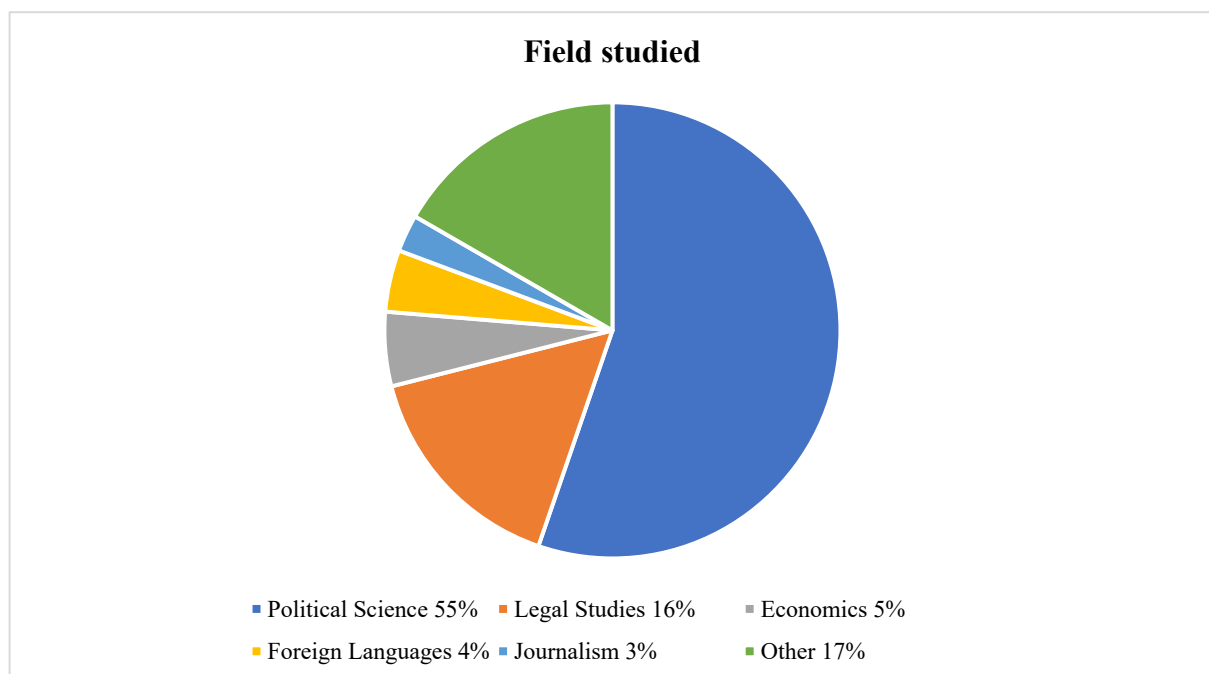


Figure 5. Field of Education

When it comes to the number of languages spoken, nearly half of the respondents speak more than three official EU languages. They represent 53 individuals (47%); 38 Accredited

Parliament Assistants speak three languages (33%) and 22 (19%) are fluent in two. Only one respondent (<1%) speaks just one official EU language.

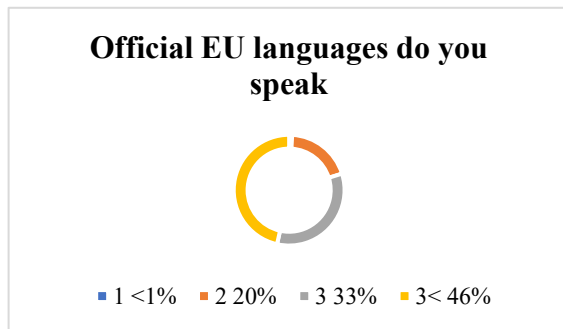


Figure 6. EU languages spoken

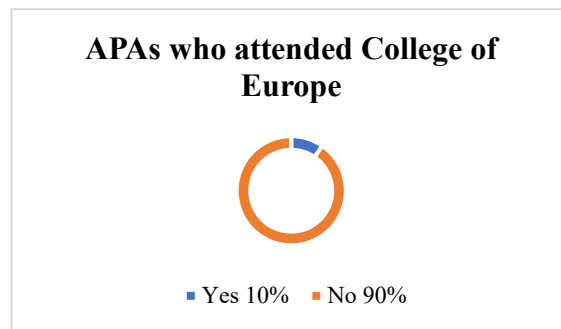


Figure 7. College of Europe

It is claimed that skills specific for the EU environment can be acquired either in Brussels or through specifically designed educational programmes that constitute an essential component of the successful European career (Svallfors 2016b). The College of Europe is often referred to as an intellectual hub for Europe where the future EU elites are educated (John 2020 Ch. 5). Yet, only 10% of assistants attended it. They account for 11 individuals. Subsequently, 103 (90%) from among Accredited Parliamentary Assistants did not attend the College of Europe. Moreover, no one who participated in the survey, attended national school of administration other than the College of Europe.

The last component of the educational path of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants measured in the survey is a traineeship with any of the EU institutions. Here, the majority – 68 out of 114 respondents completed traineeship (60%) compared to 46 who did not (40%). From among those who had this opportunity 27 current assistants (24%) completed traineeship with the Member of the European Parliament. Nearly half less, because 13 assistants (11%), are former Schuman Trainees; 9 assistants had traineeship with the EP political group (8%) or are former Blue Book trainees in the European Commission (8%). Assistants who chose ‘other’ make the number of 10 (9%).

Finally, only 33 assistants (29%) have previously worked for the EU or in the national administration of the Member State, compared to 80 APAs who have not (71%).

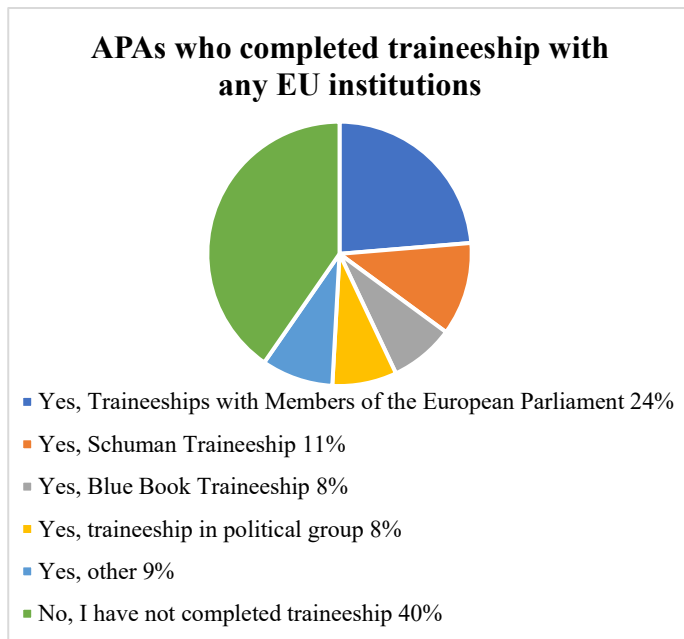


Figure 8. Traineeship

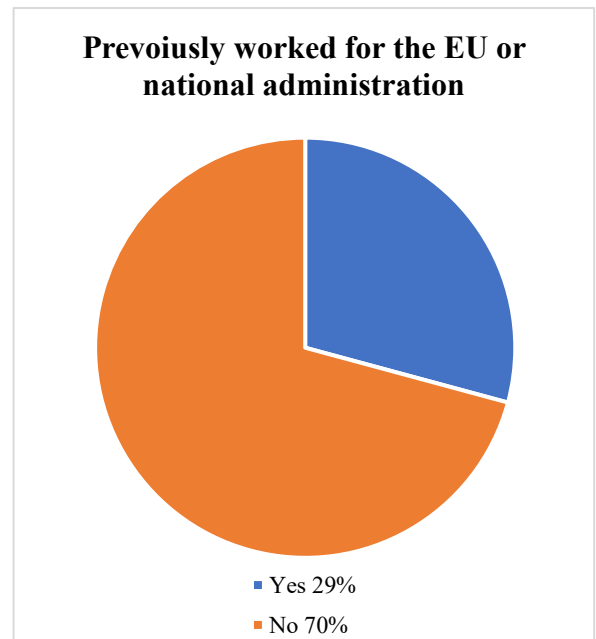


Figure 9. Work for national administration

## 4.2 Findings: Accredited Parliamentary Assistant knowledge expertise and provision of the context-dependent knowledge based on education and previous experience of APA and MEP.

### Hypothesis 1: Inexperience of the MEP and the context-dependent knowledge.

First formulated subhypothesis assumes that the more inexperienced the MEP is (thus, serves the first term as the Member of the European Parliament), he or she depends more on the context-dependent knowledge provided by their assistant with regards to legislative and political issues.

**Table 8.1** shows that the correlation between terms served and provision of knowledge is not straightforward. Since they are elected, MEPs highly depend on their assistants. The first component is related to **process expertise**. In that case, the same number of assistants (68,7%) claimed that during the first term of their MEP's service, they provide him or her with expertise with regards to understanding policy-making processes in the EP environment. This goes slightly up during the second term of the MEP (70,8%) and significantly drops to 47,8% from the third term of the service and onwards. Nevertheless, the p-value is equal to 0,1652 and the relationship is not statistically significant.

The second context-dependent politically useful knowledge element is **information** access – that is knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information. Interestingly, it increases proportionally to the number of terms served by the MEP. Starting from 76,1% during the first term, it grows to 87,5% during the second term, reaching 91,3% in the cell representing third term and more of the Member's service. However, also in that case the p-value is equal to 0,1666 and thus, the relationship is not significant.

In which areas you serve as a point of reference to your MEP		13. How many terms your MEP performs his/her mandate?						Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value
		1 term		2 terms		3 terms and more			
16. Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP	yes	46	68,7%	17	70,8%	11	47,8%	74	0,1652
	no	21	31,3%	7	29,2%	12	52,2%		
16. Knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information	yes	51	76,1%	21	87,5%	21	91,3%	93	0,1666
	no	16	23,9%	3	12,5%	2	8,7%		
16. Knowledge expertise related to framing political message into the EP/EU language	yes	46	68,7%	16	66,7%	14	60,9%	76	0,7947
	no	21	31,3%	8	33,3%	9	39,1%		
16. Other	no	57	85,1%	22	91,7%	18	78,3%	97	0,4258
	yes	10	14,9%	2	8,3%	5	21,7%		
Total		67		24		23		114	-

**Table 8.1.** Hypothesis 1

Please choose tasks you are responsible for in your everyday work.		13. How many terms your MEP performs his/her mandate?						Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value
		1 term		2 terms		3 terms and more			
18. Drafting documents for MEP	yes	64	95,5%	20	83,3%	21	91,3%	105	0,1965
	no	3	4,5%	4	16,7%	2	8,7%	9	
18. Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP	yes	49	73,1%	18	75,0%	15	65,2%	82	0,7208
	no	18	26,9%	6	25,0%	8	34,8%	32	
18. Giving political advice to MEP	yes	57	85,1%	16	66,7%	15	65,2%	88	0,0585
	no	10	14,9%	8	33,3%	8	34,8%	26	
18. Providing background information for MEPs	yes	60	89,6%	21	87,5%	23	100,0%	104	0,0899
	no	7	10,4%	3	12,5%	0	0,0%	10	
18. Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs	yes	65	97,0%	21	87,5%	22	95,7%	108	0,2574
	no	2	3,0%	3	12,5%	1	4,3%	6	
18. Facilitating compromises within the EP	yes	47	70,1%	19	79,2%	17	73,9%	83	0,6815
	no	20	29,9%	5	20,8%	6	26,1%	31	
18. Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council	yes	32	47,8%	7	29,2%	10	43,5%	49	0,2766
	no	35	52,2%	17	70,8%	13	56,5%	65	
18. Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)	yes	27	40,3%	10	41,7%	10	43,5%	47	0,9638
	no	40	59,7%	14	58,3%	13	56,5%	67	
18. Administrative tasks	yes	46	68,7%	18	75,0%	17	73,9%	81	0,7927
	no	21	31,3%	6	25,0%	6	26,1%	33	
18. Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants	yes	37	55,2%	11	45,8%	14	60,9%	62	0,5721
	no	30	44,8%	13	54,2%	9	39,1%	52	
18. Media Outreach	yes	32	47,8%	12	50,0%	13	56,5%	57	0,7684
	no	35	52,2%	12	50,0%	10	43,5%	57	
18. Other	yes	5	7,5%	3	12,5%	2	8,7%	10	0,7698
	no	62	92,5%	21	87,5%	21	91,3%	104	
Total		67		24		23		114	-

Table 8.2. Hypothesis 1

Finally, 68,7% of APAs provide MEPs with the knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP which is linked with the **problem formulation** component of knowledge. This slightly drops to 66,7% in the second term, declining further to 60,9% during the third and more terms served. However, the  $p\text{-value} = 0,7947$ , therefore the relationship is not statistically significant.

The first subhypothesis has to be rejected as the relationship between all components of the context-dependent knowledge and MEP's experience in the EP are not statistically significant.

The results get more interesting in the second subhypothesis depicted in **Table 8.2.** – where three components of the context-dependent knowledge are further broken into specific tasks and responsibilities of APAs and when the independent variable is the amount of terms served by MEP and dependent variable are particular responsibilities that assistants are assigned with. In the task: “giving political advice to MEP” in Table 8.2 it can be observed that during the first term served by MEP, exactly 85,1% of assistants offer their advice to their Member on political matters. During the second term, there is a significant drop to 66,7% and during the third term and more, the rate slightly decreases to 65,2%. The option “giving political advice to MEP” is very close to being statistically significant as the  $p\text{-value} = 0,0585$ . However, as the  $p\text{-value}$  is not equal or below 0,05, the second subhypothesis is rejected.

Because both subhypotheses were not statistically significant, therefore the hypothesis one is rejected.

### **Hypothesis 2: MEPs position in the EP structure and provision of the context-dependent knowledge by APAs.**

With regards to the second hypothesis, it was assumed that the higher position the MEP holds in the EP structure, the more context-dependent knowledge APA provides. To answer this hypotheses, two subhypothesis were formulated.

In Table 9.1. the independent variable indicates whether MEP is a Chair, Vicechair of the committee, delegation, political group or any other EP institution, while the dependent variable is again one of the three components of the context-dependent knowledge.

In which areas you serve as a point of reference to your MEP		22. Is your MEP a Chair/ Vice-Chair of any Committee, Delegation, political group or holds any other position within EP organisational structure?				Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value *Yates corr **Fisher's exact
		Yes		No			
16. Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP	yes	41	62,1%	33	70,2%	74	0,48955 *
	no	25	37,9%	14	29,8%	39	
16. Knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information	yes	55	83,3%	38	80,9%	93	0,46032 **
	no	11	16,7%	9	19,1%	20	
16. Knowledge expertise related to framing political message into the EP/EU language	yes	46	69,7%	30	63,8%	76	0,65148 *
	no	20	30,3%	17	36,2%	37	
16. Other	no	56	84,8%	40	85,1%	96	0,59424 **
	yes	10	15,2%	7	14,9%	17	
Total		66		47		113	-

**Table 9.1.** Hypothesis 2



Please choose tasks you are responsible for in your everyday work.		22. Is your MEP a Chair/ Vice-Chair of any Committee, Delegation, political group or holds any other position within EP organisational structure?				Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value *Yates corr **Fisher's exact
		Yes		No			
18. Drafting documents for MEP	yes	59	89,4%	46	97,9%	105	0,08275 **
	no	7	10,6%	1	2,1%	8	
18. Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP	yes	48	72,7%	34	72,3%	82	0,86622 *
	no	18	27,3%	13	27,7%	31	
18. Giving political advice to MEP	yes	50	75,8%	38	80,9%	88	0,34235 **
	no	16	24,2%	9	19,1%	25	
18. Providing background information for MEPs	yes	59	89,4%	45	95,7%	104	0,19243 **
	no	7	10,6%	2	4,3%	9	
18. Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs	yes	62	93,9%	46	97,9%	108	0,305 **
	no	4	6,1%	1	2,1%	5	
18. Facilitating compromises within the EP	yes	48	72,7%	35	74,5%	83	0,8362
	no	18	27,3%	12	25,5%	30	
18. Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council	yes	29	43,9%	20	42,6%	49	0,8835
	no	37	56,1%	27	57,4%	64	
18. Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)	yes	28	42,4%	19	40,4%	47	0,8317
	no	38	57,6%	28	59,6%	66	
18. Administrative tasks	yes	46	69,7%	35	74,5%	81	0,73158 *
	no	20	30,3%	12	25,5%	32	
18. Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants	yes	35	53,0%	27	57,4%	62	0,6419
	no	31	47,0%	20	42,6%	51	
18. Media Outreach	yes	36	54,5%	21	44,7%	57	0,3013
	no	30	45,5%	26	55,3%	56	
18. Other	yes	7	10,6%	3	6,4%	10	0,3348 **
	no	59	89,4%	44	93,6%	103	
Total		66		47		113	-

Table 9.2. Hypothesis 2

The first element of the dependent variable – knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP, that is **process expertise** – indicates that those APAs whose MEP holds higher position in the EP structure, less frequently provide this type of expertise (62,1%) compared to their colleagues whose MEP does not hold any position (70,2%). However, as the p-value is equal to 0,489, the relationship is not statistically significant.

The second component, finding reliable information – that is **information access** – does not show any significant differences between two studied groups of assistants. APAs whose MEP holds higher position, provide marginally more services related to information access to their colleagues whose employer does not hold any position: 83,3% to 80,9%. Furthermore, the relationship is not statistically significant as the p-value is equal to 0,46032.

For MEPs who hold position in the EP institutional structure, the provision of knowledge expertise related to framing political messages into the EU language (**problem formulation** component of knowledge) among APAs is indeed higher (69,7%) compared to those APAs whose MEP does not hold any position (63,8%). However, the relationship is not statistically significant – the p-value = 0,65158

In the second subhypothesis in Table 9.2, three components of the context-dependent knowledge are further broken into particular tasks and MEP's position in the EP structure is the independent variable. The only relationship that is close to being statistically significant is the first task in the table – 'drafting documents for MEP'. Here, APAs whose employer is Chair, Vicechair or holds any higher position in the EP structure, responded that they are assigned with task to draft documents for their MEP in 89,4% of the cases. Contrary to that, those APAs whose employer does not hold higher position, prepare or draft documents of behalf of their employer in 97,9% of the cases. However, in the following case the p-value is 0,0827. For that reason the relationship is not statistically significant, and the subhypothesis has to be rejected.

Because in both subhypotheses relationship between variables is not statistically significant, the hypothesis is rejected.

6. What was the field of your studies?	21. Do you consider hard knowledge obtained at the university (type of degree) to be less important than soft knowledge (such as writing and research skills)?					Total
	Definitely no	Rather no	Neither yes or no	Rather yes	Definitely yes	
Political Science	2	12	18	23	7	62
%	3,2%	19,4%	29,0%	37,1%	11,3%	
Other	2	11	14	14	10	51
%	3,9%	21,6%	27,5%	27,5%	19,6%	
Total	4	23	32	37	17	113

Chi<sup>2</sup> p-value = 0,6961  
**Table 10.1.** Hypothesis 3

6. What was the field of your studies?	25. Do you consider your academic degree to be helpful you in covering work of the assigned committee, delegation, political group etc.?					Total
	Definitely not	Rather not	Neither yes or no	Rather yes	Definitely yes	
Political Science	3	5	7	25	11	51
%	5,9%	9,8%	13,7%	49,0%	21,6%	
Other	1	8	7	13	19	48
%	2,1%	16,7%	14,6%	27,1%	39,6%	
Total	4	13	14	38	30	99

Chi<sup>2</sup> p-value = 0,1045  
**Table 10.2.** Hypothesis 3

### **Hypothesis 3: Hard knowledge is less important than soft knowledge in the work of APA**

The following hypothesis examines relationship between hard knowledge, soft knowledge and their value for APA in their daily work. It is assumed that the soft knowledge, such as writing or research skills is more important to APA compared to hard knowledge for instance – particular degree obtained at the university.

Two subhypotheses were tested and each of them examined relationship between field of studies as the independent variable and respectively 1) statement about hard knowledge being less important in APA's professional toolkit compared to the soft knowledge – Table 10.1 and 2) statement about academic degree being helpful in covering work of the assigned committee, delegation etc. – Table 10.2. Among those APAs who studied political science 48,4% of respondents agreed with the statement that hard knowledge is less important to soft knowledge (Definitely yes 11,3%; Rather yes 37,1%); 29% of the examined population chose 'Neither yes or no' and 22,6% chose did not agree (Definitely no 3,2%; Rather no 19,4%). This is relatively respective for APAs who hold degree in different field. 47,1% of respondents agreed with the following statement (Definitely yes 19,6%; Rather yes 27,5%); 27,5% chose answer 'Neither yes or no' and 25,5% did not agree with the statement (Definitely no 3,9%; Rather no 21,6%). However, it has to be noted that as the p-value = 0,6961, this means that the examined relationship is not statistically significant.

The second subhypothesis examines the relationship between the field of APAs' studies on covering work of the assigned committee, delegation or political group. In the following case, 70,6% of APAs whose degree was in political science, agreed with the statement that the academic degree is helpful in covering work of the assigned committee, delegation etc. (Definitely yes 21,6%; Rather yes 49%), 13,7% neither agreed nor disagreed and 15,7% did not agree with the statement (Definitely no 5,9%; Rather no 9,8%). This can be compared to 66,7% of APAs with different educational background who agreed with the statement (Definitely yes 39,6%; Rather yes 27,1%); 14,6% who neither agreed nor disagreed and 18,7% who disagreed (Definitely no 2,1%; Rather no 16,7%). The p-value is equal to 0,1045 and again, the relationship is not statistically significant. Therefore, the second subhypothesis has to be rejected.

As both subhypotheses are not statistically significant, the third hypothesis is rejected.

11. Before starting your work as an APA, have you completed traineeship with any EU institutions?	21. Do you consider hard knowledge obtained at the university (type of degree) to be less important than soft knowledge (such as writing and research skills)?					Total
	Definitely no	Rather no	Neither yes or no	Rather yes	Definitely yes	
Yes	2	15	17	24	10	68
%	2,9%	22,1%	25,0%	35,3%	14,7%	
No	2	8	15	13	7	45
%	4,4%	17,8%	33,3%	28,9%	15,6%	
Total	4	23	32	37	17	113

Chi<sup>2</sup> p-value = 0,8393

**Table 11.1.** Hypothesis 4

11. Before starting your work as an APA, have you completed traineeship with any EU institutions?	25. Do you consider you academic degree to be helpful you in covering work of the assigned committee, delegation, political group etc.?					Total
	Definitely not	Rather not	Neither yes or no	Rather yes	Definitely yes	
Yes	2	7	10	25	13	57
%	3,5%	12,3%	17,5%	43,9%	22,8%	
No	2	6	4	13	17	42
%	4,8%	14,3%	9,5%	31,0%	40,5%	
Total	4	13	14	38	30	99

Chi<sup>2</sup> p-value = 0,3039

**Table 11.2.** Hypothesis 4

**Hypothesis 4: University knowledge is less important to APA than the knowledge of the EP environment.**

Fourth hypothesis is also split in two subhypotheses. The first depicts relationship between the traineeship completed and usefulness of the soft knowledge over hard knowledge. Table 11.1 shows that those who completed traineeship are more keen to acknowledge that the university knowledge is less important than soft knowledge.

They account for 50% of all APAs who completed traineeship (Definitely yes 14,7%; Rather yes 35,3%). 25% of respondents claimed that they neither agree nor disagree and another 25% stated that they do not agree with the statement (Definitely no 2,9%; Rather no 22,1%). Among those who have not been trainees, 44,5% agree with the statement that the hard knowledge is less important than soft knowledge (Definitely yes 15,6%; Rather yes 28,9%); neither yes or no was chosen by 33,3% and those who do not agree make 22,2% (Definitely no 4,4%; Rather no 17,8%). However, as the p-value is equal to 0,8393, the relationship is not statistically significant and the first subhypothesis is rejected.

Table 11.2. denotes relationship between completing traineeship and the statement about the academic degree being helpful in covering work of the assigned committee, delegation etc. In the following case, 66,7% of APAs with previous experience as trainees, indicates that their academic degree is helpful in covering committee work (Definitely yes 22,8%; Rather yes 28,9%); 17,5% neither agreed nor disagreed and 15,8% did not agree with the statement (Definitely no 2,9%; Rather no; 17,8%). In the second case, APAs without traineeship claimed in 71,5% that their academic education is helpful in covering work in committees etc. (Definitely yes 15,6%; Rather yes 28,9%); 9,5% stated neither yes or no and 19,1% did not agree with the statement (Definitely no 4,4%; Rather no 17,8%). The relationship is against expectation as it does not show statistical significance between two variables – the p-value is equal to 0,3039. The following subhypothesis has to be rejected.

Both subhypotheses are not statistically significant which means that the fourth hypothesis has to be rejected.

11. Before starting your work as an APA, have you completed traineeship with any EU institutions?	26. How much would you agree with the following statement: For my MEP, I am the most important source of information about current processes and affairs in the EP.					Total
	Definitely no	Rather no	Neither yes or no	Rather yes	Definitely yes	
Yes %	2 3,0%	12 17,9%	17 25,4%	24 35,8%	12 17,9%	67
No %	1 2,3%	2 4,5%	4 9,1%	21 47,7%	16 36,4%	44
Total	3	14	21	45	28	111

Chi<sup>2</sup> p-value = 0,0118

**Table 12.1.** Hypothesis 5

11. Before starting your work as an APA, have you completed traineeship with any EU institutions?	27. How much would you agree with the following statement: To obtain information about current affairs in the EP, I mostly rely on my own, internal network of contacts rather than official EP sources.				Total
	Rather no	Neither yes or no	Rather yes	Definitely yes	
Yes %	14 20,6%	22 32,4%	22 32,4%	10 14,7%	68
No %	6 13,3%	15 33,3%	18 40,0%	6 13,3%	45
Total	20	37	40	16	113

Chi<sup>2</sup> p-value = 0,7242

**Table 12.2.** Hypothesis 5

**Hypothesis 5: Completing traineeship with the EU institutions by APA transcribes to being better source of information to MEP.**

By examining the fifth hypothesis, it was expected that the traineeship with any of the EU agencies, thus the previous experience with the functioning of the institution, transcribes to better performance of APA as a source of information to their MEP.

Two relationships were examined. In both of them the independent variable is the act of completing traineeship with the EU. The dependent variable in the first subhypothesis (Table 12.1) is the ordinal variable concerning statement on being the most important source of information for the MEP. Here, 53,7% of those who have completed traineeship agree with the following statement (Definitely yes 17,9%; Rather yes 35,8%); those who neither agree nor disagree constitute 25,4% and those who disagree make 20,9% (Definitely no 3%; Rather no 17,9%). Among those assistants who have not completed traineeship the proportions are different – 84,1% claim that they remain the most important source of information for their MEP (Definitely yes 36,4%; Rather no 47,7%); 9,1% stated ‘neither yes or no’ and only 6,8% did not agree with the statement (Definitely no 4,5%; Rather no 2,3%). In that subhypothesis the p-value = 0,0118, therefore the relationship is significant. The following subhypothesis is accepted.

The second subhypothesis (Table 12.2) examines the relationship between completing traineeship and the statement on APAs’ reliance on their own internal sources of information in the EP. In the following hypothesis, 47,1% of respondents who completed traineeship agree with the statement (Definitely yes 14,7%; Rather yes 32,4%); those who neither agree nor disagree represent 33,3% of respondents, and those who opted for ‘rather no’ answer make 20,6%. Among those who have not completed traineeship, 53,3% agree with the statement (Definitely yes 13,3%, Rather yes 40%); those who neither agreed nor disagreed make 33,3% of respondents and option ‘rather no’ was chosen by 13,3% of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants. Interestingly, no assistant from among those who have and have not completed traineeship chose option ‘Definitely no’. However, the p-value is equal to 0,7242. Thus, the relationship is statistically not significant. For that reason the subhypothesis is rejected.

As the first subhypothesis is statistically significant and the second subhypothesis is not – the hypothesis five is partially accepted.



In which areas you serve as a point of reference to your MEP		1. What is your age?								Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value
		20-29		30-39		40-49		50<			
16. Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP	yes	18	48,6%	43	69,4%	10	90,9%	2	50,0%	73	0,0292
	no	19	51,4%	19	30,6%	1	9,1%	2	50,0%	41	
16. Knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information	yes	32	86,5%	49	79,0%	9	81,8%	2	50,0%	92	0,4108
	no	5	13,5%	13	21,0%	2	18,2%	2	50,0%	22	
16. Knowledge expertise related to framing political message into the EP/EU language	yes	25	67,6%	41	66,1%	8	72,7%	2	50,0%	76	0,8777
	no	12	32,4%	21	33,9%	3	27,3%	2	50,0%	38	
16. Other	no	33	89,2%	51	82,3%	10	90,9%	3	75,0%	97	0,6785
	yes	4	10,8%	11	17,7%	1	9,1%	1	25,0%	17	
Total		37		62		11		4		114	-

Table 13.1. Hypothesis 6

In which areas you serve as a point of reference to your MEP		4. How long have you been working as the Accredited Parliamentary Assistant?										Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value
		< 1 year		1 - 2 years		3 - 5 years		6 - 10 years		10 years <			
16. Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP	yes	9	33,3%	22	64,7%	18	66,7%	18	94,7%	7	87,5%	74	0,0001
	no	18	66,7%	12	35,3%	9	33,3%	1	5,3%	1	12,5%	41	
16. Knowledge expertise related to the committee work	yes	15	55,6%	28	82,4%	21	77,8%	15	78,9%	8	100,0%	87	0,0299
	no	12	44,4%	6	17,6%	6	22,2%	4	21,1%	0	0,0%	28	
16. Knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information	yes	23	85,2%	24	70,6%	22	81,5%	17	89,5%	7	87,5%	93	0,4440
	no	4	14,8%	10	29,4%	5	18,5%	2	10,5%	1	12,5%	22	
16. Knowledge expertise related to framing political message into the EP/EU language	yes	18	66,7%	21	61,8%	15	55,6%	17	89,5%	5	62,5%	76	0,1241
	no	9	33,3%	13	38,2%	12	44,4%	2	10,5%	3	37,5%	39	
16. Other	no	23	85,2%	28	82,4%	24	88,9%	16	84,2%	7	87,5%	98	0,9661
	yes	4	14,8%	6	17,6%	3	11,1%	3	15,8%	1	12,5%	17	
Total		27		34		27		19		8		115	-

Table 13.2. Hypothesis 6

Please choose tasks you are responsible for in your everyday work.		1. What is your age?								Total	Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value
		20-29		30-39		40-49		50<			
18. Drafting documents for MEP	yes	33	89,2%	57	91,9%	11	100,0%	3	75,0%	104	0,3678
	no	4	10,8%	5	8,1%	0	0,0%	1	25,0%	10	
18. Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP	yes	25	67,6%	48	77,4%	7	63,6%	1	25,0%	81	0,1447
	no	12	32,4%	14	22,6%	4	36,4%	3	75,0%	33	
18. Giving political advice to MEP	yes	25	67,6%	51	82,3%	10	90,9%	2	50,0%	88	0,1338
	no	12	32,4%	11	17,7%	1	9,1%	2	50,0%	26	
18. Providing background information for MEPs	yes	35	94,6%	54	87,1%	11	100,0%	3	75,0%	103	0,2033
	no	2	5,4%	8	12,9%	0	0,0%	1	25,0%	11	
18. Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs	yes	35	94,6%	57	91,9%	11	100,0%	4	100,0%	107	0,5122
	no	2	5,4%	5	8,1%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	7	
18. Facilitating compromises within the EP	yes	24	64,9%	46	74,2%	10	90,9%	2	50,0%	82	0,2292
	no	13	35,1%	16	25,8%	1	9,1%	2	50,0%	32	
18. Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council	yes	13	35,1%	28	45,2%	7	63,6%	1	25,0%	49	0,3177
	no	24	64,9%	34	54,8%	4	36,4%	3	75,0%	65	
18. Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)	yes	14	37,8%	25	40,3%	5	45,5%	2	50,0%	46	0,9469
	no	23	62,2%	37	59,7%	6	54,5%	2	50,0%	68	
18. Administrative tasks	yes	31	83,8%	39	62,9%	8	72,7%	3	75,0%	81	0,1564
	no	6	16,2%	23	37,1%	3	27,3%	1	25,0%	33	
18. Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants	yes	19	51,4%	33	53,2%	7	63,6%	3	75,0%	62	0,7334
	no	18	48,6%	29	46,8%	4	36,4%	1	25,0%	52	
18. Media Outreach	yes	19	51,4%	31	50,0%	5	45,5%	2	50,0%	57	0,9896
	no	18	48,6%	31	50,0%	6	54,5%	2	50,0%	57	
18. Other	yes	2	5,4%	6	9,7%	1	9,1%	1	25,0%	10	0,6634
	no	35	94,6%	56	90,3%	10	90,9%	3	75,0%	104	
Total		37		62		11		4		114	-

Table 13.3. Hypothesis 6

Please choose tasks you are responsible for in your everyday work.		4. How long have you been working as the Accredited Parliamentary Assistant?										Chi <sup>2</sup> p-value	
		< 1 year		1 - 2 years		3 - 5 years		6 - 10 years		10 years <			Total
18. Drafting documents for MEP	yes	24	88,9%	31	91,2%	24	88,9%	18	94,7%	8	100,0%	105	0,7085
	no	3	11,1%	3	8,8%	3	11,1%	1	5,3%	0	0,0%	10	
18. Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP	yes	17	63,0%	24	70,6%	20	74,1%	14	73,7%	7	87,5%	82	0,6913
	no	10	37,0%	10	29,4%	7	25,9%	5	26,3%	1	12,5%	33	
18. Giving political advice to MEP	yes	16	59,3%	26	76,5%	22	81,5%	17	89,5%	7	87,5%	88	0,1328
	no	11	40,7%	8	23,5%	5	18,5%	2	10,5%	1	12,5%	27	
18. Providing background information for MEPs	yes	25	92,6%	31	91,2%	24	88,9%	16	84,2%	8	100,0%	104	0,6297
	no	2	7,4%	3	8,8%	3	11,1%	3	15,8%	0	0,0%	11	
18. Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs	yes	26	96,3%	31	91,2%	26	96,3%	17	89,5%	8	100,0%	108	0,6335
	no	1	3,7%	3	8,8%	1	3,7%	2	10,5%	0	0,0%	7	
18. Facilitating compromises within the EP	yes	13	48,1%	27	79,4%	20	74,1%	15	78,9%	8	100,0%	83	0,0088
	no	14	51,9%	7	20,6%	7	25,9%	4	21,1%	0	0,0%	32	
18. Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council	yes	6	22,2%	14	41,2%	12	44,4%	12	63,2%	5	62,5%	49	0,0490
	no	21	77,8%	20	58,8%	15	55,6%	7	36,8%	3	37,5%	66	
18. Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)	yes	7	25,9%	12	35,3%	10	37,0%	12	63,2%	6	75,0%	47	0,0275
	no	20	74,1%	22	64,7%	17	63,0%	7	36,8%	2	25,0%	68	
18. Administrative tasks	yes	20	74,1%	27	79,4%	15	55,6%	12	63,2%	7	87,5%	81	0,1969
	no	7	25,9%	7	20,6%	12	44,4%	7	36,8%	1	12,5%	34	
18. Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants	yes	9	33,3%	17	50,0%	18	66,7%	12	63,2%	6	75,0%	62	0,0653
	no	18	66,7%	17	50,0%	9	33,3%	7	36,8%	2	25,0%	53	
18. Media Outreach	yes	12	44,4%	18	52,9%	13	48,1%	9	47,4%	5	62,5%	57	0,9040
	no	15	55,6%	16	47,1%	14	51,9%	10	52,6%	3	37,5%	58	
18. Other	yes	2	7,4%	3	8,8%	3	11,1%	1	5,3%	1	12,5%	10	0,9516
	no	25	92,6%	31	91,2%	24	88,9%	18	94,7%	7	87,5%	105	
Total		27		34		27		19		8		115	-

Table 13.4. Hypothesis 6

### **Hypothesis 6: APAs seniority and provision of the context-dependent knowledge.**

The last hypothesis is divided into four subhypotheses which examine relationship between APAs' age/length of service and the context-dependent politically useful knowledge they provide MEPs with. First two subhypotheses study the relationship between APAs seniority in the EP / APAs' age and three types of the context-dependent knowledge (Table. 13.1., Table 13.2.). Next two subhypotheses analyse relationship between APAs seniority in the EP / APAs' age and types of the context-dependent knowledge which are further broken into particular set of twelve tasks (Table. 13.1., Table 13.2.).

In the first subhypothesis, relationship between assistants' age and elements of the context-dependent knowledge provided to MEPs is statistically significant only with regards to understanding policy-making processes in the EP (**process expertise**). In the following case, the p-value is equal to 0,0292. It increases with age – from 48,6% for the youngest group of assistants between 20 and 29 years old; 69,4% for APAs between 30-39 years of age to 90,9% among those between 40-49 years old. Among those who are over 50, the provision of process expertise drops significantly to 50%.

The second subhypothesis deals with the relationship between assistants' length of service and the provision of knowledge. As in the case of the first hypothesis, the only statistically significant relationship is observed in the first case – between years of service and the knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP (**process expertise**). Here the p-value = 0,0001. In this relationship it can be observed that the more experienced APA is, the more knowledge he or she provides to their employer. During their first year of work, only 33,3% of assistants provide their MEP with knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP. Between first and second year it nearly doubles to 64,7%. This trend continues in the next measured period as 66,7% of APAs who worked between 3 and 5 years claimed that they provide this component of knowledge. This is followed by 94,7% – nearly 50% rise – in the next period of those who work as APAs between 6 and 10 years, decreasing to 87,5% among assistants work longer than 10 years. Therefore, with regards to the first part, this subhypothesis is partially accepted.

The third subhypothesis examines relationship between age and further divided into particular responsibilities of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants. However, none of the following tasks is statistically significant and the subhypothesis is rejected.

The last, fourth, subhypothesis looks at the relationship between division of responsibilities, and the length of assistants' service in the EP. This relationship gives more nuanced picture about assistants' impact on the knowledge provision as three out twelve of tasks are statistically significant.

The first one, 'facilitating compromises within the EP', is related to **problem formulation** component of the context-dependent knowledge. In that case, it can be observed that the length of service is proportionally related to the growth in the task assigned. In the first year of APAs work, only 48,1% of them are assigned with it. In the next period, the provision of facilitating compromises goes up to 79,4% and remains relatively stable over next periods – 74,1% for those working between 3 and 5 years, 78,9% for those working between 6-10 years. Next, among those who work more than 10 years as APAs 100% chose this answer. The relationship is statistically significant as the p-value = 0,0088.

The second relationship that is statistically significant is the value 'Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or Council'. This responsibility also falls under the scope of the **problem formulation** component of the context-dependent knowledge. The rise in responsibility grows with the length of assistant's service, but less significantly than under the 'facilitating compromises within the EP' task. Only 22,2% of assistants who work less than a year facilitate compromises with the EC or Council; respectively 41,2% of those who work between 1-2 years and 44,4% between 3-5 years. 63,2% of those whose length of service is between 6-10 years are assigned with this task. Respondents who work more than 10 years are responsible for conducting this task in 62,5%. The p-value is 0,0490, thus the relationship is statistically significant.

The last relationship that is statistically significant is the relationship between the length of service and 'monitoring executive bodies' which falls under the **process expertise** context-dependent knowledge. During the first year of their work, only 25,9% of assistants are assigned with this task. This goes up to 35,3% among those serving as APAs between 1-2 years. Next the percentage modestly grows to 37% in column 3-5 years. 63,2% of those who work between 6-10 years are responsible for the task of monitoring executive bodies. This grows up to 75% for those Accredited Parliamentary Assistants who work more than 10 years. The relationship is statistically significant as the p-value is equal to 0,0275.

For the abovementioned reasons and the fact that subhypotheses are partially accepted, hypothesis six is partially accepted.

### 4.3 Discussion

This section discusses the empirical findings of Pearson's Chi-square statistical analysis and links them back with the literature on Accredited Parliamentary Assistants. If the hypothesis was rejected or partially accepted, potential explanations are offered. A summary of the empirical findings about the hypotheses can be found in the end of this section in Table 14.

#### **Hypothesis 1 Inexperience of the MEP and the context-dependent knowledge.**

The first hypothesis looked at the relationship between MEP's experience in the EP and APA's provision of knowledge. The hypothesis was divided into two subhypotheses that were both statistically not significant and therefore rejected.

However, in the first subhypothesis it can be observed that the percentage provision of all components of the context-dependent knowledge described by Svallfors is high. Thus, for many assistants, they constitute important components of work. In particular, components referring to process expertise ('Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making process in the EP') and information access ('Knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information') should be investigated more profoundly – perhaps on the larger group of respondents as the p-value in the first case equals 0,1652 and in the second the p-value = 0,1666. Therefore, both results are close to being statistically significant.

The same holds for the second subhypothesis when knowledge components were broken into smaller set of responsibilities. In the following example, from among given answers, two are very close to being statistically significant. These are 'Giving political advice to MEP' (p-value = 0,0585) and Providing background information for MEP (p-value = 0,0899). This is related to the **Table 6.** that merges Svallfors' typology (2020) and Egeberg et al. frame of tasks (2013) and indicates that there is relationship between both segments.

#### **Hypothesis 2 MEPs position in the EP structure and provision of the context-dependent knowledge by APAs.**

The second hypothesis assumed that with the increase in the role that MEPs play in the EP structure, APAs provide more context-dependent knowledge. This means that the expected role was projected to increase proportionally to the career of their member. Although the first subhypothesis was rejected, there is a tendency in provision of the expertise related to finding reliable information and expertise related to framing political messages. That is because assistants whose MEP holds higher position in the EP structure, provide more knowledge

expertise in those two areas compared to their colleagues whose employer is a Member without higher function. Interestingly, the latter group of APAs tend to provide more process expertise type of knowledge. This may result from the fact that higher function of the Member is positively related to his or her seniority in the EP. That would indicate that more experienced Members hold higher functions in the EP, and as a consequence, are less reliant from their staff with regards to the problem formulation component of knowledge from their staff. However, this should be further examined by including a larger set of actors into the study.

In the second rejected subhypothesis, only one aspect of particular task gets close to being statistically significant – namely ‘Drafting documents for MEP’ where the p-value = 0,08275. This task falls under the category of problem formulation expertise according to **Table 6**. that merges components of Svallfors and Egeberg et al. framework. More APAs are responsible for drafting documents of their employer who does not hold higher position (97,7%) compared to the other group (89,4%).

A potential explanation is offered by Egeberg et al. who wrote about the role of the Directorate-General staff in facilitating work of MEPs who are Chairs of committees or are responsible for drafting committee reports (Egeberg et al. 2013, p. 500). After the Treaty of Lisbon and increase in the legislative powers of the EP, the majority of legislative work was transferred to the EP committees that are in charge of various policy areas. As a result, the role that the Directorate-General plays in the policymaking process additionally increased (Grau i Segú 2019 p. 407, Neuhold & Dobbels 2013). Civil servants are in charge of gathering information which they later use to prepare committee reports; have agenda-setting prerogatives; prepare the EP committee work and enable information exchange between relevant stakeholders and MEPs (Winzen 2011 p. 32). Apart from that, through the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), the DG staff creates time-consuming and resource-intensive ex-ante and ex-post assessments of the policy proposals. These specific tools of the Parliament’s oversight function contribute to the MEPs’ work (Anglmayer & Scherrer 2020). Therefore, a Member who holds a higher position in the EP structure may additionally rely on the knowledge provided by the DG staff which in turn reduces work of Accredited Parliamentary Assistant.

### **Hypothesis 3: Hard knowledge is less important than soft knowledge in the work of APA**

Two formulated subhypotheses in the third hypothesis were rejected. As a consequence, the third hypothesis was rejected as well. Even though, they are not statistically significant, looking at the components of the relationship between field of studies and the statement on hard knowledge being important in work of assistants, the results indicate that APAs responses are not straightforward and relatable to Svallfors description of policy professionals (2016b). In his work he writes:

“[I]t is not so much the content of the university education that is important – it is more a question about acquiring generic analytical skills and learning how to put arguments into written and spoken form. [...] But many interviewees claim that the actual content of the political science education is of little importance. The reality of politics is far removed from what is taught in the university courses, and the necessary process expertise is acquired on the job” (Svallfors 2016b).

This claim can be partially undermined by the observable trend of the Pearson’s Chi-square statistical analysis as only 48,4% of assistants with background in political science agreed with that hard knowledge obtained at the university is less important in everyday work than soft knowledge. Respectively, 47,1% of those with other education agreed with the statement. In the second statement on academic degree being helpful in APAs work on covering committee, delegation or political group, 70,6% of those who studied political sciences and 66,7% of those who pursued their education in other fields indicated that it is important. For that reason, the observed tendency seems to not reflect traits of policy professionals described by Svallfors.

### **Hypothesis 4: University knowledge is less important to APA than the knowledge of the EP environment.**

Further examining the statement about the usefulness of hard knowledge, soft knowledge and degree studied, the fourth hypothesis looked at the relationship between those variables and APAs traineeships. The lack of differences between two groups may indicate that the traineeship carries other, undetermined and not set out in this subhypothesis values or advantages. The same conclusion can be drawn from the second subhypothesis which examines academic degree being helpful in covering committee work, as responses are relatively similar between both studied groups. This may indicate that the traineeship with the EU institution does not translate to perceiving university knowledge as less important in the work of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants.



**Hypothesis 5: Completing traineeship with the EU institutions by APA, transcribes to being better source of information to MEP.**

This hypothesis is partially confirmed as the first subhypothesis is statistically significant. What is visible is that those assistants who completed traineeship with the EU, to a lesser degree believe that they remain the most important source of information to their employer (53,7%), compared to their colleagues who have not completed traineeship (84,1%). While hypothesising about potential causes of this situation, a few factors have to be considered.

APAs who had traineeship may be more aware about the functioning of the European Parliament, staff structure and potential sources of information such as the European Parliament Research Service. For instance, during the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term – in years 2014-2019, the EPRS conducted sixty one evaluations for standing and temporary committees (Anglmayer & Scherrer p. 413). Apart from this, the role of political groups and their staff cannot be neglected – the EP political groups can efficiently organize division of labour within likeminded members. MEPs can ensure themselves access to the legislative agenda, resources and committee assignments in return for their votes which are in accordance with the party line. Moreover, during the legislature process, party group officials ensure that drafted documents are in line with political positions. Furthermore, they are responsible for political coordination with other groups and committees (Neuhold & Dobbels 2015, p. 586). Knowing this, APAs with previous traineeship may be more aware of different sources of knowledge their Member can use, compared to their colleagues who have not completed traineeship. Moreover, due to the high rotation among MEPs every European elections and the fact that previous elections were held in 2019, there still might be a relatively large group of individuals who previously worked with the Member on the national level, who became APAs after their MEP's election. For that reason, they are yet not familiar with other knowledge-providing agencies in the European Parliament.

**Hypothesis 6: APAs seniority and provision of the context-dependent knowledge.**

Finally, the last hypothesis is partially accepted as only particular aspects of the knowledge provision are statistically significant. Hypothesis examined the length of APAs service and 1) type of the context-dependent politically useful knowledge provided and 2) the set of particular tasks they fulfil.

The 'process expertise' component is statistically significant for both independent variables – age of APAs and their length of service. However, looking the latter variable we can observe

correlation between time served and the increase in the knowledge provision. Therefore, this is in accordance with the literature on policy professionals which outlines the importance of the on-the-job training. Assistants' provision of two other knowledge components outlined by Svallfors are high from the beginning of APAs career and remain on the same level across all researched periods of assistant's service.

Apart from this, the last subhypothesis indicates that there is a relationship between Svallfors typology and the length of APAs service as three statistically significant tasks applied from Egeberg et al. (2013) fall under the scope of the problem formulation and process expertise types of the context-dependent knowledge. All indicate that there is a substantial growth in APA's knowledge provision in the second examined period of their service – that is after one year of work as the Accredited Parliamentary Assistant. In particular, task 'facilitating compromises within the PE' is of a great importance for MEP with regards to communication with representatives of his or her political group. This is because political groups have an important role in coordinating legislation and assigning MEPs to particular reports that they are later assigned with to draft. Each political group has a limited number of points which are used to bid in order to 'buy' the possibility to assign its member to draft a report (Synnøve & Hermansen p. 150). The same applies to contacts with shadow rapporteurs. In return, the report has to be drafted in accordance with the line of the group and assistants play an important role in facilitating those compromises (Neuhold & Dobbels 2015).

Another tasks that is very close to being statistically significant and worth further examination is the task 'Coordination MEP's work with local assistants' (p-value = 0,0653). This previously scarcely mentioned aspect of APAs' work is interesting in the view of the research conducted by Hermansen and Pegan (2017) who examined the relationship between electoral cycle and the use of assistant to improve chance of securing seat in the upcoming elections. Moreover, APAs are often in charge of creating written questions to the European Commission (Busby & Belkacem 2013) which constitute an essential tool in MEP's assortment to raise important questions that impact their constituencies. Questions to the EC are also a valuable and convenient tool that does not require specific expertise from both the Member and assistants and, more importantly, do not fall under the detailed scrutiny of the political group leadership. Hence, APAs' work do not solemnly focus on the transitional, European level and Member's activities in Brussels or Strasbourg, but reaches constituencies, voters and serves as the invaluable help on the national level (Euchner & Frech 2020). All this adds to the fact that APA's can be perceived as the invaluable electoral resource that

contributes to securing policy and re-election goals. APAs good performance in the EP results in better political achievements and general quality of political portfolios. As a result, chances of Members to receive higher place during the next European elections increase (Hermansen & Pegan 2017 p. 3).

	<b>Propositions</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1)	Provision of the context-dependent knowledge by APAs to MEPs is positively related with MEPs' juniority in the EP.	Rejected
2)	Provision of the context-dependent knowledge by APAs is positively related with MEPs position within the EP hierarchy.	Rejected
3)	Hard knowledge, compared to soft knowledge, is negatively related to problem formulation performed by APAs	Rejected
4)	University knowledge, compared to the knowledge of the EP environment, is negatively related to process expertise knowledge performed by APAs.	Rejected
5)	Traineeship with the EU institutions is positively related to APA's provision of information to MEPs	Partially Accepted
6)	Provision of the context-dependent knowledge MEPs is positively related to APAs seniority in the EP	Partially Accepted

**Table 14.** Empirical Analysis of Theoretical Propositions

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

This chapter gives a summary of the conducted research. Moreover, this chapter answers the research question that was formulated in the introduction to this work. In addition, this part of the thesis will elaborate on the findings of the thesis. Next, the limitations of the study are brought out which will be followed by suggestions for further scholarly research regarding the topic of this work.

Accredited Parliament Assignats are important, yet unnoticed, actors in the literature regarding staff structure of the European Parliament. Furthermore, the empirical data on their work and knowledge provided is limited. Moreover, due to the growing power of the EP in the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, this group of political actors remained in the shadow of other civil servants from the EP Directorate-General and officials working for the political party groups. The majority of literature does not notice their potential influence on the only directly elected institution of the European Union work of elected and Members of the European Parliament.

The goal of this research was twofold – firstly to fill the empirical knowledge gap about these actors and secondly, to examine what kind of knowledge Accredited Parliamentary Assistants provide Members of European Parliament with.

For that reason, the following research question was formulated – *What kinds of knowledge and expertise do APAs provide, and how does this depend on their education and career background?*

To answer the research question, six hypotheses were created. Descriptive statistics and statistical analysis were used in order to examine various relationships between characteristics of assistants, characteristics of Members and statements regarding APA's provision of the knowledge. Pearson's chi-square test, Yates' correction and Fisher's exact test were used. The anonymous, online survey was conducted among APAs and the set of data was collected (N = 116). Formulated variables measured provision of the context-dependent knowledge, tasks APAs are assigned with and set of statements presented to assistants which were related to provision of knowledge and expertise. Moreover, variables regarding seniority of MEP and his or her position in the EP hierarchy, APAs age, length of their service, education and previous traineeship with the EU institutions were created.

The research question can be divided into two components. The first part asks about *kinds of knowledge and expertise that APAs provide* and the second one *how the provision of knowledge depends on the education and career background* of those actors.

To answer the first part of the question, the literature on policy professionals was employed and three components of the context-dependent politically useful knowledge were examined in accordance with the literature and Svallfors typology (2016b).

Policy professionals are political actors whose importance in contemporary democratic states grows vastly. They are employed in order to affect politics and policies but are neither civil servants and intellectuals nor they are elected officials. The key resource of policy professionals is knowledge that takes three forms: problem formulation (highlighting and framing social problems in their possible consequences) process expertise (understanding “where how and why” of the political and policy making processes) and information access (skill to find reliable and relevant information in the fast manner; Svallfors 2016b). The main motivation of policy professionals is the desire to transport their message into the political agenda and at the same time to remain far from the media spotlight (Svallfors 2016b, p. 19).

Moreover, in order to answer the research question, set of tasks was employed in accordance with the academic paper written by Egeberg et al. (2013) on the relationship between officials in the European Parliament. A set of eight tasks employed in their research was further developed by the author and four other tasks were added to the set of responsibilities.

Based on the academic literature, and the insight regarding nature of policy professionals and Accredited Parliamentary Assistant, six hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis looked at the relationship between experience of the MEP in the Parliament and the provision of knowledge context-dependent, politically useful knowledge by assistant. It was expected that less senior Member seeks more knowledge provision form his or her assistant. Furthermore, it was argued that the higher position the MEP holds in the European Parliament’s structure which means that he or she is a Chair or Vicechair of one of the EP committees, delegations, intergroups or political groups – the amount of the context-dependent politically useful knowledge provided by APA increases. Apart from this, with regards to the literature on policy professionals and the fact that, according to Svallfors, the hard knowledge is of lesser importance to policy professionals when compared to soft knowledge (such as drafting and research skills), it was argued that hard knowledge is indeed less important among studied group of APAs with education in political sciences and APAs

with other education. Furthermore, having reflected on the characteristic of policy professionals and the unique set of abilities they have to possess, and which can be only acquired through the on-the-job training, it was expected that for former trainees with the EU institution (in the European Parliament, the European Commission or in the office of MEP), the hard knowledge is less important than soft knowledge in their professional life. Moreover, it was expected that the academic degree is not very helpful for Accredited Parliamentary Assistant in covering works of committees, delegations, intergroups or political groups. Next, by referring again to the literature on policy professionals and Accredited Parliamentary Assistants, two relationships were examined: 1) firstly, between completing traineeship and statement on assistant's internal network of contacts; 2) secondly between completed traineeship and the statement on being the most important source of information for MEP. The latter subhypothesis was statistically significant and accepted. Lastly, it was argued that the provision of politically useful context-dependent knowledge increases with the seniority of Accredited Parliamentary Assistant. The reasoning behind this was that the more APA is familiarized with the specific EP environment, the more valuable actor he or she is for the Member.

Based on the statistical analysis, hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4 were rejected while hypotheses 5 and 6 were partially accepted. The latter two were partially accepted as each of them had subhypotheses from which at least one was accepted. Part one of the research question can be therefore answered by the statement that Accredited Parliament Assistants provide Members of the European Parliament with the knowledge related to process expertise. Moreover, Accredited Parliamentary Assistants provide knowledge and expertise related to facilitating compromises with other EU institutions such as the European Commission and European Council; Monitor executive bodies such as Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS) or other EU agencies. Apart from that, assistants facilitate compromises within the European Parliament.

With regards to the second part of the research question, namely – *how the provision of knowledge depends on the education and career background* – there is a relationship between length of Accredited Parliamentary Assistant's service and knowledge provided to the MEPs. The longer assistant works in the European Parliament (not necessarily for one Member) his or her importance increases. Furthermore, assistants who had traineeship with the EU institution are less convinced that they remain the most important source of information for their MEPs. This is interesting provided that the internship should equip them with knowledge

about the European Parliament and/or European Union. On the other hand, it could be the traineeship that gave trainees knowledge about different possible sources of information useful for their MEP, at the same time making them more aware, that they are not the only actors in the EP that can provide their employers with expertise and information.

## **5.1 Contribution to existing scholarship**

The aim of the research was to fill the theoretical and empirical knowledge gap about Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in the EP and more generally – to the academic literature about the European Parliament and its staff structure. Moreover, it is one of the first studies about APAs that focuses solemnly on this particular group of political actors and knowledge expertise they provide to the Members of the European Parliament.

The research makes a theoretical contribution by employing framework developed by Svallfors on policy professionals and the context-dependent politically useful knowledge they provide and applying it to the case of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants in the European Parliament. The literature regarding policy professionals has not been previously applied to the EP level and previous academic literature in this domain has only touched upon political actors on the European level mostly in the contest of the lobbying efforts and characteristics of lobbying in the European Parliament (Svallfors 2020, Ch. 5). This research contributes to the characteristic of policy professionals outlined by Svallfors by presenting set of descriptive data that polemize and add to the existing knowledge about the educational background of policy professionals. For APAs – who share many similarities with policy professionals – academic degree, constitutes an important aspect of their professional toolkit, oppositely to Svallfors' description of policy professionals. Furthermore, contrary to the literature that states that specific skills related to the EU environment can be acquired either through precisely designed educational courses or through the on-the-job training. The majority of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants have not attended the College of Europe – 'intellectual hub for Europe' (John 2020 Ch. 5) and 60% had traineeship with the EU institutions.

Moreover, this research offers an empirical insight in the work of assistants and provision of context-dependent politically useful knowledge provided by them. This is based on APAs biographical data, such as age, length of service or previous work experience in the EP. Earlier works that described APAs were mostly based on the ethnographic research design (Busby & Belkacem 2013) or were descriptive in their nature (Grmelova 2019, Michon 2015) or when used quantitative and qualitative data – they focused on the comparison between

assistants and other groups of officials working for the EP – Directorate-General civil servants and political groups' staff (Pegan 2017, Egeberg et al. 2013).

Furthermore, the research incorporates Svallfors framework and modifies it by merging it with set of tasks performed by APAs and other officials in the EP as described by Egeberg et al. (2013). Three components of knowledge are further broken into smaller set of tasks that assistants perform. This allows for closer examination of their duties and responsibilities and could be further developed in the future studies.

## **5.2 Limitations of the research**

The research carries several limitations. They are discussed in the following subsection.

The largest weakness is the limited number of responses in the questionnaire as the  $N = 116$ . There are 1923 Accredited Parliamentary Assistants currently working in the European Parliament. Therefore, the response ratio is equal to 6%. More responses would translate into more precise set of data. This in turn, would lead to the greater statistical significance of the results. The other limitation is that the results of the statistical analysis in most of the cases are statistically not significant. There are three factors that can be responsible for this: 1) firstly, the population of respondents that participated in the survey is not large enough to give statistically significant results of the analysis; 2) secondly, the questions asked were not relevant or respondents misunderstood its parts; 3) lastly, there was indeed no correlation between examined variables.

Furthermore, the survey focused on the assistants of the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term (2019 – 2024). This makes it harder to map the changing nature of the knowledge provision among APAs across number of terms, but also throughout the five year period of the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term of the European Parliament. This limitation prevents from obtaining larger image about APAs as the evolving nature of the EP imposes new responsibilities on MEPs, and as a consequence, assistants.

Furthermore, the research in its efforts to answer the research question is limited only to qualitative approach. Additional supplementation of the research with the number of interviews with Accredited Parliamentary Assistants or Members of the European Parliament could strengthen hypotheses and result in more nuanced answers. Moreover, interviews could lead to development of better set of tasks used in the research.



### **5.3 Suggestions for further research**

Further research on Accredited Parliamentary Assistants could look closer examine party affiliation of MEPs and the knowledge provided to MEPs depending on the part colour and different political ideological affiliation (i.e. pro-European political groups i.e. European Peoples Party vs. Euro-sceptic political groups such as Identity and Democracy Group). This would offer an interesting and important insight into the working relationship between differentiated groups in the EP and assistants' knowledge provision to MEPs on the opposite ideological spectrums.

Secondly, as mentioned in the previous subsection, mixed methodology linking statistical analysis and interviews could offer more exhausting answer to the question about knowledge provided to MEPs by assistants. Ethnographic research conducted by Busby and Belkacem (2013) was a successful attempt to examine a set of tasks and comprehensive picture of the everyday work of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants.

Next, comparative analysis between assistants working in subsequent parliamentary legislative terms could offer a broader picture of the changing nature of assistants' work. However, because of the great number of assistants working in the EP premises and high rotation among them, such research would require a substrative effort to track those agents and invite them to participate in the survey.

Finally, the relationship between Accredited Parliamentary Assistants and offices in local constituencies could be further examined. This particular relationship and the knowledge provision not only to MEPs, but the whole office of the Members is an overlooked relationship. The assistants who provide knowledge expertise to MEP with regards to policy processes in the EP can provide process expertise to local assistant and by doing this, to constituents. The aspect has been touched upon by Hermansen and Pegan (2017) who looked at the relationship between accredited and local assistants' activities in the run-up to the European parliamentary elections and this research offers promising results in this specific matter.

## References

- Anglmayer, I., & Scherrer, A., (2020) Ex-post evaluation in the European Parliament: an increasing influence on the policy cycle, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 26:3, 405-426
- Ball, H. L. (2019). Conducting Online Surveys. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(3), 413–417.
- Blockmans, S., Russack, S., & Baboš, P., (2019). Representative democracy in the EU: Recovering legitimacy, *CEPS*.
- Bowler, S., & Farrell, D., (1995) The Organizing of the European Parliament: Committees, Specialization and Co-ordination. *British Journal of Political Science*, 25(2), 219-243.
- Brewer, M., Crano, W. (2014). Research Design and Issues of Validity. In H. Reis & C. Judd (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bryman, A., (2011) Yates's Correction. In: Lewis-Beck, Brynman & Futing Liao, T., (Eds.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, Sage Publications. [Accessed 29.07.2021]
- Busby, A., Belkacem K., (2013) "Coping with the information overload": An exploration of assistants backstage role in the everyday practice of European Parliament politics', *European Integration online Papers*, Special Issue 1, Vol. 17, pp. 1-28.
- Clapham, C., & Nicholson, J. (2014). Yates' correction. In: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Mathematics*., Oxford University Press. [Accessed 29.07.2021]
- Corbett, R., Jacobs, F., Shackleton, M., (2011) *The European Parliament* (8th edition). London: John Harper Publishing.
- Costa, O. (Ed.). (2018). *The European parliament in times of EU crisis : Dynamics and transformations*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl> [Accessed 20.07.2021]
- Council Regulation (EC) No 160/2009 of 23 February 2009 amending the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Community
- De Clerck-Sachsse, J., & Kaczyński, P. M. (2009). The European Parliament—More powerful, less legitimate? *CEPS Working Document* No, 314.
- Dobbels, M., Neuhold, C., (2013) 'The Roles Bureaucrats Play': The Input of European Parliament (EP) Administrators into the Ordinary Legislative Procedure: A Case Study Approach, *Journal of European Integration*, 35:4, 375-390.
- Dobbels, M., Neuhold, C., (2015) *Officials 'Pre-Cooking' EU Affairs?* The Role of EP Officials in the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP). In: Bauer M.W., Trondal J. (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of the European Administrative System*. European Administrative Governance

- Earnshaw, D., & Judge, D, (2002) No simple dichotomies: lobbyists and the European Parliament, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 8:4, 61-79.
- Egeberg, M. (2020) Policy design or organizational design: On the relevance of the study of public policy and administration. *Public Administration*; 98: 801–804.
- Egeberg, M., Gornitzka, Å., Trondal, J., & Johannessen M. (2013) Parliament staff: unpacking the behaviour of officials in the European Parliament, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20:4, 495-514.
- Egeberg, M., Gornitzka, Å., Trondal, J., (2014) People Who Run the European Parliament: Staff Demography and Its Implications, *Journal of European Integration*, 36:7, 659-675.
- Egeberg, M., Gornitzka, A., Trondal, J., Johannessen, M., (2011) Parliament Staff Backgrounds, Career Patterns and Behaviour of Officials in the European Parliament, *ARENA Working Paper 10/2020*.
- Eichbaum, Chris, & Shaw, Richard. (2007). Minding the minister? Ministerial advisers in New Zealand government. *Kōtuitui*, 2(2), 95-113.
- Euchner, E., & Frech, E. (2020). Candidate Selection and Parliamentary Activity in the EU's Multi-Level System: Opening a Black-Box. *Politics and Governance*, 8(1), 72-84.
- EUR-Lex (2020) 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.
- Europe Elects (2021) EU Election Projection 2024, *Europe Elects* <https://europeelects.eu/ep2024/> [Accessed 27.07.2021]
- European Parliament (2012) Codecision And Conciliation - A Guide to how the Parliament co-legislates under the Treaty of Lisbon, The Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union.
- European Parliament (2015) Join the European Parliament! *Directorate-General for Personnel* Access: [https://www.uab.cat/doc/DOC\\_EUROACCIOJoinTheEP](https://www.uab.cat/doc/DOC_EUROACCIOJoinTheEP) [Accessed 03.06.2021]
- European Parliament (2019) Review Of European And National Election Results, *Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit*.
- European Parliament (2021) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/organisation/political-groups>. [Accessed 03.08.2021]
- European Parliament (2021) [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/assistants\\_\\_\\_](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/assistants___) [Accessed 03.08.2021]
- European Parliament (2021) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/the-secretary-general/en/organisation/directorates-general>. [Accessed 03.08.2021]

European Personnel Selection Office (2021) Conditions of Employment of Other Servants, [https://epso.europa.eu/documents/regime-applicable-aux-autres-agents\\_en](https://epso.europa.eu/documents/regime-applicable-aux-autres-agents_en). [Accessed 03.08.2021]

European Union, (July 2020) European Union Citizenship and Democracy, *Flash Eurobarometer 485*.

Grau i Segu, M., (2019). Democratic representation and information in a supranational setting: The case of the European Parliament (1979-2019). *Parliaments, Estates & Representation*, 39(3), 400-411.

Grmelová, N., (2019) The Legal Status of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants, *Institute for European Policy*.

Héritier, A., Meissner, K. L., Moury, C., Schoeller, M. G. (2019). *European parliament ascendant : Parliamentary strategies of self-empowerment in the EU. ProQuest Ebook Central*.

Hess, A., Hess, J., (2017). Understanding tests of the association of categorical variables: the Pearson chi-square test and Fisher's exact test. *Transfusion (Philadelphia, Pa.)*, 57(4), 877–879.

Hix, S. (2002). Parliamentary Behavior with Two Principals: Preferences, Parties, and Voting in the European Parliament. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3), 688-698.

John, S., Education and Solidarity in the European Union: Europe's Lost Spirit, *Springer International Publishing AG*, 2020.

King, A., et. al., (1978 [1990]). The New American political system, Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press.

Kremelberg, D. (2011). Practical statistics a quick and easy guide to IBM SPSS Statistics, STATA, and other statistical software. *Los Angeles, [Calif.] ; London: SAGE*.

Kruyen, P., & Van Genugten, M., (2020) Opening up the black box of civil servants' competencies, *Public Management Review*, 22:1, 118-140.

Kuehnhanss, C., Murdoch, Z., Geys, B., & Heyndels, B. (2017). Identity, threat aversion, and civil servants' policy preferences: Evidence from the European Parliament. *Public Administration*. 95.

Laurens, S. (2017). Lobbyists and Bureaucrats in Brussels: Capitalism's Brokers (1st ed.). *Routledge*.

Mahoney, C. (2008). Brussels Versus the Beltway : Advocacy in the United States and the European Union. *Georgetown University Press*.

Marcella, R., & Carcary, I., & Baxter, G., (1999) The information needs of United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). *Library Management*. 20. 168-178.

Mason, T. (2020, January) Expertise in Australia's National Bureaucracy The Evolution of 'Frank and Fearless' Bureaucratic Competencies (Thesis). Leiden University

- Michon, S. (2008) 'Assistants in the European Parliament, A Springboard for a European Career', *Sociologie du Travail* 50(2): 169–183.
- Michon, S., (2015). Parliamentary assistants (EU), *ResearchGate*
- Moehle, F. (2020, January). Populism and Public Administration - Leadership of the U.S. Federal Executive Under President Trump (Thesis). Leiden University.
- Neuhold, Ch., Dobbels, M., (2015) Paper keepers or policy shapers? The conditions under which EP officials impact on the EU policy process, *Comparative European Politics*, 13, 577–595.
- Neunreither, K., (2002) Elected legislators and their unelected assistants in the European Parliament. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 8(4), 40-60.
- OECD (2007) Political Advisors and Civil Servants in European Countries." *OECD Publishing*.
- OECD (2011), Ministerial Advisors: Role, Influence and Management, *OECD Publishing*.
- Pegan, A. (2011) European Parliament and its administration: What do we know and where do we go next? *Paper presented at the EGPA Annual Conference, Bucharest, Romania*.
- Pegan, A., (2015) An Analysis of Legislative Assistance in the European Parliament, *PhD Université du Luxembourg*.
- Pegan, A., (2017) The role of personal parliamentary assistants in the European Parliament, *West European Politics*, 40:2, 295-315.
- Roederer-Rynning, Ch., & Greenwood, J., (2017). The European Parliament as a developing legislature: Coming of age in trilogues? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(5), 735-754.
- Ruiter, E., (2020) The European Parliament's mandate for trilogues: explaining the discretion of political group advisors, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1-20.
- Selling, N, Svallfors, S., (2019) The Lure of Power: Career Paths and Considerations among Policy Professionals in Sweden, *Politics & Policy (Statesboro, Ga.)*, 47(5), 984-1012.
- Shih, J., Fay, M. (2017). Pearson's chi-square test and rank correlation inferences for clustered data. *Biometrics*, 73(3), 822–834.
- Sue, V. M. & Ritter, L. A. (2012). Concluding comments. In: *Conducting online surveys* (pp. 211-213). *SAGE Publications, Inc*.
- Svallfors S., (2017a) "Most MPs are Not All that Sharp." Political Employees and Representative Democracy, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40:7, 548-558.
- Svallfors, S., (2016a). Out of the Golden Cage: PR and the Career Opportunities of Policy Professionals. *Politics & Policy*, 44(1), 56-73.

Svallfors, S., (2016b) Knowing the game: motivation and skills among policy professionals Working Paper 2016:1, *Institute for Futures Studies*.

Svallfors, S., (2016c) Politics as organised combat – New players and new rules of the game in Sweden, *New Political Economy*, 21:6, 505-519.

Svallfors, S., (2017b) Knowing the game: motivations and skills among partisan policy professionals, *Journal of Professions and Organization*, 4, 55–69.

Svallfors, S., (2020). Politics for Hire. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: *Edward Elgar Publishing Limited*.

Synnøve, S., & Hermansen, L., (2018) (Self-)selection and expertise among decision-makers in the European Parliament, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 24:1.

Toshkov, D. (2016). Research Design in Political Science (1st ed.) [E-book]. Palgrave Macmillan

van der Velde, F. (2020, January) Merit or politicization in the Dutch top civil service? Neutral and responsive competencies of Dutch Secretaries-General appointed in the period 1994-2020 (Thesis). *Leiden University*

Wedel, J. (2011). Federalist No. 70: Where Does the Public Service Begin and End? *Public Administration Review*, 71, S118-S127.

Winzen, T., (2011) Technical or Political? An Exploration of the Work of Officials in the Committees of the European Parliament, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 17:1, 27-44.

Wodak, R., (2009) The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual. *Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan*.

## Appendix A

Because of its size, Appendix A is enclosed in the separate PDF file.

## Appendix B

### Survey: Between policy professionals and assistants: education and competences of APAs in the EP

Question asked	Possible set of answers
1. What is your age?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 20-29</li> <li>2. 30-39</li> <li>3. 40-49</li> <li>4. 50&lt;</li> <li>5. Prefer not to answer</li> </ol>
2. What is your gender?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Female</li> <li>2. Male</li> <li>3. Other</li> <li>4. Prefer not to answer</li> </ol>
3. What is the political group of your MEP?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)</li> <li>2. Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; 3) Renew Europe Group</li> <li>3. Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance</li> <li>4. Identity and Democracy Group;</li> <li>5. European Conservatives and Reformists Group</li> <li>6. The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL</li> <li>7. Non-attached Members</li> <li>8. Prefer not to answer</li> </ol>
4. How long have you been working as the Accredited Parliamentary Assistant?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. &lt; 1 year</li> <li>2. 1 - 2 years</li> <li>3. 3 - 5 years</li> <li>4. 6 - 10 years</li> <li>5. 10 years &lt;</li> </ol>
5. What is the highest level of your education?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PhD</li> <li>2. MD/MPhil</li> <li>3. Master (MBA, MA, MSc, JD)</li> <li>4. Bachelors</li> <li>5. No academic degree</li> </ol>
6. What was the field of your studies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Legal Studies</li> <li>2. Economics</li> <li>3. Political Science</li> <li>4. Foreign Languages</li> <li>5. Journalism</li> <li>6. Translation</li> <li>7. Other</li> </ol>
7. Please indicate what was your field of studies.	N/A
8. Did you attend College of Europe?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
9. Did you attend national state school of public administration?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>

<b>10. How many official EU languages do you speak?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 1</li> <li>2. 2</li> <li>3. 3</li> <li>4. 3&lt;</li> </ol>
<b>11. Before starting your work as an APA, have you completed traineeship with any EU institutions?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes, Schuman Traineeship</li> <li>2. Yes, Traineeships with Members of the European Parliament</li> <li>3. Yes, Blue Book Traineeship</li> <li>4. Yes, traineeship in political group</li> <li>5. Yes, other</li> <li>6. No, I have not completed traineeship</li> </ol>
<b>12. Have you previously worked for the EU or national administration?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
<b>13. How many terms your MEP performs his/her mandate?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 1 term</li> <li>2. 2 terms</li> <li>3. 3 terms and more</li> </ol>
<b>14. How much do you agree with the following statement: I guide(d) my MEP into the institutional world of the EP?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Definitely yes</li> <li>2. Rather yes</li> <li>3. Neither yes or no</li> <li>4. Rather no</li> <li>5. Definitely no</li> <li>6. Prefer not to answer</li> </ol>
<b>15. How much do you agree with the following statement: Because my MEP serves his/her first term, my influence on legislative and political issues is greater.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Definitely yes</li> <li>2. Rather yes</li> <li>3. Neither yes or no</li> <li>4. Rather no</li> <li>5. Definitely no</li> <li>6. Prefer not to answer</li> </ol>
<b>16. Please, choose in which areas you believe you serve as a point of reference to your MEP</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge expertise related to understanding policy-making processes in the EP</li> <li>2. Knowledge expertise related to finding reliable information</li> <li>3. Knowledge expertise related to framing political message into the EP/EU language</li> <li>4. Other</li> </ol>
<b>17. If you chose 'Other' or would like to elaborate more on question 15 you can do it here.</b>	N/A
<b>18. Please choose tasks you are responsible for in your everyday work.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drafting documents for MEP</li> <li>2. Providing scientific, technical, legal, advice to MEP</li> <li>3. Giving political advice to MEP</li> <li>4. Providing background information for MEPs</li> <li>5. Meeting/contacting people on behalf of MEPs</li> <li>6. Facilitating compromises within the EP</li> <li>7. Facilitating compromises with the Commission and/or the Council</li> <li>8. Monitoring executive bodies (Commission, EEAS, EU agencies)</li> <li>9. Administrative tasks</li> <li>10. Coordinating MEP's work with local assistants</li> <li>11. Media Outreach</li> <li>12. Other</li> </ol>
<b>19. If you chose 'Other' or would like to elaborate more on question 17. you can do it here.</b>	N/A
<b>20. Do you consider your academic degree to be helpful in your everyday work as an APA?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Definitely yes</li> <li>2. Rather yes</li> <li>3. Neither yes or no</li> <li>4. Rather no</li> </ol>



	5. Definitely no
<b>21. Do you consider hard knowledge obtained at the university (type of degree) to be less important than soft knowledge (such as writing and research skills)?</b>	1. Definitely yes 2. Rather yes 3. Neither yes or no 4. Rather no 5. Definitely no
<b>22. Is your MEP a Chair/ Vice-Chair of any Committee, Delegation, political group or holds any other position within EP organisational structure?</b>	1. Yes 2. No
<b>23. Could you name what position does he/she hold? (If you prefer not to answer type: Prefer not to answer)</b>	N/A
<b>24. Are you responsible for covering and monitoring work of any particular committee, delegation, political group and/or EP institution.</b>	1. Yes 2. No
<b>25. Do you consider you academic degree to be helpful you in covering work of the assigned committee, delegation, political group etc.?</b>	1. Definitely yes 2. Rather yes 3. Neither yes or no 4. Rather not 5. Definitely not
<b>26. How much would you agree with the following statement: For my MEP, I am the most important source of information about current processes and affairs in the EP.</b>	1. Definitely yes 2. Rather yes 3. Neither yes or no 4. Rather no 5. Definitely no
<b>27. How much would you agree with the following statement: To obtain information about current affairs in the EP, I mostly rely on my own, internal network of contacts rather than official EP sources.</b>	1. Definitely yes 2. Rather yes 3. Neither yes or no 4. Rather no 5. Definitely no