



# Public administration characteristics and performance in EU28:

## Introduction

Written by  
Nick Thijs and Gerhard Hammerschmid (Eds.)  
April - 2018



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Introduction**

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## Introduction

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See also: See also: EC, A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CHARACTERISTICS AND PERFORMANCE IN EU28.

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## FOREWORD

The present publication has been developed in a study that the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) carried out between September 2015 and June 2018 under the title "Support for developing better country knowledge on public administration and institutional capacity building"<sup>1</sup> (hereafter EUPACK – European Public Administration Country Knowledge). The EUPACK project aimed to help the Commission develop consistent and coherent knowledge on the characteristics of public administrations across all EU Member States; deepen the understanding of public administration functioning based on common approach and methodology, and capture of reform initiatives and dynamics; understand the role of external (EU funded) support to administrative reform process.

Despite of the substantial body of research, the existing analyses on public administration in the EU Member States focus on individual countries, regions or countries with a similar administrative tradition. A comprehensive and systematic overview that would allow drawing parallels and understanding differences across all Member States was missing so far. This publication comes to cover the gap. As a departing point, it defined the scope of public administration for each Member State, in order to ensure consistent and comparable set of information. A detailed framework guided the collection of quantitative data (drawing on existing, publicly available indicators and statistics) as well as qualitative information that covers the institutional systems, capacity, performance and management of public administrations. The analysis allowed developing a substantive overview on the formal and informal characteristics of public administration systems for all EU countries. Conclusions were drawn about their systems, functioning, culture and performance. On the basis of the collected information, a report for each Member State was prepared. In addition, a systematic and comparative synthesis of key areas of institutional capacity and functioning across all EU countries was developed.

This publication presents the substantial work carried out during the study. The current **introduction** outlines the approach taken to explore the characteristics of public administrations in the EU Member States. It is followed by **country chapter for each EU Member State**. A separate report called "**A comparative overview of public administration characteristics and performance in the EU28**" presents the synthesis overview. This also outlines the methodological difficulties and data limitations encountered during the study. The conclusions in these publications represent an independent expert view. The reports have been presented and discussed with practitioners and researches in several events. While data and methodology may remain open for further discussion, we believe that the publication is an important milestone towards a more comprehensive understanding and further exploration of the administrative systems, performance and trends of public administrations in EU Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> Contract VC/2016/0492

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We would like to thank everyone for their commitment.

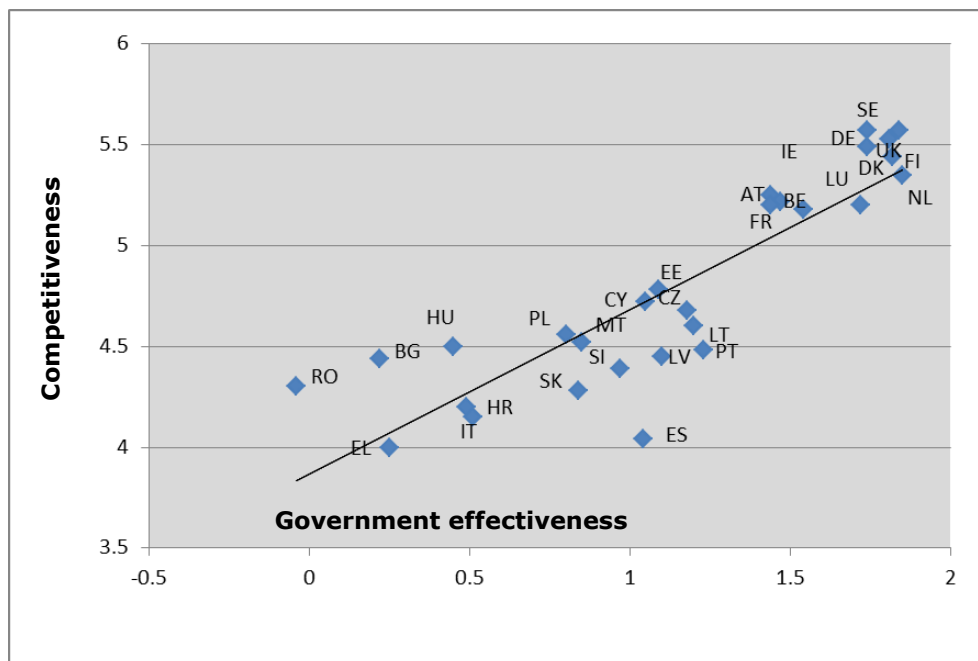


## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FOR THE EU

With around 75 million employees, the public sector is Europe's biggest single 'industry', employing around 25% of the workforce (around 16% in central government alone) and responsible for almost 50% of GDP<sup>2</sup>. Given its scale and scope, public administration – the organisation and management of publicly-funded resources – has enormous importance for the daily lives of our citizens, and the performance and prospects of businesses.

The quality of a country's institutions, both governmental and judicial, is a key determining factor for its economic but also societal well-being. Administrative capacity is increasingly recognised as a pre-requisite for delivering the EU's treaty obligations and objectives, such as creating sustainable growth and jobs, and maximising the benefits from EU membership. The chart below shows a very strong correlation of World Bank government effectiveness, as measured by the World Bank Government Effectiveness Indicator<sup>3</sup> on the one hand and economic competitiveness (World Economic Forum indicator) on the other hand. Economically competitive countries have effective governments.

**Figure: Economic impact of government effectiveness**



**Source:** WorldBank Government Effectiveness 2015; World Economic Forum. The Global Competitiveness 2016-2017

Member States' administrations currently face the triple challenge of (1) delivering better with less i.e. meeting societal & business needs in times of tighter budgets, (2) adapting service provision to demographic, technological and societal changes and (3) improving the business climate through fewer and smarter regulations and better services in support of growth and competitiveness. These days, public authorities must

<sup>2</sup> Eurofound, ERM annual report, 2014

<sup>3</sup> The indicator dedicated to government effectiveness takes into account the quality of services and policies provided the public sector. It also includes to what extend the civil service is independent from political pressure and how credible is the government

be able to adjust to the dynamic and often disruptive changes in the economy and society. In an increasingly 'connected' but uncertain world, policies and structures that have been successful in the past might not be sufficient or appropriate to serve citizens and business in the future. The ability to reflect today's needs and to anticipate tomorrow's, agile enough to adapt, must become permanent features of the public sector. Most of all, administrations must build on a solid foundation: ethical, efficient, effective, open and accountable.

Experience in Europe in the past two decades shows different administrative reform paths and results<sup>4</sup> mainly due to different degrees of reform capacity, sustainability of reform approaches, coverage and a 'fitting context'. The incentives that triggered the "New Public management" wave of reforms in older Member States, addressed domestically recognised needs to reduce the size of government and make administration more efficient. Change has been rationalised through the accumulated management experience and exchange with peers. In new Member States, the "first wave" of reforms began with the EU-accession requirements<sup>5</sup> for establishing professional and depoliticised civil service systems but also often strongly influenced by NPM ideas<sup>6</sup>. The limited internal capacity was compensated with externally managed support. Limited strategic orientation and ownership of reforms<sup>7</sup> led to mixed results<sup>8</sup>.

The size, structure and scope of public institutions are unique to each country, and their architecture and organisation is a national competence. At the same time, good governance is recognisably in the interests of the EU as a whole, as well as individual Member State. Without effective public administrations and high quality, efficient and independent judicial systems, the EU's *acquis* cannot be effectively implemented, the internal European market cannot be completed, and the Europe 2020 goals of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth cannot be realistically achieved. Given its potential contribution to economic growth, strengthening public administration is a recurring priority of the Annual Growth Survey that kicks-off each European Semester, and the resulting country-specific recommendations (CSRs) for civil and judicial administrations. Between 2012-2016 20 Member States have received country specific recommendations (CSRs) in the area of public administration.

Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities was added as a key ESF priority in 2007-2013<sup>9</sup>. The objective was to go beyond the technical assistance for the better management of EU funds and assist the ongoing administrative reforms in the countries with weaker institutions. Smart administration, development of human capital and related ICT of the administration and public services were seen as a fundamental requirement for economic growth and jobs already with the renewed Lisbon agenda.

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Pollitt and Sorin Dan. 2011. COCOPS Policy Brief 1: The Impact of New Public Management (NPM) Reforms in Europe. see [http://www.cocops.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/COCOPS\\_PolicyBrief\\_1\\_newlayout.pdf](http://www.cocops.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/COCOPS_PolicyBrief_1_newlayout.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sigmaweb.org>

<sup>6</sup> Tiina Randma-Liiv and Wolfgang Drechsler. 2017. Three decades, four phases: Public administration development in Central and Eastern Europe, 1989-2017, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 30, iss. 6-7, pp. 595-605.

<sup>7</sup> For more information see thematic evaluations of the PHARE programme.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer-Sahling, J. (2009), "Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe Five Years After EU Accession", SIGMA Papers, No. 44, OECD Publishing; Also WB, Administrative capacity in the new EU Member States: the limits of innovation? See <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2007/06/8187914/administrative-capacity-new-eu-member-states-limits-innovation>

<sup>9</sup> Community strategic guidelines on cohesion (2006/702/EC) For more information, see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32006D0702&from=EN>

Altogether, 14 Member States programmed relevant interventions in their ESF OPs for about EUR 2 billion.

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in 2014-2020 explicitly encourage and enable Member States to strengthen governance under the thematic objective 11: *“enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration”*. TO11 is expected to co-fund operational programmes (OPs) in excess of €4 billion.<sup>10</sup> Implicit but also important support may be provided under thematic objective 2 *“enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies”*, as well as the other objectives, triggering reforms in the management and delivery of particular public services (for example, water and waste management under thematic objective 6, or employment and social services under thematic objectives 8 and 9).<sup>11</sup> 17 Member States<sup>12</sup> have programmed support under TO11 for a total of about EUR 4.2 billion. The biggest share of that funding is provided by ESF (EUR 3,6 billion).

The key areas of intervention include:

- improving quality of policy making through better monitoring and analytical capacity, streamlined impact assessment, and systems for simplification and reducing red tape, modernisation of budgeting;
- improving administrative service delivery through diversified access, optimised back-office processes, and interoperable e-government solutions;
- increasing effectiveness of Member States' justice systems through e.g. training of court staff, introducing case management systems, optimisation of the workflow;
- increasing transparency of public administration and stronger stakeholder involvement;
- improving quality, integrity and professionalism of the civil service via adjusting the recruitment, career and performance systems

In this context, understanding of public administration characteristics and reform dynamics in Member States is critical for the European Commission in order to be able to provide for effective implementation of the ESIF investments, and/or other support and maximise EU value added. Furthermore, any future EU initiatives in this area - be they related to funding, policy or dialogue with Member States - need to be based on a sound understanding of context, needs, opportunities and challenges, as well as drivers and obstacles to administrative reform, in order to be able to respond with a targeted and customised approach that fits the specific needs of the respective Member State.

## **2. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

In the current study, the production of a substantive overview of public administration systems, culture, functions and characteristics of the EU Member States combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Five components are systematically described and analysed.

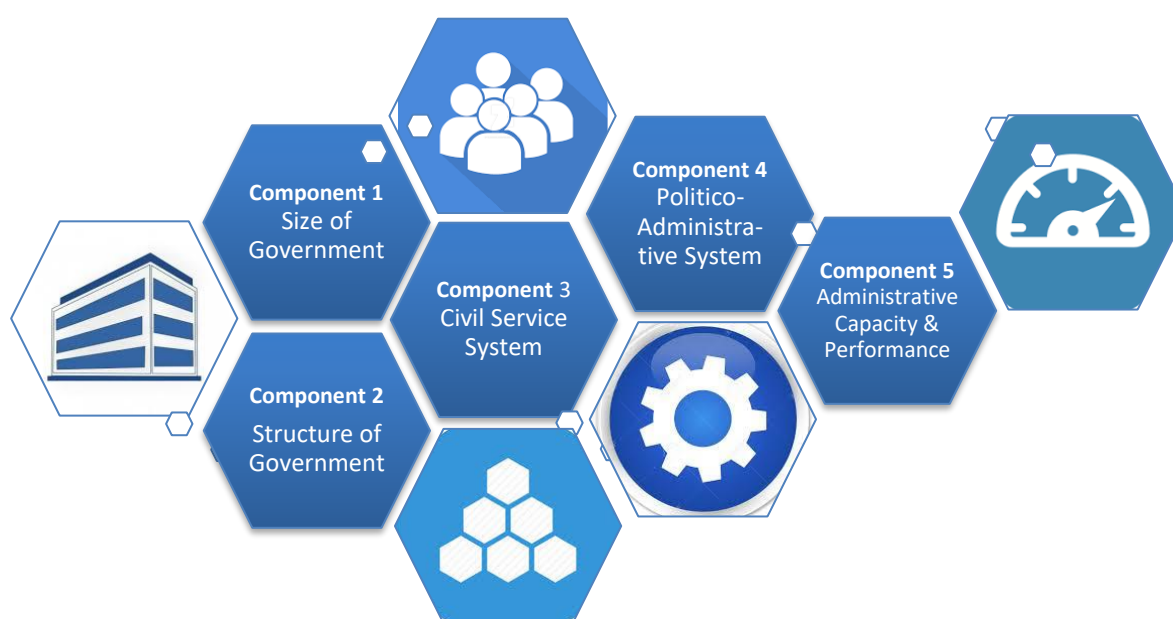
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<sup>10</sup> A summary of the operational programmes can be found at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7932&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>

<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EC) 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council, Article 9.

<sup>12</sup> Out of 18 eligible



**Component 1** provides comparative data on the size of government in the EU MS. It presents key indicators and analysis the size of government using both expenditure and employment data both with regard to country comparisons and longitudinal development for the post-financial crisis period 2010-2016. Based on central government share of expenditures and employment the chapter also looks at the different degrees of decentralization of the EU MS.



**Component 2** puts the focus on the scope and structure of government. It deals with core features of the state system and especially the multi-level governance of allocating government responsibilities and competencies to different tiers of government. The component provides a comparative overview of how the distribution of power between the different government levels related to different policy areas is organized. Some key information on the structure of the executive government is provided - how is the “machinery of government” organized, i.e. what is the number of ministries and agencies; what is the degree of centralization/decentralization and of management autonomy and how is the centre of government and responsibility for administrative reform organized. The country reports provide detailed information especially on the internal structure and coordination mechanisms/ arrangements (e.g. strategic management, controls, decision-mechanisms) of government, the relative strength of centre of government and forms of horizontal cooperation vs. silo structures.



The key features of the Member States’ civil service systems are covered in **component 3**. This component analyses the status and categories of government employees (e.g. civil servants vs. public employees) but also describes the national systems based on categories such as career vs. position-based systems, closedness/openness of civil service, coherence between different government levels and difference to private sector employment from a cross-country comparative perspective. The country chapters present detailed information on the Civil service regulation at central government level such as content, critical assessment,

stability vs. dynamic over the last 10 years, key changes and current challenges or issues of consistency for the whole government sector (how far is it binding/relevant for all government levels, % of overall civil service employment covered). This component also introduces key characteristics of the central government HR system with regard to how it is organized and key functions such as recruitment and selection, appraisal, remuneration and specific systems for top executives.



The politico-administrative system and the societal context of public administration and the administrative tradition and culture are the two main components of **component 4**. The first part describes key features of the state system such as elite decision-making including the link of politics with business, degree of corporatism and role of organized interest groups on policy making but also the importance of stakeholder dialogue and citizen participation in the Member States.

With regard to administrative tradition and culture key elements of administrative traditions such as managerialisation and regulatory density, administrative autonomy and public service bargains are described but the component also presents some national culture indicators from Hofstede.



The final **component 5 on administrative capacity and public administration performance** aims for an indicator-based assessment of both capacity and performance of public administration in the EU Member States. The analysis is conducted according to five **dimensions** (1) Transparency and Accountability, (2) Civil Service Systems and HRM, (3) Service Delivery and Digitalization, (4) Organization and Management of Government, and (5) Policy Making,

Coordination and Implementation<sup>13</sup> plus an additional analysis of overall performance. As a basis for this analysis 28 cross-country comparative indicators (European Commission, Eurostat, World Bank, UN, OECD, the Quality of Government Research at the University of Gothenburg or the Bertelsmann Foundation, etc.) were selected and agreed by the EC as contracting authority.<sup>14</sup>

**Table: List of indicators used in the EUPACK dimensions**

1. Transparency and Accountability	
Indicator	Source
Access to government information	Bertelsmann Stiftung- Sustainable Governance Indicators
Transparency of government	European Commission- E-government Benchmark
Voice and accountability	World Bank- Worldwide Governance Indicators
Control of corruption	World Bank- Worldwide Governance Indicators
TI perception of corruption	Transparency International- Corruption Perception Index
Gallup perception of corruption	Gallup World Poll

<sup>13</sup> Based on different frameworks/sources (e.g. tender, national sources, existing Quality of Public Administration fiche, toolbox, OECD methodological guidelines, public management research) these 5 key dimensions of public administration (reform) have been distinguished and are used throughout the different EUPACK reports.

<b>2. Civil Service Systems and HRM</b>	
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Source</b>
Impartiality	Quality of government institute Gothenburg- Expert survey
Professionalism	Quality of government institute Gothenburg- Expert survey
Closedness	Quality of government institute Gothenburg- Expert survey
<b>3. Service Delivery and Digitalisation</b>	
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Source</b>
Online services	UN e-government Index
E-government users	European Commission-Digital Economy and Society Index
Pre-filled forms	European Commission-Digital Economy and Society Index
Online service completion	European Commission- Digital Economy and Society Index
Barriers to public sector innovation	European Public Sector Innovation Scoreboard 2013
Ease of doing business	World Bank- Ease of Doing Business
Services to businesses	Eurobarometer 417
<b>4. Organization and Management of Government</b>	
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Source</b>
Strategic planning capacity	Bertelsmann Stiftung- Sustainable Governance Indicators
SGI implementation capacity	Bertelsmann Stiftung- Sustainable Governance Indicators
QOG implementation capacity	Quality of Government Institute Gothenburg- Expert Survey
Interministerial coordination	Bertelsmann Stiftung- Sustainable Governance Indicators
<b>5. Policy Making, Coordination and Regulation</b>	
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Source</b>
Regulatory quality	World Bank- Worldwide Governance Indicators
Rule of law	World Bank- Worldwide Governance Indicators
Societal consultation	Bertelsmann Stiftung- Sustainable Governance indicators
Use of evidence based instruments	Bertelsmann Stiftung- Sustainable Governance Indicators
<b>6. Overall Performance</b>	
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Source</b>
Trust in government	Eurobarometer 85- Spring 2016 Eurobarometer 72.4- 2010
Improvement of public administration over time	Eurobarometer 75.4- 2011
Government effectiveness	World Bank- Worldwide Governance Indicators
Public sector performance	World Economic Forum- Global Competitiveness Index

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