



## Insights into public sector workforce governance to advance the Sustainable Development Goals\*

### Summary

There is a need to sustain the momentum of innovation in the public sector prompted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, paired with comprehensive human resources development strategies premised on national development objectives, a change of mindsets in the public sector, raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting public sector workforce diversity and building the human resource capacities of subnational authorities. Investing and building capacities in emerging areas, such as artificial intelligence, can encourage young professionals to join the public sector and motivate and retain them once hired.

### Recommendations

The Committee recommends that the Council:

*Recognize* that building resilient institutions calls for more creative, flexible and integrated ways of working that are focused on the needs of people, as well as an adequate stock of competencies, capabilities and resources at all levels, and *encourage* Governments to further promote professionalization and diversity of the public sector

workforce, invest in digital skills, update competency frameworks for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, address inequalities that exist within the public sector workforce, and take steps to address social inequities in the design and delivery of public services (Paragraph 20).

► See [ECOSOC resolution 2024/L.14](#)

\* Excerpt from Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Report on the twenty-third session. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2024, Supplement No. 24 ([E/2024/44-E/C.16/2024/9](#))

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration is a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) advising on issues related to governance and institution-building for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Discussion**

### **Sustaining the momentum of innovation**

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The Committee underscores that the public sector workforce is key for ensuring effective crisis response and reinforcing the 2030 Agenda. The momentum of innovation in the public sector workforce prompted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including transformations in the ways in which public institutions and political leadership relate to one other and their constituencies, should be sustained, rather than allowing it to fade away in the face of pandemic recovery and multiple ongoing crises diverting managerial and political attention.

To promote innovation in public sector workforce arrangements, it is important to overcome overly rigid and bureaucratized public administrative cultures and ensure a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the factors that enable important innovations to emerge. Governments should continue to promote experimentation, behavioural insights and collaboration with experts, researchers and other non-governmental stakeholders to boost innovative solutions. Improving regulatory and interorganizational frameworks that enable partnerships, co-production arrangements and

innovative forms of public service delivery are necessary.

Public administrations can also benefit from releasing the creativity and innovative forces of the public sector workforce by recognizing the role of bureaucratic hackers in solving complex problems, equipping public servants with the knowledge and skills required to pursue innovative initiatives, promoting mobility for public servants within the administration and supporting managerial discretion and flexibility.

Specific attention should be paid to incremental innovations, both legitimate and socially accepted, as well as effective, in terms of public service delivery and societal outcomes. In addition, peer and policy learning relating to innovation should be enhanced, covering various policy areas. Oversight institutions, respecting their legal mandates, can go beyond their audit and control functions and become true catalysts for policy learning and innovation, including through forms of social accountability and partnerships with social organizations and citizens.

### **Reflecting sustainable development objectives in human resources development strategies**

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The Committee stresses that governments at all levels should be equipped to anticipate risks and effectively adapt and transform their public sectors to support sustainable development in line with the aspirations of their citizens. Governments should invest in intellectual capital and human resources, including in the skills, competencies, resources, working conditions and values of public servants, which can support the building of strong institutions

and the achievement of effective public service delivery. This can also promote and anchor trust in public institutions. Comprehensive human resources development strategies premised on streamlined national and international development objectives and based on standards are required to achieve that objective, which should include merit-based human resources management and performance management and monitoring.

Public institutions should create an enabling, supportive and motivating institutional environment for public servants, not only to attract candidates to join the public sector workforce, but also to motivate and retain them once hired. This includes investing in and building new capacities in various areas, such as artificial intelligence and climate risk assessment, respecting and leveraging intergenerational knowledge.

There is also an urgent need to build the capacities and competencies of subnational governments, while evaluating and improving their approach to human resources development and management. Public administration institutes, schools of government and civil service training schools and institutes play a pivotal role.

## **Investing in changing mindsets and raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals**

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New strategies to change mindsets should be adopted to generate attitudes and beliefs among political leaders and public servants that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda, which should ultimately lead to a transformation in their behaviour. Further steps should be taken to integrate working methods relating to the Sustainable Development Goals into the curricula of schools of administration and other training facilities, with a specific emphasis on policy coherence. The Committee also supports the ongoing review of the standards of excellence for public administration education and training undertaken by the Department of Economic and

Social Affairs and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration.

There is also an urgent need to increase understanding and knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals to make public servants and non-government stakeholders aware of their ambitious nature and potential and accelerate their achievement.

## **Increasing public sector workforce diversity**

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Governments should foster public sector workforce diversity by adopting the principles of non-discrimination and leaving no one behind and aiming for broad societal representation. While advances have been observed regarding gender equality, more needs to be done regarding other dimensions. Racial equity, for example, should be promoted through affirmative action and a representative public sector workforce.

After identifying gaps in the public sector workforce representation, governments should foster and enforce inclusive and non-discriminatory policies that can contribute both to correcting discriminatory human resources policies and ameliorating working conditions in the public sector through an equitable and inclusive environment. To be effective, diversity and inclusion strategies should be grounded in merit-based employment policies, open recruitment systems and robust legal protection from discrimination.

**You can access the CEPA working group page for more information [here](#).**