



# Reinventing public sector workforce training and institutional learning towards changing mindsets in the public sector\*

## Summary

Agile, data- and insight-driven institutions are necessary to be better prepared and more resilient in managing crises. Building such institutions will depend on access to new skill sets and fostering of more citizen-centred and collaborative mindsets among public servants. A review of public sector workforce capabilities to achieve the SDGs and of related training efforts is part of the solution. To ensure effective training and capacity-building strategies, appropriate and sustainable resource allocation will be required, paired with the adaptation of global good practices. Young people, particularly affected by the multiple crises, should be more involved in policymaking and public institutions as their engagement will be key to achieving the Goals and driving systemic reforms over the longer run.

## Recommendations

The Committee recommends that the Council encourage governments to further promote professionalization 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 18)

► See [ECOSOC resolution 2023/28](#)

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\* Excerpt from Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Report on the twenty-second session. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2022, Supplement No. 24 ([E/2023/44-E/C.16/2023/9](#))

## **Discussion**

### **Reinventing public sector workforce training and institutional learning towards changing mindsets in the public sector**

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The Committee notes that agile, and data- and insight-driven public institutions are necessary in order to improve preparedness and resiliency in managing current and future crises. Such institutions rely on a new set of skills and a democratic and citizen-centred mindset among public servants, including elected officials and political appointees.

A holistic approach to change the mindsets of public servants and political leaders to align them with the principles and values of the 2030 Agenda and the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development should be made a priority. This would also help to emphasize the culture, ethics and values that underpin the role of public servants.

### **Need for systematic review of public sector capacity-building efforts**

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Shortages of capacity and skills among public servants, including elected officials and political appointees, are among the key shortcomings hampering public sector efforts in support of the achievement of the Goals. However, the outsourcing of core activities of the public sector to external actors should only take place in areas where efficiency gains could be attained, without risking accountability and other objectives.

Public sector capacity-building efforts should be systematically and comprehensively reviewed, especially in countries in which public service delivery remains ineffective. Particular attention needs to be paid to technology adaptation, access and entitlement to training, prescribed courses, course accreditation, the relationship of the provided training and education to policies, and the procedures for job grading, remuneration, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal and promotion.

Building strong institutions through training should be based on the detailed assessment, analysis and prioritization of individual and institutional needs. The analysis of institutional needs should focus on service delivery improvements, the need for

rationalized and cost-effective structures and institution-building, and the promotion of greater internal and external accountability. The assessment of individual needs should facilitate a system of personal development plans for all employees and identify appropriate forms of staff development. Training programmes should be designed to be gender sensitive and inclusive.

The long-term outcomes of effective training should include a change in behaviour and an improvement in work performance of public servants, which in turn could result in a mindset change at all levels. Public-sector training and education might incur high costs, and the resources used has to be justified and monitored. The use of specific criteria and key performance indicators is recommended. In addition, trainings should be assessed for their impact, with the goal being to promote higher impact training and drive stronger return on investments. Structural and systemic measures should accompany training to ensure the retention and impact of learning.

To ensure effective training and capacity-building strategies, appropriate and sustainable resource allocation will be needed, including at the

subnational level, as well as the adaptation of good practices from around the world.

## Skills of public servants and behavioural insights

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Public servants, including elected officials and political appointees, will need to develop new skills and competencies to engage more effectively in the digital era. The digital divide should be kept in mind when developing training that relies on technology to ensure that no one is left behind.

The spread of misinformation and disinformation, the proliferation of digital platforms and the growing political polarization demand an active response from the public servants involved in drafting public communication strategies aimed at informing and inspiring citizens to take positive actions in the pursuit of more democratic, sustainable and green societies. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the crucial role of inclusive communication in bridging ethnically and linguistically diverse groups and digital literacy gaps between generations and urban and rural populations. The pandemic also showed

that the strategic use of behavioural insights could be effective in encouraging compliance and policy uptake, particularly in highly decentralized governance settings.

In the face of multiple crises, the urgent transformation of public institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world demands a public sector workforce capable of fostering resilience. The workforce could be created through policymakers developing strategic foresight skills, giving a more prominent role to leaders and public servants willing to challenge the system and innovate from within by redefining the rules and making them strategically better (referred to as bureaucratic hackers) and increasing the use of more innovative policymaking tools that go beyond top-down approaches.

## Engagement of young people

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The challenges and needs of young people, who are particularly affected by the multiple crises, should be taken into account and their involvement in policymaking and public institutions increased as their engagement will be key to achieving the Goals and driving systemic reforms over the longer run. The administrative capacities of the public sector could be reinforced with regard to delivering youth-centred services, collecting evidence to track inequalities faced by young people, informing decision-making and embedding the principle of intergenerational equity in rule making, public spending decision-making and stakeholder

consultations. Different approaches could be used for the meaningful participation of young people such as in edutainment and gamification.

Given the lack of awareness of the role public servants and lack of trust in the public sector, the role and value of the public sector workforce is to be promoted and some of its successes showcased to attract and retain young public servants at all levels, including at the local and subnational level. Efforts should also be made to ensure that young people are supported throughout their careers to balance out their (digital) skills and their lack of experience.

## Technical guidance for government officials



[CEPA strategy guidance note on promotion of public sector workforce diversity](#) (draft)

## Related expert papers on this topic (2016-present)



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Diversity and non-discrimination in public administration: strategic enablers of sustainable development ([E/C.16/2016/3](#)) (20 January 2016)

See also:



UN/IASIA Initiative on Public Administration Education and Training for the Current and Next Generation of Government Leadership ([Aide-memoire](#)) .



Enhancing the Competence of Government Leadership: New Approaches to an Old Problem - A Report on the Joint “UN/IASIA Initiative on Public Administration Education and Training for the Current and Next Generation of Government Leadership” to the First Meeting of CEPA ([Report](#))