

22nd session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written statement of the Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies - State Secretariat of Public Function - Ministry of Finance and Public Function - Government of Spain

Agenda Item 6.: Application of the UN principles of effective governance for sustainable development for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

In December 2022, the Government of Spain approved Law 27/2022, of December 20, on the institutionalization of public policy evaluation in the General State Administration, which is the first element of a Strategy to strengthen the public system of policy evaluation in public administrations that must be approved by 2026.

With this Law, the Spanish Government adopts an approach that promotes and ensures evaluation from the planning of public policies, and the institutionalization of evaluation as a tool for collective and organizational learning, improvement of public service, accountability, and transparency, contributing to the effectiveness and efficiency of public action.

It is a model of institutionalization of evaluation that, through an instrument with the force of law, contemplates evaluation from the formulation of public policies, covering their entire life cycle with a comprehensive and pluralistic approach. This model emphasizes the strengthening of strategic planning by incorporating common and mandatory elements and technical aspects for all public policies and the performance of ex ante evaluations and evaluability analyses. It also establishes commitments to the incorporation of evaluation results into evidence-based decision making, applying the "apply or explain" principle, and to transparency and accountability.

The approach of the model implemented by Spain is fully consistent with the principles of effective governance for sustainable development proposed by the United Nations Organization through the Economic and Social Council to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The final objectives of the standard are to optimize the decision-making process, improve planning and its instruments, help to improve the situation of the challenges of society and sustainable development, providing knowledge on various criteria of public value to which public action should contribute, especially the Sustainable Development Goals, which are expressly referred to in the preamble of the Law and developed in different sections with specific issues of public policies that should be the target of evaluation, such as the elimination of poverty, the fight against climate change, education, equality between women and men, the defense of the environment and the design of cities to meet the current demographic challenge and for future generations.

The Law also regulates various obligations in the area of strategic planning with an evaluation approach, which are intended to provide soundness and quality to public policies. These obligations concern all ministries and the government as a whole, since the former must draw up departmental evaluation plans every two years, and the latter must approve a strategic evaluation plan every four years. All public policies, regardless of how they are formulated (plans, programs, norms, etc.) must undergo an evaluability analysis prior to their approval to ensure that they contain minimum quality elements in planning, in the monitoring system and in the evaluation forecast. In addition, the most relevant policies should have an ex-ante and an ex-post evaluation. And, if they have a duration of four years or more, a mid-term evaluation must be guaranteed.

The law includes an institutional architecture that enables the participation of all the actors involved, including the public. The Law includes the authorization for the creation of a state agency with a high degree of autonomy from the Government for the coordination and promotion of the entire public evaluation system, and other bodies to articulate communication between ministries (departmental coordination units and the Higher Evaluation Commission) and a collegiate body conceived as a forum for consultation and participation with civil society and other administrations (the General Evaluation Council).

Given that this is the first time in Spain that a regulation of this type has been approved, with a transversal and general approach, a learning scenario is proposed in which public employees will be involved, through different training itineraries adapted to their needs that will be designed in collaboration with the Spanish National Institute of Public Administration, which is the competent body for the training of public employees.

Despite the efforts made to institutionalize evaluation, there are still many challenges to be faced. Among the most important of these is to achieve sustained governmental support over time in order to achieve the cultural change in the Administration that is necessary to internalize these new obligations so that they become part of its daily activity, reinforcing the quality of public policies with the aim of improving people's lives, which, in short, is what public action should aim to achieve.