



# THE GHENT DECLARATION

## ON THE CHALLENGES AND COMMON ACTIONS FOR EUROPEAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS



The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, meeting in Ghent on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024, as part of the European Network for Public Administration (EUPAN) under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union:

- Considering the implementation of the strategy paper (2022-2025) of EUPAN and its priority themes: transformation of the civil service and HR policies; transparent, accessible, resilient and green public services that meet user's expectations; organizational changes, public innovation, digital transformation and "greening" of public administrations;
- Considering the importance to develop HR policies that are sustainable, promote diversity, evidence-informed, inclusive, respectful, human-centred and flexible and that supports the added value that civil servants can have towards citizens;
- Considering the importance of effective government institutions as central part of the resilience of the society in dealing with crises;
- Considering the European Green deal of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, which aims to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy and stop climate change, revert biodiversity loss and cut pollution;
- Recognizing that equity, integrity and a civil service that leads by example are vital to public governance, ensuring citizen's trust, safeguarding the public interest and reinforcing fundamental values such as the commitment to a pluralistic democracy based upon the rule of law and respect of human rights;
- Underlining the contribution of the civil service to a new model of sustainable growth and prosperity, to a human, inclusive and solidary Europe, in line with objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion, the principles of the European Pillar of social rights, and the promotion of the values of peace and democracy on the European continent;
- Recognizing the necessity to increase the capabilities of civil servants for responding to major societal crises and challenges, including the green and digital transitions;
- Recalling the Rome declaration of March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017, that stresses the commitment to work towards a social Europe, based on promoting economic and social progress, equality between women and men and rights and equal opportunities for all;
- In continuity with the conclusions' principles and objectives from their previous meeting in Lisbon on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, for an innovative, participatory, open and transparent public administration, close to the citizens;
- In continuity with the Declaration of Strasbourg on the common values and challenges of European Public Administrations on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022,

during the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Declaration addresses three essential areas: attractive, modern and innovative civil services that lead by example; transparent and resilient public services that meet users' expectations; and high quality, inclusive digital public services that respect European values;

- Capitalizing on the experience of the Barcelona Summer School on Open Government, during the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2023;
- Considering the commitment of the European Commission to support European Union (EU) public administrations through the actions set out in the Communication on Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPAct);
- Acknowledging the importance of social dialogue within central government administrations and the work achieved on digitalisation by the Social Dialogue Committee for central government administrations;
- Considering the work carried out within the European and international networks dedicated to public administration transformation and the civil service, particularly in the areas of human resources management, transformation of public services, support for digital transformation and the building of shared public administration values, which promote a common understanding of these challenges and possible common responses;
- Considering the opportunities for deepening pragmatic cooperation on public sector digital transformation from the recently agreed Interoperable Europe Act, the Open Data Directive and Data Governance Act;
- Considering the initiatives carried out by the United Nations, including the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Taking into account the national context, labor market structure and differing responsibilities of the ministers of the Member states;
- Considering the data gathered from all Member States in the 2023 data collection of an HR scorecard.

Affirm their willingness to follow up on the cooperation initiated among public administrations within the EU, taking into account the specific models and prerogatives of the Member States and the European Commission on their respective administrations, on the common issues and challenges in terms of societal, green and digital transitions and civil service.

## **I Future perspectives**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European

Commission, acknowledge the importance of:

- Promoting a civil service ready to tackle the current and future challenges, by:
  - Focusing on a sustainable civil service with attention to climate and the environment and a long-term evidence-informed HR strategy, based on respect and continuity;
  - Considering the security and preparedness of civil service for crisis situations;
  - Considering the ethical use of emerging technologies, including the field of AI, whilst ensuring the fundamental rights of EU citizens and respecting workers' and users' rights focusing on flexibility, work-life balance and developing skills, and whilst guaranteeing employees' health and safety and personal data protection;
  - Removing administrative burden by improving the exchange of information, interoperability and re-use of solutions between public administrations. Ensuring a consistently high level of cybersecurity in close cooperation amongst administrations in line with the commitments taken in the Berlin, Lisbon and Strasbourg declarations;
  - Developing, when relevant, HR strategies that take into account the constant changing nature of functions, the need to upskill and reskill civil servants and actions to promote healthy, resilient and productive workers throughout their career while providing support to HR professionals;
  - Establishing a culture of innovation with room for experimentation and empowering the civil servants;
  - Integrating further the European mobility of civil servants as a tool for the transformation of the civil service, in particular by sharing good practices and by organizing mutual learning exchanges and inspiration sessions with the possibility to invite candidate and potential candidate countries on a voluntary basis.
- Continuing to develop a civil service focused on high quality and inclusive services, by:
  - Supporting a balance combining service delivery (automatic allocation of benefits, digital services and human interaction) and optimal user experience;
  - Contributing to the competitiveness and economic development of the EU by reducing administrative burden, while safeguarding the rights of users;
  - Building trust in the public service through citizen participation and open communication;
  - Encouraging the development of evidence-informed policies with the involvement of citizens, scientific communities and other stakeholder organisations.

- To address shared challenges in HR policies, such as:
  - Attracting and retaining talents;
  - Supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce;
  - Strategic personnel planning including succession planning;
  - Identifying key competencies for the future that allow civil servants to excel in a changing world;
  - Dealing with the impact of digitalisation and the green transition on HR policies.

## **II Evidence informed policy-making**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, acknowledge the importance of:

- Using evidence in making and evaluating policy decisions for the public sector, by:
  - Building capacity for evidence-informed policy making throughout the government;
  - Strengthening the exchange between policy, scientific institutions and knowledge brokers;
  - Providing accessible data;
  - Analysing the possibilities of a framework that embodies policy preparation and evaluation.
- Measuring and comparing on a regular and voluntary basis the evolution in the HR field within public administrations.
- Reflecting on the appropriate use of external expertise, supporting knowledge transfer, and encouraging the strengthening of internal expertise.
- Assessing the possibilities regarding in-house consultancy at a European and transnational level.

## **III Equity, Inclusion and Diversity**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, deem it important:

- To encourage diversity in public personnel as an added value, in order to have organisations that are more creative, more in touch with the diverse population they serve and its needs, and benefit from a richer decision-making process.



- To consider inclusive policies that promote diverse composition of public administrations reflecting the diverse societies they serve, and prevent exclusion and discrimination.
- To improve the accessibility of the workspace in its broadest sense – physical, digital – with adaptations for personnel with disabilities or special needs.
- To share good practices regarding the diverse composition of public personnel and outreaching actions towards diverse societal groups, be it on a legal or regulatory base or based on corporate and social/societal responsibility objectives in accordance with national legal frameworks and rules.
- To embrace a paradigm shift in the way diversity, equity and inclusion management is thought of, at an individual and organisational level.
- To share information and good practices regarding diversity, equity and inclusion management (DEI), e.g. communication and employer branding actions, positive actions, thematic action plans management methods or monitoring methods, inclusive corporate culture.
- To take into account the needs of all users when designing processes and infrastructure.

## **IV Wellbeing**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, deem it important:

- To prioritize the health and wellbeing of all civil servants.
- To recognize that a comprehensive approach to wellbeing encompasses physical and mental health, ergonomics, and a supportive work environment.
- To enhance mental health and physical wellbeing, in particular in the context of digitalisation, by developing and implementing comprehensive programs with the involvement of stakeholders.
- To increase the managers' and HR professionals' awareness and support by acknowledging the critical role they play in the wellbeing of their teams.
- To recognize the importance of disconnection during non-working hours while taking into account exceptions that may arise in special circumstances or urgencies, and the importance of dialogue on the subject with one's hierarchy.
- To support reintegration after long-term sickness while addressing the individual needs of the employee.

## **V Ethics and Integrity**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, acknowledge the importance of:

- Further raising awareness of and strengthen compliance with existing integrity policies.
- Ensuring the public sector is at the forefront of responsible and ethical use of digital technologies, safeguarding transparency and accountability, interoperability and security, and participation and inclusion.
- Making practical use of the advantages offered by innovations such as AI in integrity and corruption-prevention.
- Incorporating ethical principles and considerations of integrity when defining strategic transformations of the public administration.
- Acknowledging that movement of staff between the public and private sectors needs to be well framed and accompanied by proportionate mitigating measures to avoid and effectively manage risk of conflict-of-interest situations.
- Facilitating peer learning experiences to share what works and why in strengthening integrity and tackling corruption in civil administration and public sector entities.

## **VI Attractiveness of the civil service as an employer**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, deem it important:

- To encourage the development of an employer branding strategy that promotes a "model" workplace, which can incorporate professional values, career opportunities, work-life balance, and being respectful to the environment, in order to attract and retain new talents.
- To promote the development of talents and to ensure the continuity and excellence of public services, through a range of possible actions which may include:
  - Exchanging information and sharing knowledge on jobs and careers within the civil services, in order to promote and strengthen the attractiveness of public administrations in Europe;
  - Reflecting on recruitment methods and access to public careers;
  - Implementing exemplary actions within public administrations in

terms of gender parity in all positions of responsibility, diversity, inclusion, and the fight against discrimination, in line with the ambitions of the European Pillar of social rights;

- o Strengthening the exchange of good practices between public administrations within dedicated networks and at all relevant levels, in order to encourage the dissemination of exemplary transformation initiatives and good practices, and to feed the discussion and investments on attractiveness, efficiency, talent and age management policies within the civil services in Europe.

Despite the best efforts made in employer branding, the European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, acknowledge the difficulties in attracting specific competencies that are highly sought after on the labour market (e.g. IT). To tackle this challenge, they are open to explore the possibilities of transnational European collaboration and the shared use of experts, for example by facilitating the mobility of European civil servants.

## **VII Transnational European collaboration and dissemination of public sector expertise**

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, acknowledge the fact that many of the challenges public administrations face are similar across countries. They acknowledge the added value that can be achieved, by:

- Identifying key areas in which similar challenges could benefit from transnational collaboration, such as the training for civil servants, the use of digital technologies, and recruiting and retaining specialized staff, including IT developers, data scientists, innovation officers, procurement managers.
- Preparing the next generation of European policymakers, by promoting cooperation and cross-border exchanges among Member States as well as the European Commission and candidate and potential candidate countries when relevant, including opportunities for civil servants to experience the working methods and culture of other European public administrations and develop capabilities to formulate objectives, deliver services, and shape long-term reforms and investments.
- Examining how crucial knowledge can be acquired and maintained within government organisations, including the sharing of good practices regarding knowledge management and in-house consultancy or other



domains, with the aim to develop common understanding, approaches and working methods among EUPAN members.

- Sharing good practices in other domains than Public Administration and organize mutual learning exchanges and inspiration sessions to develop common values, approaches, frameworks and working methods among EUPAN members.
- Identifying possibilities and sharing best practices for greening public administration by reducing the environmental and climate impact. The climate crisis is a challenge shared by all member states, but maturity levels vary. Member states can share best practices in order to maximize the benefits of successful initiatives.
- Taking into consideration the work of the various European networks dealing with public administration issues, taking into account the results and best practices as well as the failure factors identified when dealing with specific themes, in particular those of the current major transformations (green, digital, demographic, ...).

## Conclusions

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, invite the Directors General in charge of public administrations to take into account these conclusions through dialogue and exchanges of good practices and within the framework of EUPAN and its strategy:

- To encourage the use of evidence in policy making.
- To measure and compare on a regular and voluntary basis the evolution in the HR field within public administrations.
- To analyse the possible added value of in-house consultancy, but while acknowledging the freedom of choice of member states to choose whether or not to invest in in-house consultancy.
- To support knowledge transfer while striving for a balanced use of internal and external expertise.
- To lead by example when it comes to wellbeing at work and share good practices on a regular basis.
- To promote a respectful and inclusive work environment ensuring infrastructure, processes, procedures, applications and appliances that meet the needs of every user and employee.
- To take into account the climate, resources and biodiversity crisis when designing and implementing initiatives and actions and in HR transformation policies, so as to ensure a smooth green transformation of the public administrations.
- To incorporate ethical principles and considerations of integrity when defining strategic transformations of the public administration, embrace

the potential offered by innovations in integrity and corruption-prevention policies, and share good practices to strengthen integrity and prevent corruption in public administrations.

- To share expertise across member states and promote cooperation and exchanges among Member States as well as with the Commission, in line with the conclusions of the previous Ministerial meetings in Lisbon and Strasbourg, facilitated also through ComPAct when appropriate.
- To articulate the work of the different networks dealing with public administration at European level.
- To implement the organisational changes necessary for the green transformation of administrations and the reduction of their ecological footprint following the Sustainable Development Goals as guidelines and basing the development of strategy on a materiality analysis considering societal stakeholders and core tasks. Sustainable goals need to be chosen and followed up with science based methodologies. In future meetings, knowledge will be shared on the success of initiatives and methodologies.

With this declaration we, the European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, invite the future Presidencies of the Council of the European Union to follow up appropriately on this declaration and to make an assessment in a future meeting.

Date : February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Ghent Declaration (Belgium)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Petra De Sutter', written in a cursive style.

Petra De Sutter, Belgium

Johannes Hahn,  
European Commission



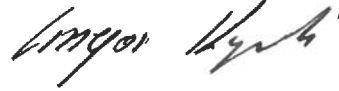
Elisa Ferreira,  
European Commission



Katalin Ágnes Uzsák, Hungary



Grzegorz Karpiński, Poland



Maria Schack Vindum, Denmark



Eliza Loizou, Cyprus



Philip McGrath, Ireland

Sigita Ščajevienė, Lithuania



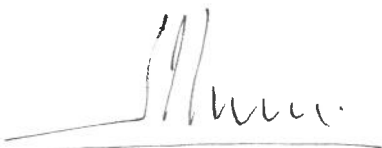
Niki Kerameus, Greece



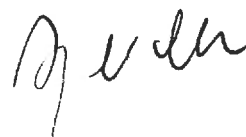
Monica Cecchi, Italy



Jānis Citskovskis, Latvia



Anne Tescher, Luxembourg



Alexandra van Huffelen,  
Netherlands



Vladimír Fraňo, Slovakia



Joyce Cassar, Malta



Kaur Kajak, Estonia



Vanya Stoyneva, Bulgaria



Andreas Buchta-Kadanka,  
Austria



Vasile-Felix Cozma, Romania



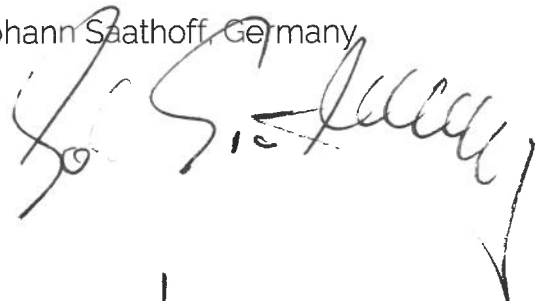
Juha Sarkio, Finland



Ivan Malenica, Croatia



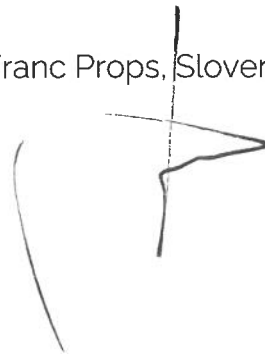
Johann Saathoff, Germany



Filipe Honrado, Portugal



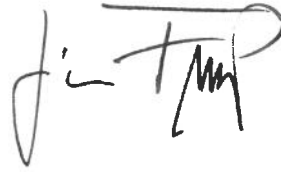
Franc Props, Slovenia



Stanislas Guerini, France

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Jindřich Fryč, Czech Republic

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Erik Slottnér, Sweden

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a large 'E' and ending with a flourish.

Clara Mapelli Marchena, Spain

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a large 'C' and ending with a flourish.

Tomas Norvoll, Norway

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a large 'T' and ending with a flourish.

Naim Gjokaj, Montenegro

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a large 'N' and ending with a flourish.