



Strategic HRM and generational challenges in European public administration

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Abstract

Aim: The study aims to analyse the implementation of strategic human resource management (SHRM) in European public administrations, focusing on generational challenges, workforce planning, and HRM strategies to enhance public sector attractiveness.

Methodology: The research is based on a large-scale international and Hungarian study, utilizing surveys, interviews, and statistical analyses conducted among EUPAN member states and observer countries to assess HRM frameworks and generational workforce integration.

Findings: The results indicate varying levels of SHRM adoption, with some countries implementing comprehensive HRM strategies while others face structural and policy challenges. Additionally, the study highlights the role of HR data-driven decision-making and the impact of generational shifts on public administration workforce planning.

Value: This research provides practical recommendations for improving generational management and modernizing recruitment and retention strategies in public administration. By identifying best practices and gaps, it offers insights for policymakers and HR professionals seeking to adapt HRM frameworks to demographic changes and labour market demands.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), Generational Workforce Management, Public Sector HR Strategies, Data-Driven Decision-Making in HRM

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Introduction

The landscape of public administration across Europe is undergoing significant transformation due to demographic shifts, evolving labour market expectations, and the increasing need for strategic human resource management (SHRM). Governments must navigate the challenges of an aging workforce while ensuring the recruitment and retention of younger generations to maintain institutional effectiveness and continuity. The public service workforce across European countries is aging, which poses significant workforce management challenges, such as maintaining a pipeline of public sector talent. The aging workforce presents challenges and opportunities for organizations, requiring HRM strategies emphasizing knowledge transfer, workplace flexibility, and the retention of older employees to maintain organizational effectiveness (Truxillo et al., 2014).

This study explores the extent to which European public administrations implement SHRM principles and how these influence workforce planning, organizational performance, and the attractiveness of public service careers. The research also examines the role of HRM strategies in managing generational diversity and fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer. This article presents data-driven insights on HRM strategies in European public administrations by leveraging findings from an extensive international and Hungarian research project conducted under the Hungarian EU Presidency 2024. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaire responses from 26 EUPAN member states and the European Commission, in-depth interviews, and comparative analysis of national HRM policies. The results provide a nuanced understanding of how European countries address workforce aging, generational expectations, and HR-driven policy reforms. Furthermore, the paper highlights best practices and emerging trends that can inform future HRM strategies in public administration. Doing so contributes to the ongoing discourse on modernizing civil service HR policies and ensuring long-term workforce sustainability.

Research context and methods

The research focuses on key themes related to strategic human resource management (SHRM) and generational challenges in European public administration. One of the primary areas of investigation is the extent to which public sector organizations develop and implement HRM strategies, particularly in response to workforce aging and the recruitment of younger generations. The study also examines the prevalence of life-cycle-based HRM strategies and the role of

workplace satisfaction surveys in shaping organizational policies. Additionally, the research explores the impact of data-driven decision-making in HRM planning, comparing different approaches across EU member states. Another crucial aspect is the effect of decentralized HRM structures on public service workforce management and the challenges that arise from implementing SHRM in various administrative contexts. By analysing these themes, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of generational workforce dynamics and best practices for ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of public administration.

The article analyses findings from our large-scale international and Hungarian research project, including questionnaires, interviews, and statistical analyses. The article proposes extending aging strategies and implementing modern HRM practices to enhance the integration of younger generations into the civil service. By doing so, it aims to expand the knowledge base on generational management and modernizing recruitment practices in the public sector.

The study addresses a specific topic within a large-scale international and domestic (Hungarian) research project. It was prepared for the Hungarian EU Presidency 2024 as part of the EUPAN (European Public Administration Network) activities. The primary focus of the research was the management of different generations in the civil service,¹ aiming to address the demographic challenges that all countries are increasingly facing. The empirical research consisted of four main phases. The first phase involved data analysis and a review of the relevant literature to establish the framework for this research. In the second phase, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to EUPAN member states and observers (and the European Commission). The third phase involved the questionnaire conducted within the Hungarian state administration, including the central and territorial levels. The fourth phase included conducting organisational questionnaires and in-depth interviews to complement the quantitative data. Data empirical collection lasted for four months in 2024.

The international questionnaire gathered responses from 27 partners. Out of a total of 38 entities (27 member countries, the European Commission, and 10 observer countries), 27 completed the questionnaire. This represents approximately 71.05% of the total entities. Structured, closed-ended responses were organized and analysed using Microsoft Excel. This facilitated calculations of frequencies, percentages, and averages, while visual representations such as charts highlighted trends across countries. Open-ended responses were manually reviewed and analysed to identify and collect the best practices from the

1 **Civil service:** the body of government officials employed in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial.

countries. Data cleaning and systematic categorization ensured the reliability of the findings. This methodological approach provided a balanced perspective, leveraging numerical patterns and detailed qualitative insights to address the research objectives effectively.

Strategic thinking

The concept of strategic human resource management (SHRM) was formed in the 1990s and became an entirely accepted approach after the turn of the millennium (McMahan, 1992); (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). As recent research has shown (Storey et al., 2019), the approach to HRM has changed significantly in recent times, with new areas of study (leadership, performance, ethics, generations) becoming the focus of attention (Haq, 2011; Nolan-Flecha, 2019; OECD, 2020). Despite the wide range of research, experts agree that organisational performance and achieving organisational goals depend primarily on the composition, competencies and readiness of human resources, which management must address at a strategic level and within a strategic framework.

As the earlier EUPAN's research during the Latvian Presidency found, "[the factors of attitudes towards public administration] are at least partly based on actual problems connected with strategic personnel planning. This means that it is impossible to improve public administration's image as an employer only through communicative means. However, in the long-term, it might only be achieved by systematically developing personnel policy, adjusting it to the overall strategy of public administration and labour market demand." (Foundation "Baltic Institute of Social Sciences" & O.D.A. Ltd., 2015).

Almost a decade since the study was carried out, we have been prompted to examine the framework for strategic planning in public administration in the context of our questionnaire. In other words, the extent to which specific HRM strategy is developed within public administrations. Although we are unable to provide comparative data for previous years due to the lack of a similar survey, and thus, it is not possible to outline trends and developments, the research can nevertheless provide information on the strategic HRM thinking of public administrations in the EU Member States, European Commission and observer countries.

HRM strategy in the central public administrations

The management of different generations in the civil service is a priority of the EUPAN presidency program of Hungary during the rotating presidency of the

Council of the European Union (aiming to address the demographic challenges that all countries are increasingly facing). Therefore, in our questionnaire, we not only asked about the strategic HRM framework of the EUPAN countries but also examined the extent to which the strategy *regarding the ageing of personnel*, including the employment of both older and younger generations, is a feature of the strategy. Accordingly, we examined the continued employment of the older generation after retirement age and the challenges of attracting young people to public administration.

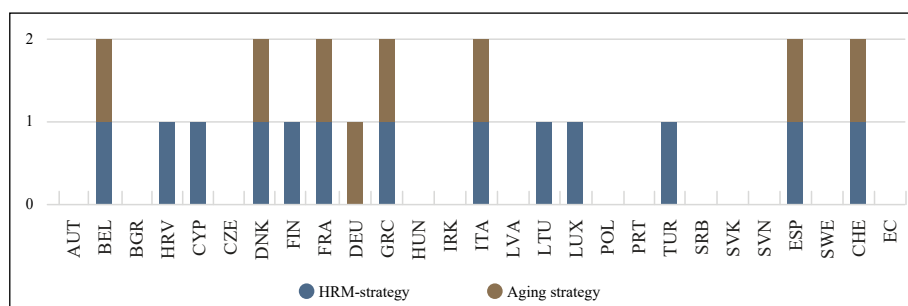
Our analysis of the HRM strategy has been limited mainly to the level of central administration. Our research defined central administration as core ministries and agencies of central and federal governments. The reason for narrowing the focus is that, on the one hand, the strategic management of public administration has its most significant impact at the level of central administration and, on the other hand, the fact that even if HRM strategies are adopted at the level of territorial administration in a country. Age-specific issues are addressed; this is not necessarily the case for all territorial administration bodies in the country.

Many EUPAN countries and observer countries responded to the questionnaire, allowing us to analyse data from 26 countries and the European Commission. Of these entities, 26 responded to questions 9 and 10 on the state of play of the HRM strategy and the ageing strategy, respectively.

From the answers to question Q9 (Is there an HRM strategy in the central administration?), 14 of the responding countries have an HRM strategy in the central administration, which indicates a 50% rate. The responses are summarised in the chart below (N=27).

Figure 1

HRM strategy and ageing strategy in the central public administrations



Note. EUPAN, 2021.

As can be seen from the chart, the HRM strategy is very often accompanied by a strategic element addressing age specificities, but in Germany, there is a separate ageing strategy.

Some of the responding countries also provided additional comments to the completed questionnaire, which helped to refine further the picture of the situation of HRM strategy in central administrations.

In *Austria*, the individual departments carry out strategic human resources planning, management, and coordination (human resources management). The federal administration needs an overall strategy for the ageing workforce. However, individual ministries take measures in this area based on their strategic fields of action.

In *Denmark*, the HRM strategies are handled by the local HRM units at the local workplaces. Due to the decentralized organisation of the Danish central government, they do not make decisions or create strategies across the central government.

In *Finland*, the government is focusing on the whole life cycle management of public officials instead of specific ageing management. Therefore, measures mentioned in the questionnaire are taken as part of everyday management and work but not as part of a specific strategy.

In *Ireland*, the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) has overall responsibilities for the civil service workforce, while individual Departments and Offices receive delegated sanction from DPENDR. The Department does not currently have one overarching HRM strategy for the Civil Service workforce, but it does provide policy and strategy across individual aspects of HRM. Aspects of DPENDR's approach to the development of the workforce are included in the Better Public Services – Public Service Transformation Strategy 2030. Individual Departments can also devise and develop their strategies for HRM, people, and culture.

Poland and *Latvia* are working on developing their specific HRM strategy. Poland uses specific standards for human resources management, and Latvia focuses more on public administration modernization and learning and development plans for public administration employees.

The Public Management Agency was established in 2023 in Lithuania and is responsible for implementing state policy in public administration and civil service, including HRM. The agency improves human resources management by organising and implementing centralized career management for institutional executives, ensuring the legality of competitions for career civil servant positions, and enhancing the human resources development process and organisational culture of public institutions.

In *Germany*, there is a specific program for structured knowledge transfer entitled “Wege-Weiser,” a specific concept for organising the remaining working years and the transition to retirement.

The project Wege-Weiser was developed by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Homeland in 2021. The idea behind it is that, like any other employer, the Federal Administration is interested in keeping older employees healthy and motivated for as long as possible. After all, they have a wealth of knowledge and valuable experience. Measures for age- and age-appropriate work organisation and a health-promoting environment play a key role here. The public sector has a role model function. Therefore, different measures should be implemented in order that:

Employers recognize the particular strengths of this group of employees. They are better than before, but they also utilize them so that employees continue to feel valued as experienced, often long-standing employees.

Employees are informed about voluntary employment opportunities at an early stage of the remaining working years, the transition to retirement, and the time after that.

Both sides are enabled to plan transparently and structurally and to organise the remaining working years, the transition to retirement, and the time afterwards smoothly ([Pathfinder, 2021](#)).

In *Spain*, the importance of data for management, the talent attraction program, the evaluation of the performance of the public employee’s program, etc., are making up an HRM strategy from the Spanish Secretariat for the Civil Service, all of them in line with introducing reforms to make the civil service more desirable to younger generations and attract specific professional profiles in the IT fields. In this sense, there is a framework document entitled “Consensus for an open administration,” developed by the Ministry for Digital Transformation and the Civil Service, that, as a roadmap, includes the guidelines for inclusive public employment with better working conditions and strategic planning for the human resources, paying particular attention to count on the social dialogue to get the results.

The *European Commission* has adopted in 2022 a well-elaborated Human Resources Strategy, presenting a shared vision for a modern, flexible and values-driven organisation that empowers staff to deliver outstanding results for people across the EU and globally. The strategy addresses the Commission’s need to perform at the highest level in the interest of Europeans and the staff’s need for an attractive workplace and a fulfilling career where their excellence and efforts will be rewarded. The strategy focuses on the three strategic priorities to address the Commission’s common challenges: attractiveness, selection and recruitment, and career prospects ([European Commission, 2022](#)).

As the additional answers show, around half of the responding countries have an HRM strategy, and two more, Poland and Latvia, are preparing one. However, this does not mean that the other countries do not have a strategic framework for HRM at all. Austria, Denmark, and Germany coordinate this task at a lower level due to their administrative structures, while Finland takes a life-cycle approach.

Ageing strategy in the central public administrations

For question Q10, we asked whether the central administration has a strategy regarding the ageing of personnel in central government administration (personnel management). The number of responses to this question was lower, with *eight countries* (Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Greece; (N=8)) and the European Commission indicating that they had such a strategic framework. They typically cover the whole public administration, while in Germany, they cover the specialized branches under the control of ministries, and in Belgium, they exclusively cover ministries or central agencies.

The *dates of adoption* of the current ageing strategy are very variable. Belgium, Denmark, and Italy adopted their strategy more than five years ago, Germany and Spain between three and five years, and Greece, France, and the European Commission between one and three years. In contrast, Switzerland adopted its strategy less than a year ago.

Greece, France, and the European Commission *have not yet reviewed their strategy*, while Switzerland, Denmark, and Spain have recently revised their strategy less than a year ago. Italy and Belgium reviewed their ageing strategies between one and three years ago, while more information is needed on the review of Germany.

The questionnaire also asked which of the *ageing objectives* the strategy prioritizes. Belgium, Italy, Greece, and the European Commission consider attracting young people to the workforce to be of paramount importance. Denmark and Spain consider the continued employment of the older generation after reaching retirement age. In contrast, Switzerland, France, and Germany consider these two elements equally important.

In terms of ageing strategy, the questionnaire offered several options (Increasing the required length of service for full/retirement pension; Reducing weekly working hours for individuals aged 60 and over by up to 15 hours, without adversely affecting future pension; Providing a flexible work schedule for more extended periods; Reducing working hours with a minor decrease in benefits; Performing mentoring tasks; Volunteering; Scholarships; Mentoring; Training/continuing education opportunities, and support for studies; Accelerating career

advancement; Premium salary; Special benefits, e.g., Family Support Benefit; Favourable employment conditions, e.g., more flexible working hours, support for training, and additional leave for individuals raising children or starting a family; Mandatory retirement for senior government officials), but only few responses were received, so these are not examined in details.

Satisfaction and Progress

An organisation must meet employees' expectations to retain them, or they will likely leave. Therefore, it is essential to holistically manage the relationship between the organisation and its employees, encompassing motivation, incentives, and rewards. Since the 1960s, the concept and significance of the psychological contract have increasingly come to the forefront of workplace research. Within the psychological contract framework, the employee and the employer mutually understand and accept the written and informal aspects of the employment relationship. (Argyris, 1960). The psychological contract expresses the written, unwritten, spoken, and unspoken expectations between the employee and the employer in their relationship. (Baker et al., 1985) During this research, we examined EUPAN countries' practices regarding satisfaction surveys and organisational development programmes.

Workplace satisfaction surveys can help reveal how much the psychological contract is fulfilled. The data collected from these surveys can highlight areas where employees' expectations are not being met, thereby assisting employers in improving the employee experience, increasing satisfaction, and strengthening commitment. Regular workplace satisfaction surveys are positively associated with improved management practices and organisational culture in public administration (Park, 2020).

The culture and structure of the civil service system affect the likelihood of implementing formalized organisational development programmes, with some countries preferring more informal or decentralized approaches.

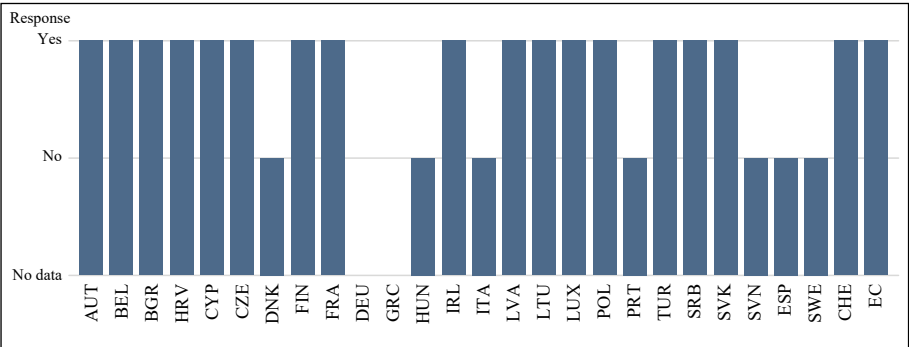
Workplace satisfaction survey at the central level in the last five years

Engaged employees perform better, take more initiative, and are more innovative than those who are not engaged. Higher engagement leads to fewer sick days and better retention, influenced by good leadership, favorable working conditions, and opportunities for career growth. The OECD Government at a Glance (2023) report found that 70% of civil servants in seven countries were satisfied

with their jobs, and 63% felt inspired by their work. Public sector organisations might consider strategies to enhance organisational attachment and ensure that all levels of staff feel valued and motivated.

Q 19 investigated whether there have been workplace satisfaction surveys at the central level in the past 5 years. Below, we have compiled the responses submitted by the EUPAN countries (N=27).

Figure 2
Workplace satisfaction survey in the last five years by country



Note. EUPAN, 2021.

We can observe different practices among certain countries, satisfaction surveys are conducted *annually* at the central level (E.g., Bulgaria, Finland, Latvia), while in others, they occur *less regularly* (E.g., Lithuania every 2 years; Switzerland every three years), every few years, or rarely.

Out of 27 responding countries, 18 confirmed that a *workplace satisfaction survey* for personnel was conducted at the central level within the last five years (Yes: 66.67%; No: 25.9%; No Data: 7.41%). This suggests that a significant majority, specifically 66,67 % of the surveyed countries, have taken steps to assess and improve employee satisfaction at a central level. The relatively high percentage reflects a common practice among these countries to monitor and address workplace satisfaction, which is crucial for organisational well-being and efficiency.

This data suggests that workplace satisfaction surveys are recognized as a strategic priority, with 66,67% of surveyed countries conducting them. This reflects a growing awareness of the link between employee well-being and organisational performance. The high percentage indicates a commitment to fostering positive work environments, gathering employee feedback, and addressing issues

proactively. Additionally, it implies that these countries have established systems to assess and improve workplace satisfaction regularly, showcasing a mature approach to human resource management.

Based on the country examples, the *main focus areas* of employee satisfaction surveys are:

Management practices: Leadership effectiveness, management satisfaction, and organisational culture.

Work environment: Physical and mental work conditions, job content, and the overall work environment.

Employee motivation and engagement: Motivation, engagement, and commitment, including meaningful work, recognition, and influence opportunities.

Career development: Career prospects, professional development, and training opportunities.

Work-life balance: The balance between work and private life (flexible working hours and remote work options).

Interpersonal relationships: Team dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and organisational communication.

Remuneration and benefits: Compensation, benefits, and job security.

Innovation and digitalisation: The impact of digital tools and adopting innovative practices.

Examining these areas is a key to understanding and improving public administration employees' well-being, motivation, and performance. It helps to highlight strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring a supportive work environment and efficient management.

We asked the respondents to briefly explain their practice, which we present in a short, summarized form.

Best practices in employee satisfaction

European public administrations employ diverse strategies to assess and enhance employee satisfaction, reflecting varying administrative structures, strategic priorities, and levels of centralization. Several countries, such as Austria, Finland, and Latvia, have adopted regular, systematic employee engagement surveys that provide insights into workforce motivation, leadership effectiveness, and career development opportunities. Austria's large-scale Federal Employee Satisfaction and Motivation Survey, for instance, covers nearly 28,000 participants and identifies key areas of concern, including process efficiency and career advancement pathways. Similarly, Finland's long-standing joint personnel survey, which has been in place since 2004, boasts a high response rate

(75%) and consistently improves leadership practices and working conditions. With its biannual Public Administration Employee Engagement Survey, Latvia ensures that employee sentiments are regularly assessed and benchmarked against international standards.

Other countries, such as Belgium, Luxembourg, and Lithuania, integrate their surveys into broader HRM strategies, leveraging the findings for policy adjustments and organizational development. Belgium's federal administration conducts workplace satisfaction assessments every two to three years, translating survey insights into targeted action plans. Luxembourg employs a standardized survey across 36 administrations, fostering leadership development and participation-driven improvements. Lithuania's biennial Employee Opinion Survey, though limited to state agencies, provides a critical pulse check on job satisfaction, with findings shaping HR policies at the ministerial level.

Some administrations approach employee engagement from a decentralization perspective. Denmark and Ireland, for instance, rely on locally managed HRM strategies, where responsibility for workplace assessments is delegated to individual departments or institutions. Denmark mandates workplace satisfaction and well-being surveys every three years at the local level rather than imposing a central framework, aligning with its highly decentralized public sector model. Similarly, Ireland's Department of Public Expenditure oversees civil service workforce policy but allows individual government departments to develop HRM strategies within an overarching policy framework.

Several countries have taken steps to integrate satisfaction surveys into broader modernization efforts. France and Spain have linked employee assessments to large-scale public sector reform initiatives, prioritizing digital transformation and workforce flexibility. France's FP+ consultation, involving over 110,000 civil servants, underscores strong demand for reorganized working hours and telework solutions. Spain, meanwhile, uses data-driven HRM approaches within its talent attraction program, focusing on making public service careers more appealing to younger professionals.

Meanwhile, countries like Poland and Croatia are transitioning and working to institutionalize strategic HRM approaches. Poland's "Your Civil Service" survey, conducted in 2024, gathered over 23,000 responses, underscoring employees' job stability and work-life balance as top priorities. Croatia, participating in an EU multi-country project on public sector HRM, is refining its methodology for tracking civil servant well-being and career satisfaction.

Finally, the European Commission has set an example by implementing an elaborate HR strategy aligning employee engagement with institutional goals. The latest 2023 Staff Survey, with a record participation of over 23,500 employees,

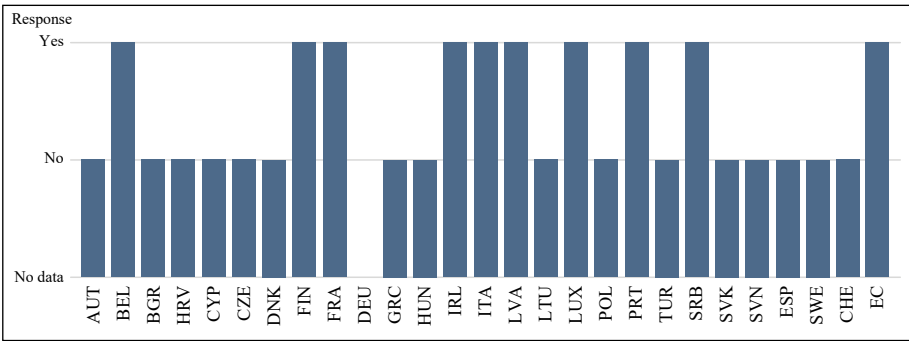
highlights strong overall engagement (73%), demonstrating how a well-structured HRM strategy can reinforce employer branding and enhance workforce retention.

These practices demonstrate the importance of embedding employee satisfaction assessments into broader HRM frameworks. While some countries excel in regularity and comprehensiveness, others are refining their methodologies and integrating survey findings into long-term strategic planning. The diverse approaches highlight the varying maturity levels in HRM strategies across European public administrations, offering valuable insights into how different systems balance employee well-being with institutional objectives.

Organisational development programme in the past five years

Q20 investigated whether there have been any organizational development programs at the central level in the past 5 years.

Figure 3
Organisational development programs



Note. EUPAN, 2021.

The data shows that 10 out of the 27 surveyed countries (N=27) confirmed that an *organisational development programme* was implemented at the central level in the past five years (No: 59.26%; Yes: 37.04%; No Data: 3.7%). This means that a relatively small portion, precisely 37%, of the countries have undertaken central-level initiatives to improve organisational structures or processes.

The modest percentage indicates that organisational development at the central level may not be a widespread focus among the majority of these countries, suggesting potential areas for further growth or investment in this area.

Cultural differences might influence the emphasis placed on organisational development. In some countries, there may be preference for more informal or decentralized approaches to organisational improvement (E.g., Denmark).

The percentage may reflect the continuity of policies. Countries experiencing frequent government transitions or political challenges may be less likely to implement long-term programmes, such as organisational development, resulting in fewer initiatives at the central level.

The data could also suggest differing national priorities. Some countries focus more on other areas, such as infrastructure, healthcare, or education, leaving organisational development at the central level as a lower priority.

The relatively modest percentage (37%) may suggest that some of the surveyed countries require more resources, such as funding. Countries with stronger economies or greater resource access might be more inclined to invest in such initiatives.

These ratios may mirror these factors, highlighting the complexity of implementing organizational development programs at the central level across different countries.

We asked the respondents to briefly explain their practice, which we presented in a summarized form.

Best practices in organizational development

European public administrations have adopted various organizational development strategies to enhance leadership, workforce planning, and modernization efforts. While some countries prioritize centralized reform programs, others focus on decentralization, flexibility, and tailored agency-specific interventions.

Comprehensive national strategies have been implemented in Belgium, Italy, and Portugal, where broad-based reforms seek to modernize HR practices and align workforce management with evolving governance needs. Belgium's organizational development initiatives emphasize leadership enhancement, integrity, and inclusion, reflecting a strong ethical dimension in public service renewal. Italy's Public Employment Reform (2023) has introduced a structured framework for strategic HR management, emphasizing digital competencies and performance evaluation, ensuring uniformity across government levels. Similarly, Portugal's Strategy for Innovation and Modernization (2020-2023) highlights digital transformation, decentralized decision-making, and leadership development as key drivers of public administration reform.

Meanwhile, Latvia and Luxembourg have positioned organizational learning and continuous development at the core of their strategies. Latvia's Learning

and Development Plan (2021-2027) aims to transition public administration into a learning organization, focusing on leadership, digital transformation, and workforce professionalization. Luxembourg's "FP2025" initiative complements this approach by promoting ongoing improvements in strategic HR planning, workforce management, and leadership capability.

A more targeted, agency-level approach is visible in Finland and Ireland, where organizational development programs are managed at the institutional rather than national level. Finland's decentralized model allows each agency to design its initiatives, ensuring that organizational improvements align with sector-specific challenges. In contrast, Ireland has implemented a Civil Service Organisational Capability Review Programme, fostering systematic departmental and agency efficiency evaluations since 2016. This structured review mechanism enhances long-term adaptability while maintaining oversight at the national level.

Other countries, such as France and the European Commission, have incorporated employee well-being and future-oriented transformation into their strategies. France's Occupational Health Plan (2022-2025) prioritizes workplace quality, social dialogue, and employee support systems, recognizing that sustainable workforce engagement is essential for effective governance. The European Commission, through its Corporate Organisational Change unit (2022) and Centre for Organisational Transformation (2023), has taken a proactive approach to modernization, focusing on AI integration, flexible working, and leadership training. The Commission's structured support for change management and cross-sectoral learning positions it as a model for large-scale administrative transformation.

Finally, Serbia's National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA) represents a specialized training-focused model dedicated to equipping civil servants with the skills necessary for a dynamic public sector. Unlike broader modernization programs, this initiative concentrates on professional capacity-building, ensuring that employees receive targeted training in key areas of governance.

These diverse organisational development strategies reflect European public administrations' varying administrative traditions and reform priorities. While some countries favor comprehensive national strategies, others emphasize decentralized, sector-specific approaches. Regardless of the model, leadership development, digital transformation, and strategic workforce planning are common themes, reinforcing the need for continuous adaptation in public sector management.

Personnel decision support

A recent survey suggests (Lattice, 2024) that when it comes to demonstrating the impact of HR on other business stakeholders, European HR teams are ahead of

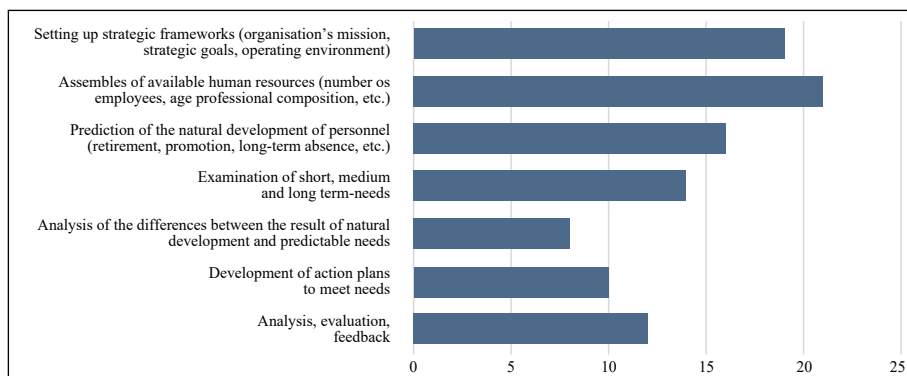
the curve compared to their counterparts in other non-European countries. Undoubtedly, European HR solutions are very advanced (European Commission, 2022; Paksi-Petró, 2023). However, it is questionable to what extent these solutions have been adopted by public administrations in the EUPAN countries and whether they can contribute to strategic decision-making and the achievement of administrative objectives using a wide range of HR strategy tools.

Decision support systems at the central level

In relation to the existence of a human resources strategy, countries were also asked which decision support systems are used in central administrations for strategic personnel planning (Q21: Indicate what procedures are used in your organisation's strategic personnel planning!). We have also provided the answer options beforehand to make the answers easier to analyse. The frequency of the responses is illustrated in the figure below (N=24; multiple answers were possible).

Figure 4

Frequency of categories used in strategic personnel planning in the central public administrations



Note. EUPAN, 2021.

As can be seen in the figure, the most frequently used category was the assessment of available human resources (number of employees, age, professional composition) option, with 21 mentions in total. Although five countries did not tick this option, there is reason to believe that some form of *Analysis and assessment of available human resources* is present in these countries. The second most frequent item selected by respondents was setting up strategic frameworks (organisation's mission, strategic goals, operating environment). Although the definition of strategic frameworks is one of the essential elements of planning,

the responses suggest that the development of action plans to meet needs and the provision of feedback (analysis, evaluation, feedback) are less than half as frequent in EUPAN countries' responses as the definition of strategic frameworks. This may be due to the fact that HRM strategic planning processes are still developing the framework (as in the case of Poland, which is preparing its HRM strategy) or to the fact that the development of action plans and the *Analysis and evaluation* of the results of their implementation are part of another process (e.g., HR controlling) outside the HR strategic planning process. Exploring this finding thus requires further research.

Another interesting correlation that can be drawn from the responses is that while *Prediction of the natural development of personnel (retirement, promotion, long-term absence, etc.)* and *Examination of short, medium, and long-term needs* are both important elements of the HR strategy toolbox of the responding countries, with 17 and 15 mentions respectively, *Analysis of the differences between the results of natural development and predictable needs* is much less present in the toolbox, with only eight countries mentioning such an exercise. In our view, this may indicate that while data-based forecasts are typically used in planning HR processes in central administrations, there is less capacity to analyse them and explore the causes and correlations more deeply and consciously.

The survey also provided an opportunity to ask what factors characterize strategic HR planning. [Q22 On a 6-point scale, please indicate to what extent the following factors characterize your organisation's strategic personnel planning (1- does not characterize it at all; 6- completely characterizes it)]. In order to assess the importance of these factors, the response options could be ticked on a scale. Based on the responses received (N=21), the highest average score of 4.2 was given to the statement *Workforce planning is aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives*. In contrast, the statement that *the leaders' approach is characterized by strategic thinking* received an average score of 4.1. Respondents least agreed with the statement *Responses to the changes in the labour market are quick and flexible*. This received an average score of 2.8, suggesting that central administrations are less quick and flexible in adapting to changes in the labour market.

When comparing the responses to this question by country, we find that *the Republic of Türkiye, Finland, France, Ireland, and Latvia* are the most prominent ones in terms of the strength of the factors. However, the responses are nuanced by the fact that several countries left this question blank, and respondents did not fill in all the boxes.

Using similar tools to the previous question, the research investigated the extent to which data and evidence-based decision-making are a feature of the

organisations in the countries surveyed. [Q23 On a 6-point scale, please indicate to what extent the following statements characterize your organisation's data- and fact-based decision-making (1- does not characterize it at all; 6 completely characterizes it)]. The number of responding countries was also slightly higher for this question than for the previous one (N=24 compared to N=21), and the average number of responses was also higher than for the previous question. While the lowest average for the previous question was 2.8, the average for this question is between 4 and 5 for all answers. The highest average score of all the answers was for *Data tables available for management decisions*, with 4.9. This is partly because low scores for this question were almost non-existent, with the majority of responses in the range 5 to 6 and a total of 16 countries indicating that using data tables for decision-making is almost or entirely typical. Also, a typical activity is *Reporting on personnel*, which is prepared regularly. This received an average score of 4.7 from the responding countries, slightly behind the 4.3 for *data used for workforce planning, and the public was regularly informed*. With regard to the latter value, two of the countries indicated a value of 1, which means that, in their case, this activity is not at all familiar, and the public is not regularly informed about facts and figures on personal affairs. The lowest average score for this question was given to the option *Data is used for social dialogue*, with respondents giving an average score of 4.0 for using data in social dialogue.

In a country-by-country comparison, *Austria* was the top respondent, followed closely by *Spain, Denmark, Ireland* and *Switzerland*. It is also worth noting that many countries left the response options blank, and respondents needed to fill in all the fields, although the response rate for this question was higher than for the previous one.

Summary

In our study, we aimed to explore the extent to which European public administrations implement SHRM principles and how these influence workforce planning, organizational performance, and the attractiveness of public service careers. Summarising the answers regarding HRM strategy and aging strategy, it can be concluded that although human resource management strategy is an essential element of human resource management in central administrations, it is only present in about half of the responding countries. However, the picture of HRM strategy is nuanced by the fact that, due to their constitutional set-up and governance structure, some countries need to address HRM strategy in

a centralized way but at a sectoral or territorial level. Other countries, however, see the need to develop an HRM strategy and are working on it. Demographic changes and their impact on public administration require increased attention to generational issues. The responses to our questionnaire show that in about a third of the responding countries, this issue is already being addressed strategically, either in terms of attracting new generations into public service or knowledge transfer and retention linked to retirement. However, the main lines of the concrete supporting measures resulting from the strategy cannot yet be clearly outlined from the available data. The challenge and opportunity for development in the coming years will be to raise HRM issues to a strategic level and to continuously update and revise these strategies in response to rapidly changing external and internal operating conditions.

We also examined EUPAN countries' practices regarding satisfaction surveys and organisational development programmes. Regular workplace satisfaction surveys are positively associated with improved management practices and organisational culture in public administration. Many of the respondents have a well-established practice of regularly conducting satisfaction surveys. This indicates a commitment to fostering positive work environments, gathering employee feedback, and addressing issues proactively. The culture and structure of the civil service system affect the likelihood of implementing formalized organisational development programmes, with some countries preferring more informal or decentralized approaches.

As for personnel strategic planning and support, it can be concluded that the responding EUPAN countries have made significant progress in assessing human resources, forecasting expected changes in the short, medium, and long term, and developing strategic frameworks for HRM, but that there is still room for improvement in consciously analysing the context of these changes and strengthening their practical application. The challenge of adapting quickly and flexibly to changing labour market conditions appears particularly striking. At the same time, responding administrations are well-placed to develop and implement a data and evidence-based decision-making system. In the responding countries, this approach is expected. Although there are areas (e.g. social dialogue) where data-driven decision-making is still less common, the widespread use of data and facts suggests good administrative decision-making.

Finally, our research has given us an insight into the HR practices of public administrations in the EUPAN member states, the European Commission, and observer countries. Although it is difficult to identify clear trends in strategic HRM across Europe, the data suggest that EUPAN member states and observer countries are paying considerable attention to HR challenges in public

administration. Our research has shed light on opportunities for improvement that can serve as inspiration for further strategies and developments in strategic human resources management.

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