



# ReSPA

Regional School  
of Public Administration

Study visit to Northern Ireland

Merit-based recruitment and performance  
appraisal – Northern Ireland practice

5-6 November 2019, Belfast (Northern Ireland)

Draft Discussion Paper and Agenda

## Background

ReSPA as an international and regional organisation aims to improve the regional cooperation in public administration (PA) through the exchange of knowledge, experience and practices, and to enhance administrative and human resource capacities in ReSPA Members.

ReSPA maintains active communication with a number of stakeholders in Europe and globally. The successful accomplishment of ReSPA's mandate requires cooperation and coordination with a number of entities that are implementing a similar mission within the Western Balkan (WB) region. Synergetic efforts have been recognised as the main guiding principles for ReSPA's interaction with the entities entrusted with the corresponding tasks.

In November 2018, ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024 was adopted and the two-year Programme of Work with an Action Plan was developed. ReSPA Strategy recognises that further professionalisation and depoliticisation are needed for adequate improvement of the public administration capacity in the Western Balkans (WB). In accordance with SIGMA findings, the institutional capacities for ensuring adequate implementation of HRM practices are limited. All WB countries face similar challenges in the public service and in Human Resources Management (HRM). Improving professionalisation and depoliticisation of the senior civil service has been a focus of ReSPA from its establishment and will be continued with the main focus on the following areas identified by the beneficiary administrations of the region: merit-based recruitment and selection and performance appraisal and career development.

ReSPA will continue to facilitate regional cooperation in Public Administration through collaborative regional structures: Programme Committee and six working groups of practitioners, managers and high-level decision makers. One of the working groups is the Working group on Human Resources Management and Development (HRMD). ReSPA's work is focused on senior and mid-level civil servants.

### **Merit-based recruitment**

Merit recruitment broadly refers to recruitment based on competitive assessment that selects the best-qualified person for a given role. Merit-based civil service management normally is judged to improve management of the EU accession process and is seen as a precondition for economic development and the consolidation of democracy.

In 2015 ReSPA produced the *ReSPA Regional Study on Improving the Implementation of Merit-Recruitment Procedures in the Western Balkans* (2015). The Study found that civil service laws adopted by ReSPA Members formally institutionalise merit-recruitment and that formal-legal procedures are mostly applied in practice. However, the regional study also showed that the institutional frameworks are often incomplete, that is, regulatory gaps and inconsistencies are identified – to varying degrees – across the region. Moreover, the capacity to implement merit recruitment procedures is often limited, in particular, when assessing more closely the capacity at the level of individual institutions as opposed to the – more developed – capacity of central civil service management departments and authorities.

In 2018 ReSPA produced a *Report on evaluation of change between 2015 and 2018*. The report focused on change since the completion of the 2015 ReSPA Regional Study. Generally, the study finds that the focus of civil service reform in the region has gradually shifted from an

emphasis on institutional reform to developing a variety of measures that help build the capacity to improve the implementation of recruitment procedures.

The study unpacks the civil service recruitment along five areas of recruitment, including (i) scope for the application of merit recruitment procedures, (ii) planning, central approval and public advertisement of job vacancies, (iii) formation of selection commissions, (iv) application of written examination and personal interviews and (v) ranking and final selection of candidates. The latter explicitly addresses the question of merit versus non-merit criteria in civil service recruitment, in particular, the role of political influence.

Looking more closely at the five areas of recruitment, the study finds that the scope of the application of merit recruitment procedures has been widened during the three years period, from 2015 - 2018. The basics of staff planning and systematisation, central approval and public advertisement of job vacancies are in place across the region. The formation of selection commissions is required across the region. However, permanent and semi-permanent selection commissions remain the exception across the region.

Written examinations and personal interviews are both basic components of merit recruitment procedures. They are required by most but not all ReSPA Members. Across the region, it is typically required to rank candidates at the end of the recruitment process. However, this area has seen least change since 2015. The study shows that there is a slight decrease in the importance of political influence in civil service recruitment, however, political influence over recruitment and selection decisions remains high in the region. Further efforts to depoliticise are hence required across in all countries.

The study concludes with general recommendations for ReSPA Members. In relation to the scope of merit-recruitment, it is recommended that the application of merit procedures to all categories of staff should be reviewed in order to ensure that all types of temporary staff, all senior civil service positions and all categories of public employees are subject to standard merit recruitment procedures. Recruitment and retention, performance evaluation and personal development, senior civil service management and competencies are the main challenges and areas for HRM that require further development.

In February 2017 the ReSPA Human Resources Management and Development Working group paid a visit to Top Civil Service Excellence Centre of the Government Office of Estonia when they were presented with recruitment, selection, assessment and development of the Estonia Top Civil Servants which was conducted centrally. Participants had the opportunity to be informed about the Estonian competency framework, leadership programme, coaching, etc. In the meantime, all of the Western Balkan countries developed competency frameworks for their civil service, but full implementation is incomplete.

Based on the above, ReSPA has planned, jointly with the University of Nottingham, to formulate a manual on how to make Merit-based recruitment work. The manual will be developed with active participation of the members of the Working Group on Human Resource Management and Development (HRMD).

Exchange of experience with other countries is also needed in order to ensure the platform for learning from one another. The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), as one of three civil services in the United Kingdom, has been recognised by one of the ReSPA Members as a service with inspiring practice cases that Western Balkan countries could learn from. That is why ReSPA has planned for the members of the Working group on HRMD to pay a visit to NICS.

Northern Ireland is recognised as having the strongest procedures legislation and oversight

procedures for merit based recruitment for civil servants in Europe and among the strongest of any country in the world. There is also a strong culture of sharing experiences for developing and embedding merit based recruitment.

## **Performance appraisal**

In November 2018 ReSPA produced *Baseline analysis on Individual Performance Appraisal of Employees in Central Public Administration in Western Balkans*. This baseline analysis assesses the quality of implementing individual staff performance appraisal in the Western Balkan countries. The study offers the insight on institutional arrangement and support to conduct individual performance appraisal in central public administration and the way of the use of information stemming from it. The analysis also provides recommendations and opportunities for improvement, for sharing of experience and starting discussion on better knowledge utilisation in strategic HRM across the countries.

The study reveals that the formal – legal framework to a large extent fits the EU trend of individual staff performance appraisal. The main challenge in Western Balkans (WB) concerns ineffective implementation of formal rules mostly due to a) lack of general managerial culture and context. b) low managerial accountability. c) A failure to link individual performance appraisal to the objectives of the institution. As a result, even when formal rules are applied, they do not reach expected outcomes. As long as the efforts to institutionalise Individual Staff Performance Appraisal (ISPA) is restricted to its formal design and anchoring in Civil Service Law without its internalisation by leadership (Senior Civil Servants) and HR department, it will be challenging if not impossible to make it effective.

A different perspective has evolved in EU countries around performance appraisal: a shift from measurement-centered approach towards more context-centered one. In this approach, performance appraisal is an integral part of overall organisational managerial culture, from management of the organisational vision, goals into individualised ones to a social process that fosters communication and interaction between civil servants, their immediate supervisors, senior civil service and/or most top representatives (be it senior civil servants, political nominees or political leaders). In this light, performance appraisal context matters because it is linked to the objectives and activities of the institution.

For the region as a whole, three sets of recommendations are distinguished on,

- *systemic level – Improving Fit with overall Managerial Framework* (focus on overall managerial framework and organisational objectives, both vertically and horizontally; review the purpose of ISPA and communicating it to all employees; horizontal collaboration with organisations from EU countries),
- *capacity level - Capacity for Implementation and Monitoring* (investment in the capacity of key actors, creating modern HR services and professionalisation of HR units, flexibility to adjust, managerial accountability; linking any managerial position with obligatory ongoing managerial leadership training; think of support activities that can enhance mutual understanding and learning; improve monitoring and control systems and capacity; fight against cynicism, apathy and fatigue with ISPA),
- *technical level –* (keep performance appraisal as simple as possible; build culture of trust and respect and early communication of any problems through participatory and continuity arrangements; focus on positive and not negative appraisal; shared responsibility for performance appraisal; linking recruitment, development and performance appraisal through

reviewing competencies to operationable and flexible for organizational adjustments; treatment of senior civil servants who cannot be exempted from ISPA).

Based on the recommendations from the study, ReSPA has planned to develop guidelines for conducting performance appraisal for the Western Balkans (WB) and consequently training on performance appraisal which would be based on the produced Guidelines.

ReSPA has also planned to support development of leaders in and is exploring either replicating the existing leadership programmes or development of a new programme to fit WB.

## Objectives

During the working visit to Northern Ireland, members of the HRMD working group will have the opportunity to exchange experience with the representatives of NICS about the implementation of competency frameworks, performance appraisal, leadership programmes, talent management, innovations in HRMD, changing HRM using digital technology, etc.

During this working visit, participants shall:

- Receive an overview of the implementation of the **competency framework** in Northern Ireland with a focus on senior civil servants (job description, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, training, promotion);
- Learn about lessons learned and obstacles encountered in full implementation of the **competency framework** in Northern Ireland;
- Identify the challenges in using **competency framework** in Western Balkan countries, and developing ideas/recommendations for improvement of the implementation.
- Receive an overview of the implementation of **performance appraisal** and use of data obtained during performance appraisal;
- Receive an overview of the application of **leadership programmes** at all levels (eg, young civil servants, senior civil servants);
- Receive an overview of the utilisation of **talent management programmes**;
- Receive an overview of **innovative models of work** from Northern Ireland (agile management, agile learning, changing of HRM by digital technology);
- Generating **ideas by WB countries** for projects that might be supported by ReSPA through the **in-country support mechanism**

## Target Group

This working visit targets the HRM working group members.

- Senior managers with responsibilities for HRM in Ministries in the region, in particular, from Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Justice, HRM office and Ministry of EU integration
- Human Resource Management staff responsible for job analysis, recruitment, performance appraisal, leadership programmes, talent management, etc.

## Presenters

**Name and Surname and short BIO, Email address:**

(TO ADD)

**Name and Surname and short BIO, Email address:**

(TO ADD)

# AGENDA

Tuesday, 05 November 2019

Venue: to add

- 09.00**                    **Welcome and introduction**  
*NICS representative, Chair of the HRMD WG and ReSPA representative*
- 09.10**                    **Expectations from the visit by the HRMD WG members**
- 09.30**                    **Presentation of Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and development of NICS People Strategy**  
  
*Novelties in Strategy development (Innovative ways of working, agile management, agile learning, leadership development, talent management, mobility, etc.*  
Q&A
- 10.15**                    **Competency framework**  
*State of art and use of competency framework in the WB (presentation by each country) and challenges faced*
- 11.00**                    **Coffee break**
- 11.15**                    **NICS - Presentation of competency framework and its use in job description preparation (part 1), with concrete examples/case studies**  
Q&A
- 12.45**                    **Lunch**
- 14.00**                    **Use of competency framework in merit based recruitment and selection (part 2)**  
Q&A
- 15.00 – 16.30**        **Use of competency framework in performance appraisal and career development**  
  
*Concrete examples, case studies, and simulation of performance appraisal*  
Q&A

Wednesday, 06 November 2019

Venue: to add

- 9.00**                    **Talent management**  
*Name of presenter*  
Q&A
- 10.00**                    **Leadership development and mobility**  
*Name of presenter*  
Q&A
- 11.00**                    **Coffee break**
- 11.15**                    **Agile management and agile learning**  
*Name of presenter*  
Q&A
- 12.00**                    **Lunch time**
- 13.30**                    **Digitalisation in HRM**  
*Name of presenter*  
Q&A
- 14.45**                    **Coffee break**
- 15.00 – 16.30**        **Internal meeting of ReSPA Working group**  
*ReSPA members of the WG, ReSPA staff, ReSPA expert*  
  
*Discussion about follow up activities*