

Summary of the Belgian presidency of EUPAN 2024

1 January 2024 – 30 June 2024



This document summarises how the European Network for Public Administration (EUPAN) under the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union contributed to the EUPAN Strategy Paper 2022 – 2025.

1. Overview of the events

During the Belgian presidency the following events were organised:

1. Online DG meeting 16 January, in preparation of the Ministerial Meeting
2. Ministerial Meeting 26 – 27 February 2024, Ghent
3. Working Level Meeting 26 – 28 March, La Hulpe
4. DISPA Meeting 17 – 19 April, Brussels
5. EPSO Meeting 25 – 26 April, Leuven
6. Summer School 13 – 16 May, Brussels
7. DG Meeting 27 – 29 May, Bruges
8. Social Dialogue Committee 30 May, Brussels

During these events, 27 Member States and 5 observer countries, 3 DGs from the European Commission, OECD and EIPA were represented.

Because of the EUPAN network's emphasis on cooperation among European public administrations, we put additional effort into sharing good practices, knowledge and experience in the form of:

- 10 keynote speakers
- 13 expert contributions
- 29 cases from Member States
- 20 workshops

At the WL and DG meeting, we also experienced the value of innovative and interactive elements, such as the 'hot potato round', first introduced during the DG meeting under the Spanish presidency. This engaging work form has been particularly useful, generating positive outcomes that have been greatly appreciated. We highly recommend the continued use of this practice in future presidencies, as it fosters dynamic interaction and enhances collaborative efforts within the network.

2. Alignment with the EUPAN Strategy Paper

I. Transformation of the civil service and HR policies	II. Transparent, accessible, resilient and green public services that meet users' expectations	III. Organisational changes, public innovation, digital transformation and "greening" of public administrations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Future perspectives• Evidence informed policy-making• Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ethics and Integrity• Equity, Inclusion and Diversity / Attractiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transnational European collaboration• Sustainable government• AI and technology

3. Ministerial Meeting - the Ghent Declaration

The European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission as part of the European Network for Public Administration (EUPAN) under the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union, signed the Ghent Declaration on 27 February 2024.

Based on a consensus, this agreement was reached and the document was signed by all 27 EU Member States, Norway and Montenegro as observer countries and by Commissioners Hahn and Ferreira (DG HR and DG Reform).

The Ghent Declaration focuses on seven main areas:

1. Future perspectives
2. Evidence-informed policy-making
3. Equity, Inclusion and Diversity
4. Wellbeing
5. Ethics and Integrity
6. Attractiveness of the civil service
7. Transnational European collaboration

Considering the following priorities of the EUPAN strategy paper 2022-2025:

1. Transformation of the civil service and HR policies
2. Transparent, accessible, resilient and green public services that meet users' expectations
3. Organisational changes, public innovation, digital transformation and "greening" of public administrations

The European Ministers invited the Directors General in charge of public administrations to take into account the following conclusions by means of dialogue and the sharing 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 potential added value of in-house consultancy, 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 to achieve a balanced use of internal and external expertise.
- To lead by example when it comes to wellbeing at work and to share good practices on a regular basis.
- To promote a respectful and inclusive work environment by ensuring infrastructure, processes, procedures, applications and appliances are provided that meet the needs of every user and employee.
- To take the climate, resources and biodiversity crisis into account 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, to embrace the potential offered by innovations in integrity and corruption-prevention policies, and to 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 and also facilitated via 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 that takes societal stakeholders and core tasks into account. Sustainable goals need to be chosen and followed up using science-based methodologies. In future meetings, knowledge will be shared on the success of initiatives and methodologies.

4. The HR scorecard as a good practice

The HR scorecard was launched at the end of 2023 with an online data collection within the EUPAN network. As nowadays everyone is convinced of Importance of evidence-informed policy-making and the need of data-driven approaches in HR, there was great willingness from all Member States, including the EU commission and 4 observer countries, to contribute and to provide data.

In the Ghent Declaration, the European Ministers "... acknowledge the importance of measuring and comparing on a regular and voluntary basis the evolution in the HR field within public administrations."

In conclusion to the DG meeting, there was a consensus to continue the HR scorecard initiative, to build upon the valuable insights and lessons that this first

edition of 2024 provided and to progressively define what has come to be known as the 'EU HR benchmark' by means of a limited number of indicators: the intention would be to start off with clearly defined core indicators and to use data that are available in (almost) all Member States.

To ensure a smooth and efficient implementation of the EU HR scorecard, several key factors should be taken into account. These include a step-by-step approach, the careful selection of indicators, alignment with existing initiatives, ensuring data comparability and maintaining confidentiality.

It was repeatedly emphasised that all contributions would be made on a voluntary basis, ensuring flexibility for each presidency and fostering a collaborative environment within EUPAN.

Ministerial Meeting: First HR Scorecard Report 2024 presented

- First Benchmark results
- Input for next strategy paper

Working Level Meeting:

- A working session on future indicators and modalities (frequency)
- Identifying a limited number of HR indicators and taking into account certain challenges

DG Meeting:

- HR Scorecard = work-in-progress
- The first edition in 2024 has provided valuable insights and lessons, which will be pivotal in refining and advancing the project
- Member States have expressed their willingness to contribute during the upcoming presidencies
- Step-by-step, i.e. launching another pilot with a limited number of clearly defined indicators
- All contributions will be on a voluntary basis, ensuring flexibility and fostering a collaborative environment

5. Main outcomes EUPAN events

5.1. Future perspectives

In the realm of 'future perspectives', the presidency emphasised the need to build a resilient and people-centred public service. Discussions centred around the balance between insourcing and outsourcing and the strategic importance of maintaining quality work in a tight labour market. These efforts underlined the necessity of preparing civil services for future challenges.

Theme during Ministerial meeting and DG meeting

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- The German case on in-house consulting capacity
- Keynotes on 'Challenges and future perspectives in HRM'

Main findings:

- Common goal: build a resilient public service that is people-centred (wellbeing, inclusion, etc.)
- Insourcing vs Outsourcing: ongoing debate
- Importance of healthy work: deal with high demands versus job control
- Quality of work becomes a strategic policy issue in a tight labour market

Main conclusion:

- Thinking about the future is an important task for the civil service

5.2. Evidence informed policy-making

For 'evidence-informed policy-making', the presidency highlighted the need for trust between scientists, policymakers, and citizens. Creating ecosystems that integrate science and policy was deemed crucial, alongside capacity-building efforts for policymakers and scientists. Sharing information and data across Member States was also emphasised as a means of supporting evidence-informed decisions.

Theme during all meetings

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- An evidence-informed approach to develop an HR Vision
- TSI project on capacity building

Main findings:

- Trust between scientists, policy makers and citizens is important
- Creating ecosystems between science and policy
- Working on capacity building for policy makers and scientists in EIPM
- Sharing information and data across member states
- Develop qualified in-house consultancy to provide relevant support for EIPM
- Think deep, think broad, think ahead

Main conclusion:

- Policy decisions should be informed by evidence; the civil service has to create an ecosystem to make this possible

Sub-theme: Collecting and using data

In terms of 'collecting and using data', the presidency stressed the importance of good data collection practices and ethical guidelines. Data should be contextualised and it is necessary to exercise caution in order to avoid overly sophisticated data and data collection methods. Data-driven decision-making was identified as an emerging leadership skill.

Theme during the Summer School

Collecting Data:

- The importance of collecting good data (Garbage IN = Garbage OUT)
- Need to cultivate a culture that values evidence-based approaches
- Common data definitions for comparability

Using Data:

- Data need to be contextualized
- Is some data collection 'too political'?
- More sophisticated data are not necessarily better
- Develop ethical guidelines for the use of HR data
- Making data-driven decisions is a new leadership skill

Main conclusion:

- Better data = better science = better informed decisions/policies

5.3. Wellbeing for public agents

'Wellbeing' was a key theme, in which the presidency advocated the need for a balance between job demands and resources. Wellbeing programmes should address physical, mental, and emotional aspects and operate on an individual, team, leadership, and organisational level. Disconnection from work was also highlighted as important for wellbeing.

Theme during ministerial, WL meeting and Summer school

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- Malta's Employee Assistance Programmes
- Belgian initiatives on prevention and reintegration after burnout

Main findings:

- Seek a balance between job demands and job resources
- Wellbeing has a physical, mental and emotional aspect
- Wellbeing programmes should take place on an individual, team, leadership and organisational level
- Disconnection is an important lever for wellbeing

Main conclusion:

- Wellbeing should form an integral part of a people-centred HR strategy

5.4. Ethics and Integrity

In the area of 'ethics and integrity' the presidency emphasised the implementation of a culture of integrity, which might be even more important than regulations. Transparency and risk analysis were seen as vital for citizen trust, along with balancing compliance and the benefits of public-private sector transfers. The role of an independent authority was also highlighted.

Theme during ministerial meeting

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- Integrity strategy in France
- Scientific research on revolving doors

Main findings:

- Importance of the implementation of an integrity culture; might be even more important than regulations
- Trust of citizens: importance of transparency and risk analysis
- Balance between compliance and added value of transfers between public and private sector
- Importance of the role of an independent authority

Main conclusion:

- Conduct additional activities to raise awareness and share good practices in order to strengthen integrity and prevent corruption in public administrations.

5.5. Equity, Inclusion and Diversity

As far as 'equity, inclusion, and diversity' were concerned, the presidency stressed the importance of ethical leadership and of creating an inclusive workplace culture. An intersectional approach was recommended, with a focus on transparent procedures and inclusive language in order to ensure equal treatment.

Theme during all meetings

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- European Commission on Inclusion Management
- Belgian inclusive work environment

Main findings:

- Numbers tell the tale: Importance of facts and figures
- Leadership – ethical leadership, role models
- Invest in an accessible workplace and culture
- Inclusion by design
- Equal treatment is a shared priority (fair and transparent procedures, inclusive language)
- Importance of an intersectional approach

Main conclusion:

- Importance of promoting a respectful and inclusive work environment

5.6. Attractiveness of the civil service

The 'attractiveness of the civil service' was addressed by stressing the importance

of an authentic employee value proposition and continuous employer branding. The shift from traditional qualifications to a focus on competencies and mindset in recruitment was encouraged, along with the use of targeted and original communication messages.

Theme during all meetings

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- Belgium, France, Sweden

Main findings:

- Attracting the necessary skills is a key challenge in all Member States
- The importance of an authentic employee value proposition
- Employer branding is a continuous process
- Civil servants as ambassadors
- A shift from degrees and certificates to a focus on competencies and mindset
- Using targeted and original messages when communicating
- A competency framework as a key solution in attracting the right candidates

Main conclusion:

- The civil service must invest in creating an employer brand.

5.7. Sustainable government

'Sustainability' formed an additional focus, with discussions on integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into public administration. Strategic planning, project management, and communication skills were deemed necessary to promote sustainability. The need for a holistic approach to initiatives was also highlighted.

Theme during DG and WL meeting

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- The Belgian Transversal Sustainability Programme
- Keynotes on sustainable government and the role of HR

Main findings:

- 'Green is everywhere'
- Shifting in the Green Deal
- Leading role for public administrations
- Challenges to translate SDGs in reality
 - The need for transformation of PA : more of the horizontal approach
 - Time dimension : The short-term nature of politics vs Long-term investment
 - Raise awareness of the why (youth knows) & keep it on the agenda
- Needed skills

- Strategic planning & project management
- Engagement & communication
- Soft skills
- In-house + consultants

Main conclusion:

- Lots of initiatives but in many cases, a lack of an overall plan and a holistic approach

5.8. AI and technology

In the context of 'technology and AI', the presidency emphasised ethical considerations and transparency in the use of AI. Collaboration opportunities with the European AI Act were noted, and the importance of guidelines for using generative AI was stressed. Technology should serve as a means to an end, not as an end in itself.

Theme during DG meeting, Summer School, Dispa

Examples of shared good practices and insights:

- France on AI Strategy for HR
- Keynotes on the role of AI in HR
- Case on "Job matching" (VDAB)

Main findings:

- Importance of ethical considerations
- European AI Act : HR matters are categorised as high risk
- Opportunity for co-evolution
- Transparency in using generative AI : the need for guidelines

Main conclusion:

- Technology for technology's sake is not a goal

5.9. Transnational European collaboration and dissemination of public sector expertise

Finally, the theme of 'European collaboration' was underscored by the willingness of Member States to work on common HR benchmarks as well as take advantage of support from the European Commission.

The dynamic within the EUPAN network was seen as crucial, and new demands for observer status from Ukraine and Moldova were positively received, highlighting the network's inclusive and collaborative spirit.

- Willingness to work on a common HR benchmark initiative
- Willingness to take advantage of the support proposed by the commission (i.e. TSI, PACE, COMPACT, EU Central Government Survey, etc.)
- The importance of the dynamics within the EUPAN network and meetings

- Request by candidate EU Member States Moldova and Ukraine to join the network: EUPAN decided unanimously to accept the applications of Ukraine and Moldova for observer status and to invite both of them to the next EUPAN meetings.

6. Main outputs from DISPA

The DISPA network addressed and explored the theme of 'evidence-based learning and development', with a focus on evaluating training programmes and conducting gap analyses to align competencies with existing programmes. The importance of raising awareness among stakeholders on the subject of evidence-based approaches and defining key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure training impact was also highlighted. A valuable practice that DISPA shared was the integration exercise conducted at the end of the meeting. This interactive and engaging approach allowed all participants to quickly formulate the meeting's findings through role-playing. We consider this type of exercise highly beneficial and recommend further exploration of its use during future presidencies.

7. Main outputs EPSO

The EPSO meeting was dedicated to the theme 'Skills & competencies throughout selection and recruitment'. Throughout the meeting, there was a focus on the adaptability, flexibility, and creativity of civil servants. Emphasis was placed on equality in recruitment processes and the importance of social media presence in attracting candidates. The presidency underscored the need to look at current and future trends in selection and recruitment procedures for European and national civil services.

The Belgian EUPAN presidency team extends its gratitude to every Member State and institution and to the European Commission for their participation and active contributions, which were instrumental in ensuring the success of each meeting held during our presidency. We believe that the numerous exchanges and plentiful interactions on various pressing topics will provide valuable input for the upcoming presidencies and will contribute towards the drafting of a new EUPAN strategy paper in 2025.