EMPLOYER BRANDING SURVEY
SUMMARY

European Public Administration Network 2017
Estonian Presidency

We are experiencing a significant change in the demographics - the amount of people entering the labor force tends to be smaller than the retiring generation. This increases the competition among employers as there is a smaller and smaller pool of workers available. In the context of tight resource constraints, the attractiveness of the civil service needs to be managed through active employer branding. Recognising the labour market competition for talent, civil services compete with all sectors for the best and brightest, especially in hard-to-recruit areas.

During EU Presidency Estonia conducted a survey among EUPAN members about their experience regarding employer branding management and activities in civil service. At the end of June 2017 a questionnaire was sent out to 32 countries and European Commission with 14 questions. By 1 September 2017 the questionnaire was answered by 26 countries and EC.

Hereby an overview of the results of the survey is given:

1. **Is finding, recruiting and maintaining talent in civil service a relevant issue in your country?**

Finding, recruiting and maintaining talent in civil service is a relevant or very important issue in most countries. Only 5 countries said that is not an issue (for different reasons), some examples:

Portugal - It is not an issue due to the labor market situation;

Spain - Civil service is based on a career system and access to public employment is highly valued.

Cyprus - employment in the public sector is viewed as very popular by candidates, therefore branding has never been an issue.

Between yes or no, 2 countries pointed out that a new type of selection procedures are implemented or new challenges are created to recruit most suitable candidates.

2. **Is the branding of the government as an employer a relevant issue in your country?**

One of the objectives to achieve is creating a positive image of PA by contributing to enhancing its reputation as an employer. This objective is linked to the need to attract skilled and higher qualified employees. For example, in Finland this kind of work already started 17 years ago.

7 countries answered that branding the government is not an issue for them. But in these countries some or most of ministries or agencies do it on their own or actions are envisaged to improve its attractiveness. In most countries there is currently no joint branding effort for the central government as a whole. However, several ministries and other large agencies are occupied with the issue on an individual basis.
Lots of countries admit that this is a relevant issue for them right now and that they are planning new strategies and actions for the upcoming years. For example Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic etc. There is no official strategy to promote the government as an employer as a whole. However, most of individual ministries and agencies do it on their own and are preparing new activities in the field of branding the government as an employer, with the aim to increase the attractiveness of the state administration as an employer, focusing on the recruitment and maintenance of talented employees.

There is very good example from Switzerland where the public sector of the Swiss Confederation is considered a model employer as it is the best regarding different aspects like Diversity, Training and Development etc.

3. **What percentage of your country’s population is employed in the public sector?**

It is impossible to make generalizations.

Different countries vary in the ways they collect and analyze data thus making it impossible to compare them. What is more, the data is presented in different ways, for example one presents the results as a percentage of people working in the private sector out of the total population, another presents a percentage of private sector employees of the working age population.

In 2016 in Estonia 132 900 were employed in the public sector full time, of whom 88% worked in the government sector and 12% in another public sector. Approximately one fifth of all working people are employed in the public sector. In 2016, 28 thousand people worked in public service.

In Germany, roughly 4,69 million people work in the public service, out of population of 82 million people.

The mean percentage of employment rate in the public sector was approximately 8%. It was lowest in Italy and highest in Norway, making up 5% and 31,5%, respectively.

4. **What is the average number of applications submitted to one position in PA?**

This question was asked in order to assess the number of candidates per one job in civil service. This shows how popular civil service is as an employer in the country. 11 out of 26 countries do not collect this kind of data at all. In this kind of situation, it is difficult to make conclusions, because the number of applicants depends solely on the specific workplace. The number of applicants varies a lot from one ministry to another, as well as the specific position.

Switzerland and Finland are prime examples what years of branding can bring about. There, the average number of applications per one job is notably higher than that of other countries. In Switzerland, the average number is 30, in Finland 41. In comparison, in Luxembourg the average number of applicants per a job is 10 and in Poland 13.

In Estonia the mean number is 17, but there are countries where the number is even below ten. For example, Lithuania and Hungary.

5. **What is the average percentage of the voluntary and involuntary staff turnover in the public sector?**

The average turnover percentage shows how the external (number of applicants for a job) and internal (number of people quitting on their own behalf) reputation of the civil service coincide.

7 countries replied that they do not collect data about turnover. Many countries that had not presented numeric values in their answers, described the situation in the following words: „Staff turnover is very low”. On average, it is possible to say that the sum staff turnover is between 5% (in Finland) and 18% (in Latvia).

In Estonia, the yearly turnover percentage has stayed the same during the last few years, in public service the sum personnel turnover is 11% and voluntary turnover comprises 7%. Involuntary staff turnover is very low, for example, in Luxembourg: in 2016, only 4 public officials out of 27000 (state civil service) were dismissed for disciplinary reasons.
In Austria, turnover is exceptionally low - in 2016, 2.9% of employees (excluding staff who are typically employed for a limited period of time) left the public sector. Owing to a rise in retirements, this percentage has increased by 0.3% compared to the previous year.

The number one reason of quitting in every country is retiring.

Some countries have a career-based system, where staff turnover means mainly mobility of civil servants within the public sector (and less to the private sector), which is therefore not an indicator of attractiveness of the civil service. This system is used for example in France.

6. Have you conducted surveys in order to evaluate how popular it is to work or apply for a job in your public sector? If so, what are the main reasons?

12 countries answered that they have conducted surveys in order to evaluate the attractiveness of the public service or satisfaction of the employees. Belgium pointed out that they conduct an employer branding survey every 2 years.

13 states have not conducted any surveys in order to evaluate how popular it is to apply or to work in public sector. In Austria, no surveys have been conducted assessing the popularity of applying for a job in the public sector, because based on the steadily high number of applicants, it can be assumed that the popularity is rather high.

Lithuania plans on conducting a survey on the attractiveness of civil service in the end of 2017.

The main reasons to apply or to work in PA are similar according to the answers:

- employment security,
- meaningful, challenging, interesting tasks,
- possibility of good salary,
- career,
- feeling of contributing to common welfare,
- guaranteed income,
- positive work environment provided by colleagues and managers.

Possibilities for career development and career planning are highlighted in surveys on the motivation for working in the civil service conducted in Bulgaria 2005–2012.

7. Have you conducted any surveys regarding the reputation of the government as an employer? If so, what are the main criteria in people choosing to work in the public sector instead of the private sector? What are the typical counter-arguments or weaknesses?

15 out of 26 countries answered that they have not conducted these kinds of surveys. 7 countries have investigated the reputation of the government as an employer. The main reasons why people prefer working in the public sector to working in the private sector are mostly the same in all of these countries. Some reasons were mentioned as follows:

- Good work-life balance
- Meaningful and challenging tasks
- Opportunity to have unique, interesting and responsible work;
- Possibility to be a part of country’s policy planning and implementation

If the candidate has a private sector experience, then the main reason is employment security.

The main weaknesses of the public sector compared to the private sector were mentioned as follows in all countries:

- Low salary is the biggest weakness
- low level of innovation

There are some widespread beliefs in the society diminishing the attractiveness of public administration as an employer: too hierarchical, decision-making processes are slow and time-consuming, work is bureaucratic, lack of support for development of individual competences and talents of employees or their initiatives, lack of flexibility, lack of support for employees’ mobility.
8. Have you actively sought out to promote the public sector as an eligible employer? If so, how have you done this?

Only seven countries replied that they do not work on promoting the public sector as an eligible employer for various reasons. All others answered that they do work on that issue and the descriptions on activities performed in order to do so were rather similar.

Yes, we have actively promoted the public sector as an employer, performed activities are as follows:

- advertising vacant positions with shared advertisements in newspapers as well as on Twitter and Facebook;
- having a network for employer image as well as a smaller working group to enhance more intense co-operation
- offering hundreds of traineeships for students from universities of applied sciences and other universities
- attending at job fairs
- creating an internet platform where are all public sector vacancies are presented

All of those activities are more recruitment activities, which are inseparable part of branding. Only Latvia answered that they have actively worked to promote public administration as a single employer over the last years. For example, in 2015 – 2016, Latvia successfully implemented a special internship programme for young professionals called “Working for the public sector”.

In Sweden, in addition to employer branding activities done by each agency, SAGE (Swedish Agency for Government Employers) has had a couple of centrally initiated activities.

9. Have you rather advertised individual agencies or the whole government?

Only two countries promote the whole government: Luxembourg and Malta. Many countries answered that they use both options, for example Switzerland: “Both: first the whole government (family brand), secondly the individual agencies for specific needs and specific professions (sub- brand).”

Some countries mentioned that the institutions that require employees with specific skills or education (for example the IT department or the military) advertise themselves more. For example, in Slovenia and Portugal, PA advertisements are only carried out for the Ministry of Defense and military forces.

Most of the countries advertise both whole public sector, and on the other hand, individual agencies do a lot of separate advertisement to promote their specific needs and requirements.

10. If your country has branded your government as an employer, have you made up a slogan, and if so, what does it sound like?

7 countries have developed a slogan. These are the same countries that brand the government as an employer, and in addition to these, Sweden, who has a clear vison for the future.

Some examples:

Luxembourg: “Commit yourself to the service of the citizen” - “Engagez-vous au service du citoyen”

Switzerland: “Switzerland - Our Company”.

Latvia: “You are Latvia – get involved and do!”
Finland: “Make a difference - jobs that count”

Netherland “Working for the Central Government is working for The Netherlands”

Bulgaria: “We work for the people”

Other countries have not branded the government nor made a slogan.

11. Has the government defined anything regarding the employee value proposition? If so, what does it sound like?

Only 2 countries have defined employee value propositions for the government – Switzerland and Sweden.

Other countries have described the main values or principles of working in civil service, or in some countries many institutions have their own employee propositions.

12. What are the common arguments for the whole PA as an employer of choice?

The best, most concise sentence comes from the European Commission: “Working for the EU means you are not working for the profit of an individual company but for the benefit of over 500 million EU citizens.”

This sentence, however, does not present specific reasons and sounds more like a slogan.

In conclusion, the following reasons can be presented from the answers of the countries:

- Meaningful and challenging tasks, possibilities to learn and develop.
- The government is a secure (job security, stability) and flexible employer.
- The working hours give the employees a good balance between work and leisure time, teleworking.
- Good working conditions
- Diversity – wide range of jobs and training

13. Does Your country have an action plan of activities for the next years to find and recruit the best possible employees to public service? If so, please describe the main activities or ideas that your plan consists of.

Only 5 countries answered that they have a specific action plan for the next year or for the upcoming years. For example, Bulgaria plan on reforming their entire public sector and have made an action plan for the years 2014–2020.

For example, the Netherlands have a plan which contains: main ingredients- further modernizing their career portal, improving the hiring process including the quality of the candidate experience. Also they plan on improving further development of the cooperation between organizations (the Dutch Central government will implement new government wide hiring and selection tooling over the next few years which will increase transparency and help improve process quality in the areas of a.o. lead times, broadcasting candidate profiles, information analysis, more targeted labor market interventions etc.).

France launched an action plan for 2018 in September.

Many countries said that institutions have their own action plans. In Sweden, most agencies have a strategic and systematic work plan. In Norway, recruitment is focused on in their strategy.

The answers of other countries were more general, saying that they plan on employing better employees etc. They said that they have programs that are being introduced in universities and at job fairs, also that they have devised career programs for many branches. Many have plans on institutional levels not regarding the whole government. Communication with university students and creating career pages on the Internet were mentioned as planned activities.
14. What are the main limitations/constraints in employer brand development in PA?

Most of the answers to this question were related to money. Whether the economic situation in the country does not allow money to be spent on a field such as this or the salaries of civil servants are too low which inhibits the promotion of the government as an employer and finding new employees.

One of the more common answers was that ministries work on this issue separately and because of this cannot name common limitations. A good example is the answer of Norway who said that the main challenge in that field is "To co-operate and find common ground on a superior level. Most organizations regard themselves as unique."

A few examples of limitations in employer brand development in PA:

- no general strategy for the government as an employer as a whole, lack of centralized approach to the topic;
- employer brand has not become a strategic function so far due to lack of resources;
- salaries in PA are uncompetitive compared to those of the private sector;
- low trust in government in general (strongly rooted historically), perception of the public service is characterized by politics and politicians.

The European Commission, through EPSO keeps a constant eye on trends in the employment market and maintains regular contacts with international academia and international public sector organisations such as the UN, NATO and the African Union to share best practices. EPSO regularly attends and presents at international conferences in the field of selection and recruitment and works closely with the Institutions and member states to improve the recruitment process.

Conclusion

Rising scepticism and the current uncertain and complex social situation, in which the public sector has to navigate, make it challenging to sell the PA brand when in reality now more than ever we need talented and motivated staff members to reach out to its citizens and engage with them proactively and positively.

Employer branding involves developing and communicating the culture of a public organization as an employer. Various communication strategies and methods can be used in order to promote the government as an attractive employer so that the sector will be able to develop a brand as an Employer of Choice. In this war for talent, public administration needs to emphasize and actively market the benefits they offer. Attracting great skills into the civil service will require some strategic thinking regarding the employer value proposition and market segmentation to attract the right candidates and this survey’s summary indicates difference between countries who has done some works in employer branding and countries who has not. With a strong employer reputation, it will be possible to attract and retain talented staff.