

# Public Service in Belarus: Current Situation and Prospects for Reforms

**Research report (brief)**

A public service - the people and institutions that implement public policy and are responsible for providing services to businesses and citizens - is one of the key components of public administration.

This report analyzes public service of Belarus using the “Principles of Public Administration”<sup>1</sup>, developed by the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management Initiative (hereafter referred to as SIGMA).<sup>2</sup>

According to the SIGMA principles, public administration reform involves depoliticizing the public service, strengthening the autonomy of central and local governments, developing e-government, increasing the transparency and accountability of public administration, and improving public financial management.<sup>3</sup> In the area of public service, SIGMA suggests six principles, any of which can be analyzed by a number of indicators. The assessment of public administration practices implemented in Belarus is based on the legislative and regulatory acts, academic literature and 15 expert interviews with former civil servants.

*Table. Assessment of the public service system according to SIGMA principles*

	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>PRINCIPLE 1. The policy and legal frameworks are in place</b>		
Establishing political responsibility for public service		There is no strategy and no clear public service policy. No coordinating body
Quality of the legal framework/secondary regulation in the public service		Legal dualism: formally some provisions are prescribed, in practice they are applied arbitrarily
Implementation and monitoring of public service policies		There is no policy and no one responsible for the implementation of public service policy
Judicial review of the rights of public servants		The courts are biased and not independent. Public servants cannot apply for reinstatement of their rights especially in the case of political termination

<sup>1</sup> Hill, K. (Ed.) The Principles of Public Administration: A Framework for ENP Countries. Paris: SIGMA, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> SIGMA website: <https://www.sigmaweb.org>

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the public finance system of Belarus according to the SIGMA methodology, see: BIPART. From State Administration to Public Administration: How Can Public Administration Assessment be Conducted in Belarus? 2022

Central body for public service management		The public service is characterized by departmental fragmentation
Availability of an information system for the public service	A database of potential candidates has been formed. But only for managerial positions	There is no centralized database. There is no way to get real-time statistics. No information about the structure of the public service
Professional human resource management		Legislation and the institutional organization of the public service does not comply with the principle of professional management
<b>PRINCIPLE 2. Adequacy and clarity of public service</b>		
Clarity in the legislative framework of the scope of public service methodology	Public service agencies are listed in Section 14 of the 2022 Law	
Adequacy of the horizontal scope of public service		The law adopts a broad definition of public service: paramilitary bodies are included, as well as political elected bodies
The vertical boundaries of the public service are defined (political appointees, public servants, and administrative personnel are separated)	Reduction of public servants was carried out earlier, some employees were transferred to the administrative personnel group	Political appointees (deputies of all levels are classified as public servants with associated privileges)
The law establishes all provisions relating to the employment relationship of public servants	The Law and the Labor Code regulate labor relations in sufficient detail	
<b>PRINCIPLE 3. Selection and recruitment</b>		
Meritocratic selection	Partially. Selection requirements do not cover candidates for executive positions	In reality, the principles of meritocratic selection are inferior to nepotism and co-optation
Legislative establishment of criteria and	Partially.	The requirement to publish vacancies is not met

procedures related to recruitment and selection	The regulations for the competition have been published. Examination criteria are formulated	
A politically neutral and professional selection committee		Competition committees are not public
Protection from discrimination, comprehensive representation	The Law sets the standard for protection from discrimination	In practice, the requirement of comprehensive representation is not met. “Glass Ceiling”
Objective criteria for demotion	The Law prescribes the criteria for imposing official penalties	
<b>PRINCIPLE 4. Remuneration</b>		
Fair and transparent remuneration system, salary classification	Information about salaries and grade increments is published	Non-transparent system of additional payments (bonuses and other forms of material incentives)
Allowances, benefits and supplemental Payments	Types of benefits are prescribed by law	
Equal pay for work of equal value	No evidence to the contrary	
The discretion of supervisors in assigning salaries and benefits is limited		No, bonuses and other financial incentives are assigned by managers
Remuneration system provides reasonable conditions for recruitment, motivation and retention of employees	To a large extent. Not at the entry positions, but at the mid- and high-ranking positions.	Uniform remuneration in large cities and regions, which leads to different assessments of its sufficiency
<b>PRINCIPLE 5. Professional development</b>		
Regular professional training according to the needs of specific target groups	Regularity is ensured	Needs of target groups are met partially. This is also due to the limited training programs offered and the lack of resources to purchase necessary training programs
Public principles of performance evaluation. Regular performance	Certifications are conducted	The criteria for certification are not public

evaluation of public servants		
Mobility of public servants is encouraged	In individual agencies, but no systematic policy	The practice of rotation and mobility should be used more extensively
Promotion (vertical and horizontal) is based on merit		There are no clear standards and procedures for promotion
<b>PRINCIPLE 6. Preventing corruption</b>		
Effective and adequate legal provisions to prevent corruption	There is a law "On Prevention of Corruption", there are rules for publishing declarations	
Corrupt behavior is criminalized in the Criminal Code	Yes	
The basic elements of the disciplinary procedure are set forth in the law	The Law on Prevention of Corruption sets out the basic norms	
Proportionality between the misconduct and the punishment		None, since grand corruption is prosecuted arbitrarily
Right to appeal disciplinary sanctions	Exists formally	Not implemented in practice

Thus, some elements and requirements of SIGMA have already been implemented to varying degrees in the legislation on public service and related regulatory legal documents. However, a significant portion of the SIGMA principles of public administration are implemented only partially or are completely missing in the legislation, what contradicts the principles of good governance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the examination of problems and achievements in the field of public service in Belarus and the responses of respondents, it is possible to identify several areas of public service reform.

### Depoliticization

1. A prerequisite for improving the quality of public administration is the depoliticization of the public service system. Depoliticization involves the implementation of a number of practical measures: the removal of political (elected) positions from the public service; selection, recruitment, and promotion to positions based on performance evaluations rather than on political loyalty; and the abandonment of coercive control over the process of public service appointments.
2. Broader processes of change are also important for depoliticization. The key is the reinstatement of the principle of separation of powers. In particular, there is a need for independent courts that can exercise control over the violation of principles and standards of conduct in public administration.
3. The availability of free mass media which performs the function of public control (watchdogging), including, among others, of public servants must be ensured.
4. It is necessary to reducing the size of the government sector and, consequently, reduce the number of ministries and agencies; optimize the functions of public servants; and abandon excessive regulation in all areas - from education to industrial production.

### Human resources management

1. It is recommended that a body be established that will develop a balanced human resources policy and be capable of conducting competitive, merit-based hiring processes for all levels of public service positions, including the top positions.
2. It is vital to create a clear list of selection criteria for the public service and to carry out serious work with the database of potential candidates that will have a real, rather than formal, nature.
3. It is necessary to create a public commission for the selection to the public service. Modification of the public service exam format are also necessary. It must become a reliable tool for assessing candidates' qualifications and motivation for public service. Public service examinations must be administered by an independent institution and must be free from the protectionist practices that now exist.
4. In order to improve diversity of thought and lessen corruption at the highest levels of government, it is critical to create the environment that support overcoming gender discrimination and elevating women to top positions in the public service.
5. A body to conduct an external audit of functions and processes in the public service should be established. The results of audit will create the prerequisites for improving the efficiency of its processes, as well as optimizing the functionality and number of public servants should be created.

### **Material incentives**

1. The existing system of material incentives for public servants in Belarus is not capable of attracting young talented people. The increase in income occurs predominantly near the end of the career in the public service. Although the grade system largely ensures predictability in the public servants' career path, it needs to be adjusted to make the public service more attractive for young employees.
2. It is necessary to form a system of performance evaluation of public servants and develop a system of bonuses, which will be based on these results, and not depend on higher management.

### **Overcoming corruption**

1. It is necessary to abandon the policy of the closure of information and the widespread practice of the "For Official Use Only" status for data that is used in the decision-making process and as a basis for public policy development. It is important to introduce the principles of transparency and openness of statistics, guideline documents and all information necessary for decision-making and ensuring accountability of public servants' actions.
2. It is important to achieve proportionality of misconduct and punishment. Currently, only low-level corruption is prosecuted; grand corruption of top officials remains unpunished.