OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND MAJOR REFORM INITIATIVES

France ranks in the lower half in EU-27 comparisons regarding the tendency to trust the national government\(^{(1)}\) and in the top-half in terms of government effectiveness\(^{(2)}\). Trust in the government has been diminishing with the exception of the year 2017.

In terms of the authority to implement and coordinate public administration reforms, France has a quite centralised system regarding ex ante procedures (mainly in the hands of the General Secretariat of Government and the Council of State) but quite a decentralised system when it comes to ex post evaluation, which is fragmented across a range of institutions (the Court of Audit, the Parliament, the National Standards Evaluation Body, the Interdepartmental Directorate for Public Sector Transformation and France Strategy).

The major overall public administration reform in France at the moment is the programme Public Action 2022, which identified administrative simplification as a key principle and was launched in June 2018. \(^{(3)}\) A EUR 700 million fund was allocated to this programme to promote public digital transformation, modernise the public service working environment and cut public spending (with the objective of a 3 % decrease in public spending by 2022)\(^{(4)}\). SRSP projects in France have focused on policy, services and organisation.

STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATION

Total government expenditure of the public sector was the highest in France among the EU-27 in 2018 (56.0 %). The central government’s share is quite low (40.8 %) and places France in the lower half in EU-27 comparisons.

The percentage of people working in the public sector in relation to the rest of the labour force is one of the highest in the OECD and EU27 (19.9 %)\(^{(5)}\). These levels have remained close to 20 % since 2014 although have slightly declined since then. Up to 34 % of public employment can be found in local self-government\(^{(6)}\).

The semi-presidential structure of the French government helps undertaking horizontal administrative reforms and facilitates coordination.

There are three territorial authorities in France: regions, ‘départements’ and municipalities. Even though these levels of government have their own legal personality, they do not have any legislative powers. The supervisory authority of the central state remains strong, which does not allow inter-governmental coordination to become an issue.

Several regions were merged to simplify the division of the French territory in 2016. The reform brought down the number of regions from 22 to 13. Regions have authority in the field of economic development and the reform intended to reinforce their role. The new responsibilities of the ‘Régions’ include SMEs support, spatial planning and interurban transports organisation.

\(^{(1)}\) European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer 92
\(^{(2)}\) World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)
\(^{(4)}\) modernisation.gouv.fr, 700 millions d'euros pour transformer l'action publique
\(^{(5)}\) Rapport annuel sur l'état de la fonction publique, 2019 Edition, p. 74
\(^{(6)}\) Rapport annuel sur l'état de la Fonction Publique, 2019 Edition, p. 75, Figure V 1-2
The coordination of administrative reforms has changed since 2017, when the pre-existing General Secretariat for the Modernisation of Public Action (SGMAP) was divided into two inter-ministerial Directorates: the Inter-Ministerial Directorate for Public Transformation (DITP) and the Inter-Ministerial Directorate for Digital Affairs and State Information and Communication System (DINSIC). The DITP coordinates the Public Action 2022 programme (‘Action Publique 2022’) and leads innovative interdepartmental projects.

The SGMAP was created to lead public administration reforms and was reorganised twice.

The programme Public Action 2022 split the SGMAP into two new bodies(7): the Interdepartmental Directorate for Public Sector Transformation (DITP), in charge of promoting organisational change and innovation within the public administration and the Interdepartmental Directorate for digital transformation (DINUM, former DINSIC), responsible for digital transformation and IT. Changes made during these two reforms could have a positive effect on the overall long-term effectiveness of public administration modernisation programmes.

The changes made during these two reforms could have a positive effect over the overall effectiveness of long-term strategic planning.

France ranks in the top half in EU-27 comparisons regarding inter-ministerial coordination(8) and implementation capacity(9), perhaps linked to the institutional structure facilitating horizontal reforms and implementation. However, France ranks in the lower half in strategic planning capacity(10).

CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEMS AND HRM

The Directorate General for Administration and Public Employment (Direction Générale de l’Administration et de la Fonction Publique, DGAFP) which is part of the Ministry of Public Action and Accounts oversees HR policy at the central level in France. However, there is a degree of autonomy granted to the individual ministries, which have their own HR directorates in charge of implementing the general strategy.

France ranks in the top half in EU-27 comparisons regarding impartiality(11) and professionalism(12). As far as closedness(13) in the recruitment practices of the administration, France obtained the highest score in 2015, meaning that it is the most closed administration in this regard. In terms of regulation, there are three branches of the civil service (central government, territorial authorities and hospitals). Each branch is governed by a specific set of provisions, but there is a common framework applicable to all of them, which is called ‘General statute of public service’ (statut général de la fonction publique).

Access to the civil service in France generally takes place after an exam (concou) after which a series of mandatory trainings adapted to the specific function to be performed will be taken during a period from one to three years at the so-called ‘application schools’ (écoles d’application). Only the civil servants recruited to perform functions at the bottom of the hierarchy are exempted from taking these trainings.

The French public service is career-based. The popularity of careers in the public sector remains high, borne out in the high number of applicants and the low turnover among civil servants. However, the private sector registers higher salaries for executives, although the difference might not be that high in other categories.

There are also public employees for whom the applicable system is different. They represent 17.04 % of the civil service. They can be hired through public or common labour law according to the post, but in any case, they are not employed on life-long tenure like civil servants. Turnover is medium among this category of public employees.

In addition, the highest positions in the state’s civil service are appointed directly by political representatives. The applicable procedure varies according to the type of post.

Job performance assessments are carried out by the direct hierarchical superior and are based on performance and career development prospects. The results can constitute a means for career advancement. The importance of seniority regarding career advancement has diminished in favour of merit. A bonus system linked to performance called ‘function and performance Bonus’ has been introduced. It can determine up to 20 % of a civil servant salary and is affected by degree of responsibility and performance assessments.

The Public Action 2022 programme identified measures focussing on the modification of contracts for civil servants in 2018. Among other measures, the civil service reform (15), voted in 2019, reformed the human resources management system, making it more flexible and merit-based (contractual recruitment, merit-based pay, modernisation of labour relations).

Mobility has been promoted by means of the Law on mobility and professional pathways, which came into force in 2009. Job mobility of public employees has slightly in-

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(7) Modernisation.gouv.fr, Découvrez la nouvelle organisation de la transformation publique et numérique de l’État
(8) Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators
(9) Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators
(10) Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators
(11) The Quality of Government Institute (QoGi), University of Gothenburg
(12) The Quality of Government Institute (QoGi), University of Gothenburg
(13) QoGi, op.cit.
(14) 14 Rapport annuel sur l’état de la Fonction Publique, 2019 Edition, p. 85, Figure V 1-7
(15) 15 Loi n° 2019-828 du 6 août 2019 de transformation de la fonction publique
increased in recent years\(^{(16)}\) (from 8.5% in 2014 to 9.9% in 2016).

The pension schemes for the civil servants were changed in 2010, when the age of retirement was increased along with social security contributions, in order to improve the sustainability of the pension system.

As regards gender balance within the administration, women are overrepresented within the three branches of the civil service (women represented 62% of civil servants in 2017). In 2012, the ‘Sauvadet Law’ established gender quotas among some senior civil servants appointments, within management boards of public establishments and within selection panels for civil servants competition. In 2017, five years after its enforcement, only 35% of senior civil servants were women, 5 percentage points below the 40% objective set by law\(^{(17)}\).

In February 2019 the project for civil servants’ reform was published and identified the following main points: increasing the numbers of contract workers on digital, communication and real estate fields, creating new tools to support mobility and professional transition and enhancement of gender equality.

Social dialogue was affected by a law passed in 2010. This law empowered civil service unions by increasing the number of issues subject to social dialogue between the government and unions, which now goes beyond salaries.

**POLICYMAKING, COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Direct participation of citizens as stakeholders within the broader political system has historically been rather marginal. However, the surge of the yellow vests’ movement prompted the French president (Macron) to launch the so-called ‘Great debate’(Grand Débat).

The ‘Great Debate’, launched in January 2019, attempted to identify the priorities for citizens in response to the yellow vests’ movement. The need for public sector reform was stressed out during the Debate. Several actions were announced consequently\(^{(18)}\), such as the establishment of 2000 new local centres for public services and the creation of a new Citizens’ Council, composed of 150 French citizens, randomly selected, in charge of drawing up new legislations. The 26th of June 2020, the first Citizens’ Council proposed 149 new measures to curb global warming.

In relation to this, France ranked in the top half in EU-27 comparisons regarding societal consultation\(^{(19)}\).

In 2016 the Digital Bill was prepared jointly with internet users before being submitted for review.

Policy advice to politicians tends to come from senior civil servants as well as consultancy companies. Even though the obligation of conducting regulatory impact assessments and ex ante evaluations on many policy issues has been enshrined in the law, these instruments are often reported as mere formalities due to the lack of time and/or tools. Indeed, France ranks in the lower half of rankings regarding the use of evidence-based instruments\(^{(20)}\) and regulatory quality\(^{(21)}\).

The relationship between politics and the administration is complex. There is a clear separation between the civil service (career-based and based on merit) and politics, except for high-level executives. However, an increasing number of high-ranking civil servants have entered politics and occupied parliamentary seats before being elected as presidents. That has to do with the existence of institutions such as ENA (National School of Administration) and certain characteristics of the civil statute that allows politicians to return to their jobs in the administration once their mandate is over.

**TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Major reforms have been put forward in the fields of transparency and accountability over the very last years, such as the law on officials’ ethics, rights and obligations, passed in 2016, the law on transparency, fight against corruption and modernisation of the economic life, and the organic law on the powers of the ombudsman and whistleblowers’ protection. These measures have aimed to improve public procurement procedures, with stronger anticorruption measures, stronger prevention of conflicts of interest, and a protection framework for whistleblowing cases.

France ranked in the top half of countries in EU-27 comparisons regarding control of corruption\(^{(22)}\).

The High Authority for transparency in public life was established in January 2014 to address the factors that have led to distrust in public officials. In addition, the law on trust in political life of 2017 has laid out new rules to avoid conflicts of interest and other issues concerning transparency and accountability, such as the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns and the appointment of staff by elected officials. There are also additional conditions that render individuals ineligible to various jobs.

\(^{(16)}\) 16 Rapport annuel sur l’état de la Fonction Publique, Edition 2019, Figure 4.6-1
\(^{(17)}\) 17 Emploi-public.fr, Panté : 35 % de femmes primo nommées aux postes de direction
\(^{(18)}\) 18 Elysée.fr, Les annonces après le Grand Débat national

\(^{(19)}\) Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators
\(^{(20)}\) World Bank, WGI op. cit.
\(^{(21)}\) World Bank, WGI op. cit.
\(^{(22)}\) Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index
the transformation of the public administration information systems.

The French government is a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and is working with the OGP community to foster greater transparency and accountability, improve governance, and increase civic engagement.

Examples of improved digital public services include the portal ‘simplified procedures’ (démarches simplifiées), launched in 2018, which aims at rendering the public services ‘invisible’ and reducing the administrative burden on businesses.

A new Marianne Charter(31) in 2016 compiled best practices carried out by Ministries and the General Secretariat for the Modernisation of Public Action (SGMAP) to improve service delivery. The Charter sets a list of 12 public service commitments, such as giving clear and precise answers to the constituents’ demands (n°7) or assessing the constituents’ satisfaction on a regular basis (n°12).

Additional changes were made in 2018 concerning transparency of results and trust between users and the administration which was prompted by the law for a State at the Service of a Trust-Based Society (Loi pour un État au service d’une société de confiance).

Despite these and similar efforts, France ranks in the lower half in indicators such as pre-filled forms(32). Nevertheless, France ranks in the top half in indicators such as digital public services for business, e-government users, online service completion and digital public services(33).

The Public Action 2022 Programme identified digital transformation and the simplification of administrative procedures as an objective. The aim is to free up time for civil servants to provide better user support.

The Government has set as an objective that by 2022 all public authorities (local and national) should use the technical infrastructure ‘FranceConnect Plateforme’ to deliver secure, simple, personalised and completely digitalised services accessible through a unique login (e-identification) that citizens, businesses and public officials can obtain via FranceConnect Identité.

The website “Vox usagers” enables individuals to share their experiences of using public services with the aim to improve them. Indicators measuring performance and quality of service will be used as of 2020 to monitor the progress of this approach. The objective set by the government is that all 54 public services publish their indicators by December 2020(34).

France ranks in the top half in EU-27 comparisons in voice and accountability,(23) transparency of government,(24) perception of corruption(25) and public integrity(26).

France became a member of the Open Government Partnership in 2014. After this, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Summit was organised (2016) and France signed the roadmap published in its second National Action plan for 2018-2020.

The Law for a Digital Republic (Loi pour la République numérique) adopted on 7 October 2016 introduced a series of measures (such as the requirement for local authorities with more than 3 500 inhabitants to publish their public information in an open data format).

France ranks in the top half in EU-27 comparisons regarding open data(27), although in the lower-half regarding access to government information(28), which is due to the different configuration of these to indicators.

**SERVICE DELIVERY AND DIGITALISATION**

Across the EU-27, France ranks in the lower half for quality of public services(29) with 42 % of citizens of surveyed citizens rating them positively. However, France ranks in the top-half for the indicator on the ease of doing business(30). Regarding quality standards in public service delivery, the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the European Foundation Quality Management (EFQM) tools remain limited at the national level.

The interministerial Directorate of Public Transformation (DITP) is in charge of digitalising the public administration. The implementation is led by the DINSIC (the Inter-Ministerial Directorate for Digital Affairs and State Information and Communication System) who is in charge of piloting the transformation of the public administration information systems.

The website “Vox usagers” enables individuals to share their experiences of using public services with the aim to improve them. Indicators measuring performance and quality of service will be used as of 2020 to monitor the progress of this approach. The objective set by the government is that all 54 public services publish their indicators by December 2020(34).

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(23) World Bank, WGI, op. cit.
(24) European Commission eGovernment Benchmark
(25) Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index
(26) European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State-Building (ERCAST)
(27) European Commission, Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)
(28) Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators
(29) European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer 92, op. cit., 39 % rated ‘good’, 3 % ‘very good’
(30) World Bank, Ease of Doing Business Report
(31) Référentiel Marianne, 2016
(32) European Commission, DESI, op. cit.
(33) European Commission, DESI, op. cit.
(34) Gouvernement.fr, Comment connaître la qualité des services publics ?