

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S COMPACT BRINGING INNOVATION TO EU PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

The ComPact, a comprehensive initiative by the European Commission to modernize and enhance cooperation between Member States' public administrations, proposes 25 actions under three pillars – the public administration skills agenda, capacity for Europe's digital decade, and capacity to lead the green transition – to support administrative modernization, capacity building and effective use of EU funds. This initiative responds to challenges such as technological change, demographic shifts and climate adaptation, and promotes seamless public service delivery and sustainable practices across the EU.

COMPACT//PA PRACTICE MODERNIZATION//DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION//GREEN TRANSITION//PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS



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The communication “Enhancing the European Administrative Space,” also known as “ComPact,”¹ was adopted by the European Commission on October 25, 2023. It is innovative in that, for the first time, the Commission proposes a comprehensive set of actions in support of administrative modernization and cooperation in and between Member States at all levels (national, regional and local). The aim is to learn, improve, and make effective use of European funds, such as those provided by the Cohesion Policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

The ComPact crowns the natural evolution of an itinerary that began about twenty years ago, defining a “twofold paradigmatic shift [that]

¹ Commission Public Administration Act.

occurred in the governance of the European Union (EU) as regards the reform of public administration in the Member States and across the European administrative system (...)” (Ongaro, 2024). It follows on seamlessly from the Staff Working Document (European Commission, 2021), the first structured paper on Public Administration and Governance (PAG) that identified five critical challenges for public administrations in the EU: rapid technological change; demographic changes and skills shortages; increasing complexity of policy issues; green transition and climate adaptation; and multiplying needs to be covered by public finances. The document also outlined ways to support public administrations.

Following the adoption of the SWD, the Commission set up its first Expert Group on PAG (2021) to provide a platform for “dialogue between the European Commission and representatives of the Member States” on the subject. In accordance with its mandate, the Group accompanied the Commission’s deliberations on the ComPAct. The ComPAct is all the more relevant as it responds to calls from Member States, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and regional and local authorities to promote cooperation and capacity building. It also addresses citizens’ expectations for better and faster public administration and for greater cooperation among national administrations at EU level, as expressed in a recent Eurobarometer survey (2023). In the logical and chronological progression from SWD to Expert Group to ComPAct, the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders have had ample time and opportunity to exchange views on key issues, means of addressing them, and mutual expectations.

National PAs play an increasingly important role in the daily lives of citizens and businesses and the public sector is key to implementing many policy priorities, ranging from competitiveness and cohesion to the transition to a green, digital economy and respect for the rule of law. Beyond its socio-political importance, the public sector is also a major economic actor, representing 51.5%

of European GDP, generating an annual public procurement market of 670 billion euros, and employing around 21% of the EU workforce. At the same time, national administrations are under increasing pressure to manage crises and unprecedented change, such as the twin transitions to digital and green. These organizations face staff shortages, difficulties in attracting and retaining talent, and a lack of expertise in complex policy areas.

With the ComPAct, the Commission proposes 25 actions to provide a framework within which the Commission itself and Member States can operate and/or request technical assistance. These actions are grouped under three pillars: the public administration skills agenda, the capacity for Europe’s digital decade, and the capacity to lead the green transition. Each pillar includes tools, methodologies and peer support, and provides for the exchange of experience and best practices.

The first pillar, linked to the objectives of the European Year of Skills, encompasses most of the actions of the ComPAct and proposes a Public Administration Skills Agenda to support Member States in up-skilling and re-skilling civil servants. The first recommendation is to transform the Public Administration Cooperation Exchange project (PACE) – launched in 2023 to facilitate the exchange of civil servants among countries – into a permanent program and to develop a passport of core competencies, including leadership and digital skills. The second recommendation, *on cooperation for training and capacity building*, proposes three main actions: the creation of a Network of Centers of Excellence to provide thematic training for civil servants across the EU; the establishment of an EU Public Administration Leadership Program focused on senior managers in Member States’ public administrations; and the creation of a public administration section on the already existing EU Academy platform with dedicated training courses and programs.

The third recommendation, *cooperation for administrative capacity at regional and local level*, proposes to increase the opportunities for regional

and local entities to access the technical assistance provided by the Commission, to organize an annual Local Public Administration Day in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities, and to conduct more in-depth research on the limitations and opportunities of the administrative capacity of regional and local administrations. Such research would include targeted studies and surveys to inform, *inter alia*, future editions of the Cohesion Report.

Finally, to *reinforce the human resource management tools in public administration*, a Passport of Core Competences applicable to jobs and roles in public administration, including leadership skills, is envisaged. Other initiatives include supporting Member States in modernizing their HR policies; updating and extending the Quality of Public Administration Toolbox to guide the modernization of PAs; developing methodologies for relevant PA indicators; conducting EU-wide studies on

relevant issues such as the attractiveness of public administration, the impact of demographic changes, and the future of jobs in public administration; and finally, promoting a wide range of data and information on a Public Administration Portal capturing the status and performance of public administrations across the EU.

The second pillar of the ComPact focuses on the Digital Decade guidelines to advance the target of 100% online access to key public services, which includes facilitating data management and digitizing administrative processes. To achieve this pillar, organizations must first and foremost work towards a future-proof digital public administration. The Commission will support PAs to implement digital and data-related legislation and increase their readiness to integrate AI technologies into their operations in a safe and trustworthy way, with a view to supervising AI technologies and designing and implementing



public policies. The Commission will also promote the sustainable and effective use of emerging technologies by PAs. The second block of activities under this the pillar will develop frameworks, guidelines, and tools for digital transformation. Specifically, this involves expediting the delivery of fully accessible online administrative services by using the Single Digital Gateway; developing tools for enhanced interoperability and seamless service delivery; publishing an overview of funding opportunities and synergies for the digital transformation of public administrations; and supporting the federation of cloud capabilities across PAs to foster their technological base and improve their delivery of public services.

The third pillar of the ComPAct, Capacity to Lead the Green Transition, focuses on encouraging Member States to implement the EU's common green agenda. This includes tools and methods for tracking carbon footprints, green budgeting and green procurement. The first objective of this pillar is to advance the implementation of the green transition. Support will be provided to update Member States' national Climate Adaptation Strategies and Plans, focusing on the implementation of the "do no significant harm" principle, including the adoption of climate proofing and other environmental guidelines. Member States will be encouraged to develop capacity to promote climate risk assessment and prevention tools and methods, and to plan, design and implement ecosystem restoration measures and nature-based solutions. The Environmental Implementation Review is recommended to identify the root causes of ineffective implementation of environmental legislation and policies by Member States with a view to designing measures to improve environmental governance.

The second objective of the pillar is to ensure that administrations "walk the talk" and take responsibility for their own greening. This will be achieved by working together to develop further guidance on the use of the EU's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), to step up the reduction of the environmental footprint of

organizations and to help them adopt the scheme. Secondly, the Commission will promote the use of methodologies to assess the carbon footprint of organizations and facilitate the exchange of good practice on ecological transition. Lastly, it will open up access to technical assistance and guidance on decarbonizing and improving the overall sustainability of buildings and efficient heating in PAs, particularly at the local level. Last but not least, the ComPAct can also guide the EU enlargement countries in building stronger PAs and in linking the external and internal dimensions of the communication file, notably by proposing standards for public administrations inspired by the SIGMA principles for PA, developed jointly with the Commission and used in the accession process and in the dialogue with neighboring countries.

Through the ComPAct, the Commission is putting in place a "Europe that Supports." In particular, beyond setting objectives and proposing legislation and funds, the Commission is helping Member States to identify the means and develop the administrative capacity to achieve shared EU objectives.



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