Assessment and recommendations

This Review covers the following five key public governance themes identified as priorities by the government of the Slovak Republic:

- improving centre-of-government (CoG) capacity to steer and lead policy development and implementation

- strengthening analytical and evaluation capacity for better policy making

- strengthening the capability of the state civil service to steer and lead policy

- scaling up digital government

- enhancing transparency and integrity across the public administration.

Two overarching themes run through these five priority areas. The first is the need for more effective whole-of-government co-ordination of strategy-setting and implementation efforts, led by the centre of government. A key sub-theme is the need for greater collaboration and co-operation between the key components of the Slovak CoG: the Government Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior.

- This requirement applies to basic efforts relating to advising the political leadership on the articulation of its Manifesto, to translating the Manifesto effectively into multi-year and annual outcomes-based government programmes focused on a small number of high-level, policy objectives to be implemented by line ministries in a way that encourages working across institutional silos to achieve integrated policy outcomes for people and businesses effectively and efficiently.

- This theme relates to the management of the Slovak Republic's interests at the EU level: it will be important to ensure that the mandate boundaries between the Government Office and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs with respect to managing relations with the EU are clearly defined. At a minimum, the Government Office's responsibility for managing the transposition of EU legislation into national law, and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs' mandate of advancing the Slovak Republic's national interests in Brussels before, during and after the EU decision-making process, implies that these two CoG institutions need to work closely together and co-ordinate their activities *vis-à-vis* line ministries effectively on an ongoing basis.

- This theme finds echo in the Review's argument that the management and governance of the generation of, demand for and effective integration of evidence into the policy-making and implementation process could be enhanced: CoG-led co-ordination of information generation across line ministries is needed to ensure that policy development in pursuit of the integrated outcomes identified in the Manifesto takes into full account all of the available evidence. This applies to

managing regulatory impact assessment (RIA) effectively both *ex ante* and *ex post* decision making, it applies to generating results from strategic foresight and horizon scanning from both private and public sector sources, to embed within the medium-term Manifesto and government programme the emerging risks and policy challenges that reflect a longer term planning horizon. It also applies to developing and implementing effectively a robust whole-of-government monitoring and evaluation framework complete with feedback loops which ensure that performance assessment results fully inform successive generations of policy development and decision making.

- This theme also reflects this Review's proposition that the governance of the Slovak Republic's approach to strategic human resources management, its transparency and integrity frameworks and its strategies for digital governance and open data could be strengthened. Greater CoG-led whole-of-government co-ordination is required to ensure common standards in strategic human resources management and the uniform implementation of the new Civil Service Act to ensure the uniform adoption of common codes of conduct and robust conflict of interest guidelines, and the effective training of civil servants in this area, and to lead a vision-based implementation of digital governance and open data strategies uniformly across the Slovak public administration.

The second theme relates to the use of evidence itself. All five of the public administration reform areas assessed highlight the need to engage in more effective generation of evidence on which to take decisions, whether in strategy setting, monitoring the performance of policy implementation, measuring spending results against policy outcomes, strategic human resources management, digital governance strategies or in fighting corruption. While certain key government actors appear to generate strategically useful information for policy development purposes, especially the Ministry of Finance's Institute for Financial Policy, disparities in evidence-generation capacity across the government are pronounced. Demand for policy relevant evidence appears low, which affects the quality of policy design and strategic decision making in all five of the areas under review.

These issues need to be addressed if the government of the Slovak Republic is to enhance the strategic agility of the state over the medium term. Many good practices already exist in these areas, which augurs well for the pursuit of the government's public administration reform agenda over the period through 2020.

Improving centre-of-government capacity to steer and lead policy development and implementation

Strengthen centre-of-government institutions and government co-ordination

The Slovak Republic applies a narrow definition to its centre of government (CoG), listing only the Government Office as its CoG institution in its responses to the questionnaire carried out for this review. In practice, however, its Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs fulfil important transversal, whole-of-government functions and could therefore also be regarded as CoG institutions. This state of affairs is, in fact, similar to the institutional arrangements that characterise the CoG across most, if not all, OECD countries. Thus, in any CoG consisting of more than one institution, it becomes crucial to ensure effective

communication and co-ordination between these institutions and collectively with line ministries.

Recognition by the government of the Slovak Republic that its CoG is polycentric could have significant implications for the way in which the Government Office interacts with the other CoG institutions, as a more robust, integrated working relationship between CoG components can improve coherence between national strategy development, national budget setting and strategic workforce planning for the government as a whole. This, in turn, helps the government to monitor and evaluate its strategic policy performance effectively, so that it can assess its performance against the achievement of results and the improvement of outcomes. Reporting to the public regularly on this performance can help enhance government transparency and accountability while reducing overlap and duplication in roles and responsibilities among CoG institutions and between the CoG and line ministries, and ultimately improve public trust in the government and its institutions.

While good working relations between the four Slovak CoG institutions appear to be the norm, their interaction seems to lack institutionalisation and a strategic dimension. It appears there is no common understanding or willingness to engage collectively in steering the design and implementation of the government's strategic policy agenda. The Government Office – and overall government co-ordination – could benefit from involving the other institutions more closely. It would be particularly relevant to have the Ministry of Finance actively contribute to whole-of-government steering, as it not only controls the fiscal framework but also appears to be leading at this juncture improvements to the government's analytical capacity.

Given the importance of sustaining productive working relations between the various components of the Slovak CoG to design, implement and monitor the performance of a national strategy that is properly resourced and based on evidence generated by properly qualified and trained civil servants, the government could consider the following recommendations.

Intra-governmental co-ordination and co-operation could be heightened in the Slovak public administration. The CoG institutions need to work more closely together on an ongoing basis in order to set and steer strategy effectively, co-ordinate the contribution of line ministries to developing and implementing this strategy, and achieve a whole-of-government approach to policy making and implementation. Most crucially, the Government Office and the Ministry of Finance could be better aligned to sustain coherence between the national strategy and the national fiscal framework, and the Ministry of Finance integrated more deliberately into whole-of-government decision making as a key institutional component of the centre of government.

Strengthening the analytical capacity in the Government Office could enhance its ability to engage effectively with the other CoG institutions and line ministries in setting, implementing and evaluating the performance of national strategy. Enabling line ministries to contribute effectively to whole-of-government strategy setting and implementation by breaking down institutional barriers to cross-sector collaboration could significantly enhance the government's ability to achieve multi-dimensional outcomes for citizens and businesses. There are good examples of co-ordination in the Slovak Republic which could be replicated, such as the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs' co-ordination on EU matters or the Government Office's own co-ordination of EU funds. Yet here as well the mandate boundaries between the Government Offices' responsibilities for transposing EU legislation into national law and the Ministry of

Foreign and European Affairs' responsibility for advancing the Slovak Republic's interests in Brussels could be clarified so as to eliminate the potential for overlap and duplication and be communicated throughout the public administration; co-ordination between these two CoG institutions on EU matters as they work with line ministries could be strengthened.

Strengthening the capacity in the Government Office so that it can take a more systematic and active approach to co-ordinating whole-of-government policy making, does not imply that the Government Office should evolve into some sort of overbearing, centralised "task-master" bent on concentrating power whose mandate would be to "dictate" policy and actions to the rest of the government. This also does not imply that line ministry competencies or line ministry enabling legislation be modified in any way. On the contrary, increasing the competencies and capabilities of the Government Office will result in better government co-ordination if the Government Office manages to become a valued partner and interlocutor for the other CoG institutions as well as for line ministries. To achieve this, it will be crucial to communicate the necessity for reform and to invest in building and sustaining a government-wide culture of co-operation and collaboration both within the government's CoG institutions – starting with the Government Office – and in line ministries.

Recommendations

- Define the Slovak Republic's centre of government as polycentric, in recognition of the fact that in addition to the Government Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior also fulfil important transversal functions. This definition could be communicated broadly across the public administration to ensure that the CoG as a polycentric driver of whole-of-government strategy is well understood in line ministries and agencies across the system – and more generally by citizens and business.

- Strengthen and reinforce co-operation and co-ordination among the CoG institutions and between the CoG institutions and the public administration as a whole. Crucially, this could contribute to overcoming the existing silo-based approach to government while ensuring that policy and spending are better linked and potential overlap and duplication reduced, thus improving the government's capacity to assess spending performance against the achievement of strategic policy outcomes. This could also ensure that a strengthened Government Office is not perceived by other government bodies as an adversary but as a true partner.

- Ensure that the mandate boundaries between the Government Office and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs with respect to managing relations with the EU are clear so as to eliminate the potential for overlap and duplication and are well communicated across the public administration; at a minimum, the Government Office's responsibility for managing the transposition of EU legislation into national law, and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs' mandate of advancing the Slovak Republic's national interests in Brussels before, during and after the EU decision-making process, implies that these two CoG institutions need to work closely together and co-ordinate their activities *vis-à-vis* line ministries effectively on an ongoing basis.

- Strengthen the Government Office's co-ordination capacity by explicitly confirming its mandate and leadership role in this area, allowing it to lead whole-of-government strategy and priority policy-setting and steering exercises effectively. Enabling the

Strengthen strategic planning processes and governance

Clearly, the Slovak Republic's Government Office constitutes the main CoG institution. As defined by the Statute of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, the Government Office's main responsibilities include checking the performance of tasks in the performance of the state administration and of those resulting from government resolutions, checking action taken on petitions and complaints, co-ordinating the performance of tasks for the development of the information society, and co-ordinating the implementation of policies of the European Communities and the European Union.[1]

The Government Office fulfils a number of key CoG functions:

- It works with line ministries to prepare the Government Manifesto. It co-ordinates activities relating to the development of state policy. It develops analytical, strategic and operational documents in all areas of the Slovak Republic's development and participates in the development and implementation of concept and strategic documents stemming from the Government Manifesto. It co-ordinates with ministries and other agencies in meeting the goals of the Manifesto. In so doing, it monitors the development of the government's draft work plans that aim to implement the Manifesto, providing expert and administrative services in strategy planning and steering, in economic and social policy and in matters relating to legislation.

- The Government Office acts as the government's main co-ordinating body on the transposition of EU legislation (while the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs acts to advance the Slovak Republic's interests in Brussels and internationally), providing expert consultation and co-ordination relating mostly to the process of developing the Slovak Republic's positions in various stages of the decision-making process; it evaluates draft EU legislation and the EU's strategic, conceptual and programme documents. It leads the process of transposing EU directives into national law and functions as a national co-ordinator for the EU 2020 strategy.

- It has the primary responsibility for preparing Cabinet meetings, for communicating government messages to the public and to other parts of the public administration, and for monitoring the implementation of government policy.

- It is responsible for the government's human resources management strategy in the civil service and for designing and implementing civil service reform.

The Review finds, however, that the Government Office as the lead CoG institution could improve its capacity to pursue a more strategic and proactive approach to implementing the Government Manifesto and to monitoring its performance. In addition, the centre of government could work more effectively to prepare the annual work programmes to implement the Manifesto in co-operation with line ministries. Ensuring that this leadership responsibility is effectively shared between line ministries and the CoG by enhancing the partnership between the two could not only foster a whole-of-government approach but also allow for the definition and adjudication of clearer whole-of-government strategic priorities. Line ministries obviously need to be closely involved in this process so that the government's work plan reflects sector-based issues and priorities, and so that line ministries can effectively translate the government's work programme into individual institutional work plans.

Both the government-wide work programme as well as the individual work plans need to be based on more robust, outcomes-based performance information and informed by the results of strategic foresight. These could be tasks for the emerging analytical centres, potentially also for an analytical centre of the Government Office, which could also engage in co-ordinating the strategic foresight efforts of line ministry analytical centres and integrating the results of this activity coherently into medium-term, whole-of-government strategy (see below and Chapter 2).

It will be important to align budgetary allocations more strategically with government priorities. In line with the 2015 OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Budgetary Governance*, the Slovak government could task the Government Office and the Ministry of Finance to ensure that strategic priorities are sufficiently financed in the national budget.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the Government Office's role with regard to strategic planning and the work programme. While the Government Office is in charge of planning and the work programme, many tasks are *de facto* being carried out by the line ministries. A more proactive Government Office could continue to gather inputs from line ministries but could set the work programme according to whole-of-government priorities.

- Consider framing the Government Manifesto around a small number of key, overarching strategic priorities under which the "tasks" could be organised. Such a narrative can be both a powerful communication tool and a way to evaluate progress at the end of a political term.

- Develop the annual work programmes with a clear, strategic hierarchy of goals in mind. Not all tasks in a government work programme are of equal importance. Stating the priorities creates clarity about the intentions of the government and contributes to focusing efforts on, and allocating human and financial resources to, the most important priority tasks.

> ### Recommendations (*continued*)
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> - Make explicit how a specific measure in the work programme is supposed to achieve the strategic priorities identified in the Government Manifesto. The Government Manifesto could thus play an important role after its adoption. Furthermore, policy makers would need to convince the centre of government that the proposed measure indeed contributes to the implementation of the whole-of-government strategy.
>
> - Create linkages between strategic planning and budgeting, thus strengthening the means by which the government can achieve its policy agenda through the judicious allocation of human and financial resources. This can only be achieved through close co-operation between the Government Office and the Ministry of Finance.
>
> - Use strategic foresight and horizon-scanning to inform government strategies and work programmes. Capacity could be vested in an analytical centre at the Government Office (see immediately below), working in close co-operation with the other analytical centres (see Chapter 2).
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> - Consider establishing an analytical unit in the Government Office, focusing on whole-of-government strategy as well as the work programme. Such a unit could be staffed partly by Government Office and Ministry of Finance experts. It is important to stress that such an analytical unit would need to be built up slowly and carefully. It could first manage the translation of the Government Manifesto into the annual work programmes. At a later stage, it could look at strategic foresight.

Enhance implementation, evaluation and reporting

The principal planning document of the Slovak Republic, the Government Manifesto, is currently not being closely monitored against the achievement of strategic outcomes as it is being implemented by the government. The Government Office could therefore be tasked to monitor and report on progress toward achieving specific strategic policy outcomes on a regular basis to the political leadership, parliament and the general public. This could enable the government to adjust policies and measures in the case of unsatisfactory performance. A similar monitoring system, on a more detailed basis, could be established for the annual work programmes, building on the work the Ministry of Finance's Institute for Financial Policy (IFP, see below) has been pursuing in developing sets of indicators to monitor progress in different areas.[2] For example, to monitor and evaluate progress in the education system, the IFP has proposed a detailed set of indicators as a supporting mechanism to measure the impact of budgetary expenditures in education.[3] It would appear, however, that these indicators are not yet used extensively by policy makers (hence the recommendation on this matter below). Lessons learnt could be communicated and feed into the development of future Government Manifestos and annual work programmes.

In order to strengthen the Government Office's monitoring capacities, it could be beneficial to establish a dedicated monitoring unit. This unit would build on and support the existing practice of implementation days by measuring progress on a continuous basis. It would be important not to overload such a unit but rather to have it focus on a limited number of key cross-governmental priorities. The unit's scope could be expanded at a later stage, if needed.

> **Recommendations**
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> - Strengthen whole-of-government performance monitoring and assessment capacity. For the centre of government, in particular the Government Office and the Ministry of Finance, to exercise its mandate in strategy setting and implementation, it needs reliable outcomes-based performance information to be able to determine whether policies are working, and if they are not, change course so that they do end up achieving the results they were designed and adopted to achieve. High-quality, comparable indicators could be developed to monitor progress and evaluate the impact of government policies and measures against expected results for citizens and businesses. The Government Office could thus reinforce its existing monitoring unit (or create a new one within the analytical unit, see above), mandating it to track policy implementation against the achievement of strategic outcomes for citizens and businesses, in addition to assessing implementation against annual outputs, as it does now. This unit could be mandated to act as the government's central co-ordination and communications hub; in so doing, it could monitor on an ongoing basis progress being made on the small number of key government-wide priorities identified in the Manifesto using the performance monitoring evidence it generates, while drawing upon performance data provided by the analytical centres. The data generated by such a monitoring unit could provide the political leadership with real-time information on the government's performance and enable it to address potential difficulties earlier and more effectively.
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> - Mandate the Government Office to provide parliament and the general public with annual reports on the implementation of the Government Manifesto. These reports could embed analytical units' quantitative and qualitative outcomes-based performance analysis within a whole-of-government policy narrative. Debates on these reports, in turn, could increase citizens' engagement with the Government Manifesto and would represent a means to hold the government publicly accountable.

Strengthening analytical and evaluation capacity for better policy making

The use of robust evidence and sound evidence-based analysis in government decision making with respect to policies, legislation and spending appears to be limited when compared to other OECD countries. In the Slovak Republic, decisions tend to be based on political priorities and the relative strength of individual ministers rather than on rational analysis of costs and benefits and potential outcomes. There are attempts to improve the situation; however, the progress remains slow especially due to the lack of demand on the side of the decision makers. The procedures for stakeholder engagement in policy- and regulation-making in the Slovak Republic are well-established; however, many consultations take place solely on an informal basis or too late in the processes when it is rather difficult to change the policy or regulation substantively.

Use analytical capacity more deliberately in the Slovak administration

Relatively unusual among OECD countries is the lack of demand on the part of the Slovak Republic's CoG for evidence and analysis from line ministries. This is also connected to the issue of insufficient policy co-ordination from the CoG where performance of government policies and/or spending programmes does not appear to be measured and evaluated, be it *ex ante* or *ex post* decisions. Senior decision makers do not seems to be aware of the ways in which analytical support could help them in their daily work and there is a tendency to consider formal obligations to support government decisions with evidence and analysis as additional administrative burden.

The Slovak Republic needs to strengthen analytical capacities in line ministries. Conditions could be created to attract skilled personnel with the necessary analytical skills. At the same time, clear procedures could be established at each line ministry on how to use these analytical capacities to improve the decision-making process. Line ministry units could benefit from more co-ordination, and sharing of recruitment, training, etc. Co-ordination from the centre of government could be strengthened for using the evidence and sharing it across the administration.

Probably the most visible example of good practice is the Institute for Financial Policy (IFP), which operates within the portfolio of the Ministry of Finance. Similar analytical units exist or are being set up as part of several other ministries, namely the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Public Works. However, these analytical units are much smaller in scale and in many cases, their influence on the decision-making process of their ministry is rather limited. The Government Office does not yet have any formally established analytical unit.

Recommendations

- Consider strengthening analytical capacity in key ministries. Create conditions to attract and keep personnel with the necessary analytical skills. Use the current EU-funded project to raise awareness in line ministries on the need to strengthen analytical capacities.

- Increase the demand for analysis and evidence to support government decisions by establishing formal procedures for *ex ante* and *ex post* assessment of government policies, programmes and regulations. Clear procedures could be established government-wide and at each line ministry on how to use the analytical capacities to improve the decision-making process.

Use performance information and strategic foresight more systematically

Quantitative information on the performance of policies, programmes and regulations appears to be used sporadically. Such performance indicators are rarely established up front – at the stage when a policy, spending programme or law are being adopted by the government. This makes it impossible to assess whether these policies, programmes or regulations are achieving their goals. *Ex post* evaluation could be conducted more often to find out whether there is a need to change, abolish and/or replace them with more effective ones.

The results of strategic foresight and long-term horizon scanning tend not to be used to inform the preparation of the Government Manifesto, with the exception of macroeconomic short- and medium-term forecasts prepared by the IFP. No other foresight activities are conducted by other institutions. In the future, analytical units could provide the government with results from strategic foresight activity, conducted both in-house and by the private sector. This work could be co-ordinated by an analytical unit within the centre of government – preferably within the Government Office (see the recommendation to this effect above). This co-ordination could help build both horizontal and vertical coherence in the development and implementation of the government's agenda.

> **Recommendations**
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> - Make the use of performance indicators more widespread when adopting policies, programmes or regulations. Adopt a government-wide policy on *ex post* evaluation of these policies/programmes/regulations. When drafting new regulations, make it obligatory to set the goals the given regulation should achieve in quantitative terms, wherever possible. The drafting institution should also set a timeframe during which the regulation's performance has to be reviewed (mandatory reviews policy).
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> - Use the analytical units to provide strategic foresight to the government. While ministerial analytical units could conduct horizon scanning as well as take into account results of private sector-led foresight activity in their sector, this activity could be co-ordinated from the CoG to provide a synthesis of these sector-specific scans and to maximise the impacts of foresight activities on whole-of-government strategy setting and implementation, notably with respect to designing and implementing the political Manifesto and its corresponding government-wide and ministry-specific programmes of work.

Improve regulatory impact assessment and consultation processes

While the obligation to conduct regulatory impact assessment (RIA) has been in place since 2008 in the Slovak Republic, it does not seem to be complied with as a general rule. Recent changes aimed at improving the RIA system are an important step forward. The creation of a semi-independent advisory body overseeing the quality of impact assessments would put more pressure on line ministries to take RIA more seriously. At the same time, draft legislation should be the subject of consultations with external stakeholders, especially business and also civil society organisations, where relevant, early in the process. On the other hand, the fact that budgetary, economic, social and environmental impacts are assessed in an isolated manner and that the quality of such analyses are evaluated by four different institutions (though members of the same commission) might not contribute to an integrated view on the assessment of the potential impacts of draft regulation.

As in the case of RIA, the necessary formal obligations to engage stakeholders are partially in place and should be strengthened by implementing the new RIA methodology. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the RIA process. What lacks is enforcement, quality oversight and sufficient demand from the government for engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. Therefore, stakeholders are insufficiently consulted, especially in the early stages of the process of developing policies and/or regulations. The government's online consultation portal is not used to the optimal extent by external stakeholders due to low user-friendliness and lack of awareness of its existence on the part of the public.

> **Recommendations**
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> - Implement the approved changes in the RIA process without further delay. Ensure full compliance, including the obligation to always assess several alternatives (including the "do nothing" option and non-regulatory alternatives, where appropriate). Evaluate the system after two years to assess whether it is working in an efficient manner and adopt changes if necessary.
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> - Adopt a methodology for early-stage consultations. Enforce the obligation to consult all legislative proposals with all relevant stakeholders as part of RIA. Train civil servants in

> **Recommendations** *(continued)*
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> consultation techniques.
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> - Make the new consultation portal more user-friendly and inform the general public better on the functionalities of the portal as well as on the possibilities to engage in the government's decision-making process.

Strengthening the capability of the state civil service to steer and lead policy

Strengthening the capability of the state civil service in the Slovak Republic is a crucial factor in ensuring an efficient and effective public sector that can promote strong, sustainable and inclusive growth. The performance of the public service depends on the capacity of its civil servants, as well as stability and continuity in public service staffing. Good human resources management (HRM) contributes significantly to the efficiency of government, its capacity to deliver public services effectively and the agility required to implement reforms in all areas of government.

The Slovak government has recently committed to assessing and improving HRM in the civil service. Work already in progress to support these aims includes the draft of a new Civil Service Act and inter-ministry collaboration to develop and finalise an HRM strategy for 2015-20. These efforts are positive first steps along the path to HRM reform in the Slovak civil service. It is important to recognise that developing and implementing reforms to HRM is a long-term project which requires ample time and continued commitment. OECD experience demonstrates that developing and embedding strategic HRM requires an incremental approach to reform while maintaining impetus and political commitment. These recent efforts set a solid foundation and pave the way for future implementation and improvements to HRM in the Slovak civil service.

Strengthen strategic workforce planning and management

The Slovak government has made positive first steps toward improving the quality of data on the public workforce, which in turn will ensure that there is accurate information on the level, allocation and trends in public employment. The analysis carried out by the Government Office in the context of the HRM strategy has started to build a basic overview of the structure and quantification of civil servants and efforts to establish civil service registers will contribute to better planning of the workforce. These efforts will in time facilitate improved control of public employment costs and provide more reliable data for decision makers to determine how best to manage the workforce to deliver public services. A more standardised approach to defining civil service positions across ministries, as proposed in the HRM Strategy to 2020, would facilitate the collection of workforce data. The fact that a number of ministries have their own human resource information systems (HRIS) is likely to complicate the establishment of a centralised workforce information system to the extent that data may not be in a standard format. Investing in ministry-specific HRIS does not represent the most effective use of resources and a more co-ordinated approach is desirable.

The capacity and skills of service offices could be strengthened to enable them to develop workforce planning. An important contribution that the Government Office could make to support the development of workforce planning capabilities would be to develop tools and frameworks which organisations could use and to organise training in workforce planning. It would also be important to communicate, incentivise and

demonstrate the benefits of strategic workforce planning and management to staff in service offices. Pilot projects to highlight benefits could be a useful starting point, particularly by demonstrating how this can enable capacity-building in areas such as analysis and digital government. In addition, ministries and the Government Office could consider co-operating when building the analytical capacities necessary for existing analytical units, or for new units being developed in some ministries.

Competency management and the use of common job profiles are tools which could help the Slovak government to advance the strategic orientation and integration of key HRM areas, including workforce planning, recruitment and selection, mobility, and training and development. Moving away from the current practice of traditional job descriptions and adopting a competency-based management framework could help the Slovak central government reinstate the principle of merit in recruitment and selection arrangements while also standardising the structure of job descriptions across ministries, making it easier to promote mobility. A competency-based management framework could also ensure a more strategic approach to career and skills development in the Slovak government, contributing to the development of human capital along the lines already highlighted in the HRM Strategy to 2020.

Recommendations

- Collect data on the public workforce to use as a foundation for strategic workforce planning and management. The Slovak government should consider prioritising the collection of quality data on the public workforce as a basis for strategic HR planning and management. A central database of workforce statistics would be a first essential step to improve workforce planning in order to better align the capacity of the public service with organisational and service demands.

- Start to develop strategic workforce planning and management. In parallel with building up the collection of workforce data, it is necessary to build skills and capacity in the ministries' service offices to use this data effectively. The necessary skills will need to be developed through targeted training programmes and it is likely that skilled HR personnel will also need to be recruited. Rather than trying to get all ministries at the same level simultaneously, a more promising approach may be to start with pilot projects in ministries that are better prepared to take this on.

- Build on competency-based management and job profiling. The Slovak government could move towards more strategic HRM by building tools such as competency management and job profiling. The roadmap for implementing competency management (see Box 3.6) would be a good starting point. Developing common job profiles for public service functions and incorporating a common competency framework could be the first step. This would help improve recruitment and selection methods and support a merit-based recruitment process. A common competency framework could eventually be integrated into planning, career management and skills development practices.

Focus on building a professional, educated and stable workforce through fair, rules-based and transparent management practices

The Slovak government's focus on reinstituting the principle of merit in recruitment and selection arrangements is a welcome step. The key requirements for merit-based recruitment are that the selection criteria are objective and relevant to the work the person is being recruited to do; that the selection process is transparent, adequately documented

and open to audit; and that the recruitment process is open to competition. Recruitment and promotion decisions could be adopted collectively through a collegial body, not entrusted to a person individually, regardless of his/her rank in the hierarchy. A strategic oversight body in relation to recruitment and merit protection, as envisaged in reform plans, could be an important contribution to upholding merit.

The compensation system in the Slovak civil service is not functioning in a transparent, merit-based or logical manner. The Slovak government needs to strengthen the merit principle by ensuring that employees' compensation is based on the nature of their work and the competencies they bring to it and not so strongly on seniority or length of service factors. The most important factors for determining base salary in OECD countries are job content, experience and qualifications. Performance-related pay is also common among OECD countries (tied to performance appraisals); however, it often constitutes a smaller portion of an employee's annual basic salary than in the current case of the Slovak public administration, and is sometimes only applied to certain groups of employees, generally senior staff.

Establishing a predictable career path within the Slovak civil service and making promotion and tenure less dependent on discretionary managerial decisions could increase the attractiveness of the civil service and thereby contribute to improving the overall quality of staff. Ensuring recruitment processes are not overly cumbersome for applicants could also increase the attractiveness of the civil service for suitable candidates. High turnover, whether for political reasons or due to better salary and career prospects in the private sector, creates instability in staffing that discourages ministries from trying to plan their workforce and undermines attempts to develop a training strategy and build up core skills. Stability at management level and ensuring a certain level of tenure and employment guarantees for civil servants is essential for the overall effective functioning of government, and for the successful implementation of the PAR agenda, as recognised in the HRM Strategy to 2020.

Recommendations

- Reinstate the principle of merit in recruitment and selection arrangements by ensuring common standards and oversight. The government could work to achieve standard methods and procedures for recruitment and selection across the administration, and ensure employment decisions are based on merit. This could be done by allowing the proposed Civil Service Council to play a strategic oversight role, to monitor and ensure merit in the staffing of the public service (similar to a public service commission in many OECD countries). The council could focus on setting principles and guidelines, carrying out audits of recruitment and investigating suspected breaches of merit.

- Clarify the compensation system and ensure it is based on merit and transparency. The Slovak government could consider active approaches to clarifying the political-administrative interface, and to managing and developing the competencies of senior leaders in the civil service. It is recommended to make a clear distinction between political appointees and professional senior civil servants, and to start managing and training senior managers in order to build competencies specific to this group.

- Professionalise the civil service through ensuring appropriate tenure arrangements. Reasonable tenure arrangements for civil servants are essential to stability, continuity and ensuring a professional civil service. The Slovak central government could consider stabilising the civil service by managing civil servants' careers through fair, rule-based

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Recommendations *(continued)*

and transparent practices, and by ensuring a reasonable degree of tenure and employment guarantees for them. The Slovak government could consider widely communicating the benefits of a stable and professional workforce. This could be done, for example, by highlighting the successful management practices of the Institute for Financial Policy in this regard.

Press on with improvements to institutional arrangements for human resources management

Central frameworks can guide strategic HRM and enable a whole-of-government approach to managing the workforce, while delegated HRM responsibilities for ministries need to be underpinned by appropriate accountability mechanisms. The Slovak government could adopt an incremental approach to strengthening central HRM responsibilities as the Government Office builds its capacity to take on such functions. The current activities and collaboration in the joint development of the new draft Civil Service Act and the HRM strategy show co-operation with regard to HRM is possible, and that the Government Office can lead these efforts. Ensuring institutional capacity and adequate resourcing in the Government Office to co-ordinate and oversee the implementation of the reforms, are key factors that will need to be balanced against the current model of strongly independent line ministries.

The government's HRM reform agenda will require strong leadership at the political and senior management levels if it is to be successful. It may be necessary to consider building shared responsibility for HRM reforms across CoG institutions, namely between the Government Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior – each operating in their appropriate domain, but fully co-ordinated to achieve the common purpose of designing, implementing and monitoring the performance of a strategic HRM strategy. The Government Office is an appropriate location for central HRM responsibility; however, the Ministry of Finance could also play a role in driving HRM reforms and the efficient and effective use of the public workforce.

Recommendations

- Ensure adequate capacity, knowledge and resources in the Government Office to support ministries' service offices and make government-wide HRM reform happen. This will be essential to support the proposed reform initiatives and help ministries' service offices implement new working methods. As the proposed HRM reform envisions that the Government Office will play a strategic and co-ordinating role, set frameworks and standards, and lead the implementation of reforms, the Slovak government could consider building adequate human and financial resources, and a solid knowledge base, to enable the Government Office to execute these new competencies.

- Build professional networks across ministries' service offices and with the Government Office to share best practices and support new working methods. Ensuring two-way communication between the Government Office and service office staff – through information sharing and genuine consultation – will be important for the implementation of the proposed HRM reforms. It will also be important to develop a network of support among HRM professionals across government, as a forum for ministries to discuss and

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> **Recommendations** *(continued)*
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> share experience and best practice with each other.
>
> - Integrate change management strategies into the design of HRM reforms. Integrating change management strategies into the reform at an early stage will help to identify the concerns of key stakeholders and develop ways of addressing the issues and tensions that inevitably arise in the course of a reform. This includes communicating with and involving stakeholders, as well as anticipating possible difficulties and devising ways of building support for changes.

Increase performance management, accountability and leadership capacity

The Slovak government could benefit from enhancing its performance orientation and developing a foundation for performance management by linking the management of people with organisational goals and strategies and, ultimately, with the government's programme and objectives. The reimplementation of performance measures at the individual level provides a good opportunity to start linking these to organisational objectives and strategies. Linking employee effort to organisational output requires that each organisation clearly articulate its strategic objectives, which each sub-unit clearly articulates its own objectives in a way that contributes to the overall objectives of the organisation, and that each employee's work objectives contribute to the goals of his/her work unit. Overall, human resource management needs to be understood as supporting organisational performance.

While managers in the Slovak government enjoy a high degree of managerial flexibility, this could be counterbalanced by accountability for management practices and results so that managers will perceive a clear link between strategic HRM and the results they are expected to produce. This may warrant a reform strategy linked to using performance indicators and organisational performance management frameworks to drive and incentivise HRM. Finding the right balance between flexibility and control is particularly important in a public service which is still developing its core values and essential administrative foundations. The Slovak government could consider building monitoring mechanisms to determine where additional support may be needed. This should, however, be done in a way that is sensitive to the limited capacities of small HRM offices.

Management of the administrative-political interface is a critical part of the development of a professional civil service, yet the Slovak central government has yet to develop a common framework to manage the senior civil service. The government could make a clear distinction between political appointees and professional senior civil servants, and start managing and training senior managers in order to build competencies specific to this group along with a common value set that upholds its members' duty to serve a "single" government and pursue the "common purpose" of meeting the needs of citizens and businesses regardless of which portfolio or ministry employs them. Over time, this could lead to more effective collaboration across institutional silos by the senior ranks of the civil service in pursuit of common, whole-of-government strategic objectives, notably those identified in the Government Manifesto at the beginning of the government's mandate, and could thus contribute over time to breaking down barriers to cross-ministry collaboration at all levels of the civil service.

Recommendations

- Develop performance and accountability mechanisms to drive and ensure results. The Slovak government could consider developing an integrated performance management framework to drive public organisations to deliver on government-wide objectives. The government could consider developing performance appraisals based on objective setting, and tying individual objectives to organisational and whole-of-government priority goals. Furthermore, the Slovak government could develop management accountability structures to ensure delegation of HRM is met with capacity and accountability at the ministry level.

- Clarify the political-administrative interface and manage senior civil servants as a group serving a "single" government. The absence of a cohort of permanent, professional civil servants at senior or middle management levels undermines continuity in public service management and is bound to weaken impartiality as the boundary between political appointments and professional managers is unclear. The Slovak government could consider active approaches to clarifying the political-administrative interface, and to managing and developing the competencies of senior leaders in the civil service.

Scaling up digital government

Although the Slovak Republic has had in place an active programme of digitisation over the past decade, it has not met expectations. In some areas there has been measurable progress, particularly with regard to Internet connectivity and usage. However, when it comes to the online delivery of public services and citizen engagement, the Slovak Republic has lagged behind peer countries both within the EU and the OECD. And while there are initial indications that some of the Slovak Republic's investments from the last EU programming period are beginning to reach fruition, it is clear that this progress is not happening as quickly or robustly as would be desired, and in most cases the development of these new online services lack a user-centric approach.

Enhance digital governance and national strategies

Robust government-wide co-ordination of the digital government agenda framed by a strategic vision of the purpose and use of ICT in government can go far in reducing barriers to progress in realising fully the benefits of implementing digital government that can accrue to the government itself, to citizens and to businesses. The current approach appears to be characterised by ministries operating with a focus almost exclusively on meeting accountability requirements for accessing EU funds as opposed to driving towards a shared whole-of-government vision on why and how digital government ought to be implemented. Having had almost all strategic activity in this area explicitly tied to funding sources has led to muddled priorities where obtaining funding for digitisation has gone from being a means to an end to, in many cases, being the end itself. This short-term approach to digital government has led to challenges in being able to absorb these funds and neglect in building internal capacity in favour of outsourcing procurement to large private sector vendors. Lack of internal capacity has also manifested itself in a relatively weak focus on the data assets of the Slovakian government, both from the perspective of internal interoperability as well as the provision of open data as an economic and public asset to citizens, businesses and academia.

There is thus a clear need to build on the current steering mechanism for digital government initiatives in the Slovak Republic located in the Ministry of Finance. At issue is not so much "who is in charge" but the need to provide mechanisms for those involved in the digital agenda, both at an operational level within line ministries and from a direction-setting level within the centre of government, to learn from each other's experiences and build a common sense of ownership based on a government-wide consensus on the strategic results that government stakeholders should be achieving as they pursue their digital government implementation agenda.

Recommendations

- Broaden and deepen the Slovak Republic's whole-of-government vision for digital government and communicate it widely across the public administration. A good starting point could be the government's new National Conception of Public Administration Systems, a document outlining a strategy for digital government that aims to bring a new systematic and co-ordinated approach to addressing e-government. The Ministry of Finance could use this concept document as the basis for engaging key digital government stakeholders from across the government in a substantive dialogue on this vision, its desired outcomes, how to achieve them and how to measure success. Given the fragmented nature of the current digitisation initiatives underway in the Slovak government, there is a need to broaden and deepen the government's overarching vision for priorities in this area. As virtually all national strategies have been explicitly tied to funding sources, this has prevented a wider and more strategic discussion on the role that digital technology could and should play in helping to modernise and reform the Slovak government in the long term and on what is needed to achieve those changes using digital government tools.

- Establish a Chief Information Officer (CIO) or equivalent position and associated information-sharing mechanisms. This review points to the need to have a strong central focal point that can act as co-ordinator and facilitator for implementing a vision for digital government and its various components government wide. The position of CIO could build on the existing mandate and functions of the Director General of Information Society in the Ministry of Finance, strengthening it to cover all aspects of public sector digitisation. Given the current split of responsibilities, the CIO position, while located in the Ministry of Finance, could be structured to report jointly to the Government Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior. This would not necessarily require transferring any responsibilities from the existing ministries responsible for digital government activities; as is the case with the responsibilities of CIOs in other OECD countries, this "hub" role could focus on exercising levers related to leading and co-ordinating digital government strategy-setting and implementation across the government, and information-sharing both within the Slovak administration and with international partners.

- Strengthen the digital government co-ordination body's capacity to allow for regular exchange of information between officials responsible for digitisation initiatives and the management of ICT. The Ministry of Finance leads a committee through its Architectural Office of Public Administration that looks at ICT-enabled projects, focused on funding and project oversight government-wide related *inter alia* to the Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure. This co-ordination body could be led by the CIO and could more fully act as a forum to bring together those leading ICT-related work across the government on a regular basis to share lessons learnt both within the government and from other jurisdictions.

> **Recommendations** *(continued)*
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> - Strengthen capacity in line ministry digital government/IT departments to drive enhanced performance in digital service design and delivery. Limited capacity and weak performance in the IT departments of individual institutions in the Slovak public administration have been defined as a major challenge to the successful development and implementation of government-wide digital government strategies and to successfully delivering digital services to people and businesses. The structure and size of these units tend not to correspond to the requirements of rolling out state-of-the-art IT strategies and could put at risk the ability to reach government-wide performance targets in this area.

Develop further online service delivery

There is strong demand-side potential for digital services, evidenced by the relatively high uptake levels of Internet-based activities by the Slovakian population as a whole. Moreover, while there have been challenges around connectivity, it appears that this is becoming less of a concern with increasing mobile penetration and the hopefully successful completion of major broadband projects in progress during the coming EU programming period.

The launch of a number of new online services by ministries during 2015 and 2016 – in part as a result of Act No. 305/2013 on e-government, which laid out a largely non-mandatory three-year time period from 2013-16 for the digitisation of public services – means that many citizens will soon have tangible incentives to start interacting more regularly with government through online channels. This represents a singular opportunity to build a sense of momentum in the government's digitisation agenda.

> **Recommendations**
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> - Reinforce the application of mandatory standards for digital services across the public administration. Standards for online services are part of a set of standards for information systems of public administration, which are published by order of the Ministry of Finance and are legally binding. Indeed, the Ministry of Finance's Architectural Office manages customised open architecture standards – TOGAF® and ArchiMate®. That said, the Slovak Republic has consistently ranked poorly in the quality of its digital services, and this should be a key area of focus going forward. Building on the experience of countries such as Estonia, the United Kingdom and the United States in building user-centric digital services, the application of mandatory standards for all new online services could be reinforced, including through robust communications government-wide. Emphasis could be placed on interoperability and interconnectivity between new digital services so as to start breaking down the barriers between the systems and databases that exist in various ministries. To ensure compliance, these standards could be linked to access to funding sources such as through the project evaluation process in the Operational Programme Effective Public Administration.
>
> - Put in place performance measures to ensure ongoing improvement of new digital services. While it is a positive development that a number of new online services are being launched in 2015, experience in other OECD countries has shown that it is important to put in place continual improvement processes to ensure ongoing enhancements and optimisation. This can include having active feedback mechanisms for those using the services as well as tracking and publishing metrics on the use of

> **Recommendations** *(continued)*
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> these services. For example, the Ministry of Finance currently conducts an annual survey on e-government user satisfaction. The government could expand this practice and use the survey results along with other input factors to inform decision making in the design and delivery of online services to citizens and businesses.
>
> - Increase the uptake of the e-ID card. As a fundamental enabler of digital services, seeing a greater uptake of e-ID cards is an important priority. To date only 5% of the approximately 1 million e-ID cards issued have had their digital signature activated. There is a need to increase public awareness of the services that can be accessed through the use of an e-ID card, particularly as new services come online in 2015/16. Finally, being able to provide incentives to encourage the use of e-ID enabled services over traditional in-person or paper-based formats could be explored.

Prioritise open government data to unlock value for government, citizens and businesses

The Slovak Republic is poised to make rapid gains in the area of the strategic use of data. Investments from the previous EU programming period are now bearing fruit with the launch of the first set of online services and the corresponding databases that power them. Initial efforts via the Open Government Partnership have led to some initial work moving forward in the realm of open government data. However, these have yet to be mainstreamed within the civil service and the use of data for other analytics or public release is still largely viewed as a side project as opposed to a key enabler. A greater focus on interoperability and identifying areas of high value for the use of data both inside of government and with external partners could lead to a significant advancement in this area while supporting other key areas of the public reform agenda, such as improved analytical and evaluation capacity.

> **Recommendations**
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> - Increase the number of datasets available on the open government data portal. The lack of high-value datasets on the open data portal is providing a barrier to the greater use of open data by government and non-governmental actors. Building on consultations that have been carried out through the Open Government Partnership and related initiatives, high-value datasets that have the greatest potential for reuse should be the primary focus. There is a need to also ensure uniform standards across similar datasets released from different ministries. As well, ensuring that the licencing regime for any datasets released allows for unrestricted reuse is also important to fostering a more dynamic open data ecosystem in the Slovak Republic.
>
> - Foster greater capacity for the use of open data inside government. The creation of a network of open data champions across all ministries could be an important first step towards greater institutionalising the creation and use of open data in the administration. Moreover, there may also be a need to develop greater centralised capacity and expertise on open government data – particularly with regards to the technical skills related to the creation, formatting and reuse of open government data – which can work with ministries and their open data champions as needed to enhance their open government data initiatives. This centralised capacity could take the form of a dedicated team of open data experts that can work with departments as well as a central data repository to ensure that all ministries can access data across the administration and the ability to put in place interoperability between various databases.

Encourage the use of social media within the government

The use of social media by the government has not yet reached its full potential in the Slovak Republic. While some ministries have gone further in experimenting with its use, there remains a lack of central guidance or vision for how it could best be utilised as a part of the broader digital agenda for the modernisation of the Slovak Republic's public administration. When leveraged to its full potential, social media can provide a useful platform for not only communicating with citizens but also for incorporating feedback into the design and delivery of policies and services. It also provides an important mechanism for improving government transparency and responsiveness.

The current lack of centralised guidance on the use of social media is a barrier to its greater use across the government. Greater use of social media by the Slovak government is important to help promote new digital services and can serve as a cost-effective channel to gather feedback from citizens as digitisation initiatives are implemented. Use of social media can also provide an effective way to gather information on key policy issues and engage with citizens to build trust in government, particularly with the younger generation, which has a comparatively higher rate of social media usage.

Recommendation

- Develop and apply social media guidelines across the public administration. Building on the work done in other OECD countries, the Slovak Republic could put in place centralised guidance on both institutional use and civil servant use of social media which aims to promote the use of social media as a way to inform and engage citizens, while mitigating legitimate risks.

Improve public procurement for ICT projects

While outside of the scope of this review, throughout discussions with government and non-governmental experts, concerns were raised about the limitations of existing procurement rules for ICT-enabled projects. Future reviews by the OECD or other organisations on the topic of government procurement could make ICT-enabled projects a priority.

Recommendation

- Review procurement processes for ICT-enabled projects. Allowing mechanisms for smaller companies to get involved in ICT procurements and making procurement processes more agile with projects broken into smaller pieces would allow more competition and reduce the risk of project failure that has often been observed with high-value, long-duration contracts. The ability to use open source software could also be explored.

Enhancing transparency and integrity across the public administration

Though the level of perceived corruption in the Slovak Republic remains high, the government has undertaken steps to enhance transparency and integrity across the public administration: the fight against corruption is included in the programme of the government of the Slovak Republic for the years 2012-16. Furthermore, the government approved a Strategic Plan for Fighting Corruption in 2011 which included preventive

measures such as publication of state contracts, reform of the judiciary to increase the transparency of court decisions, competitive selection of judges and presidents of courts, as well as stricter rules for judicial governance and clear provisions for public procurement.

Update, apply and enforce the government's code of conduct across the public sector

With the new Civil Service Act currently under discussion, the Slovak Republic has the opportunity to update and adopt a new code of ethics which has enough substance and powers of enforcement to address existing shortcomings. An inclusive, consultative approach towards designing codes of conduct is essential to ensuring take-up and implementation. The experience of OECD countries demonstrates that consulting or actively involving stakeholders in drafting the code helps build a common understanding of public service values and expected standards of public employee conduct. Stakeholder involvement would, in addition, improve the quality of the code so that it met both public employees' and citizens' expectations. The government would also be able to demonstrate commitment to greater transparency and accountability, thereby gaining public trust.

The inter-ministerial working group of experts preparing the code of ethics could define: *i)* the values of the public administration; *ii)* the standards of conduct expected of public officials; and *iii)* the scope of the code and to whom it shall apply. Similarly, surveys and other tools for collecting empirical data could help the Slovak Republic to identify the issues and concerns that are most relevant to its public service. It is essential that the content and issues covered by the code build on the Slovak Republic's existing sector-related codes of conduct so as to promote consistent values and standards of conduct throughout the public service.

A code of conduct must be part of a wider organisational strategy, with the institution in question committed to provide clear guidance and education on the behaviour expected of public officials in the workplace. At the moment, the Slovak Republic does not have a regular educational programme or government-wide manual on the code of conduct. It could consider tasking a specialised organisation with designing a single code of conduct to ensure that all public employees have the same understanding on the subject. Such an organisation could also offer guidance and counselling to public officials facing ethical dilemmas. Each public service body could then ensure that it takes into account the specific nature of its area of work.

A code of ethics being a flexible instrument, regularly monitoring its implementation will help determine whether it fits the bill of promoting high standards of conduct within the public service. If it does not, further guidelines may be drawn up to clarify the values and standards of conduct that the code lays down. A body which oversees and monitors the implementation of the code of conduct and compliance with standards of behaviour is also crucial.

Recommendations

- Define clear, easily understandable values and standards of conduct in a consultative and participative manner. The new Civil Serve Act currently in discussion will provide an opportunity to update and adopt a new code of ethics which has enough substance and powers of enforcement.

Recommendations *(continued)*

- Establish a government-wide co-ordinated system for ensuring consistency throughout the public sector in understanding the values and standards of conduct promoted by the code. This could be tasked to an independent Civil Service Committee currently under discussion.

- Ensure that all public officials have the same understanding on the code of conduct through guidance and training on how to apply the code in daily work. In particular, guidance and training on how public officials should apply their codes of conduct in sensitive situations must be provided.

- Monitor and assess the implementation of the code of conduct and its impact on promoting integrity in the public sector. Surveys could provide useful information to help determine whether the code serves its purpose.

- Incorporate ethical dimensions into management frameworks to achieve compliance with the values of the public service. The Slovak Republic should establish a clear mechanism to ensure compliance with the code of ethics.

- Promote the consistent application of sanctions for ethical misconduct by public officials while ensuring that sanctions are both proportionate and dissuasive.

Improve the management of conflict of interest

The management of conflict of interest does not appear to be strictly enforced in the Slovak Republic. Adequate enforcement of the rules on asset disclosure and conflict of interest requires strengthening the mandate of the Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on Conflicts of Interest. As for management of conflict of interest among civil servants, their annual asset declaration is not subject to the internal audit and staff members are not educated on the content of conflict of interest policy. Establishing clear procedures for identifying, managing and resolving conflict of interest situations is crucial. The Slovak Republic could also consider tasking a specialised organisation with designing and providing procedures for establishing a conflict of interest offence and proportional consequences for non-compliance with conflict of interest policy, including disciplinary sanctions. The Slovak Republic also needs to adopt diagnostic tools in assessing the implementation of conflict of interest policies.

The Slovak Republic could also consider designing and providing central national programmes to raise awareness for managing conflict of interest in the public sector. While most OECD countries adopt various awareness-raising policies such as initial dissemination of rules/guidelines to public officials upon taking office and providing training, there is no systematic initiative to promote understanding of conflict of interest in the Slovak Republic. In order to ensure co-ordination across the government, the Government Office or the Ministry of the Interior could ensure that training, education and guidance on management of conflict of interest are available to all public officials. The government could also develop a national awareness programme which the heads of public entities could then apply and tailor to the organisational level.

> **Recommendations**
>
> - Establish a central function within the public administration responsible for the development and maintenance of the conflict of interest polices. Such function could be assigned to either the Government Office or the Ministry of the Interior.
>
> - Develop clear procedures for identifying, managing and resolving conflict of interest situations.
>
> - Introduce a proper oversight mechanism to ensure the accuracy of asset disclosure forms. Online management of the asset disclosure system could also reduce the administrative burden and increase transparency.
>
> - Enhance communication on the management of conflict of interest across the public administration. Measures such as online publication of guidance and setting up an advice line/help desk for employees could increase awareness among the public administration.
>
> - Consider the development of a government-wide monitoring and evaluation system. The Slovak Republic could conduct surveys or design an employee feedback mechanism on a regular basis to assess the implementation of conflict of interest policies.
>
> - Strengthen the policy measures to address the practice of revolving doors. For example, the Slovak Republic could consider introducing a cooling-off period to manage post-public employment.

An emerging cause for concern in the management of conflict of interest is the practice of revolving doors. In the 2013 OECD Survey on Lobbying, one-quarter of lobbyists questioned had previously held positions in the public sector. Most said they had worked in senior managerial or advisory capacities in ministries or had been advisers to prime ministers. Revolving door practices pose a risk to fairness and impartiality in decision making. The Slovak Republic could consider establishing cooling-off periods, during which public officials are not to lobby their former government departments. Update ethics training and deliver it more systematically across the public sector

Ethics training in the Slovak public sector remains formalistic and has limited practical impact on the behaviour of public officials. More efforts are needed to update and improve the overall framework for ethics training in the public sector. Political support for ethics training could be demonstrated not only through declarations but also through practical actions, such as by setting an example of ethical behaviour and by allocating funds and staff to the implementation of ethics training and towards their positive impact on the behaviour of civil servants.
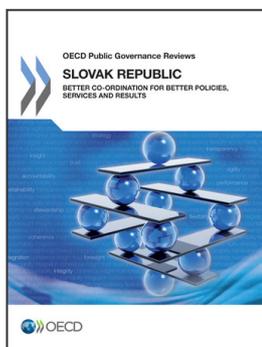
Ethics training should be a part of a broader and comprehensive anti-corruption strategy, as it helps to prioritise and focus training efforts and improve their cost effectiveness. It is also important to have a legislative or other official requirement to deliver and receive ethics training for public officials established in, for example, a Civil Service Act, a code of conduct or other appropriate regulations. Governments need to make at least one public agency responsible for the overall framework for ethics training, for central planning, co-ordination and evaluation of results. In the Slovak Republic, the Government Office could play this role. Clear formulation of responsibilities of such a central body should be complemented with proper co-ordination with other ministries and government agencies that provide ethics training as well.

Recommendations

- Ensure top-level buy-in for ethics training government wide. Political support for ethics training should be demonstrated not only through declarations but also through practical actions, such as allocation of sufficient funds and staff to the ethics training programmes.

- Establish a leading department/agency for central co-ordination of planning, delivery and evaluation of ethics trainings. The Government Office or Ministry of the Interior could play an important role in this process.

- Organise trainings based on needs assessment, targeting specific groups of public officials. At minimum, ethics training should be provided to all new public officials, senior public officials and those in areas of risk.

- Make ethics training practical and interactive with appropriately trained trainers. It is recommended to apply a combination of theoretical lectures and practical case studies into training. Dilemma exercise is one of the most effective training methods to develop practical ethical decision-making skills. Train the trainer programmes are also an effective measure to maintain and improve the quality of the trainers for ethics training.

- Conduct evaluation and follow up of the results of ethics training in order to ensure that the use of public money is producing the desired effects as well as to look for ways to improve the training approaches to make them more effective.

Notes

1.   Available   at: www.vlada.gov.sk/statute-of-the-government-office-of-the-slovak-republic.

2.   www.finance.gov.sk/Default.aspx?CatID=8103 and www.finance.gov.sk/Default.aspx?CatID=9336.

3.   www.finance.gov.sk/Default.aspx?CatID=9720.