

# Anticipating the training needs of Public Administration workers

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## Executive Summary

The Portuguese Public Administration is facing a moment of accelerated transformation and several critical challenges regarding its evolution. Six transformation trends – Digitalisation, Population Ageing, Migration Dynamics, Sustainable Development, Collaborative Governance and European Integration – are exerting pressures that impact the way the State organises its resources, creates public value and interacts with the population. The analysis resulting from the work carried out showed that Digitalisation and Population Ageing are the trends with the most pronounced impact on the dynamics of change, and that there are still gaps in skills which address the impacts of all of the identified trends. On the other hand, training needs vary according to career profile, with senior managers showing greater urgency in strategic management skills, whilst technical assistants have training needs in operational and public relations skills. Senior technicians present a wider range of skill training needs. A set of 12 priority training agendas resulted from the analysis, which reflect the complexity of the challenges faced by the various professional groups, from responding to demographic and social pressures to institutional capacity building and the Public Administration's relationship with third parties, in a context of growing interdependence and institutional complexity.

## Recommendations

- From a strategic standpoint: integrate analytical tools into the strategic workforce planning of the Public Administration, prioritise training and skills related to population ageing, periodically update the skills mapping, extend the needs assessment to the local and decentralised administrations, and recognise that training is not a sole and sufficient condition to ensure a better response to the challenges posed by emerging trends;
- From an operational standpoint: evaluate the coverage of the current training offers and identify gaps, compile a catalogue of training proposals based on the priority training agendas, coordinate with partner organisations the mapping and development of training linked to the training agendas, develop a training programme focused on workforce ageing management skills for the Public Administration, build capacity for the digital transition and for the use of the analytical tools employed in the study, support central Public Administration bodies in applying these tools, and create an inter-institutional working group and metrics for follow-up, monitoring, and implementation of the recommendations and the evolution of the skills gap identified.

## Target audience(s) of this policy brief

Policy makers; Senior and middle managers; Representative workers' organisations; INA (National Institute of Administration); DGAEP (Directorate-General for Administration and Public Employment)

## Introduction and Problem Statement

The Portuguese Public Administration is facing a set of structural changes which pose very significant challenges to its response capabilities, and represent an opportunity to add value to the delivery of public services.

The relevant literature underlines that the future performance of public organisations depends fundamentally on the quality and suitability of their workforce's skills (Dickinson & Sullivan, 2014; Needham & Mangan, 2014). Thus, skills management in the Public Administration is becoming increasingly relevant.

On the other hand, many skills needs assessments tend to be reactive, based on

immediate needs and frequently misaligned with the structural transformation trajectories which affect the public sector (OECD, 2017), rendering them insufficient to respond to the medium to long-term challenges.

Therefore, the study developed by IPPS-Iscte sought to address these issues through the systematisation of the relevant knowledge on the transformation dynamics of the Central Public Administration, the comparative analysis of European skills management practices, the definition of an analytical model to plan skills and training needs, the mapping and testing of a skills framework, and, lastly, the development of alternative evolution scenarios.

## Analysis / Key Findings

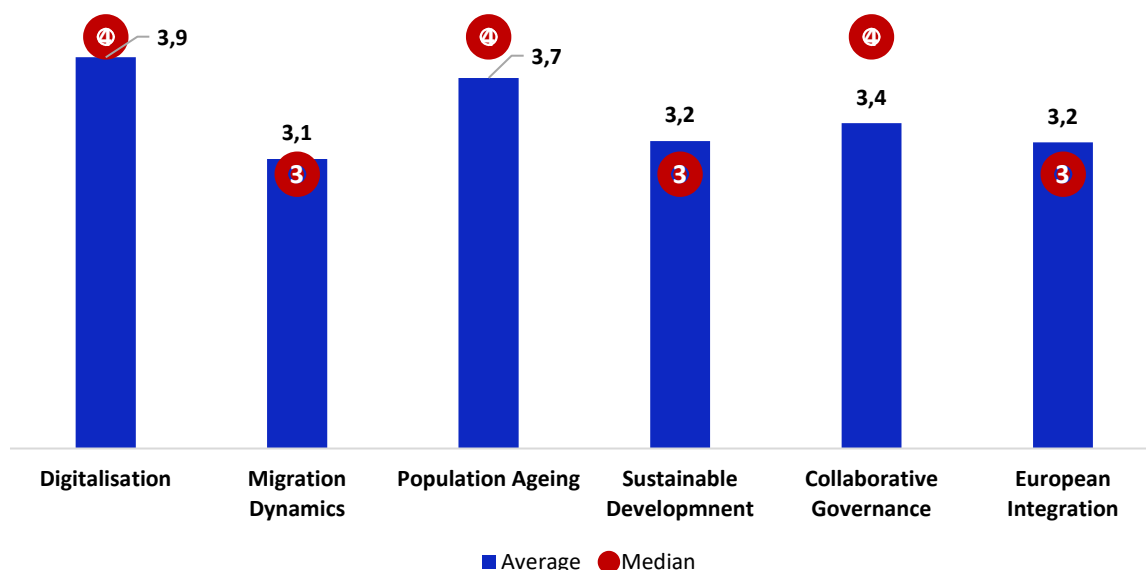
The research work was based on a review of the relevant literature, international benchmarking, and empirical data collection via a survey and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.

The literature analysis revealed the existence of six major trends that present themselves as vectors of change, acting simultaneously and reconfiguring the functioning of Public Administration: Digitalisation, Population Ageing, Migration Dynamics, Sustainable Development, Collaborative Governance, and

European Integration. This analysis also made it possible to identify a portfolio of 96 skills, organised by trend and by four public value channels that structure the main functions undertaken by Public Administration.

The benchmarking exercise suggests, regarding trends, that digitalisation is the domain with the greatest development in the provision of skills management strategies and frameworks. Population ageing is also emphasised, with a focus on the generational management of the Public Administration

Figure 1 – Mean significance of the impact of the trends in Central Public Administration



Source: Workers' Survey

workforce. Migration dynamics, sustainable development, and collaborative governance are less systematically incorporated into international skills frameworks, though they are nonetheless present in the frameworks analysed. European integration permeates the management of public administrations: policy guidelines, structural funds, and communication and cooperation between countries at the European Union level contribute to the convergence of skills' management strategies, and acceleration of trends such as digitalisation.

The skills models studied, on the other hand, make it possible to organise some core skills by trend:

- Digitalisation: identification and prevention of future scenarios and knowledge updating, cyber security, information management, algorithmic management and use of artificial intelligence, as well as digital communication and participation;
- Population Ageing: strategic human resources management, knowledge transfer and retention, and services adaptation for greater inclusion and accessibility;
- Sustainable Development: operational environmental management, increased energy and material efficiency, environmental monitoring, circular economy management, and environmental awareness in strategic decisions;
- Collaborative Governance: multilevel organisation of institutional governance, institutional cooperation capacities, coordination of multidisciplinary and inter-institutional teams, and openness to society;
- European Integration: knowledge of the European legal framework, advocacy of national interests, regulatory foresight, management of transnational networks, and comparative institutional learning.

The survey administered to 314 managers, senior technicians and technical assistants of the Central Public Administration, provides several relevant data points. Figure 1 presents the mean significance of each of the transformation trends and the median, on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 is "Not at all significant" and 4 is "Very significant".

Digitalisation and Population Ageing are the trends with the most significant impact on Public Administration in the medium and long-term.

There is also a cross-cutting gap between the skills currently present in Public Administration organisations, and their actual needs. The need for training is perceived as high, which contrasts with the level of presence of skills that, in some cases, is manifestly insufficient.

Furthermore, training needs across career levels are not uniform. On the one hand, senior technicians reveal a homogeneous training needs, whilst managers have greater urgency for training in strategic organisational management skills, and technical assistants show deficits in operational skills and in dealing with the public, which is consistent with the profile of these workers.

The information gathered through the qualitative methods emphasises the relevance of the ageing dynamics within organisations, and the need for skills that make the management of the ongoing decentralisation of competences within the Public Administration more effective. Another relevant dimension is the mention of a strong interdependence between skills acquisition and systemic issues, such as career flexibility, the condition of IT platforms and equipment, and the workers' own motivation to undertake training.

The analysis and triangulation of data made it possible to identify 12 Training Agendas that reflect the complexity of the challenges to be addressed:

- Strategic vision and innovation in the Public Administration;
- Collaborative and multilevel governance;
- Management of ageing and active inclusion;
- Co-design and people-centred innovation;
- Public communication and cultural diversity;
- Design of digital services and systems;
- Digital literacy and information ethics;
- Green transition and public responsibility;
- European citizenship and transnational cooperation;
- Institutional capacity-building and collaborative innovation;

- Public procurement management and public-private partnerships;

- Public participation and social response.

## Policy Options and Recommendations

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In light of the main findings from the research, a set of recommendations was drawn up, both of a strategic and of an operational nature.

### Of a strategic nature:

- R1: Incorporate the use of the analytical tools produced by the study into the development of the ReCAP (Skills Renewal Programme for the Public Administration) and into the strategic skills planning processes of Central Public Administration bodies;

- R2: Adopt an integrated approach to the development of digitalisation skills, linking the technical dimension with the strategic, ethical and organisational dimensions;

- R3: Recognise population ageing as the trend with the greatest impact on the skills gap and to establish priority short-term training responses;

- R4: Create a mechanism for the periodic updating of the skills mapping, and of the training agendas which are a priority;

- R5: Recognise that training is not the sole and sufficient condition to ensure a better response to the challenges created by the transformation trends;

-R6: Extend the skills needs assessment to Local and Deconcentrated Public Administrations (CCDR and CIM), acknowledging the growing centrality of this level of government in the delivery of public services and in policy implementation.

### Of an operational nature:

- R7: Evaluate the degree of coverage and suitability of the existing training provision in light of the study's findings, while identifying gaps and development priorities;

- R8: Identify and compile a Catalogue of training proposals based on the priority Training Agendas, ensuring coherence, suitability for different profiles, and coordination between paths;

- R9: Coordinate with partner training organisations the mapping and development of training offers linked to the priority Training Agendas;

- R10: Develop, as a priority, an advanced training programme focused on workforce ageing management skills for the Public Administration;

- R11: Train for the digital transition;

- R12: Equip human resources professionals in Central Public Administration bodies with the skills needed to use the analytical tools produced in the study;

- R13: Support each Central Public Administration body in applying the cross-cutting analytical tools to its specific reality, without prejudice to the coherence of the skills framework produced;

-R14: Create an inter-institutional working group and a set of metrics for the follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations and of the evolution of the skills gaps identified.

## Conclusion

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Six major transformation trends present themselves as vectors of change that act simultaneously and reshape the functioning of Public Administration.

In this regard, Public Administration must be equipped with the technical and management skills which will enable it to respond more

effectively to emerging challenges. The study undertaken suggests that the existence of a skills deficit that cuts through all domains and career paths, being more acute in skills related to Population Ageing and more critical, owing to its cross-cutting nature, in Digitalisation skills.

Digitalisation, in particular, features more prominently in the international benchmarking in virtually all cases. The focus groups emphasised the relevance of ageing dynamics, especially from the perspective of internal human resources management, as well as skills that can make the management of the ongoing decentralisation processes more effective.

Generally speaking, responding to each of the trends requires a specific and differentiated set of organisational and institutional skills. The analysis undertaken made it possible to develop and test a framework of 96 competences that are linked to the trends of change and to the channels of public value considered in the analytical model that was developed. On the other hand, the implications for public action resulting from the trends vary

according to the confirmation (or otherwise) of certain critical uncertainties and the alternative scenarios for the evolution of the Public Administration that arise from them. This degree of uncertainty reinforces the need to identify skills that are cross-cutting to all (or nearly all) scenarios.

The use of a sensitivity analysis, to be applied following a foresight exercise, enables each body to consolidate its strategic vision and prioritise skills, ultimately making it possible to produce training tailored to its development needs and to each of its workers. This training must, however, take into account systemic factors linked to career flexibility, the condition of IT platforms and equipment, and the workers' own motivation to undertake training. Failure to do so risks producing insufficient results.

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