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## **Toward a more strategic and effective local self-government workforce in Poland**

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This chapter discusses the framework for human resource management (HRM) at the local self-government level. Specifically, it explores challenges related to leadership and management capability, employer attractiveness and the role of human resource functions in local self-government units (LSGUs). It points to scope for a more strategic approach to workforce management and draws on international examples of good practice in this regard.

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## Introduction

Officials in local self-government administrations in Poland play central roles in delivering value for society. The tasks they carry out include running schools and hospitals, organising public transport and promoting investment. Big cities administered by local self-governments, like Kraków, Toruń and Wrocław, are engines of the regional economy. In some cases, particularly in smaller and rural municipalities, local self-government buildings physically anchor the community – they are administrative, social and cultural service providers and a key point of daily interaction for business owners and citizens alike. Partly because of this proximity to the population, local self-government in Poland generally enjoys higher trust levels (over 60%) than the national government (33%) and the parliament (34%) (Kaczmarek, 2016<sup>[1]</sup>).

To continue to meet evolving citizen demands, local self-government administrations must be able to attract talented and motivated candidates and develop and use their skills and competencies fully. Having talented and motivated employees is a precondition for success in key areas that will help long-term development, such as co-ordination across levels of government, development and design of evidence-based strategies for growth, communicating better with the public and developing ways to engage them in policy-making, setting, executing and managing budgets, and navigating complex and changing regulatory landscapes (e.g. for procurement).

As such, the importance of human capital development at the local self-government level is recognised in two key planning documents elaborated by the Polish government – the Strategy for Responsible Development (*Strategia na rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju do roku 2020 z perspektywą do 2030 r.*, SOR) and the National Regional Development Strategy 2030 (*Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego 2030*, KSRR):

The SOR specifically highlights institutional efficiency as a competitive asset. It notes the importance of “an efficient state [...] building interdepartmental thematic teams, management by objectives, remuneration schemes that motivate employees, clerical officer traineeships, common state purchasing policy and smart public procurement, e-government and comprehensive economic policy management” (OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

The KSRR emphasises the skills necessary to conduct an effective development policy, in particular in areas with low development potential, and to promote links between the local and regional public sector (OECD, 2019<sup>[3]</sup>).

Attracting and developing human capital at the local self-government level in Poland, however, is challenging. The experience of LSGUs in Poland broadly aligns with the findings of an OECD/European Committee of the Regions survey which observed that smaller municipalities are hampered by having an inadequate pool of managerial and technical talent and service providers; larger municipalities face complex transport, planning and infrastructure tasks and do not have the workforce skills to address these tasks effectively (OECD, 2019<sup>[4]</sup>). The same survey also indicates that subnational government capacities vary enormously within countries in all countries surveyed and are not consistent with their responsibilities.

Governments at the national and subnational levels across the OECD are finding it harder to attract and retain the skills they need. Megatrends such as globalisation, digitalisation and ageing populations have wrought profound changes on labour markets. In the past, governments could rely on traditional aspects of public sector employment such as job stability and predictability of pension entitlements to attract candidates. But now, with many younger candidates eager for impact, autonomy and growth, the concept of a “government job” is less attractive. In Poland, many LSGUs, such as the city of Międzyrzec Podlaski and Łańcut County – reported outward migration or “brain drain” as a particular challenge affecting the attraction, retention and engagement of candidates and staff.

Through the Public Employment and Management (PEM) Working Party, the OECD has been working with a variety of countries on building strong, resilient and forward-looking workforces. This chapter describes the shape of local self-government employment in Poland and the legal provisions which govern

key aspects of people management. Specifically, it presents and discusses the three related challenges of leadership/management development, improvement of employer attractiveness/recruitment and the importance of effective human resource management (HRM) institutions and practices to do this. The framework for this discussion is the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability (OECD, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>).

### ***Size and shape of local self-government employment in Poland***

Poland is governed by a national administration and a subnational self-government administration. There are three tiers of subnational self-government administration: 16 *województwa* (voivodeships/regions), 314 counties (*powiats*) and 66 big cities, like Kraków, that have rights and responsibilities usually reserved for counties – these are referred to as cities with “county rights”. There are 2 477 municipalities (*gminas*). Local self-governments can be either urban or rural, or a mix of urban-rural. A key aspect of the reforms leading to the creation of LSGUs in Poland in the 1990s was that local self-governments would have their own staff who would be distinct and independent from public servants at the national level. Previously, they were employed by the state. The success of the Polish reforms to local self-government thus depended on the people involved in local self-government – both those elected and those employed by municipalities (Regulski, 2003<sup>[6]</sup>).

In 2018, Polish LSGUs employed close to 255 000 people – markedly more than the state administration (principal and central organs of administration, territorial organs of combined government administration and some state agencies), which employed around 174 000 people (OECD, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>). This number does not include teachers (including school heads), employees of cultural institutions, , management boards and supervisory boards of municipal companies. The number of LSGU employees has remained broadly stable since 2010, as has the balance between state and local employment. As noted by the Polish Central Statistics Office, the average monthly gross salary in LSGUs was PLN 5 014 (EUR 1 132). Statistically speaking, this is broadly in line with the average public sector gross wage of PLN 5 105 and slightly above the average private sector gross wage of PLN 4 390 in 2018 (OECD, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>). Wages are higher in central administrations than in local self-government. A general perception on the part of local self-government officials is that salary is not competitive enough to attract the volume and quality of candidates with specific expertise needed to deliver on local self-government mandates. Although it is beyond the scope of this report to establish an empirical pay gap, salary competitiveness will be addressed later in the context of the broader attraction of LSGUs as employers.

Across the OECD, in 2017, more general government employees were employed at the sub-central level than at the central level, though this varies across countries (Figure 7.1). Some federal states, such as Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, characteristically demonstrate higher levels of general government employees working at the sub-central level. Others with a unitary state model, such as Ireland, Israel and Turkey, tend to concentrate most general government workers at the central level (OECD, 2019<sup>[8]</sup>). In Poland, the larger number of staff working at the local level indicates the scope of their responsibilities in delivering value for citizens.

Figure 7.1. Distribution of general government employment across levels of government, 2017



Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>), *Government at a Glance 2019*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccf5c38-en>.

### Legal framework for HRM at the local self-government level in Poland

To review and update their approach to managing LSGU staff, political leaders and senior managers must work within a legislative framework. While the fact-finding missions to Poland conducted as part of this project revealed a perception of legislative rigidity, the legal framework governing human resource management at the LSGU level does permit managers some flexibility in some aspects of HRM. Identifying, prioritising and exploiting these opportunities will be key.

Chapter VII of the Polish Constitution establishes the framework for local self-government (*samorząd terytorialny*). Articles 163-172 provide the basis for their functioning, specifying the scope of tasks, funding and elections to constitutive and executive bodies, among other aspects. With regard to HRM, Article 169 of the constitution provides that “the internal system of LSGUs shall be defined, within the limits of the Acts, by their constituent bodies”. The framework for key HRM aspects, such as recruitment, promotion, performance management and remuneration in local self-government, are specified in the Act of 21 November 2008 (*Ustawa z dnia 21 listopada 2008 r. o pracownikach samorządowych*):

- **Required qualifications:** Officials employed by local authorities must meet basic criteria including: i) possess at least an upper secondary education; ii) have no criminal record of intentional indictable crimes; and iii) have a good reputation. Managerial positions also require three years of experience in a similar position or a commercial activity consistent with the requirements for the post and a higher education.
- **Recruitment:** The staffing of local self-government positions must be open and competitive, and require a public call of the position(s). The actions of a special committee, assigned the task of directing the recruitment procedure, must be transparent and the results must be announced publicly.

- **Performance evaluation:** Local self-government officials are subject to mandatory, periodic evaluations performed at least biannually but not more than once every six months.
- **Restrictions on private activities:** Officials cannot engage in activities that may cause a conflict of interests with their work in the local authority and all are obliged to make a statement as to their business activities.

The 2008 reforms were designed to remove some of the perceived rigidities and introduce new standards. With regard to HRM, the act introduced the possibility of promotion within individual job groups (Article 20) and provided for periodic assessment at least every two years (Article 27). It introduced the “preparatory service” (Article 19), a probationary period combining training, on-the-job experience and finishing with a test of substantive knowledge. It introduced an oath of local self-government employees (Article 18) as well as the obligation to secure funds for the training of local self-government employees. It opened the possibilities of shaping the level of remuneration in all positions where the basis of employment is an employment contract and – to a limited extent – in other positions, with the exception of the level of remuneration of the commune head/mayor/president. Remuneration issues were further clarified in the Act of 15 May 2018 (*Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 15 maja 2018 r. w sprawie wynagradzania pracowników samorządowych*). Box 7.1 outlines the main actors involved in HRM in LSGUs.

### Box 7.1. Responsibility for human resource management in Polish LSGUs

The following actors are usually involved in HRM processes:

- **Mayor of municipality or respectively head of the county** (here as the statutory head of the office) – in relation to the heads of LSGU organisational units and LSGU office employees [except for the treasurer of the municipality/county, who is appointed and dismissed by the council] and other activities in the field of labour law in relation to the treasurer, including determining remuneration, carried out by an executive body, i.e. the Mayor/Head of the county). According to art 5.5 of the Law on Local Self-Government Employees, the Mayor/Head of the county has a right to authorize the secretary of the municipality/county to set and implement HRM policy.
- **Heads of organizational units of LSGUs** – in relation to unit employees (e.g. schools, municipal welfare offices, children shelters, cultural centres, libraries, etc.).
- **Secretary of municipality/county and heads/staff of human resource (HR) departments** – design system solutions (sometimes with the support of external entities) and annual operational plans (e.g. remuneration fund management, training plans, etc.). They also carry out technical activities based on individual decisions previously made.
- **Employee service superiors** (e.g. Heads of units, directors of departments, offices) – have a major impact on the implementation of system tools in subordinate organisational units through participation in operational planning and the right to submit individual applications on individual HRM matters for the Mayor's/Head of the county decision.

Source: Commentary provided by the Association of Polish Cities.

The counterpart at the national level for local Polish self-governments is the Department of Public Administration within the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The Department of Public Administration houses the Secretariat of the Joint Commission of Government and Local Self-government.

The joint commission is a body that brings relevant central ministries together with associations representing the regional and local authorities to verify compliance of locally developed solutions with the constitutional and legal framework.

The ministry's role regarding operational HRM in LSGUs is relatively limited. Nevertheless, it does play a role in providing training support to local self-government bodies. In the 2014-20 programming period for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the ministry accessed funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) under Thematic Objective 11 – Efficient public administration. One of the investment priorities was “enhancing institutional capacity and efficient public administration”. Indeed, a recent project aimed to support LSGUs in the implementation of accessibility requirements for staff with disabilities (OECD, 2019<sup>[9]</sup>). Training co-ordinated by the ministry thus targeted officers working in HRM units of local self-government.

Local self-government in Poland is also framed by Poland's ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1993. With regard to HRM, Article 6 of the charter notes that:

- *Without prejudice to more general statutory provisions, local authorities shall be able to determine their own internal administrative structures in order to adapt them to local needs and ensure effective management.*
- *The conditions of service of local self-government employees shall be such as to permit the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competency; to this end, adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided (Council of Europe, 1985<sup>[10]</sup>).*

LSGUs thus have normative motivation as well as legislative scope to develop initiatives and solutions to deal with HRM as long as those initiatives and solutions respect the legal framework. Nevertheless, it should be noted that as municipalities and counties have limited regulatory powers, they are restricted to situations in which legislative competency is expressly provided in national legislation. Consequently, they cannot create a local rule whenever they want to attain an objective (Kulesza and Sześciło, 2012<sup>[11]</sup>).

## Strategic human resource management (SHRM) and the Future of Work

People are the backbone of any organisation. That is why it is so important that the people who work in local self-government administration in Poland are skilled, motivated and able to work productively and with purpose. A 2018 paper from the Polish National Institute of Local Self-Government (*Narodowy Instytut Samorządu Terytorialnego*), a unit of the Ministry of the Interior, notes that “a long-term vision for the development of local self-government administrations [...] should be supported by a vision of strategic human resource management” (Warsaw, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). SHRM takes a long-term perspective to attracting, recruiting, developing and managing staff. It is an approach used by governments to frame and link how they manage workforces with the types of outcomes they wish to achieve. This emerges from the recognition that:

*[t]housands of jobs are part of our work-a-day world, and the variety of tasks and human requirements necessary to carry out this work is staggering. Faced with such variability in jobs and their requirements on the one hand, and with people and their individual patterns of values, aspirations, interests, and abilities on the other, programmes for the efficient use of human resources are essential (Cascio and Aguinis, 2019<sup>[13]</sup>).*

Governments that apply SHRM principles look at the processes and tools used to ensure that workforce capacities are aligned with the mission and core strategic objectives of the government. This means ensuring that the right people with the right skills work in the right places to achieve goal and objectives as effectively and efficiently as possible (OECD, 2017<sup>[14]</sup>). Typical stages of SHRM planning include determining what skills are needed (gap analysis), evaluating how people with those skills can be attracted

to the public sector, developing a culture of learning to support employee development and using skills optimally through sound management practices and organisational structures.

Recognising the need for a whole-of-government approach in applying SHRM principles, in 2019, the OECD Council adopted the Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability (OECD, 2019). The recommendation is a normative instrument that aims to guide member and partner countries in developing public sector workforces with the right leadership and skills, supported by effective organisations and practices.

**Figure 7.2. OECD Council Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability**



Source: OECD (2019<sup>[5]</sup>), *Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability*, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.

Governments that have adopted SHRM principles usually share several common traits. First, senior leadership explicitly recognises the role of people management strategies in achieving organisational objectives. They are actively involved in strategies to attract and retain the best candidates for the civil service. Second, the involvement of senior leaders helps embed a view of HR departments/ministries or units as proactive partners that can help achieve strategic objectives – not passive administrators of staff files. Third, governments that practice SHRM recognise the importance of developing a workforce with the right skill and competency mix at the individual and team levels. The vast majority of OECD countries use competency frameworks to inform recruitment campaigns, assessment questions, performance management and promotion/mobility decisions. This is designed to create a virtuous circle where clear organisational objectives are aligned with observed characteristics of people who contribute successfully to achieving those objectives. Finally, iterative, agile solutions are encouraged and supported by fit-for-purpose information technology (IT) systems.

Guided by these questions, many governments have been implementing reforms to ensure that workforces are able to adapt to the “Future of Work”. OECD research has identified three key aspects of preparing government workforces for the Future of Work (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[15]</sup>).



- **Forward-looking:** Public service employers will need to be better at planning for the future to ensure recruiting skills and talent can adapt to change. This requires public employment systems to ensure their job classification can adequately incorporate emerging jobs and respond with appropriate remuneration packages.
- **Flexible:** The future is full of uncertainty and public services will need to be flexible and agile to respond to unforeseen change. This implies the need to be ready to reallocate skills to emerging challenges and pull together multi-disciplinary teams across ministries and agencies. Pay systems, therefore, need to strike a careful balance between specificity for skills and talent, and harmony across organisations to enable mobility and agility.
- **Fulfilling:** The diversity of the public service workforce will continue to grow to incorporate more skills and backgrounds that it has traditionally done so in the past. And with a diversity of people comes the need for a diversity of employment models and individualisation of people management. This suggests the need to think about pay systems that recognise and reward motivation and achievements, without crowding out the intrinsic motivation of public employees.

At the time of writing, Polish LSGUs were grappling with additional responsibilities and pressures in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Continuity and adaptation in the provision of administrative services to citizens, safely opening schools and running healthcare facilities are key priorities. Yet as the pandemic has illustrated, the types of “wicked” policy challenges facing government administrations span multiple policy areas and require new approaches and ways of working. These challenges can have far-reaching effects: the European Union (EU) Annual Regional and Local Barometer shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is widening existing social and economic disparities in the EU and that regional and local authorities have a key role in economic recovery (European Committee of the Regions, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>). An effective municipal response to the pandemic, and the development of longer-term municipal capacity, thus depends on leveraging the skills and motivation of a skilled, flexible and resilient public sector workforce. The following section discusses three areas of people management where investment and attention by LSGUs could play a key role in preparing for the Future of Work and building workforce capacity.

## People management challenges in Polish LSGUs

Polish LSGUs face specific people management constraints due to contextual factors such as proximity/accessibility to urban centres (i.e. greater competition for candidates with other employers) and local labour market dynamics. LSGUs must also respond to broader trends that affect government workforces around the world, such as the digitalisation of public services and working methods, and changing and more diverse citizen expectations. Drawing on the questionnaire of Polish LSGUs administered by the Association of Polish Cities as part of this project, as well as qualitative data collected during four fact-finding missions to Poland, three broad and interrelated people management challenges were identified:

- **Leadership and management capability:** The Law on Local Self-Government Employees defines the framework for workforce management. LSGU leaders have a particularly important role to play in the development of municipal capacity through identifying scope for adjustment to work practices within the constraints of this law. This involves developing and gaining consensus for a workforce strategy vision, providing resources and ensuring accountability. The skills and competencies involved are complex.
- **Targeted investment in skills:** LSGUs in Poland need specialist skill sets and staff with a broad range of transversal competencies. However, many struggle to attract candidates. This is particularly acute for smaller, rural municipalities. Investment in employer branding, recruitment efforts, compensation and learning and development will be key. Moreover, skills in LSGUs are required for effective implementation of the tasks outlined in the other chapters of this report, such



as effective co-ordination, budgeting, navigating the regulatory landscape and engagement with citizens.

- **Institutions/Strategy:** Responsibility for HRM decision-making within LSGUs is multi-layered: the mayor, the secretary, human resource departments and line managers all play key roles in the day-to-day management of staff. However, there are few strategic guidelines or high-level principles (such as a workforce strategy document) to guide co-ordination, prioritisation and decision-making. This can lead to a fragmentation of efforts and a weakened ability to develop human capital initiatives.

The lack of homogeneity between LSGUs means that not all are affected by these challenges to the same degree. It should come as no surprise that smaller LSGUs in general have more difficulty developing and implementing strategic workforce development strategies than larger LSGUs with more staff and greater institutional capacity. The lack of homogeneity means that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to key HRM challenges. This places a premium on local leadership and managerial ability to develop local, tailored solutions within the current legal framework. It suggests the need for greater sharing of good practices and collaboration, and a long-term approach to the development of human capital at the local self-government level.

### ***Investing in leadership capability can improve organisational capacity in LSGUs***

As outlined in the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability, leaders and managers are a central part of developing HRM capacity in governments. Building leadership capability in the public service is essential to meeting citizen expectations and developing a high-performing workforce. The recommendation explicitly calls on adherents to focus on:

1. Clarifying the expectations incumbent upon senior-level public servants to be politically impartial leaders of public organisations, trusted to deliver on the priorities of the government and uphold and embody the highest standards of integrity without fear of politically motivated retribution.
2. Considering merit-based criteria and transparent procedures in the appointment of senior-level public servants and holding them accountable for performance.
3. Ensuring senior-level public servants have the mandate, competencies and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power.
4. Developing the leadership capabilities of current and potential senior-level public servants.

The provisions of the recommendation typically apply to senior leaders of the public service, i.e. not elected politicians. However, in the case of Poland, elected mayors still have substantial day-to-day management tasks. Their interaction with non-elected positions, such as the secretary, assume pivotal importance for the HRM of the LSGU. Given the variety of size and contexts of Polish LSGUs, it is difficult to identify specific leadership challenges affecting all LSGUs. Senior leaders in Płock, for example, are responsible for managing an organisation of some 600 LSGU employees. There, one of the key challenges facing leaders is adapting employee skills to new contexts and mandates, and ensuring that organisational structures and practices facilitate this. To do this, leaders and managers can draw on a human resource department. On the other hand, in rural LSGUs such as Ziębice, there is no human resource department. The mayor personally decides on who co-ordinates activities if various organisational units of the office are involved in a cross-functional project.

One of the most comprehensive reports on leadership in Polish LSGUs relates leadership capability with the ability to innovate (OECD, 2019<sup>[17]</sup>). The report includes a study pointing to the rapid pace of change in the functioning of local self-governments and the potential for new solutions in public administration, based partly on practices adopted in the private sector. As such, the principles of effective leadership as set out in the recommendation apply across all LSGUs. The challenge for LSGUs is to identify how the

principles relate to their specific organisational context and to support investment in leaders through training in order to build capability.

Effective leaders can drive efficiency and productivity by creating the right conditions for employee engagement, a concept that is often measured and tracked through employee surveys. Engaged employees are shown to perform better and be more productive and more innovative (see for example OECD (2016<sup>[18]</sup>)). Box 7.2. illustrates some of the ways that the OECD has been working with administrations to boost leadership capacity.

### Box 7.2. Assessing and reinforcing leadership skills in Croatia and Greece

Ahead of the 2021-27 programming period for ESIF, the OECD worked with a pilot group of five managing authorities (MAs) of ESIF to diagnose administrative challenges and support targeted capacity-building actions. Supporting leaders and senior managers was a key part of those actions in two MAs: the MA of the Competitiveness and Cohesion Operational Programme in Croatia and the MA of the Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development Operational Programme in Greece.

In both MAs, the OECD has focused on boosting leadership capacity through a series of workshops and surveys in two areas: employee engagement and analysis of key managerial, professional and operational competencies. The OECD designed and ran a tailored employee engagement survey in order to quantify key issues relating to staff motivation and perceptions of their work environment and bring them to the attention of senior leaders. The results were used to design a series of workshops focused on developing an action plan to improve employee engagement. In parallel, the OECD ran a competency gap analysis of both MAs in Croatia and Greece. The analysis enabled senior leaders in the MAs to better understand the areas where employees wished to develop their skills and competencies. It also provided valuable feedback for senior leaders on perceptions of managerial competency. The results of the gap analysis were used to design a learning and development strategy for the MAs through a series of workshops involving leadership perspectives as well as data from the surveys and employee focus groups.

Both work streams provided valuable feedback for leaders as well as a way to involve them directly in co-creating workable and long-term solutions for their organisations.

There are encouraging signs that leadership capability at the local self-government level is being prioritised (Box 7.3). The city of Płock, for example, uses an online training provider specialised in Polish local self-government called *Akademia Wspólnoty* to enrich its training programme for staff and support senior leaders. Fora to exchange experiences and investment in training, coaching and mentoring are thus key aspects of building leadership and management capability in LSGUs.

### Box 7.3. School for City Leaders programme, Poland

The School for Leaders Foundation (*Szkoła Liderów*) established the City Leaders programme to develop leadership capacity in local self-government leaders, non-governmental organisations and companies. The purpose is to develop recommendations and ideas for the authorities of their cities and then put the ideas into practice. At the beginning of 2020, in order to further develop activities aimed at city leaders, the concept of a special programme dedicated to representatives of city authorities – people with the greatest influence – was created, called Leadership in Local Self-government. Its goal is to build resilience to city crises by developing the leadership skills of leaders and deepening knowledge of urban resilience in terms of health, economic, social and environmental challenges. The essence of the project is also the actual exchange of experience and proven solutions to systemic problems between city management. The programme is targeted at people holding key positions for the operation of local self-government (mayors, presidents, deputies, treasurers, secretaries, heads of key departments and management of city councils) from ten invited cities. The programme structure comprises online modules and in-person training. The School for Leaders Foundation is a publicly funded body supported by private grants.

Source: Szkoła Liderów (2020<sup>[19]</sup>), *Leadership in Local Self-government*, <https://www.szkoła-liderow.pl/przywodztwo-w-samorzadzcie/>.

### ***Improving employer attractiveness can facilitate the recruitment of specialised skill sets***

LSGU leaders and senior managers are essential to developing workforce capacity: a key component of effective leadership depends on attracting, developing and managing workforces with complex skill sets to address increasingly complex policy challenges. This is specifically mentioned in the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability, which calls on public administrations to:

1. Continuously identify skills and competencies needed to transform political vision into services that deliver value to society.
2. Attract and retain employees with the skills and competencies required from the labour market.
3. Recruit, select and promote candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes, to guarantee fair and equal treatment.
4. Develop the necessary skills and competencies by creating a learning culture and environment in the public service.
5. Assess, reward and recognise performance, talent and initiative.

There is thus a need for substantive skills and specialist qualifications (e.g. construction engineers). However, many LSGUs report difficulty in recruiting the skills they need. In larger LSGUs close to urban centres with alternative employment options, salary was frequently cited as a barrier to recruitment. In smaller LSGUs, particularly rural ones, outward migration toward urban centres depletes local labour markets and thus reduces the pool of prospective, qualified candidates.

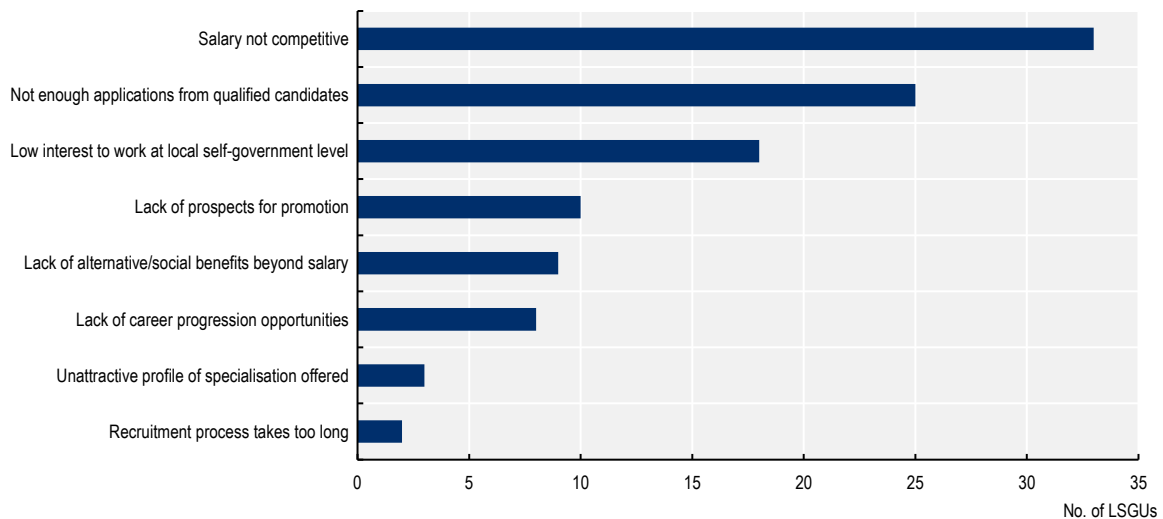
#### *The salary of LSGU staff is seen as a barrier to recruitment*

Figure 7.3 illustrates that salary competitiveness is a key challenge affecting recruitment in Polish LSGUs. OECD questionnaire data gathered for this report show that the three key determinants of pay in Polish LSGUs are educational qualifications, job content and relevant experience. This aligns with trends in OECD countries which show that the most important factors in determining base salary for government jobs are job content and education qualification, regardless of the hierarchical level (OECD, 2018<sup>[20]</sup>). This suggests a system that rewards static indicators (things that happened in the past and are already

acquired, like a university degree) at the expense of a more dynamic system that rewards performance. In reality, a mixture of both is necessary to be able to attract candidates and develop a high-performance culture.

A common challenge across OECD countries is how to pay public servants a wage that reflects the importance of their role and the local labour market while maintaining overall control of public finances. The principle of flexibility to allow targeted pay increases for certain profiles based on precise conditions and regular review and dialogue has helped many administrations overcome barriers to salary competitiveness. Doing so implies a long-range vision for HRM capacity and identification of critical roles linked to local development strategies. It suggests the need for regular and segmented analysis of local labour market conditions and more local discretion within a set budget.

**Figure 7.3. Challenges affecting attraction in Polish LSGUs**



Note: While the size of the questionnaire response sample does not allow to draw statistically relevant conclusions, it nevertheless offers sample-specific insights that may be relevant for a larger audience of Polish LSGUs.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on LSGU responses to the OECD questionnaire (2020).

A recurring theme during qualitative interviews was the perception that low salaries are a barrier to attracting talented candidates: 39% of LSGUs said that increasing the attractiveness of the LSGU as an employer was a high priority and almost as many (37%) listed pay reform as a high priority. On the other hand, just 13% of LSGUs saw recruitment reform as a high priority, which suggests a pressure point around salaries.

However, targeted wage adjustment for certain positions as well as general salary increases proves difficult. In 2018, a Regulation of the Council of Ministers (*Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 15 maja 2018 r. w sprawie wynagradzania pracowników samorządowych*) reduced the salaries of mayors and their deputies by an average of 20% (OECD, 2019<sup>[21]</sup>). This may have had the unintended effect of pressing down wages throughout the LSGUs, exacerbating attraction and retention difficulties. Increasing the salary of key positions to a relevant market-level could result in some staff members being paid more than the mayor – the political and administrative head of the LSGU.

It was beyond the scope of this study to establish an empirical pay gap for local self-government employees compared to relevant markets. Nevertheless, pay is central to the psychological contract public employers have with each employee. The link between pay and attractiveness as an employer is well established, and compensation plays an important role in “virtually every aspect of organisational functioning” (Gupta

and Shaw, 2014<sup>[22]</sup>). It is a consideration in career choices and influences decisions to accept job offers and to remain with an employer. It also affects the number and quality of job applicants (OECD, 2012<sup>[23]</sup>). As such, Polish LSGUs must be able to maintain some level of salary competitiveness with relevant external markets, especially for key positions where there are long-standing recruitment challenges (e.g. lawyers, civil engineers, construction engineers, etc.). However, benchmarking a fair and appropriate salary for some categories of public servants – for example, an advisor or policy officer – can be difficult. This partly relates to methodological considerations involved in establishing equivalency for certain positions and contexts, as well as the scope for political considerations and a range of other contextual factors to affect the findings. In the context of Polish LSGUs, the Association of Polish Cities has lobbied for greater flexibility to determine wages according to factors such as the size of the local self-government unit and average labour market salaries.

*The need for new skills and competencies has never been greater*

The global financial crisis in 2008 caused many governments across the OECD to reduce public sector pay in an effort to balance public budgets (OECD, 2012<sup>[23]</sup>). It is to be expected that Poland's fiscal and budgetary response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as in many countries, will also create further pressure on public sector pay, including at the local self-government level. As such, in the absence of empirical data on salary levels in Polish LSGUs compared with relevant market levels and in the context of limited space for broad pay rises, a central challenge for LSGUs in Poland will thus be how to improve attractiveness as an employer and recruit and develop the skills they need – particularly in smaller LSGUs like Łancut. Moreover, the scope of responsibilities of LSGUs is increasing at the same time as budgetary resources (transfers and own-tax revenue) are less predictable. This creates further pressure on LSGU administrations to adapt established ways of working to meet new demands.

OECD countries have been addressing these issues by rethinking their skill needs and adapting recruitment practices to match diverse candidate expectations. Building effective public sector workforces depends on employers recognising that their needs are evolving ever more quickly. Focusing only on estimates of how many employees will be needed to implement projects – as is the case in many LSGUs – and simply replacing workers with the same skills will not be effective in the long term.

Learning and development is a key part of building effective public sector workforces yet, in many Polish LSGUs, much of the training content focuses on equipping employees to interpret regulations (e.g. around public procurement). While this is important, longer-term municipal capacity can be increased by complementing training on procedural issues with broader competency-based training. Competency-based training identifies important competencies required for specific functions or levels of hierarchy – such as decision-making, influencing others, achieving results – and aligns training programmes with those competencies.

Public employers want public employees with the technical/substantive skills needed to address these challenges using new (technological) tools at their disposal. This creates three big challenges. First, public employers need increasingly specialised expertise, which is usually in short supply. This puts them in direct competition with private sector employers. Second, public employers also need employees with more complex behavioural competencies and management skills. Finally, public employers are looking for employees whose values align with those of their public sector organisations.

In all of these areas, employers want to hire candidates with the professional expertise and strategic orientation needed to deliver cutting edge services to the society they serve. But technical skills such as knowledge of legislative provisions are not enough: increasingly, public services are prioritising transversal skill sets and competencies that are even harder to assess, such as risk-taking, capacity to innovate and problem-solving. A number of public policy reforms – such as the growing use of participatory budgeting processes in LSGUs – depend on new skill sets that not all public employees have. Size also matters:

LSGUs in rural areas are more at risk of “brain drain” of young and qualified candidates than LSGUs within functional urban areas (FUAs) where there are comparatively more employment options.

So how can Polish LSGUs improve the attraction of candidates with these types of skills within the current pay framework? While pay is a key component of how the public sector is perceived as an employer, Box 7.4 provides examples of administrations that have begun to address issues of attractiveness and recruitment through initiatives that do not affect pay. The common thread underpinning these initiatives is the identification and prioritisation of key skills and competencies that add value to the public sector. Developing new ways to engage with candidates through in-person events (career fairs), formal partnerships with universities and the use of social media to promote job opportunities can all improve the pool of candidates in LSGUs. Reducing barriers to applying to jobs, such as facilitating online applications, can make it easier for candidates to apply, and re-thinking the assessment process for candidates – while respecting the provisions on recruitment in the law on local self-government – can help LSGUs have scope to modernise and upgrade recruitment. Finally, investing in employee career development by providing opportunities for staff to work in different parts of the LSGU to gain more experience can prove stimulating. These types of practices are usually known as “mobility programmes” and typically refer to a period of a few months during which an employee is supported to gain new skills by taking a short-term assignment in a different functional area.

Each of these practices depends on joined-up thinking and co-ordination among the many actors involved in HRM, which is the focus of the next section.

#### Box 7.4. Improving employer attractiveness and recruitment through non-pay related modalities

**Belgium:** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Finance has invested in improving outreach to candidates to promote careers in the ministry through social media. The ministry uses Facebook Live events to engage with candidates and has moved interviews and some testing online. A key component of this was developing more guidance and support for candidates during the application process and investing in induction programmes for new staff. Candidate satisfaction with the recruitment process as measured through surveys has increased.

**Estonia:** Estonia has invested in employer branding to promote careers as a senior public servant. Previous advertising campaigns have emphasised the mission-oriented nature of public service and appealed to candidates’ motivation to have an impact and serve the public good.

**France:** The Directorate-General for Public Administration (DGAFP) has developed a centralised recruitment portal and smartphone application for candidates to browse job offers at different levels of the public administration and submit applications through the portal. The portal and application are designed to increase user-friendliness, standardise job offers and provide greater control and visibility of candidates to hiring managers.

**Israel:** A pilot project led by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) aims to increase the attractiveness of public sector careers by involving senior public servants in various aspects of recruitment. Four ministries/agencies took part in the initial pilot. The CSC provided tailor-made support to senior managers in communicating with the public about career opportunities, reviewing and updating key job requirements, and engaging with candidates as part of the application process.

**Ireland:** Promoting public service as an employer of choice is one of the three pillars of the Civil Service People Strategy. Actions taken include supporting organisations to ensure roles are more varied and meaningful and by supporting staff to develop appropriate skills to respond effectively to evolving business challenges. Communications have been increased with existing civil servants, potential new



recruits and with the public to raise awareness of the richness, variety and importance of the work civil servants do on behalf of society. Addressing diversity and inclusion, mobility, the opportunity for promotion, learning and development of staff will also help the Civil Service be seen as an employer of choice.

**Italy:** In preparation for the 2021-27 period, the Calabria, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and Umbria regions in Italy have collaborated to set up a registry of chartered accountants specialised in the management and control of programmes co-financed by ESIF. This project was extended to include other administrations, such as those in Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Sicilia and Trento. The purpose is to help Managing Authorities of EU funds recruit candidates with sought-after skills but who can prove difficult to attract.

Source: Belgium: Presentation by Ms Joke Bauwens at SIGMA webinar on innovation in recruitment 22 July 2020; Estonia: Information provided by the Estonian Top Civil Service Excellence Centre; France: French Government (2019<sup>[24]</sup>), *Place de l'emploi public*, <https://www.place-emploi-public.gouv.fr/>; Israel: Information provided by the CSC, see also OECD (forthcoming<sup>[25]</sup>), "Leadership for a high performing public service, Draft working paper, OECD, Paris; Ireland: Civil Service HR Division (2017<sup>[26]</sup>), *People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017-2020*, <https://hr.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/People-Strategy-for-the-Civil-Service-2017-2020.pdf>; Italy: OECD (2020<sup>[27]</sup>), *Strengthening Governance of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy: Administrative Capacity Building Roadmaps*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9b71c8d8-en>.

### ***Developing coherent HRM institutions can provide a more effective basis for strategic workforce management practices***

Across the OECD, the structure of HRM decision-making usually tries to achieve a balance between several principles. At the national level, centralising decision-making in a central HRM body suggests a greater ability to align people management practices with high-level organisational objectives. Conversely, the assumption underlying decentralising decision-making to individual ministries or departments is that they are best placed to decide on policies that work for them. But for this to work, managers need to be bought into the system and seen as key partners for implementation and reforms. Managers need a degree of autonomy and flexibility to develop a high-performing culture, encourage good work and remedy sub-optimal performance. This is recognised in the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability, which calls on adherents to clarify the institutional responsibilities for people management to strengthen the effectiveness of the public employment system through:

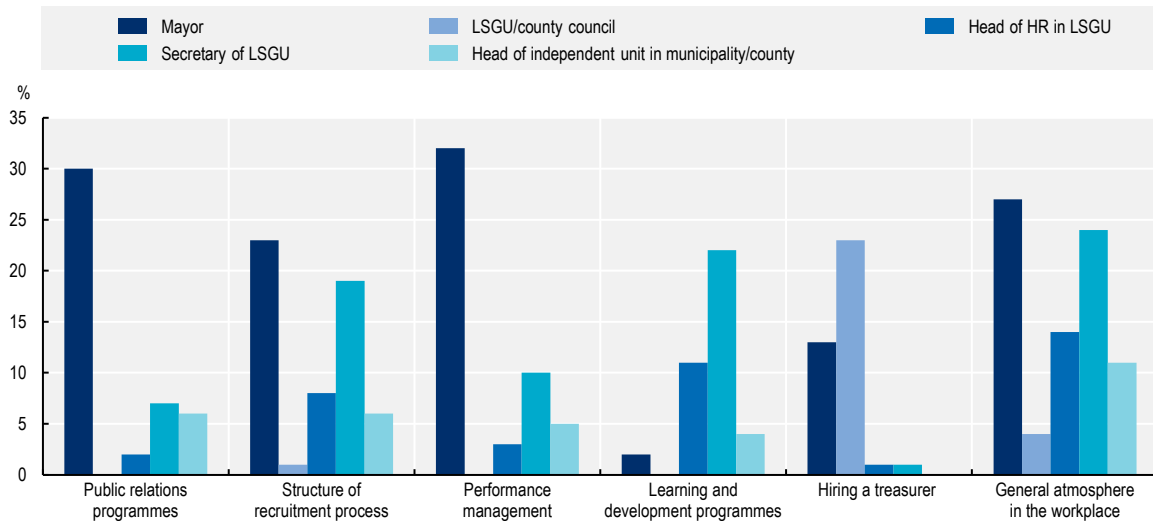
1. Establishing institutional authority to set and oversee common minimum standards for merit-based people management.
2. Delegating an appropriate level of autonomy to individual agencies, ministries, leaders and/or managers, in order to allow the alignment of people management with their strategic business objectives.
3. Ensuring appropriate mechanisms for communication and information sharing among institutional actors in the public employment system.
4. Ensuring that each institutional actor in the public employment system has the appropriate mandate and resources to function effectively.

Flexibility in decision-making is typically underpinned by a strategy or clear guidelines and rules of procedure so that HRM decision-making on aspects such as recruitment, promotion and training is done objectively and using all available workforce data. There is no one single right way to do this – the important aspect is to get the balance right between various principles such as transparency, flexibility, accountability and performance, and to ensure proper co-ordination between different actors involved in HRM decision-making.



In Polish LSGUs, formal responsibility for key HRM decisions like recruitment and promotion is concentrated mainly in the hands of two key positions: the mayor (*burmistrz/wójt*) and the secretary (*sekretarz*) of LSGUs (Figure 7.4). The mayor in LSGUs has a dual mandate: she or he is a political leader elected by citizens of the municipality and also an executive manager. The secretary is employed on the basis of an open recruitment competition, i.e. not appointed.

**Figure 7.4. Decision-making responsibility for key HRM processes in LSGUs**



Note: While the size of the questionnaire response sample does not allow to draw statistically relevant conclusions, it nevertheless offers sample-specific insights that may be relevant for a larger audience of Polish local self-governments units.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on LSGU responses to the OECD questionnaire (2020).

This concentration means that for the most part, HRM departments in LSGUs mostly carry out administrative tasks such as running payroll, processing training requests and ensuring that recruitment procedures meet all legal requirements. It is also important to note that there are additional actors outside the formal remit of HR departments who play an important role in the management and development of staff, e.g. operational managers (e.g. directors of departments and organisational, managers).

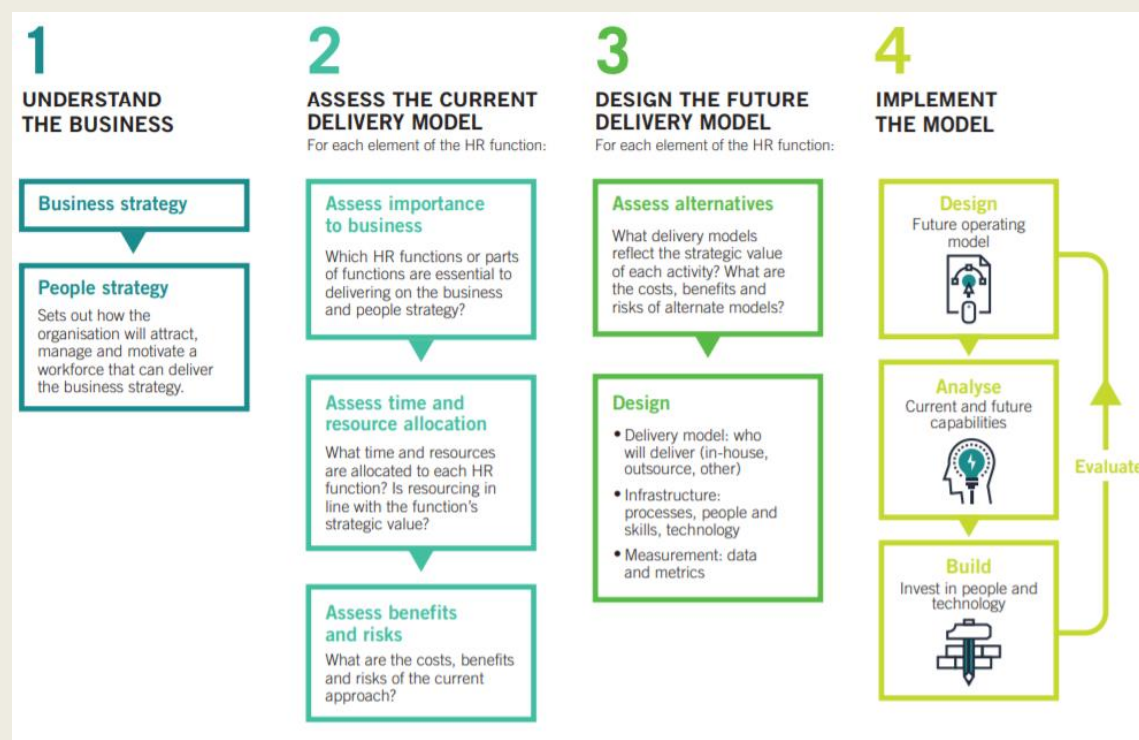
Responsibilities for different aspects of HRM is thus shared among many actors in Polish LSGUs. This can be seen as a good thing – HRM is a dynamic process involving a healthy division of responsibilities between line managers and the organisational HR unit as appropriate. Nevertheless, as LSGUs look to the future, the key question is whether the time spent by each actor on human resource activities adds value and contributes to an overall HR strategy. The overall goal is improved workforce capability; so are the activities of human resource departments and line managers underpinned by clear guidelines and a common vision of overall objectives?

In 2015, the Australian Public Service (APS) launched an exercise to address many of these questions: the review began with a vision for the future APS, examined existing reforms and benchmarked other country practices (Box 7.5). The review looked at the need to re-design HRM practices and specifically found that human resource activities in the APS were not sufficiently focused on high-value, strategic activities, partly due to capability gaps. It found a lack of clarity around the role of the APS Commission in HRM and noted the scope to re-design learning and development and leverage technology for better HR performance and delivery.

### Box 7.5. 'Unlocking Potential': Sample model for review of human resource capacity and practice in the Australian Public Service (APS)

The APS review included a sample model for reviewing how different people and parts of the organisation contributed to HRM:

Figure 7.5. Sample model for review of human resource capacity, Australia



Source: Australian Public Service Commission (2015<sup>[28]</sup>), *Unlocking Potential: Australian Public Service Workforce Management Contestability Review*, [https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Unlocking-potential-APS-workforce-management-review-Design\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Unlocking-potential-APS-workforce-management-review-Design_WEB.pdf).

Reviewing and reinforcing human resource units and activities means that LSGUs can devote more of their time to higher-value (and potentially more engaging) activities such as developing and managing programmes to manage LSGU staff more strategically. In many administrations, HRM units play a key role in the collection, management and use of data used to inform workforce management policies such as recruitment, training and employee turnover. This could mean, for example, exploring how HRM units could be positioned to support mobility programmes for short-term secondments to other parts of the LSGU, or indeed a different LSGU or level of LSGU such as the regional voivodeship. The APS review stemmed from the recognition that reviewing HR capacity was a necessary first step to building stronger and more effective workforces. As LSGUs in Poland look to the future, their ability to put in place effective HRM practices will play an important role in how they are able to develop and mobilise the skills of LSGU staff to deliver value for citizens.

While individual LSGU staff may not perceive reform of HRM as a key priority, one factor may well be a misconception of HR practices and what a modern, well-developed HR function is actually about (Zientara and Kuczynski, 2009<sup>[29]</sup>). A dominant theme in research on HRM practices in local self-government in Poland is the degree to which they have moved away from traditional, “top-down” forms of people management to embrace modern management methods. This suggests that there is indeed scope for reviewing human resource operations and building capacity to support leaders and managers in attracting, recruiting and managing a high-performing workforce. The following recommendations provide guidelines for how LSGUs may wish to do so.

## Recommendations

The chapter on HRM describes the shape of local self-government employment in Poland and the legal provisions, which govern key aspects of people management. It presents and discusses the three related challenges of leadership/management development, improvement of employer attractiveness/recruitment and the importance of effective HRM institutions and practices.

This is a good time to build momentum on many of these issues. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many administrations across OECD countries have had to rethink and adapt key elements of how they run and manage public sector workforces. The post-crisis period will be a unique opportunity to capitalise on changes whose implementation was expected to occur only gradually in the future. Examples include large-scale remote working, agile tools to reallocate staff to where they are most needed, and streamlined and technology-enhanced people management processes such as recruitment and training.

The recommendations that follow are designed to support LSGUs to achieve these broad objectives. A common thread underpinning the recommendations is that reforms to HRM practices are not only about regulations: they also require a great deal of culture change within institutions. The question is how administrations can attract and retain qualified people and ensure that they work in a positive and constructive environment, and continually develop their skills. In general, public sector legislation – and this is the case at the local self-government level in Poland – leaves some room for managerial discretion in achieving these aims. The challenge is to find it and use it in ways that encourage innovative thinking: often what is most needed is internal discussion, consensus and agreement to pilot a new approach.

Given the vast number of LSGUs in Poland, the recommendations below should be treated as indicative of good practices. The point is not to apply them narrowly but to use them as a basis to design solutions that adapt to local conditions.

### **Recommendations for all LSGUs**

*Invest in supporting leaders and managers to ensure that they have the autonomy, tools, support and accountability to effectively use their leadership capabilities*

This refers to political leaders such as mayors as well as positions such as municipal secretaries and line unit operational managers. Leaders’ and managers’ objectives should provide a clear sense of values, vision, direction and an appropriate level of autonomy as well as accountability to be able to achieve them. Leaders should have access to learning opportunities and peer support (such as coaching/mentoring) as well as relevant tools – including financial tools – to access the skills and expertise they need. This could include initiatives to:

- Increase ways for mayors and senior managers (such as the treasurer, municipal secretary and line managers of organisational units) to discuss training needs and share experiences in problem-solving, both within individual LSGUs and with other LSGUs.

- Develop “communities of practice”, i.e. informal groups to structure thematic collaboration and share good practices. This has proven to be an effective practice in many administrations.
- Map competency gaps at the management level, exploring how these could be addressed through current or new training tools.
- Ensure that accurate and relevant human resource data are available to senior managers to inform policies, e.g. through data held in IT systems or generated through employee surveys.
- Support the development of a middle-management pipeline, i.e. to support high-performing staff with the potential to move into managerial positions in the future.

### *Focus on the attraction and development of transversal skills and competencies*

Many LSGUs reported facing difficulties in candidate volume (not enough) or quality (not enough with the right skills) – and sometimes both. Investment in employer branding and a more strategic approach to recruitment could help address these gaps. LSGUs could begin to address this and consider:

- Identifying key competencies that add value to the work of the LSGU and prioritising ways to communicate job opportunities better to candidates with those competencies. This could include: developing relationships with universities and public employment services to increase the number of qualified applicants; adjusting recruitment processes to test for these competencies; and investing in fit-for-purpose and needs-based recruitment programmes.
- Seeking out internal staff from LSGU resources (e.g. with managerial potential) and preparing them to carry out new duties or take on new functions.
- Pooling resources between LSGUs for hard-to-recruit profiles, e.g. through identifying roles where one particular profile could work on a project basis for LSGUs that are geographically close to each other or, if the work allows, remotely.
- Introducing an online application for recruitment. Jobs in local self-government are advertised electronically (online) but candidates still have to fill out and send hard copies of their applications. Adding the possibility to apply online could help candidates – especially younger candidates with valuable IT skills – to perceive local self-government as a modern employer and fitting place for their ambitions.
- Reviewing the recruitment process. While staying within the scope of legislation, LSGUs could review aspects of the recruitment process such as improving communication with candidates and ensuring that screening and interviews are focused on assessing relevant competencies in addition to minimum requirements.

### *Review the effectiveness of HRM practices and invest in strategic workforce management capabilities*

The scope of local self-government responsibilities is changing. Some organisational structures are no longer a good fit for these increased responsibilities. While some local development strategies make reference to the human capital required, this is frequently in the form of headcount estimates. This is a good starting point but a focus on what type of workforce – not just numbers – is needed should be included in planning processes. This could include initiatives to:

- Support human resource units and managers so that they can play a greater role in the achievement of organisational objectives, particularly through the identification, recruitment and development of high-potential talent.
- Monitor the impact of HR policies and procedures, gather and review workforce data and adjust policies where appropriate, including through budgetary and human capital resource reallocation in line with organisational objectives.

- Invest in the capability of HR units and managers through training on SHRM.
- Invest in improving employee engagement as part of a healthy organisational culture where employees feel motivated and supported to contribute to LSGU objectives.

### ***Recommendations for the Ministry of the Interior and Administration***

*Test a more flexible approach to regulations where there is clear evidence that it makes sense*

LSGUs of all sizes work under a common legal framework for HRM. The ministry, either on its own initiative or through relevant bodies, could consider reviewing where targeted and evidence-based derogations to the law on local self-government may be useful. For example, some smaller LSGUs reported persistent difficulty in recruiting/retaining much-needed profiles. The ministry could grant flexibility for a pilot group of LSGUs to develop alternative recruitment solutions that would still respect the principle of merit-based recruitment and transparency in these cases.

*Consult with local self-government organisations regarding long-term pay strategy for LSGU staff and elected representatives*

On the one hand, many LSGUs feel that staff salaries are too low. On the other, the Ministry of the Interior correctly points out that national regulations only provide for a minimum level of salary and that, therefore, LSGUs do have scope to adjust staff salaries upwards in order to improve attraction. However, a stumbling block appears to be the salaries of elected officials, where there is an upper ceiling on what they can be paid. In light of these divergences of opinion, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration could consider convening a pay reform commission or using existing consultation bodies to study the state-of-play of pay at the LSGU level and the impact of salary on attraction and retention of selected skill sets.

*Expand the ministry's co-ordination role in delivering targeted training*

The ministry can play a valuable role in complementing local training strategies by identifying and supporting the dissemination of examples of good practice. While it already does this to a degree, particularly through the use of EU funding, it should explore how it could expand support to more LSGUs on a more long-term basis, complementing training organised in co-ordination with local self-government organisations on a decentralised basis. The ministry could also play a supporting role in creating opportunities for sharing of knowledge and experience across municipalities, e.g. through the facilitation of communities of practice.

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