



2025

**INSTITUTIONALISATION
OF THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE
MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
AND THE ASTANA CIVIL SERVICE HUB**

This study report is the result of a joint effort of the Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH) and the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM) of the Republic of Korea. The study explores institutional models, partnership mechanisms, and operational practices of leading international organisations working in public personnel administration. It provides a comparative analysis of their priorities, functions, and cooperation modalities, and examines the emerging needs of the ACSH participating countries. The findings offer some insights and afford practical recommendations to inform the establishment and development of the ACSH Korea Centre.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ultimate purpose of this study was to assess the feasibility of a Centre of Excellence in public personnel management – the ACSH Centre in Korea – that will elevate the collaboration between the Republic of Korea, UNDP, and the Astana Civil Service Hub in the field of civil service reform and development to a more meaningful level. It explores potential approaches this partnership may adopt to function effectively.

The study presents insights that can guide the development of the Centre’s strategic and operational frameworks, define its core functions, and suggest cooperative mechanisms. This material will inform the discussions with the relevant Ministries in Korea regarding the potential establishment and operation of the ACSH-Korea Centre, as well as its long-term sustainability and relevance in the personnel management realm at the regional and international levels.

The report envisions the establishment of the ACSH Centre in Korea as a flagship initiative for Korea’s “administrative diplomacy”, in strategically disseminating its public sector innovations, by leveraging the ACSH ever expanding network of its participating countries and its status as an “international platform of excellence”.

Furthermore, it envisages its focus to be on digital modernisation of personnel administration, as well as on institutional integrity and meritocracy, and its “Proactive Administration” framework; while utilising the proven ACSH model of thematic Peer Learning Alliances.

It also envisions to be cost-effective by adopting a streamlined governance and operational model; a lean Secretariat model for minimising overheads and prioritising high-level technical expertise, financed by a dual-stream funding model, by Korea and project-based voluntary contributions from its participating countries.

In conclusion, we believe that the establishment and operation of a Centre for Excellence for public personnel management will provide a practical and strategic response to the growing demand for Korea’s public personnel management expertise and contemporary experience around the world, utilising the Astana Civil Service Hub, an agile and versatile platform for development cooperation, and thus ultimately advancing the United Nations Sustainable Goals 16 and 17.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the outcome of a collaborative effort of the Astana Civil Service Hub and the Ministry of Personnel Management of the Republic of Korea, showcasing their strong commitment to institutionalising international cooperation in public personnel administration and advancing evidence-based approaches to civil service development.

We extend our deep appreciation to the diligent research team at the Astana Civil Service Hub, including Ms. Tolkyn Omarova, Project Expert; Mr. Amanzhol Yestekov, Project Associate; and Mr. Panagiotis Liverakos, Research and Knowledge Management International Consultant. Their dedicated efforts in research planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting have significantly contributed to the success of this project.

A special acknowledgment is extended to the representatives from the Ministry of Personnel Management – Ms. Yejin Han, Deputy Director, and Mr. Jung Hae-young, Assistant Director, of the International Cooperation Division – for sharing their expertise, strategic guidance, and technical support throughout the study.

We also express our sincere gratitude to colleagues from the Agency for Civil Service Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and to experts from the OECD (GOV), the World Bank, and UNPOG, as well as to representatives of leading professional associations such as the American Society for Public Administration, the Asian Association for Public Administration, and EROPA. Their generous contributions sharing their insights and perspectives greatly enriched the comparative analysis, strengthened the international dimension of the study, and enhanced the robustness of the findings.

Last but not least, heartfelt thanks are extended to all collaborators and participants who contributed to the needs-assessment survey. Their feedback was essential for identifying regional priorities and informing the recommendations for the future ACSH Korea Centre.

About the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM)

The Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM) is a central government agency of the Republic of Korea responsible for designing and implementing public personnel policy including recruitment, remuneration, human resource development, welfare and pension programmes, and ethics and disciplinary processes affecting the public officials of Korea. In November 2014, the MPM was newly established under its current name to reinforce a fair, transparent, and balanced innovation throughout the civil service system in Korea. Currently, the MPM consists of 8 bureaus and 31 divisions, and two affiliated organisations including the National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI) and the Appeals Commission totalling 594 employees (405 in head office and 189 in affiliated organisations, as of 26 March 2024).

More information at <https://openminister.mpm.go.kr/english/>

About the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading United Nations organisation fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with its broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, it helps nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and the planet.

More information at www.undp.org

About the Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH)

The Astana Civil Service Hub is a flagship initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations Development Programme. It was created in 2013 by 5 international organisations and 25 countries: now comprising 45 participating countries. The geographical range of its participants stretches from the Americas and Europe through the CIS, the Caucasus, and Central Asia to ASEAN countries, demonstrating that partnerships for civil service excellence is a constant and universal need for all nations.

Its mandate is to assist in the promotion of public service effectiveness by supporting the efforts of governments of the participating countries in building institutional and human capacity; and thus, contributing to the improvement of civil service systems in the countries of the region and beyond.

The Astana Civil Service Hub is a multilateral institutional platform for the continuous exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of public service development, aiming at supporting government in the region and beyond through fostering partnerships, capacity building and peer-to-peer learning activities, and evidence-based research.

More information at www.astanacivilservicehub.org.

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

AAPA	Asian Association for Public Administration
ACSH	Astana Civil Service Hub
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APAG	Academy for Public Administration and Governance, Vietnam
ARPA	Asian Review for Public Administration
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CAPS	Chinese Academy of Personnel Science
CJK	China–Japan–Korea
CLAD	Latin American Centre for Development Administration
DPIDG	Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EROPA	Eastern Regional Organisation for Public Administration
GOV	OECD Directorate for Public Governance
ICSC	International Civil Service Commission
MOIS	Ministry of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPM	Ministry of Personnel Management of the Republic of Korea
NAOG	National Academy of Governance, Mongolia
NCPAG	National College of Public Administration and Governance, Philippines
NIDA	National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand
NIPA	National Institute of Public Administration, Indonesia
NHI	National Human Resources Development Institute
NSG	Network of Schools of Government
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEM	Public Employment and Management
PGC	Public Governance Committee
SANPA	South Asian Network for Public Administration
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TOT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNPAN	United Nations Public Administration Network
UNPOG	United Nations Project Office on Governance
WGS	World Government Summit

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study

In June 2024, the Ministry of Personnel Management of the Republic of Korea and the Astana Civil Service Hub signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the ACSH Korea Centre. With this task in mind, it is timely to clearly define its envisioned role, operational strategy, and its long-term value. This joint research explores the potential approaches the ACSH Korea may adopt to function effectively. The Study aims to lay the groundwork for a meaningful and sustainable collaboration between Korea and the ACSH participating countries in the field of civil service development.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

Many international organisations and research institutes exist that address public personnel administration related subject matters. In this landscape, the ACSH stands out as an entity encompassing wide expertise and experience in personnel management matters; a culmination of its twelve-year active involvement in public personnel management and civil service development. Against this backdrop, the establishment of the ACSH Korea Centre presents a unique opportunity to utilise the ACSH as the mechanism through which the Korean Government to play a prominent role in shaping global discourse on public personnel management.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to provide information and evidence that can inform discussions with the relevant government ministries in Korea regarding the potential establishment and operation of the ACSH Korea Centre. The study presents some practical insights and recommendations that can guide the development of the Centre's strategic and operational frameworks, delineate its core functions and suggest its cooperative mechanisms; modalities, thereby supporting its long-term sustainability and relevance across the broader ACSH network.

1.3 Methodology

The study has adopted a qualitative comparative approach to examine the roles and operational strategies of other international organisations involved in public personnel administration and governance matters. By analysing the focus areas, functions, and institutional arrangements of such organisations, the research aims to identify the unique and distinguishing features which may provide a niche for the ACSH Korea Centre. This comparative analysis will help inform strategies that can differentiate the Centre and position it as a strategic hub for specialised international cooperation in civil service reform.

Through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from the Ministry of Personnel Management of the Republic of Korean, the Astana Civil Service Hub, experts from international organisations, ACSH long-standing partners, i.e., UNDP, OECD. These interviews provided valuable insights that may contribute towards shaping the strategic considerations for establishing the ACSH Korea Centre, as well as its operational expectations, and potential areas for collaboration.

2. CONTEXT OF THE ACSH KOREA CENTRE

2.1 The Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH)

The Astana Civil Service Hub was founded as a joint initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan and UNDP. In March 2013, 25 countries and five international organisations adopted the Hub's founding declaration, and it has since grown to include 45 participating countries. ACSH's mission is to assist governments in promoting civil service effectiveness by building institutional and human capacity. ACSH focuses on three main activity areas: (1) Partnerships and networking, (2) Capacity building and peer-to-peer learning, and (3) Research and knowledge management.

The ACSH was conceived to strengthen regional cooperation, recognising that pooling expertise and peer learning can accelerate reforms beyond what individual countries might achieve alone.

It is governed by a multilateral executive structure. The Steering Committee – led by its Chairman – provides strategic oversight and sets its course. The Committee, which includes UNDP's Resident Representative, senior figures from the OECD and other global development institutions, and Kazakhstan's Agency for Civil Service Affairs directs the ACSH research and capacity-building priorities.

An Advisory Board – comprising 15 members, mostly from its founding partners - offers substantive guidance on activities and publications and helps cultivate new partnerships. Implementing organisations include the UNDP and Kazakhstan's Agency for Civil Service Affairs. Hence, the ACSH blends government leadership, UN oversight and broad international support in its governance structure.

The ACSH activities are designed around a demand-driven agenda that keeps knowledge and practice exchange flexible. It conducts workshops, study tours and on-line trainings on topics like personnel management, digital transformation, and others, as defined by the results of biennial needs assessments surveys.

The Hub pioneered thematic Peer Learning Alliances (e.g. on one-stop-shop services, e-government, and AI governance) to capture tacit knowledge from practitioners. In response to COVID-19, ACSH promptly launched a Virtual Alliance of Practitioners, an online platform containing over 40 practical guides and conducting over 40 webinars for more than 5,000 civil servants. ACSH also supports formal training: for example, it offers graduate scholarships at Kazakhstan's Academy of Public Administration. Altogether, these activities embody ACSH's innovative model of combining experiential learning, research and networking.

Key factors behind ACSH's success include its broad partnerships and flexibility. It has established over 90 institutional partnerships worldwide (with government bodies, international organisations, think tanks and universities) and signed over 60 memoranda of understanding, providing the participating countries with access to global expertise. A roster of more than 140 leading experts offers high-level expertise and professional advice at the request of participating countries.

The ACSH tailors its activities to country needs: needs-assessment periodic surveys inform the participating countries' priorities and guide the ACSH offerings. By aggregating resources, ACSH avoids duplication: for example, dozens of countries attend a single regional workshop, making capacity-building cost-effective.

Numerous metrics attest to the ACSH impact. Over the past decade, it has organised about 200 capacity-building events, reaching some 12,800 civil servants from 126 countries. It has produced over 90 knowledge products (from case studies to policy briefs) and published 25 issues of its International Journal on Civil Service Reform and Practice. These outputs have been widely

recognised: UNDP officials note that ACSH is “one of the prime instruments... to make a contribution towards [the SDGs]” and an “efficient platform” for consolidating and disseminating governance best practices. In short, the ACSH collaborative network and innovative formats (e-learning, peer forums, publications) have proven effective in promoting knowledge sharing and reform.

ACSH occupies a unique niche among civil service cooperation initiatives. Unlike single-country training institutes or bilateral programmes, it is a multilateral platform covering Eurasia and beyond. It convenes officials from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region in common forums. For example, in 2025 ACSH brought more than 30 civil servants from 12 countries (Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Asia–Pacific) to Korea to study AI-driven governance.

It also engages global networks – at the World Government Summit 2025, ACSH leaders met counterparts from the OECD, ASPA (USA), EROPA (Asia-Pacific), AAPAM (Africa) and other regional associations to forge links. This cross-regional remit distinguishes ACSH: it acts as a bridge between Asia and Europe, linking the Global South and OECD countries. An independent assessment notes that the ACSH has become “an international platform of excellence for knowledge sharing, capacity development and networking”.

By contrast, most other civil service networks are confined to particular regions (e.g., AAPA in Asia, or ESPANet in Europe) or are exclusively donor-led. ACSH’s multistakeholder model – blending government ownership with UNDP oversight and diverse partners – is itself a best-practice example. Indeed, the UN’s High-Level Committee praised ACSH as “a successful example of multilateral cooperation” and urged replicating its model in other regions. Its voluntary participation mechanism (any country can join), its regional neutrality, and its flexible agenda give it agility that few formal institutions can match.

For potential funders, ACSH therefore offers a leveraged way to support reforms across many countries simultaneously, amplifying impact. For participating governments and funders, ACSH provides concrete value. It delivers peer-reviewed content and training that align with international best practices, reducing each country’s need to build such capacity in isolation. By participating, countries gain access to global benchmarks (e.g., from Korea’s digital government, OECD guidelines, etc).

Donors view ACSH as advancing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals by strengthening governance and the rule of law; as UNDP emphasises, the Hub’s work directly supports SDG targets on effective, accountable institutions. Stakeholders note that ACSH fosters sustainable cooperation. Rather than short-term workshops, it builds long-term networks of practitioners and experts. A Qazaq diplomat observes that the Hub “promotes... creation of a professional civil service” and has “helped...governments build capacity, forge partnerships and adopt best practices and innovations from all over the world”.

Potential funders can thus expect their contributions to catalyse reforms across the region, not just isolated programmes. The ACSH Governing Committee also leverages both in-kind support (hosting meetings, staff time) and financial contributions from members, spreading costs. In practical terms, ACSH has managed roughly USD 1.2 million per year (2024–2026) to sustain its activities, a relatively modest budget given its reach.

2.2 The Korean Public Service System

The Republic of Korea’s public service system has evolved to ensure democratic and efficient administration, with public servants serving the entire nation. The core goal of this system is to establish a government that meets the expectations of the people by securing administrative professionalism, safety, fairness, and efficiency. The personnel management system is guided by

three fundamental principles: (1) Democratic Civil Service System, emphasising a commitment to serving the Korean populace; (2) Career Civil Service System, recruiting individuals dedicated to a lifelong commitment to public; and (3) Merit System, placing individuals in roles strictly based on qualifications and abilities, irrespective of political affiliation or favouritism.

Korea has just over one million public servants, with 750,000 serving as national public officials and 390,000 as local public officials (2025). The Korean civil service is broadly divided into «career» and «special career» civil servants. Career civil servants encompass general services, special services, and technical services personnel, while special career civil servants include politically determined personnel, specially designated services personnel, contract-based personnel, and manual workers. The rights, duties, and responsibilities of public servants are protected and regulated by the National Public Service Act and Local Public Service Act, which ensure the efficient operation of the government.

The Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM) established in 2014, is the government institution responsible for public sector personnel administration and management. It deals with various aspects of public service including recruitment, promotion, talent development, compensation, performance management, ethics, and pensions. It carries out an integrated personnel administration function, and it promotes various policies to improve public sector culture and ensure the protection of public servants' rights.

These tasks are carried out by the Ministry and its affiliated agencies, which include the National Human Resources Development Institute and the Appeals Commission, responsible for nurturing talent and protecting the rights of public servants respectively. Additionally, the Government Employees Pension Service operates the pension system, contributing to the economic stability and welfare of public servants and their families.

The MPM has been continuously working on improving the public sector culture to strengthen accountability and foster a work environment where public servants take pride in their work. Specifically, the MPM encourages proactive administration so that public servants can handle their duties creatively and professionally for the public good. A system has been established to support public servants in cases where responsibility issues arise, such as disciplinary action, investigation, or lawsuits, when engaging in proactive administration to improve unreasonable regulations. This system ensures that public servants can perform their duties safely.

The Ministry of Personnel Management has also been working on improving organisational culture in the public service through encouraging work-life balance and creating a child-friendly work environment. Currently, public servants with children under 8 years old can use up to 3 years of parental leave, and a revision to the National Public Service Act is underway to extend this leave to public servants with children under 12. Additionally, public servants with children under 8 years old can use up to 2 hours of paid special leave (childcare time) per day, helping to fill the gap in childcare and improving the work environment and job satisfaction of public servants.

Digital technology is also being utilised to innovate personnel administration. The e-Saram is a standardised electronic human resource management system – currently upgraded to its third-generation version – enabling government-wide personnel administration, with computerised tasks from recruitment to retirement, facilitating electronic management of appointments, performance evaluations, training, work scheduling, and salary calculations. Since 2014, mobile services are supporting a flexible work environment. Currently, efforts are underway to recommend personalised training courses for public servants using AI through the talent development platform. E-Saram's functionalities in personnel management has been the subject of comparative studies with other personnel management systems, highlighting its features and versatility as good practices to follow (ACSH, 2023).

Korea's public service personnel management has gained global recognition, ranking 3rd in the areas of recruitment and senior public service management in the OECD's "Government at a Glance 2021". This achievement has increased international interest in the innovation and modernisation of Korea's public sector and personnel management systems. In this context, the MPM continues to cooperate through multilateral platforms such as the OECD, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the World Bank to advance public sector innovation and personnel management systems.

Furthermore, cooperation requests continue from regions such as Central and South-eastern Asia, Latin America, and Africa, where countries are eager to learn from Korea's exemplary personnel management systems and digital public service administration. Cooperation methods are evolving, including sending Korean experts abroad, long-term study programmes in Korea, and training local faculty members directly or in affiliation with knowledge sharing institutions. Through these efforts, MPM contributes to the global development of public sectors through innovations in public personnel administration and multilateral and bilateral international cooperation.

2.3 Global Landscape of Public Personnel Administration

Broader changes in public administration globally have also triggered changes in public personnel administration, as public human resources are an integral part of the public administration realm. Changing conditions call for different types of civil servants. Civil servants who are able to take initiative in a variety of policy areas and issues and are capable of coping with contemporary challenges. And, as such challenges facing governments around the world multiply and become more complex, the role of a well-functioning public administration grows ever more important. Indeed, we believe that, in the 21st century, a merit-based, effective and efficient public service will become a nation's most important competitive advantage.

A changing world points to the need for public personnel who are competent professionals, who possess and acquire enhanced capacities to work individually or in teams, under pressure in demanding environments, both national and international, in which they must be expected to serve the public good single-mindedly and unequivocally. Furthermore, overall technological and other developments have not left public personnel administration unscathed. They have affected the bureaucratic structures traditionally associated with the public sector. A key instrument in these developments has been to encourage greater flexibility and discretion of officials in the management of human resources. It has been unavoidable given the changes that have taken place in organisational structure and management techniques.

The emphasis has shifted to strategic management in the attempt to overcome the disconnect between policy and operations. The most common changes in to HRM appear to be around decentralisation and accompanying devolution to line managers, flexibility in personnel budgets, performance management, management development and delegation that encourages leadership and personal development.

Moreover, HRM techniques developed in the private sector have offered considerable scope for applications within the public sector, although limited in reality because of the special conditions within the public sector. They have urged public sector managers to develop a range of new competencies in different cultural, organisational and environmental conditions. Oftentimes, greater flexibility and responsiveness as well as a result-driven approach is demanded of the public sector. At the same time, the preservation of institutional integrity is still essential.

Nevertheless, the main goal here is to improve managerial capacity of the public service in handling complex contemporary issues in an environment of high expectations by citizens. This is a strategic shift in HRM aimed at building and enhancing a cadre of highly qualified, highly able,

and highly motivated human resources at all levels of government in the short-, medium- and long-term (Farazmand, 2004: 6).

By way of concluding, we may say that there is clearly no convergence in most areas of civil service reform. However, some salient common trends have emerged. For example, a clear trend is a reduction of the differences between the private and public sectors. There has also been a tendency to increase managerial autonomy, discretion and flexibility by deregulating human resources management, delegating authority and individualising accountability and performance, especially among OECD Member States. Furthermore, there is a tendency to focus on the quality and efficiency of civil servants' performance. Thus, worldwide, priority has been attached to the issues of effectiveness, transparency, accountability, client orientation, integrity and responsiveness. Lastly, it seems that many countries have embarked on creating comprehensive electronic personnel management systems in order to streamline personnel management operations and other tasks, such as the management of performance appraisals, the analysis, planning and management of training needs, etc.

2.4 Rationale for Establishing the ACSH Korea Centre

The Republic of Korea has established itself as a global benchmark in public personnel management, particularly through its pioneering digital human resource management (e-Saram) and robust integrity frameworks. Current demand for benchmarking these systems has shifted from proactive Korean outreach to a demand-driven model, where partner governments – particularly from Central Asia, ASEAN, and the Caucasus – initiate official requests for cooperation. As Korea continues to navigate internal challenges such as aging populations and low birth rates, international cooperation has evolved into a mutually beneficial paradigm where Korea both shares its expertise and seeks innovative solutions from its global partners.

Within this expanding landscape, the Ministry of Personnel Management remains the central architect of Korea's civil service excellence. However, its institutional structure was not designed to operate as a permanent international knowledge hub. International cooperation functions are concentrated in a small unit that already operates at full capacity. This creates an operational bottleneck when high-level policy and reform work risks being crowded out by the growing logistical and administrative demands of hosting delegations, responding to bilateral requests, and maintaining follow-up. The challenge is a function of the current institutional arrangements, rather than of commitment, ambition, or strategic intent.

Conversely, the Astana Civil Service Hub has evolved into an international development cooperation platform – over the past thirteen years – that builds and sustains long-term partnerships, it creates and nourishes networks of experts and practitioners, and it transfers pertinent knowledge and practical experience to its participating countries and beyond. It is worth noting the significant role the Republic of Korea has played in this remarkable evolution.

In this context, the ACSH Korea Centre may be the most suitable vehicle to tap into the Ministry's resources in various personnel matters and utilise the ACSH as the platform that will contribute to: (i) the creation of partnerships across thematic areas in personnel management and development to disseminate good practices, (ii) the emergence of expert networks focusing on various aspects of personnel management in the public sector, and (iii) the generation of knowledge for the benefit of the Centre's participating countries.

The establishment of an ACSH Centre in Korea provides a practical and strategic response to the growing demand for Korea's public personnel management expertise while simultaneously strengthening the global role of the Astana Civil Service Hub as an agile, low-bureaucracy platform for international cooperation. It transforms expanding international interest from an operational

burden into a structured, scalable, and cost-efficient opportunity. By externalising research, capacity building, coordination, logistics, and technical follow-up to a dedicated entity, the Centre relieves institutional pressure from the Ministry of Personnel Management, allowing it to preserve its focus on domestic reform while engaging internationally with greater professionalism and continuity. Unlike a government ministry, the Centre offers flexibility in recruitment and financing, enabling it to engage non-civil service experts and maintain long-term analytical continuity that rotating public officials cannot ensure.

The Centre also addresses one of the most persistent challenges identified by partner countries, including Kazakhstan: the erosion of institutional memory caused by frequent staff rotation. By acting as a permanent repository of technical knowledge, project history, and cooperation frameworks, the ACSH Centre ensures continuity across administrative cycles and protects long-term investments from stagnation. It ensures that the technical nuances of a five-year capacity development project are not lost when a Ministry Director or Project Manager rotates to a new position.

Equally important is the platform advantage. ACSH offers a low-bureaucracy, agile cooperation mechanism that minimises red tape and avoids the heavy administrative procedures typically associated with bilateral or intergovernmental arrangements. Instead of Korea having to negotiate and manage dozens of separate MOUs, diplomatic clearances, and reporting lines with individual countries, cooperation through ACSH provides immediate, streamlined access to a network of more than 45 countries under a single institutional framework.

This approach significantly reduces transactional friction: fewer formal negotiations, faster mobilisation of activities, lighter administrative procedures, and lower coordination costs. Time and budget that would otherwise be spent on bureaucratic processes can be redirected toward substantive technical work, research, and capacity building. By replacing fragmented bilateralism with an efficient multilateral platform, ACSH enables Korea and its partners to cooperate in a more flexible, cost-effective, and impact-oriented manner, while preserving the professionalism and credibility of formal international engagement.

Overall, the establishment of an ACSH Korea Centre offers tangible benefits for all the stakeholders. By embedding Korea's world-class experience directly within the ACSH ecosystem, the Centre enhances Kazakhstan's leadership as the initiator of a truly global governance platform and providing partner countries with streamlined, red-tape-light access to high-quality expertise through a single multilateral framework.

Operating under a multilateral framework, the Centre would help overcome traditional "silos" in international cooperation, including those observed within regional UN structures, and provide a platform for structured, multi-country learning and collaboration. By leveraging Korea's technical expertise and resource support, the Centre offers practical tools and guidance for implementing reforms effectively, ensuring sustainable capacity building while maximizing the impact of international cooperation.

At the same time, the establishment of the Centre is a projection of Korea's strategic soft power. By institutionalising its role within the ACSH network, Korea moves from being a "provider of lessons" to a "shaper of global standards." State agencies often lack time and resources to conduct deep, cross-regional comparative research. The Centre will fill this gap, producing evidence-based studies that align Korean innovations with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As an externalized entity, the Centre possesses financial and analytical flexibility to respond rapidly to emerging global opportunities, such as high-level HR forums or urgent benchmarking requests, without the rigid constraints of annual state budgeting cycles.

Ultimately, for the global community, the provides a coherent, multilateral, and SDG-aligned platform for public service reform, directly contributing to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by strengthening transparent, accountable, and effective public administrations, and to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by promoting inclusive, cross-regional, and results-oriented partnerships. Through peer learning, evidence generation, and structured knowledge exchange, the Centre supports sustainable capacity building across regions and reinforces multilateral cooperation as a driver of governance reform.

3. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PLATFORMS

In the global landscape, public personnel management and civil service reform are addressed by a range of international organisations and research institutes, albeit to varying degrees and through different institutional lenses. While some organisations engage with these issues more directly, others approach them as part of broader agendas related to public governance, institutional development, and administrative innovation. With the exception of the Astana Civil Service Hub, the review did not identify any multilateral international organisation whose core mandate is exclusively focused on personnel administration or civil service management.

Against this backdrop, a purposeful selection of multilateral platforms was undertaken for comparative analysis. The study focuses on the Eastern Regional Organisation for Public Administration, the OECD Directorate for Public Governance, and the United Nations Project Office on Governance, which together represent complementary institutional models operating at regional and global levels. The selection includes both regional and international organisations, allowing for meaningful comparison across different mandates, scales, and modes of engagement.

The selected organisations were analysed across five dimensions:

- (i) organisational scope and agenda-setting;
- (ii) functions and delivery modalities;
- (iii) institutional structure and governance models;
- (iv) partnership mechanisms and cooperation approaches; and
- (v) strategic insights and lessons learned.

This comparative approach enables the study to move beyond a narrow, sector-specific assessment and instead generate strategically relevant insights into how different multilateral platforms contribute – directly or indirectly – to civil service and public sector reform.

3.1 Eastern Regional Organisation for Public Administration

The Eastern Regional Organisation for Public Administration (EROPA) is a long-standing regional platform for cooperation in public administration in the Asia Pacific. It stands as the first regional organisation in the Global South dedicated to the professionalisation of public administration to accelerate economic and social development. Established by treaty in 1958 and formally constituted in 1960, EROPA is hosted by the University of the Philippines' National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG) in Manila. Its objectives focus on advancing the study and understanding of public administration, fostering cooperation and knowledge exchange among institutions and practitioners, and developing leadership and management capacity, particularly among current and future public sector leaders.¹

¹ <http://www.eropa.co/constitution.html>

3.1.1 Organisational Scope and Agenda-Setting

EROPA's historical and contemporary focus has been firmly anchored in public administration and management, with particular emphasis on the role of the bureaucracy and the civil service. Long before “governance” became a dominant term in international discourse, EROPA concentrated on public administration practice. Over time, it expanded its thematic scope to address governance more broadly, including local governance, decentralisation, devolution, and more recently federalism. This evolution reflects a consistent analytical position; that is: strengthening public administration requires sustained attention to both national and local bureaucratic systems.

Historically, EROPA has also engaged with major regional challenges, most notably corruption and anti-corruption in public administration from the 1970s onward. Its agenda has continued to evolve to encompass core civil service capacity development themes, including recruitment systems, meritocracy, performance standards, ethics and accountability, and leadership development. These priorities are framed within a broader concern for building effective, professional, and responsive public administrations. Thematic directions are proposed by the Secretariat and reviewed by state members through the Executive Council, which formally endorses priorities, while the Secretariat retains a relatively high degree of autonomy in shaping agendas and convening activities. The organisation's most recent priorities are reflected in the sub-themes of its 2025 Conference (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Sub-themes of the 2025 PSPA-EROPA Joint International Conference



3.1.2 Functions and Delivery Modalities

EROPA operates primarily as a convening platform and knowledge broker, rather than as an implementing or funding agency. Its work is delivered through a model that prioritises the exchange of experience and the co-production of applied knowledge. Central to this delivery modality is the organisation's flagship annual international conference, which serves as a critical forum for practitioners, academics, and policymakers to reflect on reform challenges across the Asia-Pacific. A defining characteristic of this modality is its rotational nature; by shifting the host location among member states – including recent and upcoming iterations in the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and China – EROPA reinforces a sense of regional ownership and inclusivity. This “rotating host” tradition ensures that the administrative agenda is shaped directly by state members, while the Secretariat provides the necessary coordination and intellectual continuity.

Beyond these high-level convenings, EROPA's delivery extends into specialised capacity-building through thematic seminars and workshops. These activities often leverage strategic partnerships with regional academic and professional associations, such as the Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA). Such collaborations are intentional, designed to bridge the historical divide between theoretical academic research and the pragmatic needs of public administration practitioners. The organisation demonstrated significant resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by successfully transitioning these dialogues to online and hybrid formats, ensuring that the momentum of regional civil service reform was maintained despite global mobility constraints.

EROPA undertakes applied research and knowledge dissemination as a distinct modality, addressing regional public administration challenges. This includes comparative studies on issues such as corruption and anti-corruption reforms across Hong Kong and ASEAN countries. Another major delivery channel for this function is the Asian Review for Public Administration (ARPA). In recent years, the production modality for ARPA has evolved through a co-publishing agreement with AAPA. This partnership enhances the journal's academic rigor and its trajectory toward formal indexing while preserving its core identity as an applied, practitioner-oriented resource. This evolution reflects EROPA's broader philosophy: generating knowledge that is not merely academic but directly usable by civil servants and administrative leaders to inform policy and practice.

Overall, EROPA's functions are delivered through low-cost, network-based, and member-driven modalities that prioritise dialogue, peer learning, and practical relevance. Its dual focus on facilitating practitioner exchange and producing applied knowledge allows the organisation to influence regional public administration reforms while maintaining a flexible, inclusive, and resilient operational model.

3.1.3 Institutional Structure and Governance Model

The institutional architecture of EROPA is characterised by a “lean hub-and-spoke” governance model that maximises regional reach while maintaining a minimal central footprint. At the heart of this structure is a small, specialised **Secretariat**, which is strategically embedded within a founding academic institution – the University of the Philippines' National College of Public Administration and Governance. The staffing model is notably lean, relying on a dedicated team of part-time professionals and faculty experts. This institutional nexus is reinforced by the tradition of having the Dean of the host college serve as the Deputy Secretary General, ensuring a seamless flow of expertise between the organisation's administrative leadership and current academic research in public administration.

Strategic oversight is provided by the **Executive Council**, which serves as the primary governing body where state members exercise their influence. The Council is responsible for setting the organisation's thematic direction and approving the cycle of annual conferences. This governance layer ensures that EROPA remains a member-driven organisation; the topics of dialogue and research are not imposed from the top down but are co-designed by state representatives to meet their respective national priorities. This democratic governance structure fosters a high degree of organisational independence and agility within the Secretariat, allowing it to respond rapidly to emerging regional administrative needs.

A unique and highly effective component of EROPA's governance is its network of specialised **EROPA Centres**. These centres, located in countries such as *Japan, South Korea, China, India, and Vietnam*, operate as decentralised nodes of excellence. Unlike traditional sub-offices, these centres are funded and managed by their respective national governments but are formally associated with the EROPA network. For example, the Human Resource Research Centre under the Chinese Academy of Personnel Science (CAPS) and the Local Autonomy College in Japan provide specialised training and research that are distributed across the EROPA network.

This model allows EROPA to offer a diverse portfolio of services – ranging from local governance expertise to human resource management – without the financial burden of direct programme implementation. By linking these national institutions under the EROPA banner, the organisation provides members with access to a vast repository of government-backed training and research, effectively turning national investments into shared regional assets.

3.1.4 Partnership Mechanisms and Cooperation Approaches

EROPA's partnership and cooperation model has evolved in response to both historical context and structural constraints. The organisation was particularly active in earlier decades partly because, at the time of its establishment, there were relatively few regional or global institutions dedicated to public administration. As the landscape became more crowded – especially with the emergence of specialised academic associations – EROPA's distinct identity as a practitioner-oriented network became more clearly articulated. The creation of the Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA) in 2010 was not conceived as a competing initiative, but rather as a complementary platform addressing a different constituency, namely academic scholars of public administration. As one interviewee emphasised, EROPA “is not an academic organisation, but a practitioners’ organisation”, a distinction that has since shaped its cooperation strategy.

Unlike organisations supported by large endowment funds or high membership dues, EROPA's cooperation strategy is a pragmatic response to a limited central budget, relying on co-creation and resource-pooling with local and global partners. This lean fiscal reality necessitates a business model where the organisation functions as a knowledge broker rather than a primary funder, leveraging the assets of its members to sustain its regional footprint. The bedrock of this mechanism is a tri-level membership structure comprising *State, Institutional, and Individual* members.

The organisation currently includes 11 state members, each represented by a designated national authority – typically a central civil service authority, such as the Philippines’ Civil Service Commission, or Indonesia’s National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA).² This designation ensures that EROPA's dialogues are directly linked to the highest echelons of national bureaucracy. To maintain regional inclusivity and ensure participation from developing economies, EROPA maintains a highly affordable fee structure that has remained largely unchanged since the 1970s (Table 1). These fees are tiered to reflect the socio-economic diversity of the region.

Table 1. EROPA membership fees by category

Category	Annual Fee, USD	Remarks
State Membership	3,300 – 4,950	Tiered by socio-economic status; provides voting rights
Group / Institutional	165 – 5,500	Universities, training institutes, and state agencies
Individual	21	For academics, students, and practitioners

Despite its affordable membership fee structure, EROPA has experienced a cycle of membership fluctuations, characterised by periods of inactivity and subsequent returns. Countries like Australia were historically active but later withdrew, while others like Malaysia and South Korea have successfully returned to the fold. Interview evidence suggests that variations in engagement are often linked to perceptions of institutional visibility and value. Where EROPA is primarily associated with periodic flagship events, some governments – particularly those coordinating participation through Ministries of Foreign Affairs – may find it more difficult to sustain long-term engagement.

In response, the current leadership has placed increased emphasis on strengthening continuous interaction and reinforcing EROPA's role as an ongoing platform for professional exchange and

² Often referred to as LAN (Lembaga Administrasi Negara).

policy dialogue. To support renewed participation, the organisation has also adopted flexible administrative arrangements for returning members, prioritising reintegration into regional cooperation over rigid enforcement of past financial obligations. The organisation has also sought to extend its regional reach, with emerging states, including Timor-Leste, currently in the process of joining as state members.

To overcome the limitations of its modest budget and small central staff, EROPA utilises strategic partnerships with specialised regional and global bodies to deliver high-impact. A critical recent development is the synergy with the Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA), which bridges EROPA's practitioner focus with academic rigor. This is further extended through ties with the South Asian Network for Public Administration (SANPA) and global entities such as the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) and the UN Project Office for Governance (UNPOG). These alliances allow EROPA to deliver cutting-edge technical content and facilitate regional representation at global platforms like the World Government Summit (WGS) alongside the Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH) and the Latin American Centre for Development Administration (CLAD).

This cooperation approach is increasingly defined by a “back-to-back” co-hosting model designed for financial sustainability. Rather than the Secretariat bearing the full cost of international convenings, EROPA partners with local associations, such as the Philippine Society for Public Administration, or the Vietnam Association for Public Administration, to share logistical and financial burdens. This is complemented by a “social capital” strategy where leadership utilises personal professional networks to secure sponsorships from local ministries or international agencies.

Furthermore, the organisation employs an “enrolment” approach to capacity building, where national institutes like Vietnam's Academy for Public Administration and Governance (APAG) or Thailand's National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) brand their senior leadership programmes under the EROPA banner. This allows national institutions to gain regional visibility while EROPA fulfils its mandate without additional infrastructure. To ensure long-term resilience, the Committee on the Continuation of the Organisation, led by senior figures from Japan and Hong Kong, provides a stabilising force that secures future hosts and maintains “social capital” across political and leadership transitions.

3.1.5 Strategic Insights and Lessons Learned

EROPA's experience highlights the viability of a network-centred institutional model for regional cooperation in public administration. Its comparative advantage lies in its ability to act as a network steward, preserving institutional memory, facilitating trust-based exchange, and sustaining engagement over time despite limited resources. The organisation's reliance on social capital, co-creation, and cost-sharing arrangements has enabled continuity while remaining inclusive of developing and emerging states.

At the same time, the interview evidence underscores the importance of continuous engagement beyond flagship annual events to sustain member commitment and visibility. EROPA's adaptive use of partnerships, co-publication, and branded enrolment of national training programmes illustrates how regional platforms can enhance relevance without assuming direct implementation roles. Collectively, these insights position EROPA as a distinct and complementary model of regional cooperation – one that prioritises practitioner-led knowledge exchange and institutional networking over programme delivery or standard-setting.

3.2 OECD Directorate for Public Governance

The OECD Directorate for Public Governance (GOV) serves as the OECD's central unit for advancing public sector effectiveness and integrity. Established in 1991 and headquartered in Paris, GOV provides evidence-based guidance and fosters international collaboration among Member States and partner countries. The Directorate's mission is to support governments in building capable, transparent, and innovative institutions that can respond effectively to evolving societal challenges, while promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to policymaking.

3.2.1 Organisational Scope and Agenda-Setting

The OECD's Directorate for Public Governance provides a global forum for policy dialogue and the establishment of common standards through a mandate that is deliberately broad and cross-cutting.³ Rather than focusing on a single functional domain, the Directorate addresses systemic governance challenges across a portfolio that includes trust and democracy, digital government, public procurement, integrity, budgeting, and regulatory policy. Within this extensive remit, *Public Employment and Management* (PEM) functions as one of ten core work streams, prioritising the development of “skilled, committed, and trusted” public workforces through strategic human resource management, leadership development, and capability building.⁴ While it is difficult to quantify this focus in exact terms, the formal structural footprint of public personnel management is positioned alongside numerous other significant governance priorities.

This institutional positioning is characterised by a horizontal approach, where civil service issues intersect with areas such as digital transformation and procurement professionalisation rather than being treated as a standalone reform domain. While this reflects the OECD's emphasis on integrated, system-level policy solutions, it also signifies that the civil service – as a foundational element of the state – operates within a multi-thematic mandate. Consequently, personnel administration effectively shares institutional space and resources with the broader governance agenda, a duality that ensures thematic relevance while naturally distributing organisational focus across a wide range of mandates.

These priorities are often articulated through high-level initiatives, such as Reinforcing Democracy and Government Unstuck, which respond to complex challenges like declining public trust and administrative complexity. The agenda for such work is shaped by a dual dynamic of bottom-up demand from member countries and top-down horizon scanning by the Secretariat. For example, when OECD analysis on artificial intelligence identified critical skills gaps, it provided the mandate for a “Skills for AI” initiative within the PEM Working Party. This illustrates how civil service-related work functions as a vital component of a broader governance ecosystem, distinguishing the OECD's integrated role from that of more specialised platforms dedicated exclusively to public personnel administration.

3.2.2 Functions and Delivery Modalities

The Directorate for Public Governance (GOV) utilises a multi-dimensional delivery model designed to bridge the gap between global policy principles and national administrative reality. Rather than acting as a traditional consultancy, the Directorate functions as a strategic facilitator, convening expertise to co-design solutions. This operational toolkit is currently organised under broad flagship frameworks, such as *Reinforcing Democracy* and the emergent *Government Unstuck initiative*, which provide the thematic structure for three primary functions:

³ <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/directorates/directorate-for-public-governance.htm>

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/public-employment-and-management.html>

1) *Applied and Comparative Research*

The foundation of the Directorate's value proposition is applied research. Distinct from academic inquiry, this function focuses on generating comparative, evidence-based insights that carry real-world applicability for member states. This is most visible in flagship publications like *Government at a Glance*,⁵ which provides internationally comparable data on public administration performance, and thematic reports such as *Public Employment and Management 2023* (OECD, 2023). Such research often begins with “horizon scanning” to identify emerging challenges, e.g., the AI-driven skills gap. By benchmarking national approaches against common global pressures, the Secretariat satisfies the “comparative thirst” of member states, allowing countries to learn how their peers are navigating similar administrative barriers. This research is not an end in itself; it serves as the essential evidence base for all subsequent standard-setting and technical interventions.

2) *Standard-Setting and Policy Dialogue*

Building upon its research base, the Directorate plays a critical standard-setting role. It provides the global forum where member states negotiate and establish common principles for public governance. A recent milestone is the *Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability* (OECD, 2025), which defines the 14 principles of a fit-for-purpose public service. These standards are not imposed top-down but are developed through iterative policy dialogue within committees and working parties. The Secretariat facilitates this process by socialising research findings through public events and ministerial meetings, helping to build consensus around “best practices”. This function creates the normative framework that guides national reforms, ensuring that individual country efforts align with internationally recognised governance principles.

3) *Capacity Building and Implementation Support*

The most direct form of delivery is capacity building, a function that often occurs through intensive, project-based work with individual countries. This modality follows a structured methodology:

- **Stock-Taking:** An initial discovery phase involving extensive stakeholder interviews to map a country's strengths and systemic challenges.
- **Deep-Dive Analysis:** A collaborative phase where the Secretariat and local stakeholders identify specific barriers and co-design focused recommendations.
- **Piloting and Facilitation:** Moving beyond report-writing, the Directorate frequently facilitates the piloting of innovative approaches. For example, the leadership competency framework project spearheaded by the Netherlands demonstrates how the Secretariat convenes international expertise to help a country test and “own” its unique administrative solutions.

The overarching delivery philosophy is one of facilitation and co-design rather than expert-led implementation. The Secretariat does not design a new system for a country to adopt; instead, it provides the analytical scaffolding and convenes the necessary expertise so that the country can retain ownership of the solutions. By acting as a facilitator, the Directorate ensures that the resulting reforms – whether focused on internal bureaucratic simplification or leadership development – are sustainable and indigenous to the national administration. This “co-design” approach distinguishes the OECD's role as a platform for peer learning and institutional growth rather than a provider of off-the-shelf administrative fixes.

⁵ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/serials/government-at-a-glance_g1g123b5.html

3.2.3 Institutional Structure and Governance Model

The Directorate for Public Governance (GOV) operates within a complex institutional framework that maintains a clear distinction between its internal administrative divisions and substantive governing structures. While the Directorate is internally organised into thematic divisions, its operational mandate is primarily driven by the Public Governance Committee (PGC). As one of the OECD's key sectoral bodies, the PGC holds significant authority in designing work programmes and reporting directly to the OECD Council. This structure ensures that the Directorate's research and policy advice are not developed in isolation but are formally mandated by member states at the highest level.

Under the Directorate for Public Governance, work is granularized into ten specialised Working Parties, including the Working Party on *Public Employment and Management*. These bodies function as the technical heart of the Directorate's governance. Although formally classified as sub-committees, they are composed of high-ranking practitioners rather than generalist diplomats. For example, the Working Party on Public Employment and Management specifically brings together the heads of national civil service agencies from across OECD member countries. This specific composition ensures that the Directorate's outputs are grounded in practical, high-level administrative expertise.

At the heart of the GOV's operations is the relationship between the Working Parties and the Secretariat – the permanent staff based in Paris. Meeting typically on an annual basis, these Working Parties serve as a “guiding light,” providing the strategic steering and political legitimacy necessary for the Secretariat's year-round research and technical activities. As illustrated in Table 2, this relationship is defined by a mutual exchange of value that effectively bridges the gap between international policy analysis and national administrative practice.

Table 2. Comparative Roles of the Working Party and the Secretariat within the GOV

Feature	Role of the Working Party	Role of the Secretariat
Function	Acts as a “Steering Committee” and sounding board.	Conducts research, projects, and data analysis.
Access	Provides a conduit to national and local government expertise.	Synthesises global trends into actionable policy advice.
Legitimacy	Ensures the work is relevant to member states' current needs.	Provides the technical framework to implement the Working Party's vision.
Data	Facilitates survey responses and peer review participation.	Designs methodology and manages the administrative process.

A defining characteristic of the Directorate's institutional environment is the structural duality between its physical and functional structures. Unlike global organisations such as the World Bank or the UNDP, which maintain extensive networks of country offices, the Public Governance Directorate operates from a highly centralised headquarters in Paris. This concentration of all personnel in a single location creates a dense hub of intellectual capital, yet this administrative unity is contrasted by a deeply decentralised committee structure. Each committee functions with a significant degree of autonomy, possessing its own specific programme of work, dedicated budget, and distinct operating assumptions.

While this decentralised governance allows for high-level thematic specialisation and ensures that work programmes are closely aligned with member-state needs, it simultaneously creates significant coordination challenges. Because committees operate under a wide range of diverse models and priorities, managing horizontal projects that span multiple sectors becomes a ‘tricky’ governance task, requiring the organisation to navigate a fragmented landscape of independent

mandates within a single, unified physical institution. Ultimately, while this cross-cutting approach increases administrative complexity, it provides the necessary framework for flexible, integrated responses to multifaceted emerging governance challenges that transcend traditional sectoral boundaries.

Membership within the Directorate for Public Governance is intrinsically tied to the OECD's foundational “all-in” governance model. Unlike other international organisations where states may opt into specific technical committees, OECD membership confers *de facto* membership across all committees and working parties. This universal technical membership, however, does not translate into uniform participation; the Directorate observes a spectrum of engagement, ranging from highly active member states that drive discussion to those that participate only sporadically or remain largely passive.

Financed through a dual-stream model, the Directorate's budget is composed of mandatory member-state assessments (core funding) and a substantial volume of project-based voluntary contributions. In practice, the majority of GOV's operational resources are derived from this project-based funding, where specific “price tags” are attached to deliverables. This financial structure incentivises the Secretariat to maintain high relevance to member-state priorities, as the bulk of its work is sustained by targeted investments rather than centralised institutional allotments.

3.2.4 Partnership Mechanisms and Cooperation Approaches

The Directorate for Public Governance operates through a partnership model characterised by deep integration with member-country administrations. Rather than a top-down relationship, cooperation is structured as a responsive ecosystem where the OECD acts as a central hub for a network of “primary stakeholders” – the government officials who comprise the various working parties and committees. This relationship is inherently dynamic; the Directorate's agenda is fundamentally driven by its members' shifting priorities, which evolve in response to geopolitical shifts, global crises, and emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence.

Beyond its core membership, the Directorate manages a complex, tiered model of engagement with non-member countries. Managed by a dedicated global relations unit, these partnerships range from designated partner status to ad-hoc, project-based collaborations. Notably, the Directorate avoids the traditional reliance on formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), preferring a more flexible “currency” of project-specific arrangements. This allows the OECD to remain responsive to non-member requests on specific themes, such as integrity or digital transformation, without the immediate necessity of formal institutional accession.

A specialised pillar of the Directorate's cooperation strategy is the Network of Schools of Government (NSG). This network serves as the primary bridge between high-level policy dialogue and the practical development of civil servants.

- ***Translating Standards into Skills:*** Meeting annually across the globe – with recent sessions in Florence, Dubai, and Thailand – the network brings together 70–100 training institutions to discuss how PGC themes translate into civil service knowledge and understanding.
- ***Academic Integration:*** While the Directorate's relationship with external research bodies is largely ad-hoc and project-based, the NSG provides a structured space for universities and training centres to align their curricula with OECD standards.

This partnership architecture illustrates a shift from a purely formal, committee-based organisation to a more fluid, facilitator-led network. By balancing digital reach with high-impact physical presence, the Directorate ensures its standards are not just discussed in Paris but are “co-designed” and implemented within the national administrative context of its partners.

3.2.5 Strategic Insights and Lessons Learned

The OECD's experience in navigating the complexities of public governance suggests that institutional impact is rarely a linear progression from research to implementation. Instead, success is defined by a "long game" strategy, where the Secretariat maintains a persistent analytical presence to capitalise on unpredictable policy windows. The following analysis outlines the core strategic insights that define the Directorate's current operational philosophy.

1) *The De-territorialisation of Administrative Excellence*

A primary takeaway from recent global engagements is the definitive shift toward a multidirectional model of knowledge exchange. The traditional "North-to-South" transfer of expertise has been superseded by a landscape where non-member nations, such as India, Argentina, and the UAE, are recognised as leaders in specific domains of administrative simplification. This "reverse learning" dynamic is evidenced by the feedback from peers in highly developed administrations, such as the United Kingdom, who found that counterparts in emerging economies have developed more innovative solutions to shared barriers. Consequently, the Directorate has learned that administrative "maturity" is context-specific; excellence exists across all levels of development, making global comparative benchmarking a vital tool even for the most advanced states.

2) *The "OECD Hat" as a Catalyst for Reform*

A critical strategic lesson is the irreplaceability of the Directorate's symbolic "convening power", often referred to internally as the "OECD hat". The Secretariat has found that its presence provides a neutral ground that allows domestic stakeholders to act more constructively than they might in a purely national context. National organisations frequently leverage the OECD's brand to overcome domestic silos, using the Secretariat's involvement to ensure high-level attendance and facilitate a collaborative "co-design" process. This suggests that the value-add of the organisation is not merely the technical content it provides, but its ability to serve as a high-profile facilitator that compels stakeholders to "show up" and engage with sensitive internal reforms.

3) *The Latency of Impact and Policy Windows*

Institutional impact is often characterised by a significant time lag. The Directorate acknowledges that systematic tracking is difficult because high-quality solutions often encounter institutional inertia. However, the strategy is to create a "mainstreamed" environment of desirable standards so that when a political window opens – sometimes years after a report is published – the evidence base is already in place. This "long game" approach allows the OECD to remain relevant across changes in government or global crises, moving from a dormant report to active legislation the moment the political orientation shifts.

4) *The Modernisation Paradox: AI vs. Fiscal Consolidation*

A central contemporary challenge is the tension between the necessity for fiscal consolidation and the urgent need for technological modernisation. History suggests that austerity measures typically "freeze" civil services, eroding their ability to attract young talent. However, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence presents a paradox: governments must implement these technologies to achieve the efficiencies required by fiscal consolidation, yet they lack the budgetary flexibility to invest in the necessary human capital. The Directorate is increasingly focusing its delivery on navigating this "modernisation paradox", identifying how governments can "do more with less" without sacrificing long-term capability.

5) *The Primacy of the Human Element*

While the pandemic expanded digital reach, a major takeaway has been the irreplaceability of physical presence. The “coffee break effect” – the informal, unrecorded exchange of experiences – remains the most valued component of the OECD’s convening power. Despite the efficiency of subject-specific webinars, the Directorate has paradoxically increased its physical “in-room” presence for core working parties. This reflects a strategic understanding that the depth of human connection and the trust built through in-person exchange are the true drivers of sustainable administrative change.

3.3 United Nations Project Office on Governance

The United Nations Project Office for Governance (UNPOG) serves as a specialised field office and primary technical arm of the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) under the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). Established in 2006 and currently mandated through 2030, the office is hosted by the Republic of Korea and funded through the Ministry of the Interior and Safety (MOIS). UNPOG is strategically positioned to strengthen the public governance capacities of Member States, primarily targeting Asia and the Pacific while increasingly extending its outreach to Eastern Africa and other regions “beyond”. Its core mission is strictly aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, focusing on the promotion of efficient, transparent, and participatory governance to enable developing countries to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3.3.1 Organisational Scope and Agenda-Setting

The UNPOG operates with a mandate strictly aligned with the overarching priorities of the UN DESA, specifically focusing on strengthening the capacity of Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the office is a regional entity, its agenda is harmonised with UN DESA’s global work plans, ensuring that technical assistance remains consistent with broader international standards. However, UNPOG maintains a degree of operational independence to pivot toward emerging “frontier” issues. Recent shifts in the global agenda have seen UNPOG move toward a specific emphasis on SDG localisation, strategic foresight, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and governance transformation through Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is noteworthy that the organisation maintains a specific thematic boundary that do not cover personnel management or Human Resource Management per se as a core service area.

UNPOG’s agenda-setting process is fundamentally demand-driven, designed to ensure that interventions are tailored to the specific administrative requirements of beneficiaries rather than being prescriptively imposed. This demand is systematically identified through two primary institutional channels: the annual Regional Symposium and biennial needs assessments. During the symposia, UNPOG presents its tools, toolkits, and research to over 500 participants from across the globe, creating a platform for Member States to identify areas where they require technical support. Moreover, every two years, the office conducts formal needs assessments to evaluate evolving regional gaps and consult with Member States on potential capacity-development interventions. This analytical phase is essential for maintaining the office’s relevance in a rapidly changing governance landscape.

The transition from identifying a need to operationalising an activity involves a rigorous and formal request process. Support is only initiated following an official request from a national government authority, which can include any functional ministry or specialised national training institutes, such as Indonesia’s National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA). These requests must be submitted to UNPOG and approved by the Director of UN DESA before being integrated into the office’s multi-year work plans. This structured approach allows for 3–5 months of detailed co-design with national partners and the UN Country Team prior to implementation.

3.3.2 Functions and Delivery Modalities

The operational framework of the UNPOG is structured around three core functional pillars: *Capacity Development, Research and Policy Analysis, and Communications and Outreach*. These pillars are integrated into a delivery model that prioritises technical assistance over direct project financing. As a subsidiary of UN DESA, UNPOG provides specialised expertise and facilitates the transfer of governance knowledge rather than functioning as a funding agency. Its delivery is characterised by a “co-production” approach, where UNPOG provides the technical framework and staff-led facilitation, while host countries or partner institutions assume responsibility for logistical implementation, such as venues and local mobilisation.

The Capacity Development pillar is the primary vehicle for translating global norms into local administrative action. UNPOG utilises a mix of national workshops, virtual webinars, and Training of Trainers (TOT) programmes designed to foster long-term institutional sustainability. A distinguishing feature of UNPOG’s methodology is the requirement for participants to develop a concrete Action Plan and Roadmap – often spanning a five-year horizon – to ensure that training does not remain a one-time event. Because UNPOG lacks a permanent field presence, it relies on a strategic synergy with the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) system and UNDP country teams to monitor and support the implementation of these plans on the ground. This modality is exemplified by partnerships with national public administration schools, such as those in Mongolia and Nepal, which “enrol” UNPOG’s toolkits into their official curricula for local officials.

Research and Policy Analysis provide the evidence-based foundation for UNPOG’s capacity-building activities, producing knowledge products such as Policy Briefs and thematic handbooks on key issues like SDG localisation and AI transformation. To ensure alignment with global standards, UNPOG follows a rigorous internal and inter-departmental review cycle where initial outlines are vetted within the division (DPIDG) before being reviewed by the broader department in New York. These products are frequently co-produced with specialised agencies like UNDP and UN-Habitat to leverage on-the-ground insights. For larger flagship initiatives, e.g., *Standards of Excellence for Public Administration Education and Training*, UNPOG applies extended validation processes that combine empirical analysis with broad expert consultation across regions, allowing its research outputs to remain both globally credible and practically relevant for public administration reform at national and subnational levels.

Finally, the *Communications and Outreach* pillar serves as the vital link between UNPOG’s technical work and the global governance community. This function is most visible in the office’s flagship events, such as the Regional Symposium, which serves as a major platform for visibility and demand identification, attracting over 500 stakeholders annually. Outreach activities also involve a sophisticated mapping of expertise to demand; UNPOG conducts intensive desk research and networking at global forums to identify the “right” experts and participants who can disseminate knowledge within their own countries. By collaborating with other international bodies like UNDRR, UNITAR, and UNESCAP, UNPOG ensures that its knowledge products reach a wide audience, maintaining a persistent organisational presence that encourages Member States to take full ownership of their administrative reforms.

3.3.3 Institutional Structure and Governance Model

The institutional architecture of the United Nations Project Office for Governance is defined by a dual-accountability model that balances its integration within the United Nations Secretariat with its operational presence in the Republic of Korea. Administratively, UNPOG serves as a specialised field office under the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, which is one of the key divisions within the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The office is led by a Head of Office who reports to the Director of DPIDG and the Under-Secretary-General of UN DESA in New York. This hierarchical placement ensures that UNPOG’s

regional activities remain strictly harmonised with UN DESA's global work plans and overarching priorities, particularly in the realms of digital government and institutional capacity building.

The governance and funding of UNPOG are governed by a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a multi-year project document established between the United Nations and the Government of the Republic of Korea, specifically through the Ministry of the Interior and Safety (MOIS). While the office is fully funded by the MOIS, it maintains a degree of operational independence to design specific activities and select beneficiary Member States based on the mandates set forth in its project document. However, this independence is bounded by its status as a subsidiary of the UN Secretariat; for instance, UNPOG does not possess the legal authority to sign independent MOUs with external organisations. Any formal legal agreements or major strategic collaborations must be vetted and signed by UN DESA headquarters to ensure institutional consistency and accountability.

In practice, this governance model results in a demand-driven but centrally aligned strategic approach. While UNPOG identifies local needs through its biennial assessments and regional symposia, every major intervention – such as a multi-year capacity development project – must be integrated into the office's work plan and approved by the Director of UN DESA. This structure allows UNPOG to act as a nimble regional technical arm, while benefiting from the global legitimacy, expertise, and peer-review systems of the broader UN DESA department. Furthermore, by presenting itself externally as “DESA”, the Office ensures that its regional technical assistance is recognised as a direct extension of the United Nations' global mandate to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3.3.4 Partnership Mechanisms and Cooperation Approaches

UNPOG's partnership framework is characterised by its integration into the broader United Nations ecosystem and its ability to engage a diverse array of stakeholders through flexible, non-formalised cooperation modalities. Unlike organisations with rigid membership structures, UNPOG utilises the standard United Nations definition of “Member States”, specifically serving a primary group of approximately 48 countries across Asia-Pacific and Eastern Africa. However, this designation does not imply formal voting rights or a restrictive membership; rather, UNPOG maintains an “open door” policy that extends its technical assistance to countries “beyond” this core group, such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, based on specific demands for governance support.

The office employs a multistakeholder engagement model to manage the complexities of diverse national agendas. A central success factor in this approach is the strategic involvement of the UN Country Team (UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP), who provide essential “on-the-ground” knowledge that complements UNPOG's secondary desk research. This collaboration is vital for navigating bureaucratic and structural challenges within beneficiary countries, such as identifying the correct focal point when multiple government entities (e.g., Ministries of Digital Government versus Statistics Offices) vie for leadership on themes like data governance. UNPOG addresses these “silo” challenges by facilitating inclusive platforms where all related organisations are brought together to discuss and harmonise their requirements.

UNPOG further expands its technical reach through a robust Expert Network and the utilisation of a Global Task Force model for major projects. For instance, during the update of the *Standards of Excellence for Public Administration Education and Training*, UNPOG established a Global Task Force with representatives from Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia to ensure a globally validated product. While major programmatic partnerships with entities like the OECD or the World Bank are managed at the UN DESA headquarters level, UNPOG directly engages these organisations as resource persons and co-organisers for regional workshops. To ensure technical depth, the Office actively maps expertise to demand by scouting speakers

from global forums and professional networks, maintaining a database of experts who provide specialised regional knowledge.

3.3.5 Strategic Insights and Lessons Learned

UNPOG's operational experience yields several strategic insights into the effectiveness of international technical assistance, centred on the principles of national ownership, transparency, and institutional customisation. A primary lesson learned is that the most effective delivery modality is country-specific capacity development. Unlike generic regional interventions, tailored workshops allow Member States to develop concrete Action Plans and Roadmaps that translate global governance tools into local administrative realities. The office's success in countries like Mongolia, Cambodia, and Nepal underscores the value of this approach; in these instances, national institutions such as the National Academy of Governance (NAOG) in Mongolia did not merely participate in a workshop but "customised" UNPOG's toolkits into their own internal curricula to train public officials at the local level.

A critical factor in sustaining these results is the emphasis on national ownership as the bedrock of institutional trust. UNPOG operates on the strategic realisation that technical assistance cannot be a permanent fixture; therefore, partners are encouraged from the outset to take full responsibility for the "what next" of an intervention. Trust is built through a "two-way communication" model characterised by high levels of transparency and accountability in the dissemination of expertise. By explicitly stating that the office cannot provide annual training for the same cohort, UNPOG creates a productive urgency that compels Member States to integrate UN toolkits into their own government structures.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Multilateral Public Administration Platforms.

Feature	ACSH	EROPA	OECD GOV	UNPOG
Focus on Civil Service HRM	Direct: Core mandate is exclusively focused on personnel administration and civil service management.	Broad: Anchored in public administration with a focus on bureaucracy and civil service as part of a wider regional agenda.	Horizontal: Public Employment and Management is one of ten core work streams alongside other governance priorities.	Indirect: Approaches civil service issues as part of broader institutional development and administrative innovation agendas
Agenda-Setting	Flexible & Demand-Driven: Priorities are defined by biennial needs assessment surveys of participating countries.	Secretariat-Led: Thematic directions are proposed by the Secretariat and endorsed by the Executive Council.	Dual Dynamic: Combines bottom-up demand from members with top-down "horizon scanning" by the Secretariat.	Demand-Driven: In addition to biennial needs assessments, activities are defined based on the specific requests of beneficiary Member States.
Membership Model	Voluntary Participation: Any country can join through a voluntary mechanism.	Paid Membership: Tri-level structure (State, Institutional, Individual) with a tiered fee system.	Member-Based: Comprised of OECD Member States and select partner countries.	UN Membership: Serves the 193 Member States of the United Nations.
Geographical Scope	Global / Cross-Regional: Covers Eurasia and beyond, acting as a bridge between Asia, Europe, and the Global South.	Regional: Focused exclusively on the Asia-Pacific region.	Global: International collaboration among high-income and partner economies worldwide.	Global: Operates as a global project office under UN DESA.
Primary Delivery Modality	Peer-to-Peer Learning: Utilises thematic Peer Learning Alliances to capture tacit practitioner knowledge.	Convening Platform: Focuses on annual rotational conferences and specialised seminars through decentralised centres.	Standard-Setting: Provides evidence-based guidance, global benchmarks (e.g., Government at a Glance), and Council Recommendations.	Technical Assistance: Focuses on capacity-building through training-of-trainers (TOT) and national workshops.

To validate these impacts, UNPOG utilises a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework consisting of immediate post-event surveys followed by a comprehensive “end-of-year package” survey sent to its entire participant database. These evaluations consistently show that UNPOG’s work is highly adopted because it allows for high degrees of flexibility – whether through a National Workshop or a Training of Trainers (TOT) model – depending on the specific request of the beneficiary. Ultimately, the transition from a one-time workshop to a self-sustaining national programme is the key metric of success, ensuring that governance reforms are maintained by local authorities long after the formal UN intervention has concluded.

The preceding reviews of EROPA, OECD GOV, and UNPOG reveal a diverse landscape of international cooperation, ranging from regional networking and global standard-setting to highly targeted technical assistance. While each model offers distinct institutional strengths – such as UNPOG’s rigorous focus on national ownership and the sustainability of reforms – their varying mandates highlight a clear opening for a platform dedicated exclusively to the technical intricacies of civil service management.

To provide a synthesis of this institutional landscape and highlight the distinct value proposition of the proposed initiative, the three analysed platforms are compared against the ACSH in Table 3. This benchmarking exercise evaluates each organisation across five strategic dimensions, ranging from their thematic focus on human resource management to their specific delivery modalities and geographical remit. By contrasting these established models, the comparison clarifies how the ACSH occupies a unique, specialised niche exclusively dedicated to civil service effectiveness, while sharing the demand-driven and flexible operational characteristics necessary for successful administrative diplomacy in the Eurasia and Asia-Pacific regions.

4. ACSH NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The Astana Civil Service Hub concluded its Sixth Needs Assessment in December 2025 in order to frame its strategic priorities for the 2026-2027 cycle of activities in governance and public administration. The analysis of the results reveals a decisive realignment of its members’ expectations towards human resource management and development, with personnel management and leadership skills rated at the top in terms of importance, along with citizen-centric services. In fact, respondents highlighted acute human capacity gaps as the prime barrier to reforms, with skills shortages cited 50 times, skill gaps 57 times, and leadership shortages 36 times, underscoring that successful execution of policies hinges upon people’s capabilities rather than conceptual visions.

This pattern signals a maturity shift: governments seek practical tools to build agile civil services capable of sustaining reforms. The urgency is focused upon redesigning performance management systems (42 citations as priority, 47 as needed support), competency frameworks (34 citations), and leadership pipelines (34 citations). Significant preference is also expressed for experiential HR approaches like skills training (55 citations), cohort programmes (37), and peer alliances (36). These findings chart ACSH’s roadmap, prioritising HR modernisation toolkits and training academies.

4.2 Survey Methodology and Sample Specifics

Eighty-six valid responses were received from participants across 20 ACSH country members. Forty-seven responses were from Central Asia (54.7% of the total), reaffirming the Hub’s role as a regional anchor. Within the region, key contributors included Tajikistan with 20 responses,

Kazakhstan with 10, Uzbekistan with 9, and Kyrgyzstan with 8. At the same time, meaningful inputs from the Asia-Pacific, including South Korea and Laos, as well as from Europe and the Americas, highlight the Hub's growing international reach and its expanding engagement beyond its core regional base.

The respondent base reflects a strategic balance between reform designers and implementers, with capacity-building institutions making up 39% of participants – including academia and research bodies (21%), as well as public administration training academies (19%). Government practitioners accounted for 36% of responses, comprising representatives from subnational governments (20%) and central ministries (16%). The survey also gathered perspectives across professional hierarchies, from specialists and practitioners (29%) who identify operational challenges to senior leaders (22%), who provide strategic direction, ensuring a comprehensive view of both policy formulation and implementation dynamics.

4.3 Needs Assessment Survey Findings

The main findings of the survey responses analysis were:

4.3.1 Workforce and HR Priorities

Workforce and Leadership Skills (average rating 4.15, ranked 3rd out of 10) and Personnel Management/HRM (4.09) rank among the top strategic priorities for ACSH participating countries over the next 24 months, with HRM securing 33 top-three responses – positioning it immediately behind Digital Government (53 responses) but ahead of Citizen-Centric Services (30 responses). This strong showing signals a maturing reform agenda where human capital is recognised not as a parallel track, but as the essential enabler of all governance transformations. HR and civil service functions represent 24% of respondents' primary roles, the third-largest category after training/research (36%) and policy formulation (27%), underscoring the centrality of people management to public sector modernisation across the network.

The demand for future-ready skills reveals a clear pivot toward hybrid competencies that blend technical fluency with adaptive leadership. Top priorities include AI literacy (55 responses), data literacy (52), and cybersecurity (34), which together account for over 40% of all skills-building related responses – far outpacing traditional areas like policy analysis/RIA (24), project/programme management (25), or procurement (8). Agile/change leadership (30 responses) and innovation methods (30) round out the top five, indicating that respondents seek not just digital tools, but leaders capable of navigating disruption, fostering experimentation, and embedding new practices into rigid bureaucracies. This skills hierarchy reflects a civil service at an inflection point: foundational digital infrastructure exists (e.g., data governance in 48 organisations), but scaling it demands public servants who can operationalise technologies responsibly.

HR system priorities further illuminate execution gaps. Performance management leads with 42 responses, signalling widespread recognition that outdated performance evaluation systems fail to reward agility or accountability – directly linked to its status as a top pain point (weak performance management cited 29 times). Workforce planning follows closely (38 responses), reflecting anxiety over talent pipelines amid rising turnover (26 responses) and slow hiring (18). Competency frameworks (34), merit-based promotion (34), and leadership pipelines (34) form a unified cluster, each demanding modern tools to replace rigid hierarchies with meritocratic, data-driven career systems. Ethics/integrity (32 responses) weaves through these priorities, emphasising that technical skills must align with public trust.

Operational bottlenecks and barriers align seamlessly with these demands, confirming human capital as the binding constraint across reform domains. Skills gaps dominate (57 responses in

the HR section; workforce skills as top general barrier with 50 responses), followed by leadership gaps (36) – particularly acute in the “middle layer” of mid-level managers who bridge policy vision and frontline execution. Uncompetitive pay (33) and retention/turnover (26) highlight structural incentives misaligned with modern talent job markets, while weak performance management systems (29) and limited training budgets (25) perpetuate capability stagnation. Limited workforce data/analytics (19) and mobility (12) compound these issues, trapping talent in siloed roles.

These data paints a civil service ecosystem where ambition outstrips capacity: 79% explore AI but only 3% scale it, not for lack of pilots, but because public sectors lack the skilled leaders and robust HR systems to institutionalise innovation. ACSH participating countries thus prioritise HR modernisation as the force multiplier enabling digital government (4.31 priority), trust reforms (4.12), and resilient operations – positioning people at the centre of next-generation governance.

4.3.2 Implementation Constraints and HR Modernisation

Reform challenges across ACSH participating countries have decisively shifted from strategic visioning to operational execution, with human capital constraints now forming the dominant bottleneck. Workforce skills shortages lead all barriers (50 responses), closely followed by HR-specific skills gaps (57) and leadership gaps (36), which together account for over 25% of all constraint mentions across digital, governance, and resilience domains. These figures reveal a civil service trapped between ambition and ability: foundational digital systems exist (data governance in 48 organizations, digital ID in 46), yet translation to impact stalls due to personnel incapable of operationalising them.

Outdated performance management systems amplify this crisis, cited both as a top HR priority (42 mentions) and pain point (weak systems: 29), creating misaligned incentives that fail to reward agility, innovation, or results. Limited training budgets (25 responses) and workforce data deficiencies (19) compound mid-level gaps – particularly among managers, data officers, and change leaders who must bridge high-level policy making with frontline practice. Retention challenges (26 responses) and uncompetitive pay (33) further erode talent pools, while rigid rules (7) and limited mobility (12) lock civil servants into siloed roles, stifling the cross-functional agility demanded by modern governance.

Targeted HR Support Demands reflect precise readiness to operationalise solutions. Performance management systems redesign tops the list (47 mentions), signalling consensus that system overhauls – moving from compliance checkboxes to competency-based evaluations – represent the highest-leverage intervention. Leadership and manager capability building follows (39 citations), directly addressing documented shortages (36) through targeted academies and peer clinics. Recruitment modernisation (31) tackles slow hiring (18 citations), while workforce analytics starter kits (28) fill data gaps (19), enabling evidence-based planning (38 priority mentions). Competency frameworks/templates (26) and mobility/career pathway models (27) directly counter rigid hierarchies, creating meritocratic pipelines that retain high-potential talent.

Digital transformation imperatives intensify these HR pressures without changing their primacy. While 79% of respondents explore AI pilots, only 3% achieve production-scale deployment – not due to technological barriers, but because public sectors lack the digitally fluent leaders and robust performance systems to institutionalise innovation. AI literacy (55 citations) and data literacy (52) thus emerge not as isolated technical skills, but as prerequisites for the adaptive civil service capable of sustaining digital government (4.31 priority), responsible AI scaling, and resilient operations.

This pattern confirms the human capital factor as the true linchpin of reform scalability. Execution does not fail for lack of vision – strategic priorities enjoy broad consensus – but because outdated HR architectures cannot support modern governance demands. ACSH participating countries thus

converge on continuous upskilling, performance redesign, and leadership pipelines as the force-multipliers enabling all other transformations, from digital interoperability to crisis readiness.

4.3.4 Service Delivery and Learning Preferences

ACSH survey respondents demonstrate a marked evolution in capacity-building preferences, pivoting decisively from passive knowledge consumption to active, peer-driven HR development that delivers measurable execution impact. Skills training emerges as the overwhelming top choice (55 mentions), followed by AI/digital use-case playbooks (47) and peer exchanges/case clinics (40) – formats that together capture 142 of 170 total support responses, or 84% of demand. These preferences signal a practitioner community ready to co-create solutions, prioritising implementation tools over conceptual guidance (vendor-neutral advice: just 4 mentions).

Preferred Learning Modalities reveal sophisticated demand for scalable, hybrid ecosystems rather than isolated events. Short online modules lead with 48 responses (56% preference), offering accessible entry points for busy civil servants. Cohort-based programmes (37 mentions) and peer learning alliances (36) follow closely, emphasising sustained communities where practitioners iterate solutions collaboratively – mirroring global transitions to “learning ecosystems” seen in OECD public sector academies and UNDP communities of practice. Mentoring/coaching (27) and simulations/labs (19) round out the portfolio, while traditional formats lag: publications/case studies (27), forums/conferences (29).

This behavioural shift demands the ACSH evolve from event organiser to ecosystem cultivator. Respondents favour experiential continuity – seminars/workshops (46 mentions) as entry points, transitioning to alliances (39), study tours (39), and academies/certifications (37) – over one-off knowledge dumps. The stark contrast between hands-on demand (skills training 55, playbooks 47) and low publication interest (27) confirms execution focus: civil servants need “how-to” toolkits and peer debugging, not additional reports gathering dust.

Strategic Implications extend to delivery infrastructure. High demand for academies/certifications (37) aligns with top skills needs (AI literacy 55, data literacy 52), suggesting credentialed pathways that blend modules (48 stated preferences) with cohort immersion. Peer alliances (36 across learning, 39 in modalities) position the ACSH to formalise “communities of reform” – regional networks where Central Asian practitioners (54.7% of responses) collaborate with Asia-Pacific peers (South Korea, Laos) on shared challenges like performance measurement systems redesign (47 mentions).

Low uptake of advisory missions (26) and leadership roundtables (15) reinforces this pattern: respondents seek practitioner-led growth over expert monologues. The ACSH must thus formulate sustained platforms – digital campuses, regional HR alliances, rolling peer clinics – that convert one-time participants into permanent reform collaborators, directly addressing the execution gap where skills enthusiasm (55 responses) outpaces institutionalisation capacity.

4.4. Strategic Recommendations: ACSH Direction 2026-2027

The Sixth Needs Assessment Survey results reveal that the ACSH participating countries stand at an execution inflection point, demanding a strategic pivot from broad knowledge-sharing to targeted HR modernisation investments that directly address the 57 cited skills gaps, 47 performance management systems redesign requests, and 39 leadership capability needs. Hence, the ACSH must prioritise high-leverage, scalable interventions that convert practitioner demand (84% favour hands-on formats) into institutional capacity, positioning the Hub as the regional anchor for civil service transformation. These recommendations sequence foundational systems (Tier 1) before specialised accelerators (Tier 2), ensuring sustainable impact across the 20-country network.

Tier 1: Foundational Investments

These address the core execution blockers cited by 65%+ of respondents, delivering immediate capacity gains through credentialed pathways and system templates.

- **HR Modernisation Academies:** Launch credential-bearing programmes targeting top skills priorities – AI literacy (55 citations), data literacy (52), and agile leadership (30) – delivered via preferred blended formats: short online modules (48 mentions) and cohort immersion (37). Target 500+ practitioners annually across Central Asia (54.7% response base), with certifications validating competencies for performance management systems. Pilot with high-response countries (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan).
- **Performance Management Toolkit:** Develop customizable templates and redesign pilots addressing the top HR priority (42 mentions) and pain points (weak systems: 29). Include KPI frameworks linking digital fluency to merit promotion, piloted in 5 volunteer countries. Expected outcome: 30% efficiency gains in mid-level manager evaluations within 18 months, directly tackling the 47 redesign requests.
- **Peer Leadership Alliances:** Formalise sustained networks for the “middle layer” (managers/data officers), building on 36 peer alliance stated preferences and 39 exchange preferences. Host quarterly virtual clinics and organise annual study tours, pairing Central Asian practitioners with South Korean/EU peers on leadership gaps (36 responses). Convert one-time event attendees (45 prior engagement) into permanent reform collaborators.

Tier 2: Catalytic Investments

These scale Tier 1 successes, targeting second-order constraints once foundational systems mature.

- **Competency Playbooks:** Produce practical guides for frameworks (34 mentions) and merit-based promotion (34), including skills matrices mapping AI/data literacy to career ladders. Bundle with recruitment modernisation tools (31) to accelerate hiring (slow hiring 18), distributed via academies and alliances.
- **Workforce Analytics Sandboxes:** Deploy starter kits (28 mentions) addressing data deficiencies (19 mentions) and enabling workforce planning (38 priority). Include dashboards tracking skills gaps, turnover (26), and mobility (12), piloted in subnational governments (20% respondent share).
- **Recruitment/Retention Pilots:** Test hybrid/remote work models (16) and pay benchmarking approaches (14), tackling uncompetitive pay (33) and turnover (26). Partner with training academies (19% of respondents) for talent pipelines, measuring 20% retention improvement in pilot cohorts.

Implementation Roadmap sequences these investments across 2026-2027: Q1 2026 launches Tier 1 academies/toolkits with the ACSH Korea Centre support; Q3 scales alliances; 2027 activates Tier 2 pilots measuring outcomes against baseline (skills gaps -20%, leadership readiness +25%). Cross-regional collaboration – Central Asia with South Korea (4 responses), EU partners – leverages ACSH’s convening power (86 responses) to close the ambition-execution gap, transforming survey insights into measurable civil service modernisation.

4.5. Strategic Implications: ACSH Korea Centre

The ACSH Korea Centre emerges as the strategic accelerator for HR modernisation across the 20-country network, leveraging South Korea's globally recognised expertise in leadership pipelines, performance-based civil service systems, and competency-driven talent management. With Central Asia dominating survey responses (54.7%, 47/86 total), the Centre bridges this core regional base to Asia-Pacific excellence, channelling Korean models – proven in scaling digital governance while maintaining meritocratic HR architectures – directly into high-need areas like AI literacy (55 mentions) and performance management systems redesign (47). Hosting identical ACSH activities (academies, clinics, toolkits) but with specialised HR focus, it converts survey insights into operational reality, positioning ACSH as the indispensable enabler of civil service transformation.

Survey data reveal execution stalled not by vision, but by human capital voids: 79% explore AI yet only 3% scale it; skills gaps cripple 57% of organisations; leadership shortages affect 36%. Korea's comparative advantages – mature performance management systems, leadership academies, and workforce analytics – directly address these gaps. Without dedicated infrastructure like the ACSH Korea Centre, participating countries risk perpetuating the “pilot-to-production” trap despite consensus on priorities (Workforce Skills 4.15 rating, HRM 4.09). The Centre fills this void by adapting Korean frameworks for analytics deployment, ethical skills integration, and merit-based career systems to Central Asian contexts.

Central Asia's dominance (Tajikistan 20 responses, Kazakhstan 10, Uzbekistan 9, Kyrgyzstan 8) makes the Centre a natural extension of ACSH's regional anchor role, while South Korea's 4 responses and Laos inputs signal Asia-Pacific readiness. It targets respondent segments most needing HR acceleration: training academies (19% of respondents), subnational governments (20%), and HR/civil service functions (24%), delivering blended programmes that scale from local pilots to network-wide adoption.

5. INSTITUTIONALISING THE MPM-ACSH PARTNERSHIP: STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE ACSH CENTRE IN KOREA

The establishment of an ACSH Korea Centre is envisioned as a flagship initiative for Korea's “administrative diplomacy”. By leveraging the ACSH's existing network of 45 participating countries and its status as an “international platform of excellence”, Korea could strategically scale its public sector innovations while contributing to the global achievement of SDGs 16 and 17. Based on an expert review of the current global landscape of civil service reform and the specific comparative advantages of the Republic of Korea, this feasibility framework outlines the strategic institutionalisation of the Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH) Centre in Korea.

It is important to note that the elements outlined herein, including governance structures, secondment models, and financial contributions, serve as preliminary recommendations intended to guide initial discussions. All such arrangements remain flexible and are subject to formal negotiation, as well as further consultation with the Government of Kazakhstan and UNDP, before any final decisions are made to proceed with the recommended actions. Final implementation remains contingent upon the official confirmation of the Centre's establishment and the consensus of all institutional stakeholders.

5.1 Institutionalisation Models for Partnership

It is recommended that the ACSH Korea Centre be established as an integrated project office, drawing on institutional arrangements used in comparable UN project offices, including the United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNPOG) under UN DESA. Under this framework, the Centre would function as a specialised technical arm of the ACSH Secretariat, physically hosted and financially supported by the Korean government; though, within a framework of shared institutional responsibility.

It is also understood that the Hub's substantive contribution will be proportionate to the level of technical expertise it may contribute to the Centre. Financially – in accordance with the UNDP policy on cost-sharing – the ACSH could provide a strategic parallel contribution of up to 10%, delivered primarily through in-kind support, including the dedication of expert staff time and the coverage of essential operational and communications expenses. This collaborative model ensures that Korea's financial stewardship is seamlessly integrated with the Hub's regional expertise to create a sustainable and high-impact platform for civil service excellence. Such arrangements may be discussed and agreed in full once a formal decision on the establishment of the Centre has been reached.

Additionally, as the core content of the Centre's mandate and scope would be provided primarily by the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM), the Centre would operate within the broader framework of ACSH and UNDP. To ensure appropriate oversight and strategic direction without unnecessary administrative overlap, the Centre's governance will be integrated into a streamlined decision-making structure. This arrangement would strengthen the Centre's positioning as an international platform for cooperation and ensure that national investment is effectively leveraged within a multilateral framework.

To ensure long-term administrative stability and operational autonomy, the Centre's legal foundation should be codified through a Host Country Agreement (HCA) and a multi-year Project Document (Pro Doc). It is recognized that this matter may require review, guidance and involvement at the UNDP HQ level. Yet, this structure provides the necessary "multilateral neutrality" and UN-backed legitimacy required to lead high-level regional policy dialogues while ensuring the Centre remains a permanent and authoritative pillar of the global governance networks.

5.2 Areas of High-Potential Collaboration

The thematic agenda of the prospective ACSH Korea Centre should prioritise domains where the Republic of Korea possesses globally recognised leadership, particularly in the digital modernisation of personnel administration. A flagship area of collaboration could focus on the cross-regional dissemination of the e-Saram experience – Korea's third-generation electronic human resource management platform, which has been identified as a global best practice for automating tasks from recruitment to retirement. Furthermore, the Centre could position itself as a global laboratory for "AI-HRM," researching how generative AI can be utilised for personalised civil service training and ethical recruitment, building on the success of recent ACSH-Korea collaborative study tours.

In addition to digital innovation, the Centre's agenda should encompass institutional integrity and meritocracy. This includes promoting Korea's merit-based recruitment systems – ranked third by the OECD – and developing comprehensive frameworks for civil service ethics and corruption prevention to enhance administrative transparency. Another critical value proposition is Korea's innovative "Proactive Administration" framework. This model incentivizes civil servants to handle their duties creatively and professionally for the public good by providing specific legal and

administrative protections against reprisal when taking professional risks, addressing a common bottleneck for reform in the Global South. To maintain long-term relevance, these thematic priorities will be dynamically aligned with the ACSH’s overarching mission and updated based on the results of biennial needs assessment surveys to ensure the Centre remains responsive to the actual demands of participating countries.

5.3 Modes of Engagement and Coordination

The operational framework of the proposed ACSH Korea Centre is envisioned as a strategic transition from traditional, one-way *knowledge transfer* toward a more dynamic model of *knowledge co-creation*. This shift fundamentally redefines administrative diplomacy as a mutually beneficial partnership, where the Republic of Korea does not merely export its systems but actively engages in a multidirectional exchange of expertise. Such an approach ensures that while Korea shares its globally recognised best practices, it simultaneously absorbs the unique contextual innovations and local solutions developed by its international peers, thereby strengthening its own administrative resilience and global benchmarking capabilities.

To operationalise this vision, it is recommended that the Centre utilise the proven ACSH model of thematic *Peer Learning Alliances*, specifically dedicated to high-priority areas such as digital HRM and AI governance. These platforms are designed to bridge the gap between high-level policy and administrative reality by allowing practitioners to share “tacit knowledge”, i.e., the practical, unwritten expertise gained through real-world implementation. To ensure that these capacity-building efforts translate into tangible reform rather than remaining purely theoretical, the Centre could implement an action-oriented delivery model where major interventions are paired with the development of Action Plans or “Roadmaps” by participating countries. These plans would function as vital accountability mechanisms, enabling the ACSH and UNDP to provide continuous monitoring and technical support, as beneficiary states integrate Korean-inspired tools into their own national institutional structures.

Furthermore, the Centre’s research agenda should prioritise the co-production of applied knowledge, moving away from static reports toward the creation of practical policy briefs and case studies, such as those addressing the ethics of AI-HRM, that are directly informed by the challenges identified during Peer Learning sessions. Central to this entire operational philosophy is the principle of demand-driven flexibility, which mirrors the core agenda-setting methodology of the ACSH. By utilising biennial needs assessment surveys to determine the most effective delivery formats – whether through national workshops, specialised study tours, or peer-to-peer learning models – the Centre can ensure it remains continuously responsive to the evolving administrative priorities and specific requests of its 45 participating states.

5.4 Proposed Governance and Operational Arrangements

To ensure the ACSH Korea Centre remains agile, cost-effective, and strategically aligned with both national and international priorities, it is suggested that the Centre is overseen by an Administrative Coordination Group (ACG) rather than a separate, resource-intensive Steering Committee. This body would be co-chaired by representatives from the Korean government, specifically the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Chairman of the ACSH Steering Committee. Such a structure would provide a balanced leadership framework, ensuring that the Centre’s strategic direction remains demand-driven while maximizing its “convening power” through a direct link to the broader multilateral network of 45 participating states.

Operationally, it is recommended that the Centre function under a “lean Secretariat” model to minimize bureaucratic overhead and prioritise high-level technical expertise. To ensure a permanent multilateral anchor and seamless synchronisation with the Hub’s headquarters in Astana, the possibility of seconding an ACSH staff member to the Centre could be explored. This liaison officer would facilitate the continuous exchange of “tacit knowledge” and ensure that the Centre’s activities, such as digital HRM and AI governance initiatives, are fully integrated into the Hub’s global activity areas. The coverage of salaries for any seconded ACSH personnel by the Headquarters would be subject to further review in light of relevant UNDP HR rules and regulations, ensuring that the final arrangement is both compliant and optimized to preserve the Centre’s resources for its substantive mission. Any related administrative and resource considerations would be subject to and require further consultations in accordance with applicable policies and procedures.

In order to ensure smooth coordination and maximum synergy with the MPM, the possibility of seconding staff from the MPM through the Korean Government Employment Leave programme should be explored. The secondment of a senior level MPM official to the Centre would facilitate prompt and expert communication on various programmes calling for input from the MPM. Other staff members including local staff should be recruited independently by the Centre.

The financial sustainability of the Centre might be secured through a dual-stream funding model, similar to the successful financial architecture of the OECD. Under this model, core operational funding would be provided by the Korean government as part of its administrative diplomacy efforts, while specific regional initiatives or specialised research projects could be supported by project-based voluntary contributions from other participating states or international partners. This approach would provide the fiscal flexibility necessary to scale activities in response to the evolving needs of the Eurasia and Asia-Pacific regions without incurring high permanent costs. By adopting this lean, integrated, and resource-efficient model, the ACSH Korea Centre would be positioned as a modern vehicle for impactful international cooperation and administrative innovation.

5.5 Long-Term Vision and Strategic Positioning

The ACSH Korea Centre is envisioned as a *Global Bridge for Personnel Management Excellence*, linking the advanced administrative standards of OECD countries with the practical reform needs of the Global South. Korea’s unique experience as a country that has successfully transitioned from development to global leadership positions it is particularly well suited to play this bridging role. In line with SDG 16 on effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, the Centre would promote governance solutions that combine technological sophistication with operational feasibility across diverse national contexts.

Building on insights from stakeholder interviews, the Centre would respond to growing international demand for adaptable, evidence-based approaches to public personnel management, including digital HRM, data-driven decision-making, and integrity-by-design. Operating through the established multilateral infrastructure of the Astana Civil Service Hub, the Centre would leverage ACSH’s convening power to engage a global network of practitioners, experts, and academics across the 45 ACSH participating countries and over 90 institutional partners, ensuring that Korea’s experience reaches key reform leaders and institutions worldwide. This directly supports SDG 17 by strengthening partnerships for knowledge exchange and capacity development.

Additionally, operating in close coordination with the Ministry of Personnel Management anchors the Centre within Korea’s national policy priorities and ensures access to high-level technical expertise. This enables the development of tailored capacity development programmes, peer-

to-peer cooperation, and forward-looking civil service models, including AI-enabled personnel management. At the same time, the Centre is designed as a platform for two-way learning, allowing Korea to continuously absorb insights and innovations from partner countries, thereby reinforcing its own administrative excellence in a rapidly evolving global environment.

Through this model, the ACSH Korea Centre advances Korea's long-term strategic positioning as a credible, forward-looking partner in global civil service reform, while contributing concretely to the achievement of SDG 16 and SDG 17 through practical, sustained, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

5.6 Risk Assessment and Mitigation Measures

The establishment of an ACSH Korea Centre involves several manageable risks that can be addressed through careful design and governance arrangements. One potential risk relates to *role clarity and institutional overlap* with existing cooperation mechanisms. This can be mitigated by clearly positioning the Centre as a complementary platform operating in coordination with the Ministry of Personnel Management, with a focused mandate on convening, knowledge exchange, and peer learning rather than implementation.

Sustainability and continuity represent a further consideration, given the long-term nature of capacity development. This risk can be addressed through phased implementation, multi-year thematic initiatives, and peer-to-peer alliances supported by the ACSH framework, which provides institutional continuity and operational stability.

Resource considerations can be mitigated by leveraging cost-effective multilateral modalities, including existing ACSH networks, digital platforms, and UNDP-supported arrangements, as well as through selective co-financing with partners. To avoid overly one-directional cooperation and ensure continued relevance, the Centre would embed comparative research, structured feedback mechanisms, and regular needs assessments into its programming.

Overall, these risks are proportionate and manageable. With clear positioning, adaptive programming, and close coordination with key stakeholders, the ACSH Korea Centre is well placed to deliver sustainable and high-impact international cooperation in public personnel management.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of the ACSH Centre in Korea will mark a transformative milestone in the decade-long partnership between the Republic of Korea and the Astana Civil Service Hub. The findings of this study confirm that the Centre is not merely an administrative expansion, but a strategic necessity required to meet the unprecedented global demand for Korea's public personnel management expertise. By institutionalising this cooperation, the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM) successfully transitions its international engagement from a reactive, bilateral model to a proactive, multilateral leadership role.

The results in this report underscore that the "Korea model" – characterised by merit-based recruitment, digital HRM (e-Saram), and robust integrity frameworks – is uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between the high standards of OECD nations and the practical reform realities of the Central Asia, the Caucasus, Global South, and beyond. Through the Centre, Korea's administrative innovations will no longer be just national assets but will be global benchmarks that directly contribute to the achievement of SDG 16 (Effective Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The proposed design of the Centre is not new; it is built upon the proven successes of EROPA, OECD, and UNPOG. By adopting the “integrated project office” model of UNPOG and the “dual stream” funding architecture of the OECD, the Centre achieves a rare balance of national ownership and multilateral legitimacy. This strategic alignment ensures that Korea’s administrative innovations and best practices in personnel management are disseminated through a streamlined, low-bureaucracy platform.

By leveraging the ACSH’s existing network of 45 countries, the Centre reduces transactional friction and coordination costs, ensuring that resources are redirected from administrative processes to substantive capacity building and applied research interventions. The proposed focus on “Peer Learning Alliances” responds directly to the urgent call from participating states for experiential, “how-to” knowledge that addresses the complex challenges of AI-driven governance and workforce transformation.

Ultimately, the ACSH Korea Centre represents a “long game” investment in global governance stability. It provides the permanent analytical presence and institutional memory required to navigate the cyclical nature of political reforms. As the Centre matures, it will not only project Korea’s strategic soft power but also foster a more resilient, accountable, and professional global civil service. The strategic directions and perspectives outlined in this study for the ACSH Centre in Korea provides the MPM and ACSH with a clear, evidence-based path to transform this vision into a high-impact reality.

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