

Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement to Support to the National Agency for Civil Servants on Human Resource Management Reforms in Romania (P503309)

Deliverable 6: *Report on the ex-post assessment of the national recruitment competition*

December 2025

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Acronyms

ABC	Activity-Based Costing (activity-based budgeting model)
ATAP	Association of Young People in Public Administration
CEFRL	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
DCE	Discrete Choice Experiment
ECDL/ICDL	European/International Computer Driving Licence (digital skills certification)
EPSO	European Personnel Selection Office
EU	European Union
HLCS	High-Level Civil Servants
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
MNL	Multinomial Logit Model
MRU	Human Resource Management
NACS	National Agency of Civil Servants
NAI	National Institute of Administration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
RAS	Reimbursable Advisory Services
SCAP	Strategy for Strengthening Public Administration
SDFP	Strategy for the Development of the Civil Service
SENEOSP	National Electronic System for Tracking Employment in the Public Sector
SIPOCA	POCA Identification System (Operational Program Administrative Capacity)
SNSPA	National School of Political Studies and Public Administration
ToC	Theory of Change
WB	World Bank



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Executive Summary

Evaluation context

Over the past decade, Romania has pursued an ambitious agenda to modernize its public administration, with human resource management (HRM) positioned as a central lever for professionalization and merit-based governance. Guided by national strategies for strengthening public administration and civil service development, reforms have sought to promote transparent and merit-based recruitment, improve performance management, and introduce competency-driven career paths. The overarching aim has been to move away from fragmented, knowledge-based HRM practices toward a consistent, modern HR architecture that supports institutional effectiveness and higher quality public services.

A core strand of this agenda was the transition to a competency-based system for recruitment and career progression, replacing traditional exams focused on rote knowledge with structured assessments of general and specific competencies. National strategies called for the development of general and specific competency frameworks, the adoption of standardized quality criteria for recruitment and evaluation, and the redesign of recruitment procedures to enhance objectivity and meritocracy. This shift laid the groundwork for a more coherent and strategically aligned HRM system across central public administration.

Building on these commitments regarding HRM reform in the public administration, Romania developed a new recruitment model anchored in a centralized, digital, and competency-driven process designed to support fairness, transparency, and standardization. The model rests on three interconnected pillars: competency-based workforce planning, a national competition assessing eligibility, general knowledge, and general competencies; and a job-based selection organized by individual institutions to assess specialized knowledge and specific competencies. Supported by a digital recruitment platform and detailed methodological rules, the model aims to strengthen workforce planning, streamline recruitment processes, and ensure consistent application of competency standards across institutions.

Figure 1. The three pillars of the reformed recruitment model



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the reconstructed theory of change

The proposed recruitment model is particularly relevant for strengthening state capacity, as it targets the central and territorial civil service, which plays a pivotal role in policy development and, in several sectors, direct service delivery. The civil service as a whole comprises approximately 145,500 civil servants, representing around 11 percent of total public-sector employment (1.307 million employees). In occupational terms, civil servants account for about 48 percent of the broader public administration workforce, estimated at roughly 302,000 positions, excluding education, health, and other large budgetary sectors. Within the civil service,

approximately 77,780 civil servants are employed in central and territorial public administration, which is the direct scope of this report¹. This group represents about 53 percent of all civil servants, 26 percent of public administration occupations, and approximately 6 percent of total public-sector employment. Focusing on this segment ensures that recruitment reforms are applied where they have the greatest systemic impact on policy quality and service delivery.

The World Bank is supporting the Government of Romania through a Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) program focused on advancing human resource management (HRM) reforms led by the National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS). This support builds on earlier efforts to professionalize the civil service, strengthen merit-based career management, and enhance performance orientation, including the introduction of a general competency framework for all civil servants and a new national recruitment and selection model anchored in competency-based assessment and digital tools. Under the RAS, assistance is delivered through four main interlinked workstreams - strengthening the Senior Civil Servants (SCS) corps, developing an Executive Development Program for top managers, strengthening strategic workforce planning through improved use of competency frameworks and HR data, and building a strategic HRM framework focused on data governance, analytics, and evidence-based workforce management.

Within the RAS, this report corresponds to Activity 6 – the ex-post evaluation of the 2024 national recruitment competition, following the initial pilot implementation of the reformed model in 2023. The evaluation is expected to examine how the competency-based and digitally enabled recruitment system operated once deployed at scale, with specific attention to centralized online testing and pre-selection based on general competencies, as well as the consistency and quality of decentralized, job-specific assessments conducted by line institutions. Its findings need to provide evidence to validate core design assumptions, identify implementation challenges, and inform targeted recommendations to refine recruitment procedures, assessment tools, workforce-planning linkages, and governance arrangements under the NACS-led competency-based HRM system.

Brief overview of the national recruitment model and the need for an ex-post evaluation

The ex-post assessment of the pilot national competition demonstrated both the feasibility and the transformative potential of this model, while also exposing operational challenges that should be addressed before large-scale implementation. The pilot project benefited from an ex post analysis carried out under PNRR Milestone 416, which informed ANFP's decision-making on the continuation of the reform. Conducted entirely via the digital recruitment platform and covering both high level civil service jobs and entry-level positions, the pilot competition significantly improved transparency and objectivity by standardizing assessment tools and reducing local procedural inconsistencies. At the same time, it revealed key institutional capacity gaps: limited experience with competency mapping, difficulties in translating the national competency framework into concrete job profiles, weak HR planning practices, and a need for stronger guidance and support in using structured testing and evaluation tools.

Following the pilot of the national competition, the model was consolidated through legislative refinements, updated methodological guidance, and two extended national competitions that attracted substantial interest from prospective civil servants. This phase clarified institutional roles and responsibilities, improved job analysis methodologies, and strengthened alignment between job profiles and the national competency framework. It also

¹ Data extracted from NACS *Report on civil service management in 2024*, Available at: <https://www.anfp.gov.ro/comunicare/publicatii/rapoarte/raport-privind-managementul-functiei-publice/>.

reinforced NACS's role as the central coordinating authority responsible for ensuring methodological consistency, validating institutional documentation, overseeing the digital platform, and maintaining procedural standards. The extended competitions confirmed public appetite for a transparent nationwide recruitment process and generated a sizable pool of eligible candidates for institutions to recruit from.

At the same time, Romania's severe fiscal constraints, linked in part to excessive budget deficits, have increased the pressure for a recruitment model that is not only transparent and meritocratic but also cost-efficient and operationally sustainable. Public institutions face an aging workforce, persistent difficulties in attracting young and specialized talent, and rising demand for digital, analytical, and transversal competencies. Limited financial flexibility heightens the need to make the most of existing recruitment tools, ensure efficient use of institutional resources, and minimize administrative burdens while preserving procedural rigor and system credibility.

In this context, an external evaluation became essential to take stock of implementation progress, identify operational bottlenecks, and recalibrate the recruitment model so it can operate viably over the long term. The evaluation offered an opportunity to assess whether the system functions as intended, to understand how competency frameworks are used in practice, to examine institutional experiences with the national competition, and to identify the refinements needed to strengthen the model's contribution to Romania's broader public administration modernization agenda.

Purpose and objectives

The overarching purpose of the evaluation was to determine how effectively the competency-based recruitment model operates in practice and to identify the adjustments required to strengthen its performance, sustainability, and alignment with Romania's strategic HRM reform objectives. The evaluation assessed whether the model improves transparency, objectivity, and the quality of candidate selection; whether it supports more strategic workforce planning; and whether it helps institutions better match job requirements with the competencies of incoming candidates. It also examined the extent to which the model supports a more uniform and credible recruitment system across central administration bodies.

A second key objective was to understand the operational, human, and financial resource implications of the model, including how staffing levels, workloads, and digital infrastructure affect institutions' ability to implement the system consistently. This analysis was significantly constrained by limited financial data. The evaluation team did not have access to detailed cost information, due to non-disclosure agreements between the government and external service providers and because the monitoring system did not capture relevant financial indicators. These constraints limited the depth of the efficiency assessment and highlighted the need for improved financial monitoring, reporting, and transparency to support future evidence-based decision-making.

Methodological approach

The evaluation employed a multi-method design comprising three complementary components: (i) a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC), (ii) a process evaluation, and (iii) an outcome evaluation. Together, these provided a comprehensive view of the recruitment model's internal logic, implementation performance, and emerging results. This structure allowed the evaluation to examine not only how the system was conceived but also how it actually functions under real conditions and whether those conditions support or hinder the achievement of reform objectives.

Figure 2 Multi method design



Source: Authors' elaboration

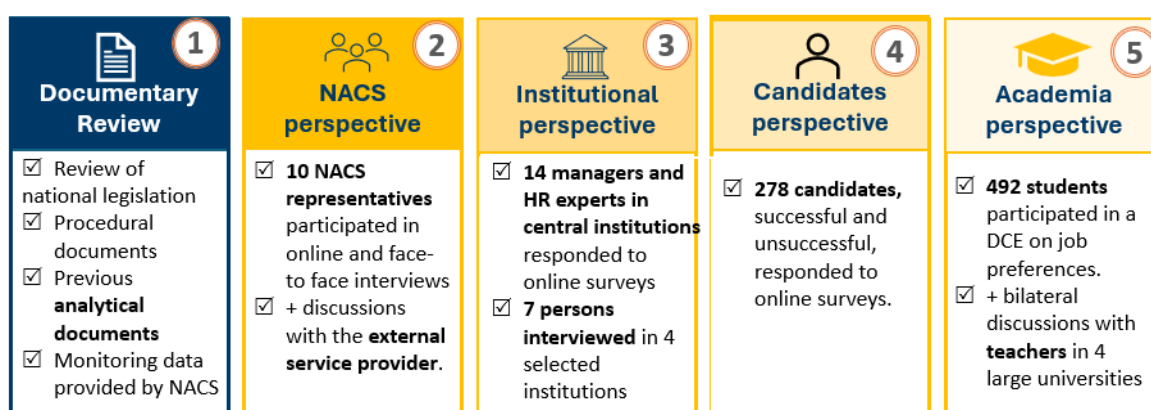
The reconstructed ToC clarified the causal assumptions underpinning the recruitment model, mapping links between inputs (such as competency frameworks, digital tools, and methodological guidance), core activities (such as eligibility verification and competency assessment), and expected outputs and outcomes (such as transparency, fairness, improved candidate quality, and stronger alignment between HR planning and institutional needs). It also identified key risks, such as uneven institutional capacity or insufficient resources, that could weaken system performance.

The process evaluation examined in detail how the recruitment model operates in practice, reviewing each stage of the national competition as well as the way institutions organize job-based selection. It assessed the consistency and fairness of eligibility checks; the reliability and clarity of general knowledge and competency tests; institutional experiences with job analysis; the adequacy of guidance provided by NACS; the quality of digital interactions for candidates and HR specialists; and the administrative burdens associated with managing the two-stage model. This component highlighted both strengths and areas where procedures need adjustment to improve feasibility and fidelity to the model's competency-based design.

The outcome evaluation analyzed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the recruitment model, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative evidence. It assessed whether the model responds to Romania's recruitment challenges - particularly talent attraction and competency alignment - whether candidates perceive the process as fair and transparent, and whether institutions benefit from a more reliable pool of applicants. It also examined early indications of system-level impact, such as the potential to contribute to a more predictable and professional civil service pipeline, while noting that financial efficiency could not be fully assessed due to missing data.

Evidence was gathered from multiple sources, including surveys of candidates and institutions, administrative data, structured interviews with NACS staff and HR specialists, analyses of legal and procedural documents, and institutional case studies. This triangulated evidence base strengthened the validity of findings by capturing perspectives from both users and implementers and by revealing system-wide patterns as well as institution-specific challenges and good practices.

Figure 3 Sources of information



Source: Authors' elaboration

Throughout the evaluation, a central guiding principle was to focus recommendations on practical adjustments to refine and strengthen the existing recruitment model rather than proposing alternative systems. Romania has already taken a substantial leap toward a more transparent, standardized, and merit-based recruitment system. Accordingly, the recommendations focus on improving delivery, enhancing digital functionalities and monitoring tools, building institutional capacity, and reinforcing NACS's operational and coordinating role, so that the model can reliably generate credible, efficient, and long-term system-level improvements.

Findings from the reconstructed theory of change (ToC)

The reconstructed ToC² confirms that the design of the new recruitment model is strongly aligned with the systemic challenges it seeks to address, but also shows that its success depends on institutional capacities that are only partially in place. The reform directly targets long-standing problems such as politicization and clientelism in recruitment, fragmented HR practices, weak strategic workforce planning, and outdated, paper-based, knowledge-only testing. By moving toward a unified, competency-based, digitally supported two-stage process, the model offers a coherent and credible pathway to more transparent, merit-based, and professional recruitment. Yet the ToC also makes clear that these benefits are contingent on robust HR functions and strong coordination capacities, which remain uneven across the system.

The ToC highlights that the three main pillars of the model - workforce planning, national competition, and job-based selection - form a logically coherent chain from strategic needs to final recruitment decisions, but that the first pillar rests on HRM capacities that are not yet fully developed. In principle, competency-based workforce planning led by NACS should enable institutions to map competency gaps, prepare high-quality job analyses, and translate these into recruitment needs feeding into a consolidated national plan. The national competition then tests general competencies in a standardized way, while job-based selection focuses on specific competencies and specialized knowledge. In practice, many institutions still lack the

² A Theory of Change is a conceptual and methodological framework that makes explicit how and why an intervention is expected to generate results and impact. It does so by identifying the causal relationships between inputs, activities, intermediate outcomes, and longer-term changes, as well as the assumptions that link these elements together. See: James Valters, Overseas Development Institute, 2014, Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results and Learning; Lisa Wyatt Knowlton & Cynthia C. Phillips, 2013, Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, and Action, Sage Publications.

analytical tools, digital capabilities, and HR expertise needed for robust workforce planning and job analysis, weakening the foundation for the entire model.

Preparatory activities, such as strategic and regulatory changes, development of tools and guidance, and piloting, were well designed in the ToC but assumed a level of institutional and technical capacity that has not yet been fully secured. The roadmap rightly combined legal amendments, a national competency framework, standardized templates, structured assessment tools, and an integrated e-recruitment platform, supported by training for HR staff and selection panels. The 2023 pilot was a critical step, allowing testing of the platform, instruments, and procedures and generating lessons for refinement. However, the ToC implicitly assumed sustained investment in human resources, training, and organizational change, which so far has materialized only partially.

The ToC also confirms that the expected outputs and outcomes - competency frameworks, standardized procedures, a digital platform, and a managed pool of qualified candidates - are logically linked to long-term improvements in merit-based recruitment, but only if they are embedded in a broader HRM reform package. In the medium term, the model is designed to generate more professional and transparent recruitment cycles, better candidate experience, and more efficient use of resources through common standards and digital tools. Over the longer term, these advances should contribute to higher quality entrants, stronger institutional capacity, and increased attractiveness of public sector careers. Yet the ToC highlights that these gains will remain partial unless recruitment is more explicitly connected with career development, performance evaluation, and compensation reforms, so that high-quality entrants see credible prospects for progression and retention.

A critical insight from the ToC is that the model requires substantial initial and recurring financial and human resources, and that the sustainability of these inputs is not yet guaranteed. Initial investments, largely financed through external funding, covered development of the e-recruitment platform, testing instruments, and training materials. The ToC, however, assumes that domestic resources will subsequently finance regular national competition sessions, advanced assessment methods, IT maintenance, and continuous training. The evaluation could not fully verify cost-efficiency or long-term affordability due to lack of financial data and weaknesses in the monitoring system, underscoring a structural risk: the model's sustainability depends on stable funding and better cost-tracking mechanisms that are not yet fully in place.

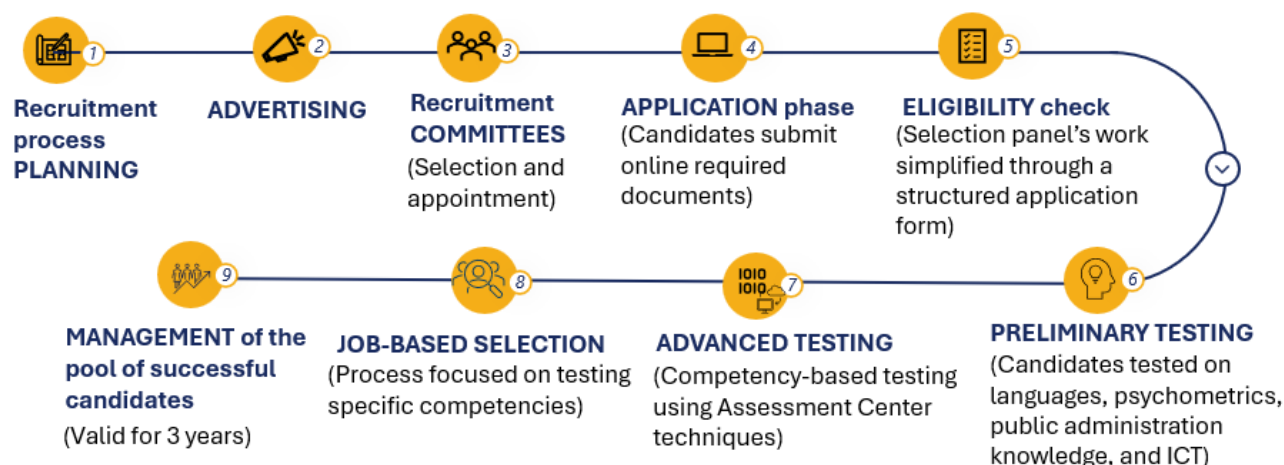
Most importantly, the reconstructed ToC reveals a central tension: while the model is conceptually sound and responsive to identified challenges, the system - especially within NACS and institution HR departments - does not yet appear sufficiently capacitated to sustain such a complex reform at scale. NACS is expected to manage the IT platform, national communication, test design, committee coordination, procurement of assessment centers, and the national pool of candidates. Line ministries and territorial institutions are expected to perform competency-based workforce planning, job analysis, and structured assessments. Yet current staffing levels, the predominance of legal generalists over HR and organizational development specialists, limited digital and analytical capacity, and still-emerging coordination mechanisms collectively fall short of the ToC's assumptions. This capacity gap is the main risk identified: a well-designed model operating in a system that is not yet fully equipped to deliver and sustain it.

Findings from the process evaluation

The process evaluation shows that the new national recruitment model has introduced unprecedented transparency, scale, and procedural standardization, yet important substantive and operational gaps prevent it from functioning as a fully competency-based system. Statistical analysis, legal and procedural review, NACS documentation, and qualitative

interviews with HR units, candidates, assessors, and platform administrators confirm that the system represents a major step forward compared to the fragmented pre-reform model: processes are uniform, digitalized, and procedurally fair. However, limitations in the methodological calibration of tests, insufficient competency alignment, documentation gaps, and limited institutional capacity undermine the model's ability to generate reliable, comparable, and meaningful assessments of candidates' abilities. The result is a system that is procedurally strong but substantively incomplete.

Figure 4. Process steps in recruitment



Despite significant procedural progress, the operational architecture of the model still relies on institutions and functions whose capacity has not grown at the pace of the reform, creating an implementation gap between design and practice. The national competition requires high levels of coordination between NACS, public institutions and authorities at central and territorial levels, test providers, and accredited assessment centers. Yet HR departments across the administration remain oriented toward legal compliance rather than competency-based HRM, and NACS continues to operate with limited technical and human resources relative to its expanded mandate. Interviews indicate that NACS staff manage heavy operational workloads - such as eligibility checks and real-time platform support - leaving limited room for methodological oversight, test calibration, or analytical monitoring. These capacity limitations weaken consistency, quality assurance, and continuous improvement across phases.

Workforce planning and recruitment preparation. Workforce planning, though formally strengthened through standardized tools and structured cycles, remains unevenly implemented and still lacks a strategic dimension. The reform introduced job analysis templates, competency mapping instruments, and a consolidated two-year national recruitment plan, expecting institutions to identify competency-based staffing needs. In practice, many institutions lack the expertise or analytical capacity to conduct genuine workforce planning. Interviews show that HR units often submit plans resembling vacancy lists rather than forward-looking assessments of competency gaps. As a result, the national recruitment plan, while procedurally coherent, is not yet a fully strategic instrument aligning staffing needs with institutional missions or performance objectives, limiting its function as the first pillar of the two-stage model.

Communication and candidate outreach. Communication and advertising have improved substantially through centralized, multi-channel outreach but remain slightly overly formal. The move to a single national portal, combined with targeted outreach via social media, job fairs,

and mainstream outlets, marks a major improvement over the previous fragmented system. However, communication materials often remain technical and legalistic, with limited information on competency expectations, test formats, scoring logic, or preparation strategies. In other words, the messages are still phrased more like administrative notices than practical guidance tailored to candidates' needs. Candidate surveys and interviews indicate that many participants understood the process only after entering it. The absence of sample questions for all testing stages and clear explanations of competency requirements reduces transparency from the candidate perspective and may disadvantage those less familiar with public administration.

Digital application and eligibility check. The digital application system significantly enhanced efficiency and transparency, but eligibility verification remains administratively heavy and insufficiently automated, creating pressure points during peak periods. The online portal eliminated paper submissions, standardized documentation, and allowed applicants to track status in real time. However, eligibility verification is still largely manual due to formal documentation requirements and the lack of automated validation mechanisms for diplomas, experience records, and identity data. NACS teams must review thousands of files in short timeframes, and appeals - although limited - still reflect candidates' difficulty interpreting formal requirements. Digitalization has resolved many procedural issues, but the eligibility phase remains resource-intensive and would benefit from further automation and simplification.

Preliminary testing. The preliminary testing phase ensures high transparency and standardization, supported by digital tools and strong integrity safeguards, but could be further improved to act as a robust filter for competency-based recruitment. It combines four instruments: knowledge tests on fundamental rights and public administration, an IT literacy test, a cognitive aptitude test, and, where relevant, a language test. Despite uniform administration, knowledge and IT tests appear to have low difficulty and discriminatory power, with rejection rates of only 0–5%, suggesting they measure minimal informational thresholds rather than competencies. The cognitive aptitude test displays certain inconsistencies across categories, with ceiling effects for execution-level candidates (a large share of candidates achieving scores close to the maximum, with means of 85.0 and 87.8 out of 100, with many at or near 100) and a 44% rejection rate for managers that cannot be fully explained by candidate profiles. Procedural fairness is high, but the instruments need to be improved in order to fulfil a competency-based assessment function.

Advanced testing. The advanced testing phase represents the core innovation of the model but should be robustly anchored in testing general competencies based on behavioural indicators, and test calibration should be substantially improved to adequately function as a recruitment filter. Although advanced testing is designed to evaluate competencies using behavioural methods, the 2024 competition used an online attitudinal questionnaire for all categories. The very high (99.9%) pass rate (1 candidate rejected out of 1,194 evaluated for entry-level, assistant, and director positions) proves that the instrument had virtually no filtering capacity and generated limited actionable insight into candidates' behavioural competencies. Interviews indicate that questionnaire items were weakly linked to defined behavioural indicators and did not adequately simulate job-relevant behaviours or performance tasks. Because assessment-center instruments (such as simulations, in-basket exercises, or case analyses) were not used in the evaluated session, the system produced no observable evidence of candidates' ability to demonstrate competencies in practice.

The in-depth assessment of the evidence made available regarding the testing instruments shows that preliminary and advanced stages ensured procedural consistency but tests need to be improved. Both stages operate under standardized and transparent conditions, supported by the digital platform, yet neither provides sufficient differentiation or reliable insight into candidates' general or behavioural competencies. Documentation gaps prevent validity

assessment, differences in cognitive test calibration undermine comparability across levels, and the absence of behavioural assessment prevents alignment with competency-based HRM. As a result, the system ensures fairness of administration but not yet fairness or accuracy of substantive evaluation, limiting its ability to support merit-based selection.

Appeals management. The appeals system functions efficiently and transparently; it should however include detailed score explanations and access to the algorithmic nature of test scoring. Eligibility appeals are numerous but mostly procedural, reflecting burdensome documentary requirements and candidates' uncertainty about compliance. Testing appeals are limited because automated scoring leaves little room for interpretive correction. However, candidates receive no item-level feedback or competency-level score interpretation, which means they cannot meaningfully challenge results or understand the basis for rejection. This reduces the developmental and accountability value of appeals, even though procedural fairness is formally ensured.

Job-based selection. The job-based selection phase is where the largest divergence between the model's intentions and actual practice occurs, mainly due to limited HR capacity, insufficient use of competency-based tools, and inconsistent methodological quality. While institutions comply with basic legal procedures, many default to knowledge-heavy written tests and unstructured interviews. Competency-based assessment methods - central to the reform - are used inconsistently. Committee members frequently lack training in competency-based interviewing, resulting in subjective scoring and fragmented practices. The evaluation found significant variation in test quality, limited use of supplementary probes, compressed assessment timelines, and weak quality assurance.

Reserve pool management. Management of the national pool of candidates is a key functional element of the model, providing an efficient mechanism for institutions to access pre-screened candidates; its strategic potential should be better exploited through better integration with workforce planning. Candidates who pass preliminary and advanced testing enter a three-year pool from which institutions can source pre-qualified applicants. The digital platform notifies candidates about openings and allows institutions to issue invitations. The evaluation concludes that while the pool infrastructure is strong, its impact could be significantly enhanced through clearer guidance and closer monitoring of its use.

Overall, the process evaluation shows that the national competition delivers large-scale, transparent, and standardized recruitment; in the future, key areas of improvement relate to institutional capacity, and competency-oriented tools required to function as a fully effective meritocratic system. The strongest achievements lie in digitalization, uniform administration, and procedural fairness, which represent a major step forward for Romania's public administration. However, the substantive pillars of competency-based recruitment remain yet to be developed: tests are insufficiently calibrated, behavioural assessment is absent, institutional HR capacity is uneven, and the feedback loop between testing and job-based selection is weak. Unless these dimensions are strengthened, the model risks remaining procedurally modern but substantively limited, reducing its potential impact on the quality and professionalism of the civil service.

Findings from the outcome evaluation

The outcome evaluation reinforces the process findings while adding a broader analytical perspective through the OECD-DAC criteria,³ confirming that the national competition

³ OECD (2010), Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264083905-en>.

model is both a significant achievement and a reform still in consolidation. It reaffirms that the system has introduced unprecedented transparency, standardization, and digitalization into recruitment, addressing many shortcomings of the previous model. By examining relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, the evaluation further assesses how well the model responds to structural workforce challenges, whether it delivers meaningful competency-based selection, how cost-effective it is likely to be, what institutional changes it has triggered, and whether it can be sustained beyond the current funding cycle. Taken together, these insights show that the reform is directionally correct and institutionally transformative but not yet operating at full potential.

Relevance. The national competition remains highly relevant to Romania's initial recruitment challenges, offering a structured response to fragmentation, politicization, and weak HRM practices, even if some constraints persist in new forms. By centralizing the first recruitment stage, introducing a unified digital platform, and anchoring processes in competency frameworks, the model directly addresses long-standing weaknesses: uneven recruitment standards across institutions, ad hoc vacancy management, and opaque selection procedures. The introduction of multiannual recruitment planning, compulsory job analysis, and limits on alternative entry routes such as conversions or transfers all respond to vulnerabilities documented prior to the reform. However, workforce planning still tends to be numerical rather than strategic, digital linkages with HR information systems are underused, and institutional application of planning requirements remains uneven. As a result, while the system effectively corrects major procedural shortcomings, it has not yet fully transformed how the administration manages its workforce.

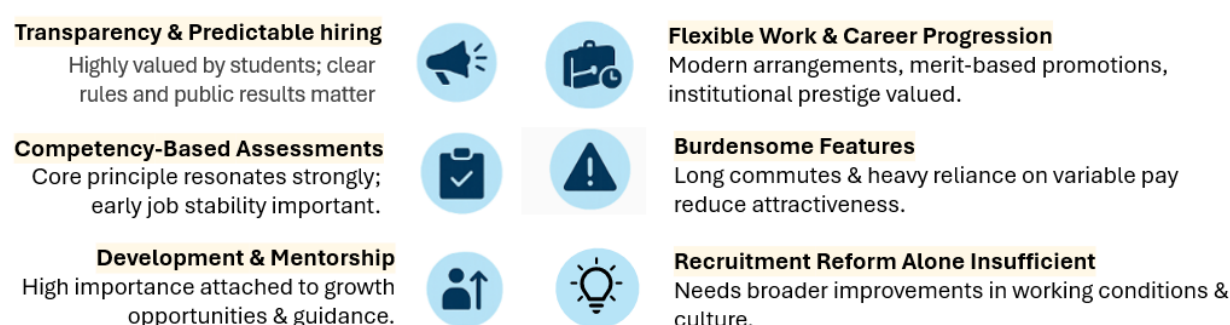
The reform also aligns strongly with broader HRM and governance priorities, but its long-term relevance increasingly depends on stronger links between recruitment, development, and career progression. Romania's public administration faces demographic pressures, difficulties in attracting specialized and younger talent, and rapidly growing demand for digital, analytical, and transversal skills. A transparent, competency-based recruitment system is therefore indispensable. However, the evaluation shows that recruitment alone cannot make public service a competitive and resilient employer. New entrants are more likely to join and stay if they see credible development opportunities, fair and motivating promotion mechanisms, and meaningful professional roles. The national competition is most relevant when viewed as a foundational pillar of an integrated HRM architecture, evolving alongside reforms in training, performance management, mobility, reward systems, and leadership development.

To deepen the analysis of relevance, the evaluation incorporated a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) with students - one of the civil service's key future talent pools - to understand how young people evaluate public employment. Integrated into the evaluation methodology, the DCE complemented administrative data, institutional surveys, and interviews by modelling real-life decision-making. Through repeated choices between hypothetical job offers, 492 students from four universities (enrolled in Public Administration studies) revealed how they trade off transparency, promotion pathways, training opportunities, work-life balance, job prestige, stability, and other attributes. The method provided richer insights than conventional surveys, capturing both the relative weight of job characteristics and important differences across student segments, and explained not only what young people prefer but also the behavioural logic behind their choices.

The DCE findings confirm the direction of the reform while underscoring that recruitment must be complemented by broader employment improvements if the civil service is to become genuinely attractive. Students strongly value the core principles introduced by the national competition - transparent and predictable hiring rules, publicly accessible results, competency-based assessments, and early job stability - suggesting that these elements

resonate with future entrants. At the same time, they attach high importance to development and mentorship opportunities, flexible and modern working arrangements, clear and merit-based career progression, institutional prestige, and stable, well-structured compensation. Features perceived as overly burdensome or unpredictable, such as lengthy commuting times or heavy reliance on variable pay, quickly reduce job attractiveness. The fact that many respondents chose to reject all job options in some experimental sets illustrates a critical point: even a transparent and meritocratic recruitment process cannot compensate for weaknesses in career development, working conditions, or institutional culture. The national competition therefore remains highly relevant, but only as part of a wider effort to build an appealing, developmental, and future-ready employment model for Romania's next generation of civil servants.

Figure 5 Factors that impact students' interest in applying for a civil service job



Effectiveness. The national competition is implemented consistently in centrally managed stages and has clearly improved fairness and standardization, but effectiveness drops in the job-based selection stage, where institutional practices diverge. Eligibility, application management, preliminary and advanced testing all follow a uniform legal and procedural framework, supported by the national IT platform and a shared committee architecture. This has reduced the fragmentation of the old system and created a common “backbone” for recruitment. Once candidates move to second-stage job-based selection, however, practices vary considerably: some institutions use competency-based interviews and job-specific exercises, while others revert to law-heavy written tests. This variation limits the model's ability to deliver genuinely comparable merit-based outcomes and weakens continuity between the national and post-based stages.

The competition is effective in generating a sizeable and well-screened pool of candidates but, given its current scale and internal balance, it makes only a modest dent in systemic vacancy pressures, especially at debutant and leadership levels. The first full rounds attracted over a thousand candidates for a relatively limited number of positions, demonstrating that the model can mobilize interest and channel candidates through a standardized process. Yet the number of posts included in the recruitment plan, particularly debutant and managerial roles, remains small relative to high vacancy rates reported by NACS. Legal hiring restrictions further constrain institutions' ability to convert eligible candidates into appointments, even when a pool exists. In practice, the model helps address shortages in some institutions, but not at a magnitude sufficient to rebalance an ageing workforce or persistent leadership gaps.

Within the testing architecture, most filtering power lies in eligibility and preliminary tests, while advanced testing - the intended competency “heart” of the model - adds almost no discriminatory value in its current form. Data from the 2024 session show that eligibility checks and preliminary tests eliminate a meaningful share of candidates, often due to missing or

inadequate documentation or difficulties meeting professional experience and seniority requirements. By contrast, advanced testing has a pass rate close to 100%, functioning more as a formal step than as a substantive assessment of behavioural competencies. In practice, the system therefore operates as a strong procedural filter on legal and knowledge requirements, but not yet as a robust differentiator of competency levels or future performance, especially at entry and mid-management levels.

Candidate surveys suggest that the competition is perceived as clear, structured, and fair by most successful candidates, while unsuccessful candidates report more confusion, technical frustrations, and doubts about fairness, especially regarding advanced testing. Successful candidates highlight transparency, clear instructions, and the usefulness of practice tests, and they generally rate the platform and communication positively. Unsuccessful candidates are more likely to report unclear eligibility criteria, inconsistent information, and uncertainty about what the tests measure, particularly the attitudinal components. These perceptions do not undermine the procedural integrity of the competition but indicate that expectations around competency testing and feedback are not yet well managed. Communication and test design could do more to explain what is evaluated and why.

The communication effort around the national competition has been professionally designed and highly visible; limited human resources and dependence on external providers reduce responsiveness and threaten sustainability. The competition portal, social media campaigns, tutorials, job fairs, and university outreach significantly raised awareness and contributed to large numbers of applications. However, a very small internal team manages day-to-day candidate communication, often under heavy pressure, and responses can be delayed by bureaucratic approvals. Targeted communication to specific groups (such as students, experienced professionals, or people with disabilities) needs to be further developed, and language is often still legalistic and technical. Moreover, much of the high-quality campaign work has been funded through NRRP and outsourced, creating a risk that visibility will decline once external funds end.

For NACS, the reform has been transformative in terms of mandate and role, but effectiveness is increasingly constrained by chronic under-capacity and reliance on temporary project funding. The agency has moved from a predominantly regulatory and monitoring role to become the operational center of gravity for civil service recruitment, responsible for methodologies, platform management, candidate pool coordination, and institutional support. This expanded mandate is at odds with limited staffing and fragmented IT support. Heavy manual workloads for eligibility checks, appeals, communication, and platform maintenance strain the organization and make it difficult to sustain performance once NRRP support ends.

Efficiency. The evaluation finds that the new recruitment model has strong potential to generate long-term efficiency gains, but a full efficiency assessment was not possible due to major data constraints. Centralizing recruitment, digitalizing applications, and standardizing testing are structural improvements that, by design, should reduce administrative burden and create economies of scale over time. Compared with the previous fragmented, paper-based system, the reform introduces a more coherent operational architecture expected to lower recurring costs as processes mature.

However, the evaluation could not calculate true cost-efficiency measures because available financial data were only aggregate. The team had access to the total value of the procurement contract, which bundles together distinct categories of expenditure, such as platform development and maintenance, testing instruments and administration, assessment centers, communication campaigns, logistics, and panel support. Neither NACS's monitoring system nor the service provider could share disaggregated financial data, due to non-disclosure

agreements and limited internal cost tracking. This prevented an itemized understanding of cost drivers.

Despite these limitations, partial evidence suggests that current unit costs are inflated by substantial one-off investments that will not recur in future recruitment cycles. Development of the digital platform, commissioning of standardized tests, and establishment of accredited testing and assessment centers represent initial capital investments with long amortization periods. In the 2024–2025 rollout, these costs significantly increased the observed cost per position and per candidate, but these figures cannot be interpreted as steady-state costs.

Looking ahead, the model is likely to become more efficient, but quantifying these gains requires stronger financial monitoring and transparency. As the system stabilizes, platform maintenance should replace development costs, testing instruments will need only periodic updates, and training investments may decline as HR capacity improves. These dynamics should reduce future unit costs, but without detailed cost breakdowns, NACS cannot yet demonstrate efficiency gains or benchmark the model against alternatives. Establishing a transparent, disaggregated cost-monitoring framework is therefore essential for assessing financial sustainability and informing long-term funding decisions.

Impact. The quality and preparedness of candidates selected through the new model appear to be improving; a more strategic workforce planning process is essential. Institutions that have recruited via the national competition generally report that successful candidates display stronger general competencies, higher motivation, and a more positive attitude toward public service than those recruited under the old system. However, the match between candidate profiles and job-specific technical requirements is sometimes suboptimal, particularly for highly specialized roles, reflecting limited capacity in some institutions to define and use detailed job-specific competencies. Regional participation is uneven, partly due to the location of test centers and variable visibility of the competition, so the model’s potential to broaden access to public jobs across the country is only partially realized.

The model has clearly enhanced the transparency, standardization, and resilience of recruitment processes, although perceptions of fairness still depend heavily on outcomes and second-stage practices. Digital testing, automated scoring, and published results reduce the scope for arbitrary or politically driven decisions, and successful candidates overwhelmingly rate the competition as fair or very fair. Unsuccessful candidates are more skeptical, particularly about advanced testing and how institutions run job-based selection. While such perceptions are not unusual in competitive processes, they underline the importance of strengthening transparency and feedback in the second stage.

The institutional impact of the candidate pool remains limited so far, as relatively few job-based selection procedures have been organized and even fewer have led to appointments. Only a minority of successful candidates have actually participated in post-based competitions, and fewer still have been hired, often after lengthy procedures. This is largely due to legal hiring restrictions and limited institutional capacity to run job-based selections, rather than a failure of the model’s design. Nonetheless, it means that the national pool - one of the central innovations of the reform - has not yet been used to its intended potential as a systematic mechanism for filling vacancies with pre-vetted candidates.

The model has created a potentially powerful data and learning base; it still needs to develop a better use of structured feedback and performance indicators. The competition generates rich data on candidate profiles, test scores, progression rates, and institutional behaviour. However, NACS does not yet systematically exploit or communicate this information through regular surveys, key performance indicators (KPIs), or analytics-driven reviews of communication, test design, and pool usage. The capacity of ANFP’s internal resources remains

insufficient relative to the needs of this reform. As a result, opportunities to iteratively refine instruments, recalibrate thresholds, and adjust processes based on evidence are not fully seized.

Sustainability. The long-term sustainability of the national competition hinges on consolidating NACS's financial and human capacity and securing a stable legal and policy framework for annual implementation. The model has been built and operated under NRRP support, which has funded external staff, IT investments, and outsourced services. Once this support ends, NACS will need a stronger core budget, a more robust internal IT and communication function, and sufficient permanent staff to run the competition every year. Without these, there is a risk that the process will be scaled down, central services weakened, or the system made dependent on ad hoc projects rather than stable institutional routines.

Institutional ownership of the model is growing but uneven, and long-term embedding will depend on consistent incentives, capacity building, and integration with broader HR strategies. Central institutions involved early in the reform show stronger commitment to using competency frameworks and the candidate pool, while some central and many territorial institutions remain hesitant, either due to limited HR capacity or because hiring restrictions and competing priorities make the model appear burdensome. For sustainability, the national competition needs to be seen not as a project but as the standard entry route into the civil service, fully integrated with institutional HR plans, training strategies, and leadership pipelines.

Finally, the durability of the reform depends on how firmly the model is anchored in core policy frameworks, and on ensuring that cost-effective adjustments are made for the continuation of the model beyond NRRP timeframe. The Administrative Code provides a solid legal foundation, but further clarifications on responsibilities, funding, and the interplay between national and institutional processes are needed. Upcoming revisions of the Administrative Code and related HRM policies offer a critical window to consolidate the model as a permanent competency-based entry system and to better connect it with performance management, mobility, and development initiatives, ensuring that recruitment becomes a true entry point into a modern, integrated career system in Romania's public administration. This would need to ensure that the model is cost-effective and sustainable from the state budget.

Conclusions

Romania should continue the national competency-based recruitment model as the central mechanism for ensuring meritocracy, transparency, and alignment with broader HRM reforms. The evaluation confirms that, as conceptualized and introduced, the model represents a major departure from past fragmented practices and is structurally sound. It is strongly aligned with the longstanding challenges identified in the reconstructed ToC - such as politicization, inconsistent standards, weak HR capacity, and irregular or opaque recruitment practices. The move toward a unified national competition, digitalized processes, and a competency-based philosophy has already demonstrated its potential to professionalize entry into the civil service, strengthen fairness, and establish shared standards across institutions. The model is also foundational for Romania's wider HRM modernization, including competency frameworks, workforce planning, digital HR systems, and future reforms in career development, performance management, and mobility. Its continuation is thus essential not only to safeguard EU-funded achievements but also to sustain public trust and consolidate a merit-based civil service.

At the same time, the operationalization of the model requires ongoing refinement to reflect lessons learned and the system's current implementation capacity. This is the first national-scale competency-based recruitment effort ever attempted in Romania, and the evaluation shows that the challenges observed are predictable and solvable. The model must be continually adjusted to ensure that competencies - not formalities or memorization - drive selection; that the system becomes cost-effective and administratively feasible; and that institutions apply the

model consistently in job-based selection. NACS's limited human and financial resources, legal rigidities, uneven institutional ownership, and the absence of long-standing national experience with competency-based HRM mean that the system is still maturing. The reform has advanced from concept to practice, but remains in a consolidation phase. Ensuring its long-term success will require simplifying processes, improving tools, strengthening HR capacity across government, and securing predictable funding. In this sense, the model is appropriately ambitious for a system that must evolve, but it needs continued investment, calibration, and institutional support.

Systemic recommendations: consolidating the architecture of the model

The national competency-based recruitment model should be consolidated as a permanent feature of Romania's HRM system, not as a temporary or experimental mechanism. The evaluation supports maintaining the two-phase logic of national filtering followed by job-based selection, the central role of competencies, and reliance on a digital platform as the backbone of recruitment. To anchor this architecture, the model needs to be fully embedded in the evolving legal and policy framework, through clearer definitions of institutional responsibilities, stronger safeguards against bypassing the pool, and explicit links to future civil service and HRM reforms. This includes maintaining the national competition as the primary entry route, limiting parallel paths such as unchecked transfers or prolonged temporary appointments, and using competition data to inform workforce planning, training, and mobility decisions.

NACS should be repositioned and resourced as a center of expertise for competency-based HRM, capable of sustaining the model beyond project-based support. The reform has already shifted NACS from a predominantly regulatory role to an operational and methodological hub for recruitment, but this shift is not yet fully reflected in its mandate, staffing, or budget. To safeguard the model, NACS needs a stronger institutional placement, a stable budget line for recruitment functions, and expanded internal expertise in psychometrics, test design, data analysis, digital systems, and strategic communication. Project-funded know-how should be systematically internalized so that design and continuous improvement of tests, platforms, and methodologies become core, permanent functions rather than one-off project outputs.

A sustainable financial model is required to ensure that the national competition remains both credible and affordable. The evaluation indicates that unit costs in the current implementation phase are higher than originally estimated, partly because they include one-off investments in the IT platform, infrastructure, and communication. At the same time, efficiency analysis was constrained by limited and aggregated financial data. Going forward, a clearer cost architecture is needed, with transparent tracking of platform, testing, communication, and logistics costs, and a funding model that relies on predictable state budget allocations rather than intermittent external projects. A clear costing model would be an Activity-Based Costing (ABC) approach that explicitly separates fixed costs (platform maintenance, item bank development, support, licences, security, governance) from variable costs per session/per candidate (proctoring/supervision, testing centres, operational staff, communication, helpdesk), calculates a standard cost per candidate and per session based on planned volumes, and introduces quarterly variance reporting against the standard (with clear rules for annual updates of unit costs). Without such a model, there is a risk that the system will be scaled back or used irregularly, undermining its role as a pillar of meritocracy.

Independent oversight and structured monitoring should be institutionalized to reinforce integrity, credibility, and continuous learning. To complement NACS's operational role, the system would benefit from a layered oversight structure: performance and compliance audits by the Court of Accounts; and a multi-stakeholder advisory body, such as an operationalized HR Council, tasked with reviewing process data, appeals patterns, and systemic risks. Regular public reporting on recruitment outcomes, pool utilization, and integrity safeguards would

enhance transparency, while a standard monitoring framework - covering timeliness, diversity, rejection rates by stage, and institutional use of candidates - would support evidence-based adjustments over time.

Operational recommendations: refining the delivery of the model

Competency-based assessment should be strengthened across both phases, with a gradual shift from knowledge-heavy multiple-choice tests toward tools that capture behaviour and job-relevant skills. The evaluation shows that knowledge tests in fundamental rights, public administration, and IT currently function more as minimal filters than discriminative instruments, while the advanced test has almost no screening effect. To align practice with the competency-based vision, the national competition should progressively integrate situational judgment tests, case studies, written tasks anchored in real administrative scenarios, and structured interviews scored against behavioural indicators. These instruments require dedicated development of assessment-center methodologies and should be prioritized for senior civil servants and managerial positions, where advanced testing can add the greatest value. For other positions, more cost-effective adaptations could be pursued by streamlining the two-phase model, including the integration of selected general competency assessments into Phase II (job-based selection), which already relies on interview criteria aligned with competency evaluation.

The national test bank should evolve into a secure, calibrated, and diversified instrument managed by NACS. A high-quality test bank is central to fairness and predictive validity. The evaluation points to the need for clearer technical documentation, item analysis, and norming, particularly for cognitive aptitude and advanced tests. NACS should manage a centralized repository of items linked to general and specific competency frameworks, subject to systematic pre-testing, periodic recalibration, and retirement of weak items. The bank should include multiple formats (MCQs, scenario-based items, short written tasks, simulations) and operate in a secure digital environment that supports randomized test generation and prevents leaks. Over time, part of the bank could be made visible through practice materials, increasing transparency without compromising security.

A national roster of trained and certified competency assessors should support consistent application of behavioural methods. Where behavioural interviews, simulations, or case-based evaluations are used, their quality depends on assessors' skills. The evaluation highlights risks associated with over-reliance on a single external provider and variability in panel practices. To mitigate these, NACS should coordinate a roster of certified assessors - drawn from both the civil service and external experts - trained in competency-based interviewing, behavioural rating, and bias mitigation. Participation in selection panels should be linked to certification, supported by periodic calibration exercises and clear ethical rules. This network would allow Romania to use advanced methods where they add most value, without locking the system into unsustainable, large-scale assessment centers.

Process simplification and logistical optimization are needed to reduce costs and administrative burdens while preserving rigor. The evaluation underlines the heavy workload for panels and the complexity of managing multiple testing centers. Concentrating preliminary testing in one or two well-equipped centers, with robust IT redundancy and clear procedures, would help reduce logistical costs and increase standardization. Language testing could be shifted entirely to the second phase, where it can be linked to specific job requirements, rather than administered generically at national level. At the same time, the architecture of commissions could be simplified so that NACS assumes full responsibility for organizing and delivering the national phase, while panels focus on eligibility, appeals, advanced testing, and job-based selection.

The functionality of the candidate pool needs to be strengthened so that successful candidates more consistently translate into appointments. Data show that only a minority of candidates in the pool proceed to job-based selection, largely due to legal hiring restrictions, institutional hesitations, and lengthy timelines. To preserve credibility, institutions that include posts in the recruitment plan should be required to organize the second phase within a defined period; parallel recruitment routes for those posts should be restricted; and temporary appointments should remain exceptional and time-limited when suitable candidates exist in the pool. Regular public reporting on pool utilization by institution, position level, and region would create peer pressure and support more disciplined use of national competition results.

Institutional HR capacity needs to be strengthened so that ministries and agencies can translate the model into consistent practice. The evaluation reveals that HR units increasingly engage with competency frameworks but still struggle with detailed job analysis, functional mapping, and designing job-specific assessments. NACS should continue to provide methodological support, practical guides, and training modules tailored to HR staff and line managers, focusing on defining competencies for specialist roles, conducting structured interviews, and using recruitment data for workforce planning. Structured feedback loops after each competition round - bringing together NACS and institutional representatives - would help identify bottlenecks, share good practices, and gradually build a learning culture around recruitment.

Continuous evaluation and adaptive management should become part of the routine life cycle of the model. Given the pace of change in public administration and digital tools, a static recruitment model would quickly become outdated. The current evaluation demonstrates the value of periodic, in-depth analysis to recalibrate assumptions about what works, where costs arise, and how candidates and institutions experience the process. Embedding such evaluations at regular intervals, supported by monitoring data and candidate surveys, would allow Romania to keep the model aligned with evolving competency needs, labour market trends, and technological possibilities, while preserving core principles of merit, transparency, and fairness.

Overall, the evaluation points to a clear strategic direction: Romania should maintain and consolidate the national competency-based recruitment model as designed, while systematically refining its implementation so that the system not only exists on paper but functions in practice as a credible, efficient, and sustainable gateway to a professional civil service.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the evaluation

1. **Over the past decade, Romania has pursued an ambitious reform of its public administration aimed at strengthening professionalism, efficiency, and results orientation.** Guided by the *Strategy for Strengthening Public Administration (SCAP⁴) 2014–2020* and the *Strategy for the Development of the Civil Service (SDFP⁵) 2016–2020*, these efforts placed human resource management (HRM) at the core of administrative modernization. Both strategies sought to professionalize the civil service through transparent, merit-based recruitment, improved performance management, and competency-driven development aligned with institutional mandates.

2. **SDFP 2016–2020 set out a comprehensive agenda to reform recruitment and career management through the introduction of competency-based systems.** Under *Specific Objective 2*, the strategy committed that “by the end of 2019, a significantly improved system for recruitment, promotion, and evaluation will be implemented, structured around quality standards regarding the necessary general and specific competencies.” The following activities were planned: (Activity 2.1) the establishment of a framework of general and specific competencies for civil service positions; (Activity 2.2) the creation of a mixed recruitment system combining a national competition with position-specific selection for execution (non-managerial) posts; and (Activity 2.3) the establishment of a transparent framework for the recruitment, selection, and performance evaluation of managerial positions.

3. **The new recruitment system was developed by NACS based on a proposed model that was initially designed under the SIPOCA 136 project⁶, “Developing a Unitary Human Resources Management System within the Public Administration.”** With technical support by the World Bank, the project led to the development of a general competency framework⁷ and the design of a new recruitment model⁸, later formalized through Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) No. 191/2022. This ordinance amended and supplemented the Administrative Code and established the legal basis for piloting a national competition for senior and entry-level civil service positions. The details regarding the application of the competency framework are outlined in Annex No. 8 to the Administrative Code (“*Rules on General and Specific Competency Frameworks*”).

4. **The World Bank provides technical assistance to the Government of Romania under a Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) on support for human resource management (HRM) reforms led by the National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS).** This RAS builds on earlier reform efforts aimed at professionalizing the civil service, strengthening merit-based career

⁴ Approved by Government Decision (GD) No. 909/2014.

⁵ Approved by Government Decision (GD) No. 525/2016.

⁶ Project deliverables are available on NACS official webpage: <https://www.anfp.gov.ro/proiecte/proiecte-incheiate/proiecte-2014-2020-expand-list/sipoca136/>

⁷ Adopted by Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) No. 191/2022, which amended and supplemented the Administrative Code.

⁸ World Bank. (2020). Defining a model for the national contest: Recruiting the right people for the right jobs in the Romanian civil service.

The report proposes a detailed model for the national competition building upon a review of international experience, on an analysis of the current recruitment system and a cost analysis. The competency framework is at the center of the proposed model, as its primary objective is to facilitate meritocratic, transparent and results oriented HRM processes.

management, and enhancing performance orientation. These reforms included the introduction of a general competency framework applicable to all civil servants and the establishment of a new national recruitment and selection model anchored in competency-based assessment. Under the RAS, support is delivered through four interlinked workstreams: strengthening the Senior Civil Servants (SCS) corps by improving HRM policies, tools, and the SCS operational model; designing and implementing an Executive Development Program for secretaries general and directors general in the central administration; strengthening strategic workforce planning through better use of competency frameworks and HR data; and developing a strategic HRM framework focused on data governance, analytics, and evidence-based workforce management.

5. **Under the RAS, this report corresponds to activity (6), which consists of conducting an ex-post evaluation of the national recruitment competition round from 2024, following the initial pilot implementation of the reformed model in 2023.** This evaluation was designed to assess how the competency-based recruitment framework and digitally enabled selection processes functioned in practice once rolled out at scale. Building on the conceptual model described above, the assessment examined the effectiveness of centralized digital testing, the application of general competencies at the national pre-selection stage, and the consistency and quality of decentralized job-specific evaluations conducted by line institutions. The findings of this ex-post evaluation are expected to generate evidence to validate core design assumptions, identify operational bottlenecks, and inform targeted recommendations for refining recruitment procedures, assessment tools, workforce-planning linkages, and governance arrangements within the competency-based HRM system led by NACS.

6. **The new recruitment system focuses on the central and territorial civil service, which represents the core of Romania's public administration and carries primary responsibility for policy development and, in some sectors, direct service delivery.** The civil service as a whole comprises approximately 145,500 civil servants, accounting for around 11 percent of total public-sector employment (1.307 million employees). In occupational terms, civil servants represent about 48 percent of the broader public administration workforce, estimated at roughly 302,000 positions, excluding education, health, and other large budgetary sectors. Within the civil service, approximately 77,780 civil servants are employed in central and territorial public administration, which is the direct scope of this report⁹. This group represents about 53 percent of all civil servants, 26 percent of public administration occupations, and approximately 6 percent of total public-sector employment. Focusing on this segment is justified by its central role in shaping public policies and ensuring the effective delivery of government services, as well as by the high leverage of recruitment reforms for overall administrative performance.

7. **As conceptualized, the model marked a decisive shift toward a competency-based and digitally enabled HRM system.** Managed by NACS, it introduced centralized recruitment using a digital platform, the application of the national competency framework, structured online testing, and a two-phase process combining a national pre-selection based on general competencies with decentralized, job-specific evaluation by individual institutions. The model sought to integrate workforce planning, competency assessment, and ICT tools, emphasizing transparency, standardization, and strategic workforce alignment.

8. **Implementation of the model was advanced through Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).** Under Component 14 "Good Governance," Reform 3, "Performance-oriented management of human resources in the public sector" was linked to three key milestones: Milestone 416 (ex-post evaluation of the pilot national competition), Milestone 417 (organization of annual national competitions for at least three categories of positions), and

⁹ Data extracted from NACS, *Report on civil service management, 2024*. Available at: <https://www.anfp.gov.ro/media/elkkojoy/2024.pdf>.

Milestone 419 (integration of competency frameworks into recruitment and evaluation of their practical application) – see Box 1.

Box 1 Relevant NRRP milestones

Milestone 416: *Ex-post analysis of the national competition (pilot) for the selection of two categories of civil service positions in central administration:*

“The pilot national competition for the selection of two categories of civil service positions in the central administration will be organized and completed in accordance with the procedures approved by the Government. After completion of the pilot project, an ex-post analysis of the results and impact will be conducted, the findings of which will inform the adaptation of the national recruitment competition to be implemented on a wider scale.”

¹Milestone 417: *Annual completion of at least two national recruitment competitions for at least three categories/grades of civil service positions:*

“The following will be carried out: (1) Government approval of the procedure for organizing and conducting the extended national competition for other categories of general civil service positions in public administration (in addition to those covered by the pilot project), in accordance with current legislation; (2) analyses based on data collection, studies, surveys, and recruitment plans will be conducted to determine how to operationalize the national competition prior to the drafting of the legislative proposal; (3) organization and completion of two national competitions.”

¹Milestone 419: *Operational competency frameworks in central public administration:*
“[...] The legislative proposal will aim for the phased implementation of competency frameworks in public institutions and will be based on the model developed under the SIPOCA 136 project. The report on recruitment and selection actions within the civil service will confirm the use of the new procedures. [...]”

** In 2025 the milestone 419 was included in the updated NRRP milestone 418.*

The ex-post analysis was financed through the NRRP, under Milestone 416:

<https://www.NACS.gov.ro/proiecte/proiecte-in-implementare/proiecte-NRRP/proiecte-NRRP-lista/concurs-national-de-recrutare-in-administratia-publica/>

9. The 2023 pilot national competition served as an important test of its feasibility.

Conducted entirely through the NACS digital platform, it targeted both senior and entry-level positions and introduced a two-stage, competency-based selection process. The pilot demonstrated notable progress in transparency, objectivity, and digitalization, but also revealed capacity gaps within public institutions, particularly in HR planning, competency mapping, and structured assessment techniques. Its evaluation¹⁰ focused primarily on implementation challenges, rather than on refining the recruitment model itself. Under strict NRRP deadlines and the need to meet milestone targets, there was limited opportunity to revisit the model’s structure or incorporate lessons from the pilot phase. As a result, the national competition moved directly into full implementation, maintaining the framework initially tested.

10. Following the pilot phase, legislative refinements were undertaken to expand and consolidate the reform. NACS refined job analysis methodologies, developed updated guidance aligning position profiles with the national competency framework, and enhanced recruitment procedures. The legal framework and digital infrastructure were further consolidated through GEO No. 121/2023, which introduced Annex 10 to the Administrative Code regulating national competitions for both central and territorial positions. Two extended national competitions were organized in 2024, one for execution-level and one for management-level posts, attracting 1,935 candidates, of whom 1,006 were added to the pool of eligible applicants for 323 available positions.

¹⁰ The **ex-post evaluation** was financed through the NRRP, under milestone 416. The report is available on NACS official webpage: <https://www.NACS.gov.ro/proiecte/proiecte-in-implementare/proiecte-NRRP/proiecte-NRRP-lista/concurs-national-de-recrutare-in-administratia-publica/>

11. **According to the Administrative Code, one of the ways in which state and territorial level civil service positions¹¹ can be filled is by way of a competition consisting of two stages:**¹² (i) the recruitment stage (also referred to as the national competition), and (ii) the selection stage (also referred to as the competition for the position). This two-stage recruitment process is aligned with the distinction that the Administrative Code makes between (i) general competences and knowledge, which are set out for each broad category of civil service positions (i.e. executive, management or high-level) and are tested/verified within the national competition, and (ii) specific competences and specialized knowledge, which are set out for a given position and are tested/verified within the competition for the position. The national competition is conducted for certain types of civil service jobs, as identified through the Recruitment Plan ¹³. A different round can be conducted for one or more types of civil service jobs. Candidates who have passed the national competition for a certain type of civil service position do not become civil servants but are able, for a period of three years after passing the national competition, to apply to any competition for the on the job competition organized for a civil service position that falls within the type for which they have passed the national competition¹⁴. It should be noted that the two-stage competition, which includes the national competition, is not applied to fill local civil service positions.

12. **The national competition is organized by NACS and is divided into three types of successive tests (eligibility check, preliminary testing, and advanced testing), and candidates that successfully complete all the tests are deemed to have passed the national competition.** Whereas the competition for the position (the second stage of the recruitment process by way of competition) is organized by the public authority/institution where the vacant position is, or, in the case of high-level civil servant positions, by a special competition committee set up for this purpose, the national competition (the first stage of the recruitment process by way of competition) is organized by NACS, as the name suggests, at a national level. In each of the phases different requirements that have to be met to fill civil service positions are assessed: (i) compliance with the eligibility requirements, (ii) general knowledge is verified in the preliminary testing, and (iii) general competences are assessed in the advanced testing. The eligibility requirements, the general knowledge and the general competences verified/assessed in the national competition are dependent on the type of civil service position for which the national competition is organized.

1.2 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

13. **Building on these foundations, with the aim of consolidating the competency-based HRM reforms introduced, but also in the context of more recent financial constraints¹⁵, an evaluation of the extended national competition was deemed necessary.** This evaluation directly contributes to Milestone 419 "*Operational competency frameworks for central public administration*," aiming to document the use of competency frameworks in recruitment and selection, assess the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms, and identify remaining

¹¹ Except for civil service positions benefiting from special statutes under the law.

¹² According to Article 467(3) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³ The type of position is defined by the category (executive, management or high-level), class (class I, II or III, according to the level of the studies required to fill in a position) and, if applicable, professional grade (professional grades refer only to execution-level position and may be entry-level, assistant, principal or superior) of the civil service position.

¹⁴ According to Article 67(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁵ Romania faces significant fiscal pressures, driven by its record-high budget deficit. Details are available at: <https://mfinante.gov.ro/domenii/bugetul-de-stat/istoric-deficit-bugetar>

operational bottlenecks¹⁶. More than a formal requirement under the NRRP, this evaluation provides a strategic opportunity to consolidate institutional reforms, strengthen the new recruitment model, and lay the groundwork for sustainable and efficient improvements in public sector human resource management.

1.3 Evaluation results and report structure

14. **This evaluation presents evidence on the performance of the new recruitment model.** Aligned with OECD-DAC standards¹⁷, the report assesses the model against five criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. It synthesizes data from multiple sources, including surveys, interviews, case studies, and institutional reviews, and provides concrete, evidence-based findings to inform policy and practice.

15. **A core part of the evaluation is a set of recommendations for an updated, competency-based, more effective and efficient, recruitment model.** These address both operational and strategic levels, including improvements to the digital platform and user experience; refined procedures and tools; greater alignment with broader HRM frameworks; and stronger coherence between central and institutional-level recruitment efforts.

16. **The recommendations in this report do not propose new policy options; rather, they focus on practical adjustments** to ensure that existing mechanisms are designed and applied to generate the envisaged results to support long-term, system level impact, operating effectively and cost-efficiently. The existing system already represents a significant step forward for Romania, providing a more transparent, standardized, and merit-based approach to entry into the civil service. The recommendations therefore focus on targeted, practical adjustments to strengthen delivery, improve efficiency, and ensure consistent implementation across institutions. These refinements also aim to reinforce and further consolidate NACS's role as the coordinating and delivery authority, ensuring that the institution has the tools, processes, and operational capacity needed to sustain the model's positive impact and long-term credibility.

17. **The evaluation also reflects on the human and financial resources required to sustain the recruitment model.** It points towards existing capacity gaps, and provides recommendations to ensure that NACS and public institutions are adequately equipped, in terms of staffing, competencies, funding, and digital infrastructure, to maintain and update the system in line with Romania's HRM reform objectives.

18. **The structure of the report is designed to reflect both the logic of the evaluation process and the evidence collected:**

- **Chapter 1:** introduced the context, purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation.
- **Chapter 2:** outlines the methodological approach, principles, tools, and limitations.
- **Chapter 3:** reconstructs the Theory of Change for the recruitment reform, underlying assumptions and risks.
- **Chapter 4:** presents the findings for the process evaluation.

¹⁶ Milestone 419 was renamed following the merger of Milestone 418 and Milestone 419 under the title Milestone 418 – Entry into force of the legal acts for the adoption of merit-based and competency-based human resource management frameworks in central public administration.

¹⁷ OECD (2010), *Quality Standards for Development Evaluation*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264083905-en>.

- **Chapter 6:** presents the findings for the outcome evaluation, organized by OECD-DAC criteria.
- **Chapters 5, 7, and 8:** provide case studies illustrating the methodological approach for the national competition, students perspectives as potential candidates, and communication activities.
- **Chapter 9:** synthesizes conclusions, sets out recommendations for updating and consolidating the recruitment model, including operational improvements and institutional capacity needs.
- **Annexes:** provide supporting materials, including process maps, and examples of competency testing approach proposed for selected general competencies.

2 Methodological approach

2.1 Evaluation scope, methods, and tools

Scope of the evaluation

19. The evaluation focused on the extended national competition model implemented by NACS in 2024, complemented by an analysis of the second phase, position-based selection by institutions, to capture the full recruitment cycle.

Process evaluation

20. The process evaluation included a detailed mapping of the recruitment process, comparing its conceptual design with its implementation. The mapping covered the full sequence of activities, from recruitment planning to final position-based selection, and examined both centralized and decentralized responsibilities. It also identified operational challenges and bottlenecks (“pain points”) affecting efficiency, consistency, and user experience.

Outcome evaluation

21. The outcome evaluation examined the short-term results of the reform from both institutional and candidate perspectives. It assessed whether the new model led to improvements in recruitment quality, transparency, IT system usability, stakeholder satisfaction, and alignment between job profiles and competency requirements, serving as early indicators of systemic change. The evaluation matrix (see Table 1) guided the evaluation by linking evaluation criteria to specific questions, indicators, methods, and data sources.

Table 1. Evaluation matrix

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Indicators / Qualitative descriptors	Methods	Data sources
Relevance	Are the reforms aligned with core needs? Are structural issues being addressed?	Degree of alignment between diagnosed issues and reforms. Perceived relevance by stakeholders.	Document review, Theory of change reconstruction, Interviews, Surveys	NACS reports, Stakeholder interviews
Effectiveness	Have the process stages been implemented consistently? Has competency-based selection improved? Was optimal coverage of the general competency framework ensured in testing for the different types of targeted positions? How effective was the use of the IT platform?	Implementation rates, satisfaction with competency-based assessment tools.	Process mapping, Surveys, Interviews, Focus groups	NACS reports, Candidate and manager surveys, System data
Efficiency	Are recruitment costs lower / more predictable? Are economies of scale achieved? Are there process bottlenecks?	Cost per recruitment, evidence of cost sharing, reported delays, candidates per post,	Financial analysis, Process mapping, Focus groups	Cost data provided by NACS, System analysis

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Indicators / Qualitative descriptors	Methods	Data sources
		number of candidates selected per post.		
Impact	Has candidate quality / diversity improved? Has public trust increased? Is the candidate pool used effectively?	Candidate profiles, levels of trust, candidate pool usage rates.	Surveys, Case studies, Document analysis	Surveys, HR reports, NACS data
Sustainability	Is institutional and NACS capacity sufficient for future cycles? Are risks being addressed? Is the reform integrated into legal/financial frameworks?	Capacity assessments, risk mitigation actions, level of formalization.	Interviews, Surveys, Document review	Strategic documents

Source: Authors' elaboration

2.2 Data sources and limitations

22. **Between April and October 2025, the World Bank team submitted both extended and prioritized data requests.** NACS and participating institutions made substantial efforts to share available information, and while some datasets were not yet fully consolidated or accessible in the required format, a significant portion of the requested data was provided. Consequently, some analyses relied on partial datasets, proxy indicators, or triangulation across multiple sources.

Key limitations included:

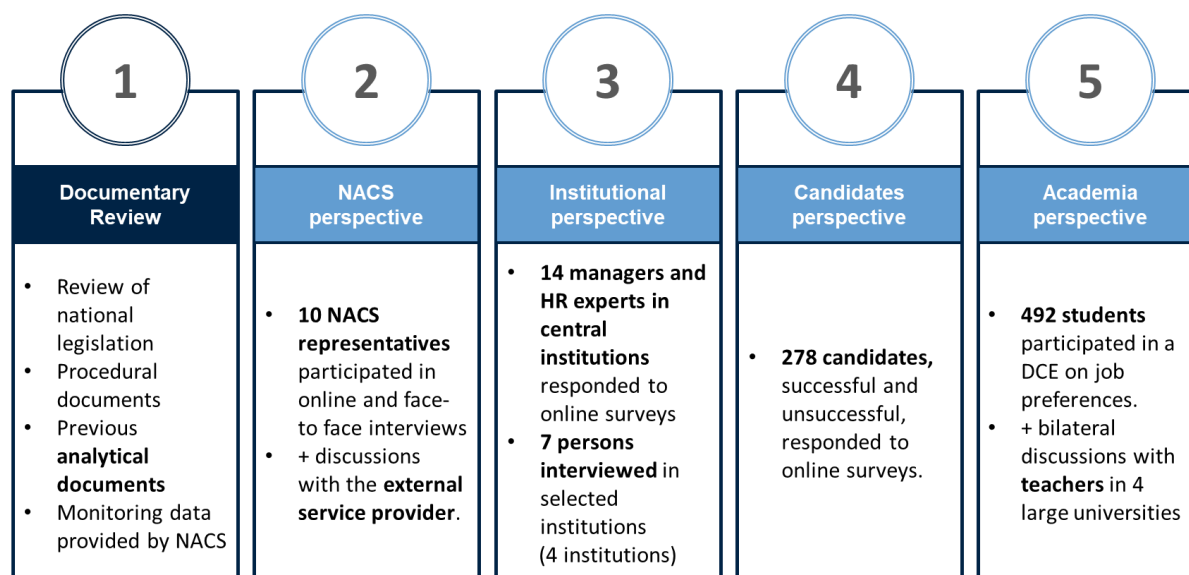
- **Documentary evidence:** The team received the core legislative and procedural framework for both phases of the recruitment model, as well as NACS's internal operational procedures. However, monitoring reports were focused only on the first part of the recruitment, the national contest. While this represents a methodological limitation for the evaluation, it may also signal the need to enhance monitoring efforts across the entire process - including both the national recruitment stage and the subsequent job-based selection phase - to strengthen coherence and system-wide learning.
- **Planning and workforce needs:** The overall recruitment plan is publicly accessible, as it is formally adopted through legislation, which provides transparency on authorized vacancies but not on the underlying analytical process used by institutions. Data on how institutions estimated recruitment needs are limited. However, the workforce planning seems to be based only on headcount data assessment by institutions, and not on competency gaps, as recommended in the conceptual model of the national contest.
- **Candidate-level data:** While total numbers of registered and admitted candidates were available, the candidate profiles (e.g., territorial distribution) were unavailable. Data on how institutions accessed and used the candidate pool were unavailable, constraining evaluation of its effectiveness for job-based selection.
- **Testing centers and methodological approach:** Detailed technical data, such as item-competency matrices, were not provided, restricting the analysis of testing validity and the link with the general competency framework.

- **Financial and resource data:** Information on service contracts, disaggregated expenses, costs per test or candidate, remained unavailable. Efficiency analysis therefore relied on previous estimates and aggregate expenditures.

Data sources and triangulation

23. **Despite these constraints, the evaluation triangulated evidence from multiple qualitative and quantitative sources to ensure reliability and depth of analysis.**

Figure 6. Data sources



Source: Authors' elaboration

- **NACS perspective:** Ten representatives from the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), Directorate General for Civil Service Management and Public Service Reform, were interviewed to provide an overview of the model's implementation, results, and sustainability risks in the context of Romania's fiscal constraints. Additional interviews were conducted with the external service provider, to clarify specific technical aspects.
- **Institutional perspective:** Insights were collected through an online survey completed by 14 managers and HR experts from central institutions. The findings were complemented by 7 in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted with 4 central institutions. The discussions explored how institutions planned their recruitment needs, the connection and overlap between the two phases of the model, their interaction with the IT platform, and their use and perception of the candidate pool. Of these 7 persons, 3 were also candidates in the national competition and provided direct insights from the process.
- **Candidate perspective:** Two online surveys gathered feedback from 190 successful and 88 unsuccessful candidates. Respondents were asked about their experience with the recruitment platform, the clarity of available information and guidance materials, the usefulness of practice tests, their experience in testing centers, their perception of fairness, and, where applicable, their job placement outcomes.
- **Academia perspective:** This perspective focused on identifying opportunities to expand and strengthen the pool of young candidates for entry-level (debutant) positions. Collective online and face-to-face discussions were held with teachers and students from four major universities offering Bachelor and Master programs in public administration: the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, Ovidius University in Constanța, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, and Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi. In

addition, a discrete choice experiment (DCE) was conducted across these institutions to assess students' job preferences, yielding 492 unique responses.

- **Where data gaps persisted, the analysis explicitly notes them and draws on stakeholder perspectives to provide indicative findings.** The report therefore presents a robust but qualified assessment: while it captures the main achievements, challenges, and resource needs of the recruitment reform, certain findings, particularly those related to cost-efficiency and Phase II implementation are limited because of incomplete data.

3 Theory of change

3.1 Challenges addressed by the reform

24. **The introduction of the new recruitment model sought to address a set of long-standing systemic challenges¹⁸ that have constrained the performance and credibility of the Romanian public administration.** Historically, recruitment in the civil service was shaped by politicization and clientelism, undermining merit-based access to public employment. Fragmented and inconsistent HRM practices limited coordination across institutions and weakened the overall coherence of human resource policies. The absence of strategic workforce planning means that staffing decisions are rarely aligned with institutional priorities or competency needs, while frequent hiring freezes and the prevalence of temporary appointments, particularly in senior positions, are further disrupting continuity and professionalism¹⁹. These weaknesses, compounded by limited institutional capacity and low inter-agency coordination, have contributed to a persistent perception of unfairness, low transparency, and declining attractiveness of public sector careers.

25. **Beyond these systemic issues, significant procedural deficiencies weakened the integrity of recruitment processes.** The former recruitment system was characterized by excessive administrative burden, outdated testing methods, and limited use of professional HR techniques. Recruitment processes were largely paper-based and time-consuming, focusing on compliance rather than quality²⁰. Testing and interview stages prioritized memorization of legal texts instead of assessing candidates' competencies, motivation, and performance potential, while members of selection panels often lacked the training and standardized tools necessary for objective evaluation. Job announcements were generic and uninformative, and advertising practices failed to attract a sufficiently broad or diverse candidate pool. Oversight mechanisms relied heavily on procedural legality rather than quality assurance, providing limited safeguards against inconsistency or undue discretion.

26. **Many of these procedural shortcomings can be traced to the limited capacity of HR functions across central and territorial administration²¹.** The HR function in both central and territorial institutions has lagged behind international trends of digitalization, specialization, and strategic coordination. In most cases, HR departments continued to operate as transactional units focused on legal compliance rather than as strategic partners in workforce planning and talent management. Low levels of digitalization are still limiting their analytical capacity, and a predominantly legal or generalist staff profile have constrained the ability to apply modern HRM tools, including competency mapping, workforce analysis, or structured assessment methodologies. These systemic weaknesses directly affected the consistency and impact of

¹⁸ See the structural problems identified in the strategic documents developed by the Romanian Government, *Strategy for Strengthening Public Administration (SSPA 2014–2020)*, *Strategy for the Development of the Civil Service (SCSD 2016–2020)*, and *Strategy for Public Administration Training (SPAT 2016–2020)* (Government of Romania, 2014, 2016a, 2016b), and further detailed in the *Baseline Diagnostic of the Legal and Institutional Framework and Recommended Options* (World Bank, 2019), developed by the World Bank team under the HRM RAS. In addition, a detailed analysis of recruitment system challenges is presented in the *Regulatory Impact Assessment Report: Better Employment System within Romania's Central Public Administration* (World Bank, 2016).

¹⁹ World Bank. 2020. Defining a model for the national contest. pp. 33–39. Available at https://www.anfp.gov.ro/R/Doc/2021/Proiecte/SIPOCA%20136/Output-uri/Romania_HRMRAS_4.1_Concursul%20national_RO_revised_final%20August,%2006,%202020.pdf

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–48.

²¹ World Bank. (2021). Analysis of the capacity of HR departments to implement proposed reforms

HRM reforms, as the successful implementation of a competency-based model requires HR departments that are equipped, connected, and empowered to perform a strategic role within public administration.

27. **Earlier strategic documents²² also highlighted broader structural challenges, notably the ageing profile of public administration staff²³ and persistent difficulties in attracting and retaining specialized expertise.** Addressing these issues requires more than refining recruitment procedures; it demands making public administration a more attractive career path for younger generations and professionals with in-demand skills. This implies strengthening career paths, linking progression to performance, and adopting more flexible recruitment approaches for specialized roles.

3.2 Brief overview of the model

28. **The new recruitment model introduced a unified, competency-based approach designed to strengthen merit, transparency, and efficiency across the civil service.** It is built around a clear distinction between general competencies, which all civil servants must possess, and specific competencies that vary by position. By grounding the process in the national competency framework, the model shifts recruitment away from administrative formalism and towards a performance-oriented system in which candidates are selected based on their ability to contribute effectively to institutional objectives.

3.2.1 Pillar I: Workforce planning

29. **Workforce planning is the strategic starting point of this model and shapes everything that follows.** Led by the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), the process requires institutions to identify not only the number of positions needed but also the competency gaps that must be addressed to achieve their missions. Using standardized tools, such as job analysis, data analysis, and deficit assessments, institutions should map the competencies required for effective performance and translate them into recruitment needs. These inputs feed into a consolidated national recruitment plan, which defines the positions that can be legally filled during the two-year cycle. When workforce planning is done well, it provides the essential link between institutional strategy, competency needs, and the broader recruitment architecture.

3.2.2 Pillar II: National competition

30. **The national competition constitutes the core innovation of the new recruitment model, replacing numerous institution-level processes with a single, centrally managed entry route into the civil service.** Organized entirely by NACS, the recruitment phase of the national competition follows a sequenced series of steps - planning, advertising, digital application, testing, and management of a reserve pool - ensuring a consistent and comparable assessment of candidates' general competencies across institutions. Successful candidates are entered into a national pool valid for three years, and in this way central and territorial authorities can access prequalified talent in a transparent and standardized manner. The table below summarizes the main procedural differences between the new system and the previous model.

²² *Strategy for the Development of the Civil Service (SCSD 2016–2020)*, pp 21–22.

²³ Including the reversed pyramid distribution of civil service occupied positions, with most staff concentrated on the top professional grade.

Table 2. Comparative overview of the current model and previous recruitment system

Recruitment phase	Current model	Previous model
1. Planning of the recruitment process	A 2-year recruitment plan in central government and deconcentrated services is drafted by NACS based on the workforce and the recruitment plans submitted by public institutions. The recruitment process consists in several national competition sessions, divided by civil servant category, which assess candidates for competencies. The recruitment competition (first stage of selection) is carried out by NACS for all civil servants in the central public administration.	The planning was done at each institution's level. Previously, a yearly occupational plan needed to be prepared and endorsed by NACS, but this provision was abolished in the current legislation. Positions are open for recruitment on a case-by-case basis or in small clusters. Execution positions are recruited by each employer, while managerial positions by NACS. On average two positions open for recruitment per process.
2. Advertising	Centralized, targeted, more diverse and intense (including social media, targeted news outlets, job fairs, etc.). Additionally, information available and updated in the recruitment portal.	Limited to Official Journal, one newspaper and the employer / NACS web page. Announcements also published on www.posturi.gov.ro
3. Recruitment committees the selection and appointment of selection panel members	3-member committees for execution civil servants; 5-member committees for managerial civil servants. NACS has representatives in the procedures managed directly or can appoint representatives for the other procedures. No training required.	3-member committees for execution civil servants; 5-member committees for managerial civil servants. NACS has representatives in the procedures managed directly or can appoint representatives for the other procedures. For these cases, ex-post control is usually in place. No training required.
4. Application phase in which candidates submit exclusively online all necessary documents	Filling the application forms carried out using NACS e-recruitment portal.	Filling the application forms, appraisal of the files and judging of appeals by a separate committee carried out in meetings of the recruitment and appeal committees.
5. Eligibility check in which the work of eligibility panel members is partially facilitated by how the application form is structured and simplified	Conducted in a centralized manner for all applicants that register to the national competition. Evaluation of files and appeals are conducted using the e-recruitment portal. The verification is only partially facilitated by the platform, as each committee member must individually review not only the application form but also the rest of the documents included in the competition file, which have been uploaded to the competition IT platform by the registered candidates. For example, for proof of length of service in the field relevant to the studies, it is possible that 4, 5, or even more certificates may be uploaded.	Conducted at the level of each recruitment procedure launched by institutions/NACS.
6. Preliminary testing candidates are tested on foreign languages,	Selective for abilities, ICT, foreign languages and general knowledge. All candidates tested for abilities. Tests	Selective for ICT and foreign languages. Tests carried out in person in each

Recruitment phase	Current model	Previous model
ICT skills, psychometric testing and general knowledge on public administration	undertaken through the e-recruitment portal.	institution that conducted the recruitment process.
7. Advanced testing which is expected to be conducted using Assessment Center techniques in order to allow competency-based testing of core general competencies	A more advanced form of competency-based assessment will be used to assess core general competencies, as part of the methods used in the Assessment, ensuring observation of behavioural indicators for the relevant general competencies.	Tests carried out on paper. Usually focused on memorizing legal texts, not necessarily correlated with the competencies required for the vacant jobs. Interviews included in the recruitment process. Very often, the selection committee focuses the questions during the interviews on knowledge and less on other competencies.
8. Management of the pool of successful candidates valid for 3 years.	The selected candidates are automatically registered in a pool of successful candidates of the first phase of recruitment. They are automatically informed for the second-phase competition (job-based competition).	The winner of the recruitment process fills the vacancy.
9. A second-phase job-based selection process focusing on testing specific competencies.	This phase can include a supplementary test, as well as written test and interview. A written test of specialized knowledge and an interview focused on specific competencies is reserved for the last stage of the process, to be implemented by the employer (job-based competition).	Not applicable

Source: Adapted and updated based on World Bank. (2020). *Defining a model for the national contest: Recruiting the right people for the right jobs in the Romanian civil service.*

3.2.3 Pillar III: Job-based selection

31. The job-based selection completes the model by focusing on the specific competencies and specialized knowledge of individual vacancies. Drawing on the job analysis performed during workforce planning; institutions refine the position profile and define the specialized competencies to be tested. They then organize a targeted selection process - typically involving a written test and a structured interview - that assesses candidates from the national pool against the unique demands of the post. Once results are validated and compliance checks are complete, the institution issues the appointment decision and initiates onboarding. In this way, the final stage ensures that recruitment decisions not only align with the general competency expectations but also match candidates to the specific professional needs of each role.

3.3 Preparatory activities

32. The implementation of the new recruitment model followed a sequenced roadmap that brought together the strategic, regulatory, and operational elements of the reform.

- **Strategic and regulatory preparation.** This involved defining a new approach to recruitment planning shifting from reactive hiring to strategic workforce planning aligned with institutional objectives, and developing a national competency framework consistent with job profiles, legal requirements, and international good practice. It also required the adoption of key legal instruments – mainly the legislation that updated the Administrative Code - notably GEO 191/2022 and GEO 121/2023, as well as Annex 8 on competency frameworks and Annex 10 on national competition procedures within the Administrative Code.
- **Developing the practical tools and institutional capacity** needed to operationalize the model. This included producing guidance for workforce planning and job analysis, creating standardized templates for job profiles and assessment criteria, and designing structured interview models and scoring grids. A major component was the digitalization of recruitment through the development of an integrated e-recruitment platform covering application management, eligibility checks, candidate assessment, pool management, and transparency functions. To ensure consistent application of the new procedures, dedicated training programs were introduced for HR professionals, assessors, and members of selection panels.
- **The roadmap also included a piloting phase.** In 2023, a pilot national competition was organized to test the functionality of the digital platform, validate the reliability of testing instruments, and assess the coherence of the two-phase process in practice. The lessons learned during this pilot²⁴ informed adjustments to tools, procedures, and guidance, helping to refine the model before its full-scale implementation.

3.4 Expected outcomes and impacts

33. **The immediate outputs of the reform activities consist of a coherent set of operational tools, processes, and institutional capabilities that serve as the foundation of the new recruitment model.** These include the development of a national competency framework defining general and job-specific competencies for civil service positions, as well as standardized procedures covering workforce planning, job analysis, selection methods, and candidate assessment. The reform also produced an operational e-recruitment platform that supports candidate management, eligibility verification, digital testing, and transparent publication of results. Lessons and good practices documented during the pilot and expanded competition cycles further contributed to refining tools and improving institutional readiness.

34. **At the intermediate level, these outputs translate into more professional and merit-based recruitment, driven by the systematic use of competency frameworks and structured assessment processes.** Standardized procedures and digital tools support greater transparency and fairness, reducing the scope for subjective or discretionary practices. The model also aims to improve the candidate experience through clearer information, more consistent procedures, and enhanced feedback mechanisms. By reducing fragmentation and promoting common standards across institutions, the reform contributes to more efficient recruitment cycles and enables better alignment between staffing needs and institutional priorities. A key product of these changes is the establishment of a digital managed pool of qualified candidates generated through national competitions and made accessible to public institutions.

²⁴ [Ex-post assessment of the pilot national competition process conducted in 2023.](#)

35. **Over the longer term, the consolidation of the two-phase recruitment model is expected to generate systemic improvements across Romania's public administration.** Stronger institutional capacity for planning, managing, and sustaining modern HRM practices should emerge as the model becomes embedded in organizational routines. However, achieving these benefits is conditional on better positioning recruitment within the broader HRM reform package, ensuring stronger links between workforce planning, career development, performance evaluation, and compensation systems. When these interdependencies are addressed, more transparent and meritocratic recruitment processes can strengthen public trust, raise the quality and professionalism of new entrants, and enhance the attractiveness of civil service careers, ultimately contributing to more effective public service delivery and a more diverse talent pool motivated to serve in public administration.

3.5 Required initial and recurring inputs

3.5.1 Financial resources

36. **Implementing the new recruitment model requires both initial investments and recurring operational resources.** The upfront costs covered the development of the digital recruitment platform, the creation and piloting of competency-based testing instruments, and the preparation of procedural manuals and training materials. As the model continues to operate, it also generates ongoing costs linked to the organization of national competition sessions, the functioning of assessment centers, the maintenance and updating of the IT platform, and the continuous training and certification of assessors and support teams.

37. **The initial rollout of the model has been largely funded through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP),** which covers most one-time costs and a significant share of operational expenses for the early competition rounds. As external funding draws to a close, Romania now needs to update the cost estimates for the adjusted recruitment model, particularly if methodological or procedural changes are introduced, and put in place a sustainable domestic financing mechanism. Ensuring continuity of funding will be essential for maintaining the digital infrastructure, preserving assessment quality, and securing the long-term viability of the national competition system. Recruitment in the civil service is an inner function and responsibility of the public administration and should not be treated as a project-dependent task or conditioned by available external funding source.

3.5.2 Human resources

38. **NACS is the central institutional actor responsible for implementing the recruitment stage of the national competition.**²⁵ Its mandate covers a broad and complex set of operational tasks: (1) developing, managing, and operating the competition IT platform²⁶; (2) ensuring publicity for each round of the national competition, from launching the call for applications²⁷, and finishing with the publication of the final report²⁸; (3) designating civil servants to serve in the committees responsible for preparing and validating test subjects, verifying eligibility, resolving

²⁵ According to Article 401(1)(q) and Article 469(1) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

²⁶ According to Article 467¹(1) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code

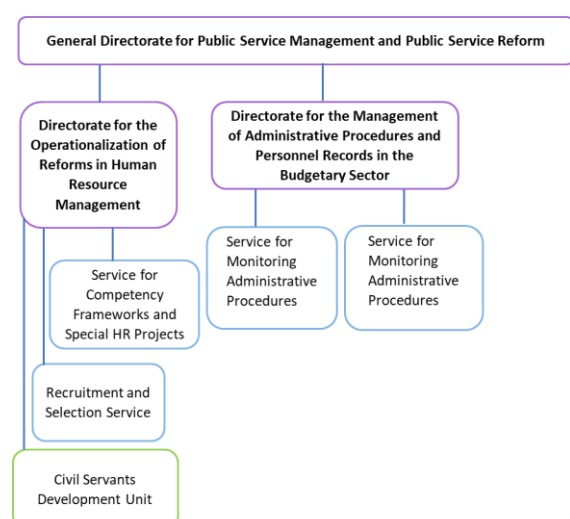
²⁷ According to Article 467(6) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

²⁸ According to Article 62 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

appeals, and organizing and conducting the competition; (4) designating personnel²⁹ to oversee audio-video surveillance during preliminary and advanced testing in the competition halls/rooms where the preliminary testing and the advanced testing are conducted³⁰; (5) establishing the test centers where preliminary and advanced testing takes place³¹; (6) selecting, through competitive procurement, accredited assessment centers for advanced testing³²; and (7) managing the pool of candidates who pass the national competition.³³

39. **Previous World Bank analytical reports³⁴ recommended revising NACS's organizational structure to strengthen its capacity to coordinate and implement these expanded responsibilities.** Although indicative staffing requirements were proposed, the emphasis of the World Bank's recommendation was not on numbers but on job profiles, highlighting the need for specialists in human resources, organizational development, job analysis, and training rather than legal generalists. This revised structure was intended to align NACS's internal organization with its expanded reform mandate and provide the professional capacity needed to sustain a modern, performance-oriented civil service.

Figure 7. Structure proposal for General Directorate for Civil Service Management and Public Service Reforms (2023).



Source: Based on World Bank. 2023. Recommendation on the new NACS organizational structure.

40. **Beyond NACS, the reform anticipated a broader strengthening of HR capacity across line ministries and territorial institutions.** HR departments were expected to adopt

²⁹ It should be noted that two slightly different terms are used to designate these persons: persons responsible for running and monitoring the audio-video surveillance process (Article 126(5) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code and Order No 435/2024, issued by the president of NACS); persons responsible for monitoring and audio-video surveillance (Article 32(2) and Article 49(4) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code). It would be advisable to amend the legislation so that a single term is used consistently across in the different legal provisions.

³⁰ According to Article 126(5) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code and to Article 2(j) and Article 3(i) of the annex to the Order No 435/2024, issued by the president of NACS.

³¹ According to Article 50(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³² According to Article 50(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³³ According to Article 63(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³⁴ World Bank. 2023. Strengthening the administrative capacity of the National Agency for Civil Service. Output 1.3. Recommendation on the new NACS organizational structure. The number of jobs recommended for each unit were removed from the initial figure, as they would need to be updated to reflect the updated mandate and workload of NACS.

competency-based workforce planning, apply standardized recruitment procedures, and progressively evolve into professional units capable of conducting job analysis, identifying competency needs, and supporting assessment processes. In the longer term, the reform envisioned the emergence of a professional cadre of assessors and HR specialists, supported by institutional coordination mechanisms such as the HR Council and specialized working groups, which would enhance coherence, facilitate cross-institutional learning, and provide continuous technical guidance.

4 Process evaluation

4.1 Planning of the recruitment process

41. **The national competition is organized by NACS at least two times a year, based on the information set out in the recruitment plan for civil servants, which covers state and territorial civil service positions (not local civil service positions).** NACS organizes the different rounds of the national competition at the frequency and for the types of civil service positions that are deemed necessary according to the information set out in the recruitment plan for civil servants, which comprises the state and territorial civil service positions (i) that are vacant or are expected to be vacated during the two-year reference period of the recruitment plan and (ii) that are set to be filled by way of competition³⁵ (as opposed to other ways of filling civil service positions).

42. **NACS draws up the recruitment plan, every two years, based on the information regarding the civil service HR needs reported by the public authorities and institutions, and the Government approves by decision the recruitment plan.**³⁶ Once the recruitment plan is approved, NACS can revise it only in certain specific circumstances and after a waiting period of at least a year from approval.³⁷ The Administrative Code provides safeguards for ensuring that civil service positions included in the recruitment plan approved by Government decision are, indeed, filled by way of competition. To this end, the law expressly forbids civil service positions included in the recruitment plan being filled, for example, by transfer or final relocation.³⁸

43. **Exceptionally, the first two rounds of the national competition organized by NACS were not based on recruitment plans approved by Government decision.** While the 2023 national competition was organized by NACS according to the specific rules set out for the pilot project in Annex No 9 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, the 2024 extended national competition was organized according to the general rules set out for national competitions in Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

- The 2023 national competition, which was part of the pilot project,³⁹ was organized for certain execution-level civil service positions (entry-level) and for high-level civil service positions, based on the recruitment needs approved by order issued by the president of NACS.⁴⁰
- The 2024 national competition (referred to as the extended national competition) was organized for certain execution-level civil service positions (entry-level and assistant) and management civil service positions (director and deputy director), based on the recruitment plan approved by order issued by the president of NACS.⁴¹

³⁵ According to Article 467(5) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³⁶ According to Article 467(5) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code and Article 17(1) and (2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³⁷ Provided in Article 17(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³⁸ According to Article 12(d) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

³⁹ The pilot project, which comprised the national competition (the recruitment stage) and the competitions for the position (the selection stage) regarding the abovementioned positions, was conducted according to the rules set out in Article 619 of the Administrative Code and in Annex No 9 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁴⁰ Order No 207/2023 issued by the president of NACS.

⁴¹ Order No 243/2024 issued by the president of NACS.

44. **The first recruitment plan for civil servants was approved by GD No 298/2025, and, in 2025, two rounds of the national competition were launched based on this recruitment plan:**

- Round 1 was organized for certain execution-level civil service positions (entry-level and superior) and for certain management civil service positions (head of service, executive director and deputy executive director who are not heads of public institutions).
- Round 2 was organized for certain execution-level civil service positions (assistant) and for certain management civil service positions (director, deputy director, director-general and deputy director-general).

4.2 Advertising

45. **NACS is tasked with ensuring the publicity of each round of the national competition that it organizes by advertising it in multiple outlets.** NACS has to publish the notice (the call for competition) for each round of the national competition, (i) in the Official Monitor of Romania, (ii) on the website of NACS, (iii) on the competition IT platform, (iv) in the online media, as well as (v) in the audiovisual media or by using other forms of additional advertising.⁴² By law⁴³, the notice has to be published in the Official Monitor with at least 30 calendar days prior to the date set out for carrying out the preliminary testing and also defines the additional information that must be published on the website of NACS.⁴⁴

4.3 Recruitment committees

46. **To operationalize the national competition, NACS relies on a broad architecture of committees established by order of its President:**

- **The committees for the preparation of the subjects for the preliminary testing, and the committees for the validation of the subjects for the preliminary testing** are set up by order of the president of NACS, and are comprised of representatives of NACS, representatives of the ministry in charge of public administration, as well as representatives of universities with faculties in public administration.⁴⁵ These committees are tasked with preparing and validating, respectively, the subjects for the multiple-choice tests by which two of the types of general knowledge are assessed during the preliminary testing: (i) the general knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment, and (ii) the general knowledge in the field of public administration.⁴⁶

⁴² According to Article 19 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁴³ The minimum content of the notice to be published in the Official Monitor includes (i) the number of civil service positions for which the national competition is organized, broken down by category, class, and, where appropriate, professional grade, (ii) the period during which candidates can apply and information on how to apply (on the latter point, it should be noted that candidates may only apply through their competition IT platform account).

⁴⁴ In addition to the minimum content published in the Official Monitor, NACS has to publish on its website (i) the full names of the vacant civil service positions, (ii) the functional departments of the public authorities and institutions within which the vacant civil service positions are set up, and (iii) the bibliography, the topics and/or the testing and competence standards used for the multiple-choice tests applied in the preliminary testing.

⁴⁵ According to Article 46(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁴⁶ According to Article 46(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

- **The eligibility check committees** are set up by order of the president of NACS. Each committee is comprised of three members: two civil servants designated by NACS and one civil servant designated by the minister in charge of public administration or by the head of the public authority/institution which has foreseen the highest number of civil service position in the recruitment plan for which the round of the national competition is organized.⁴⁷ For each eligibility check committees three alternate members are also designated.⁴⁸ The members of the eligibility check committees must fulfil certain requirements⁴⁹ and must be free from situations of incompatibility and conflict of interest.⁵⁰ The main tasks performed by the eligibility check committees are:⁵¹ to check the eligibility of candidates by reference to the requirements for participating in the national competition; and to post the result of the eligibility check in the competition IT platform.
- **The eligibility appeals committees** are set up by order of the president of NACS. The members of each eligibility appeals as well as the alternate members are designated according to the same rules that apply for the members of the eligibility check committee.⁵² Members of the eligibility appeals committees must fulfil the same requirements as the members of the eligibility check committee.⁵³ The main tasks performed by the eligibility appeals committees are:⁵⁴ to settle the appeals lodged by candidates against the result of the eligibility check; and to post the outcome of the appeals in the competition IT platform for publication.
- **The committees for organizing and conducting the competition** are set up by order of the president of NACS. The members of each committee for organizing and conducting the competition as well as the alternate members are designated according to the same rules that apply for the members of the eligibility check committee.⁵⁵ The members of the committees for organizing and conducting the competition must fulfil the same requirements as the members of the eligibility check committee.⁵⁶ The main tasks performed by the committees for organizing and conducting the competition are:⁵⁷ to validate, in the competition IT platform, the identity verification of candidates present for the preliminary testing and the advanced testing conducted in the test centers; to enter, in the competition IT platform, the note “cancelled” in the event of a candidate being eliminated from the competition; and to validate the presence/absence of candidates for the preliminary testing and the advanced testing conducted in the test centers.

⁴⁷ According to Article 21(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁴⁸ According to Article 21(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁴⁹ According to Article 22(2)(a)-(c) and Article 23(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, the members of the eligibility check committees must fulfil the following requirements: (i) to have knowledge in the field of public administration, (ii) to have at least 3 years’ training and/or experience in human resources management or public administration, (iii) to be of recognized moral probity, and (iv) to not have been subject to a disciplinary measure for which the sanction was not removed from the record. not be subject to any of the incompatibilities or conflicts of interest referred to in Articles 23 and 24.

⁵⁰ According to Article 22(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁵¹ According to Article 27(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code

⁵² According to Article 21(1) and (2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁵³ According to Article 22(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁵⁴ According to Article 27(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code

⁵⁵ According to Article 26(2) and Article 21(1) and (2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁵⁶ According to Article 26(2) and Article 22(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁵⁷ According to Article 30(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

- **The appeals committees tasked with settling appeals lodged against the results of the preliminary testing** are set up by order of the president of NACS. The members of each appeals committee as well as the alternate members are designated according to the same rules that apply for the members of the eligibility check committee.⁵⁸ The members of the appeals committees must fulfil the same requirements as the members of the eligibility check committee.⁵⁹ The main tasks performed by the appeals committees tasked with settling appeals lodged against the results of the preliminary testing are:⁶⁰ to settle the appeals lodged by candidates against the result obtained at the multiple-choice tests for (i) the general knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment, or (ii) the general knowledge in the field of public administration and to post the outcome of the appeals in the competition IT platform for publication.

47. **Ensuring the integrity and professionalism of the recruitment process depends on the quality and suitability of the civil servants designated to serve on the various committees involved in the national competition.** Under Article 467(3) of GEO No. 57/2019, committee members are required to meet a specific set of conditions designed to safeguard objectivity and professionalism. They must have knowledge of public administration, at least three years of training or experience in human resource management or public administration, and demonstrate recognized moral integrity. In addition, they must not fall under the incompatibility situations set out in Article 23 of Annex 10, such as having unexpunged disciplinary sanctions or simultaneously serving on both an eligibility verification committee and its corresponding appeals committee. Similar restrictions apply to the conduct and appeals committees involved in administering the preliminary and advanced testing stages. Members must also avoid conflict-of-interest situations defined in Article 24 of Annex 10, including financial or personal ties with candidates, political or economic interests that could compromise impartiality, family relationships up to the fourth degree with candidates or other committee members, or personal relationships of friendship or hostility with any of the candidates.

48. **Despite these detailed requirements, the legislation does not specify how compliance with these conditions should be verified, nor does it assign clear responsibilities for conducting such checks.** This gap is especially problematic for conditions formulated in broad or subjective terms, such as the requirement for moral integrity or for demonstrating professional knowledge in public administration. Moreover, the designation of committee members is not structured as a competitive or open process. Civil servants are appointed administratively, without a mechanism through which interested staff can signal their availability or be selected on the basis of merit or relevant competencies. Introducing a transparent expression-of-interest and selection process could strengthen professionalism, ensure a broader and more diverse pool of assessors, and enhance confidence in the integrity of the recruitment system.

4.4 Application phase

49. **Candidates for the national competition have to set up their competition file on the competition IT platform.** In order to conduct the national competition, NACS has developed and

⁵⁸ According to Article 26(2) and Article 21(1) and (2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁵⁹ According to Article 26(2) and Article 22(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁶⁰ According to Article 30(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

manages a dedicated IT platform, which candidates have to register to and to use throughout the recruitment process. Any individual can set up a user account on the competition IT platform⁶¹ and can create his/her personal and professional profile, comprising identification data (like the name, the personal identification number, the identity document), information on his/her education and training, professional experience, computer skills, language skills, and, where appropriate, disability information (required in case reasonable accommodation of the competition conditions is necessary). Users are also able to upload in their accounts relevant documents (e.g., identity documents, diplomas, employer recommendations, documents certifying the past or current work experience). Users registered on the competition IT platform receive a unique identification code, which will be used in the communications related to the national competition. Candidates can enter a national competition only through their user accounts, by applying to one (or several) of the open national competitions. With a few exceptions,⁶² the entire process of taking part in the national competition (applying, testing, notifications of result, lodging complaints, notification of the settlement of complaints) is carried out on the competition IT platform.

50. The competition file can only be set up online, through the candidate's user account registered on the competition IT platform. Within 20 calendar days from the moment the notice (the call for competition) is published, candidates must set up their competition file, which consists of:⁶³

- **The application form.** Candidates have to fill in the application form online. The content of the application form for the national competition is set out by law.⁶⁴ The online application form includes sections regarding information relevant for the national competition (studies, professional experience, computer skills, language skills) as well as a declaration on honor regarding the fulfilment of several of the eligibility requirements. Additionally, candidates for high-level civil service positions must indicate their option of the four foreign languages (English, French, German or Spanish) that will be assessed in the preliminary testing.

It should be noted that the declaration on honor also covers the general requirement that civil servants have to be medically and psychologically fit to hold a civil service position.⁶⁵ According to the Administrative Code, compliance with this requirement is not verified in the national competition, but in the job-based competition (i.e., the selection stage, which is the second stage of the recruitment process),⁶⁶ which raises the question of whether it is appropriate/relevant to include it in the declaration on honor submitted within the national competition.

- **The annexes to the application form**, comprising documents that prove fulfilment of several of the eligibility requirements. As shown in Table 3 below, the documents that have to be annexed to the application form depend on the category of civil service position. These documents have to be uploaded to the relevant section of the online application form. Documents which are uploaded to the candidate's user profile, but are not uploaded to the

⁶¹ <https://platforma-concurs-national.anfp.gov.ro/>

⁶² E.g., the advanced testing for high-level civil service positions and for certain management civil service positions is conducted in person and entails direct observation of the candidate's behavioral indicators.

⁶³ According to Article 38 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁶⁴ The template of the application form is set out in Article 137 point I of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁶⁵ Set out in Article 465(1) point (e) of the GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁶⁶ According to Article 94(2) point (f) and Article 97(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

online application form, cannot be accessed by the members of the evaluation committee and, therefore, cannot be considered in the eligibility check.

51. **Once the candidate has filled in and uploaded the required information and documents, he/she can formally apply to the national competition.** At the end of the application period, each candidate that has applied is given a competition file registration number which, together with the unique identification code given when registering on the competition IT platform, will be used for communicating the results of the tests that comprise the national competition.

Table 3. The content of the competition file required for each category of civil service positions

Content of the competition file	Execution-level civil service positions	Management civil service positions	High-level civil service positions
Application form	✓	✓	✓
ID card	✓	✓	✓
Supporting document issued by the competent authorities, if there has been a change of name mentioned in the birth certificate	✓	✓	✓
Diplomas or equivalent education documents (that attest the level of education corresponding to the class of civil service position under competition ⁶⁷)	✓	✓	✓
Employment record and/or a certificate issued by the employer for the period worked, certifying the general seniority as well as the seniority in the specialized field the studies necessary for holding the civil service position	✓	✓	✓
Master's degree in public administration, management or in the field of studies necessary for holding the civil service position or an equivalent degree	-	✓	✓
Certificate or document that attests having graduated from the specialized training program for holding a high-level civil service position, organized by NIA, or having served a full term of office as a Member of Parliament	-	-	✓

⁶⁷ According to Article 386 of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, civil service positions are classified depending on the level of the studies required to fill those position:

- class I comprises the civil service positions for which a bachelor's degree or equivalent is required;
- class II comprises the civil service positions for which a short higher education degree, completed with a diploma, in the period prior to the application of the three Bologna cycles, is required;
- class III comprises the civil service positions for which a secondary school education, completed with a baccalaureate diploma, is required.

4.5 Eligibility check

52. **The first step of the national competition consists of checking whether the candidates meet the eligibility requirements.** The higher the category of the civil service position the more extensive the legal requirements for holding a civil service position and, consequently, the eligibility requirements within the national competition are:⁶⁸

- **The eligibility requirements for execution-level civil service positions⁶⁹** include, inter alia, (i) to hold the Romanian citizenship, and to have residency in Romania, (ii) to be at least 18 years old, (iii) to have the educational qualifications and seniority in the specialized field required by law for holding the civil service position, (iv) to not have been dismissed from a civil service position or to not have had his/her employment contract terminated for disciplinary reasons within the last 3 years.

Box 2. The requirement on professional experience in the specialization of studies needed for the exercise of a public function

Professional experience in the specialization of studies required for the exercise of a public function constitutes one of the eligibility conditions for occupying public positions. According to Article 424(3) of the Administrative Code, experience in the specialization is the experience acquired under an individual employment contract, a service relationship, or through a liberal profession, demonstrated with appropriate documents.

The requirement for professional experience in the specialization of studies needed for the exercise of a public function is not, in itself, incompatible with the use of the general competency framework (in the recruitment stage of the competition) or the use of specific competencies (in the selection stage of the competition). Professional experience in the specialization reflects a certain level of practical experience, which is not necessarily captured by general and/or specific competencies. In line with international experience, recruitment processes for positions within EU-level authorities/institutions sometimes include eligibility conditions related to professional experience.

Demonstrating and verifying the fulfilment of the requirement regarding professional experience in the specialization of studies needed for exercising a public function presents several challenges. One of the most frequent reasons for rejecting candidates during the eligibility verification stage of the recruitment phase is the failure to demonstrate the required length of experience in the specialization of studies. This situation may stem from the rigid and restrictive nature of this condition (which requires proof of a direct link between the specialization of studies and the positions held by the candidate throughout their professional career) and/or from gaps or lack of clarity and interpretation in the legal provisions governing this requirement.

Completely removing the requirement regarding professional experience in the specialization of studies necessary for exercising a public function would have, inter alia, the following consequences:

- it would eliminate a significant filtering element of candidates' professional experience;
- it would require identifying a new criterion for classifying the professional grades of execution-level civil service positions (to the extent that this classification method is maintained);
- it would lead to an inconsistent approach to eligibility conditions for positions across the public sector (public functions vs. contractual positions), since Government Decision (GD) No. 1336/2022 refers to experience in the specialization of studies required for contractual positions in the public sector (a possible solution would be to amend GD No. 1335/2022 as well, removing references to experience in the specialization of studies).

⁶⁸ According to Article 42(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁶⁹ Set out in Article 465(1) points (a), (b), (f), (h)-(k) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

The requirement on experience in the specialization of studies needed for exercising a public function could be reformulated or replaced:

- With a requirement regarding general work experience. This formulation would make it easier to demonstrate and verify compliance; however, it would suffer from the major disadvantage of being largely irrelevant, given that work experience may be accumulated in activities substantially different from those associated with the public function.
- With a requirement regarding relevant professional experience (i.e., the period during which the candidate performed duties or tasks relevant to the public function being filled). Such a condition would be similar to the eligibility requirement for professional experience applied in recruitment processes for positions within EU institutions or in other EU member states⁷⁰. Under that system, only professional experience obtained after completion of the degree required for participation in the competition is taken into account, a limitation that could also be considered in reformulating the present requirement.

The major advantage of such a formulation is that it targets only professional experience that is, in principle, useful for exercising the public function, based on the similarity of duties and tasks. However, implementing such a requirement has several implications:

- It would require (i) candidates to submit documents that detail the duties/tasks actually performed, and (ii) eligibility verification committees to assess the extent to which these duties/tasks can be considered relevant in relation to those foreseen for the public function being filled. From this perspective, verifying this condition may face the same interpretation and application difficulties as the current requirement on experience in the specialization of studies (for example, issues may arise in counting periods of relevant experience when a candidate previously held a position involving both tasks similar to those of the public function and tasks unrelated to it⁷¹).
 - Verification of this requirement could not be carried out during the the national competition, since the announcement for this stage does not include information about the duties/tasks of each position being filled. Consequently, potential candidates would not be able to self-assess whether they meet the requirement on relevant professional experience.
 - Verification of this requirement would therefore need to occur exclusively during the selection stage (the job-based competition). Given that eligibility screening at this stage is conducted by committees established at the level of individual public authorities/institutions, the reformulated requirement would need to be accompanied by methodological guidance and/or training programs to ensure a consistent and uniform approach to verifying compliance.
- **The eligibility requirements for managerial civil service positions⁷²** comprise all the eligibility requirements for execution-level civil service positions as well as an additional educational requirement, namely, to be a graduate with a master's degree in public

⁷⁰ For example, in Ireland, which was one of the models that informed the recommendations on the national competition in 2019, vacancies clearly specify where needed the relevant experience, which is linked to the core tasks of the job advertised. More information available at: <https://www.publicjobs.ie/en/job-search>.

⁷¹ A regulatory solution in this regard could be the one provided in Section 2.3, paragraph (1)(e) of the annex to the general competition notice C/2025/1273 (published in the Official Journal of the European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/1273/oj>): "In order to be taken into consideration, professional experience must meet the following general conditions: [...] it must fulfil the relevance criteria defined in the competition notice. If only part of the tasks performed during a given period of professional experience can be considered relevant, the following rules apply: (i) if more than 75% of the tasks are relevant, the entire period of professional experience shall be considered relevant; (ii) if more than 50% but no more than 75% of the tasks are relevant, the indicated period of professional experience shall be taken into account at a rate of 75%."

⁷² Set out in Article 465(1) points (a), (b), (f), (h)-(k) and in Article 465(3) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

administration, management or in the field of studies necessary for holding the civil service position or with an equivalent degree.

- **The eligibility requirements for high-level civil service positions⁷³** comprise all the eligibility requirements for management civil service positions as well as several additional requirements, which include, inter alia, (i) to have graduated from the specialized training program for holding a high-level civil service position, which is organized by National Institute of Administration (NIA), or to have served a full term of office as a Member of Parliament, and (ii) to have at least 7 years' seniority in the field of studies necessary for holding the civil service position. It should be noted that the legal provisions that set out the legal requirements for holding a high-level civil service position and the national competition eligibility requirements for high-level civil service positions need to be reviewed to address the issues presented in the box below.

Box 3. Issues regarding the legal provisions on the requirements for holding a high-level civil service position and the national competition eligibility requirements for high-level civil service positions

Article 42(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 stipulates that the **eligibility requirements** for the national competition for high-level civil service positions are the ones set out in Article 394(4) of GEO No 57/2019.

These legal provisions are affected by several issues:

- Article 394(4)(a) provides that, in order to hold a high-level civil service position, an individual must fulfil all the requirements set out in Article 465 of GEO No 57/2019. In fact, paragraphs (3) and (4) of Article 465 of GEO No 57/2019 are not applicable to high-level civil servants.
- Article 42(1) provides that the requirements set out in Article 394(4) are verified in the eligibility check. In fact, Article 394(4) also includes requirements that are not verified in the eligibility check (e.g., the requirement to have general knowledge of written communication skills in one of the following languages: English, French, German or Spanish, at A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which is assessed in the preliminary testing). Furthermore, one of the requirements set out in Article 394(4) is to have passed the national competition, which, obviously, cannot be a prerequisite for taking part in that very same competition.

To address these issues, the affected legal provisions should be amended by including more accurate references: Article 394(4)(a) should reference the requirements set out in Article 465(1) and (2), and Article 42(1) of Annex No 10 should reference the requirements set out in Article 394(4)(b)-(e).

53. The candidates that prove that they meet all the eligibility requirements are declared “admitted”, while the other candidates are declared “rejected”. The eligibility check committee,⁷⁴ set up by NACS, assesses whether the documents uploaded by the candidates prove they fulfil the eligibility requirements. The eligibility check committee must conduct its assessment within 10 working days after the closing date for submitting applications to the national competition.⁷⁵ Following the assessment, the committee decides, unanimously or by majority, which candidates are declared “admitted” and which are declared “rejected”. The result of the eligibility check and, where appropriate, the reasons for rejecting the candidate, are communicated (i) through the competition IT platform, in the candidate's user account, and the candidate being notified by email, as well as (ii) on the website of NACS, in the section specially created for this purpose.⁷⁶

54. Any candidate who is dissatisfied with the results of the eligibility check conducted by the eligibility committees may file an appeal with the eligibility appeals committee.

⁷³ Set out in Article 394(4) of GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁷⁴ According to Article 20(4) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, one or several eligibility check committees may be set up by NACS, depending on the number of candidates that have applied to the national competition.

⁷⁵ According to Article 42(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁷⁶ According to Article 43(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

Within 24 hours after the results of the eligibility check are published, any candidate who is dissatisfied may file an appeal via the competition IT platform, under penalty of forfeiture of his/her right to appeal.⁷⁷ The appeals lodged against the results of the eligibility check are settled by the eligibility appeals committee⁷⁸, within three working days of the deadline for lodging appeals.⁷⁹ The eligibility appeals committee decides, unanimously or by majority⁸⁰, (i) to accept the appeal, if it concludes that the documents annexed to the application form prove that the candidate meets the eligibility requirements, or (ii) to reject the appeal, if it concludes that the uploaded documents do not prove that the candidate meets the eligibility requirements.⁸¹ The outcome of the appeals is communicated (i) through the competition IT platform, in the candidate's user account, the candidate being notified by email, and (ii) on the website of NACS, in the section specially created for this purpose.⁸² Candidates whose appeals have been rejected may file a complaint with the administrative court of law.⁸³

55. During the eligibility check, legislation does not grant NACS and candidates the right to send clarification requests and provide such clarifications regarding the documents they submitted, nor to submit additional documents. Thus, the outcome of this test is based solely on the documents that candidates have annexed to the application form. As opposed to the competition for the position (i.e., the selection stage), during which candidates are allowed to submit, if requested to, other relevant documents, from the category of those provided for in art. 94 para. (2) - (4) of Annex no. 10 to the Administrative Code, regarding the eligibility requirements,⁸⁴ the law does not provide such a possibility during the eligibility check. The downsides of not providing the possibility for candidates to submit additional documents are that it may lead to rejecting candidates on minor formal grounds (e.g., not submitting the supporting document issued by the competent authorities that attest the change of the name mentioned in the birth certificate, submitting an out-of-date ID card). Candidates that, in fact, meet the eligibility requirements, but were not diligent enough to submit the proper supporting documents (e.g., submitting certificates issued by employers for the period worked, which do not clearly state the education requirements for the jobs filled by the employee/candidate and/or do not allow to ascertain whether seniority achieved in those jobs is relevant to the field of studies necessary for holding the civil service position) are rejected.

56. Nonetheless, these downsides are offset by the fact that it makes the eligibility check process more streamlined, since the eligibility check committee only assesses the documents that the candidates have initially annexed to the application form and does not have to (and cannot) request clarifications or additional documents from the candidates, and free from

⁷⁷ According to Article 56 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁷⁸ According to Article 20(4) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, one or several eligibility appeals committee may be set up by NACS, depending on the number of candidates that have applied to the national competition.

⁷⁹ According to Article 57(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁸⁰ In the event that there are differences of opinion between the members of the appeals committee regarding the verification of eligibility that could not be resolved by mutual agreement, the candidate is declared "admitted" or "rejected" depending on the majority opinion, recorded according to the individual sections allocated to each member in the competition information platform. The member of the appeals committee regarding the verification of eligibility who does not agree with the majority opinion formulates a separate, reasoned opinion and records it in the individual section available in the competition information platform.

⁸¹ According to Article 57(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁸² According to Article 60 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁸³ According to Article 61(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁸⁴ According to Article 97(5) and (6) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

any suspicion that certain candidates might be favored by being allowed to amend their application form and/or to submit missing documents.

57. **After the eligibility appeals committee has settled the appeals lodged against the eligibility check results, the candidates declared “admitted” following the eligibility check have to choose a test center and a date and time for taking the preliminary/advanced testing.**⁸⁵ The preliminary testing for all civil service positions and the advanced testing for most of the civil service positions⁸⁶ are conducted online on the competition IT platform, but candidates are required to take the tests in person in NACS designated test centers (i.e., on computers located in these centers). Therefore, where appropriate, the candidates declared “admitted” at the eligibility check must opt for a test center out of the list provided by NACS and for a certain testing session (i.e., a certain date and time slot). Within three working days of being notified via the competition IT platform, candidates must choose the preferred test center and the testing session, in the dedicated section of their user accounts. Candidates that fail to choose a test center are assigned by NACS to a test center in such a way as to ensure a minimum of 10 candidates per test center.⁸⁷ Furthermore, even candidates that have filled their option in the competition IT platform may be reassigned by NACS to a different test center and/or testing session, so that a minimum of 10 candidates per test center and per testing session is achieved.⁸⁸

Box 4 Issues regarding the assignment of candidates to the NACS designated test centers

In the 2023 national competition (within the pilot project) there were only two NACS designated test centers, in the 2024 national competition (referred to as the extended national competition) and in the two rounds of the 2025 national competition, the number of test centers was increased to eight.

The locations of the eight test centers across Romania are indicated in the map below:



⁸⁵ According to Article 44(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁸⁶ With the exception of high-level civil service positions and certain management civil service positions (namely, director-general, deputy director-general, executive director and deputy executive director who are heads of public institutions), for which the advanced testing is conducted in assessment centers.

⁸⁷ According to Article 44(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁸⁸ According to Article 44(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

Source: the 2025-2026 Candidate's Handbook, drafted and published by NACS.⁸⁹

Analysis of the geographical distribution of the NACS designated test centers shows an uneven coverage:

- The only test center located in the historical region of Moldavia is located in the town of Suceava, at the northern extremity of the region.
- Five counties (Bacău, Galați, Vaslui, Satu Mare, Vrancea) do not have any test center on their territory or the territory of any of their neighboring counties (i.e., the closest test center is two counties away). Four of these five counties (Bacău, Galați, Vaslui, Vrancea) are located in a single region (Moldavia) and represent half of the counties of that region.
- Three of the eight test centers are concentrated in three neighboring counties (Bucharest-Ilfov, Prahova and Brașov), each of these counties sharing a border with one of the other two counties.
- The uneven geographical distribution of the NACS designated test centers could effectively limit the pool of potential candidates, as candidates who live farther away from the test centers may be less willing or able to participate in the national competition than those who live closer.

This restrictive effect on the potential pool of candidates can be compounded by the fact that NACS is allowed to unilaterally assign a candidate to a certain test center and/or testing session, (i) if the candidate has not exercised his/her right to opt for a test center and/or testing session,⁹⁰ and (ii) if the number of candidates that have opted for a certain test center and/or testing session does not meet the minimum threshold of 10 candidates per test center and testing session⁹¹. This could result in candidates being assigned, without them having any say on the matter, to test centers significantly farther away from their place of residence, which would entail higher costs for taking part in the preliminary/advanced testing (e.g., transportation, accommodation) and, consequently, could deter the participation of candidates with limited financial resources.

4.6 Preliminary testing

58. **The preliminary testing consists of assessing whether candidates have the general knowledge and cognitive aptitudes required for holding civil service positions, by way of multiple-choice tests that candidates have to fill/solve online on the competition IT platform at one of the NACS designated test centers.** The law sets out the types of general knowledge required for holding civil service positions, which are assessed during the preliminary testing. While most of the required types of general knowledge are the same notwithstanding the civil service position, the preliminary testing of these types of general knowledge is usually tailored to the category of civil service positions. There are five broad types of general knowledge assessed during the preliminary testing:

- **General knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment.** The multiple-choice tests used to assess this type of general knowledge are designed separately for each category of civil service positions, which suggests that even though the same type of knowledge is required to fill any civil service position, the level of general knowledge is dependent on the category of civil service positions.
- **General knowledge in the field of public administration.** As with the previously mentioned type of general knowledge, the general knowledge of public administration is assessed by way of multiple-choice tests that are designed separately for each category of civil service

⁸⁹ Available at: https://concurs-national.anfp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/Ghidul-candidatului-CN-2025-2026_28.03.2025_pt-site.pdf (accessed: 29.06.2025).

⁹⁰ According to Article 44(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁹¹ According to Article 44(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

positions, which substantiates the same assumption that the required level of general knowledge of public administration increases the higher the category of civil service positions is.

- **Theoretical knowledge of information technology, at basic level (IT).** According to the Administrative Code, candidates for a civil service position must have theoretical IT knowledge at the “beginner user” level similar to the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) or International Certificate of Digital Literacy (ICDL) certification levels.⁹² It should be noted that, in the absence of any legal provision to the contrary, the same level of IT knowledge (i.e., “beginner user” level) is required for all categories of civil service positions. While apparently precise, the reference to the ECDL and ICDL certification levels is actually difficult to use to determine the “beginner user” level required for the theoretical IT knowledge (arguments to this end are presented in Output 1 - Report on the assessment of the digital competencies needed in the Romanian civil service, prepared under the Technical Support Instrument component “Romania: Developing a General Digital Competence Framework for Civil Servants”).

Box 5. Issues regarding the requirements on theoretical knowledge of information technology

According to the Administrative Code, candidates for a civil service position must have theoretical IT knowledge at the “beginner user” level similar to the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) or International Certificate of Digital Literacy (ICDL) certification levels.

Review of the three most recent rounds of the national competition⁹³ revealed that, besides the generic requirement of having theoretical IT knowledge at the “beginner user” level similar to the ECDL/ICDL certification levels, the notices for launching the national competition list the particular topics that are covered by this requirement, which are broken down in three categories: (i) using computers, internet and email, (ii) text editing - **Microsoft Word**, and (iii) spreadsheet calculation - **Microsoft Excel**.

Although the Microsoft Office suite is widely used in the Romanian public administration (it may virtually be the only office suite software used in practice), referencing the particular applications developed by a certain software provider in the national competition notices may not be advisable.

- **Cognitive skills.** In terms of the level required for the cognitive skills, the Administrative Code provides that these cognitive skills are assessed in compliance with the level of the civil service positions for which the national competition is organized, which refers to the hierarchical level of the civil service positions (i.e., to the category of civil service positions: executive, management or high-level). This assumes that the level required for the cognitive skills increases with higher civil service positions.

Box 6. Issues regarding the requirements on cognitive skills

According to the Administrative Code, in the preliminary testing the cognitive skills of the candidates are assessed. The law does not specifically set out the types of cognitive skills that are assessed during the preliminary testing.

Review of the four rounds of the national competition launched⁹⁴ found that the types of cognitive skills assessed during the preliminary testing were: deductive reasoning; numerical reasoning; and verbal reasoning.

⁹² According to Article 47(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁹³ Namely, the national competition launched in 2024 (referred to as the extended national competition), and the two rounds of the national competition launched in 2025.

⁹⁴ Namely, the national competition launched in 2023 (within the pilot project), the national competition launched in 2024 (referred to as the extended national competition), and the two rounds of the national competition launched in 2025.

It would be advisable to amend the Administrative Code so that it clearly lists the three types of cognitive skills that are assessed in the preliminary testing. Furthermore, provisions should be added to regulate certain basic aspects of the process of assessing the cognitive skills, like:

The weighing that the scores awarded following the assessment of the three types of cognitive skills have in the overall score (i.e., the weighing could be set out by law, or it could be determined for each round of the national competition, with the obligation, in the latter case, to include information on weighing in the notice by which the national competition is launched).

The minimum threshold for the overall score as well as the minimum thresholds for each of the three types of cognitive skills, that candidates have to obtain in order to be deemed as having the required level of cognitive skills.

- **General knowledge of written communication skills in one of the following languages: English, French, German or Spanish.** This type of general knowledge is only required for holding high-level civil service positions. The Administrative Code requires that candidates for high-level civil service positions have a level of proficiency in one of the four previously mentioned foreign languages equivalent to the A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL).⁹⁵

Table 4. The types of general knowledge required for the categories of civil service jobs

Type of general knowledge assessed during the preliminary testing	Execution-level civil service positions	Management civil service positions	High-level civil service positions
General knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment	✓	✓	✓
General knowledge in the field of public administration	✓	✓	✓
Theoretical IT knowledge at the “beginner user” level (similar to the ECDL or ICDL certification levels)	✓	✓	✓
Cognitive skills	✓	✓	✓
General knowledge of written communication skills in one of the following languages: English, French, German or Spanish, at A2 level according to the CEFRL	-	-	✓

- **The preliminary testing is managed by the committee for organizing and conducting the competition, set up by NACS⁹⁶ (these are different from the eligibility referred to above).** The preliminary testing is carried out in person at NACS designated test centers. The preliminary testing sessions are audio and video recorded.⁹⁷ In order to take part in the preliminary testing,

⁹⁵ According to Article 47(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

⁹⁶ According to Article 26(2) and Article 20(4) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, one or several committees for organizing and conducting the competition may be set up by NACS, depending on the number of candidates that have applied to the national competition.

⁹⁷ According to Article 126(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

candidates must fulfill certain administrative requirements,⁹⁸ which include, inter alia, signing the application form by hand (it should be noted that during the application process, candidates are not required to sign the application form, just to submit through their user accounts in the competition IT platform). Candidates that do not meet all the administrative requirements are deemed to be “absent” and cannot take part in the preliminary testing. During the preliminary testing, five broad types of general knowledge are assessed by way of multiple-choice tests (a separate test for each type of general knowledge), which are developed as shown in Table 5 below. The competition IT platform generates randomly and automatically the tests for each candidate; candidates can access the tests by using the unique test code provided by the secretary of the committee for organizing and conducting the competition.⁹⁹ During the preliminary testing, candidates are not allowed to possess or use any source of information or mobile telephones or other means of communication at distance; failure to comply with these rules results in the candidate being expelled from the test, and in the status of his/her application being changed to “cancelled”.

Table 5. Multiple-choice tests used to assess the types of general knowledge required for the categories of civil service positions

Type of general knowledge assessed during the preliminary testing	Multiple-choice tests used to assess the type of general knowledge
General knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment	Tests extracted from a database containing subjects (questions) and their answers, developed by the committees for the preparation of the subjects and the committees for the validation of the subjects
General knowledge of public administration	
Theoretical IT knowledge at the “beginner user” level (similar to the ECDL or ICDL certification levels)	For IT and language tests - Sets of tests endorsed by a public or private Romanian or international authority in the field, or by a pre-university or university educational establishment with a department in the field relevant to the general knowledge assessed. Cognitive skills assessment is carried out using instruments approved by the Romanian College of Psychologists.
Cognitive skills	
General knowledge of written communication skills in one of the following languages: English, French, German or Spanish, at A2 level according to the CEFRL	

59. In order to pass the preliminary testing and be declared “admitted”, candidates have to obtain an overall score of at least 60% as well as a minimum score of 50% for each multiple-choice test.¹⁰⁰ Within three working days after all the candidates for the same category of civil service positions have finished the competition stage, the results of the tests are communicated (i) through the competition IT platform, in the candidate's user account, the candidate being notified by email, as well as (ii) on the website of NACS, in the section specially

⁹⁸ These requirements are set out in Article 49(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code and consist of the candidates (i) being present at the assigned test center on the date and time specified in the notification sent by NACS, (ii) presenting a valid ID card, (iii) signing by hand the application form, and (iv) knowing the username and the password for the user account set up on the competition IT platform.

⁹⁹ According to Article 49(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰⁰ According to Article 54(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

created for this purpose.¹⁰¹ Depending on the outcome of the preliminary testing, candidates are notified on the status of their application (which can be “absent”, “cancelled”, “rejected” or “admitted”) and, where appropriate (i.e., if their application is “rejected” or “admitted”), on the score they obtained in each multiple-choice test as well as on the overall score.¹⁰² In their user accounts on the competition IT platform, candidates can also access the scoring scale for the tests and a report with the answers they provided in the tests.¹⁰³

60. Any candidate who is dissatisfied with the results of the preliminary testing may lodge an appeal with the appeals committee. Candidates can only submit complaints regarding the results they obtained in the multiple-choice tests for two of the five types of general knowledge, namely, (i) general knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment, and (ii) general knowledge in the field of public administration. Within 24 hours after the results of the preliminary testing are published, any candidate who is dissatisfied may lodge an appeal via the competition IT platform, under penalty of forfeiture of his/her right to appeal. The appeals formulated against the results of the preliminary testing are settled by the appeals committee set up by NACS, within three working days of the deadline for lodging appeals. The appeals committee analyses the scoring scale and the answers provided by the candidate that has lodged the appeal, and each member of appeals committee scores the multiple-choice tests referred to in the appeal. The appeals committee decides, unanimously or by majority, (i) to accept the appeal, if the score awarded by the appeals committee members is higher than the score awarded initially in the preliminary testing, or (ii) to reject the appeal, if the score awarded by the appeals committee members is equal to or lower than the score awarded initially. The outcome of the appeals is communicated (i) through the competition IT platform, in the candidate's user account, the candidate being notified by email, and (ii) on the website of NACS, in the section specially created for this purpose.¹⁰⁴ Candidates whose appeals have been rejected may file a complaint with the administrative court of law.¹⁰⁵

Box 7. Issues regarding the grounds for appealing the results of the preliminary testing

According to the Administrative Code, the right of candidates to lodge appeals against the result of the preliminary testing is limited to the score obtained in the multiple-choice tests for two types of general knowledge:¹⁰⁶

- General knowledge in the field of respect for human dignity, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, preventing and combating incitement to hatred and discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment.
- General knowledge in the field of public administration.

This means that candidates are not granted the right to lodge appeals regarding the score obtained in the multiple-choice test for the other three types of general knowledge:

- Theoretical IT knowledge.
- Cognitive skills.

¹⁰¹ According to Article 54(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰² According to Article 54(2) and (3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰³ According to Article 49(8) and Article 54(4) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰⁴ According to Article 60 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰⁵ According to Article 61(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰⁶ According to Article 58(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

- General knowledge of written communication skills in one of the following languages: English, French, German or Spanish (applicable only to candidates for high-level civil service positions).

The main discernible difference between the two groups of types of general knowledge lies in the way in which the multiple-choice tests for assessing them are developed:

The tests for the first two types of general knowledge are developed by the committees for the preparation of the subjects and the committees for the validation of the subjects, which comprise representatives of NACS, representatives of the ministry in charge of public administration, as well as representatives of universities with faculties in public administration.¹⁰⁷

The tests for the other three types of general knowledge are based on sets of tests endorsed by a public or private Romanian or international authority in the field, or by a pre-university or university educational establishment with a department in the field relevant to the general knowledge assessed, which are purchased by NACS.¹⁰⁸

This difference alone does not justify the decision to entirely deprive candidates of the right to lodge appeals against the results obtained in the tests for the latter types of general knowledge.

Therefore, consideration should be given to amending the law in order to regulate the right of candidates to lodge appeals against the results obtained in all the multiple-choice tests that comprise the preliminary testing, especially since these results are, for all intents and purposes, administrative acts and should as such be subject to an administrative appeal.

4.7 Advanced testing

61. **The advanced testing phase of the national competition consists of assessing whether candidates have the general competences required for holding civil service positions.** The law sets out the general competences required for holding civil service positions, which are assessed during the advanced testing. The required general competences and their level of complexity are set out distinctly for each category of civil service positions. The general competences required for holding civil service positions are defined as the competences needed by all civil servants to work effectively at any hierarchical level and regardless of specialization.

62. **The Administrative Code sets out five broad categories of general competences:** (i) personal efficiency, (ii) interpersonal efficiency, (iii) social responsibility, (iv) management skills, and (v) leadership.¹⁰⁹ Within each category, the law defines certain general competences and lists the descriptors and behavioural indicators for those general competences.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, general competences have several levels of complexity: (i) basic, (ii) operational, (iii) enhanced, and (iv) strategic. For each category of civil service positions (with a further breakdown in case of the execution level and management civil service positions, respectively) the law sets out the required general competences within the category of competences (it should be noted that not all civil service positions have general competences within each category of competences) and the level of complexity of the required general competences.

63. **The advanced testing is conducted differently depending on the type of civil service position under competition.** In the case of execution-level civil service positions and of certain management civil service positions, the advanced testing entails candidates solving a questionnaire on a computer, through the competition IT platform, at one of the NACS designated **test centers**. The advanced testing conducted in test centers are managed by committees for organizing and conducting the competition, set up by NACS. For the civil service positions

¹⁰⁷ According to Article 46 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰⁸ According to Article 47(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁰⁹ Listed in Article 17 item (i) of Annex No 8 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹¹⁰ Listed in Article 17 item (ii) of Annex No 8 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

mentioned in this point, the advanced testing is carried out in person at NACS designated test centers and these testing sessions are audio and video recorded. The advanced testing conducted in test centers follows after the completion of the preliminary testing. Since the two tests (the preliminary testing and the advanced testing) are conducted, on the same day, one after the other, all candidates that complete the preliminary testing are allowed to take part in the advanced testing (i.e., candidates take part in the advanced testing, notwithstanding whether they actually passed the preliminary testing, simply because the short succession of the two test does not allow for the results obtained in the preliminary testing to be communicated). Candidates must fill a questionnaire, which is designed to assess their general competences and their level of complexity by reference to those required for the category of civil service positions under competition. The questionnaire is the candidate's self-assessment of the frequency of self-perceived behavioural indicators that the law sets out for each general competence depending on the required level of complexity. Candidates are expected to be scored in relation to each behavioural indicator on a scale of 1 to 5¹¹¹, where a score of 3 or more means that the candidate has at least an acceptable level of the targeted behaviour. The score for each general competence is determined as the weighted average of the scores for the behavioural indicators corresponding to that competence. The candidate is deemed to have the required level of complexity for the general competence under assessment if he/she has obtained an overall score of at least 3 for that competence. Following the advanced testing, the competition IT platform automatically generates an individual report for each candidate, containing information on his/her general competences and their level of complexity.

64. **Advanced testing for certain civil service positions¹¹² is carried out in accredited assessment centers, public or private entities authorized to administer competency assessments based on observable behavioural indicators¹¹³.** These assessment centers are selected by NACS through competitive public procurement procedures. The assessment centers must provide the logistical resources needed to carry out the entire process of advanced testing, including, most importantly, experts certified in the field of competence assessment, that will conduct the assessment of the candidates' general competences. According to the Administrative Code, the requirement that members of the eligibility check committees and eligibility appeals committees must be free from situations of incompatibility and conflict of interest¹¹⁴ also applies *mutatis mutandis* in the case of the advanced testing conducted in assessment centers. The main tasks performed by assessment centers/the experts employed by the assessment centers are: to conduct the advanced testing, which consists of the direct observation of the candidates' behavioural indicators corresponding to the required level of complexity of the general competences; to draw up the individual reports for the candidates that have participated in the advanced testing, containing information on their general competences and their level of complexity, and to upload the individual reports to the competition IT platform; and to analyze the individual report for the candidates that have lodged complaints against the

¹¹¹ According to Article 20(2) of Annex No 8 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, the scores that can be awarded for each behavioral indicator are:

- 1 – is not adequate;
- 2 – behavior manifested to a very small extent;
- 3 – acceptable behavior;
- 4 – behavior manifested to a large extent;
- 5 – behavior manifested.

¹¹² High-level civil service positions and certain management civil service positions (namely, director-general, deputy director-general, executive director and deputy executive director who are heads of public institutions).

¹¹³ According to Article 3(f) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹¹⁴ According to Article 22(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

results of the advanced testing and to upload the results of the appeals to the competition IT platform.

65. **in assessment centers the advanced testing entails direct observation of the candidates' behavioural indicators corresponding to the required level of complexity of the general competences.**¹¹⁵ Candidates for the positions referred to in this point of report are allowed to take part in the advanced testing only if they have been declared “admitted” following the preliminary testing (as opposed to candidates for the positions mentioned in the previous paragraph of this report, who are not subject to this requirement, because in their case the advanced testing follows immediately after the preliminary testing – i.e., before the results to the preliminary testing are communicated). Candidates who have passed the preliminary testing are notified by e-mail, via the competition IT platform in their user account, of the date and time of the advanced testing, the assessment center and the conditions for access to the center, based on the planning of the candidates’ participation in the advanced testing rooms, made by the assessment center.¹¹⁶ The advanced testing sessions carried out in the assessment centers are audio and video recorded.¹¹⁷ The advanced testing is conducted according to the assessment center’s own methodology, which must be published on the website of NACS at least five working days prior to the start of the testing.¹¹⁸ The advanced testing conducted in assessment centers consists of the direct observation of the behavioural indicators set out by law for the general competences (as opposed to the advanced testing conducted in test centers, which consists of a self-assessment questionnaire filled in by candidates). The direct observation of behavioural indicators must be carried out by persons who have specialist training recognized by law in the field of competence assessment,¹¹⁹ which apply specific methods, including but not limited to: case study, presentation, role-play, behavioural interview, group exercise, which are selected by the assessment center and brought to the candidates’ attention before the advanced test.¹²⁰ Candidates are scored for each behavioural indicator, and the score for each general competence is determined as the weighted average of the scores for the behavioural indicators corresponding to that competence. The candidate is deemed to have the required level of complexity for the general competence under assessment if he/she has obtained an overall score of at least 3 for that competence.¹²¹ Following the advanced testing, the assessment center uploads to the competition IT platform an individual report for each candidate, containing information on his/her general competences and their level of complexity.¹²²

66. **Candidates for which the individual reports attest that they have each of the required general competences are declared “admitted” following the advanced testing.**¹²³ Within three working days after all the candidates for the same category of civil service positions have finished the advanced testing, the results of the tests are communicated (i) through the competition IT platform, in the candidate's user account, the candidate being notified, as well as (ii) on the website of NACS, in the section specially created for this purpose.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ According to Article 52(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹¹⁶ According to Article 51(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹¹⁷ According to Article 126(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹¹⁸ According to Article 52(4) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹¹⁹ According to Article 19(1) and Article 20(1) of Annex No 8 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²⁰ According to Article 52(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²¹ According to Article 20(4) and (5) of Annex No 8 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²² According to Article 53(2)(a) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²³ According to Article 55(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²⁴ According to Article 55(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

Box 8. Issues regarding the absence of the right to appeal the results of the advanced testing conducted in test centers

The Administrative Code regulates only the right to appeal the result of the advanced testing conducted in assessment centers.¹²⁵

This means that candidates for execution-level civil service positions and for the other types of management civil service positions (namely, head of service, executive director and deputy executive director who are not heads of public institutions, director and deputy director), for which the advanced testing is carried out in test centers (not assessment centers), do not have the right to appeal the results of the advanced testing.

The decision not to grant the right to appeal the results of the advanced testing conducted in test centers might have been rooted in the fact that this type of advanced testing consists of the candidate's self-assessment of the frequency of his/her own self-perceived behavioural indicators in connection to the behavioural indicators set out by law for each general competence.

According to the 2025-2026 Candidate's Handbook, drafted and published by NACS,¹²⁶ candidates that undergo the advanced testing in test centers are required to fill a questionnaire and the candidate must decide to what extent he/she agrees or disagrees with the statement, using a rating scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "never" and 10 means "always".

Thus, since the outcome of the advanced testing conducted in test centers depends heavily on the candidate's own perception and answers to the statements in the questionnaire, the results of this method of testing are inherently less open to appeal.

Nonetheless, this peculiarity of the advanced testing conducted in test centers does not justify entirely depriving candidates of the right to lodge appeals against the results they have obtained, since there still could be other reasons to appeal the results (e.g., the results could be affected by clerical errors regarding the way in which the statements are phrased, by errors of the competition IT platform in compiling the answers and in generating the score).

Therefore, consideration should be given to amending the law in order to regulate the right of candidates to appeal the results of the advanced testing carried out in test centers, especially since these results are, for all intents and purposes, administrative acts and should as such be subject to an administrative appeal.

Finally, according to the Administrative Code, candidates who are dissatisfied with the result of the advanced testing may file a complaint with the administrative court of law.¹²⁷ It is notable that the wording of this provision differs from the similar one regarding filing complaints regarding the eligibility check or the preliminary testing: whereas the latter provision stipulates that complaints may be lodged only by candidates whose appeals regarding the result of the eligibility check or of the preliminary testing have been rejected, the former provision refers to claims filed by the candidates who are dissatisfied with the result of the advanced testing.

Recourse to the administrative court of law is, as a rule, subject to the plaintiff going through a prior complaint procedure, by which the plaintiff tries to settle the matter with the competent public authority/institution before bringing it to court. The prior complaint procedure can also take the form of an administrative appeal procedure, by which the public authority/institution itself reviews the allegations and decides whether they are justified or not.

In the case of the result of the advanced testing conducted in test centers, the question then is raised what is the prior complaint procedure that candidates should undergo before filing the claim with the administrative court of law, since the Administrative Code does not regulate the possibility of an administrative appeal regarding this result (as opposed to the result of the advanced testing conducted in assessment centers, which is subject, according to the Administrative Code, to an appeal lodged with the

¹²⁵ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²⁶ Available at: https://concurs-national.anfp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/Ghidul-candidatului-CN-2025-2026_28.03.2025_pt-site.pdf (accessed: 29.06.2025).

¹²⁷ According to Article 61(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

assessment center). This legal uncertainty all the more justifies the decision to regulate by law the right of candidates to appeal the results of the advanced testing carried out in test centers, so that the appeal procedure can stand in for the prior complaint procedure required under administrative claims law.

67. **Any candidate who is dissatisfied with the results of the advanced testing organized for high level civil servants and certain other managerial positions may lodge an appeal with the appeals committee.**¹²⁸ Within 24 hours after the results of the advanced testing are published, any candidate for a high-level civil service position and for a certain management civil service position¹²⁹ who is dissatisfied may lodge an appeal via the competition IT platform, under penalty of forfeiture of his/her right to appeal.¹³⁰ The appeals against the results of the advanced testing are settled by the assessment center where the appealed testing was conducted, within three working days of the deadline for lodging appeals.¹³¹ The assessment center analyzes the individual report drawn up following the advanced testing of the candidate who lodged the appeal. The analysis is carried out in accordance with the legal provisions that regulate the assessment of general competences (that also apply to the initial advanced testing, as described in point 65 of this report) and with the assessment center's own methodology.¹³² The assessment center uploads to the competition IT platform the result of the appeals.¹³³ The outcome of the appeals is communicated (i) through the competition IT platform, in the candidate's user account, the candidate being notified to this end by e-mail, as well as (ii) on the website of NACS, in the section specially created for this purpose.¹³⁴ Candidates who are dissatisfied with the result of the advanced testing may file a complaint with the administrative court of law.¹³⁵

Box 9. Issues regarding the appeals against the results of the advanced testing conducted in assessment centers

The advanced testing of candidates for high-level civil service positions and for certain management civil service positions (namely, executive director and deputy executive director who are heads of public institutions, director-general and deputy director-general) is conducted in assessment centers.¹³⁶

According to the Administrative Code, candidates that have undergone the advanced testing in assessment centers have the right to lodge an appeal against the result of the testing with the assessment center where the test was conducted.¹³⁷ The legal provisions on this matter provide that:

When an appeal is lodged against the result of the advance testing, the assessment center where the appealed testing was conducted must analyze the individual report of the candidate who lodged the appeal.¹³⁸

The analysis is carried out in accordance with the legal provisions that regulate the assessment of general competences (that also apply to the initial advanced testing, as described in point 65 of this report) and with the assessment center's own methodology.¹³⁹

The assessment center uploads the result of the appeals to the competition IT platform.¹⁴⁰

¹²⁸ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹²⁹ Namely, executive director and deputy executive director who are heads of public institutions, director-general and deputy director-general.

¹³⁰ According to Article 56 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³¹ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³² According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³³ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³⁴ According to Article 60 of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³⁵ According to Article 61(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³⁶ According to Article 3(f) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³⁷ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³⁸ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹³⁹ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁰ According to Article 59(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

Candidates who are dissatisfied with the result of the advanced testing may file a complaint with the administrative court of law.¹⁴¹

There are several potential issues generated by the existing legal provisions, as well as by the fact that the Administrative Code does not further regulate the process appeals settlement process:

The same assessment center that has drawn up the individual report that is the subject of the appeal is also in charge of carrying out the analysis on which the result of the appeal is based. This may raise concerns over the impartiality of the process.

The Administrative Code does not stipulate whether the analysis of the individual report is carried out by a single employee of the assessment center or by a committee comprising several employees. Having the analysis carried out by a single individual may raise concerns over the objectivity of the process.

The Administrative Code does not provide for any involvement of NACS or any other public authority/institution in the process of settling the appeal, so there is no third-party oversight of how the assessment center carries out the analysis.

The Administrative Code does not stipulate what is the scope of the analysis of the individual report carried out following an appeal. The scope of the analysis should be expressly limited by law to the aspects of the individual report/advanced testing result that are the subject of the appeal (e.g., if the appeal refers only to one general competence that the candidate was not acknowledged to have, then the analysis should only cover the behavioural indicators related to that competence).

The Administrative Code does not actually spell out whether, following the analysis of the individual report, the appeal will be formally admitted or rejected. The law simply mentions the assessment center will analyze the individual report and will upload the result of the appeals to the competition IT platform. While this may seem inconsequential, in fact, having the appeal formally rejected could be needed in order for the appellant candidate to have cause to file a claim with the administrative court of law.

This would mean that the result of the advanced testing is an administrative act, i.e., an act issued by a public authority or an assimilated public authority, within the meaning of the law governing administrative court claims.

In fact, according to the Administrative Code, the assessment centers are legal persons of public or private law. This means that, most likely, assessment centers will not be public authorities or assimilated to public authorities, which raises the question of whether the results of the advanced testing carried out by these assessment centers can be subject to claims filed with the administrative court of law if they are not endorsed/formally issued by a public authority (as, for example, NACS).

According to the Administrative Code, the candidate who is dissatisfied with the result of the advanced testing conducted in assessment centers may file a complaint with the administrative court of law. The Administrative Code does not provide that the recourse to the administrative court of law is in any way subject to the candidate first lodging an appeal with the assessment center.

This is notably different from the wording used in the similar legal provision of the Administrative Code that regulates the right to file with the administrative court of law complaints related to the eligibility check and the preliminary testing. This provision specifically refers to the right of candidates to file claims with the administrative court of law if the appeal regarding the eligibility check or the preliminary testing was rejected (meaning that only if the candidate has lodged an appeal and that appeal was rejected, does he/she have cause to file a claim with the administrative court of law).

Thus, the wording of the Administrative Code provision on the right to file a claim with the administrative court of law against the result of the advanced testing conducted in assessment centers needs further clarification:

If lodging an appeal with the assessment center is a prerequisite for filing a claim with the administrative court of law, then the law should clearly set out this prior requirement.

¹⁴¹ According to Article 61(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

If lodging an appeal with the assessment center is not a prerequisite for filing a claim with the administrative court of law, then this raises the question of what the prior complaint procedure applicable in this case is. On this point, it should be highlighted that, as mentioned above, recourse to the administrative court of law is, as a rule, subject to the plaintiff going through a prior complaint procedure, by which the plaintiff tries to settle the matter with the competent public authority/institution, before bringing it to court.

4.8 Management of the pool of successful candidates

68. **Candidates that have successfully passed preliminary and advanced testing are deemed “admitted” following the national competition¹⁴² and are included in the pool of candidates that have passed the national competition, which is managed by NACS.** At the end of the national competition, a final report is drawn up and is published on the website of NACS and uploaded to the competition IT platform, in the section specially created for this purpose¹⁴³. The final report includes the results and scores obtained by the candidates in the national competition, which are generated by the competition IT platform.¹⁴⁴ The candidates that have passed the national competition are included in a pool of candidates, which is managed by NACS through the competition IT platform. Each candidate is included in this pool of candidates for a maximum period of three years starting from the date on which the final report on the national competition was published.¹⁴⁵

69. **Throughout the three-year period they are included in the pool of candidates , the successful candidates can apply to the job-based selection process (the selection stage) organized for any civil service position** (i) that falls within the type for which they have passed the national competition or (ii) that is within the same category, class, and, where appropriate, professional grade, and for which the required level of complexity of the general competences is the same as the one for which they have passed the national competition.¹⁴⁶ Over the three-year period, candidates are automatically notified about the competitions for the position (the selection stage) that are organized for the positions they are eligible for, via the competition IT platform in the candidate's user account and by email.¹⁴⁷ Upon expiry of the three-year period, the competition IT platform automatically (i) blocks the right of candidates to apply to the competitions for the position they had been eligible for after passing the national competition,¹⁴⁸ and (ii) notifies the candidates in their user accounts and by email of being removed from the pool of candidates.¹⁴⁹ It should be noted that being included in the pool of candidates after passing the national competition for a type of civil service position does not preclude candidates from taking part in the national competitions for other types of civil service position. For example, if a candidate passes two rounds of the national competition conducted for two different types of positions, the three-year period over which the candidate has the right to apply to competitions for the position (the selection stage) will be determined, separately, by reference to each round of the national competition he/she has passed.

¹⁴² According to Article 55(5) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴³ According to Article 62(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁴ According to Article 62(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁵ According to Article 63(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁶ According to Article 67(1) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁷ According to Article 63(2) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁸ According to Article 64(5) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

¹⁴⁹ According to Article 63(3) of Annex No 10 to GEO No 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.

4.9 Job-based selection

70. **The job-based selection has been formalized under GEO No. 57/2019 (Administrative Code) and its subsequent amendments, particularly Annex 10 introduced after 2023.** Here, the selection stage is explicitly defined (Annex 10, art. 3 lit. r) as the process organized by the competent public authority, or, for senior civil servants, by a special high-level committee, to verify specific competencies and specialized knowledge. The legislative framework operationalizes the link between general competencies, as regulated in Annex 8 and assessed during the national stage, and the specific competencies to be tested during the post-level stage, which must be derived from a standardized job analysis process. The legislation allocates clear roles: the institution organizes the process, manages publicity, and forms the selection committee, while NACS may provide representatives, guidance, and ex-post compliance checks. Procedurally, the law prescribes announcement of the vacancy to the pre-selected pool, eligibility verification by a dedicated committee, and testing that may involve a written or practical probe, a competency-based interview, and, optionally, a supplementary probe administered by an accredited expert. Scoring is to follow the “correction scale” model, with appeals handled by a dedicated contestation committee. Annex 10 introduces precise definitions and standardizes terminology, such as *Competition IT Platform*, but leaves methodological choices, including the use of Assessment Centers, at the discretion of the organizing authority, provided the competencies and knowledge are adequately tested.

71. **In practice, as evidenced by the 2024 data collected, legal analysis, and the dataset covering 351 finalized competitions across 136 institutions, the “job-based selection” has been implemented with varying degrees of fidelity to the proposed and legislated models.** Institutions largely comply with the eligibility rule that restricts participation to the national pool, but there is significant variation between central and territorial authorities in their capacity to design and execute competency-based selection processes. Frequently, institutions revert to knowledge-heavy written tests that focus on legislation, reminiscent of pre-reform practices, with limited integration of behavioural competency assessments. Where NACS has provided guidance and templates, especially in central government bodies, more structured competency-based interviews have been employed. Digital tools are used for application submission, eligibility checks, and occasionally for test delivery, but job-specific assessments remain predominantly in-person and paper-based. While Annex 10’s formal requirements for committee composition are met on paper, many members lack training in competency-based interviewing, leading to inconsistencies in assessment quality. The most common challenges include limited institutional capacity to define and operationalize specific competencies, misalignment between urgent staffing needs and the length of the two-stage process, and candidate confusion over requirements and platform navigation. Nonetheless, pockets of good practice exist, including the use of job analysis aligned with Annex 8, the inclusion of practical simulations for technical posts, and early coordination between HR departments and NACS in tailoring post-level tests.

Table 6. Comparative synthesis – on the job selection phase

Feature	Initial Model (WB 2020)	Legislation Administrative Code (Annexes 8–10)	Practice
Organizing authority	Institution, with NACS oversight	Institution, with defined roles for NACS & committees	Same as law; NACS involvement varies
Eligibility	From national pool (3 years validity)	From national pool (per Annex 10 art. 3 lit. r)	Generally respected

<i>Focus</i>	Specific competencies + specialized knowledge; AC techniques recommended	Specific competencies + specialized knowledge per job analysis; method not strictly prescribed	Often knowledge-based tests; competency focus inconsistent
<i>Methodology</i>	Assessment Center possible; competency-based interviews	Requires job analysis; defines “expert”; uses correction scale	Variable, central institutions more advanced
<i>Standardization</i>	Proposed templates & tools; flexible	Definitions, committee types, scoring rules codified	Templates sometimes used; no uniform quality
<i>Quality assurance</i>	NACS monitoring & possible observer in committees	Ex-post control allowed; NACS guidance	Monitoring partial; depends on NACS capacity
<i>Candidate experience</i>	Digital platform; structured communication	Platform mandated	Platform used; candidate guidance still weak

72. **The comparison of the initial model, legislative framework, and practical implementation reveals a high degree of alignment in structural terms: the two-stage process is intact, eligibility rules are observed, and institutional responsibilities are broadly respected.** However, notable gaps persist in methodological rigor, particularly in the consistent application of competency-based assessment techniques and the fuller use of supplementary probes. Shortcomings are evident in training and preparation of committee members, the systematic recording of scores and thresholds, and the strategic pacing of assessments to balance efficiency with quality. Critical operational issues include uneven institutional capacity, insufficient integration of the competency framework into practical testing, and limited candidate support in navigating digital platforms. Addressing these challenges will require targeted capacity-building, reinforcement of methodological standards, and enhanced monitoring by NACS to ensure that the principles of meritocracy, transparency, and competency-based recruitment that underpin both the 2020 model and the legislative framework are realized in day-to-day practice.

5 Case study 1: methodological analysis of testing instruments

5.1 Procedural framework, instruments and test administration

73. **According to the procedural framework established by the NACS , the testing stage of the National Competition aims to verify the general competencies required for public service.** According to the Methodology of the Testing Center, preliminary and advanced testing (February 2024), testing constitutes the first phase of the recruitment process and is designed as a unified and standardized mechanism at the national level. It is conducted through the IT platform managed by NACS in accredited testing centers and serves to assess candidates' general competencies and professional potential. The updated Methodology (published in 2024 for the 2025 cycle) reaffirms this objective and specifies that testing is conducted "under standardized conditions, with identical duration and administration procedures for all candidates."

74. **Official documents state that preliminary testing is procedurally standardized and includes instruments designed to measure the general competencies defined by NACS.** According to the same methodology (Chapter 3, paragraphs 2–3), preliminary testing is conducted "exclusively in electronic format through the NACS digital platform" and includes the following tests:

- General knowledge tests – covering "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" and "Public Administration".
- IT test – digital competencies, focused on the use of basic computer applications.
- Cognitive aptitude test, consisting of 33 items (deductive, numerical, and verbal reasoning), with automatic scoring and conversion to STEN scale based on norms provided by the service provider.
- Foreign language test, administered to candidates for senior management positions (not administered in the national recruitment round evaluated).

The Methodology establishes a total duration of 120 minutes and uniform administration conditions for all participants, regardless of the targeted position category.

75. **The Methodology specifies that advanced testing serves to assess the behavioral and managerial competencies of candidates for management positions.** Chapter 7 of the Testing Center Methodology – advanced testing (February 2024) defines this stage as intended for "the assessment of transversal competencies relevant to the exercise of public management functions." The instruments used are the Competency Questionnaire (administered online) and the Assessment Center (organized by accredited providers, based on methodology approved by NACS). The document states that both are "administered under standardized conditions, with uniform application at the national level."

76. **Passing criteria are uniformly established for all categories of public functions, according to the Testing Center Methodology.** For preliminary testing, the passing thresholds are minimum 50% of the maximum score on each test and 60% of the total cumulative score

(Testing Center Methodology – Feb. 2024, art. 5.1.1). For advanced testing¹⁵⁰, the minimum threshold is level 3 on a 1–5 scale for each assessed competency (Advanced Testing Methodology, 2024). These thresholds are applied identically to all categories - entry-level, assistants, directors - without adjustment based on the complexity level of the position.

77. **The analyzed competition session (February–April 2024) did not include senior civil servant positions, hence it did not include the foreign language test or advanced testing through behavioural analysis methods.** According to data provided by NACS for methodological evaluation, the National Competition session covered only candidates for execution-level public functions (entry-level and assistants) and for middle management positions (directors). In this session, there were no candidates for the Senior Civil Servant category; therefore, the specific tests for this level - the foreign language test and the Assessment Center based on behavioural analysis (IN-BASKET), provided in Chapter 7.4 of the methodology, were not administered.

78. **Both sets of tests were administered in the same session through the same digital system, without temporal or procedural separation between stages.** This overlap standardized administrative conditions but eliminated the possibility of distinguishing between the assessment of general competencies and that of behavioural competencies. In the absence of different instruments and distinct application moments, the use of the terms 'preliminary testing' and 'advanced testing' remains formal.

79. **For the entire preliminary testing stage, NACS ensured a unified and equal procedural framework applicable to all participating categories of public functions.** All tests were conducted exclusively in digital format at regional testing centers under video surveillance and with standardized rules regarding duration, access, and administration procedures. Candidates used the same national IT platform, accessed through unique authentication and individual test codes, which enabled automatic and random generation of question sets and automatic scoring of responses.

80. **Tests were completed sequentially, in an order chosen by the candidate, within a single testing session with a maximum duration of three hours,** without differences between candidate categories regarding format, testing conditions, or minimum passing thresholds. The structure of the tests and corresponding response times are summarized in the table below, which reflects the complete architecture of the preliminary testing stage and, by extension, its connection to the advanced testing intended for management positions and senior civil servants.

Table 7. Comparative overview of assessment instruments in the 2024 national competition: structure, duration, and methodological characteristics

Applied Test	Declared Purpose	Structure and Number of Items	Allocated Time	Relevant Notes
<i>Knowledge Test – Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities</i>	Assessment of foundational knowledge regarding human rights principles, equal opportunities, and ethical values of public service.	10 multiple-choice questions randomly selected from a pool of 190 items based on the official bibliography.	30 minutes	Multiple-choice test; automatic scoring; passing threshold ≥50%.

¹⁵⁰ For high level civil servants and certain other managerial civil service jobs (director general, deputy director general, executive director and deputy executive director who are heads of institutions).

Applied Test	Declared Purpose	Structure and Number of Items	Allocated Time	Relevant Notes
<i>Knowledge Test – Public Administration</i>	Assessment of knowledge regarding the organization and functioning of public administration, decision-making processes, and institutional framework.	30 multiple-choice questions randomly selected from a pool of 190 items based on the official bibliography.	30 minutes	Multiple-choice test; automatic scoring; passing threshold $\geq 50\%$.
<i>Digital Skills (IT)</i>	Assessment of basic digital skills aligned with ECDL framework.	20 questions randomly selected from a pool of 201 items across three domains: (1) Computer use/internet/email (64 items); (2) Text editing (67 items); (3) Spreadsheet calculations (70 items).	30 minutes	Single-choice test; automatic scoring; passing threshold $\geq 50\%$.
<i>Cognitive Abilities</i>	Assessment of cognitive aptitudes: deductive reasoning, numerical reasoning, and verbal reasoning.	33 questions (10 deductive, 9 numerical, 14 verbal).	30-45 minutes	Presented as a standardized psychological test; automatic scoring converted to STEN scale (standardized scores 1–10);
<i>Advanced Testing (Behavioral/ Managerial Competencies)</i>	Assessment of general competencies according to the competency framework (Annex VIII, Administrative Code) – but in the participant's guide, it is presented as an attitudinal test.	154 items – situational – attitudinal questionnaire.	Variable (60–120 minutes).	No public technical specification; items rated on 1–10 scale; converted to 1–5 scale (conversion methodology undisclosed);

5.2 Promotion rates and information communicated to candidates

81. **Promotion rates differ significantly across position categories, suggesting variations in test difficulty and instrument calibration.** According to centralized data from official NACS reports for the 2024 session, among eligible candidates who attended preliminary and advanced testing, 86% of entry-level candidates were admitted (668 out of 781 participants), 88% of assistants (294 out of 334), but only 55% of directors (44 out of 80)¹⁵¹.

¹⁵¹ ANFP. (2024). Statistics and Reports – Extended National Competition 2024. Available at: <https://concurs-national.anfp.gov.ro/rezultate/statistici-rapoarte/>

Table 8. Percentage of candidates admitted/rejected in testing

Job Category	Participants in Testing	Admitted	Rejected	Pass Rate
Entry-level	781	668	113	86%
Assistants	333	294	39	88%
Managers	80	44	36	55%
Total	1,194	1,006	188	84%

82. The gap of over 30 percentage points between execution and management levels does not reflect differences in qualification, but rather possible methodological variations in how competencies were assessed. The results also indicate that the cumulative passing rule ("minimum 60% total") affects an additional reduced percentage of candidates, confirming that most rejections stem from failure to reach the 50% threshold on individual tests, predominantly on cognitive aptitudes, rather than from the total cumulative score.

Table 9. Percentage of candidates rejected by test and cumulative criterion

Job Category	Dignity and Equal Opportunities	Public Administration	IT Knowledge	Cognitive Abilities	Below 60% Total Score
Entry-level	4 %	3 %	1 %	7 %	8 %
Assistants	2 %	3 %	2 %	5 %	6 %
Managers	5 %	1 %	0 %	44 %	16 %

83. Information communicated to candidates after testing is limited to raw scores and "Admitted"/"Rejected" qualifications, without explanations regarding score interpretation or the level of competencies demonstrated. According to the Candidate Guide for the National Competition, published on the NACS website, participants receive exclusively the results automatically generated by the digital platform, percentage scores for each test and final admission status. Official documents do not provide for the provision of individual feedback reports, presentation of competency levels achieved, or clarification of the conversion of raw scores to STEN or to percentages of compatibility with the reference standard.

84. At the operational level, the digital platform ensures a high degree of procedural transparency, as for knowledge tests, candidates receive, immediately after completing the test, automatic feedback on their responses, indication of correct and incorrect answers, which confirms the accuracy of the scoring process and eliminates the risk of technical evaluation errors for these tests.

85. However, the absence of interpretive final feedback, both for preliminary tests and, critically, for advanced testing that assesses behavioral competencies, prevents candidates from understanding their performance profile in relation to the general competencies required for public service. Candidates receive no information on which specific competencies require further development, which strengths were demonstrated, or how their results align with the competency framework targeted by the competition. Thus, although testing

is procedurally transparent through uniform conditions and publication of result lists, transparency related to the meaning and diagnostic value of scores remains limited.

5.3 Preliminary testing

5.3.1 Knowledge tests: "fundamental rights and equality of chance" and "public administration"

86. **General knowledge tests serve to verify the level of understanding and application of fundamental concepts necessary for exercising public service functions.** According to the Testing Center Methodology, preliminary and final testing (February 2024), these tests aim to assess theoretical knowledge in the areas of "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" and "Public Administration," considered essential for execution-level and management-level civil servants. They do not measure competencies (complex behavioral constructs) or aptitudes (innate potential), but rather informational acquisitions regarding the normative, institutional, and procedural framework that underpins public administration activity.

87. **Knowledge tests were developed in partnership with academia, ensuring a high level of content expertise and impartiality in question/item development.** According to methodological documents, the tests were developed with support from the Department of Administrative Sciences at "Ovidius" University of Constanța, which contributed to topic selection, item formulation, and content coherence verification. This collaboration constitutes good institutional practice, as it separates test construction from test administration, providing additional guarantees of correctness and neutrality. Tests are administered exclusively online, in multiple-choice format with a single correct answer, with sets randomly generated for each candidate and automatically scored through the national digital platform.

88. **The analysis of the preliminary testing relied primarily on public documents, however, these did not include the minimum technical information necessary to assess the fairness and comparability of knowledge tests, such as item difficulty, piloting, selection criteria, and justification of passing thresholds.** The fact that question sets were randomly generated from an extensive pool implies possible variations in difficulty level between candidates. In the absence of data on item performance (percentage of correct answers, discrimination power), it cannot be determined to what extent each individual test is equivalent in terms of level of difficulty. Additionally, the 50% passing threshold is not accompanied by methodological justification, for example, through a standard cut score setting procedure based on defining the minimum acceptable level of knowledge for access to public service.

89. **However, the extensive database obtained from national testing sessions provides solid premises for subsequent calibration.** Statistical analysis of accumulated performance could allow estimation of average item difficulty, adjustment of passing thresholds, and publication of transparent reasoning regarding the minimum accepted competency level, a measure that would strengthen the credibility and methodological consistency of the tests. According to interviews conducted with the NACS team responsible for organizing the National Competition, such calibration analyses and item reviews have already been initiated, indicating a positive direction toward professionalization and continuous improvement of the testing process.

90. **The "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" test aims to assess general knowledge regarding constitutional principles, human rights, equal treatment, and non-discrimination, as fundamental values of public service.** According to the methodology, the test serves to verify understanding of the legal reference framework and correct application of legal provisions in routine administrative situations. Items target basic concepts from constitutional and administrative law, principles of equal opportunities, and public ethics norms,

with emphasis on correct interpretation of concepts and civil servant responsibilities. The test is common to all categories of public service positions and is administered online, in multiple-choice format with a single answer, randomly selected for each candidate from a common question pool.

Table 10. Statistical indicators¹⁵² for the "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" Test (2024)

Indicator	Entry-level (N=781)	Assistants (N=333)	Managers (N=80)
Mean	74	76,5	71,4
Median	80	80	70
Mode	80	80	80
Standard Deviation (STDEV)	15,41	15,75	13,94
Skewness (Skew) ¹⁵³	-0.54	-0.61	-0.54
Rejection Rate	4%	2%	5%

91. **Statistical analysis of the results shows a high level of average performance and generally low-test difficulty for all candidate categories.** Central tendency values indicate means between 71 and 76 points and medians close to 80, confirming a distribution concentrated in the upper range of the scale. Negative skewness indicators (Skew between -0.54 and -0.61) highlight a pronounced accumulation of scores above the passing threshold, while moderate standard deviations (≈ 14 –15 points) reflect high group homogeneity.

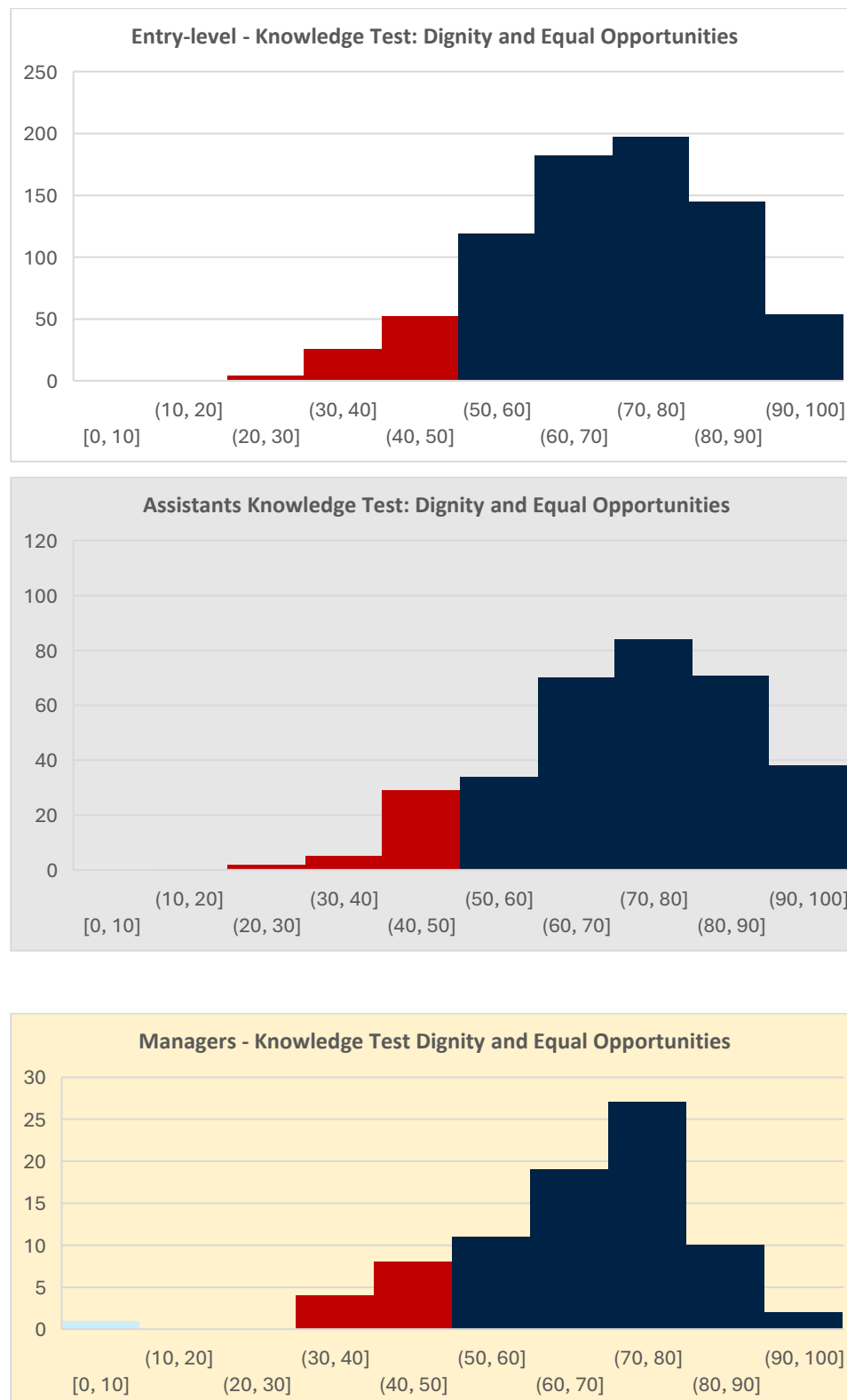
92. **These characteristics describe a test with low discriminatory power, which verifies mastery of a common knowledge set but does not distinguish between candidates with advanced competency levels.** Ceiling distributions and the absence of extreme values suggest that the test functions more as a mechanism for minimal knowledge verification than as an effective selection instrument.

93. **The characteristics of the Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities test seem to indicate that this test is designed to ensure that all candidates meet a minimum knowledge requirement in a critical legal and ethical domain.** In this case, the current calibration might be broadly appropriate: the test operates as a threshold verification tool rather than a selection instrument. If future policy aims to use this test for ranking or for distinguishing between different competency levels, then recalibration and increased difficulty would be necessary. However, as long as its role remains that of confirming a minimum baseline knowledge, its present design could be considered aligned with its purpose.

¹⁵² Source: ANFP website - <https://concurs-national.anfp.gov.ro/rezultate/statistici-rapoarte/>

¹⁵³ Negative skewness (Skew < 0) indicates distributions concentrated in the upper range of the scale—the tests were easy, and most candidates obtained high scores.

Figure 8. Distribution¹⁵⁴ of scores on the "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" test, by civil service position category (2024)



¹⁵⁴ The graphs illustrates the distribution of results for the three position levels—entry-level, assistants, and directors. The horizontal axis indicates score ranges (0–100), and the vertical axis shows the number of candidates in each 10-point interval.

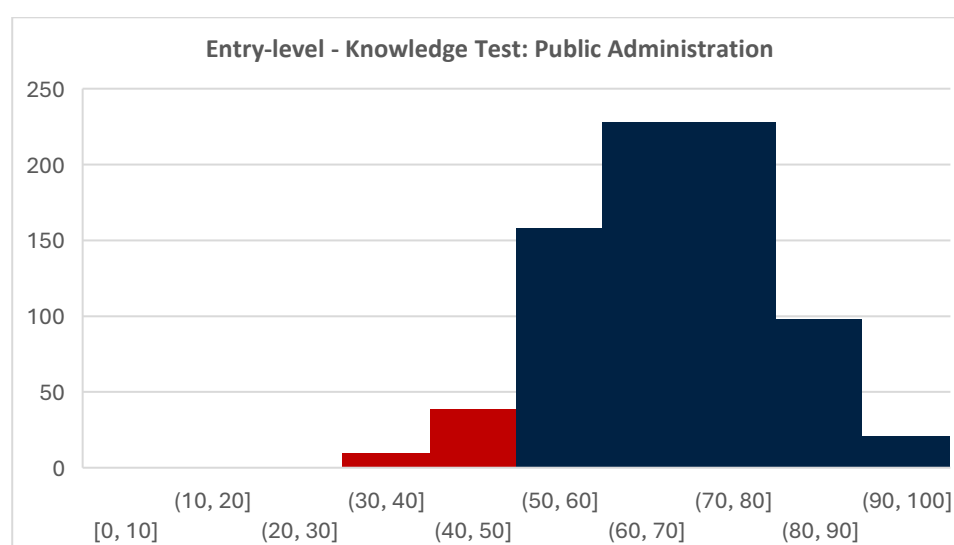
94. The "Public Administration" test aims to verify theoretical and applied knowledge regarding the organization and functioning of public authorities, principles of good governance, and the legislative framework of public service. According to NACS methodology, the test seeks to assess the degree of understanding of administrative mechanisms, relationships between institutional levels, and principles of ethics and transparency that govern civil servant activity. Items cover essential topics from public management, administrative procedures, and administration–citizen relations, formulated in multiple-choice format with a single correct answer. The test applies to all categories of public service positions and is administered digitally through the national testing platform, which automatically generates question sets from a common pool and performs automatic scoring of responses.

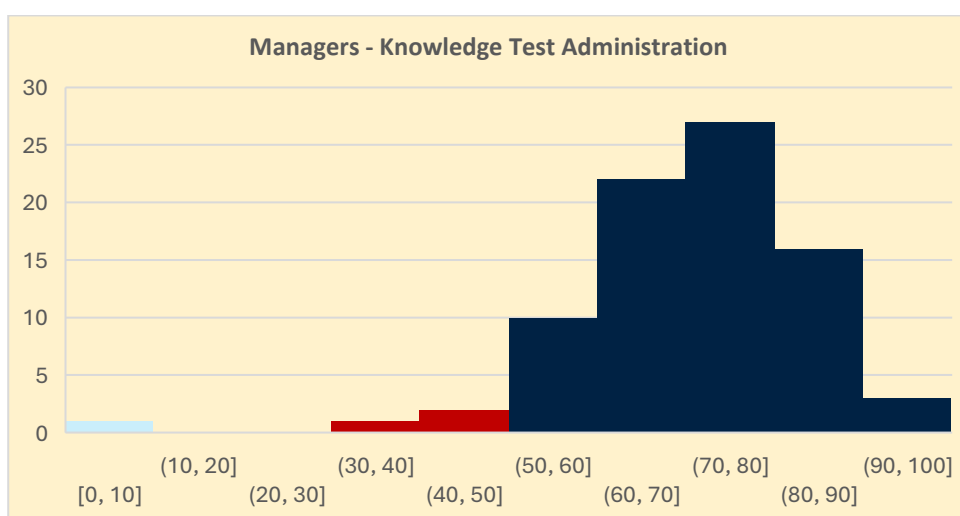
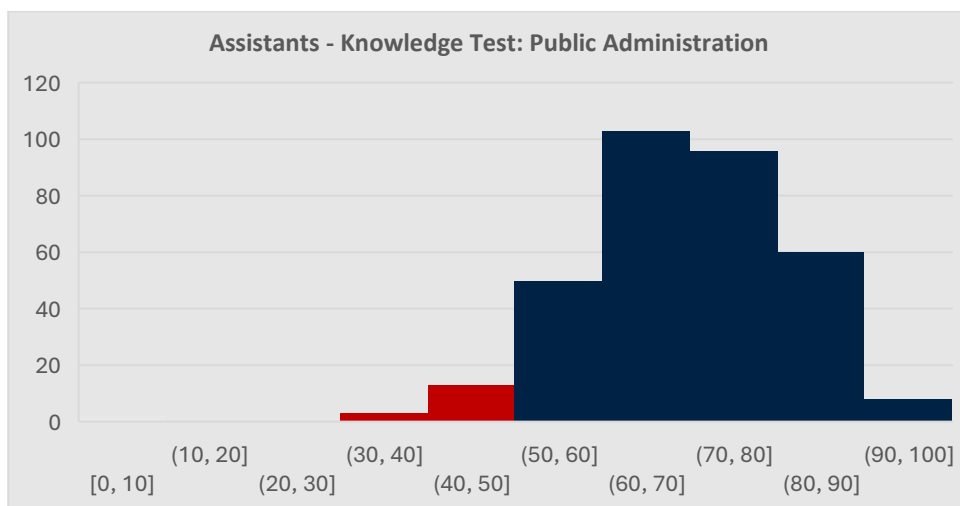
Table 11. Statistical results for the "public administration" test (2024)

Indicator	Entry-level (N=781)	Assistants (N=333)	Managers (N=80)
Mean	69	71,0	72,5
Median	70	70	73,33
Mode	73,33	73,33	73,33
Standard Deviation (STDEV)	11,74	12,14	11,01
Skewness (Skew)	-0.15	-0.65	-0.32
Rejection Rate	4%	3%	1%

95. The "Public Administration" test has a similar distribution but with a slight shift of the peak toward the 60–70 point range. This tendency indicates a marginally higher difficulty level compared to the first test, though differences are small. For entry-level and assistant candidates, scores are concentrated in the 60–90 range, and standard deviations (11–12 points) show low variability. For directors, the distribution is more compact, with clear concentration around the 60–80 point range and moderate negative skewness (–0.32). This profile shows that the test maintains a high level of homogeneity but with reduced differentiation between candidates and no significant variations across groups.

Figure 9. Distribution of Scores on the "Public Administration" Knowledge Test, by Public Service Position Category (2024)





96. **The results obtained on the "Public Administration" test show a statistical profile similar to that observed for the "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" test, characterized by high mean values and reduced dispersion.** Means range between 69 and 73 points, medians around 70–73, and negative skewness indicators (Skew between –0.15 and –0.65) show a concentration of scores in the upper range of the scale. Moderate standard deviations (≈ 11 –12 points) reflect high group homogeneity, suggesting low difficulty and a ceiling distribution similar to that observed in the "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" test. The test fulfills the function of verifying basic knowledge regarding public administration principles and mechanisms but does not succeed in highlighting relevant differences between candidates with higher competency levels. Thus, the test has predominantly certificative value, confirming the existence of a common level of institutional literacy but not providing information about the degree of knowledge applicability in real administrative contexts.

97. **Comparison of the two knowledge tests reveals similar structure and functionality.** The larger number of items in the "Public Administration" test (30, compared to 10 in the "Fundamental Rights" test) suggests slightly better score stability, as a larger volume of questions reduces the influence of chance on the final result. However, this conclusion is presumptive, as available data do not include item analysis or reliability coefficients (e.g., Cronbach's Alpha, split-half reliability). For objective confirmation of reliability, an ex-post analysis based on the existing database is recommended: calculation of internal consistency coefficients, verification of item-total correlations, and identification of questions that do not contribute to test stability. Such analysis would enable documentation of instrument quality and statistical justification of future

revisions, in accordance with standard practices recommended by AERA/APA/NCME (2014) and international professional selection bodies (EPSO, ETS).

98. **Moving forward, once the system is consolidated, future development of knowledge tests should aim at integrating them into situational-judgmental exercises that allow observation of knowledge application in concrete administrative contexts.** To move beyond theoretical knowledge, these tests can be constructed to leverage knowledge of "Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities" and "Public Administration", through tasks requiring candidates to analyze, draft, explain, decide, and act according to their knowledge (the skills component within the competency sphere). For example, knowledge regarding human dignity, equal treatment, and professional ethics can be applied in scenarios involving resolution of a discrimination complaint, management of a conflict of interest, or drafting an internal memo on compliance with integrity standards. Similarly, public administration concepts can be tested through exercises involving prioritization of citizen requests, coordination of an administrative process, or justification of a decision based on applicable legal framework. Through such tests, knowledge is no longer assessed in isolation but becomes an integral part of observable behavior in tasks relevant to public service, providing a much completer and more predictive picture of the candidate's actual professional competency at the time of assessment.

5.3.2 Knowledge test in the field of digital technologies (IT)

99. **The knowledge test in the field of digital technology aims to verify candidates' general level of digital literacy in relation to the minimum requirements for technology use in routine administrative activity.** According to the Testing Center Methodology – preliminary testing (February 2024), the test is designed as a standardized instrument, administered electronically, intended to assess candidates' ability to use computer equipment, office applications, and digital communication environments. The test seeks to confirm that participants possess the fundamental competencies necessary for working in a digital environment - namely, computer operation, internet navigation, email communication, and use of common applications for writing and data processing. The test is eliminatory in nature and applies to all candidates, regardless of the targeted public service position category, representing a mandatory stage of preliminary testing conducted in NACS-accredited centers.

100. **According to the mentioned methodology, the test is structured into three thematic modules: computer use, internet, and email (64 questions), text editing – Microsoft Word (67 questions), and spreadsheet calculation – Microsoft Excel (70 questions), for a total duration of 30 minutes.** Most likely, the high number of questions indicated in the documentation reflects the complete pool of items available in the database and not the actual set received by each candidate in the testing session. However, it is not clear to what extent the automatic question selection criteria and their difficulty level were calibrated to ensure equivalence between generated tests. In the absence of this information, it can be assessed that the test had a predominantly screening role, aimed at confirming a minimum threshold of digital literacy.

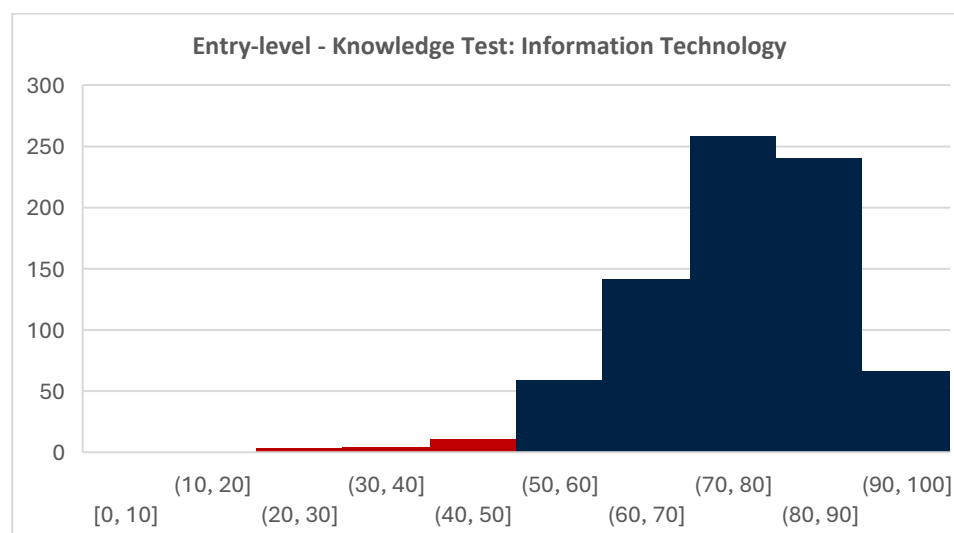
101. **Statistical analysis based on candidate results indicates high overall performance and low-test difficulty for all analyzed categories.** Mean scores range between 78 and 82 points, with medians constant in the 80–85 range, confirming a tendency for results to concentrate in the upper range of the scale. Score distributions are strongly negatively skewed (Skew = –0.72 for entry-level, –1.00 for assistants, and –0.64 for directors), indicating a pronounced accumulation of results above the mean. Reduced standard deviations (approximately 11 points) support the hypothesis of high-performance homogeneity, and the concentration of values in the 70–90-point range suggests a low difficulty level. For execution-level categories (entry-level and assistants), nearly identical results show that the test does not differentiate distinct levels of digital competency. For management positions, the slightly higher mean (≈82 points) does not reflect superior test complexity but rather greater familiarity with the

professional digital environment. Overall, the uniform distribution and lack of significant variation confirm the test's screening¹⁵⁵ character, useful for validating basic digital literacy.

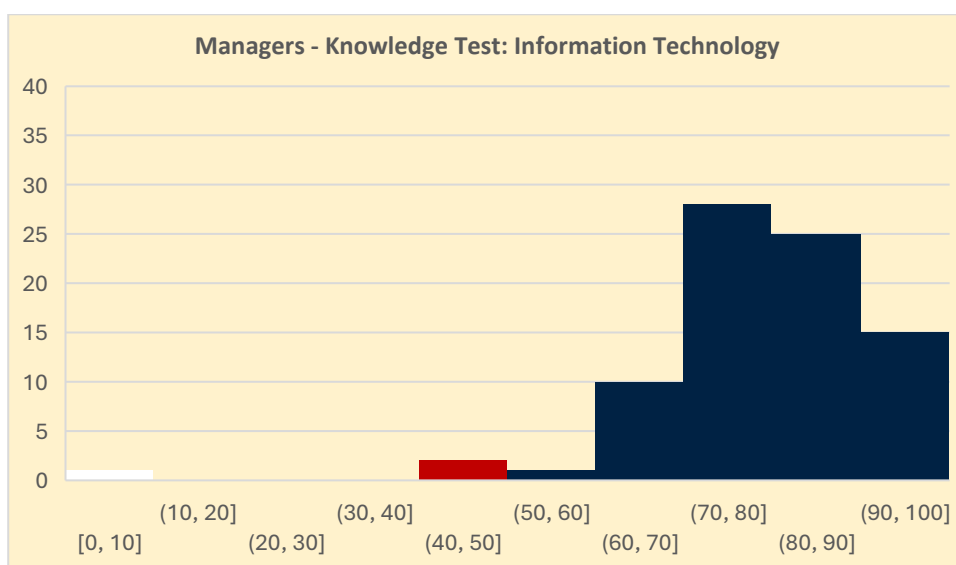
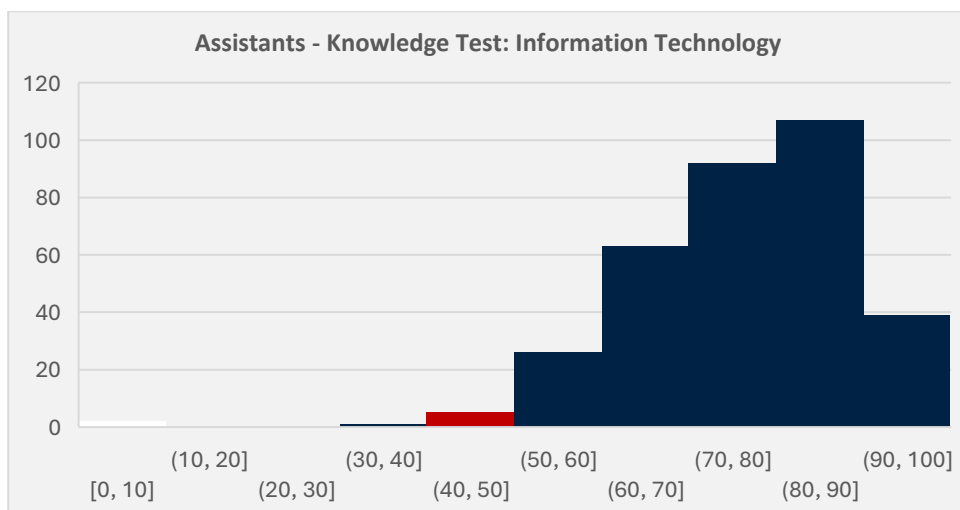
Table 12. Statistical results for the "IT Knowledge" test (2024)

Indicator	Entry-level (N=781)	Assistants (N=333)	Managers (N=80)
Mean	78	78,9	81,9
Median	80	80	80
Mode	85	85	80
Standard Deviation (STDEV)	11,71	12,47	10,66
Skewness (Skew)	-0.72	-1.00	-0.64
Rejection Rate for the IT Knowledge Test	1%	2%	0%

Figure 10. Distribution of scores on the "IT Knowledge" test, by civil service position category



¹⁵⁵ Screening tests are designed for rapid identification, not for fine discrimination between high levels of performance. Cullen, B., O'Neill, B., Evans, J. J., Coen, R. F., & Lawlor, B. A. (2007). "A review of screening tests for cognitive impairment". *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, 78(8), 790-799.



102. **From a methodological perspective, the results confirm that the digital knowledge test functioned predominantly as an instrument for verifying basic digital literacy.** According to the Testing Center Methodology, preliminary testing (2024), the test is administered exclusively electronically, containing automatically generated single-answer items, but the document does not specify selection criteria, difficulty, or weighting. Interviews confirmed that questions involve practical application of knowledge or only recognition of theoretical concepts regarding digital application use. In the absence of more details, it cannot be assessed with certainty the extent to which the test verifies functional competencies essential for administrative activity. From this perspective, the instrument fulfils its purpose of validating a minimum threshold of digital literacy but has reduced predictive value regarding applied digital performance.

103. **IT test results must also be interpreted in the context of candidates' socio-educational profile, who most likely acquired basic digital competencies during university education.** The rejection rate was low, approximately 1–2% among entry-level and assistant candidates, and no candidate from the director category was eliminated at this test. Most participants come from generations who completed their studies in digital or hybrid environments, used online learning platforms, and electronic tools for drafting and submitting academic work. In this context, the test confirms the existence of a common and expected competency, elementary digital literacy.

104. **A stronger and broader digital-competency assessment is needed to accurately reflect the skills required in today's public administration.** The current methodology for the IT

test specifies that only a narrow subset of digital knowledge is evaluated, focusing mainly on basic operations such as email use and elementary Office and Excel functions. While these skills remain relevant, they represent only the most fundamental layer of digital literacy. To align with current expectations for public-sector roles, the digital component should be broadened to capture the core competencies defined in DigCompRO and in the recently proposed digital competency framework model for the public administration¹⁵⁶, including information and data literacy, digital communication, content creation, safety, and digital problem-solving. At the same time, it is reasonable to maintain the threshold at a basic level, as the purpose of the test is to verify minimum digital skills, with more advanced competences expected to be developed on the job - especially for roles that are not specialized digital profiles.

105. Moving forward, recommendations on the future adaptation of the IT test need to be aligned with the phased introduction of the proposed digital competency framework for the public administration that was developed under a TSI¹⁵⁷ project. Recommendations on the minimum threshold for IT skills and the minimum set of general digital competencies targeted to be tested in the national competition, as well as potential future expansion to a broader set of digital competencies are included in Output 3¹⁵⁸ under the TSI project.

¹⁵⁶ Under the Technical Support Instrument project on Developing a General Digital Competency Framework for the Public Administration, financed by the European Commission and implemented by the World Bank

¹⁵⁷ Idem

¹⁵⁸ World Bank, Output 3 – Recommendations for introduction and operationalization of the general digital competency framework in the public administration, developed under the TSI project Developing a General Digital Competency Framework for the Public Administration, 2025.

5.3.3 Cognitive aptitude test

106. **According to the Testing Center Methodology, preliminary testing (2024, revised), the cognitive aptitude test serves to identify the extent to which the cognitive requirements of public service align with the individual's capacity to meet the intellectual demands specific to the position¹⁵⁹.** This approach is consistent with specialized literature and international psychological standards, according to which general cognitive aptitude tests (GMA – General Mental Ability) represent the most robust predictors of professional performance and learning capacity, especially when combined with other structured selection procedures, such as structured interviews or integrity assessment (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Schmidt & Oh, 2016). At the same time, the use of these instruments in recruitment and promotion processes must be supported by evidence of validity and reliability specific to the target population, in accordance with SIOP Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures (2018) and Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014). These standards require the existence of adequate norming, complete technical documentation, and correct interpretation of scores before they can support decisions with direct impact on candidates' careers. In this regard, the declared intention of the cognitive aptitude test within the National Competition aligns with internationally validated practices but must be supported by rigorous empirical demonstration of these psychometric requirements in the specific context of public service in Romania.

107. **The formulation in the Testing Center Methodology (2024), "the cognitive aptitude score represents the percentage of compatibility of the assessed person relative to a predefined performance standard/targeted position", cannot be confirmed due to the absence of documentation.** Such a performance standard was not documented through predictive validity studies or job analyses that establish optimal levels of cognitive aptitudes for each functional category. According to international standards (SIOP, 2018; AERA/APA/NCME, 2014), defining a performance standard requires empirical demonstration of a correlation between cognitive test scores and actual job performance, based on representative samples. In the absence of evidence, such as predictive validity studies, technical norming reports, or scientific articles documenting the instrument's norming at least on the Romanian population with higher education (a category that includes civil servants), the claim regarding "percentage of compatibility with the predefined performance standard/targeted position" cannot be confirmed without access to documentation.

108. **The cognitive aptitude test is presented by the service provider and test instrument author as a standardized psychological assessment, validated on the Romanian population and endorsed by the Romanian College of Psychologists.** Its purpose is to measure deductive reasoning, numerical aptitude, and verbal aptitude, dimensions considered fundamental for analyzing and solving problems encountered in administrative activity. The test contains 33 items, of which 10 for deductive reasoning, 9 for numerical aptitude, and 14 for verbal aptitude, and is administered in online format, with allocated time between 30 and 45 minutes. Results are expressed in standardized STEN scores (1–10), converted from raw scores based on norms established for each category of public service positions. For execution-level positions (entry-level and assistants), the recommended threshold is between STEN 5–10, and for management positions between STEN 6–10, with the final score representing the candidate's percentage of compatibility with the position profile.

¹⁵⁹ ANFP, National Competition Methodology 2024, p. 27. The formulation should be clarified. A cognitive aptitude test does not measure the "alignment" between job requirements and individual capacity, but rather estimates general cognitive potential that can predict performance in complex tasks. The expression "cognitive requirements of public service" is also too general in the absence of a job analysis that defines these specific requirements.

109. The testing methodology describes this threshold as *objective and indisputable*, being used as the basis for recommending or not recommending the candidate. Passing the test is conditional on obtaining a general score of at least 50% on the cognitive aptitude test and 60% at the preliminary testing level. These criteria provide a clear delineation of minimum accepted performance. The Bank team did not have access to additional details on the norming process, item selection, or psychometric analysis of instrument reliability, essential elements for confirming the objective and replicable character of the test in successive applications for the purpose of the National Competition.

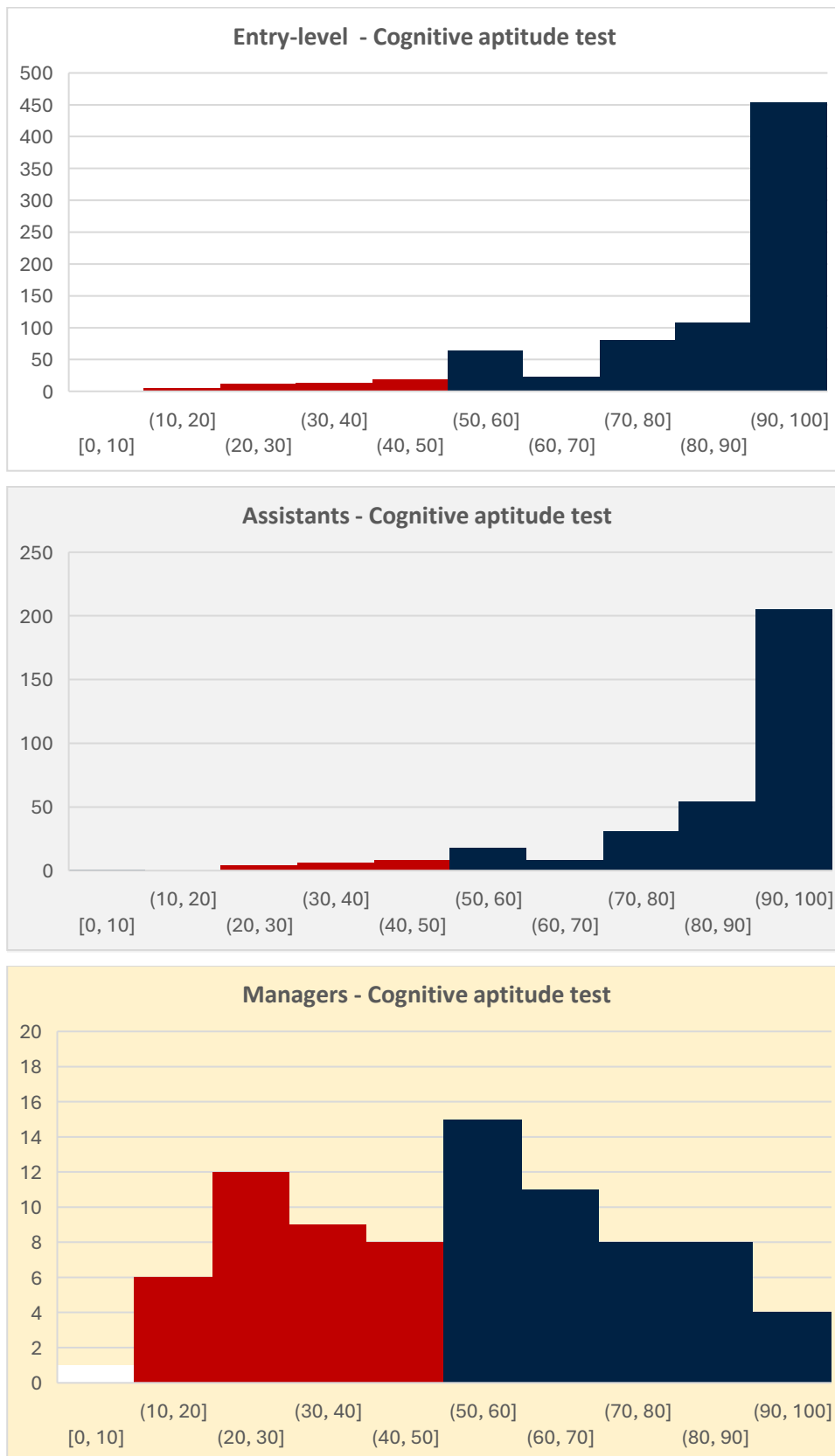
Table 13. Statistical results for the "cognitive aptitudes" test (2024)

Indicator	Entry-level (N=781)	Assistants (N=333)	Managers (N=80)
Mean	85.0	87.8	51.8
Median	100	100	52.7
Mode	100160	100	77.4
Standard Deviation (STDEV)	20.6	18.4	22.5
Skewness (Skew)	-1.38	-1.52	-0.08
Rejection Rate for the Aptitude Test	7%	5%	44%

110. Analysis of the results from cognitive aptitude test and score distribution raises an essential question regarding the methodological framework of score reporting. According to the methodology, results should be expressed in standardized STEN scores (range 1–10), calculated based on norming for each functional category, with recommended thresholds also defined in STEN terms (5–10 for execution, 6–10 for management). However, the reported values, means of 85.0 and 87.8 points for execution, maximums of 100, and distributions with ceiling effect for over half of candidates, suggest that the presented data are raw percentage scores, not STEN scores. This discrepancy indicates either that the STEN standardization process was not effectively applied, or that internal reporting uses a different metric than that described in official documentation. If scores had truly been converted to STEN according to a normal distribution, it would be impossible for over 50% of candidates to obtain the maximum score (STEN 10), because by definition, STEN 9–10 represents only the top 7% of the reference distribution. This confusion between raw scores and standardized scores impacts result interpretation and makes it impossible to evaluate the validity of the declared norming, as it cannot be verified whether norming was conducted according to psychometric principles or whether scores merely reflect a simple mathematical conversion without normalization on the relevant population.

¹⁶⁰ When mode, median, and maximum score coincide for over 50% of candidates, the test exhibits extreme ceiling effect, rendering it unable to differentiate cognitive aptitude levels within this group—a fundamental violation of psychometric validity essential for selection instruments. According to Standard 4.10 of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014), such situations compromise the test's capacity to provide discriminated and relevant scores for individual decisions.

Figure 11. Distribution of Scores on the Cognitive Aptitude Test by Public Service Position Category



111. **Statistical analysis reveals significant polarization between execution and management categories, suggesting that the cognitive aptitude test had real selection effect for management positions.** The major differences between results obtained by these

categories likely indicate the use of distinct psychometric instruments or the application of different norms and calibrations for the same items. For entry-level and assistant candidates, distributions are completely ceiling-bound: over half of candidates obtained the maximum score (100) and means between 85–88 points confirm a very low difficulty level. In contrast, for management positions the situation is reversed, nearly 44% of candidates failed to reach half of the possible score, and the overall mean of 51.8 points signals a significantly more difficult test.

112. For execution-level positions, the test appears to have had a primarily formal value, confirming the existence of a minimum threshold of cognitive aptitudes but without the capacity to efficiently discriminate between different levels of intellectual performance. Uniformly high results with pronounced ceiling effect indicate that the instrument measured basic capacity for understanding and solving standardized tasks. Under these conditions, the test functioned practically as a screening mechanism.

113. Discrepancies between instruments used cannot be explained by real differences in cognitive aptitudes between hierarchical levels. The absence of technical documentation clarifying the nature of these differentiations limits the analysis in terms of comparability of results between position categories. An illustrative example shows the problematic nature of the situation: the same person, if taking the test for an execution position and later for a management position, could obtain fundamentally different results, suggesting "distinct" levels of cognitive aptitudes, even though both tests measure the same dimensions (deductive, numerical, and verbal reasoning). Such variation does not reflect real changes in the candidate's cognitive capacities but rather differences in norming between categories. Consequently, a unified norming procedure and cross-validation of test versions are required to guarantee correctness of result comparison and coherent application of evaluation standards across hierarchical levels.

114. Overall, the cognitive aptitude test represents an essential component in the methodological architecture of the National Competition, having the potential to measure general aptitudes relevant to performance in public administration. In the future, the current methodology could be improved. The test, by its nature, should act as a pre-selection instrument, intended to identify learning potential and competency development capacity, not serve as a final selection test with ranking or differentiation effect among candidates with closely similar high scores¹⁶¹. Its fundamental purpose is to assess whether the evaluated person possesses sufficient cognitive resources to assimilate and subsequently apply the knowledge and skills required by the position. However, to fully support a coherent and merit-based selection process, the instrument would benefit from recalibration and updated norming. These adjustments would allow the test to better fulfil its intended purpose while maintaining its contribution to a rigorous and fair recruitment system.

5.4 Advanced testing

115. According to the Testing Center Methodology, Advanced Testing (2024), this stage aims to assess behavioural and managerial competencies relevant to the exercise of public management functions. Chapter 7 of the Methodology specifies that advanced testing seeks to measure transversal competencies - communication, leadership, citizen orientation, strategic thinking, performance management, and integrity - through specific instruments such as the

¹⁶¹ Psychometric literature and organizational practice recognize cognitive aptitude tests primarily as pre-selection instruments, with the main role of identifying a minimum threshold of cognitive capacity necessary for developing position-specific competencies. These instruments contribute to eliminating candidates whose cognitive levels are insufficient, maximizing selection process efficiency. Fine distinction between candidates who exceed this threshold requires robust psychometric tests with high reliability, alongside additional assessments that complete the competency profile.

Competency Questionnaire and Assessment Center (In-Basket exercises, case analysis, presentation, and competency-based interview). In the official conception, advanced testing represents the higher level of the evaluation process, intended to verify candidates' capacity to manifest observable behaviours associated with key competencies within the general framework of the civil servant.

116. In the official conception, advanced testing should function as a direct assessment of competencies, integrating results from other tests and providing a complete perspective on the candidate's professional profile. In its current form, advanced testing differs across two categories of civil service jobs:

- (i) for execution-level jobs and some of the managerial job (head of service, director, deputy director), advanced testing relies on an online attitudinal questionnaire focused on identifying candidates' agreement with general statements about conduct and choices, which is intended to be linked with the general competencies;
- (ii) for the other civil service jobs the advanced testing phase relies on more adapted competency-based testing instruments; however, these jobs were not included in the 2024 national recruitment process and therefore are not covered by the current evaluation.

117. The online questionnaire used in the advanced testing phase for execution-level jobs and managerial jobs targeted through the 2024 national recruitment rounds had almost no screening effect, given its 99.9% pass rate (1 candidate rejected out of 1,194 evaluated for entry-level, assistant, and director positions). This uniformity demonstrates that the test does not allow to properly differentiate between candidates, all are declared competent regardless of actual level of competency mastery. The official results therefore seem to indicate that the instrument has limited selective or diagnostic relevance.

118. The Bank team did not have access to examples of advanced testing questions, but interviews indicate that questions could be improved in terms of their correlation with the behavioural descriptors that define the competencies provided in Annex VIII of the Administrative Code. Interviews pointed out that the online questionnaire did not include any questions on the candidates' strategic or operational abilities: whether they can deliver a coherent presentation, whether they can critically analyze and synthesize an administrative document, whether they can draft a substantiated report, whether they can collaborate effectively in a team or if they can prioritize interventions.

119. However, given that the Bank team did not have access to test questions or test documentation, this evaluation report can only highlight potential limitations. This evaluation cannot confirm its status as a validated psychological instrument nor its relevance for measuring civil servant competencies.

120. Psychodiagnostics' instruments, even when scientifically validated, cannot substitute for assessment of complex professional competencies. Cognitive aptitude tests (GMA), personality inventories (Big Five), or situational judgment tests (SJT) measure general potential, preferences, or attitudes, but not actual performance in specific work tasks including those pertaining to public service. These instruments operate at a level of abstraction that limits their power to capture behaviors relevant to the professional context, including the particular context of the administrative domain.

121. For example, a verbal reasoning test requiring synonym identification does not measure institutional communication competency, just as a logical reasoning test does not reflect administrative problem-solving competency. Both assess general cognitive capacities but do not verify their application in real work situations, where competencies manifest behaviorally through action (abilities, skills), decision-making, and interaction. Thus, even the

most robust psychometric tests can only have an orientation role in training programs, but are not apt to be used in selection processes.

122. **Valid assessment of professional competencies requires observation of behaviour in action and reproduction of conditions as close as possible to the context of activities in fulfilling a public service function.** Such an approach presupposes that the assessment includes simulations of relevant tasks, drafting a document, analyzing a data set, prioritizing competing requests, or communicating with institutional actors - through which the candidate effectively demonstrates the assessed competencies. This is the logic of work sample testing and assessment center methodologies, recognized in specialized literature as methods with superior content validity.¹⁶² According to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014, Standard 11.16), "when the purpose of assessment is prediction of performance in job-specific tasks, content validity is critical - tests must include representative samples of critical job tasks." Current digital platforms allow implementation of this type of assessment at large scale, through interactive simulations and scoring based on explicit behavioral criteria (Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales – BARS), providing both scientific rigor and logistical efficiency.

123. **The analysis of the 2024 National Competition, based on the official test results and information obtained through interviews, suggests that the advanced testing questionnaire needs to be improved to ensure alignment with the principles of competency-based assessment.** The test ensures limited differentiation between candidates and provides insufficient evidence of behavioural or managerial capability. This evaluation highlights an important opportunity: the test's continued use after the pilot phase demonstrates institutional commitment to integrating competency-oriented tools in recruitment. However, for effectiveness, this should be continued only with clearer methodological grounding, stronger evidence of validity, to ensure that the instrument would evolve into a meaningful component of the recruitment process. Strengthening it would support the broader objective of reinforcing merit-based recruitment and enhancing confidence in the public service competition system.

5.5 Interpretation of candidates' results from a methodological perspective

124. **Results communicated to candidates include only the numerical scores and general qualifications on written tests, accompanied by two verdicts: Admitted / Rejected (at "Preliminary Testing" and "Advanced Testing").** This reporting method provides no information regarding the level of manifestation of competencies provided in Annex VIII of the Administrative Code, such as communication, integrity, problem-solving, planning, teamwork, initiative, or citizen orientation. The typical format appears as follows:

Table 14 Candidate test scores extracted from NACS website

Identifier	Final Result	Dignity & Equality	Public Administration	IT (F)	Cognitive Aptitude	Preliminary Total Score	Preliminary Testing	Advanced Testing
2UNV7H9	Rejected	40	53.33	80	76	62.34	Rejected	Admitted
786MC15U	Rejected	70	60	75	7.67	53.17	Rejected	Admitted

¹⁶² Thornton, G. C., III, & Rupp, D. E. (2006). *Assessment centers in human resource management: Strategies for prediction, diagnosis, and development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

6C0HU37	Admitted	90	76.67	90	100	89.17	Admitted	Admitted
DTSP6EG	Admitted	80	70	75	100	81.25	Admitted	Admitted

125. According to the methodology of the National Competition, final results should be reported on a scale of 1 to 5 for each competency, accompanied by a clear description of the significance of the obtained level.

Table 15 Results report for each competency

Candidate / Identification Number		
COMPETENCY	Score Obtained	Level/ Interpretation
Problem Solving and Decision Making	3.75	advanced
Planning and Organizing	4.75	excellent
Initiative	2.75	medium
Communication	2.25	critical
Teamwork	3.00	medium
Integrity	4.25	advanced
Citizen Orientation	3.75	advanced
Final Score	3.50	Admitted / Rejected

126. If results are presented on distinct levels for each competency (from 1 to 5), they could become a useful instrument not only for selection but also for professional development and career guidance. Rejected candidates could clearly identify areas where they need to improve before a new competition participation, and admitted candidates could subsequently compete, fairly and on merit, for positions requiring higher levels of mastery of specific competencies. Additionally, institutional mentors could use these data to guide the integration and initial training process ("on the job"), prioritizing development of competencies where the candidate's level is only minimally acceptable.

127. The calculation of results from tests of different natures - knowledge, IT, and cognitive aptitudes - into a single percentage score should also be reconsidered. These tests measure distinct constructs: knowledge tests verify informational acquisitions and degree of familiarity with the domain, while the aptitude test estimates cognitive potential and capacity to learn or apply logical reasoning. These dimensions are not comparable¹⁶³, lacking the same unit of measurement, distribution, or psychological significance. Establishing a single passing threshold (e.g., 60% average result) should also be reconsidered: an easy test with small

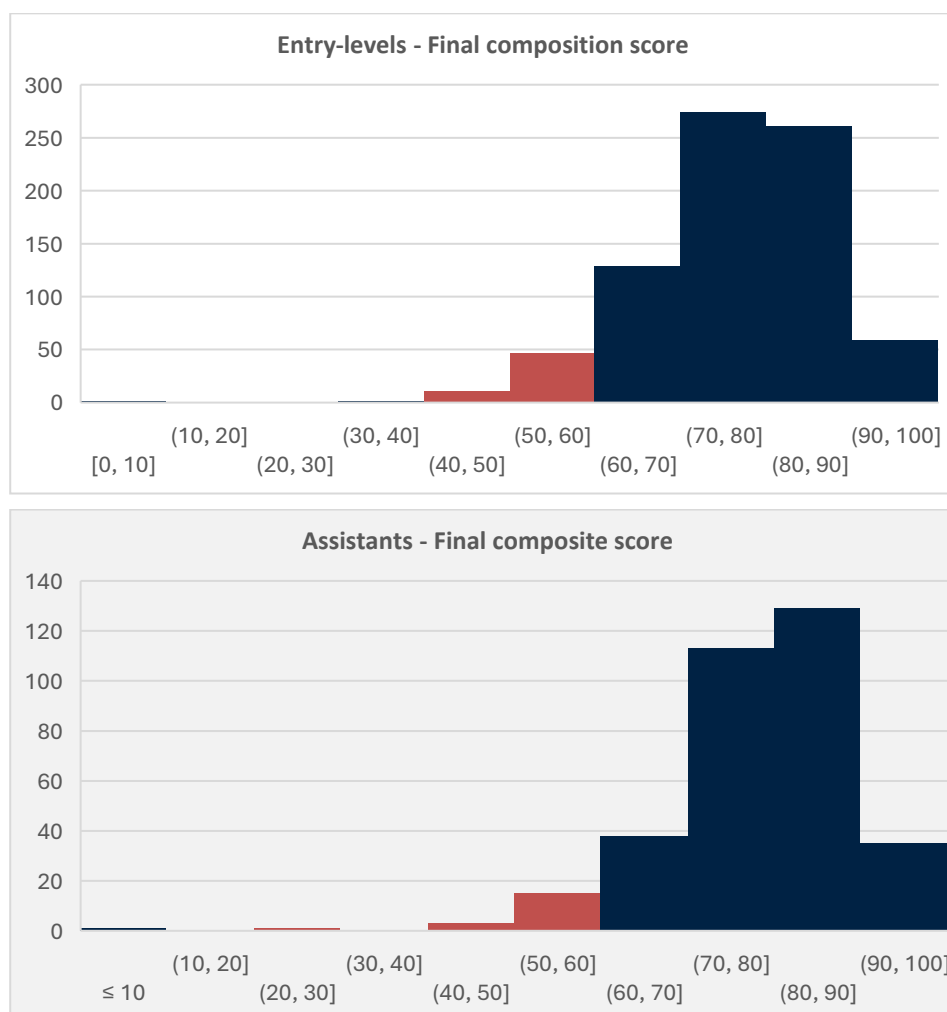
¹⁶³ According to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014, Standard 5.1), score aggregation is permitted only if there is evidence that they reflect the same underlying construct and can contribute to valid cumulative measurement. In the absence of such evidence, the arithmetic mean of heterogeneous scores produces an artificial indicator without diagnostic value. For example, a candidate with a high score on knowledge but weak on cognitive aptitudes can obtain the same final average as another with inversely distributed scores, even though their professional profiles are fundamentally different.

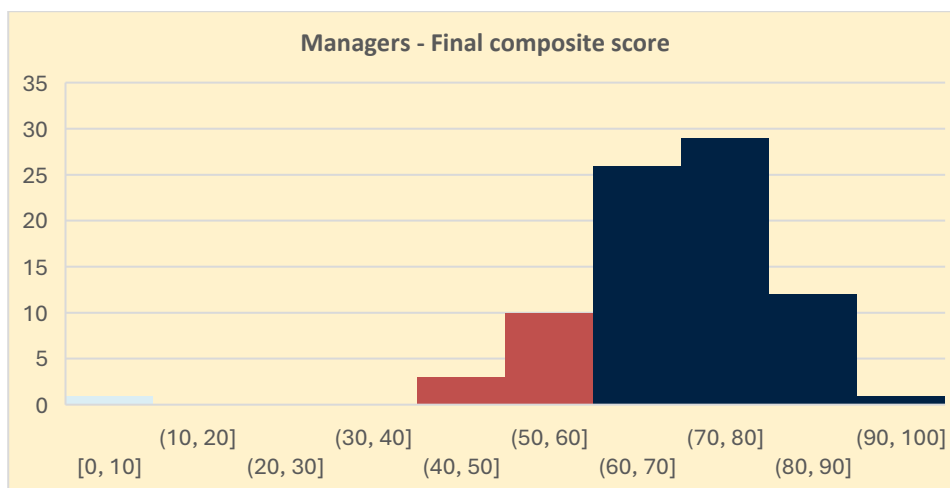
dispersion disproportionately influences the total score compared to a difficult and discriminative test. Consequently, the admission or rejection decision may reflect more the mathematical structure of the calculation formula than the candidate's actual performance. This approach contravenes SIOF Principles (2018, §4.2) regarding combining results from multiple sources and affects the fairness of the selection process, which should be based on empirical evidence regarding the relevance of each test for performance in public service.

Table 16. Statistical results for final composite scores on preliminary tests

Statistical Indicators	Entry-level	Assistants	Managers
Mean (Average)	77.00	78.54	69.42
Median	77.92	79.67	70.30
Mode	83.34	83.75	74.84
Standard Deviation (STDEV)	10.29	10.06	10.12
Distribution Skewness (SKEW)	-0.62	-1.01	-0.29
Final Rejection Rate	14%	12%	45%

Figure 12. Distribution of final composite (aggregated) scores on preliminary tests





128. **Statistical analysis of results at the overall competition level shows high homogeneity and limited differentiation between position categories.** Similar means for entry-level and assistant candidates (≈ 77 – 79 points) and low standard deviations (≈ 10 points) indicate low test difficulty and score concentration in the 70–90-point range, confirming the non-discriminative character of applied instruments. Negatively skewed distributions ($\text{SKEW} < 0$) highlight the ceiling effect; most candidates achieve high scores without clear differentiation between competency levels.

129. **For management positions, the significantly lower mean (≈ 69 points) and much higher rejection rate ($\approx 45\%$) suggest application of different instruments or distinct evaluation norms, which affects inter-category comparability.** In the absence of technical documentation clarifying these scaling differences, it cannot be established whether lower scores reflect genuinely more complex cognitive requirements or simply a variation in test calibration.

130. **Overall, the final composite score does not provide a valid basis for inferences about competency or professional performance.** Similar values between candidates, lack of visible correlation between position level and testing results, and contradictions between admission rates at "preliminary testing" and "advanced testing" indicate a measurement process lacking predictive power. From a methodological perspective, the current system generates an apparently coherent but statistically inert picture: most candidates are concentrated around the same mean, and observed differences cannot be interpreted in terms of professional competencies.

131. **The National Competition assesses candidates' general competencies and obtained results should provide information about these competencies.** Although the methodology specifies that testing aims to identify the extent to which candidates possess competencies necessary for exercising public services such as problem-solving, planning and organizing, initiative, communication, integrity, and citizen orientation, final results consist of a percentage average and global qualification of "Admitted/Rejected" type, without details regarding the level of competency manifestation. A competency assessment system should provide information on the level achieved for each assessed dimension. Such reporting would allow candidates to understand their own level of development, and public institutions to use these profiles for matching between position requirements and demonstrated competencies.

132. **Candidates' perception of the tests used in the National Competition is also a key factor for the legitimacy of the process.** Knowledge tests are generally seen by candidates as transparent and fair because their structure, content, and scoring logic are easy to understand.

Cognitive aptitude tests also benefit from strong confidence, largely rooted in trust in the psychology profession. For advanced testing, candidates interviewed expressed limited understanding of the rationale for the test, and the Bank team did not have access to test documentation.

133. In this context, to further strengthen the credibility and robustness of the National Competition, NACS should further improve especially the advanced testing component. Providing illustrative examples of test items (without compromising security) would further demystify the process and help candidates understand the nature of the competencies assessed. For future evaluations of the National Competition, ensuring structured access to documentation materials (manuals, test blueprints, norming tables, scoring procedures, and security protocols) will also facilitate independent evaluation and support continuous improvement. This would reinforce its contribution to a robust, merit-based recruitment model and align the system with international standards of transparency and evidence-based practice.

5.6 Conclusions of the analysis

134. The National Competition for filling public service positions represents a pioneering endeavor in Romanian public administration, through the introduction of a unified, digitalized, and standardized selection system. This is the first time that the recruitment process for civil servants has been organized on a completely digital infrastructure, with instruments applied under controlled conditions, identical for all candidates across the country. This approach has enabled procedural fairness, reduction of subjectivity, and increased transparency of the selection process. At the same time, the large volume of collected data constitutes a valuable resource for systematic analysis of testing instrument effectiveness and for subsequent calibration of human resource policies in the public sector.

135. Through its complexity and scope, the National Competition marks a stage of institutional modernization and convergence with European good practices in public service assessment. Implementation of standardized tests, conducted in specialized testing centers, has enabled uniformization of selection procedures and alignment with principles of meritocracy, objectivity, and professionalization of administration. This evolution places Romania among the few states in the region that use, at national scale, psychometric and behavioural assessment instruments for civil servant selection.

136. Beyond immediate results, the National Competition has significant strategic value for the Romanian administrative system. Centralization of the testing process and creation of a coherent database regarding candidate performance provides the premises for developing evidence-based HR policy. These data can support decisions regarding professional training, human resource planning, and updating of the competency framework. At the same time, experience of the implementation of the 2024 competition constitutes a valuable methodological reference for designing future competitions, allowing improvement of test calibration and increased validity of competency assessment.

137. Detailed analysis of instruments used in the National Competition has revealed some differences between the declared intention of the methodology and the actual performance of applied tests. While digital infrastructure ensures uniform and fair competition conduct, assessment instruments are not yet sufficiently calibrated to validly measure competencies defined in the regulatory framework of public service. The cognitive aptitude test, though standardized, has disproportionate weight in the final decision, without evidence of predictive validity for professional performance. Additionally, "advanced testing," designed as a behavioural differentiation stage, has limited impact on filtering candidates.

138. To synthesize the main findings on the quality and methodological relevance of instruments used in the National Competition, the table below presents a comparative evaluation of the five administered tests. The analysis was conducted based on criteria of clarity, transparency, validity, reliability, and relevance for the declared purpose of the competition, that of assessing the general competencies of the civil servant, as well as associated risks. The table brings together elements from available public documentation, correlated with statistical results and empirical observations formulated in Chapters 6.3–6.7.

Table 17. Comparative evaluation of the five administered tests.

Analysis Criterion	“Fundamental Rights” Test	“Public Administration” Test	IT Test	Cognitive Aptitude Test	“Advanced Testing”
Clarity of Application Purpose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Public documentation on test content and structure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Public information on how the test was built	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Candidate differentiation capacity	✓ low	✓ low	✓ very low	✓ high for mngmt	✗ none
Significant correlation with final score (predictive power)	✓ moderate (r≈0.60)	✓ moderate (r≈0.65)	✓ moderate (r≈0.63)	✓ high (r≈0.83)	✗ none
Rejection rate relevant for selection	✗ (0–5%)	✗ (0–5%)	✗ (0–2%)	✓ (5–44%)	✗ (≈0%)
Relevance to the competition’s purpose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Risk of legal contestation (lack validity or documentation)	✓low	✓low	✓low	✗moderate	✗high
Immediate recommendations	Calibrate and increase the number of items per test. Develop a 4-level proficiency scale for candidate differentiation.		Align with the proposed digital competency framework	Check calibration and documentation for future use and consistency	Improve by changing type of tests applied

139. The National Competition demonstrates that NACS has the institutional infrastructure capable of ensuring large-scale recruitment in a uniform and transparent manner, yet initial success should be enhanced by improving the scientific rigor of assessment. From a methodological perspective, the current process is based on instruments that require additional validation, clear norming, and explicit correlation with targeted professional competencies. In this way, the system would ensure stronger and more relevant results for the meritocratic purpose of the competition.

5.7 Methodological recommendations

140. **The methodological analysis of the National Competition reveals the need for improving the testing instruments.** While the digital infrastructure and procedural architecture can already be considered good administrative practice, the level of predictive relevance and methodological calibration of the tests could be improved.

141. **The recommendations below are grouped by time horizons (short-term and medium- to long-term) with the aim to gradually improve testing instruments:**

Test	Short-term recommendation (1 year)	Medium to long-term recommendation (2-3 years)
<i>Knowledge Test – Fundamental Rights and Equal Opportunities</i>	Calibration of item difficulty. Increase to 20 items (or apply the CAT¹⁶⁴ method). Establish a 4-level performance standard (insufficient/satisfactory/advanced/excellent). Set the minimum passing threshold at 70% (satisfactory level) accompanied by partial or full publication of the item pool.	Integration as a subcomponent of the Integrity competency – knowledge of the legal framework on human dignity and non-discrimination as an observable criterion of ethical behavior (through behavioral assessment instruments).
<i>Knowledge Test – Public Administration</i>	Calibration of item difficulty. Increase to 40 items or apply the CAT method. Establish a 4-level performance standard as in the previous test Set the minimum passing threshold at 70% (satisfactory level) accompanied by partial or full publication of the item pool.	Integration as a subcomponent of the Citizen Orientation competency – knowledge of the administrative system and citizens' rights as the foundation of service-oriented behaviour.
<i>IT Test</i>	Extension of the number of items and coverage to be adapted to the proposed general digital competency framework for the public administration, but only for selected digital competencies in areas 1-5 and only at basic level (A).	Extension of the number of items and coverage to be adapted to the proposed general digital competency framework for the public administration, to cover more general competencies and the various proficiency levels needed across different civil service jobs.
<i>Cognitive Aptitude Test</i>	Separate reporting of results for the three dimensions (numerical, verbal, logical), without aggregation into a single score. Maintain only for identifying minimum acceptable aptitude level, not for ranking candidates by competency level.	Continue to use only as a pre-selection instrument (establishing a minimum access threshold).
<i>Advanced Testing</i>	The test should be adapted to be correlated with general competencies and testing	Development of an evaluation methodology based on the Assessment Center model, with authentic

¹⁶⁴ Computerized Adaptive Testing (CAT) is a computer-based assessment method where item difficulty adapts automatically to each candidate's responses. The system selects subsequent items from a calibrated pool, increasing difficulty after correct answers and decreasing it after incorrect ones, enabling more precise and efficient measurement of each participant's knowledge or ability level.

Test	Short-term recommendation (1 year)	Medium to long-term recommendation (2-3 years)
	should rely on instruments as proposed in the proposed model by the Bank in 2020 (case studies, simulations etc.) Such tests can also be adapted for digital format. Alternatively, general competencies can be tested through interviews in the job-based selection process.	simulations administered by a national team of certified assessors, responsible for piloting, validation, and continuous improvement of evaluation instruments, at least for top managerial civil service jobs.

142. **Similarly, it is recommended to improve "Advanced Testing" in its current format, to allow relevant differentiation between candidates.** Results from the 2024 competition indicate a pass rate of nearly 100%, with no evidence of measuring behaviours associated with the competencies in Annex VIII of the Administrative Code. In the absence of validated instruments (simulations, case exercises, structured interviews) and correlations with job performance, this type of test needs to be considerably improved. As the Bank team did not have access to test examples, these findings are limited by the documentation publicly available.

143. **A robust competency evaluation system requires the systematic involvement of certified assessors throughout the entire assessment lifecycle, from instrument development and pilot testing to calibration, scoring, and continuous improvement.** Certified assessors are essential for constructing valid evaluation scenarios, developing standardized rubrics aligned with the behavioural indicators in the competency framework, diversifying case studies to prevent memorization, and calibrating task difficulty to ensure appropriate discrimination across proficiency levels. Their expertise ensures that simulated tasks authentically replicate the complexity and contextual demands of public service work while maintaining psychometric rigor.

6 Outcome evaluation

6.1 Relevance

6.1.1 Alignment with initial recruitment challenges and institutional needs.

144. **The new recruitment model offers a structured response to the systemic weaknesses identified in the Theory of Change (see Chapter 3).** The centralization of key recruitment stages, the use of a unified digital platform, and the shift toward selection based on general and specific competencies all contribute to reducing the fragmentation and inconsistency that characterized the previous system. Important constraints nevertheless remain; Table 18 below maps the previously diagnosed challenges to the mechanisms of the new model and highlights the areas where alignment can still be improved.

Table 18 Challenges of the previous recruitment model

Previous model		National competition model
Challenge	Description	
Process: Lack of strategic workforce planning	The recruitment process for civil service positions was not guided by strategic workforce planning. Institutions lacked a systematic way to align staffing and skills needs with their mission. Combined with politicization and clientelism, this gap meant that recruitment - particularly for high-level positions - was irregular and often bypassed merit-based procedures. The credibility of the high-level civil service was further weakened by excessive use of temporary appointments and unclear eligibility rules. Entry into these roles required either a specialized training program or a full parliamentary mandate - two experiences not truly comparable.	The new model introduced multi-annual recruitment planning. That was supposed to be linked directly to competency needs based on job analysis, current and predictable vacancies. Workforce analysis and competency frameworks are mandatory, which should reduce ad hoc hiring. This represents a strong step forward: it not only provides structure but also professionalizes planning. However, the multi-annual recruitment planning provided by the Administrative Code is based on a headcount gap analysis only and not informed by a strategic workforce planning process. It is unclear how the multi-annual recruitment planning is linked with strategic planning, as it is done at institutional level, based on current job analysis, not at sector level, considering planned service and institutional developments. Moreover, the effectiveness of the planning process depends on the capacity and consistent implementation by all institutions. The preparation of the multi-annual recruitment plan is not currently linked with IT platforms, including NACS' database for public sector staff (SNSOSP), therefore the information from other digitalized management tools for HRM is not properly capitalized. It is not clear if institutions are actually expected to conduct job analysis before each workforce planning process, which would increase the administrative burden of the process, with no visible gains.
Process: Different entry points into the civil service	The legal framework permitted two parallel tracks for entering the civil service, creating a risk of double standards in recruitment. In addition to competitive selection, civil servant status could also be	Complementary to the National Recruitment Competition Model, the Administrative Code limits the conversion of contract-based positions in civil services positions.

Previous model		National competition model
Challenge	Description	
	granted through the conversion of contract-based positions, provided the individual met eligibility criteria and obtained NACS approval. However, this route raised concerns, as it could be seen as a procedural formality driven more by administrative compliance and political will than merit.	The Administrative Code was also amended to include more transparency and verification of competences for transfers, closing some loops for filling in sensitive positions in the civil service.
Institutions: Low coordination and recruiting capabilities	Despite NACS's formal mandate to oversee recruitment in both central and territorial administration, the process remained fragmented. Central coordination for evidence-based workforce planning and recruitment was weak, and a gap persisted between legal provisions and actual practice. Job announcements for similar roles included varying eligibility criteria and evaluation content, resulting in uneven recruitment outcomes. HR departments played different roles, but strategic involvement was rare. Most acted either as gatekeepers, narrowly focused on legal compliance - often under political pressure - or as silent partners, mechanically following procedures with little initiative. Only a few operated as strategic players, planning vacancies in advance, supporting exam boards, and offering mentorship.	The new model significantly strengthened central coordination by NACS through the national competency framework and the digital recruitment platform. Institutions use a qualified candidates' pool selected through a centralized process in the first phase of the recruitment. This ensures consistency and fairness for the recruitment process at the national level. Moreover, as part of the National Recruitment Competition Model, the HR departments are expected to receive guidance, tools, and training, enabling them to act more strategically. This is likely to reduce fragmentation and professionalize HR functions, though building long-term HR capacity will require sustained investment and monitoring.
Process: Burdensome application process	The recruitment process was burdensome and overly formalistic, relying on paper-based applications and legalistic evaluations.	Applications are now managed through a digital recruitment platform that allows online submission, and transparent publication of results. This reduces administrative burdens and improves candidate experience.
Tools: Ineffective advertising campaigns	Job advertisements were poorly designed to attract qualified candidates, often lacking clear, practical information about job content and salaries. Advertising practices were relying mostly on traditional outlets rather than modern recruitment channels like social media, job fairs, or specialized platforms.	The new model introduces professionalized outreach and employer branding: communication campaigns, partnerships with universities and professional bodies, and proactive use of social media and job fairs. All these activities and approaches directly addresses the challenge of ineffective communication. These activities are a response that addresses both visibility and reputation and lead to large for the positions put up for National Competition.
Content: Ineffective testing design and implementation	Testing emphasized memorization of laws, lacked consistency	The new model uses standardized tests, aiming to be competency-based tests. They have been administered digitally at the national level. A certified

Previous model		National competition model
Challenge	Description	
		testing item bank ensures consistency and objectivity. The model planned a focus shift from rote knowledge of legislation to real competencies relevant to civil service performance. The capacity of the model to test competences in the most meaningful way is analyzed under the “Effectiveness” section of this evaluation.
Content: Integrity flaws in testing	The system was highly decentralized and had limited monitoring. The large number of separate and very different recruitment processes generated challenges for systematic monitoring and oversight. In this context, the previous model was vulnerable to integrity breaches.	Integrity is safeguarded within the National Recruitment Competition Model through automated testing and audit trails. This reform is highly effective in addressing the previous shortcomings and aligns with international best practice.
Process: Limited safeguards on ensuring the quality of the process	Few mechanisms existed for quality assurance, feedback, or continuous improvement.	The new system envisaged quality assurance mechanisms: regular evaluations, and systematic updates of tools and training. The digital platform enables process monitoring and auditability, as well as feedback loops with candidates and institutions (although these are not yet used by NACS). This can represent a substantial improvement, creating a culture of continuous learning and adaptation
Governance: Excessive politicization of appointments	Senior and mid-level positions were often filled through political influence, temporary mandates, or parallel entry routes. Legal provisions for merit-based recruitment were frequently bypassed, eroding credibility and discouraging qualified candidates from applying.	The new model directly targets politicization by requiring that all appointments pass through a standardized, merit-based, competency-driven process. The creation of a national candidate pool, accessible only to those who succeed in objective testing, reduces discretion and limits political interference. By embedding transparency (public posting of results, digital traceability) and standardizing procedures, the model strengthens the principle of meritocracy. This is arguably one of the most important achievements of the reform: while it cannot fully eliminate political influence, it raises the costs of bypassing merit and improves fairness, thus helping rebuild trust in public service recruitment. However, temporary appointments in managerial positions remain overused in practice (although based on verification of competences according to the Administrative Code).

Source: Challenges based on World Bank. (2020). *Defining a model for the national contest*.

6.1.2 Alignment with broader HRM reforms and updated needs

145. Romania’s competency-based recruitment model retains strong relevance today, given demographic pressures (i.e. an aging public administration) and difficulties in attracting young and specialized talent. The demand for digital, analytical, and cross-cutting skills continues to grow, requiring a recruitment system capable of competing credibly for high-skill candidates and assessing them on competencies rather than rote knowledge. At the same

time, these pressures highlight that recruitment alone is insufficient: new entrants will only join and remain if the system offers a complete, coherent package of development opportunities, fair progression, and meaningful work. The model therefore sits within a broader shift toward an integrated HRM architecture in which workforce planning, recruitment, learning, performance management, and career advancement function as mutually reinforcing elements that both attract new talent and retain the skilled personnel already in the system.

6.2 Effectiveness

6.2.1 Consistency of model implementation (eligibility, testing, candidate pool, hiring).

146. **The implementation of the national competition is broadly consistent at national level but remains uneven across institutions and stages of the process.** As documented in Section 4, the planning, advertising, application, eligibility, and testing phases follow a uniform legal and procedural framework, supported by the national IT platform and a standardized committee architecture. This national backbone has reduced fragmentation and ad hoc practices compared with pre-reform recruitment. However, the subsequent job-based selection stage, implemented by individual institutions, shows variation in fidelity to the model, with some authorities reverting to knowledge-heavy, traditional tests rather than fully competency-based methods.

6.2.2 Effectiveness of the competition

147. **However, when placed in the broader context of vacancy levels, the competition only partially offsets systemic shortages, particularly at entry and leadership levels.** The 2024 recruitment plan included 167 vacant entry-level positions, 130 assistant-level positions, as well as 21 director-level and 5 deputy director-level management positions, excluding posts covered by special statutes. By contrast, data from the 2023 NACS annual report on civil service management indicated that 60.8% of all entry-level (debutant) positions remained unfilled, accounting for 17.3% of all vacancies. This underscores the ongoing challenge of attracting and retaining young professionals in the civil service and the associated risks of an aging workforce. The report also highlighted shortages in leadership, with 62 director positions vacant out of 558 and 16 deputy director positions vacant out of 106 nationwide. Therefore, the recruitment plan can partially alleviate current staffing shortages but falls short of fully addressing systemic gaps, particularly at the debutant and leadership levels. While the national competition marks a critical step toward renewal, its scale remains limited compared to the overall vacancy levels, signaling the need for sustained and expanded recruitment efforts in the coming years.¹⁶⁵

Table 19. Capacity of the national competition to ensure a pool of candidates answering the recruitment needs

Position level	No. of positions in the recruitment plan	No. of candidates	No. of selected candidates after recruitment phase	No. and % of selected candidates after selection phase

¹⁶⁵ NACS, Annual report on the management of the civil service for 2023.

<i>Debutant</i>	167	1174	668	91	54%
<i>Assistant</i>	130	627	294	41	31%
<i>Director and deputy director</i>	26 (21 director and 5 deputy director positions)	152	44	4	16%

148. **Analysis of progression through the recruitment stages shows that the competition is strongly front-loaded.** Eligibility checks and the preliminary test perform nearly all filtering, while the advanced test adds almost no discriminatory value. For debutant positions, 87% passed eligibility, but only 66% sat the preliminary test; among those, 86% passed, and virtually all (99.9%) passed the advanced stage. Assistant positions followed the same pattern: 66% passed eligibility, 53% reached testing, and 88% of those tested reached the pool, with almost all passing the advanced test. For director-level positions, eligibility admitted 65%, the preliminary test eliminated 45% of those tested, and again nearly all candidates (99%) passed the advanced stage. Across all categories, the advanced test, intended to assess competencies, had almost no filtering effect.

Table 20. Progression of candidates for debutant positions

	Total no. of candidates to the test	Admitted	Rejected
Eligibility check	1174	1017	157
Appeals to eligibility checks	66	3	63
Eligibility check after appeals	1174	1020	154
Preliminary test	781	669	112
Advanced test	780	779	1
Final (cumulated result) to preliminary and advanced test	781	668	113
Appeals to preliminary and advanced check	62	0	62
Final results of preliminary and advanced test after appeals	781	668	113

Table 21. Progression of candidates for assistant positions

	Total no. of candidates to the test	Admitted	Rejected
Eligibility check	627	413	214
Appeals to eligibility checks	67	0	67
Eligibility check after appeals	627	413	214
Preliminary test	334	294	40

Advanced test	334	333	0
Final (cumulated result) to preliminary and advanced test	334	294	40
Appeals to preliminary and advanced check	23	0	23
Final results of preliminary and advanced test after appeals	334	294	40

Table 22. Progression of candidates for director and deputy director positions

	<i>Total no. of candidates to the test</i>	<i>Admitted</i>	<i>Rejected</i>
<i>Eligibility check</i>	152	97	55
<i>Appeals to eligibility checks</i>	21	2	19
<i>Eligibility check after appeals</i>	134	99	35
<i>Preliminary test</i>	80	44	36
<i>Advanced test</i>	80	79	1
<i>Final (cumulated result) to preliminary and advanced test</i>	80	44	36
<i>Appeals to preliminary and advanced check</i>	11	0	11
<i>Final results of preliminary and advanced test after appeals</i>	80	44	36

149. **The reasons for ineligibility reveal a system that is rigorous on formal compliance but sometimes overly dependent on administrative documentation.** Among the most common reasons included missing or invalid educational documents (such as diplomas or certificates required for the specific class of public function). Additional grounds for rejection were: failure to provide proof of name changes through official documents, submission of expired or incomplete certificates of studies or employment experience, incomplete application forms, or expired identity documents. Overall, ineligibility for all positions was linked to missing mandatory documents and the failure to demonstrate compliance with the legal requirements for education, professional experience, and identification.

150. **Professional experience and seniority represented a significant source of ineligibility for assistant and managerial positions, as panels frequently found the submitted documents insufficient, while also facing challenges in consistently interpreting non-standard certificates or employment records.** For assistant and managerial positions, the

eligibility panels concluded that the certificates or employment records submitted by some candidates did not provide sufficient proof of the required professional experience or seniority. At the same time, interviews conducted for this evaluation indicate that assessing professional experience and seniority was not always straightforward. There were difficulties in interpreting certain certificates or employment records, particularly when these were not standard or commonly encountered documents. This lack of clarity occasionally led to inconsistent judgments and highlighted the need for clearer guidance and standardized criteria to ensure a fair and uniform assessment process.

151. The surveys conducted with successful and unsuccessful candidates provide a comprehensive picture of the perceptions and experiences of participants in the National Recruitment Competition. Most respondents have been candidates to the competition for debutant and assistant civil service position. The respondents to the survey for successful candidates were young and mid-career professionals aged 25–44, most of them with strong educational backgrounds (mainly Master’s and Bachelor’s degrees), often in economics, engineering, public administration, or law. Many had either very little professional experience or more than seven years, with the private sector being the primary source of applicants. By contrast, the survey of unsuccessful candidates highlights a somewhat different profile and experience. Most of them were older, with the largest shares between 35–44 and 45–54 years, and many had significant professional experience, with over half reporting more than seven years in the workforce. Like the successful group, most held Master’s or Bachelor’s degrees in economics, engineering, public administration, or law. Many of these candidates also came from the private sector, though about a third had prior experience in the public sector. Geographically, most respondents were assigned to centers in Bucharest and Suceava, with smaller numbers in other cities, showing a concentration of the process.

152. Regarding perceptions of the process, most candidates found the information about recruitment clear and accessible. Among successful candidates, 74% rated the information as very clear (score 5) or clear (score 4). Eligibility criteria were also considered easy to understand by 88% (86 “very clear” and 81 “clear” out of 190 respondents). Instructions for the preliminary test were clear for 90% (171 out of 190), and for the advanced test, 91% (172 out of 190). By contrast, unsuccessful candidates gave more mixed assessments: only 61% (54 out of 88) considered the general recruitment information clear or very clear, while 34% rated it only somewhat clear or unclear. For eligibility, just 69% (61 out of 88) found the criteria clear or very clear, while 29% reported doubts or confusion. Instructions for tests were also less positively rated, with 47%–50% reporting clarity, but significant shares indicating uncertainty.

153. Almost all candidates used the practice tests provided by NACS: 92% of successful candidates (174 out of 190) and 73% of unsuccessful ones (64 out of 88). Among successful candidates, 68% rated the practice tests as useful or very useful (scores 4–5), while only 5% considered them not useful. For unsuccessful candidates, the ratings were more fragmented: only 29% (26 out of 88) rated them as useful or very useful, while 22% considered them of little or no value and many skipped the question, likely because they had not used the tests. On difficulty, 44% of successful candidates found practice tests similar to the real ones, while 30% found them easier and 18% harder. Among unsuccessful candidates, opinions were more polarized: 23% said the practice tests were easier, 23% about the same, and 18% harder, suggesting inconsistencies between preparation and actual testing.

154. Taken together, the two surveys paint a balanced picture. Successful candidates appreciated the transparency and clarity of the process, while unsuccessful candidates highlighted inconsistencies, technical challenges, and doubts about fairness, particularly in the advanced test stage. The comparison suggests that while the system works well in providing structure and opportunities for those who succeed, it leaves many of the unsuccessful

candidates dissatisfied, pointing to areas where the recruitment model could be strengthened: especially in communication, and the advanced testing stage. Most candidates, including successful and unsuccessful ones, appreciated the clarity, fairness, transparency, and usefulness of preparation tools. However, gaps remain in ensuring that tests are fully relevant to job requirements and that communication is consistent and accessible.

155. Interviews with NACS staff and the service provider confirm that the national competition has introduced significant improvements in meritocracy, transparency, and standardization of recruitment. The tests were developed under rigorous psychometric standards, with acceptance committees and external experts ensuring validity and fairness. For HLCS roles included in the national competition pilot, in 2023, assessment centers used structured exercises (e.g., case studies, role plays, simulations) designed by psychologists and organizational behavior specialists, guided by standardized rubrics and methodological manuals. The opinion of NACS representatives is that this ensured consistency across evaluations and strengthened trust in outcomes.

156. Overall, the competition process ensured transparency and meritocracy in recruitment, but testing instruments could be improved, especially in the advanced testing phase, to ensure the system's ability to effectively differentiate candidates by competence level. For higher-level positions such as director and deputy director, the preliminary test plays a stronger role in screening candidates, reducing nearly half of those tested, while the advanced test continues to show little added value. This suggests that the system works better for senior positions but still does not fully achieve its purpose in distinguishing between levels of competence at the final stage. A more detail analysis of this issue is presented bellow in the sub-section *"Institutional use of competency frameworks"*.

157. Interviews with NACS representatives and staff also highlight the strain placed on competition panels members. Within NACS and the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Public Administration, eligibility and competition panels were trained and supported through manuals and platform-integrated instructions, but participation in this panels was often perceived as burdensome. The absence of clear standards for the eligibility checks leaves room for inconsistent application of these checks and uncertainty. The high volume of appeals, combined with the lack of adequate financial incentives, created fatigue and limited motivation among panels members. Moreover, for the competition panel, the apparent lack of influence over the verification of tests, that is automatically done in the IT platform, was also mentioned in interviews. While some financial rewards improved perceptions, they were insufficient to offset the heavy workload. In practice, NACS had to mobilize staff from unrelated departments to handle the pressure during peak competition phases, raising questions about sustainability.

158. Appeals appear to have a marginal impact, as very few of them result in changes to the outcomes and only in the stage of eligibility check. For debutant positions, only three appeals were successful out of 66 lodged, while for assistant and director positions no appeals changed the outcome. This can be interpreted in two ways: either the procedures are robust and leave little room for error, or the appeals mechanism does not sufficiently accommodate valid complaints. In either case, the data shows that the appeals stage has no real effect on the progression of candidates.

159. Therefore, the excising data reflects both strengths and areas to improve for the National Competition. On the one hand, the system provides a structured process that reduces the risks of ad hoc recruitment and ensures compliance with basic legal and knowledge requirements. On the other hand, the over-reliance on eligibility and preliminary testing, combined with the very limited filtering capacity of the advanced test, calls into question its effectiveness in identifying the best-qualified candidates. This should be taken into account for potential adjustments, to ensure that testing instruments are relevant and well calibrated.

6.2.3 Effectiveness of communication

160. **NACS implemented a structured communication system for the National Competition, which ensured professional campaigns but also generated delays and bureaucratic bottlenecks in candidate interaction.** Communication for the National Competition was carried out by NACS within its formal communication framework, supported by operational procedures, a visual identity manual, candidate guides, and manuals for using the IT platform. The communication efforts were led by the Directorate for Operationalizing Public Function Reform (DOPFR), in cooperation with the Communication and International Relations Service (CIRS), while execution was outsourced to a provider (GPI). This structure ensured professional campaigns but also managed simple communication with candidates.

161. **Through the dedicated portal: the digital competition platform, stronger social media presence, and consistent branding, NACS promoted the competition with diverse tools such as tutorials, testimonials, job fairs, and university outreach.** NACS built a dedicated contest portal, strengthened its social media presence (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube), and developed consistent branding (“Competent people for Romania”). Campaigns included online tutorials, testimonials, “myth-busting” content, job fairs, workshops, and visits to universities.

162. **Communication was generally clear for successful candidates, but weaker for the next stages and notably less satisfactory for unsuccessful candidates.** Communication of results was seen as clear by successful candidates: 91% (173 out of 190) found the disclosure of results clear or very clear. However, only 60% found information about the second stage of job selection clear, while 28% rated it as partly clear or unclear. Guidance on next steps was even weaker, with just 20% receiving clear instructions and 26% receiving none at all. In contrast, for unsuccessful candidates, communication about elimination was less satisfactory: only 44% (39 out of 88) found it clear, while 16% said it was unclear and 40% skipped the question.

163. **The communication activities show very good results given the traffic of the competition portal and the number of applications for the competition.** Portal traffic increased sharply in 2024–2025, especially during peak contest periods, showing high visibility and engagement. This is aligned with a large number of applications: overall 1,935 candidates for the 323 opened positions.

164. **The analysis of the communication for the national competition also shows some challenges, the most important being related with the limited human resources available for communication.** NACS manages candidate communication with a very limited team of 7–8 people nationwide, many of whom juggle other responsibilities. During peak recruitment periods, staff were overwhelmed by dozens of emails and phone calls daily, with about half requiring personalized responses. Even simple inquiries were delayed by bureaucratic processes and legal reviews. This shortage of dedicated staff not only slows responses but also undermines candidate experience, pointing to the urgent need for at least one or two full-time communication specialists.

165. **Although externalizing communication allowed for a good use of available NRRP resources, the level of institutionalization and sustainability of the communication strategy remains limited.** A more limited reliance on an external contractor could be considered, but within cost-effective communications plans. Most major communication campaigns, including those for the extended national competition, have been financed through NRRP funds and delivered by an external provider. While this ensured professional execution, it created dependency and raised concerns about sustainability once EU funding ends. Without a stable internal budget, NACS risks being unable to maintain visibility and trust in future competitions, undermining the recruitment reform.

166. **Moreover, communication to the general public was stronger than the targeted communication, although the main objective of the communication was to generate a large pool of well qualified candidates and to ensure support for the national competition within the public administration.** Although NACS expanded its presence through social media, job fairs, and university visits, its communication campaigns mainly addressed a broad, general audience. Survey data show that word-of-mouth remains the main source of information for 42–45% of candidates, while social media only reached 13–18%. Specific subgroups such as students, experienced professionals, and people with disabilities received limited tailored messaging. This lack of segmentation reduces impact and risks missing target audiences.

167. **Some limitations are present in the communication with candidates and potential applicants.** Candidate guides and responses, although detailed and legally precise, often use technical jargon and lengthy sentences that are difficult for the general public to follow. For example, simple “yes/no” clarifications are sometimes embedded within dense legal references. Although efforts to simplify language have started, NACS still needs to move toward shorter, citizen-centered messages supported by visuals, checklists, and infographics to make communication more accessible.

168. **Promotion of the initial stages of the national competition was strong and well-coordinated, but communication fell short in the job-specific selection phase, which is managed by individual institutions.** Candidates frequently reported uncertainty about available jobs, unclear instructions, and limited follow-up after the preliminary exam. This gap weakens overall trust in the process and reduces the visibility of final outcomes. Stronger coordination and accountability mechanisms are required to ensure consistency across all stages.

6.2.4 Institutional use of competency frameworks.

169. **Institutional use of competency frameworks is improving but remains uneven across the public administration.** At the central level, many ministries and agencies have started to integrate competency frameworks more systematically into workforce planning and recruitment. Competency-based selection criteria are increasingly reflected in job announcements and interview processes. However, significant disparities remain, particularly at the territorial level. Some institutions struggle with defining specific competencies for positions, and in some cases, there is limited understanding of how to adapt the national framework to specialized or technical roles. Continued support from NACS, including training, peer learning, and clearer methodological guidance, will be key to deepening and standardizing competency-based HRM.

6.2.5 Functionality and usability of the digital platform.

170. **The digital recruitment platform has proven functional and robust but requires further improvements in usability.** The platform successfully managed large-scale candidate registration, eligibility checks, and testing, and provided transparency through automated communications and published results. It is a core enabler of the national competition model and has increased the efficiency of processes that were previously manual and fragmented. Nevertheless, user feedback indicates that some aspects of the platform - particularly the clarity of instructions, navigation for candidates, and the alignment between platform workflows and institutional HR processes - require refinement.

171. **Candidates, especially the successful ones, widely considered the platform user-friendly, while unsuccessful candidates reported more frequent technical difficulties.** On the technical side, successful candidates appreciated the usability of the IT platform: 91% rated it easy or very easy for registration, and 90% for account creation and navigation. Communication through the platform was also well-regarded, with 83% rating it good or very good. Among unsuccessful candidates, although 73% found the platform manageable, a substantial minority (27%) reported difficulties, especially with uploading documents and completing applications.

6.2.6 Effects on NACS's role and capacity

172. **The reform has substantially enhanced NACS's role as the national coordinator of civil service recruitment.** Through the design, piloting, and implementation of the model, NACS has evolved from a predominantly regulatory and monitoring body into an active operator of key recruitment processes. NACS has also expanded its role in providing methodological guidance and capacity building for public institutions. The agency now leads the coordination of recruitment planning, manages the national pool of pre-selected candidates, and monitors the use of competency frameworks across the system. This shift represents a significant institutional transformation aligned with its expanded mandate under the Administrative Code and NRRP commitments.

173. **However, the capacity of the agency was a constant challenge.** The interviews show several limitations that may affect sustainability:

- Even though the recruitment platform digitalized applications, all eligibility checks and appeal resolutions are processed manually by NACS staff, alongside their normal duties. This creates significant workload pressure on an already small team. For example, in validating competency frameworks, at least six staff were needed by 2025–2026, but in practice only two or three were available, with periods when just one was operational.
- Candidate communication often overwhelms the agency, with staff managing dozens of emails and calls daily. Without a dedicated communication unit, responses must pass through bureaucratic approval chains, slowing down interactions and leaving the team overstretched during peak testing periods.
- The digital platform is maintained internally by just three to four key individuals. Staff turnover and low salaries create risks for continuity and sustainability, since the departure of even one specialist could disrupt operations. The lack of a consolidated IT department further undermines resilience.
- Much of the competition's implementation relies on temporary EU/NRRP funds, which expire in 2026. Without stable budget allocations, NACS risks being unable to maintain testing centers or organize competitions nationwide, potentially restricting them to Bucharest only.
- NACS struggles to retain staff due to uncompetitive salaries compared with other central institutions. This fragility makes the reform highly dependent on temporary project teams rather than long-term institutional capacity.

6.3 Efficiency

6.3.1 Recruitment costs per candidate (before and after reform)

174. **The reform could potentially ensure greater transparency in recruitment costs per candidate, but cost benchmarking still needs to be developed.** Prior to the introduction of the national competition model, detailed and comparable data on recruitment costs at the institutional level was scarce, as processes were decentralized and cost reporting was inconsistent. The new model, through its centralized digital platform and standardized procedures, could allow for better tracking of direct costs - including platform operation, assessor remuneration, logistical expenses, and training for panel members. While higher total upfront investments were needed to operationalize the system, the costs per candidate are expected to decline over time as the model reaches maturity and gains efficiency.

175. **Prior to this reform, the initial cost analysis conducted by the World Bank team highlighted that the recruitment process in Romania was among the most expensive in the**

region¹⁶⁶. The average cost per recruit was estimated at RON 11,777 (approximately EUR 2,505) for managerial positions and RON 5,746 (around EUR 1,220) for execution-level positions. These values were significantly higher than those observed in comparable European systems - such as Slovakia, where the cost per recruit averaged EUR 675, or the United Kingdom, where it ranged between EUR 1,560 and EUR 2,973. The cost differentials reflected inefficiencies arising from a fragmented, paper-based system that required substantial staff time and administrative effort.

176. The initial cost estimate also broke down the cost structure of the traditional recruitment process, revealing that the largest share of total expenditure was associated with the functioning of selection panels - including staff time for setup, allowances for panel members, and travel and accommodation expenses for managerial-level competitions. Other significant components included the written testing and application appraisal stages, which were particularly resource-intensive for execution-level competitions due to the higher number of candidates and longer internal communication chains. In addition, publicity and announcement costs were found to be disproportionate to their impact: NACS spent between EUR 5,000 and EUR 8,000 per month on advertising vacancies in publications with limited reach, leading to an average cost of EUR 60 per hire merely for competition announcements.

177. Building on this diagnosis, the World Bank proposed a cost structure including:

- the human resources costs for competition panels;
- cost for assessment centers and training of staff for the competences assessment;
- cost for licenses, and test development.

On the other hand, cost for ICT infrastructure and cybersecurity costs were considered one off costs.

178. In addition to the initially considered costs, the following costs should be considered:

- maintenance costs for the IT platform;
- communications costs.

179. Overall, the initial cost findings demonstrated that while the transition to a competency-based, centralized recruitment model requires a substantial upfront investment, the expected long-term benefits - including digitalization, streamlined procedures, and economies of scale - are likely to reduce recurrent costs per candidate. Furthermore, the new model allows for a clearer understanding of cost components and performance metrics, creating the conditions for continuous benchmarking and efficiency monitoring across recruitment cycles.

180. The value of the public procurement contract¹⁶⁷ for services related to the National Competition amounts to RON 35,181,996 (approx. EUR 7m). The contract covers services for the National Competition in 2024 and 2025, including:

- the development of the National Competition IT platform;
- testing of candidates through preliminary and advanced tests in test centers and, when required (for senior-level positions under the law), in assessment centers;
- provision of infrastructure for test and assessment centers;

¹⁶⁶ World Bank, HRM RAS, Deliverable 4.1 - Defining a model for the national contest. Available at: https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Livrabilul-9.1_EN_Model-privind-organizarea-concursului-national.pdf.

¹⁶⁷ no. 26.770/29.05.2023/291/30.05.2023

- logistical support for the participation of competition panels (*comisii de concurs*) in test and assessment centers, including transportation and accommodation costs;
- promotion of the National Competition both online and through job fairs.

181. **The data available for this evaluation do not specify separate costs for the National Competition rounds in 2024 and 2025, nor do they provide a breakdown of costs by type of service or test.** Therefore, the following calculations refer to the National Competition rounds conducted in both years (2024 and 2025) under this public procurement contract. Accordingly, the estimated values:

- consider the costs of the selection stage conducted at the institutional level only partially, to the extent covered by NACS through the IT platform for the selection stage;
- excludes staff costs for NACS and public institutions;
- excludes staff costs for design of the preliminary knowledge test;
- take into account the significant costs of developing the IT platform and related infrastructure, even though these are one-time costs that will not be repeated for future competitions.

182. **According to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the public procurement, the planned value of the contract was based on the recruitment of a total of 9,130 positions through the National Competition, resulting in an estimated average cost of RON 3,853 (approx. EUR 700) per position.** The ToR also projected a total of 42,000 candidates to be tested, corresponding to an estimated cost of approximately RON 838 (approx. EUR 160) per tested candidate. However, neither the actual number of positions included in the National Competition (according to the recruitment and promotion plans), nor the number of candidates reached the values initially estimated in the ToR. The data available for evaluation do not include the actual payments made by NACS to the contractor, although part of the contract value was linked proportionally to the number of administered tests. Consequently, the following calculations are based solely on the total contract value.

183. **The total number of positions included in the recruitment plans for 2024–2025, for which the National Competition was organized, amounts to 1,708, according to the competition announcements published by NACS in 2024 and 2025.** Therefore, the average cost per position is RON 20,598 (EUR 4,100). If the 2025 promotion competition is included - given that its organization was covered under the same contract and used the same IT platform and testing methodologies - an additional 226 management positions must be considered. In this case, the average cost per position is RON 18,191 (approx. EUR 1,600).

184. **The high unit cost for the 2024 recruitment competition could be explained by the inclusion of ICT investments in the calculation, but lack of access to data did not allow a detailed assessment. A unit cost of RON 18,191 per position in the National Competition is higher than the average cost of RON 5,552 (approx. EUR 1,100) per position recorded during the 2023 pilot phase, calculated using the same method.** Considering the number of registered candidates, there were 6,338 participants in total in the National Competition (1,953 registered for the two rounds in 2024 and 4,385 registered for the two rounds in 2025). Accordingly, the average cost per candidate is RON 5,551. If the 462 candidates from the 2025 promotion competition are added, bringing the total number of candidates to 6,800, the average cost per candidate decreases to RON 5,174 (approx. EUR 1,035). This unit cost: RON 5,174 per candidate in the National Competition is higher than the average cost of RON 2,826 (approx. EUR 565) per candidate recorded during the 2023 pilot phase, calculated in the same way. However, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as the 2024–2025 cycle includes significant one-time expenditures related to the development of the IT platform and supporting digital infrastructure.

These costs will not recur in future competition cycles and therefore inflate the unit cost in this implementation phase.

6.3.2 Cost efficiency at NACS level

185. **At the level of NACS, the centralization of recruitment functions has led to more structured operations but also increased institutional costs that raise sustainability questions post-NRRP.** While the reform improved procedural consistency and central control, it also requires significant new functions and budgetary commitments for NACS, including maintaining the digital platform, managing large-scale recruitment logistics, training panel members, and providing technical support. These operational costs were largely covered through NRRP funding during the rollout phase. However, with the upcoming conclusion of NRRP support, questions arise regarding the long-term financing model. Options could include the allocation of dedicated funding from the national budget for recruitment or introducing a service-based model in which beneficiary institutions contribute to the costs of recruitment services. However, the absence of budget data for the 2024 recruitment competition limited potential calculations of actual cost per hire.

6.4 Impact

6.4.1 Quality, diversity, and preparedness of selected candidates.

186. **The quality and preparedness of candidates selected through the national competition model is gradually improving, though gaps remain in matching profiles to institutional needs.** Institutions that hired through the new model generally report that selected candidates demonstrate stronger general competencies and higher levels of motivation compared to those recruited through previous decentralized processes. However, there is also recognition that for many specialist or technical roles, gaps remain in aligning candidate competencies with specific job requirements. This partly reflects the limited capacity of institutions to develop detailed position profiles and to define job-specific competencies at the outset.

187. **Diversity outcomes across the candidate pool are mixed, with signs of regional disparities in applicant rates.** The open, merit-based nature of the national competition has improved opportunities for candidates from a wider range of backgrounds to enter public service. However, lower participation from certain regions, reflected in the lower use of some of the regional centers, persists. This is linked to uneven visibility of the national competition.¹⁶⁸ Some other logistical barriers to participating in assessment centers and broader socio-economic disparities may play a role, but available data is limited in this respect. Addressing these gaps will require more targeted outreach and support in future recruitment cycles.

6.4.2 Improvements in transparency, trust, and institutional resilience.

188. **The model has contributed to improved transparency and trust in recruitment processes, although further gains depend on consolidating institutional practices.** The use of standardized assessments and digital tools has reduced the scope for subjective decisions and political influence.

189. **The candidates generally found the process clear, fair, and transparent, with unsuccessful candidates showing some distrust in the fairness of the process.** Among

¹⁶⁸ Higher application rates are in cities and regions where universities are working well with NACS and promoting the national competition among their students.

successful candidates, 89% rated the competition as fair or very fair, with only 11% expressing doubts or disagreement. For unsuccessful candidates, confidence was weaker: only 36% (32 out of 88) considered the competition fair or very fair, while 32% judged it only partly or not at all fair mainly for reasons related to how eligibility and appeals are integrated in the process. This contrast indicates that the perception of fairness was strongly linked to outcomes, with unsuccessful candidates more skeptical about the integrity of the process. However, compared with the previous recruitment model, the progress is significant.

190. However, achieving full transparency in job-based selection processes remains an ongoing challenge. There is still variability in how institutions conduct second-stage interviews and final hiring decisions, as resulting from NACS monitoring of the job selection stage. Sustained monitoring and capacity-building will be necessary to ensure that transparency gains from the national phase are preserved at institutional level.

6.4.3 Usage of the candidate pool by institutions

191. Participation in the job-specific selection stage was limited and did not result in many candidates ultimately filling civil service positions. Only 36% of successful candidates (69 out of 190) participated in the second stage of the national competition. Among them, 52% were selected and accepted a position, 42% were rejected or declined offers, and 6% were still waiting for results when the survey was conducted. For those who completed the process, 48% reported a duration of 3–6 months, while only 38% were appointed in less than three months. Importantly, 68% of those employed felt their current job matched the advertised profile well, while only 10% expressed dissatisfaction.

192. The small number of job selection organized procedures can be explained by the legal limitations to recruitment from national legislation. The small number of job selection procedures can be explained not only by institutional capacity limits but also by legal restrictions on recruitment introduced through measures for fiscal responsibility in 2023 and 2024¹⁶⁹. As part of Romania's fiscal consolidation package, government ordinances imposed strict controls on public sector hiring, including a suspension of new recruitments except in exceptional cases. These measures, designed to contain the public wage bill and meet EU fiscal targets, significantly curtailed the ability of institutions to organize job-based selection procedures, even when eligible candidates were available in the national pool. As a result, many institutions either postponed recruitment or resorted to temporary arrangements such as secondments and interim appointments, undermining the intended functionality of the two-stage recruitment system.

193. The data analysis further illuminates operational realities. The average response time to committee requests is approximately 1.65 days, while the average time allowed for appeals is 12.08 days, shorter than the more generous windows envisaged in the 2020 model, raising questions about candidate preparedness. The gap between written and interview tests averages just 0.31 days, with most cases conducted on the same day. While this compression may increase efficiency, it risks undermining the quality of deliberation and potentially contributes to candidate fatigue. Additional tests, a mechanism encouraged by the 2020 model and permitted by legislation, were used in only 56 cases that included one additional test, nine that included two additional tests, and just that included three additional tests, indicating underutilization of richer, competency-based evaluation methods.

¹⁶⁹ EGO nr. 115/2023, Article VII; EGO 156/2024.

6.4.4 Uptake and responsiveness to candidate/institution feedback

194. **The absence of systematic surveys and KPIs based on candidates' feedback limits NACS's ability to evaluate candidate perceptions on the national competitions and communication channel effectiveness, highlighting the need for structured feedback mechanisms to improve future the competition design and the communication strategies.**

Post-competition communication relies mainly on testimonials, events, and the monitoring reports of the service provider (including for communication), without systematic surveys or key performance indicators. As a result, NACS has limited evidence about how candidates perceive the process or what communication channels are most effective. A more structured feedback system - such as post-competition surveys, standardized KPIs, and better use of portal analytics - would allow NACS to refine its communication strategy and strengthen its impact over time.

6.5 Sustainability

6.5.1 NACS capacity (financial, staffing) to coordinate and sustain the model

195. **The long-term sustainability of the national competition model will depend on strengthening NACS's institutional capacity and securing stable financial resources beyond the current NRRP funding.** While the implementation of the new model has benefited significantly from NRRP support - in terms of staffing, expertise, and IT investments - this external funding is temporary. NACS's current organizational structure and core budget do not yet fully reflect the additional workload required to manage an annual national competition cycle, maintain and upgrade the digital platform, and provide ongoing training and support to institutions. Without a clear post-NRRP funding model, there is a risk that NACS may not be able to maintain the quality and consistency of services delivered.

6.5.2 Institutional ownership

196. **Institutional ownership of the model is growing but remains uneven across sectors and levels of public administration.** Central government bodies, especially those involved in the design and early piloting of the model, show higher levels of engagement and a stronger commitment to embedding competency-based recruitment. By contrast, some central and territorial authorities often demonstrate weaker buy-in, due to limited HR capacity, unfamiliarity with the model, or competing priorities. Ensuring sustained ownership will require not only continued training and guidance but also clear policy incentives and stronger leadership from NACS and central government actors. Broader integration of the model into human resources strategies at the institutional level is key to fostering long-term cultural change.

6.5.3 Risk mitigation progress

197. **Progress has been made in mitigating the main operational risks identified during the pilot and first implementation cycles, though several challenges remain.** Improvements have been achieved in areas such as digital platform stability. However, risks linked to institutional capacity for workforce planning, uneven uptake of the candidate pool, and potential inconsistencies in post-based selection processes persist. A structured risk management framework, monitored by NACS with input from institutional users, would help maintain a clear focus on addressing these issues in future cycles.

6.5.4 Complementarity with other HRM reforms

198. **The model is strongly complementary to other HRM reforms but needs better integration at policy level.** The national competition model aligns well with the broader goals of SIPOCA 136, other NRRP milestones, and ongoing digitalization initiatives in public

administration. However, the links between recruitment reforms and parallel efforts in performance management, workforce planning, and professional development are not yet fully embedded in policy frameworks. A more coherent and joined-up approach would enhance the overall effectiveness of HRM reform and ensure that the national competition becomes a central pillar of a modern HR ecosystem.

6.5.5 Long-term integration into legal and policy frameworks.

199. **Long-term sustainability will depend on embedding the model into the core legal and policy framework of public administration.** The adoption of Annex 10 of the Administrative Code has provided a strong initial legal basis for the model, but further integration is required. Clearer legal definitions of institutional responsibilities, stable funding arrangements, and alignment with future civil service legislation will be necessary to make the model a permanent feature of public recruitment. In this respect, forthcoming policy updates - particularly the planned revision of the Administrative Code - offer an opportunity to consolidate the reform and provide long-term stability.

7 Case study 2: students' preferences regarding employment

7.1 Purpose and methodological approach

200. **This case study examines how students, one of the most important future talent pools for Romania's civil service, perceive the attractiveness of a public sector career under the reformed recruitment model.** The analysis explores which job-related features matter most to prospective applicants, such as salary, transparency and fairness in recruitment, promotion prospects, mentorship and training opportunities, working conditions, and job prestige. It also examines the trade-offs students are willing to make among these attributes, offering insight into whether public employment is perceived as a compelling option and whether the current reforms align with the expectations of younger generations. Because debutants are a core target group for the national competition, their preferences provide a critical lens for anticipating how the reform may influence future labor supply.

201. **The case study applies a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) to elicit students' preferences under realistic decision-making scenarios.** Grounded in Lancaster's theory of value and McFadden's Random Utility Theory, the DCE does not ask respondents to rate the civil service in abstract terms but instead places them in repeated choices between hypothetical jobs that vary across attributes relevant to public employment. **Each student evaluates multiple choice cards and can also reject all options**, mirroring real labor market behavior where public service competes with private alternatives. Attribute selection was informed by literature review, qualitative consultations, and piloting, and covers both classical employment dimensions (e.g., salary, workload, job security, work-life balance, commuting time) and policy-relevant features central to Romania's reform agenda, such as transparent recruitment, performance-based promotion, horizontal mobility, and opportunities for training and mentorship. Two fractional-factorial designs with salary as the overlapping attribute ensured analytical robustness without overburdening respondents.

202. **The DCE reached 492 students from four universities offering Public Administration programs in Romania:** SNSPA Bucharest, Ovidius University Constanța, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj, and Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Iași. Most respondents were enrolled in Public Administration, with smaller shares studying Political Science, Law, European Studies, Sociology, International Relations, Public Policy, or Economics. To complement the survey results, additional online and face-to-face interviews were held with teachers and students from the same four universities, offering qualitative insights on the correlation between academic curricula, the competencies developed during university training, and the competency expectations emerging from the newly defined competency frameworks for public administration.

203. **The DCE provides richer and more policy-relevant insights than traditional attitudinal surveys by capturing the concrete trade-offs students make between job characteristics.** By observing how respondents choose among structured alternatives, the method reveals the relative strength of preferences, for instance, whether transparent recruitment can compensate for a lower starting salary, or whether development opportunities outweigh rapid promotion. This allows a clearer understanding of which features genuinely enhance the appeal of a public sector career and which are secondary from the perspective of potential entrants. The approach also uncovers important differences in how various student groups value key aspects of public employment. Some students, especially those with higher public service motivation, may prioritize fairness, stability, and meaningful societal impact, while others may place greater

weight on salary, mobility, or work–life balance. Identifying this heterogeneity helps design more effective recruitment messages, differentiated entry pathways, such as graduate schemes or fast-track programs, and other HRM interventions that reflect diverse expectations. Because salary is included as a common attribute, the DCE also enables the estimation of the monetary value young people assign to improvements in non-financial aspects of public employment.

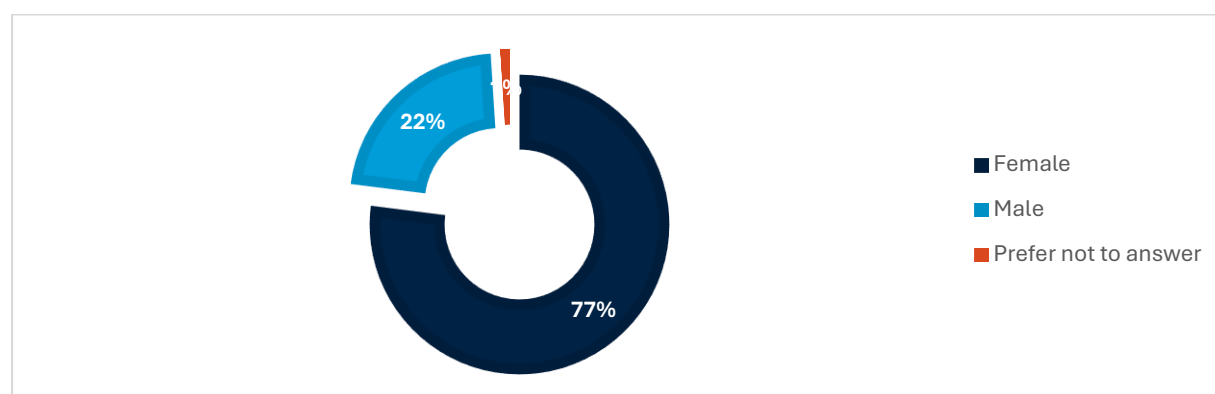
204. **Beyond eliciting preferences, the DCE also serves as a diagnostic tool for understanding how young people perceive the ongoing civil service reforms and what this implies for future HRM adjustments.** If features such as limited mobility, unclear performance evaluation, or the perceived absence of merit-based promotion reduce job attractiveness, this signals deeper structural issues requiring policy attention. Conversely, strong preferences for transparent recruitment, competency-based selection, or mentorship opportunities indicate that important elements of the reform resonate with future applicants. The option to reject all job offers further shows whether the civil service, even under improved conditions, competes effectively with private sector alternatives. These insights reveal whether centralized recruitment, competency-based testing, and increased transparency align with students' priorities and where the model may need refinement. They also clarify how financial, institutional, and developmental incentives influence willingness to enter public service, providing actionable evidence to guide the next phase of Romania's HRM reform and to strengthen the civil service's appeal to younger generations.

7.2 Profile of respondents

7.2.1 Gender

205. **The gender distribution of the sample reflects broader enrollment patterns in public administration and related social science programs in Romania, where women traditionally constitute the majority.** In this study, female students represent 77 percent of respondents, while male students account for 23 percent. This composition has implications for recruitment strategies and policy design. Women already show relatively strong interest in public sector employment and express a higher preference for administrative roles, suggesting that reforms focused on fairness, predictability, and work–life balance may be particularly effective in supporting female entry and long-term retention. At the same time, the comparatively lower representation of male respondents highlights an opportunity to broaden outreach and ensure that recruitment messages resonate with both genders, especially for roles where male participation has historically been higher, such as regulatory or enforcement functions.

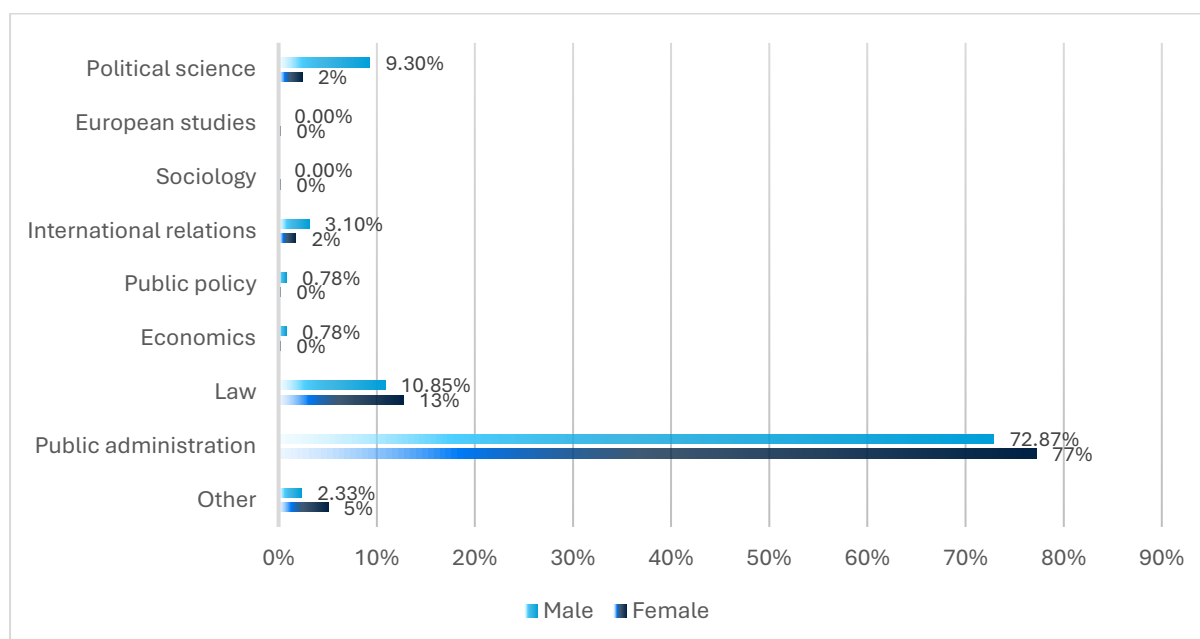
Figure 13. Gender distribution



7.2.2 Field of study

206. **The survey is dominated by students enrolled in public administration programs, reflecting a deliberate focus on the primary academic feeder stream into the civil service.** Among respondents, 73 percent of male students and 77 percent of female students study public administration, while others come from complementary fields such as Political Science, Law, European Studies, Sociology, International Relations, Public Policy, or Economics. This mix reflects the broader ecosystem of public sector recruitment, where institutions require both specialized and multidisciplinary profiles.

Figure 14. Field of study, by gender

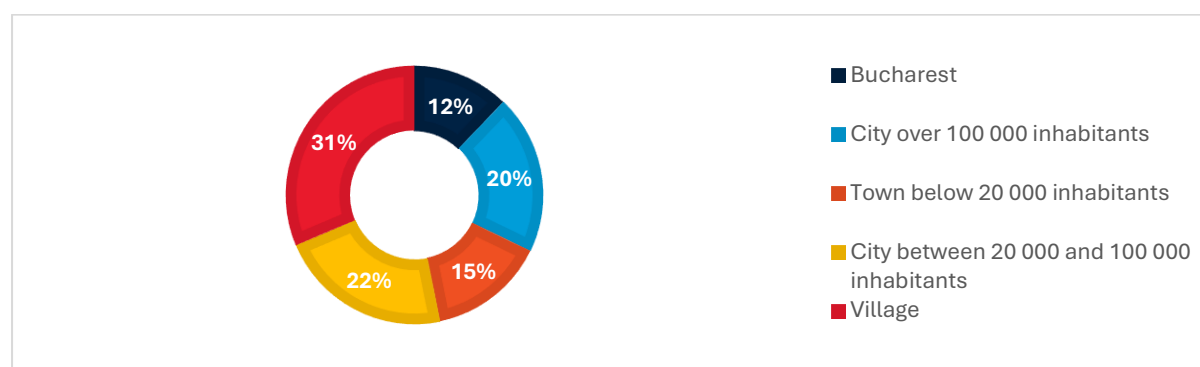


207. **Qualitative interviews, however, suggest that the advantage of public administration programs within this feeder stream is not consistently recognized in recruitment practices.** Several students and teachers expressed concern that specialized academic training does not systematically translate into a competitive edge, noting that “*public administration graduates do not always have an advantage over graduates from unrelated fields.*” Clarifying degree relevance, while preserving openness to multidisciplinary profiles, may help ensure that academic pathways align more clearly with public administration needs.

7.2.3 Residence and residential arrangements

208. **Respondents come from a wide range of permanent residence settings, and their housing arrangements reflect diverse living situations during their studies.** About one-third of students report living in rural areas, while the rest come from towns and cities of varying sizes, including a small share from Bucharest. Their current residential arrangements also vary: 44 percent live in privately rented accommodation, 37 percent live with family, 19 percent reside in student housing, and a small fraction fall into other categories. This distribution indicates that students navigate university life under different living circumstances, shaped by location, access to housing, and study arrangements.

Figure 15. Place of permanent residence



7.2.4 Family and personal income

209. **Family and personal income levels point to generally modest financial circumstances, alongside limited employment experience among respondents.** Most households earn below 10,000 RON (approx. EUR 2,000) per month, and the majority of students report personal incomes under 1,500 RON (approx. EUR 300), with one in five having no income at all. Gender differences are notable: female students are more concentrated in the lowest income brackets, while higher earnings are more common among male respondents. Employment exposure is also limited, around 20 percent are currently employed, roughly 40 percent have worked in the past, and another 40 percent have never been employed. These patterns highlight the financial constraints many students face, which are likely to influence how they assess job security, remuneration, and advancement opportunities in the public sector.

7.3 Declared job preferences

7.3.1 Prospective occupation and type of employer

210. **Students show a clear overall preference for administrative roles, with other prospective occupations attracting smaller but meaningful levels of interest.** Administrative positions are the most frequently selected option, followed by project management and management roles. Smaller shares of respondents expressed interest in policy analysis, communication, research, teaching, IT, or legal professions. Full-time employment is the overwhelmingly preferred working arrangement across the sample.

Figure 16. Preferred prospective occupation, by gender

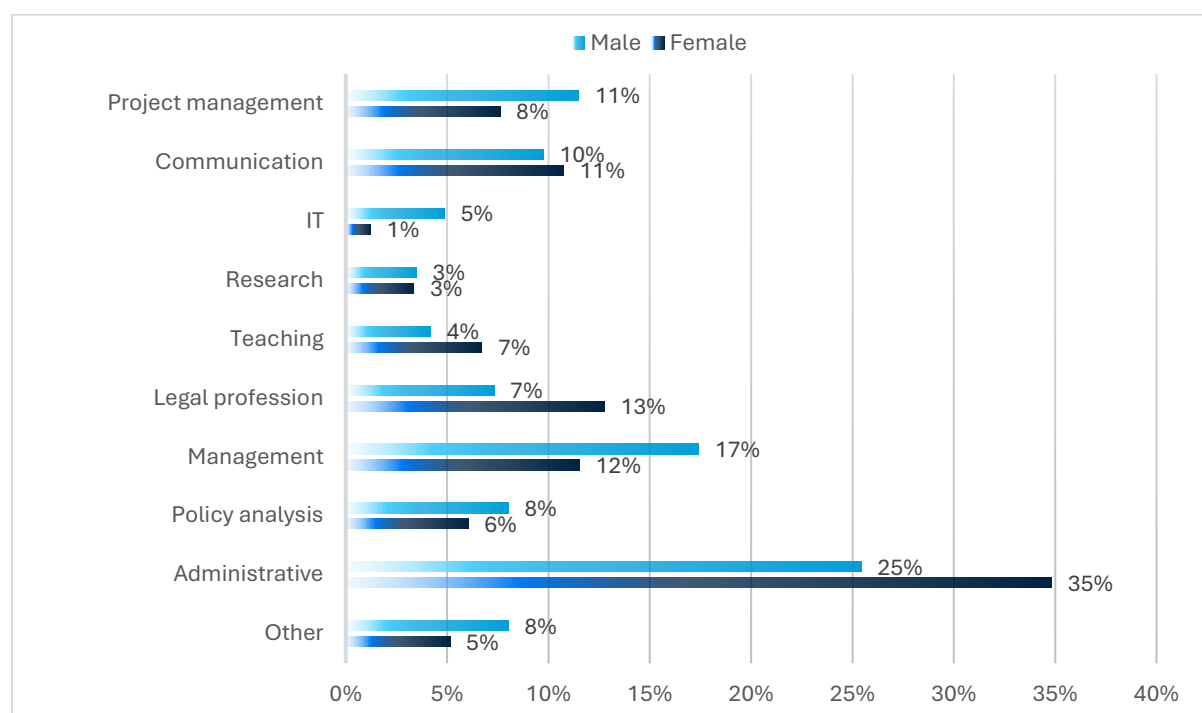
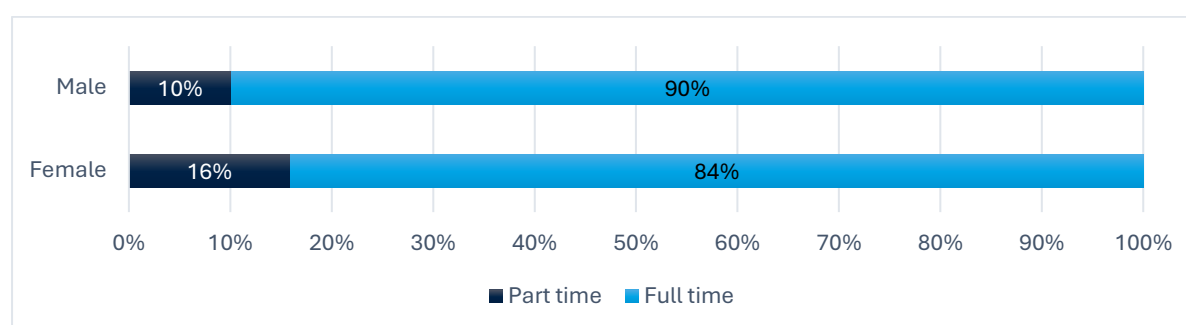
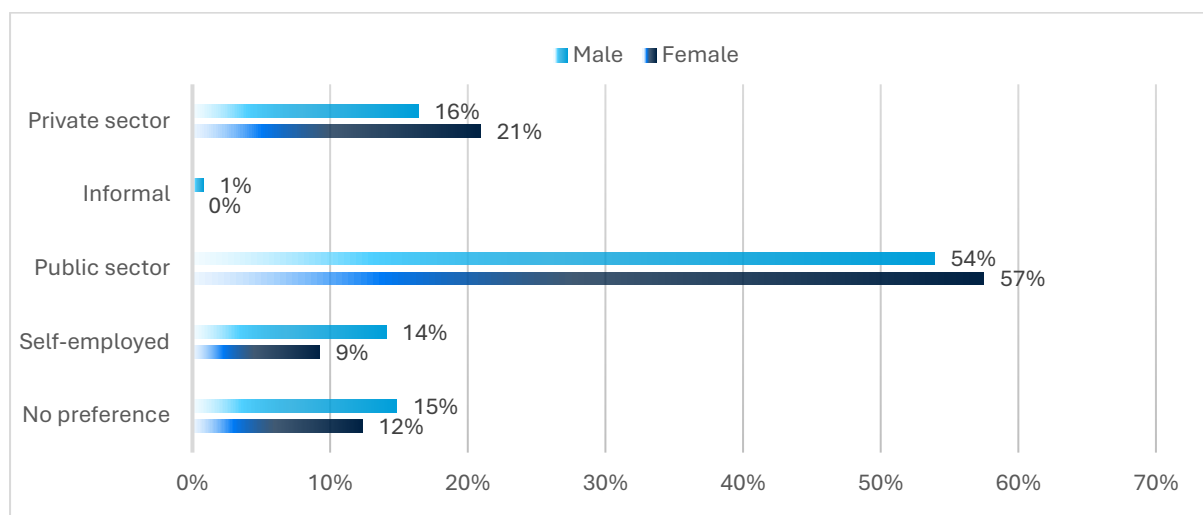


Figure 17. Preferred working arrangement



211. **Preferences regarding the type of employer also follow a consistent pattern, with a broad inclination toward public sector employment.** More than half of respondents indicate a preference for working in the public sector, while roughly one-fifth favor private sector careers. A smaller proportion would opt for self-employment, and a comparable share report no strong preference. These results suggest that, despite differences in individual occupational interests, the public sector remains an attractive career destination for a majority of surveyed students.

Figure 18. Preferred type of employer

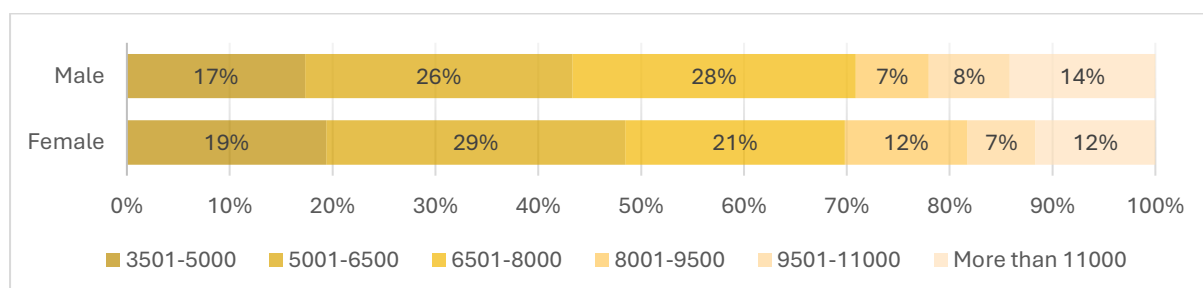


212. **Interviews confirm that many students select Public Administration studies with an interest in public service from the outset.** Several began pursuing this pathway in high school through vocational guidance, motivated by the perception that public administration offers a socially meaningful and stable career, and attracted by roles involving direct contact with citizens and public institutions. Both students and university professors in Public Administration programs emphasized that practice placements in public institutions reinforce this motivation, as they gain exposure to administrative procedures, document management, and interaction with real cases and workflows. These experiences were generally evaluated positively, and interview respondents noted enthusiasm following internships.

7.3.2 Income expectations

- **Students' expectations regarding satisfactory income cluster around mid-range salary levels, with only modest variation across respondents.** Nearly half consider an income of up to 6,500 RON (approx. EUR 1,300) sufficient, while a sizeable share expect between 6,501 and 8,000 RON (approx. EUR 1,300 and 1,600). Around one-third would aim for earnings above 8,001 RON. Although male respondents report slightly higher expectations on average, the overall distribution of desired income levels is broadly similar.

Figure 19. Income considered satisfactory, RON

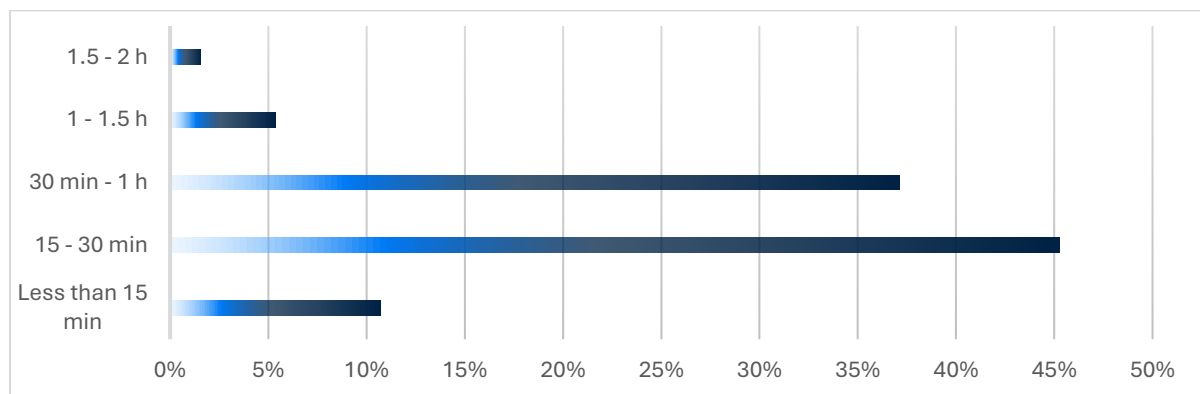


213. **Nevertheless, the qualitative interviews make clear that salary differentials vis-à-vis private sector opportunities represent a major retention challenge.** For students already earning above public entry levels, transitioning into the public sector may represent a financial setback, despite their initial wish to pursue a career as a civil servant, in line with their academic choices.

7.3.3 Commuting time

214. **Commuting preferences indicate that most students favor workplaces located within a short to moderate travel distance.** More than half of respondents would be willing to commute for no more than 30 minutes, with 11 percent preferring a commute under 15 minutes and 45 percent accepting a 15–30-minute journey. An additional 37 percent are willing to travel up to one hour, while only a small minority (7 percent) would accept a longer commute. These patterns suggest that proximity and accessibility are important considerations in students' evaluation of potential job opportunities

Figure 20. Maximum preferred commuting time to work

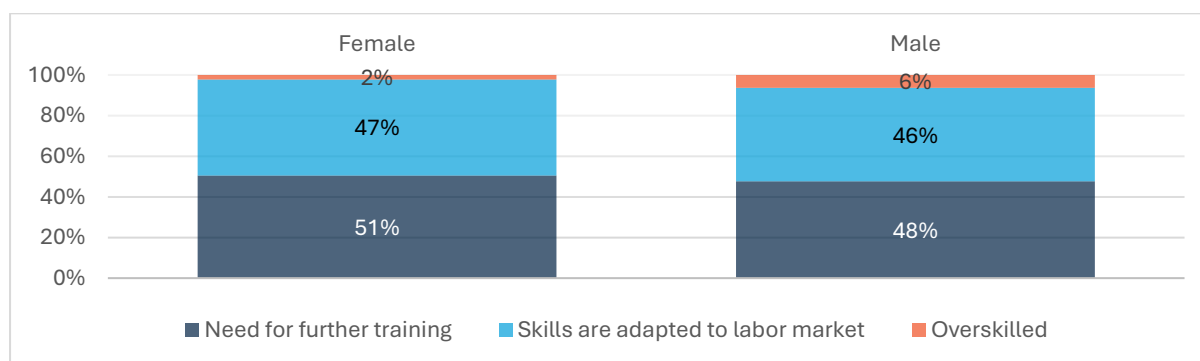


7.4 Subjective evaluation of skills and preparedness for employment

7.4.1 Skills and reskilling

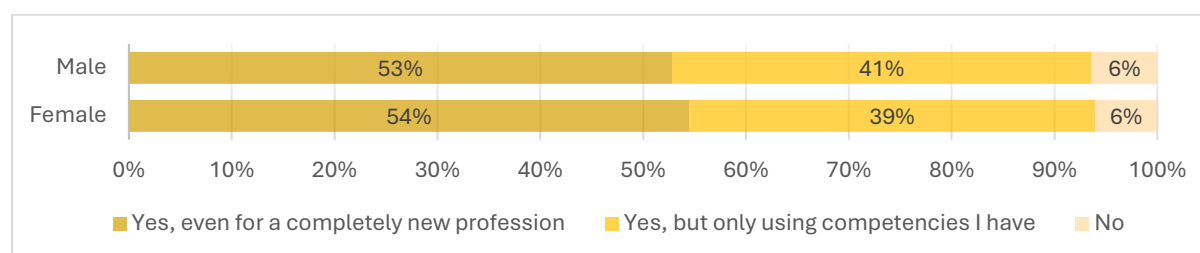
215. **Students report a mixed perception of how well their current skills align with labor-market needs.** About half of respondents feel they still need additional training, while a similar share believe their current skills are reasonably aligned with labor-market requirements. Only a very small proportion consider themselves over-skilled, suggesting that most students view their competencies as still developing.

Figure 21. Fit between current skills and local labor market needs



216. **Willingness to reskill is exceptionally high across the sample.** More than nine in ten respondents are open to reskilling if required, and over half would retrain even for a completely new profession. The remainder prefer reskilling within areas related to their existing competencies. This indicates a strong readiness among students to adapt to changing labor-market demands.

Figure 22. Willingness to reskill, by gender



7.4.2 Preparedness for employment

217. Despite this adaptability, students feel only moderately prepared for the job-search process. Confidence levels are modest across the three areas assessed - searching and selecting job offers, preparing application documents, and participating in interviews. Roughly one-third feel well or very well prepared to navigate job offers, and slightly higher shares feel prepared to draft application documents or participate in interviews. A small minority report feeling poorly or very poorly prepared in each area. These patterns suggest that many students would benefit from additional career guidance, practical workshops, and structured preparation for recruitment processes.

Figure 23. Self-assessment of being prepared to search and select job offers

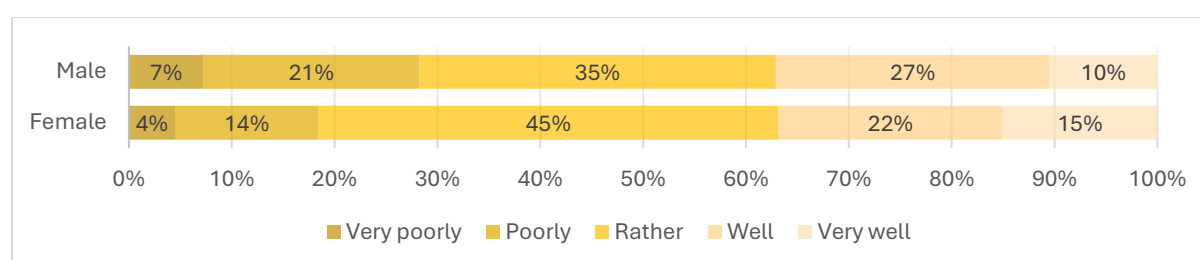


Figure 24. Self-assessment of being prepared to prepare job application documents

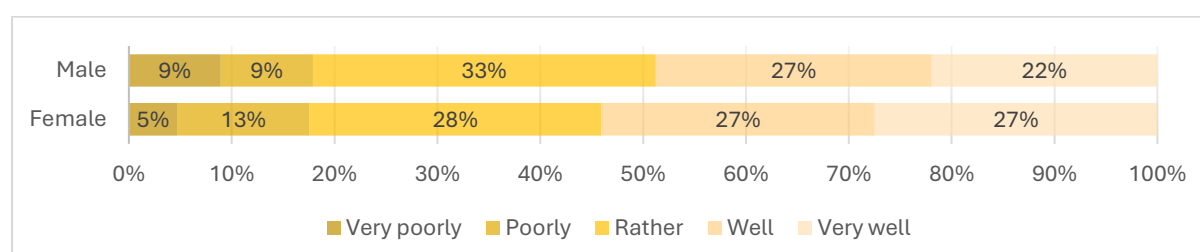
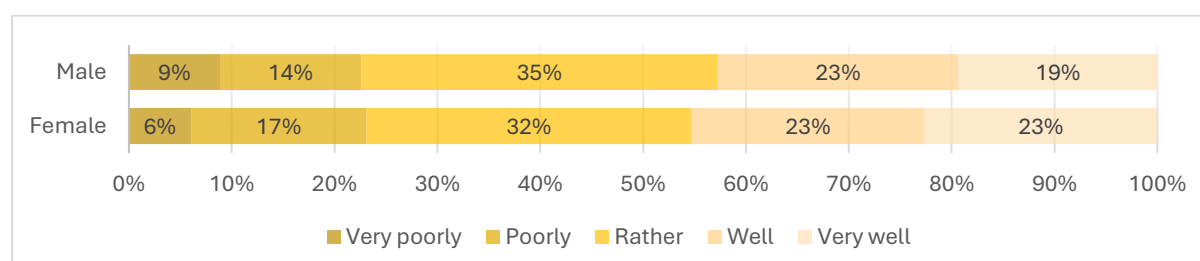


Figure 25. Self-assessment of being prepared to participate in job interviews



Box 10. Alignment between curricula and public administration competency frameworks

University representatives confirmed that they were not formally consulted in the creation of the general competency framework for the civil service. While individual academics contributed informally in a personal capacity, institutions did not receive official invitations to participate. This limited formal engagement with universities during framework design.

Faculty explained that NACS's civil service competency framework and ARACIS¹⁷⁰ accreditation requirements do not fully align. ARACIS mandates specific learning outcomes tied to each course, while NACS defines competencies expected in public administration roles. Universities attempted to integrate public-service competencies into curricula but were unable to fully reconcile them with ARACIS standards. As a result, institutions must prioritize ARACIS structures even when they differ from competencies sought in public administration recruitment.

Universities reported active efforts to build digital competencies, including courses on digital tools, e-government, data analysis, and artificial intelligence. Students are encouraged to use tools such as R, Python, and social media analytics. Faculty noted that many students lack applied digital literacy when entering university, requiring foundational digital training in the first year. They also highlighted infrastructure constraints, such as the absence of dedicated administrative simulation labs, which limit hands-on training capacity. Plans exist to develop such infrastructure pending available funding.

7.5 Revealed occupational preferences (DCE results)

218. **This section presents the results of the DCEs, first using Multinomial Logit (MNL) models and then a Latent Class Logit (LCL) model to explore preference heterogeneity.** The MNL results quantify average preferences across all respondents for each of the two DCE designs, while the LCL model is used to identify segments of respondents with distinct patterns of preferences within the sample.

Box 11. Econometric model - MNL

Each respondent i 's choice is determined by their utility, which depends on both the observable characteristics (attributes) and the unobserved individual-specific factors associated with selecting alternative j in situation t . This relationship can be represented as:

$$U_{ijt} = \mathbf{X}_{ijt} \boldsymbol{\beta} + e_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

Where $\mathbf{X}_{ijt}$ denotes the observed job attributes with a corresponding vector of parameters $\boldsymbol{\beta}$, while e_{ijt} represents the stochastic component capturing unobservable influences. Assuming that this stochastic term follows an independent and identically distributed extreme value (Type I) distribution, the probability that respondent i chooses alternative j from a set of J options is given by a conditional logistic regression model:

$$P(j|J) = \frac{\exp(\mathbf{X}_{ij} \boldsymbol{\beta})}{\sum_{k=1}^J \exp(\mathbf{X}_{ik} \boldsymbol{\beta})} \quad (2)$$

Depending on the specific choices and attribute levels, this formulation allows for the estimation of the utility function using the maximum likelihood method. Since respondents are assumed to select the alternative that maximizes their utility, the resulting probability reflects an optimization process. The expression in equation (2) corresponds to the well-known Multinomial Logit Model (MNL).

The MNL model coefficients indicate the relative importance of the attributes in driving choice behavior, and can be interpreted as population-average effects, providing a baseline understanding of the direction and strength of preferences.

¹⁷⁰ ARACIS's mission is to conduct external evaluations of the quality of education offered by higher education institutions and other organizations providing similar programs in Romania. It aims to certify, based on quality standards, the capacity of educational providers to meet expectations, promote a culture of quality within universities, protect students by ensuring transparent and credible information about education quality, and advise the Ministry of Education on strategies and policies for the continuous improvement of higher education in connection with the pre-university system. More information available at: <https://www.aracis.ro/>

7.5.1 Preferences for hiring-related attributes (DCE 1)

219. **The DCE results show that transparency, early job security, competency-based promotion, and performance-linked evaluation are among the most valued features of public employment for surveyed students.** Figure 26 presents the utility estimates from the first DCE, covering hiring-related attributes such as transparency, recruitment procedures, working conditions, job security, promotion rules, and performance evaluation. Clear hiring criteria combined with a public list of results are especially important, worth about RON 527 per month relative to unclear procedures. Competency-based tests and case studies are strongly preferred to reference-based or memorization-based assessments. Immediate job stability matters as well, with an immediate permanent contract valued RON 236 higher than one granted after 12 months. Students also attribute high value to reform-oriented promotion systems: they would accept roughly RON 571 less in salary for a competency-based promotion track allowing advancement after two years rather than a seniority-based system with promotions after four or more years. Similarly, performance systems based on quarterly KPIs and bonuses up to RON 1,000 are valued at approximately RON 586 relative to an annual manager review with no bonus. The results of DCE 1 indicate that key pillars of the reform - transparency, meritocracy, and performance orientation - carry substantial value for future entrants into the civil service.

Figure 26. Discrete choice experiment testing hiring-related attributes – utility units

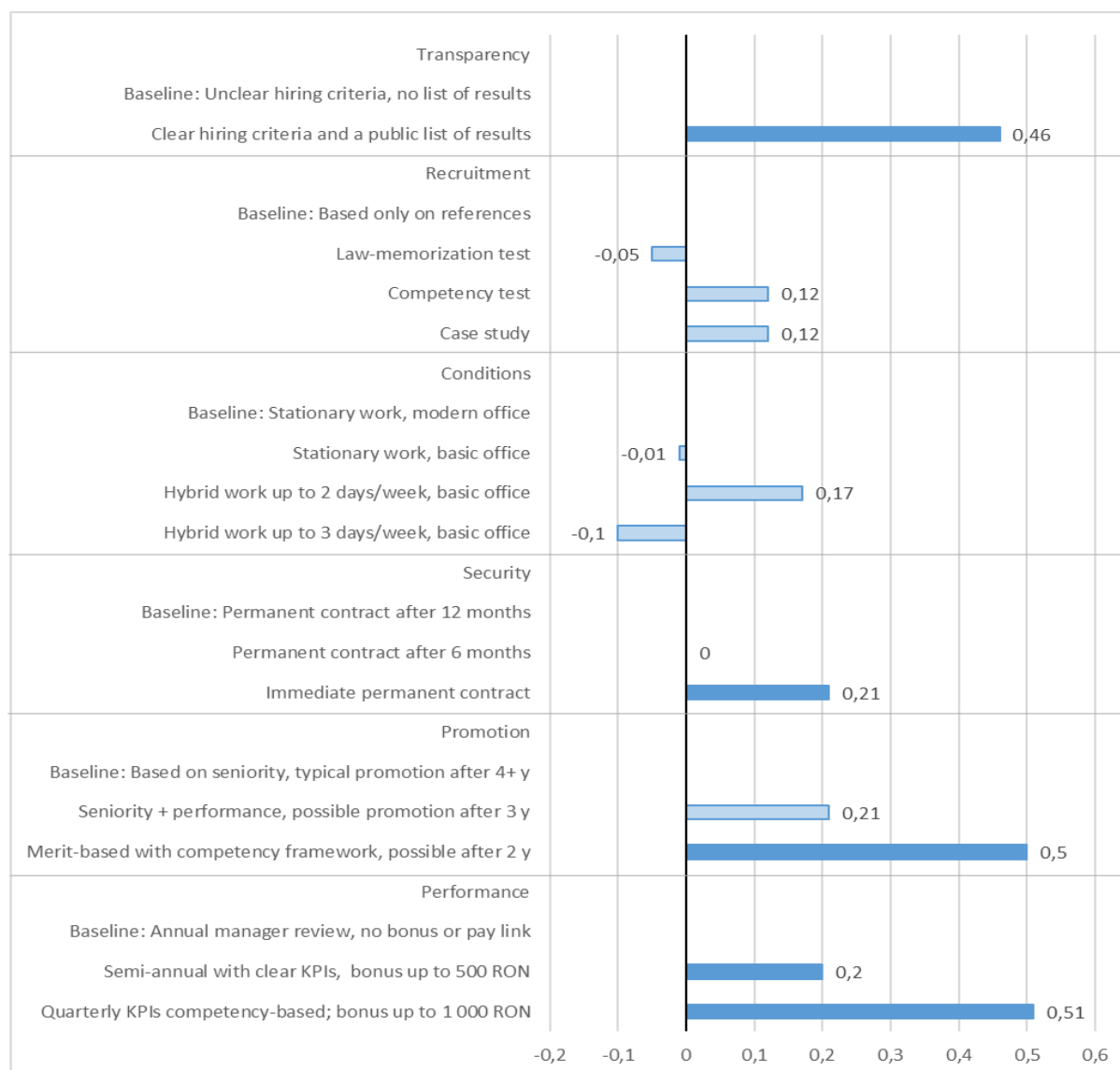


Table 23. Discrete choice experiment testing hiring-related attributes – willingness to pay

Attributes	WTP ¹⁷¹
Transparency	
Baseline: Unclear hiring criteria, no list of results	
Clear hiring criteria and a public list of results	527,27
Recruitment	
Baseline: Based only on references	
Law-memorization test	-5,51
Competency test	133,58
Case study	134,01
Conditions	

¹⁷¹ Note: bold coefficients indicate statistically significant results (5% level).

Attributes	WTP¹⁷¹
<i>Baseline: Stationary work, modern office</i>	
<i>Stationary work, basic office</i>	-5,74
<i>Hybrid work up to 2 days/week, basic office</i>	195,69
<i>Hybrid work up to 3 days/week, basic office</i>	-114,64
Security	
<i>Baseline: Permanent contract after 12 months</i>	
<i>Permanent contract after 6 months</i>	-0,46
<i>Immediate permanent contract</i>	235,97
Promotion	
<i>Baseline: Based on seniority, typical promotion after 4+ y</i>	
<i>Seniority + performance, possible promotion after 3 y</i>	245,56
<i>Merit-based with competency framework, possible after 2 y</i>	571,02
Performance	
<i>Baseline: Annual manager review, no bonus or pay link</i>	
<i>Semi-annual with clear KPIs, bonus up to 500 RON</i>	231,10
<i>Quarterly KPIs competency-based; bonus up to 1 000 RON</i>	586,43

7.5.2 Preferences for work-related attributes (DCE 2)

220. The second DCE confirms that work-life balance, job prestige, meaningful training, and short commuting times are strong drivers of job attractiveness, while variable-pay schemes are viewed with skepticism. As shown in Figure 27, respondents value mobility options such as annual internal openings or year-round application possibilities (worth RON 166–214). They express clear preferences for substantial training packages - particularly 60 hours per year with funded certification and a formal mentor - while intermediate options receive negative valuations. Flexible hours with compensated overtime are valued at about RON 537, and flexible hours with a right to disconnect at RON 374, relative to fixed schedules. Job prestige is highly valued: high-prestige positions are worth around RON 804, and medium-prestige positions about RON 382, relative to low-prestige roles. Students strongly prefer a fully fixed salary to remuneration with a high variable component, with utility falling sharply whenever the fixed portion drops below 70 percent. Commuting time is another decisive factor: a 45-minute commute requires compensation of about RON 531, and a 75-minute commute about RON 1,121, relative to a 15-minute commute. Overall, DCE 2 indicates that respondents value stability, predictability, meaningful development opportunities, and manageable daily conditions more than aggressive performance-reward structures.

Figure 27. Discrete choice experiment testing work-related attributes – utility units

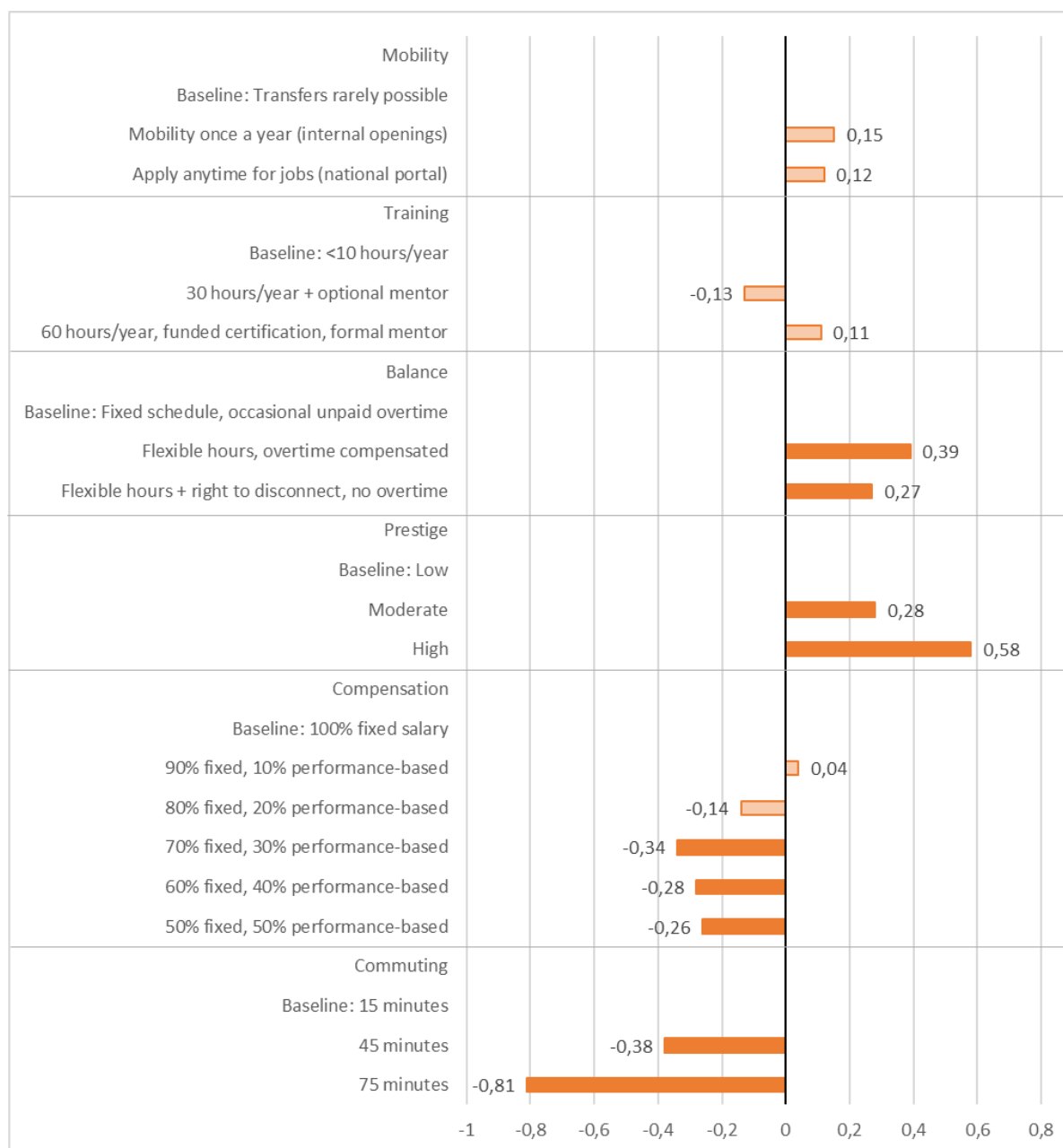


Table 24. Discrete choice experiment testing work-related attributes – willingness to pay

Attributes	WTP
Mobility	
Baseline: Transfers rarely possible	
Mobility once a year (internal openings)	213,71
Apply anytime for jobs (national portal)	166,2
Training	
Baseline: <10 hours/year	
30 hours/year + optional mentor	-187,00
60 hours/year, funded certification, formal mentor	149,86
Balance	

Attributes	WTP
Baseline: Fixed schedule, occasional unpaid overtime	
Flexible hours, overtime compensated	536,57
Flexible hours + right to disconnect, no overtime	373,77
Prestige	
Baseline: Low	
Moderate	382,37
High	804,23
Compensation	
Baseline: 100% fixed salary	
90% fixed, 10% performance-based	56,07
80% fixed, 20% performance-based	-193,67
70% fixed, 30% performance-based	-471,85
60% fixed, 40% performance-based	-396,64
50% fixed, 50% performance-based	-358,80
Commuting	
Baseline: 15 minutes	
45 minutes	-531,13
75 minutes	-1121,36

7.5.3 Segmentation of Respondents' Preferences

221. **To analyze whether distinct groups of respondents value attributes differently, the Bank estimated a Latent Class Logit (LCL) model for each DCE.** The LCL approach assumes that the sample is composed of a finite number of unobserved classes, each with its own set of preference parameters. Respondents are probabilistically assigned to these classes based on the similarity of their observed choices. A three-class specification was selected as a pragmatic compromise between explanatory power and model parsimony, and to allow for the interpretation of low, medium, and high preference profiles across key attributes.

222. **For hiring-related attributes, the latent class analysis identifies three distinct segments with clearly differentiated priorities (Table 25 – latent classes).** Class 2, representing about 43% of respondents, shows moderate positive preferences for merit-based promotion and performance-linked evaluation, but relatively low sensitivity to transparency or job security; this group can be interpreted as pragmatic career entrants focused on tangible rewards and advancement opportunities. Class 3, comprising 31% of the sample, exhibits strong positive coefficients for transparency, promotion, and performance evaluation, suggesting a profile of reform-oriented idealists who place high value on fairness, clarity, and competency-based progression. Class 1, accounting for 27%, displays weak and sometimes negative coefficients across most attributes, with only a modest preference for job security; this group appears more risk-averse or disengaged, and less motivated by institutional features of the civil service.

Table 25. Latent classes of the population based on the hiring-related attributes

Variable	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Transparency	-0,052	0,03	1,548

<i>Recruitment</i>	-0,008	0,087	-0,03
<i>Conditions</i>	-0,041	-0,038	-0,006
<i>Security</i>	0,239	0,023	0,202
<i>Promotion</i>	0,196	0,307	0,44
<i>Performance</i>	0,054	0,353	0,748
<i>Salary</i>	0,000	0,002	0,001
<i>Class share</i>	0,265	0,428	0,307

223. **For work-related attributes, the LCL results reveal similarly heterogeneous patterns of preferences (Table 26 – latent classes).** Class 1, which includes about 46% of respondents, values work–life balance and job prestige most strongly, pointing to a large segment attracted by stability, predictable working conditions, and social recognition. Class 2, covering 30% of the sample, shows weaker or negative valuations of training, mobility, and changes in compensation structure, indicating a more neutral or skeptical stance toward several reform elements. In contrast, Class 3, representing 24% of respondents, assigns high positive utilities to training, flexible working arrangements, and prestige, consistent with a development-oriented group drawn to learning opportunities, flexibility, and reputational benefits. Together, these segments underline that while many students are receptive to reform features that emphasize fairness, professional growth, and flexibility, a significant minority remains ambivalent, highlighting the need for differentiated communication and tailored recruitment strategies within Romania’s civil service modernization agenda.

Table 26. Latent classes of the population based on the work-related attributes

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Class 1</i>	<i>Class 2</i>	<i>Class 3</i>
<i>Mobility</i>	0,071	-0,030	0,181
<i>Training</i>	0,031	-0,265	0,329
<i>Balance</i>	0,159	0,242	0,535
<i>Prestige</i>	0,225	-0,011	0,470
<i>Compensation</i>	-0,025	-0,018	-0,415
<i>Commuting</i>	-0,014	-0,031	-0,008
<i>Salary</i>	0,000	0,003	0,001
<i>Class share</i>	0,461	0,295	0,244

7.6 DCE Conclusions and policy recommendations

224. **This study provides new empirical evidence on what makes public sector careers attractive to Romania's next generation of potential civil servants.** Using a DCE, it captures how students weigh different job attributes and reveals which features of the current reform agenda resonate most strongly with future applicants. The results show that transparency in recruitment, job security, merit-based advancement, work-life balance, and opportunities for development are central to how young people assess the value of civil service employment.

225. **The DCE results highlight a strong preference for fairness, predictability, and competency-based career progression.** Students place high value on transparent hiring criteria, public availability of results, and immediate access to permanent contracts. They also favor promotion systems based on merit and competency frameworks rather than seniority, and they respond positively to performance evaluations linked to clear indicators and meaningful bonuses. These findings confirm that the principles underpinning the reformed recruitment model - transparency, competency-based evaluation, and meritocracy - are aligned with the expectations of young entrants.

226. **Preferences related to working conditions reinforce the importance of modernizing the civil service employment experience.** Respondents consistently prioritize flexible working arrangements, opportunities for training and mentorship, and clear pathways for professional development. Stability in compensation is also valued, with fully fixed salaries preferred over highly variable, performance-linked structures. Short commuting times, manageable workloads, and the prestige associated with the institution further shape job attractiveness. These findings reflect a generation seeking both purpose and quality of life, expecting well-structured, developmental career paths rather than rigid bureaucratic roles.

Box 12. Perspectives from Young Civil Servants: Findings from the ATAP "Why Do We Stay?" Survey (2025)

Recent evidence from the ATAP 2025 survey of young civil servants closely mirrors the DCE findings, showing strong convergence between future entrants and those already in the system: salary, meritocracy, and career development consistently emerge as the main drivers of satisfaction and retention, with widespread concerns about low pay, limited merit-based promotion, and the need for fair, transparent, and depoliticized recruitment processes. Young civil servants also underscore the importance of modern, flexible, and supportive workplaces - digital tools, reduced bureaucracy, mentorship, and healthier organizational culture - which directly reflect students' preferences for flexible schedules, structured development opportunities, and improved working conditions. While nearly one-third of young public employees consider leaving due to poor career prospects, lack of recognition, and rigid institutional norms, many remain motivated by stability and civic purpose, noting that strengthened meritocracy and clearer development pathways would substantially improve long-term retention

Source: Asociația Tinerilor din Administrația Publică (ATAP). (2025). Why do we stay? (Chestionar ATAP – De ce mai rămânem?). Bucharest, Romania.

227. **The latent class analysis shows that these preferences are not uniform, underscoring the need for differentiated recruitment strategies.** A major segment of respondents values transparency, training, and professional prestige, forming a reform-oriented, development-minded group. Other segments are more pragmatic, focusing on career progression and income, or more risk-averse, placing disproportionate value on stability alone. This heterogeneity suggests that a single recruitment narrative or career pathway will not appeal equally to all potential candidates.

228. **These findings point to several actionable priorities for strengthening Romania's HRM reform and increasing the attractiveness of civil service careers.** Transparent, competency-based recruitment needs to be fully institutionalized, with contests built around clear criteria, publicly accessible results, and structured evaluation tools. Providing earlier job

security, particularly through immediate or short-term pathways to permanence, would help attract qualified graduates seeking stability at the start of their careers. A consistent, merit-based promotion framework is essential for reinforcing credibility and ensuring equal opportunities across institutions.

229. **Strengthening training, mentorship, and career development is equally important for long-term retention and professionalization.** Standardized induction programs, formal mentorship structures, and certification-linked training aligned with the national competency framework should become integral components of civil service employment. At the same time, improvements to work–life balance, such as hybrid work arrangements, flexible schedules, and right-to-disconnect provisions, would help align public sector working conditions with the expectations of younger talent.

8 Case study 3: Communication and feedback channels

8.1 Purpose and scope of the communication review

230. **Communication was expected to support the national competition by raising awareness, improving understanding of the new model, and strengthening trust in a transparent, merit-based recruitment system.** According to the 2020 theory of change¹⁷², effective communication is a critical enabler of reform: it should attract qualified applicants, inform institutions about their roles, counter negative perceptions about public employment, and contribute to positioning the civil service as an employer of choice. In line with EU experience, communication was also expected to advance medium- and long-term employer-branding goals by highlighting the values, stability, learning opportunities, and professionalism associated with public administration careers.

231. **Previous ex-post analysis of the pilot national competition¹⁷³ identified communication gaps and offered targeted recommendations for improvement.** The analysis showed that the pilot national competition was broadly promoted but lacked adequate awareness among potential candidates due to poorly targeted social media efforts. The recommendations included involving detailed target group analysis, using appropriate channels such as student organizations for entry-level roles, professional groups for experienced positions, and institutional networks for leadership roles. Another recommendation emphasized the need for more targeted promotion to effectively reach the right audiences, along with intensified efforts to enhance engagement with the appropriate target groups.

232. **This review assesses the communication efforts for the extended national competition, examining the alignment between communication activities, competition objectives, and employer-branding principles.** The analysis covers institutional arrangements, roles, internal procedures, collaboration between NACS and the external provider, and the timeliness and clarity of communication across channels. It evaluates both operational communication (information on stages, deadlines, and processes) and strategic communication (brand identity, value messages, candidate experience), identifying factors that supported or limited impact.

233. **The assessment draws on multiple sources¹⁷⁴, including internal NACS documents, communication plans, monitoring reports, online analytics, interviews, and survey data.** Key

¹⁷² World Bank. 2020. Defining a model for the national contest. Available at https://www.anfp.gov.ro/R/Doc/2021/Proiecte/SIPOCA%20136/Output-uri/Romania_HRMRAS_4.1_Concursul%20national_RO_revised_final%20August,%2006,%202020.pdf

¹⁷³ [Report for carrying out consultancy services for the elaboration of an ex-post analysis of the national competition \(pilot\).](#)

¹⁷⁴ The review covered communication strategies, plans, budgets, main publications, and evaluation reports, fall 2023 - 2024. Main sources included the NACS Institutional Development Strategy 2024-2027, Report on the management of civil servants and civil servants, Pilot National Contest Promotion plan, internal communication procedures (Operational procedure for ensuring the publicity and promotion of the National Competition; and (ii) Operational procedure regarding the internal communication process for employer brand creation & optimization in public administration), 2024 GPI General plan for the campaign, Detailed action plan, revised version cf. address No. 17265/2024, 2024 NACS Visual Identity Manual,

sources include operational procedures, the visual identity manual, the communication and branding strategy, campaign reports, and data from the contest portal and social media channels. Qualitative insights were collected from interviews with NACS staff, the service provider, and institutional stakeholders, while candidate perspectives were integrated through surveys and feedback gathered at events.

8.2 Institutional arrangements and communication processes

8.2.1 Governance, roles, and internal procedures

234. **NACS's communication responsibilities for the national competition are defined by legal obligations and internal procedures that establish a multi-actor institutional setup.** By law, NACS must ensure publicity for each competition round through the Official Monitor, its website, the contest platform, and additional media channels, publishing notices at least 30 days before preliminary tests. Internally, communication is guided by the (i) Operational Procedure for Publicity and Promotion of the National Competition and the (ii) Operational Procedure on Internal Communication for Employer Brand Development, alongside the Visual Identity Manual, Candidate Guides, platform user manuals, and the 2025-2028 Communication and Branding Strategy. These instruments provide a coherent framework for consistent communication.

235. **The communication process relies on collaboration between multiple NACS departments and an external service provider.** Communication leadership is shared primarily between the Directorate for Operationalizing Public Function Reform (DOPFR) and the Communication and International Relations Service (CIRS), with support from the Promotion and Branding Department (CPB) and the Civil Service Reform Department (CRFP). Execution and monitoring were outsourced to Great People Inside (GPI¹⁷⁵), which developed, according to NACS's Terms of Reference, into detailed plans, content, events, and monthly reports. While this arrangement ensured access to professional expertise and scalability, the multi-layered approval process, often involving legal review, slowed response times during peak contest periods and created dependency on external capacity.

Candidate guide, 2025 Communication plan, 2025 – 2028 Communication and branding strategy of the National Agency of Civil Servants, 2024 Manual for the use of the competition IT platform by candidates, Extended National Competition Platform Selection stage, 2024 NACS Newsletters and Euro Functionarul magazine, NACS official website, National Contest website dedicated page, Report for carrying out consultancy services for the elaboration of an ex post analysis of the national competition (pilot), and social media accounts activity for 2024 (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube). This documentary base ensures that the report's recommendations for improving communication are evidence-based and aligned with institutional priorities.

¹⁷⁵ In accordance with Contracts No. 26770/29.05.2023 and No. 291/30.05.2023, NACS regularly submits the posting plan to both the Quantitative and Qualitative Reception Commissions for review and acceptance.

Figure 28. Communication key stakeholders



Source: Authors' elaboration

8.2.2 Workflow, capacity, and internal coordination

236. **The roles and workflows established for contest communication were thorough on paper but proved demanding in practice, especially given limited in-house staffing.** DOPFR defined communication needs, oversaw contest-specific accounts, and coordinated messaging, while CIRS amplified content through NACS's general channels. An Acceptance Commission reviewed GPI's communication plan and products for accuracy and alignment with NACS standards. Monthly monitoring reports provided data on reach and engagement, though these were not systematically integrated into decision-making. Interviews highlighted the need for at least one dedicated communication specialist, and ideally two during peak periods, to manage candidate relations, content, and performance monitoring if NACS aims to gradually internalize more functions.

237. **The institutional setup offered advantages in terms of structure, expertise, and consistency, but also revealed gaps in agility, capacity, and end-to-end coordination across recruitment stages.** The clear division of responsibilities helped maintain coherent messaging and brand uniformity, while outsourcing provided access to modern tools and creative outputs. However, slow internal approvals reduced responsiveness; insufficient staff limited the ability to manage high volumes of candidate queries; and the absence of structured communication responsibilities for institutions involved in Stage II weakened continuity after the national pool was formed.

8.3 Strategic approach, targeting, and messaging

238. **NACS's communication approach for the extended national competition was designed to increase awareness, guide candidates through the process, and reinforce the credibility of the new recruitment model.** The 2024 Communication Plan¹⁷⁶, developed by GPI on the basis of NACS's ToRs, outlined actions aimed at promoting contest stages, informing institutions, and attracting qualified candidates for both central and territorial public roles. The plan emphasized transparency, clear explanation of procedures, and proactive outreach to ensure that potential applicants understood eligibility requirements, key deadlines, and the benefits of participating in a modernized, merit-based contest.

¹⁷⁶ Based on NACS Operational Procedure on ensuring National Contest Publicity and Promotion

239. **The communication strategy adopted a multi-channel approach intended to maximize reach and visibility across diverse population groups.** It leveraged diverse platforms such as social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube), Google Ads, radio and TV spots, workshops, job fairs, and promotional materials, alongside a dedicated contest website. This approach ensures broad visibility and multiple engagement points for potential candidates, providing opportunities for interaction and feedback.

240. **The plan encouraged a consistent brand image, which supported the plan's credibility, focusing on visual coherence, high-quality graphics, and a neutral, informative tone.** This builds trust in the public sector recruitment process and presents a professional, reliable image to a wide audience. The plan also emphasized adaptable messaging, allowing adjustments based on ongoing feedback and performance data to keep communication effective throughout the recruitment cycle.

241. **Audience targeting, however, remained broad¹⁷⁷, limiting the ability to tailor content to specific candidate segments with distinct expectations and information needs.** While the plan defined general audiences, it lacked segmentation for debutants, mid-career professionals, or specialized profiles. As a result, some posts used generic language that resonated broadly but insufficiently addressed the motivations of younger candidates, experienced specialists, or individuals unfamiliar with the public sector. This diluted the strategic potential of communication to “speak differently” to groups with different aspirations.

242. **The communication materials successfully incorporated storytelling and human elements, though opportunities remained for deeper engagement and personalization.** Testimonial videos from successful candidates humanized the process and increased the emotional appeal of public service careers. Dynamic visuals and simple explanatory content helped counter stereotypes and explain contest stages. For the future, additional interactive formats, such as contests, Q&A sessions, polls and user-generated content campaigns¹⁷⁸, could improve the campaign's ability to build community and sustain interest, especially among younger audiences.

8.4 Performance of communication channels and user experience

8.4.1 National Competition portal and NACS website

243. **The national competition portal¹⁷⁹ became the central hub for contest-related information and one of the strongest assets for transparency and public visibility.** The portal consolidated key materials - guidance, eligibility rules, timelines, FAQs, results, sample tests,

¹⁷⁷ 2024 National Contest Communication plan, Specific objectives: Promotion of the stages of the National Competition:

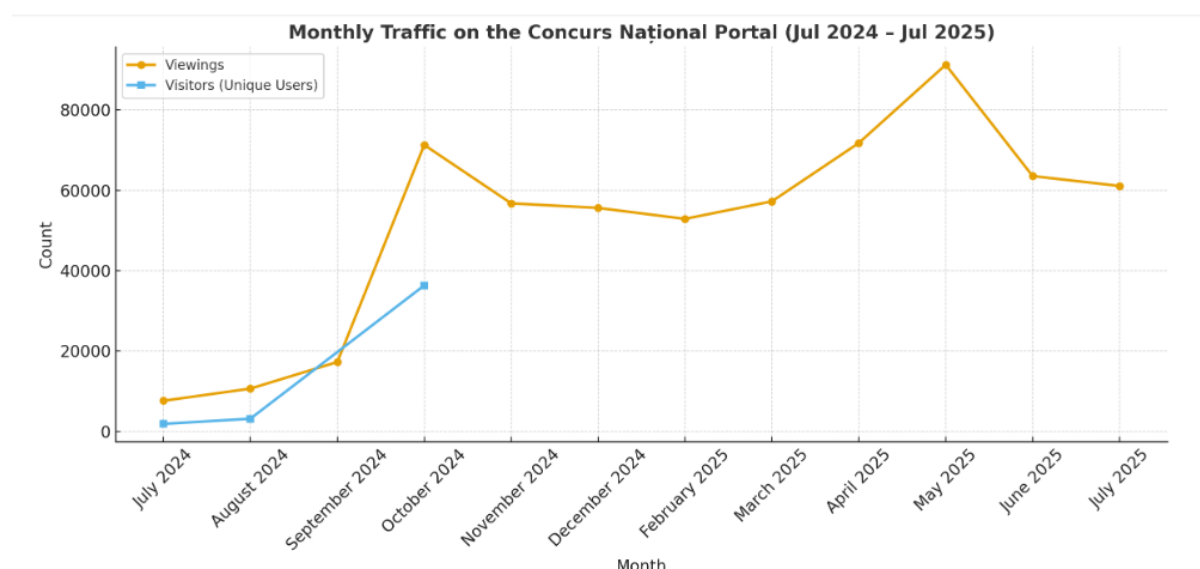
Through activities we **aim to reach a wide audience**, in order to attract and inform the public about the vacant public positions, the necessary profiles and the content of the recruitment process. III. Directions of action: (...); **motivating young people** to take an interest and choose a career as a civil servant in the public administration in Romania; promoting the transparent and merit-based recruitment system in the **Romanian public administration** and to the **general public**.

¹⁷⁸ A user-generated content (UGC) Campaign is a structured effort by an organization to encourage its audience to create and share content related to a specific theme, product, service, or cause. The campaign typically provides a prompt, hashtag, or incentive to motivate participation, and then curates, amplifies, or showcases the best submissions. UGC campaigns are usually run on social media platforms, but can also include websites, blogs, or review sites.

¹⁷⁹ <https://concurs-national.anfp.gov.ro/>

and testimonials - within a visually coherent interface that aligned with the new visual identity. Traffic increased substantially from mid-2024 to mid-2025, with monthly viewings rising from under 10,000 to consistently above 50,000 and peaking above 90,000 during contest months, demonstrating high demand for reliable, official information.

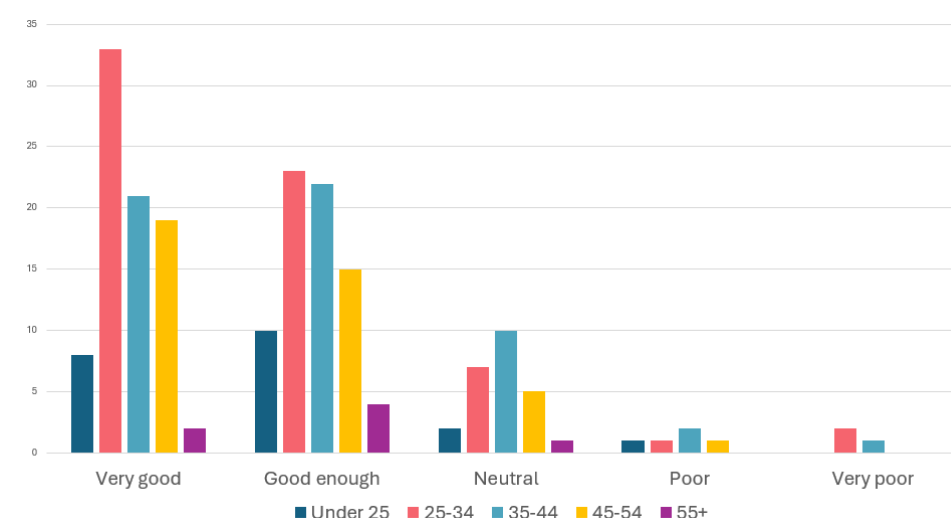
Figure 29. Monthly traffic on the National Contest portal (2024 - 2025)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on data provided by NACS (monthly viewings (all months) and unique visitors (only where reported)).

244. User feedback indicates that most candidates found the portal's general information clear, particularly among core working-age groups. Survey results show that the majority of respondents rated the clarity of general information as "4" or "5" on a five-point scale, especially among the 25–34 and 35–44 cohorts. Older candidates reported somewhat lower but still positive clarity ratings, confirming that the portal supported comprehension for most users while revealing accessibility gaps for others.

Figure 30. Candidate survey results: "How would you rate the communication with candidates through the platform (notifications, updates)?"



Source: The Candidate survey results – 190 respondents

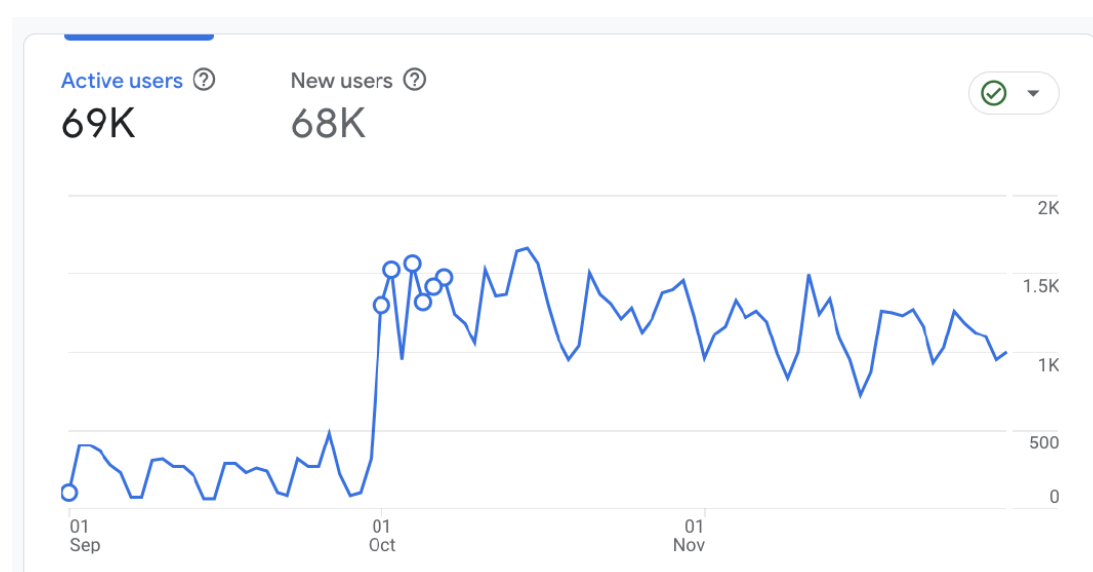
245. **The main NACS website¹⁸⁰ played a complementary but less central role, with contest-related pages dominating engagement.** The section dedicated to the national competition accounted for more than 90% of all page views (35,871) and almost all active users (18,036), while other pages recorded lower engagement times. This concentration underscores the contest's importance as an entry point to NACS's online presence and illustrates the need for clear navigation, updated content, and prominent links to the contest portal from the homepage.

8.4.2 Social media and digital campaigns

246. **Social media channels served as the most dynamic communication tools, providing timely updates and directing large numbers of users to the contest portal.** Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube carried announcements on contest launch, deadlines, eligibility, practice tests and job fairs. They receive a moderate level of engagement¹⁸¹: around 35,000 followers on Facebook, 23,000 on the NACS LinkedIn page, and 2,000 on the Contest LinkedIn page.

247. **The shift from organic communication to paid campaigns in late 2024 significantly expanded reach but created dependency on external funding.** Between March and September 2024, communication relied on organic social media posts, while from October onwards, Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, Google Ads, and SEO became the main sources of new users. In October–November 2024 alone, more than 64,000 visitors accessed the contest portal via paid promotion, confirming the strong impact, but also the cost, of paid placement.

Figure 31. NACS traffic increase representation due to paid promotion



Source: GPI's Campaign Report No. 07 – Month/Period: November 1 – 30, 2024; Revised version according to minutes no. 463/2025

248. **Engagement was highest for posts featuring deadlines, milestones, or concrete calls to action, while dense or technical content performed less effectively.** Motivational messages, testimonials, and dynamic visuals generated strong interaction, but posts containing lengthy legal explanations or links to long PDFs were less accessible for first-time or younger candidates browsing on mobile devices. This pattern highlights the importance of plain language and modular, platform-adapted content.

¹⁸⁰ www.anfp.gov.ro

¹⁸¹ Data as of June 2025

8.4.3 Guides, manuals, newsletters, and publications

249. **The Candidate Guide¹⁸² and platform manuals offered comprehensive, visually coherent information that supported applicants throughout the process.** The 66-page Candidate Guide included clear visuals, screenshots, structured sections, and positive messaging about public service values, inclusiveness, and data protection. However, its length, frequent legal references, and detailed explanations discouraged full reading, contributing to repeated questions and preventable errors during application.

250. **Platform user manuals were particularly strong visually, though additional digital interactivity could further enhance user experience.** Annotated screenshots, consistent color schemes, icon glossaries, and structured headings supported usability, yet the documents remained PDF-based without clickable tables of contents, internal hyperlinks, or accessibility features such as screen reader compatibility. Interactive online versions could greatly enhance their practical value.

251. **Newsletters and the EURO Civil Servant Magazine contributed to awareness but did not fully leverage their potential as strategic communication instruments.** The monthly newsletter effectively summarized key milestones, such as regulatory changes, publication of tests, results, and workshop highlights, but engagement remained modest, and content was not tailored to distinct audiences (e.g., students, HR managers). The magazine showcased the new recruitment system but offered limited ongoing coverage of the extended contest, missing opportunities to reinforce reform narratives across issues.

252. **In-person events, job fairs, university visits, workshops, and internships, played a valuable role in strengthening trust and facilitating direct interaction with potential candidates.** These events allowed NACS to explain the contest model, answer questions, and build partnerships with universities and institutions. Participation varied, but overall, events helped reach audiences less active online. For future cycles, a balanced mix of digital and in-person engagement could optimize coverage while managing costs.

8.4.4 Reach, feedback use, and costs

253. **Survey results provide useful insights into how candidates discovered the contest and how they perceived the clarity of communication.** Word of mouth emerged as the most common source (42–45%), followed by the official website (30–43%) and social media (13–18%). Younger candidates relied more on universities, highlighting the value of academic partnerships. These insights can guide more targeted outreach in future cycles.

254. **Monitoring data from NACS and the service provider responsible for delivery confirms strong increases in reach and engagement, though the KPI framework remains primarily focused on output metrics.** Views, clicks, impressions, and follower counts are well tracked. However, outcome-oriented indicators, such as improved understanding, reduced errors, or perception shifts, are less developed. A future KPI framework could integrate both types of measures for more meaningful evaluation.

255. **Communication activities benefited from NRRP-related funding and a comprehensive service contract, enabling high-quality multimedia production and broad media presence.** Investments covered visual identity development, videos, GIFs, radio and TV spots, online banners, and event activities. Several products, such as brand assets and templates, can be reused in the future. However, traditional media placements accounted for significant costs and may not always deliver the most cost-effective impact.

¹⁸² <https://www.anfp.gov.ro/media/mbdl5gnf/ghidul-candidatului-2024.pdf>

256. **Past campaigns had high upfront promotion costs, but many were one-time or reusable, enabling lower costs in future cycles through reuse and scaling down.** The biggest cost drivers were TV distribution (330k), radio distribution (325k), and events (job fairs), followed by video production volume, services for concept, campaign, and action plan: 80,000 RON, and identity manual development. However, some costs were largely one-time and won't be needed for future contests, with only minor refreshes later, such as brand/identity foundations: slogan (1.1), logo (1.2), stationery/templates (1.3–1.4), and social channel design (1.5). Some videos can be reused or lightly re-edited for future cycles instead of remade from scratch. Many promotional materials (1.6) are either reusable (roll-ups/banners if evergreen) or can be minimized; consumables (agendas, flyers, pens, bags) can be scaled down significantly or switched to digital equivalents.

8.5 Communication challenges

(i) Political and institutional factors undermine public credibility

257. **The political factor is one of the main challenges identified during interviews.** Political volatility remained a significant obstacle, as frequent shifts in priorities disrupted the communication strategies' effectiveness, leading to inconsistent messaging, reduced credibility, funding cuts, and delays in ongoing initiatives. The national contest roll-out has often coincided with an unfavorable political environment, with public announcements about salary freezes and job cuts undermining the credibility of NACS's contest initiatives. This created a conflicting narrative, as the launch of a national competition sometimes coincided with negative news about public sector employment conditions.

258. **This tension between negative sector-wide news and NACS's recruitment efforts makes it difficult to maintain public trust and consistent messaging.** This instability undermines transparency and erodes stakeholder trust in the recruitment system and the broader public administration. Public distrust is evident in some negative comments on NACS' social media posts about the contest. Defamatory messages worsen this perception. For example, at the July 2025 job fair organized by NACS, at the National Institute of Statistics (INS), 9 out of 23 invited institutions confirmed their attendance, and 7 participated. The 2025 political context affected participation, with events like a strike at INS taking place on the same day in front of the fair premises.

259. **Additionally, admitted candidates rarely engage in public discussions to clarify positive aspects or address negative perceptions.** Even when there are successful outcomes, positive news is often outshined by broader political announcements. Additionally, NACS' limited relationships with mass media influence its ability to disseminate information and manage public perception. As per one interviewee's statement *"It is very difficult to keep up with negative perceptions, since we lack the counterweight"*. The absence of counterweighed communication contributes to staff frustration, as NACS personnel feel exposed and compelled to defend the contest against criticism, eclipsing good things.

260. **Despite these challenges, there is evidence of strong interest in NACS competitions.** For example, for the 2024 competition 1953 candidates¹⁸³ have registered. The 2025 competition round counted over 700 applications were received for assistant positions (compared to an anticipated 400), and more than 200 applications were submitted for director roles¹⁸⁴. However, for the 2025 contest, the gap between registered participants and the ones that showed up was

¹⁸³ 1801 candidates for debutants and assistants and 152 for director and deputy director roles.

¹⁸⁴ As per interviewees statement during interviews

significant for some of the locations. It is recommended to implement a questionnaire at the start of the application process to determine how candidates learned about the job, what aspects in the communication convinced them to apply, and their motivation. Collecting this information could help tailor future communication campaigns. Additionally, a post-competition survey (e.g., via free surveying tools) could be used to gather feedback and insights from participants and from those not participating.

(ii) Resource constraints affect the quality and consistency of campaigns, digital presence, and overall strategy

261. NACS's communication efforts are hampered by insufficient human and financial resources. Reliance on GPI indicates low capacity in areas like content creation, event management, and performance monitoring. While this could eventually provide greater control and cost savings, it also poses risks if internal capabilities are not adequately developed. NACS admits a shortage of communication staff, leading to overwhelming workloads, which limit the team's ability to plan, implement, and evaluate impactful strategies. This eventually reflects in its capacity to attract new talent. There is also a clear need for at least one dedicated staff to manage candidate relations, as current responsibilities are overwhelming and only partially covered by the communications team. The service provider also confirmed that 1–2 NACS dedicated staff would be required for NACS to independently manage all communications for the national contest. Most communication initiatives depend on international project funding, which is not sustainable and can demotivate staff, limiting opportunities for skill development. So far, including the 2024 extended contest, NRRP has funded communications, but it is unclear if NACS can continue to support effective future campaigns.

(iii) Communication between the two stages of the recruitment process is disconnected and discontinuous hindering its success

262. While NACS actively promoted the initial phase and published results, for the job-based competition, other institutions provided limited communication, information and results recognition. Admitted candidates reported on social media that jobs were not posted, and the next steps were unclear after the contest, causing confusion. As a result, communication was incomplete and the opportunity to celebrate final outcomes - important for building trust and transparency - was missed. Currently, post-contest and post-job selection communication is minimal and ineffective, which reduces the impact of NACS efforts for the first phase. To address this, ongoing and coordinated communication is needed throughout the full recruitment cycle, which could be achieved by (i) strengthening accountability and defining clearer roles and obligations for other institutions in candidate communication; (ii) institutions being more proactive in promoting their positions and communicating with candidates to avoid these gaps; and (ii) leveraging the newly established *Communicators' network*¹⁸⁵ within the public administration.

(iv) Social, economic, and technological challenges can undermine the communication process

263. Economic factors, such as inflation, tend to shift focus toward immediate financial concerns, deprioritizing long-term HRM reforms. This context makes it harder to engage stakeholders in broader institutional changes. Moreover, while advancements in social media

¹⁸⁵ As per NACS communication team interview, an inter-institutional Communicators' network within the public administration was recently established by the GSG and its activity has been continuing. The purpose is to ensure consistent, unitary, and of high-quality communication efforts. The network set-up recommendations was previously provided by the Bank under the Strengthening the Capacity of the GSG to Accelerate Public Investments in Romania RAS, [Output 4, page 17, para 25](#).

and mobile technologies offer new opportunities, they also introduce reputational risks due to reduced control over messaging and the potential for employee-driven communication. The lack of clear codes of conduct and lagging digitalization, coupled with insufficient advanced digital communication skills, hinder the development of more effective communication products and impact monitoring tools.

(v) The complexity of language in communication remains a challenge, as messages must be both clear and detailed

264. **The language used in communications has improved considerably over the past two years.** However, long sentences and technical jargon still make some of the messages difficult for the general public to understand, creating barriers to effective communication. Efforts to simplify messages are ongoing, but the need to provide comprehensive details often results in lengthy explanations. Sometimes, a “yes” or “no” answer to simple candidate questions on social media channels is hidden within a lengthy response with legal references. To improve clarity and keep the technical details as well, the main points could be summarized in the first sentence in simple language, followed by supporting details.

(vi) Candidate communication and engagement

265. **The interviewees highlighted the need to improve communication process with candidates.** Although a comprehensive Candidate Guide and FAQ are available on the portal, many candidates do not read these materials thoroughly and instead rely on intuition to navigate the application platform. As a result, candidates often make errors such as uploading incorrect or incomplete documents, missing essential files, or submitting them after the deadline. These mistakes prevent the eligibility committee from properly reviewing applications and lead to increased appeals¹⁸⁶ and complaints, creating additional workload for NACS staff.

266. **One contributing factor may be the Candidate Guide’s length (66 pages), which, despite providing detailed step-by-step instructions, could benefit from a better structure.** To enhance clarity and ease navigation, a visual simplified representation of the process (journey map) could be developed and presented upfront, followed by concise step descriptions and a *checklist*. On the other hand, the application process, by its nature, tests candidates’ attention to detail, which is an important skill for public administration roles. Those who fail to follow instructions are often eliminated, which, while unintentional, can serve as an aptitude filter. For example, in Spain, the online application process is considered a test of basic digital skills. Nevertheless, these issues underscore the need for clearer communication and potentially more user-friendly application procedures.

(vii) Data collection and feedback utilization

267. **Feedback mechanisms, such as GPI’s monthly monitoring reports, post contest and event surveys, are underutilized.** Post-competition survey (e.g., via free surveying tools) could be used to gather more feedback and insights from participants. Enhanced feedback mechanisms could further improve outreach and engagement strategies. For example, after the 2025 job fair, feedback did not include data on communication channels used, and there is no annual reporting or systematic use of collected data to inform future strategies.

¹⁸⁶ There were 66 appeals submitted for junior professional grade eligibility test results, and 67 appeals for assistant professional grade results.

8.6 Opportunities for further improvements in communication

268. **NACS should progressively transition from a communication model largely dependent on externally funded campaigns toward a more sustainable, internally driven approach.** This shift requires a phased strategy that strengthens in-house communication capacities, prioritizes cost-effective digital channels and the responsible use of AI over high-cost traditional media, and builds reusable content and knowledge assets. The following measures outline how this transition can be operationalized in the short, medium, and long term.

Short-term focus (within 12 months)

269. **NACS should strengthen candidate support by introducing practical tools that reduce repetitive queries and enhance clarity.** Priority actions include implementing a structured FAQ library, creating concise step-by-step visual guides, and developing short explainer videos integrated directly into the portal. A simple chatbot, other use of AI tools or automated message system could also address high-frequency questions efficiently. Communication materials should apply plain-language principles more consistently to improve accessibility for all candidate groups. Shorter posts, clearer phrasing, and modular explanations would support users browsing on mobile devices. Templates for legal responses could help balance accuracy with clarity.

270. **Coordination with recruiting institutions should be reinforced with shared templates,** guidance, and minimum standards for Stage II communication. A standardized communication pack, containing suggested announcements, timelines, and candidate instructions, would help ensure consistency and maintain transparency across the full recruitment process.

271. **NACS should continue strengthening partnerships with universities, civil society, and local institutions** to expand outreach. These partnerships proved valuable for awareness-raising and can be further leveraged for targeted messaging, career presentations, or co-hosted events aligned with the employer-branding agenda.

Medium-term focus (1–2 years)

272. **NACS should develop a more structured communication and employer-branding strategy aligned with segmentation, user profiles, and measurable indicators.** This approach should include tailored communication paths for debutants, specialists, rural candidates, and underrepresented groups, supported by SMART objectives and an improved KPI framework that captures both reach and comprehension. Further integration of user-centred design would strengthen the contest portal as a primary communication tool. Interactive features - such as guided walkthroughs, a visual candidate journey map, or personalized dashboards - would improve usability and reduce reliance on direct inquiries. Regular user-testing cycles could help refine design choices.

273. **A consolidated feedback loop should be established to ensure that insights from monitoring, surveys, and inquiries systematically inform adjustments.** Regular synthesis of feedback could support incremental improvements across communication products, ensuring the system becomes progressively more adaptive.

274. **NACS should expand internal communication capacity to balance external support with growing internal expertise.** A dedicated communication specialist, or a small team supported by periodic training, would enable NACS to manage content, monitor performance, and orchestrate campaigns more effectively over time.

Long-term focus (2–4 years)

275. **NACS should gradually shift from reliance on externally funded campaigns toward a sustainable, internally driven communication model.** This transition would involve strengthening in-house skills, prioritizing cost-effective digital tools and the use of AI over expensive traditional media, and developing reusable content libraries.

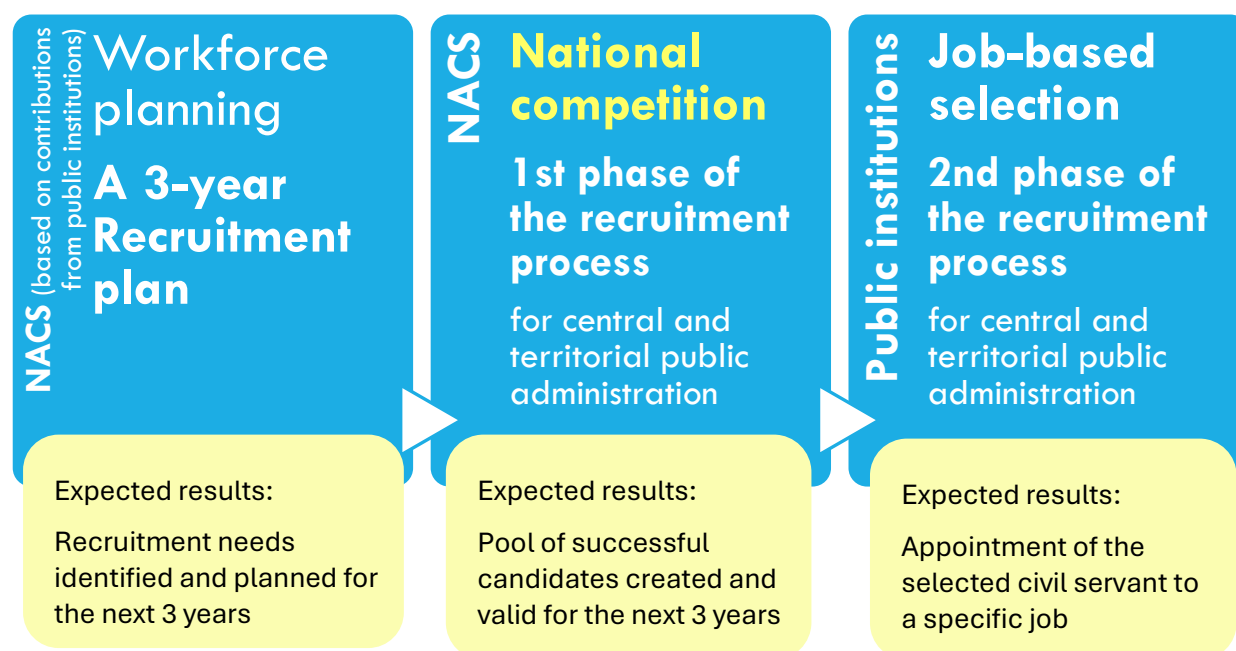
276. **Employer branding should be embedded into an integrated talent-management vision for the civil service, going beyond contest cycles.** A long-term narrative should highlight the values, mission, culture, learning opportunities, and career evolution that define civil service roles. Success stories from contest graduates could become part of an ongoing branding effort.

277. **The recruitment ecosystem would benefit from modernized digital infrastructure enabling seamless information flow across institutions and stages.** Over time, integrating Stage II data, outcomes, and timelines into the contest platform would improve transparency, demonstrate results, and reinforce the credibility of the entire recruitment process.

9 Conclusions and recommendations

278. **The assessment has shown that Romania’s new recruitment model has brought important improvements.** The model responds to long-standing structural weaknesses and introduces transparency, meritocracy, and digital tools that strengthen public trust, as detailed in Chapter 3. These design features mark a significant departure from previous fragmented and discretionary practices. They provide a stronger basis for a professional and impartial civil service and align recruitment with broader HRM reforms led by NACS. The model, as adapted by NACS, reflects in general the recommendations formulated by the Bank in 2020-2021. The two recruitment and selection phases correspond to an intervention logic for competency assessment that was meant to empower NACS to ensure meritocracy and transparency while introducing competencies at the heart of the HRM system (Figure 32 below).

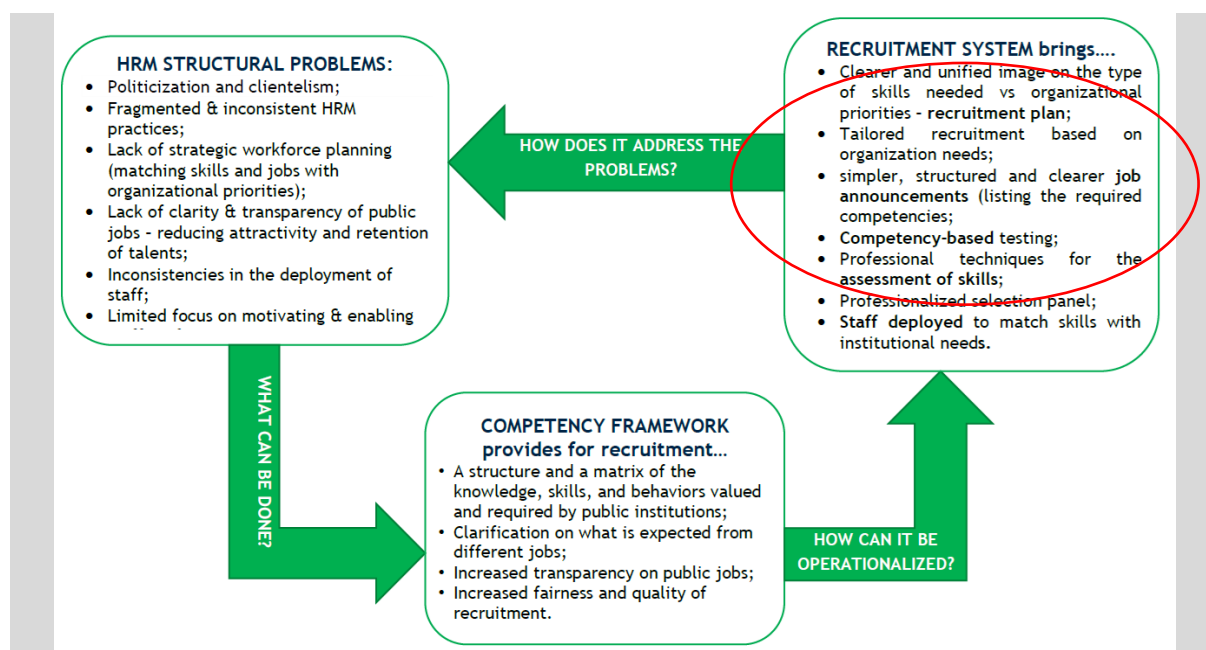
Figure 33 The initial model as recommended by the Bank and co-designed with NACS¹⁸⁷



Box 13 Reform intervention logic proposed by the Bank in 2020

The intervention logic recommended by the Bank under the HRM RAS corresponded to a shift from fragmented and politicized practices toward a meritocratic, competency-based system capable of attracting, selecting, and retaining the right people for the right jobs.

¹⁸⁷ Extracted from the World Bank, 4.1b) *Proposed handbook on recruitment*, delivered under the HRM RAS, 2021.



The reform was proposed to rely on the following key pillars:

- Competency-based workforce planning, ensuring that recruitment is systematically tailored to institutional needs.
- Information and communication measures designed to reach target groups effectively, aligned with a stronger employer branding strategy for the Romanian civil service.
- Recruitment management through transparent and digitalized processes, to increase efficiency and trust.
- Preliminary testing to screen candidates for potential and for general knowledge and skills required across the civil service (e.g., IT, public administration, foreign languages).
- Advanced testing based on the general competency framework, to ensure rigorous competency-based assessment.
- Job-based selection in a second phase, focusing on the evaluation of position-specific competencies.
- Competent selection panels that include experts in competency-based assessment
- Adequate safeguards for filling vacancies, limiting the use of alternative methods and ensuring reliance on the pool of pre-selected candidates.

279. **Importantly, the new recruitment system implemented in the Romanian civil service was developed with EU financing, creating obligations for ensuring sustainability and maintaining the investment.** This reform was financed through EU funds and formed part of Romania's commitments under the NRRP and earlier strategic frameworks¹⁸⁸, and provided the basis for EU support over the past three years¹⁸⁹. This creates a clear obligation to sustain the

¹⁸⁸ The Strategy for the Consolidation of the Public Administration 2014-2020 and the Strategy for the Strengthening of the Civil Service (SDFP 2016-2020)

¹⁸⁹ Through NRRP financing, as detailed in chapter 1.

implementation of this reform (adapted as deemed fit based on evidence, following evaluation), in order to ensure long-term sustainability and credibility.

280. **On the other hand, the current legal framework and its implementation revealed a number of areas that could be improved for the reform to have its desired impact.** The first rounds of application showed that, while the model is conceptually strong, its operationalization faces a series of challenges. Some procedures proved less effective than intended, and certain tools were not applied consistently. There are also questions about the balance between central oversight and institutional responsibility, as well as about the costs and capacity required to maintain the system once external support (contracted expertise and support) phases out.

281. **The table below highlights the main benefits and the main areas for improvement observed so far, based on the findings presented in Chapters 4-8 of this report.**

Table 27 Key benefits and areas for improvement in the civil service recruitment system

Dimension	Key benefits	Areas for improvement
Transparency and meritocracy	The centralized recruitment phase ensures uniform application of rules and reduces discretion/risk of politicization. The digital platform increases auditability.	The system still allows the use of alternative ways to enter the system, impacting the meritocratic application of the recruitment criteria (transfers from the local public administration, or the use of temporary appointments as a general practice for high level civil servants jobs and also for managerial positions). Phase 2 of the recruitment and selection model (job-based selection) still allows variability in how interviews and job-based tests are conducted, with risks to transparency and fairness.
Competency-based approach	The general competency framework was introduced at national and institutional levels; psychometric testing filter for potential, IT tests and general knowledge of public administration are also relevant.	General competencies tested in Phase 1 through MCQs for the majority of candidates lack selectivity and are implemented in ways that do not seem to allow behavioral observation, which is critical in advanced testing. In Phase 2, general and specific competencies are often blurred.
Candidate quality	Institutions report better-prepared, more motivated candidates compared to the previous model.	Specialist and technical positions still face gaps in matching competencies to needs, due to weak workforce planning (which does not correlate needs with functional areas or key specific competencies).
Institutional coordination	NACS has gained a stronger role as coordinator, manager of the pool, and operator of the digital platform.	The methodological authority and the coordination role of NACS remain limited because of institutional capacity gaps and because of the limited political will for the finalization of selection processes following phase 1; uneven institutional ownership across central institutions.
Efficiency	Economies of scale were achieved through centralization and digitalization. Recruitment costs expected to be more transparent and predictable.	Costs remain highly dependent on EU/NRRP funding; sustainability beyond external financing not secured. <i>Cost variability depending on number of candidates and functioning of testing centers is not clear as it was fully covered by external contractors and data was not available on detailed cost categories.</i> <i>Detailed unit costs could not be calculated for the current model, only estimated.</i>

Dimension	Key benefits	Areas for improvement
Digitalization	The platform is functional, robust, and central to reform. It increases consistency and supports candidate trust.	Usability challenges remain; integration with other digital systems is partial; continuous upgrades are not yet guaranteed. Monitoring functionalities are not fully developed.
Operationalization of competition commissions	Clear formulation of tasks across various commissions (eligibility, organization of the competition, appeals, selection etc.)	Certain gaps or bureaucratic inefficiencies exist: the commission for the organization of the preliminary testing is actually responsible for the process and not the assessment. This role could be covered by NACS' mandate. Advanced testing is externalized to specialized contractors. For high level civil servants, a selection commission is supposed to cover phase 2, but the scope of phase 1 could be sufficient for this category of civil servants.

282. **Building on these findings, recommendations in this chapter are structured in three parts:**

- (i) the overall model and the role of competencies as its backbone,
- (ii) the operational aspects of the model, with proposals for refinement, and
- (iii) implications for institutional capacity for NACS and HR departments to continue the implementation of the model under its adapted form.

9.1 Enhancing the operational model for the national competition

283. **The original vision was to shift Romania's civil service recruitment away from fragmented and politicized practices and towards a meritocratic, competency-based system.** Recruitment was conceived as the gateway to professionalization, ensuring that only candidates with the right competencies, motivation, and integrity could access public roles. A strong focus was placed on competency-based assessment as the backbone of the model, moving beyond knowledge checks to evaluate behaviours and skills relevant across the civil service. Transparency, digitalization, and fairness were embedded as guiding principles, supported by safeguards designed to prevent circumvention of the process and to guarantee consistent application over time. Together, these elements aimed to build public trust, align Romania's civil service with European standards, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the model.

An updated vision for the recruitment system through national competition

284. **The updated vision is to consolidate Romania's recruitment model into a sustainable, cost-effective and competency-based system that consistently delivers the right people for the right jobs. Building on the progress already achieved, the revised model should strengthen the role of competency-based assessment,** ensuring that both general and job-specific competencies are rigorously evaluated through fit-for-purpose methods, while streamlining processes. Safeguards need to secure the integrity of the process, prevent reliance on alternative pathways, and guarantee effective use of the candidate pool. Integration with digital platforms and the establishment of a robust monitoring framework should ensure transparency, efficiency, and evidence for continuous improvement. With NACS positioned as a center of expertise and adequately resourced, the updated model aims not only to ensure

sustainability but also to embed meritocracy, professionalism, and public trust as permanent features of Romania's civil service recruitment system. This vision positions the recruitment model as a central pillar of Romania's modern HRM system, fully aligned with NRRP commitments and EU-supported reform frameworks.

Possible pathways for the improved operationalization of the updated vision

285. **The recruitment model should retain its core features of transparency, meritocracy, and digitalization, while optimizing efficiency and clarifying the distinct role of each phase.** For this vision, two optimization pathways are proposed below for the updating of the recruitment system:

Table 28 Two possible pathways to update the recruitment model

Options	Pathway 1 – Incremental improvement	Pathway 2 – Streamlined delivery model
Brief description	Incremental improvements in the current system Retains the current two-phase national competition (first phase including verification of eligibility, preliminary testing and advanced testing + second phase for job-based selection) but strengthens the competency-based dimension of the advanced testing phase to avoid reliance on MCQ.	Preliminary testing remains as in the current model. Advanced testing for execution level staff and certain managerial jobs (director, head of service) is integrated in one process as part of the job-based selection process.
National competition. Preliminary testing	Maintained largely as now (general knowledge of PA, psychometric tests, basic digital skills). Could be streamlined and concentrated in fewer testing centers. Digital competency testing only for minimum level across all job profiles based on the digital competency framework proposed	
National competition. Advanced testing	Strengthened to ensure assessment based on behavioral indicators, not only MCQs. Competency-based methods introduced more systematically (e.g., case scenarios, situational judgment).	Maintained in Phase 1 only for HLCS and top managers (directors who are heads of institutions and general directors). Merged into Phase 2 for the majority of jobs together with job-based selection. Focused on both general and specific competencies using case studies, simulations, written tasks contextualized to jobs, and structured interviews
Job-based selection	Conducted separately, as currently. Written exams aligned more closely with specific competencies (not only legal knowledge). Interviews redesigned to clearly test role-specific and managerial competencies (general criteria in the Administrative Code to be modified as they currently reflect general competencies).	Integrated with Phase 2. Job-based selection becomes part of the advanced competency assessment. Institutions test both general and role-specific competencies in the same process, with NACS on panels to ensure consistency. Members of selection panels would be periodically trained (training modules were already developed by NACS).
Utilization of candidate pool	Strengthened. Mandatory use of candidate pool for filling advertised vacancies within a fixed timeframe. Alternative routes prohibited. Pool utilization monitored and reported.	

NACS role	NACS repositioned as methodological authority and center of expertise. All panels standardized with NACS participation.	
Advantages	Lower political and institutional resistance (smaller changes in legislation).	More rigorous, meritocratic, and competency-driven.
	Faster implementation, as it builds on the existing legal framework.	Eliminates duplication in testing general competencies (current criteria for the job-based selection process refer also to general competencies).
Disadvantages	Early improvements in competency-based testing visible within 1–2 cycles.	Empowers more institutions to apply the general competency framework model creating more solid foundations for applying the framework also in other HR processes
	Retains NACS' key delivery role.	Increases chances of pool utilization.
		Positions NACS as a genuine center of expertise.
Disadvantages	Requires development of new competency-based test batteries and structured testing tools, which entails higher design and delivery costs.	More complex legal and institutional changes needed, with a longer transition period.
	Larger logistical effort to train assessors for behavioral observation.	NACS presence required in all selection panels, creating significant capacity and resource pressures.

286. **The experience of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) recent reform shows that even leading recruitment systems must adapt, moving away from costly assessment centers toward more streamlined, digital, and cost-effective testing.** EPSO has served as a reference model for Romania's national competition design, especially in its emphasis on competency-based testing and transparent, meritocratic procedures. However, recent EPSO reforms show that large-scale assessment centers relying on behavioural observation and multiple staged in-person evaluations are increasingly seen as costly and difficult to sustain. According to its reform option adopted on 31 January 2023, EPSO has removed oral tests and the assessment Centre phase, shifting instead toward a single testing session conducted online via remotely proctored written tests¹⁹⁰. The EPSO competition model for permanent EU civil service positions now uses a set of online tests to assess candidates' reasoning skills, EU-related or field-specific knowledge, digital skills (where relevant) and written communication. Testing includes computer-based reasoning skills tests (verbal, numerical and abstract) with a pass/fail outcome, followed – depending on the competition – by an EU knowledge test for generalists or a field-related multiple-choice test for specialists, plus digital skills tests when specified in the Notice of Competition. Since 2024, EPSO has introduced a written test focusing on communication skills, which replaces the case study for new competitions; the case study only remains for some ongoing competitions, where it continues to assess drafting abilities. All tests are organized and delivered online via EPSO's Single Candidate Portal, with eligibility checks and reserve lists ensuring a transparent, standardized and modernized recruitment process for EU institutions.¹⁹¹

287. **In Romania's context, where the civil service recruitment system has so far depended largely on EU-funded projects for infrastructure and test development as well for**

¹⁹⁰ Information available at: <https://eu-careers.europa.eu/en/introducing-faster-leaner-and-more-accessible-competition-model>.

¹⁹¹ <https://eu-careers.europa.eu/en/competitions-permanent-positions>.

support in implementation, continuing sustainability will require that the system be carefully calibrated for cost-effectiveness. The EPSO experience underlines key lessons: streamlining phases reduces overhead (e.g. assessor training, logistics of in-person centers), and focusing testing on written, online components lowers per-candidate costs and shortens timelines. For Romania, the second optimization pathway which centralizes preliminary filtering, integrates advanced competency testing with job-based selection, and ensures NACS participation to maintain quality - mirrors the EPSO shift in a way that balances ambition with budgetary realities. Implementation will still require financing for testing centers (or their digital equivalents), for panel members, and for maintaining and updating test banks, but the reduced complexity and more limited reliance on behavioural observation in large in-person settings make these investments more manageable.

288. **Considering cost-efficiency aspects highlighted in this evaluation report, the second optimization pathway might be preferable,** as it implies that the model maintains its current pillars (competency-based testing and digitalization), but ensures a streamlined two-phase system where:

- **Phase 1** acts as a rigorous, meritocratic and cost-efficient filter, testing psychometrics, general knowledge of PA, and digital skills.
- **Phase 2** becomes the platform for advanced competency-based assessment, combining structured interviews, case studies, and simulations to **test both general and job-specific competencies in depth.**
- **NACS** consolidates its role as methodological authority, linking recruitment with workforce planning, HRM IT systems, and broader HRM reforms.
- **Financing** is secured through a sustainable model that ensures continuity beyond EU-funded cycles.

289. Specific objectives for the updated model include:

Table 29 Specific objectives of the updated recruitment model

Proposed objectives for reform updating

Ensure recruitment is competency-driven and merit-based	Consolidate competency-based assessment as the backbone of the process, with a stronger focus on behavioral indicators to select candidates who demonstrate the skills, attitudes, and integrity required for the public service.
Strengthen a recruitment process that is cost-effective	Streamline testing phases to remove duplication, reduce costs, and deliver a transparent, fair, and easy-to-navigate process for both institutions and candidates.
Safeguard the sustainability and credibility of the model	Establish clear rules and safeguards that make the candidate pool the main entry pathway into the civil service, preventing alternative hiring routes and ensuring vacancies are filled in a timely and transparent manner. Secure adequate and predictable financing for the recruitment process, recognizing it as a cornerstone of meritocracy in the civil service and as a defining feature of Romania's public administration.

Strengthen accountability through digital integration and evidence	Align recruitment with Romania's broader HR digitalization agenda and establish a monitoring framework that tracks outputs and outcomes such as timeliness, diversity, and pool utilization, reinforcing transparency and trust.
Position NACS as a center of expertise in competency-based HRM and further capacitate HR departments	Enhance NACS' institutional role, capacity, and resources so it can effectively coordinate and deliver the recruitment reform, provide guidance to institutions, and guarantee consistency and quality across the system.

9.2 Operational recommendations for a more effective delivery mechanism

290. **The operational success of Romania's national recruitment model depends not only on the soundness of its conceptual design but also on the quality and consistency of its implementation mechanisms.** The pilot phase revealed several areas where technical, procedural, and logistical improvements are essential to ensure that the system operates with transparency, efficiency, and fairness at scale. To uphold the meritocratic principles that underpin the reform, the recruitment process must be refined to deliver rigorous competency assessment, institutional coordination, and integrity safeguards. The following operational recommendations outline practical measures to strengthen the model's functionality from end to end - covering test design, assessor deployment, process simplification, digital integration, and institutional oversight.

Competency focus

291. **Competencies lie at the heart of the reformed recruitment model, serving as the foundation for selecting candidates who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of performing effectively in a modern public administration.** However, the 2024 roll-out of the national competition has shown that current assessment methods - particularly in the early stages - do not fully capture or differentiate candidates based on their competencies. To ensure that the recruitment process genuinely reflects a merit-based approach, it is essential to strengthen how competencies are assessed and linked to institutional needs. The following measures aim to reinforce the central role of competencies by enhancing assessment tools, aligning recruitment planning with functional domains, and refining eligibility criteria to broaden access while maintaining quality.

292. **An important measure is to introduce competency-based workforce planning, as recommended in 2020 reform roadmap¹⁹².** Recruitment needs should be explicitly linked with institutional mandates and strategic goals. Institutions should identify the functional domains (e.g., legal, procurement, policy analysis, digital services) to which their jobs belong. This mapping would improve alignment between job requirements and candidate competencies and

¹⁹² World Bank, HRM RAS, Deliverable 4.1, Defining a model for the national contest, 2020. Available at: https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Livrabilul-9.1_EN_Model-privind-organizarea-concursului-national.pdf.

allow more tailored targeting in the second phase. Candidates could then be invited to advanced interviews that are specific to their background and the relevant job family.

293. A central challenge in achieving true competency focus lies in the design of the assessment methodology used in the first phase of the competition. Currently, the process is dominated by MCQs, which primarily test factual knowledge rather than actual competencies. This approach fails to capture the behavioral qualities - such as judgment, communication, integrity, and motivation - that are essential for effective performance in public administration. Competency-based recruitment, by definition, requires assessing how candidates behave and make decisions in context, not merely what they know.

294. To align the first phase more closely with the reform's competency-driven objectives, the assessment process should integrate tools that allow for the direct observation of candidate behavior. Structured interviews, situational judgment tests (SJTs), and case-based simulations are all effective methods for eliciting evidence of competencies in action. These formats present realistic administrative scenarios - such as resolving a conflict with a citizen or making an ethical decision under pressure - and require candidates to demonstrate how they would respond. Responses should then be evaluated against standardized behavioral indicators using scoring rubrics, ensuring fairness and consistency. Integrating these methods would make the first phase more meaningful and aligned with the competency profiles the reform aims to promote in the civil service.

295. Revise eligibility criteria to remove or adjust conditions that unnecessarily restrict access for otherwise qualified candidates. This includes clarifying and standardizing criteria related to seniority and specialization of studies. Overly narrow interpretations currently exclude applicants with adjacent or equivalent qualifications, even when those qualifications are relevant. Likewise, application fields on the digital platform should be simplified to reduce barriers to submission and ensure consistent data collection.

296. Strengthen the competency-based assessment process through competency focused tests and deployment of trained assessors. For the testing of general competencies, the process needs to prove relevant, rigorous, valid and fair (so that it delivers consistent candidate evaluation, avoiding situations in which all candidates pass the initial or advanced testing phase).

For this:

- **Update the test banks.** A well-functioning test bank is the cornerstone of a fair, reliable, and competency-based recruitment system. In the context of Romania's national competition model, the test bank must go beyond static knowledge items and evolve into a dynamic, secure, and methodologically robust instrument for assessing general and job-specific competencies. Its development and governance require careful planning, multidisciplinary expertise, and strong institutional ownership to ensure alignment with competency frameworks, relevance to the evolving needs of public administration, and protection against security breaches. The following measures outline the operational steps necessary to establish and maintain a high-quality test bank that can support transparent and merit-based recruitment at scale.
- Develop and maintain a centralized repository of validated test items covering both general (e.g., integrity, problem-solving, digital literacy, communication) and job-specific competencies.
 - Diversify methods to include written case studies, situational judgment tests, structured interview questions, in-basket exercises, and behavioral simulations.

- Implement a periodic refresh and validation cycle (e.g., every 2–3 years) ensuring item relevance to administrative practice and aligned with evolving competency frameworks, digital skills, and EU standards.
- Assign NACS formal authority for test bank governance, including item development protocols and expert review procedures. NACS should establish and coordinate a multidisciplinary team dedicated to test creation, validation, deployment, review, and retirement, comprising in-house staff (e.g., subject matter experts, occupational psychologists, digital assessment specialists) and external contributors (e.g., university professors, practitioners from public administration, certified assessors). This team should operate under clear international methodological standards and item development protocols as regards quality and fairness.
- Expert working groups should be formed for each competency category and for functional domains, drawing on university partners, ministry experts, and certified HR professionals. For domain-specific items, NACS should consult sectoral ministries or professional bodies to co-develop or validate content.
- Each item should go through pre-testing with a sample pool of candidates to calibrate difficulty and detect bias. Items showing low discriminatory power or cultural sensitivity issues should be revised or discarded.
- The test bank should be centrally managed in a secure digital environment, with differentiated access for contributors, reviewers, and authorized institutional users. This platform should also support randomized test generation to reduce risk of leakage.
- A public "Test Bank Preview" portal should offer practice questions and explanations. Feedback mechanisms should allow candidates and trainers to suggest improvements.

→ **Develop and manage a roster of trained and certified competency assessors.**

Competency-based recruitment relies not only on the quality of assessment tools but also on the professionalism and consistency of those who apply them. Trained and certified assessors play a critical role in ensuring that interviews, simulations, and other behavioral evaluations are conducted objectively, fairly, and in line with standardized criteria. Establishing a national roster of assessors is therefore essential to operationalize the competency model effectively across institutions and competitions. The following measures propose a structured approach for recruiting, training, certifying, and deploying assessors in a way that safeguards integrity, supports scalability, and promotes consistent assessment quality throughout the public administration system.

- NACS should coordinate a standing roster of trained assessors, comprising both certified civil servants and external professionals (e.g., psychologists, HR experts, retired officials, practitioners in different public administration fields).
- Assessors should be contracted under multi-annual framework agreements, activated based on demand for each competition or NACS should create an online registry of all certified assessors, with profiles, competencies, and availability status. The platform should allow institutions to request assessors per competition.
- A standardized selection and certification process should include: initial training, a competency-based evaluation simulation, a scoring reliability test, and a code of ethics commitment.

- Assessors should be categorized by domain expertise (e.g., general administration, IT, HR) and geographic mobility. Both internal civil servants and external professionals should be eligible, with participation incentives clearly defined (e.g., compensation per assignment, recognition certificates).
 - Avoid centralizing all assessment through a single private provider; instead, recruit and train a distributed network of independent evaluators to ensure neutrality and quality.
- **Make training of panel members mandatory and recurrent.** Ensuring the integrity and consistency of the recruitment process depends heavily on the capacity of panel members to apply competency-based assessment principles effectively. Without proper training, even well-designed tools and procedures risk being misapplied or inconsistently interpreted. To professionalize the role of panelists and minimize subjectivity, it is essential to establish mandatory and recurrent training programs tailored to their responsibilities at each stage of the selection process. The recommendations below outline the necessary steps to standardize panel training, promote methodological rigor, and build a sustainable framework for maintaining high-quality evaluation practices across all institutions involved.
- Panel training must be mandatory and recurrent, focusing on standardized interview techniques, behavioral scoring, unconscious bias mitigation, and legal compliance.
 - Training modules should include practice exercises, calibration scoring, and certification assessments.
 - Recertification every three years should be tied to actual participation in panels and compliance with scoring protocols.
 - Create a panelist guidebook, FAQs, and video tutorials to support ongoing learning. Include anonymized case studies of scoring inconsistencies and how to address them.
 - Maintain a compliance register: institutions may only use trained panelists, and audits should verify certification.
- **Oversight and monitoring.** A transparent and trustworthy recruitment system requires more than well-designed procedures - it must be supported by robust oversight and continuous monitoring mechanisms. These mechanisms ensure that rules are applied consistently, deviations are detected early, and corrective actions are taken systematically. Oversight also reinforces public confidence by demonstrating that the process is subject to independent scrutiny and responsive to evidence. To that end, the following recommendations propose concrete measures for establishing a comprehensive monitoring framework, enabling data-driven supervision, promoting institutional accountability, and safeguarding the integrity of the recruitment process from end to end.
- NACS should manage a national competency monitoring system, ensuring transparency and consistency and develop a real-time dashboard accessible to MDLPA, GSG, Ministry of Finance, NACS and oversight bodies (e.g., the Court of Accounts), showing key indicators per recruitment cycle: pass/fail rates, appeal outcomes, assessor usage, question performance.
 - Institute a random sampling protocol for the job-selection phase: 10% of scored interviews and test results to be re-scored or audited for consistency and bias. In case of identification of procedural deviations or irregularities, the NACS should analyze their causes and propose methodological clarifications, as well as other corrective measures.

- NACS should produce an annual Recruitment Report detailing trends, flagged anomalies, and system-level adjustments made.
 - Introduce candidate satisfaction surveys after each competition round, with anonymized responses published in summary.
 - Institutions must report on test item usage, assessors mobilized, and methods applied in the second phase.
 - Introduce a mandatory reporting mechanism: institutions to document how test items and assessors were used, feeding into NACS monitoring. These reports should feed into a centralized quality assurance system.
 - To ensure that the recruitment process is fair, consistent, and resistant to manipulation or information leaks, integrity safeguards must be embedded at each stage of the competition cycle. This begins with the secure management of the test bank: access to item development, storage, and selection must be strictly limited to authorized personnel through role-based permissions, encryption protocols, and audit trails. Randomized test generation from a large item pool should be mandatory to ensure that no two candidates receive the same test configuration, significantly reducing the risk of advance disclosure. All personnel involved in item handling - whether internal or contracted - should sign confidentiality agreements and be subject to background checks, with legal accountability for breaches.
 - Additionally, transparency and traceability mechanisms must be established to monitor compliance and deter attempts at bypassing the system. For example, each stage - from eligibility checks to final appointments - should be logged in a centralized digital platform, enabling real-time oversight by NACS, STS and external auditors. Appeals processes must be independently managed, with assessors having access to anonymized test data for validation. Regular integrity audits and candidate feedback surveys should be institutionalized, and their results made public to reinforce accountability and continuous improvement. These combined measures will ensure a closed and secure process architecture that resists interference and inspires trust.
- **Ensure that the assessment of HLCS and top managers is conducted in a cost-effective manner that is finalized through appointment.** The recruitment for HLCS should remain in two phases, but streamlined. The first phase should include preliminary testing (as for all civil servants) plus general competency testing, conducted by a centralized panel in which at least one-third of members are certified competency assessors (either contracted externally or selected from within the civil service). The second phase should consist of a job-based structured interview, conducted by each institution, with the participation of the head of the recruiting institution, to evaluate both role-specific requirements and broader leadership competencies. Again, temporary appointments (counted on the job and not for a specific person) should not be possible for a period longer than 2 years, as long as successful candidates are available in the pool.

Process optimizations and system safeguards

297. **Beyond the core design of the recruitment model, its effectiveness depends on how smoothly and securely it functions in practice.** Operational bottlenecks, procedural redundancies, or insufficient safeguards can undermine both the efficiency and credibility of the

system. To ensure that the process is streamlined, cost-effective, and protected from vulnerabilities such as misuse or circumvention, targeted process optimizations and integrity safeguards are essential. The following measures aim to refine the logistical and procedural aspects of the model while reinforcing controls that uphold fairness, transparency, and institutional discipline throughout the recruitment cycle.

298. For cost-efficiency NACS could consider rationalizing language testing. Given that language skills were only included for high-level civil servants and managerial civil service jobs that are heads of institutions in the preliminary phase, this requirement should be completely eliminated at that stage. Instead, language testing should be included in the second phase if the job description specifies it as a requirement. For managers and HLCS, this should always be mandatory, though institutions could also accept certified language diplomas as proof.

299. Cost efficient organization of preliminary testing in fewer centers (maximum 2) should be considered. Preliminary testing should be concentrated in one, or at most two, testing centers. This would reduce administrative costs and logistical complexity, while ensuring uniform standards. These centers should be adequately equipped for secure, standardized delivery and accessible from major regions. It is recommended to increase the redundancy of IT systems (backup generators, multiple internet service providers), establish partnerships with local universities or training centers to use compliant facilities, and consider running a pilot for supervised remote testing for low-risk groups, using facial recognition, screen monitoring, and AI-based fraud detection.

300. Recruitment commissions/selection panels should also be optimized. The current recruitment commission responsible for organizing the process should be eliminated. NACS already has the legal mandate to organize and deliver the national competition and should act in that capacity. Panels should only be created for:

- i. Eligibility verification (including appeals)
- ii. Preliminary testing of general knowledge, potential (psychometric testing) and basic digital skills (including appeals)
- iii. Advanced testing of general competencies
- iv. On the job selection testing of general and specific competencies (including appeals)

301. The utilization of the candidate pool needs to be improved. As of 2024, a large number of candidates remain unmatched to positions, while new candidates are expected to join in 2025. This situation creates credibility risks for the model. To preserve credibility:

- Make it mandatory for institutions to organize Phase II selection within a maximum of four months after the national competition results.
- Vacancies not filled within this window should be removed from organizational chart of the institution and staffing plans.
- Prohibit parallel recruitment mechanisms (transfers, temporary hires) for roles already declared in the competition plan.
- Temporary appointments may only be used as exceptions and must be time-limited.
- NACS should publish quarterly utilization reports: number of matched candidates vs. pool size, per institution.

302. Given NACS' efforts in the area of digital transformation, the agency should strengthen correlation between the recruitment platform and the other HRM relevant digital

systems. The recruitment model should be fully aligned with Romania's broader digital transformation agenda in public administration. Integration with the SENEOSP and the civil service database should allow for systematic tracking of¹⁹³:

- Candidate pool composition and placement rates
- Career trajectories of appointed civil servants
- Institutional usage of national recruitment pipelines
- Reporting should be automated and contribute to workforce planning and performance reviews.

303. **This would ensure that data from the national competition is not siloed**, but actively feeds into workforce planning, mobility management, and staff development policies. Strengthening digital integration would also reduce duplication, improve accuracy of reporting, and enhance transparency for both institutions and candidates.

304. **NACS should be institutionally repositioned to strengthen its strategic role in civil service management, ensure greater coherence between recruitment, competency development, and HRM digital transformation, and enhance its ability to coordinate cross-government HR reforms.** Given its central role in managing and coordinating the national competition, NACS requires adequate institutional positioning and capacity to sustain the reform. To sustain reform and lead ongoing professionalization:

- Reposition NACS not only as the administrator of the recruitment process, but also as a center of expertise in competency-based HRM, offering guidance, training for the competency-based HRM, methodological support to institutions and strategic workforce planning.
- Elevate NACS administratively (e.g., to a central government unit) to reinforce authority.
- Ensure adequate staffing, including recruitment experts, psychometricians, IT developers, statisticians and communications staff.
- **Transition from project-based financing to predictable budget lines** for ongoing platform maintenance, assessor mobilization, and test bank development.

305. **Sustaining and scaling the new recruitment model will require a strategic shift in how public administration perceives recruitment: from an episodic procedural task to a professional, data-driven function.** This transformation is essential not only to address the bottlenecks observed in the first rounds but also to build a transparent, merit-based, and future-ready civil service. Achieving this shift depends on regular, structured evaluations and continuous monitoring of the recruitment system. Periodic assessments - similar in depth and methodology to the current evaluation - are critical for identifying emerging risks, adjusting processes, and aligning recruitment with evolving organizational needs. The pace of change in the public administration, particularly under the influence of digital transformation, makes static models quickly obsolete. New technologies, shifting competency requirements, and evolving service delivery expectations require recruitment systems that learn and adapt. Institutionalizing periodic evaluations allows the system to recalibrate entry standards, update testing methodologies, refine digital competency requirements, and respond proactively to trends in candidate behaviour and labour market dynamics. In this sense, continuous monitoring is not an

¹⁹³ More detailed recommendations on the optimization of data on civil service are included in Deliverable 3 under the RAS.

administrative formality but a core mechanism for ensuring that the recruitment model remains credible, efficient, and aligned with strategic workforce planning. By embedding evaluation and monitoring as permanent features of the recruitment cycle, public administration can ensure that the model stays relevant, fair, and capable of supporting a professional civil service able to meet new challenges.

9.3 Implications for institutional capacity for NACS and HR

306. **The long-term success of the adapted recruitment model hinges on strengthening institutional capacity** both at the center - through NACS - and across the HR departments of public institutions. Implementing a consistent, merit-based, and competency-driven system at scale requires a fundamental shift in how recruitment is resourced, coordinated, and managed across government.

307. **NACS should be empowered with the authority, resources, and visibility to lead and safeguard the reform.** Beyond its technical role in administering examinations, NACS should evolve into a strategic center of expertise on competency-based human resource management. This may require elevating NACS's institutional placement - potentially integrating it into the center of government, such as the Prime Minister's Office or the General Secretariat of the Government - to ensure sufficient authority, influence, and coordination power. Such a repositioning would align NACS with similar reform-driving institutions in other European administrations.

308. **Operationally, NACS needs to continue to expand its internal capacity.** Conducting national competitions based on modern assessment standards involves a broad range of complex functions: designing and maintaining test banks, managing digital platforms, training assessors, ensuring legal compliance, and communicating with candidates. The agency's current structure and staffing are insufficient to meet these demands. A planned institutional scale-up should include recruitment of specialists such as occupational psychologists (to ensure methodological rigor in test development), IT developers (to maintain and enhance the digital platform), communications professionals (to engage the public and support candidates), and legal experts (to manage appeals and compliance). Furthermore, project-based know-how - acquired with the support of external consultants - must be systematically transferred to permanent staff to ensure institutional continuity beyond NRRP funding.

309. **A core dimension of capacity is ensuring predictable and sustainable financing.** To date, many foundational investments - including platform development, test design, and communication efforts - have been funded through EU mechanisms such as NRRP. While these resources catalyzed the reform, they are time-limited and set to expire by 2025. Without a durable financing strategy, the system's credibility and scalability will be at risk. A logical solution is to institutionalize a dedicated state budget line to cover ongoing operational costs, including digital infrastructure, assessor contracting, item development, and staff salaries.

310. **Alongside NACS, HR departments within ministries and agencies must take on a more strategic role in recruitment and workforce planning.** The new model sets higher expectations for institutional HR units, moving beyond administrative compliance toward active involvement in competency-based selection. To support this shift, a targeted subset of HR roles and their job descriptions should be adjusted to explicitly reflect these more strategic tasks, in addition to core administrative responsibilities. To deliver on these expectations, HR personnel must be trained in interpreting competency frameworks, conducting structured interviews, and using digital HR tools to plan, track, and evaluate recruitment processes. These capabilities

should be built through regular, modular training coordinated by NACS, potentially in collaboration with INA, ensuring development that is adapted to different HR roles.

311. In parallel, HR departments must be more involved in the early stages of planning recruitment needs. This includes identifying functional domains and priority specific competencies linked to each vacancy, which enables a more tailored and strategic match between candidates and roles. Support from NACS - such as methodological guides and on-call advisory services - can help HR teams develop job analysis techniques and improve coordination with line managers. Institutional learning should also be encouraged: after each recruitment cycle, HR teams should participate in structured feedback loops with NACS to assess process challenges, candidate performance, and lessons learned. Over time, this feedback-driven culture can help institutionalize a continuous improvement mindset.

312. Crucially, ownership and buy-in from institutions are essential. While NACS provides the technical infrastructure and guidance, the legitimacy and effectiveness of the reform will ultimately depend on whether ministries and agencies actively embrace the new model and the principles it upholds. This calls for targeted change management efforts, particularly among leadership and middle management. Communicating the benefits of transparent, competency-based hiring - and aligning it with institutional goals - will be key to shifting mindsets and practices.

313. In addition to strengthening implementing bodies, a robust system of independent oversight is essential to ensure the credibility, reliability, and long-term sustainability of the new recruitment model. Oversight entities play a critical role in verifying that the process is applied consistently, that integrity risks are mitigated, and that institutional practices remain aligned with merit-based principles. To be effective, this oversight must be institutionalized, transparent, and empowered to act on findings.

314. It is recommended that a dual-layered oversight mechanism be established. At the strategic level, the Romanian Court of Accounts should conduct regular performance and compliance audits focused on the recruitment system's effectiveness, financial integrity, and risk management. These audits should be complemented by operational oversight from an independent advisory body - such as a multi-stakeholder Civil Service Recruitment Oversight Council, composed of representatives from academia, civil society, professional HR associations, and integrity institutions. This body would review process data, monitor appeals outcomes, and publish regular public reports, providing a platform for transparency and civic scrutiny. The role could be assumed by the HR Council, which is legally established under Law 69/2019 as a national multi-stakeholder body tasked with coordinating HR policies, reviewing strategies, issuing consultative opinions on draft legislation, and monitoring progress in public-sector HR reforms, but which has never been operationalized¹⁹⁴.

315. Embedding such oversight mechanisms ensures not only checks and balances but also public trust. They provide external validation that the system is delivering on its promise of

¹⁹⁴ Law 69/2019 establishes the National Council for the Development of Human Resources in Public Administration, a consultative, non-permanent body operating under the Secretariat General of the Government and coordinated by the Prime Minister. Its mandate is to coordinate public-sector HR policies, evaluate progress toward government HR objectives, identify reform priorities, and issue consultative opinions on national HR strategies and draft legislation affecting civil service personnel. The Council must also prepare annual reports for the Prime Minister, review major HR reforms, and provide recommendations to harmonize legislative initiatives. It has a multi-stakeholder composition, including representatives from key ministries, local government associations, academia, NGOs, and trade unions. Although legally established, the Council was never operationalized, despite having a defined role as an oversight and coordination mechanism for HR policies across the public administration.

merit-based, fair, and transparent recruitment, while also offering institutional support for continuous improvement. These safeguards, when properly mandated and resourced, will reinforce the resilience and legitimacy of Romania's civil service reform over the long term.

316. **In conclusion, building institutional capacity for both NACS and HR departments is foundational to the sustainability of the national recruitment model.** The reform introduces new methods, technologies, and accountability mechanisms that require substantial adaptation across the system. With clear mandates, adequate funding, specialized staffing, and ongoing support, both NACS and institutional HR units can fulfill their roles as stewards of a modern, fair, and high-performing civil service. These investments in capability will anchor the reform's core values - merit, transparency, and efficiency - while ensuring that its impact endures well beyond the initial implementation phase.

Annexes

Annex. 1 Process mapping: AS IS model for Phase I National Competition¹⁹⁵

This mapping synthesizes the current ('AS IS') process for the national competition phase (Phase I). It reflects the legal framework and operational guidance currently in force and commonly applied practices across central and territorial authorities.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
PREPARATION				
Recruitment Plan ¹⁹⁶ (2 year validity)	1. NACS requests central and territorial public institutions and authorities to determine recruitment needs by reference to the positions that would need to be filled in through national competition (recruitment needs), for the next two years	Until 31 st of January of the 1 st of the 2 years for which the Recruitment Plan is prepared	NACS Public institutions/ authorities at central/territorial level (HR departments and line managers; the heads of these institutions approve the communication to be sent to NACS)	Legal basis: Administrative Code: Annex 10: Arts. 69-71, 88-90, Annex 8, art. 26-30 Order 334/2024 of the President of NACS Comments: The recruitment platform is not linked to SENEOSP – institutions need to specify their CIF and the code of the jobs It is not clear if institutions are actually expected to conduct job analysis before each workforce planning process Institutions are not expected to provide any reference of specific competencies required for those jobs (nor the functional areas to which
	2. Public institutions and authorities determine the number of vacant positions , and the positions expected to be vacated (at least 10% of the vacant positions are to be set at debutant and assistant level) – data for this workforce planning exercise is expected to be obtained also based on jobs analysis	10 calendar days since the receipt of the <i>Request</i> from NACS		
	Public institutions submit to NACS the <i>information</i> needed for the Recruitment Plan, through the recruitment platform.			

¹⁹⁵ Based on Administrative Code Annex 10..

¹⁹⁶ This is prepared in parallel with the Promotion Plan an dinformation is compiled as a package for both processes, but promotion is not under the scope of this assessment.



Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	The submission needs to include the following¹⁹⁷: Name of the authority/institution. Contact details of the responsible person in the HR department (full name, position, phone number, and email address of the HR unit). Fiscal Code (CIF) of the institution. Details of civil service jobs: • full title of vacant positions and positions expected to become vacant in the next 2 years; • whether they are allocated to the national competition, job-based competition, or promotion competition for managerial positions; • identification elements of each position (category, class, professional grade, unique identification code); • semester/year when the position is expected to become vacant. • Functional department/unit(s) where the positions listed above are located. Vacancy announcement includes mandatory details (institution, position, working hours, exam dates, conditions, bibliography, duties, contacts, application method).			they are mapped, as this is not yet a legal requirement)
	3. NACS prepares the Recruitment Plan based on the needs communicated by public authorities and institutions and the civil service records managed by NACS (SENEOSP).	No legal deadline	NACS	The law does not specify a concrete deadline for drafting or submission of the Plan.

¹⁹⁷ In line with art. 2 from Annex 10 to the Administrative Code GEO 57/2019.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	The plan covers civil service positions (art. 11(1)) that are either vacant or expected to become vacant over a two-year period.			In practice, NACS works on an annual cycle, even though the plan covers two years.
	4. The Recruitment Plan is adopted through Government Decision ¹⁹⁸	No legal deadline	NACS prepares the draft GD MDLPA formally promotes the draft GD The Government approves the GD	The legislation allows that a recruitment plan is adopted every year, each with a 2 years coverage.
	5. Potential revision of the Recruitment Plan is possible only 1 year after its adoption , based on requests regarding: (i) new authorities; (ii) reorganizations/new posts; (iii) unfilled posts after ≥2 selection rounds; (iv) newly vacated posts not foreseen.	No deadline (but can be initiated only 1 year after the initial Plan is adopted)	NACS can initiate the revision ONLY based on request from institutions	Legal basis: Annex 10 to the AC: art 17. NACS cannot initiate the process unless requested.
Organization of the recruitment competition	6. Schedule recruitment rounds. Scheduling and determining targeted functions for recruitment competitions in the first year when the Plan is adopted: NACS organizes recruitment	From the receipt by NACS of the information from public institutions (<i>activity 3) above</i>) until the official publication of the Announcement	NACS analyzes the information and determines the needs to be targeted in the	Legal basis: Art. 18 Annex 10, AC A mandatory minimum number of competitions per year may become problematic in years with few

¹⁹⁸ Civil service positions included in the approved recruitment plan (art. 17(2) of Annex 10 to the AC) **cannot** be:

- Converted into contractual (non-civil service) posts.
- Transformed into posts of another class/grade, or changed by more than 50% of their duties.
- Eliminated, except in cases of reorganization reducing posts in the respective unit.
- Filled through transfer or permanent relocation.
- Filled through mobility within the category of senior civil servants.

Once a position is included in the recruitment plan, it must remain stable and open for competitive recruitment, not altered, removed, or filled through alternative administrative routes.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	competitions ≥2 times/year based on the approved Plan. NACS organizes recruitment competitions for the respective year based on the analysis of the Recruitment Plan data and by applying 3 <i>opportunity criteria</i>: the total number of vacant or anticipated public positions for the next semester, the share of management positions within this total, and the proportion of entry-level and assistant execution posts.	regarding the national competition in the Official Gazette.	Recruitment competitions.	vacancies or budget constraints. NACS may be forced to organize competitions with very low numbers of posts, which can result costly and inefficient.
Prepare tests (not in all recruitment rounds)	7. Tests on public administration Specialized commissions are set up, established by NACS president, to draft and validate questions. NACS and the ministry in charge of public administration, collaborate with universities and service providers to build a database of exam questions on human rights, equality, non-discrimination, and public administration. The bibliography must include the Constitution, key parts of the Administrative Code, and laws on non-discrimination and gender equality. Members and secretaries of these commissions receive the same allowances as other competition committees. IT tests /cognitive/language tests – these are procured by NACS – the acquired test batteries need to be recognized	Before round, but no clear legal deadline	NACS Ministry responsible for PA Commission for test preparation	Art 46-47 Annex 10 AC ! This activity is not integral part of the process for each recruitment round, but it is foreseen in the legislation as a key phase in the provisions regarding preliminary testing.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
Publicity for the recruitment competition	8. Publish announcement. NACS publishes the announcement on the recruitment competition in the Official Gazette (part III) and on NACS website. The announcement includes: number of positions (by category/class/grade); registration period & method; eligibility conditions; estimated testing periods; contact data; location(s); max duration per test. On its website additional info is published: full jobs titles; functional units; bibliography; and standards/themes for IT/cognitive/language tests.	At least 30 days before the preliminary test date.	NACS External contractors can support implement additional publicity measures	Legal basis: Art. 19 Annex 10, AC
Setting up eligibility and recruitment commissions, including appeals commissions	9. Setting up eligibility and eligibility appeals commissions. By administrative act of NACS President. The act designates presidents & secretaries. NACS determines the number of commissions depending on candidate volume (number of candidates registered). Composition and criteria: Each commission must have 3 members (2 designated by NACS President + 1 from the ministry for public administration or from the authority with most jobs in the Plan); 3 alternates similarly designated; members must have admin knowledge, ≥3 yrs HR/PA experience, recognized probity; free of incompatibilities/conflicts. Indemnity: 10% of national minimum gross basic salary	From announcement publication no later than start of eligibility verification	NACS prepares the administrative act NACS President signs the administrative order Relevant ministries designate members Indemnity paid by the employer authority of each commission member	Art 20-25 from Annex 10 to the AC
	Setting up recruitment commissions and appeals commissions for the organization of preliminary and advanced testing Same provisions as for eligibility commissions	By start of preliminary testing at latest	Same provisions as for eligibility commissions	Art 26 of Annex 10 to the AC

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	<u>Indemnity</u> : 10% of national minimum gross basic salary			
DELIVERY of the recruitment phase ¹⁹⁹				
Candidate registration & application	10Registration on the platform – profile creation. Candidates need to register online on the recruitment platform managed by NACS email validation; Candidates fill the registration form (name, CNP, ID details, residence, email, phone); consent to T&Cs and GDPR; the profile is assigned a unique identifier; NACS uses technical protocol with National Registry for Persons Evidence for identity validation; continuous profile updates are allowed.	Anytime before generating the dossier for the competition.	Candidates register NACS validates NACS and RNEP communicate for validation	Art. 37 from Annex 10 to the AC
	Application: dossier generation and validation. Candidates: - fill in the application form online; - upload: ID; diplomas/equivalents; work record/HR certificate for work experience; plus master's diploma for leadership; plus extra docs for high level civil servants positions (incl. master, and document proving completion of INA specialized program); - choose foreign language for high level civil servants preliminary test.	Within 20 calendar days from announcement publication	Candidates via platform Platform NACS	Art. 38 - 40 of Annex 10 to the AC

¹⁹⁹ The recruitment phase is defined as taking place from the first day of creating the competition dossier until the communication of the final report, in accordance with Article 62(2)

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	After the deadline, the platform locks the dossier and assigns registration number (used with unique ID for results). Platform auto-notifies the start & end of registration.			
Eligibility verifications and appeals	11 Eligibility checks. The eligibility commission checks fulfillment of eligibility conditions by each candidate (art. 465(1)(a,c,f,h-k),(3) & art. 394(4) as applicable) based on the application dossier The decision is recorded on the platform	Within 10 working days after registration closes	Eligibility commission	Art 42 of Annex 10 to the AC
	12 Communicate results on eligibility checks: The eligibility commission publishes admitted/rejected (with reason if rejected) in candidate account (email notification) and on NACS website. The majority rule applies if members of the commission have divergent views (but they record the separate opinion).		Eligibility commission	Art. 43 of Annex 10 to the AC
	13 Appeals Candidates that were rejected can appeal in the platform	Within 24 hours from publication	Candidates	Art 56 of Annex 10 to the AC
	14 Appeals decision The appeals commission re-verifies conditions. In case of lack of unanimity, majority rule applies; The commission admits the appeal (modify result) or reject.	Within 3 working days after the appeal window closes	Eligibility appeals commission	Art. 57 of Annex 10 to the AC

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
Preliminary testing	15 Center allocation and scheduling After eligibility appeals are resolved, candidates declared “<i>admitted</i>” are automatically notified via the recruitment platform to choose, within 3 working days: their preferred NACS test center, and the date and time slot for their tests (from those pre-set by the organizer). Once the 3-day period expires, the option can no longer be changed. Redistribution Candidates who do not select a center within the deadline are automatically assigned to a test center, ensuring at least 10 candidates per center. Notification Candidates receive an email + platform notification with final scheduling and access conditions.	Within 3 working days from notification of eligibility result/appeal outcome After 3-day window / as needed	Candidates (via platform) NACS	Art. 44 and 48 (2) of Annex 10 to the AC
	16 Preliminary testing in the testing center. Preliminary testing covers multiple choice tests on: (a) human dignity, rights, equality, and non-discrimination; (b) general knowledge of public administration; (c) basic IT knowledge (beginner/ECDL-ICDL); (d) cognitive abilities; and (e) written communication in a foreign language – A2 (English, French, Spanish, or German) for high level civil service jobs. Testing is exclusively computer-based.	On test day, per announcement Tests last max 3 hours in total (may be shorter)	NACS Recruitment commission	Art. 45(1)-(4); 47(2)-(4) of Annex 10 to the AC Art. 49 and 54 Annex 10 AC

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	The test day procedure: ID verification; Candidates sign the application form (art. 137(a)); Tests are randomly generated - with a unique test code After finishing, candidates receive their answers' report in their platform account. Test content: (all categories)²⁰⁰: General knowledge – human rights/non-discrimination & public administration 10 Q (rights/equality/discrimination: OG 137/2000; Law 202/2002) – max 30 min 30 Q (public administration: Constitution; OUG 57/2019 parts listed) – max 60 min Question banks certified by Univ. “Ovidius” Constanța. IT knowledge & skills (beginner/ECDL-ICDL level) – 20 Q / 30 min Modules: computer–internet–email (64 ref Q), Word (67), Excel (70); certified by ECDL România. Cognitive aptitudes – 33 Q / 45 min Deductive reasoning (10), numerical (9), verbal (14); instrument validated/standardized in RO, endorsed by the College of Psychologists of Romania STEN scaling (1–10) and job-specific performance benchmarks.			

²⁰⁰ According to the **Methodology** for preliminary testing developed by the contractor contracted by NACS (Great People Inside company) – delivered to NACS as final deliverable in February 2024.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	+ <u>Only for High-Level civil servants: Foreign language A2</u> (EN/FR/ES/DE) – 20 Q / 30 min; certified by accredited institutions (Honterus/Alliance Française/Unirea).			
	17 Testing results publication Scoring & pass mark Pass = ≥60% general and ≥50% on each type of test block; Candidates receive in their platform account the <i>barem</i> and their individual block scores + general score.	Publish within 3 working days after all candidates in that category tested	NACS	Art 54 Annex 10 AC
	18 Appeals to preliminary testing The right to appeal is only possible for tests of human rights and public administration. Candidates submit the appeal. The appeal commission analyzes the subject contested and its correlation with the bibliography and decide.	Submit appeal within 24 h; Appeal decision within 3 working days after appeal window closes	Candidates Recruitment Appeals Commission	Art 56-58 Annex 10 AC
Advanced testing	19 Candidates participate in the advanced recruitment phase in the same day and immediately after the preliminary testing. Only candidates admitted following preliminary may attend advanced. Testing follows two modalities: A. For execution, director/deputy director, executive director (and deputy) (who are not heads of institutions), and head of service: online questionnaire via platform, at test centers.	Immediately after preliminary test; max 2 hours (can be shorter)	Candidates NACS Platform / Center	Art. 51, 53, 55, 56 Annex 10 AC The legislation explicitly makes a distinction: for most positions, candidates are evaluated through standardized online tests at test centers, while for high-level civil servants and institutional heads, assessment centers are required, using observed behavioral methods to assess general competencies at the necessary level of complexity. The written test approach used in Romania's recruitment and

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	B. For high level civil servants and civil servants who are heads of institutions (director general/executive and deputies) – testing takes place in the assessment center (procured) through observed behavioral indicators for general competencies at required complexity (methods: case, presentation, role-play, behavioral interview, group exercise, etc.). The methodology - published at least 5 working days before start. Test content for assessment center²⁰¹:The methodology developed by the contractor mentions three types of exercises: Analysis/Presentation (written, 90 min). Candidates analyze institutional data (text, tables, graphs) and prepare a written report/presentation²⁰². In-basket exercise (written, 90 min). Candidates manage a simulated inbox (emails, memos, reports, schedules).Tasks: prioritize, delegate, make decisions, draft responses²⁰³. Competency-based interview (written, 90 min). Candidates answer situational questions with real professional examples, structured around: Situation, Objective, Action, Result (SOAR)²⁰⁴. Scoring methodology			assessment procedures can ensure legal defensibility, since all candidate responses can be documented, reviewed, and compared fairly. However, relying predominantly on written exercises reduces the opportunity to observe real-time behaviors, interpersonal skills, and leadership abilities.

²⁰¹ Based on the *Methodology* proposed by the contractor (Great People Inside company) and delivered to NACS as final form in December 2023.

²⁰² Competencies targeted: problem-solving, initiative, planning/organization, communication, teamwork, performance management, leadership (commitment, innovation/change).

²⁰³ Competencies targeted: problem-solving, planning, initiative, integrity, citizen orientation, team development, performance management.

²⁰⁴ Competencies targeted: problem-solving, initiative, communication, teamwork, integrity, citizen orientation, performance management, leadership.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	Competencies evaluated on a 1–5 scale based on observable behavioral indicators: 1 = not observed; 3 = partially observed; 5 = fully observed. Each indicator weighted equally; competence score = average of indicators. Minimum score = 3 per competence to be declared “admitted.”			
	20 Test results publication: Individual report on general competencies & complexity level: auto-generated (platform) for modality A; uploaded by assessment center for modality B. Results consolidated in individual reports include information on candidate profile, scores, strengths, development needs, recommendations.²⁰⁵ Reports uploaded on the competition platform; results communicated via email + profile + NACS website within 3 working days after all candidates finish.	After test Publication within 3 working days after all candidates finish	Platform/NACS Assessment Center	Not clear if candidates are presented their development needs as included in the methodology.
	Appeals Candidates can appeal within 24 hours after results publication. The assessment center reviews the contested report within 2 working days after appeal deadline.	Appeals commission decide within 3 working days after the appeal window closes.	Appeals commission	

²⁰⁵ According to the **Methodology** developed by the Contractor

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
Finalization of the recruitment phase	21 Publication of Final Report Platform generates all results & scores per candidate; publish on NACS website and upload to platform dedicated section.	After communicating results & resolving appeals	NACS Platform	Art 62 Annex 10 AC
MANAGEMENT OF THE POOL OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES				
Post recruitment candidate pool management	22 Candidates pool management by NACS NACS manages pool in platform for max 3 years from candidate's recruitment-stage promotion (Final Report publication date). Platform allows: Auto-notifications for job-based selections matching the function/category/class/grade & same general competencies complexity Candidates can update their profile with new documents.	Up to 3 years	NACS/Platform Candidates	Art. 63-64 Annex 10 AC

Annex. 2 Process mapping: AS IS model for Phase II Job-based selection²⁰⁶

This mapping synthesizes the current ('AS IS') process for the job-based selection phase (Phase II) following the national recruitment stage. It reflects the legal framework and operational guidance currently in force and commonly applied practices across central and territorial authorities.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
II. 1. Organization of the procedure	Draft/validate position profile and specific competencies (aligned to Annex 8 general competency framework and job analysis).	In recruitment plan – in 10 days from the request of NACS	Hiring Institution (HR Department) Hiring Manager / Organizational Unit Head Institution Leadership (approval) NACS (format guidance/oversight)	Ensure alignment with the General and Specific Competency Framework (Annex 8) and with Annex 10 procedural requirements. Include equal-opportunity statement and contact for queries.
	NACS notification at least 10 working days before vacancy announcement	10 working days (notification)		Refs: Annex 10: Arts. 69–71, 88–90.
	Draft and approve job announcement, including methods, evaluation criteria/weights, and required documents. Vacancy announcement includes mandatory details (institution, position, working hours, exam dates, conditions, bibliography, duties, contacts, application method).			

²⁰⁶ Based on Administrative Code Annex 10, Chapters VII–XIII.



Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
II.2. Publication of Vacant Posts	Publication on institution and NACS websites and on the official recruitment platform/portal; optionally share via other channels; ensure accessibility of candidate guidance.	at least 30 calendar days before written test.	Organizing authority/institution; NACS (publication for high civil servants).	Vacancy package includes job description, specific competencies/knowledge, admissibility conditions, selection modalities, calendar, and contact points. Publication must ensure transparency and equal access.
II.3. Institutional Designation of Selection Committees	Establishment of Competition Committee and Appeals Committee through administrative act. Designate a president and a secretary Sign conflict-of-interest and confidentiality statements. Provide briefing/training on competency-based selection and use of scoring rubrics. The topics are proposed by each member of the committee (they are not subject to approval) and are uploaded to the IT application on the day the test takes place. The interview plan is prepared by the selection committee on the day this stage is conducted.	From NACS notification to vacancy announcement date.	Institution Leadership (appointment decision) HR Department (secretariat / compliance) Selection Committee members (+ expert where required) NACS (may designate a representative / oversight per law)	Composition varies: 3 members for execution posts, 5 for managerial, 7 for high civil servants; includes NACS and possibly prefecture representatives. Possible inclusion of experts for supplementary tests. Upon request, a member of the trade unions can be designated as member of the selection/appeal committee Refs: Arts. 73–77.
II.4. Application and Eligibility Verification	Candidates submit electronic applications within 20 calendar days from announcement. Competition Committee verifies eligibility within max. 5 working days from application deadline. Results communicated electronically and posted online. Possible request for clarifications within 2 days after deadline; candidates respond in 1 day.	20 calendar days application + 5 working days eligibility check.	Competition Committee; Secretariat.	Refs: Arts. 94–97. Use the platform to track statuses and timestamps. Apply data-protection rules. Keep a clear audit trail.
II.5. Testing Phase Conduct of Evaluations (Interviews/Tests)	May include 3–4 stages: eligibility check (described above), supplementary test (if applicable), written test, and interview.	Sequential; interview max. 8 working days after written test results.	Competition Committee; appointed experts (supplementary tests).	Refs: Arts. 92, 98–104, 105–108. - Conduct specific-competency and specialist knowledge verification using methods stated in the notice (e.g., written test, practical test, structured

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
				interview, portfolio/case exercise). - Use standardized scoring sheets and observable indicators for specific competencies; record minutes and scores. - Apply elimination thresholds and overall ranking rules; publish interim results. Written test content prepared on day of test, max. duration 3 hours, point thresholds: 60/100 (execution), 70/100 (managerial). Interview within max. 8 working days after written test result. Panel members score independently. The reasons leading to a candidate's rejection at the eligibility verification stage are indicated, while for the other stages the score obtained is recorded and displayed. Ensure standardized conditions and integrity measures
II. 6 Publication of Results & Appeals (on Evaluations)	Publish results with individual scores per each test. Manage appeals on evaluation results; Appeals Committee reviews written tests and the recoding of the interviews. Publish final results post-appeals.	As set up in the vacancy announcement	Selection Committee (supported by secretary).	Communicate via the platform and institution website. Keep a full, dated archive of communications and decisions
II.7. Appeals Management	Candidates may contest results of eligibility check, written test, or interview within 1 working day after publication. Appeals resolved within 2 working days. Outcomes communicated via platform and published online. Receive contestations (eligibility/results) via the channel and within the deadlines specified in the	1 working day submission + 2 working days resolution.	Appeals Committee; Secretariat.	Refs: Arts. 110–115.

Phase	Activities	Timeline	Responsible	Comments
	notice. Appeals Committee reviews files, scoring sheets, and procedures; deliberates and issues a reasoned decision. - Communicate decisions to candidates and update standings if outcomes change.			
II. 8 Final Appointment to Positions	- Confirm final ranking; verify compliance (documents, integrity requirements, incompatibilities). - Issue the administrative act of appointment/assignment; notify winner(s) and alternates. - Complete onboarding and, where applicable, initiate the debutant probation/stage (stagiou) and performance setting.	After resolution of any appeals and expiry of challenge periods; appointment timelines follow the institution's internal procedures and the Administrative Code requirements.	Appointing authority (head of the public authority/institution) with HR support.	For debutant execution posts, a statutory probation/stage applies. Records archived; results are published for transparency.

Annex. 3 Exemplification of a methodological approach for competency-based testing of selected general competencies

The design of competency assessment instruments in the National Contest requires a clear methodological approach that translates competencies into observable behaviours and explicit analytical criteria. The competencies “Citizen Orientation” and “Integrity” are used in this annex for exemplification purposes on how they can be used in the evaluation process, as they represent core dimensions of public service and directly influence the quality of services delivered to citizens. Assessing these competencies enables the identification of candidates capable of acting responsibly, fairly, and in the public interest, in alignment with principles of good administration and established international practices.

The assessment of the “Citizen Orientation” competency must be grounded in the candidate’s ability to perform actual tasks, rather than in self-descriptions or statements about personal behaviour. In competency assessment, the critical element is observable behavioural performance, not an individual’s opinion of their own attributes. A competency is demonstrated through actions: analyzing a case, making a justified decision, handling a challenging citizen request, applying an administrative principle, or solving a problem within an institutional context. For example, citizen orientation needs to be assessed through the candidate’s response to a realistic scenario requiring a proportional, clear and professional reply to a dissatisfied service user, or through the selection of the correct course of action in a time-sensitive administrative context. Similarly, integrity is not measured through positive self-descriptions, but through how a candidate handles ethical dilemmas — peer pressure, improper requests, or conflicts of interest. Assessment tools that do not incorporate tasks, situations, decision points and consequences do not constitute competency assessments²⁰⁷; they are merely self-evaluations with very limited predictive validity for public sector performance.

International benchmark models from OECD, the UK Civil Service, the Canada Public Service Commission, and the EU EPSO consistently recommend competency assessment methods that evaluate a candidate’s ability to act in realistic situations rather than their ability to self-describe. Robust approaches include Situational Judgement Tests (SJT), case studies, in-basket exercises, structured competency interviews, text-based simulations, and work-sample tasks. These instruments require candidates to apply reasoning, justify decisions and demonstrate observable behaviours aligned with public service values. The emphasis placed on decision-making, proportionality, service quality and accountability in these models reinforces the importance of assessing “Citizen Orientation” and “Integrity” using behavioural and scenario-based methods rather than declarative knowledge tests.

Developing valid competency assessment instruments for the National Competition requires a structured, multi-step methodology. The process begins with the definition of a clear 1–5 competency scale that reflects the progression from basic rule application to advanced judgement. This is followed by the operationalisation of the competency into observable behavioural indicators aligned with each level of the scale. Based on these indicators, appropriate assessment instruments and digital item formats are selected, and test items are constructed to elicit applied reasoning in realistic administrative scenarios. The final and

²⁰⁷ Assessment tools that do not incorporate tasks, situations, decision points and consequences do not constitute competency assessments; they are merely self-evaluations with very limited predictive validity for public sector performance ($r = 0.10\text{--}0.18$; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).



essential stage is the systematic testing, validation and piloting of the items to ensure reliability, fairness, difficulty balance and alignment with the intended behavioural indicators. This sequential approach provides methodological coherence and ensures that the resulting tools measure competency performance accurately and consistently.

Step 1: Revisiting the use of the competency scale & signification is the foundation of any valid assessment instrument. For the National Competition, the recommended scale ranges from 1 to 5, each level representing a distinct stage of competency development, drawing on the Dreyfus model (from “novice” to “expert”), while the cognitive complexity required at each stage aligns with Bloom’s Taxonomy (from “remember” to “create”). Thus, levels 1–2 correspond to early-stage performance, where candidates can recognise and apply standard rules; level 3 represents operational competence, characterised by the ability to analyze situations and make contextually appropriate decisions; and levels 4–5 reflect advanced judgement, including the ability to evaluate complex scenarios, anticipate consequences and generate balanced solutions. Each interval is defined through observable behaviours, degree of autonomy, situational complexity and required reasoning. This structured progression enables the development of items that discriminate meaningfully across levels and ensures coherent, comparable assessment for the competencies “Citizen Orientation” and “Integrity.”

Table 30 Alignment of the 1–5 Competency Scale with the Dreyfus Model and Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy

Scale Level (1–5)	Dreyfus Stage	Bloom Operation	Cognitive Demand
> 1 – Basic recall	Novice	Remember	Recognition of rules, terminology and simple definitions
2 – Rule application	Advanced Beginner	Understand Apply	Application of basic rules and procedures in standard, predictable situations
3 – Operational competence	Competent	Apply + Analyze	Interpretation of scenarios, identification of key elements, selection of adequate actions
4 – Advanced judgement	Proficient	Analyze Evaluate	Assessment of complex situations, weighing of variables, detection of inconsistencies
5 – Expert reasoning / synthesis	Expert	Evaluate Create	Integration of multiple constraints, anticipation of consequences, formulation of solutions

Step 2: Operationalizing the competency into behavioural indicators is essential to ensure that assessment measures what candidates do, rather than what they know or believe about themselves. For the National Competition, each level of the 1–5 competency scale needs to be translated into clear, observable behaviours that reflect the complexity of tasks, degree of autonomy and nature of decisions expected at that level of seniority. These indicators should describe concrete actions - how candidates handle citizen interactions, prioritise tasks, respond to incomplete information, identify administrative errors or apply principles of good administration. Behavioural indicators serve as the bridge between the abstract definition of the competency and the design of test items, enabling consistent scoring, transparent expectations and alignment between role requirements and assessment methods.

Table 31 Example of behavioural indicators for the “citizen orientation” competency across the 1–5 scale

Competency Level (1–5)	Behavioural Indicators (Operationalised, Observable Actions)
>1 – Basic recognition	• Recognises basic administrative requirements in citizen-facing interactions. • Identifies legal terms and standard steps needed to handle a routine request. • Provides correct information when the procedure is clear and predictable.
2 – Rule application	• Applies standard rules and procedures when interacting with citizens, following clear instructions. • Handles straightforward requests appropriately, checking required documents and respecting basic deadlines. • Seeks guidance when confronted with situations that exceed standard procedural boundaries.
3 – Operational competence	• Analyses typical administrative situations and selects the appropriate citizen-oriented action. • Identifies errors, omissions or ambiguities that may affect service quality. • Formulates clear, complete and proportionate responses to citizen requests, including in moderately ambiguous situations.
4 – Advanced judgement	• Manages complex situations involving multiple variables (timing, incomplete information, potential rule conflicts). • Prioritises tasks based on citizen impact and administrative consequences. • Evaluates alternatives and justifies balanced decisions grounded in principles of good administration.
5 – Expert reasoning	• Anticipates recurring citizen-related issues and identifies improvement opportunities in service delivery processes. • Integrates citizen feedback into recommendations and procedural adjustments with systemic impact. • Designs comprehensive solutions, establishes standards and contributes to institutional practices that enhance public service quality.

Step 3 - Defining the instruments and types of exercises is essential for assessing actual behavioural performance rather than merely the mechanical application of rules. Within the National Competition, the instruments should reflect the full range of behaviours associated with the “Citizen Orientation” competency, particularly reasoning, decision-making and professional communication. An integrated approach is therefore proposed, whereby the current “Public Administration” knowledge test becomes a component of the overall competency evaluation, contributing the foundational knowledge required for scenario-based and competency-focused exercises. The choice between an exclusively digital assessment and a mixed model depends on the complexity of the behaviours being measured and the reliability of available methods, though a combined approach provides a more complete picture of a candidate’s capacity to act in the public interest.

A mixed assessment model is generally recommended when organisational capacity allows it, as it enables the combination of digital scenario-based exercises with assessor-scored tasks that more closely simulate real administrative interactions. Mixed models allow for short constructed responses, case discussions or structured follow-up probing, which can capture nuance, judgement and justification that may not be fully observable through digital-only formats. These approaches are aligned with the most robust OECD and UK Civil Service practices for evaluating complex, citizen-facing behaviours. If, however, the decision is made to implement an exclusively digital assessment, the instruments must rely on formats that can be automatically or semi-automatically scored. In such cases, tasks should remain scenario-based and reasoning-

driven²⁰⁸, using item types that discriminate levels of performance without requiring human evaluation. The table below illustrates possible exercise types suitable for a fully digital assessment approach, aligned with the different levels of the competency.

Table 32 Example of fully digital exercise types and item formats for competency assessment

Aspect Assessed (Competency Level)	Exercise Type (Digital)	Item Format	What It Measures
Recognition of basic rules (Level >1)	Recognition item (similar to current knowledge test)	Simple MCQ ²⁰⁹	Foundational knowledge required for citizen-facing tasks
Application of procedures in standard cases (Level 2)	Simple scenario (similar structure to knowledge test but contextualised)	MCQ – Best Answer	Ability to apply rules correctly in predictable, routine situations
Operational reasoning in typical administrative situations (Level 3)	Situational Judgement Test (SJT)	MCQ with 4 plausible options	Selection of proportional, citizen-oriented actions
Detection of administrative errors and service-quality issues (Level 3–4)	Error spotting	Highlight / Multiple selection	Ability to identify problems that may impact service quality
Task prioritisation based on citizen impact (Level 3–4)	Prioritisation scenario	Ranking / Drag-and-drop	Ability to prioritise tasks according to citizen needs and consequences
Professional and citizen-oriented communication (Level 3–4)	Short constructed response	150–300 characters (auto-flag + rubric-based scoring)	Ability to formulate clear, accurate, citizen-focused messages
Multi-factor analysis and ambiguity management (Level 4)	Mini-case (branching scenario)	Sequential decision points	Ability to navigate situations with multiple variables and constraints
Anticipation of administrative consequences (Level 4–5)	“What happens if...” exercise	MCQ / Mapping grid	Understanding of consequences for citizens and administrative processes

²⁰⁸ A relevant international example is the UK Civil Service Fast Track SJT format, which illustrates how scenario-based reasoning exercises can distinguish between levels of behavioural effectiveness: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/503119/Practise_exercise_situational_judgement_questions.pdf

²⁰⁹ MCQ (multiple-choice questions) are useful for assessing declarative knowledge and routine rule application, but they have significant limitations in measuring behavioural competencies. For competencies such as Citizen Orientation and Integrity, MCQs should be used only at the lower levels of the scale (1–2), as they cannot capture complex reasoning, prioritisation or the handling of administrative dilemmas.

Example 1 - SJT item type (Level 3)

Scenario: A citizen requests clarification regarding the allocation of public funds for a local development project. The message is polite but concerned: “I cannot find any information on the institution’s website. This project directly affects my neighborhood. Could you explain what decisions have been made so far?” Under the transparency obligations set out in the Administrative Code and Law 544/2001, the institution must provide accessible, accurate and timely information, while respecting confidentiality and data-protection requirements.

Question: Which initial response is most appropriate, demonstrating both compliance with legal transparency obligations and an active orientation towards the citizen’s needs?

- A. “The information is available on our website, under the ‘Local Projects’ section. Please consult the documents provided and contact us if you have further questions.”
- B. “The project is under internal review. We will send you the official communication on the decisions once the approval procedure is completed.”
- C. “Thank you for your enquiry. We are sending you the publicly available decisions adopted so far and indicating where future updates will be posted.”
- D. “To provide a complete response, please specify which aspect of the project you are interested in: the allocated budget, the implementation stage or the work schedule.”

Example 2 — Short Constructed Response (Level 3–4)

Scenario (≈60 words): A citizen complains that their freedom-of-information request under Law 544/2001 has not been answered after two weeks. The internal registry shows the request is under review to ensure completeness and accuracy of the information to be disclosed.

Task (max. 300 characters): Draft a concise reply acknowledging the delay and explaining the next steps in a citizen-oriented manner.

- ✓ Expected elements in the drafted response:
- ✓ Recognition of delay
- ✓ Explanation of current status
- ✓ Specific timeframe for response
- ✓ Polite, transparent tone

Example 3 — Error Detection Exercise (Level 3–4)

Draft administrative reply (contains errors): “Dear citizen, the institution has approved the plan and you must accept this decision. According to Law 233/2012, you have no further rights to request information. Details will be published when possible. Please refrain from additional messages as they slow down our work.”

Task: Identify all errors or inappropriate elements in the draft reply above. For each error, specify:

- ✓ What is wrong (quote the problematic fragment)
- ✓ Why it is wrong (legal/professional principle violated)
- ✓ How it should be corrected

Expected errors to identify: Incorrect legal reference (Law 233/2012 is not relevant to freedom of information); Authoritarian tone (“you must accept”); False statement about citizen rights (“no further rights”); Vague timeline (“when possible” — violates legal deadline requirements); Dismissive instruction (“refrain from messages” — discourages legitimate citizen engagement)

Step 4 This step focuses on the design of test items that validly measure the behavioural indicators defined in Step 2. Item construction must ensure that the assessment elicits applied reasoning and observable decision-making rather than factual recall. The following six principles could provide a methodological basis for developing high-quality items for the National Competition.

1. One behaviour per item – each item must target a single behavioural indicator to ensure clarity and reliable scoring.
2. Use realistic administrative scenarios – items must reflect authentic situations that public officials encounter, not abstract rules.
3. All response options must be plausible – distractors must require genuine reasoning; no option should be obviously incorrect.
4. Balance length, tone and structure of options – the correct answer must not be identifiable through stylistic cues.
5. Integrate principles of good administration – items should embed proportionality, service quality, legality and citizen impact.
6. Match item complexity to competency level – simple MCQs for levels 1–2, SJT and error-spotting for level 3, multi-factor scenarios for levels 4–5.

Step 5 ensures that the items developed in the previous stages function as intended and measure the targeted behavioural indicators reliably. All items must undergo systematic testing and validation before being included in the final assessment. This process involves analyzing item performance (difficulty, discrimination, plausibility of distractors), verifying alignment with the behavioural indicators, and identifying potential sources of bias or ambiguity. A pilot test must then be conducted on a sufficiently large and diverse sample to allow statistical evaluation using classical test theory or item response theory. Based on the results, items are revised, replaced or recalibrated to ensure fairness, consistency and appropriate difficulty levels. This validation cycle is essential for guaranteeing that the final instruments provide accurate, defensible and evidence-based measurement of the competencies “Citizen Orientation” and “Integrity.”

The development of competency assessment instruments is a continuous and iterative process that must be led by trained competency assessors. Their role is to regularly review, update and recalibrate behavioural indicators, item formats and scoring criteria in response to evolving administrative practices, legislative changes and empirical evidence from test performance. Competency assessors must ensure that multiple item versions are drafted, tested and refined, and that successive iterations strengthen the validity, reliability and fairness of the instruments. This ongoing development cycle safeguards the integrity of the assessment system and ensures that the National Competition consistently measures how candidates demonstrate the required competencies in realistic administrative situations.

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