



**EU AND ITS MEMBER
STATES MOBILISING
PUBLIC SECTOR EXPERTISE
IN EU'S EXTERNAL ACTION**

GOOD PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

In its conclusions on “European Public Sector Expertise in the EU’s External Action”¹, the Council of the European Union has recognised European Union (EU) public sector expertise as a key asset in supporting partner countries. In the Joint Communication on ‘The Global Gateway’, technical assistance is identified as a key component of the Global Gateway investment and delivery model through its contribution to capacity building and improvements in the enabling environment for investments with knowledge sharing between public sector experts highlighted as one of the key modalities.

The NDICI-Global Europe also specifically highlights administrative cooperation measures involving public sector experts from EU Member States, creating an opportunity to elevate public sector expertise as an innovative tool to advance the EU’s external and development goals. This is a significant milestone, as it has been 15 years since the 2008 Backbone Strategy on Reforming Technical Cooperation emphasised the importance of expanding the mobilisation of public sector expertise.

According to the Council, European public sector expertise plays a critical role in providing technical assistance to address specific development challenges. It helps to foster mutual trust between institutions and promotes European values, standards, and policy approaches that are essential for building strategic partnerships. Public sector expertise can be combined with other implementing modalities to apply the policy-first principle by nurturing policy dialogues that guide financial cooperation and investment towards development results. Public sector expertise has also proven to be an effective way to build capacity and promote public policy reform processes in partner countries through institution-building tools, such as Twinning and TAIEX.

In its conclusions, the Council urges the EU and its Member States to expand their technical assistance by mobilising European public sector expertise. The Council recommends that Member States incentivise the involvement of their public experts in assignments in partner countries at institutional level. The European

Commission should also enhance coordination, synergies and learning between the EU and its Member States to raise awareness of the strategic importance of public sector expertise and facilitate learning from public sector expertise programmes.

This document synthesises recommendations and provides ways forward to implement the Council’s conclusions on European public sector expertise in the EU’s external action. It is based on the outcome of discussions during the Practitioners’ Network task force on technical public cooperation and the European Public Administration Network’s High-level event in Paris, as well as the findings of the “Study on the EU and its Member States mobilising Public Sector Expertise for Development” conducted in 2019 and 2021². It also takes note of the Joint European Commission – Practitioners’ Network Action Plan on mobilisation of European public sector expertise in international development cooperation, which calls for the EU and its Member States to scale up their regular technical assistance through, inter alia, the mobilisation of European public sector expertise.

In the context of development cooperation, there are three main modalities in which public sector expertise can be mobilised. These include project-type interventions, secondment of experts, and expert missions. To deliver these interventions effectively, a range of delivery tools can be used, such as policy advice, consultancy services, workshops and seminars, trainings, internships, study visits, fact-finding missions, and knowledge-sharing networks. By leveraging these modalities and delivery tools, public sector expertise can be effectively mobilised to support development cooperation and external actions.

As a result of the above outlined process, three different areas have been identified as barriers in the field of public sector expertise: (1) legal and political challenges, (2) administrative, operational and financial constraints and (3) joint implementation in the area of public sector expertise. Consequently, this paper presents best-practices that have been identified in each of the respective areas.

¹ Council conclusions on EU public sector expertise (2021)

² Mapping on EU public sector expertise (2019) and Analysis paper on EU public sector expertise (2021)

To address the challenge of a lack of political will and support at the Member State level for implementing public sector expertise actions and reforms, the following steps could be taken forward:

- It is important to create awareness among policymakers about the benefits of public sector expertise actions in international cooperation. This can be done by various means, such as organising workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns.
- The involvement of all stakeholders is crucial in driving political will and support. Engaging with civil servants and interest groups (e.g. governmental and implementing agencies) can help to build a broader coalition in support of public sector expertise actions and reforms.
- Encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing among Member States can help to build a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for public sector expertise actions and reforms. This can be achieved through platforms such as peer-to-peer learning exchanges and best-practice sharing initiatives.
- Monitoring and evaluating the progress of public sector expertise actions and reforms is necessary to ensure that they are achieving their intended objectives. Equally, this information can be used to communicate on the process and its successes.

To overcome the challenge of restrictive laws governing financial incentives and per diems for international assignments, the EU and its Member States could consider the following actions:

- Undertake a comparative analysis of the laws and regulations in different Member States with a view to identifying laws that restrict international assignments and highlighting best practices that facilitate these assignments. The best practices identified could eventually be replicated by other Member States' legal systems.
- Identify their training needs in developing effective recruitment strategies and navigating the legal and regulatory environment.
- Create a database of qualified candidates with relevant skills and expertise who are interested in international assignments and promote this database across the EU, to facilitate mobilisation of their experts by other Member States.

- Offer competitive salary packages and benefits to attract qualified candidates. Additionally, creating a more flexible legal framework for financial incentives and per diems could also encourage recruitment.

To incentivise the mobilisation of public experts for international assignments, Member States could consider the following actions:

- Develop a comprehensive framework for international assignments that includes guidelines on non-financial incentives, training, and support for public experts.
- Include public sector expertise in human resources strategies, give value to international public sector expertise assignments within career development processes and structures, and acknowledge international experience as an asset for future promotions or with other types of rewards.
- Incorporate intercultural and language skills into career development goals and include these soft skills in recruitment criteria.
- Include a reference to the modalities of public sector expertise in national Civil Service Acts.
- Streamline administrative procedures to ensure that returning public sector experts can easily reintegrate back into their sending institution.
- Create a network of civil servants who are willing to take on international assignments and provide them with opportunities to share their experiences and best practices.
- Encourage civil servants to make use of available European networks and raise awareness about EU institution-building tools.
- At the institutional level, establish professional safeguards for seconded experts, ensuring that experts are maintained in their institutions upon their return from long-term missions.
- Ensure that returning experts have opportunities for career development and promotion within their institutions.
- Acknowledge and make use of the international experience gained by the returning expert to make participation in a public sector expertise exchange more attractive.

To overcome the challenge of limited occasions for bilateral peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, the EU and its Member States could consider the following actions:

- Use Member States' diplomatic missions and field offices in partner countries, or Member States' Permanent Representations in Brussels, to facilitate communication and knowledge exchange.
- Establish partnerships with other Member States to promote collaboration and joint projects, for instance using TAIEX and Twinning.
- Consider developing virtual platforms and communities of practice for knowledge exchange that allow experts from different Member States to share their experiences and best practices.
- Ensure that the lessons learnt from an international exchange are further disseminated and publicised throughout the home administration and European networks.

To overcome the challenge of barriers to effective mobilisation of public sector expertise caused by unclear legal frameworks with respect to seconded short-term and long-term experts in partner countries and inadequate support at the national level, the EU and its Member States could consider the following actions:

- Develop clear legal frameworks based on international standards and good practices that define the roles and responsibilities of seconded experts in partner countries. These should also be communicated effectively to all parties involved.
- Establish communication channels between the seconded experts, the sending organisation, and the receiving organisation to facilitate administrative support to address legal challenges faced by seconded experts.
- Provide adequate support to seconded experts, including training and information on the legal basis of their contract.

To overcome challenges impeding the mobilisation of public sector expertise such as inadequate workplace security for seconded experts at institutional and partner country levels, EU Member States could consider the following actions:

- At the partner country level, Member States can conduct security assessments and risk analysis before seconded experts are deployed to partner countries to identify potential threats and develop appropriate measures to mitigate them.
- At the institutional level, provide security training to seconded experts before deployment, including personal security, situational awareness, and emergency response.
- Additionally, provide adequate training and information on the local context, culture, and legal system to allow the expert to better navigate in the new environment.

ADMINISTRATIVE, OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

To realise fully the benefits of deploying civil servants in external action, Member States could:

- Provide adequate training, mentoring, resources, and career development opportunities to support civil servants who are deployed in external action.
- Develop a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of civil servant deployments in external action to inform ongoing improvements and adjustments.
- Acknowledge the added value of embedding seconded experts in partner administrations from the point of view of trust building, leveraging institutional partnerships, adopting tailored responses and building a sense of shared ownership.

To overcome fragmentation and lack of coordination in mobilising civil servants for international secondments, Member States could:

- At the European level, examine the possibility of setting up a European public sector expertise hub for exchange, coordination, and harmonisation on the use of public sector expertise for development cooperation.
- At the national level, consider establishing a centralised system or platform for managing and coordinating the deployment of civil servants for secondments across different ministries.
- Harmonise remuneration for international assignments across all public institutions.
- Develop a national-level strategy for mobilising public sector expertise for international cooperation that outlines priorities, objectives, and expected outcomes.

To match the demand for public sector expertise with appropriate institutional and national-level expertise, Member States could:

- Establish a centralised database or registry of public sector experts that includes information on their areas of expertise, experience, and availability.
- Harmonise the approach within Member States for sending experts on short-term and long-term

assignments by establishing a clear process for identifying demand for public sector expertise and matching it with the appropriate national institution, e.g., governmental or implementing agency, thematic Ministry, research institute, laboratory etc.

- Assess public sector experts for international assignments on their intercultural competencies and their capacity to transfer skills, in addition to their technical knowledge and, if necessary, offer training to civil servants recruited for international assignments to equip them with the relevant soft skills, such as those needed to share knowledge in an international context or to work in inter-cultural environments.
- Match peers according to shared tasks and areas of responsibility to ensure the optimal sharing of expertise in international assignments.
- Establish a rigorous selection process to ensure that experts correspond to the needs of the partner countries.
- Identify the institutions at EU Member State level that have the most relevant experience with respect to partner countries' priorities and needs and, in particular with respect to partner administrations' contexts and specificities.

To address the availability of human resources that can be mobilised as public sector expertise for international assignments, Member States could:

- Develop a comprehensive human resources management strategy for mobilising public sector expertise in international assignments that includes recruitment, training, retention, and career development.
- Develop a system for identifying and prioritising areas where public sector expertise is needed and allocate resources accordingly and coordinate with other Member States on this.

To address the challenge of complex administrative procedures that can hinder the mobilisation of public sector expertise and impact the quality of interventions, Member States could:

- Assess and streamline administrative procedures to reduce bureaucratic obstacles and facilitate the mobilisation of public sector expertise.

JOINT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE AREA OF PUBLIC SECTOR EXPERTISE

- Establish a centralised system or platform for managing administrative procedures related to the mobilisation of public sector expertise.
- Develop clear guidelines and protocols for administrative procedures related to the mobilisation of public sector expertise and communicate them effectively to all parties involved.
- Provide training and support to public sector experts on administrative procedures and requirements to ensure compliance and quality of interventions.

To overcome the lack of institutional awareness of, and capacity to mobilise public sector expertise within Member States, EU institutions could:

- Provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to Member States.
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns to inform Member States about the benefits and opportunities of public technical assistance.
- Showcase successful public sector expertise stories as part of these awareness-raising campaigns.

Insufficient operational frameworks at the institutional level in Member States are impeding the mobilisation of public sector expertise for development. These challenges could be addressed by:

- Establishing a national policy framework to provide general guidelines within which experts and Member State institutions can operate.
- Developing an organisational structure in the form of a coordinating body that promotes, steers, and provides support to the institutions and experts.
- Assessing institutional frameworks at the national and sub-national levels to identify gaps and areas for improvement.
- Establishing processes and procedures to regulate how experts participate in peer-to-peer actions.

To promote joint implementation, knowledge sharing, and resource pooling in the area of public sector expertise, the EU and its Member States public institutions could:

- Foster partnerships and collaboration among EU institutions and European networks to leverage their collective expertise, resources, and networks that focus on promoting the use of public sector expertise in external action.
- Adopt a Team Europe approach to develop wider and deeper networks of national experts and pool their information and know-how.
- Work to promote and facilitate greater participation by all 27 EU Member States and their specialised agencies in actions that mobilise public sector expertise, emphasising inclusiveness and the added value of each Member State in public sector expertise.
- Develop and implement joint programmes and initiatives that address common development challenges and priorities by mobilising public sector expertise. Identify a structured approach at the EU level to efficiently share relevant public policy models and experiences from Member States and the European Commission with partner countries' institutions.
- Reach out to EU Delegations and/or Member State Embassies in countries where there is a national interest to promote the European public sector expertise offer.
- Explore synergies with other tools and modalities to gradually build a pipeline of actions, projects and programmes that make best use of public sector expertise in combination with other tools and modalities.