Improving merit recruitment practices in the Western Balkans: Lessons from the ReSPA Regional Study

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Approach of ReSPA regional study

• Focus on implementation
• Unpacking procedures to identify the weakest link
  – Adverts and approvals, commissions, written exams, interviews, rankings, final selection
• Bottom-up research approach
  – Work with / by ReSPA Community of Practitioners in HRM/HRD
  – Work with regional experts
  – Survey of personnel managers
• Recommendations for region & each country
Main findings

• Merit recruitment usually formalised by law
• Procedures are widely applied in practice (i.e. rule evasion is unusual)
• But
  – Perceived ineffectiveness of procedures
  – Political interference is widespread
    • Importance of non-merit criteria
    • Influence of politicians and political appointees
  – Perceived lack of fairness and efficiency
Relative importance of selection criteria:
'Somewhat', 'very' & 'extremely important' (per cent of respondents, cross-country average)

- Professional competences: 79%
- Support from political leadership: 59%
- Support from political part: 23%
- Belonging to an ethnic or social group: 24%
Importance of [POLITICIANS] in determining recruitment outcomes:
Somewhat, very, extremely important (per cent of respondents, example of BiH State level)
Main obstacles to effective merit recruitment practices

• Problems of regulation
  – Loopholes and systemic weaknesses

• Problems of examination standards
  – Low standards
  – Cumbersome processes

• Problems of capacity
  – HR units
  – Ex post and external monitoring

• Problems of information
  – Committee members and managers
  – Politicians including MPs

• Problems of informal norms
  – Culture of favouritism and political control
Problems of regulation

• Under-regulation of complementary policies with negative side-effects
  – E.g. temporary employment
Problems of examination standards

• Despite use of (often complex) examination systems, lack of capacity to identify competences
  – Insufficient criterial frameworks
  – Low standards
  – High pass rates
    • Examinations as routines to legitimise permanent employment?
Figure 5: Passing rates for written examinations
Problems of capacity

- Insufficient capacity to manage and monitor personnel management
  - Small size or complete lack of personnel departments
  - Lack of HRM experts
  - Weakness of ex post monitoring
  - Limited role of civil society in externally monitoring public administration
    - But good examples, e.g. Institute Alternativa (Montenegro)
Problems of information

• Insufficient knowledge as major obstacle to better implementation
  – Selection commissions
    • Ad hoc members, mainly senior civil servants
    • Independent experts (academia, civil society)
  – Personnel managers
  – Politicians, including MPs
Problems of informal norms

• Informal norms undermine (rather than support) formal civil service rules
  – Widespread acceptance of political control over personnel policy
  – Accommodation of ethnic diversity
  – Culture of favouritism
Recommendations

• What is possible – given the context?

• Improve regulatory framework
  – Review and develop complementary regulation

• Raise standards
  – Review and improve examination systems and standards

• Develop capacity and external monitoring
  – Strengthen personnel departments
  – Work with civil society

• Invest in training and education to raise information levels, public and political awareness
  – Senior civil servants, politicians, applicants