EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Better Governments for Better Lives



Strengthening State Capacities for Strategic, Meritocratic and Inclusive Management of Civil Service in Latin America and the Caribbean

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IDB

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Executive Summary

In the last 10 years, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have experienced significant challenges, which have required the adoption of public policies that have been limited by gaps in state capacity, particularly related to civil service management. The policies that LAC countries have been implementing to reduce poverty and inequality, boost economic growth, strengthen citizen security, and mitigate the impacts of climate change, among other issues, face a set of structural challenges and and opportunities:

- **complex fiscal context**—First, the countries of the region present a complex fiscal context, which is the result of low growth and multiple external shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, and the tightening of global financial conditions.[1] These factors have contributed to a narrow fiscal space (i.e., limited available resources) for countries to meet urgent social demands.
- **state capacity and citizen confidence**—The LAC region has been experiencing a decline in state capacity,[2] which has led to a decrease in citizen confidence in public institutions, and that citizen confidence is currently among the lowest in the world.[3]
- **information and communications technologies**—The rapid development of information and communications technologies (ICTs) offers state entities the enormous potential to improve service delivery.

1 As an illustration, the average growth for the period 2014–23 was 1.15 percent compared to 3.52 percent for the period 2004–14 (World Bank, 2023).

2 The World Bank's government effectiveness index, which is a proxy for state capacity, shows that the region is worse off than two decades ago, as that value went from the 56th percentile in 2004, to the 53rd in 2014, and to 48.5 in 2022, the latest year for which the value is available {World Bank).

3 Confidence in LAC is 17 percent vs. the world average of 25 percent (see Introduction, Figure 0.2; Keefer and Scartascini, 2022).)

> **The effective implementation of policies aimed at improving the living conditions of citizens depends primarily on the ability of public agencies to provide adequate human resources."**

To implement policies that address the fiscal challenge and the shocks that drive it, to strengthen state capacity, and to reap the benefits of ICTs, government agencies will need to develop certain capabilities,[4] including those needed to adapt their organizational structure and human resources to this new and changing landscape.

The effective implementation of policies aimed at improving the living conditions of citizens depends primarily on the ability of public agencies to provide adequate human resources. All the actions necessary to implement public policies require the intervention of a large number of public officials. The creation of regulatory norms, the construction of public infrastructure, and the provision of public services depend on the decisions and actions of the civil service. Therefore, the effectiveness of the state in implementing its public policies requires that civil servants have the necessary knowledge and skills; that strategic, meritocratic, and inclusive management become guiding principles in the civil service; and that efforts are aimed at strengthening the professionalism and integrity of public servants.[5]

This book aims to answer three key questions:

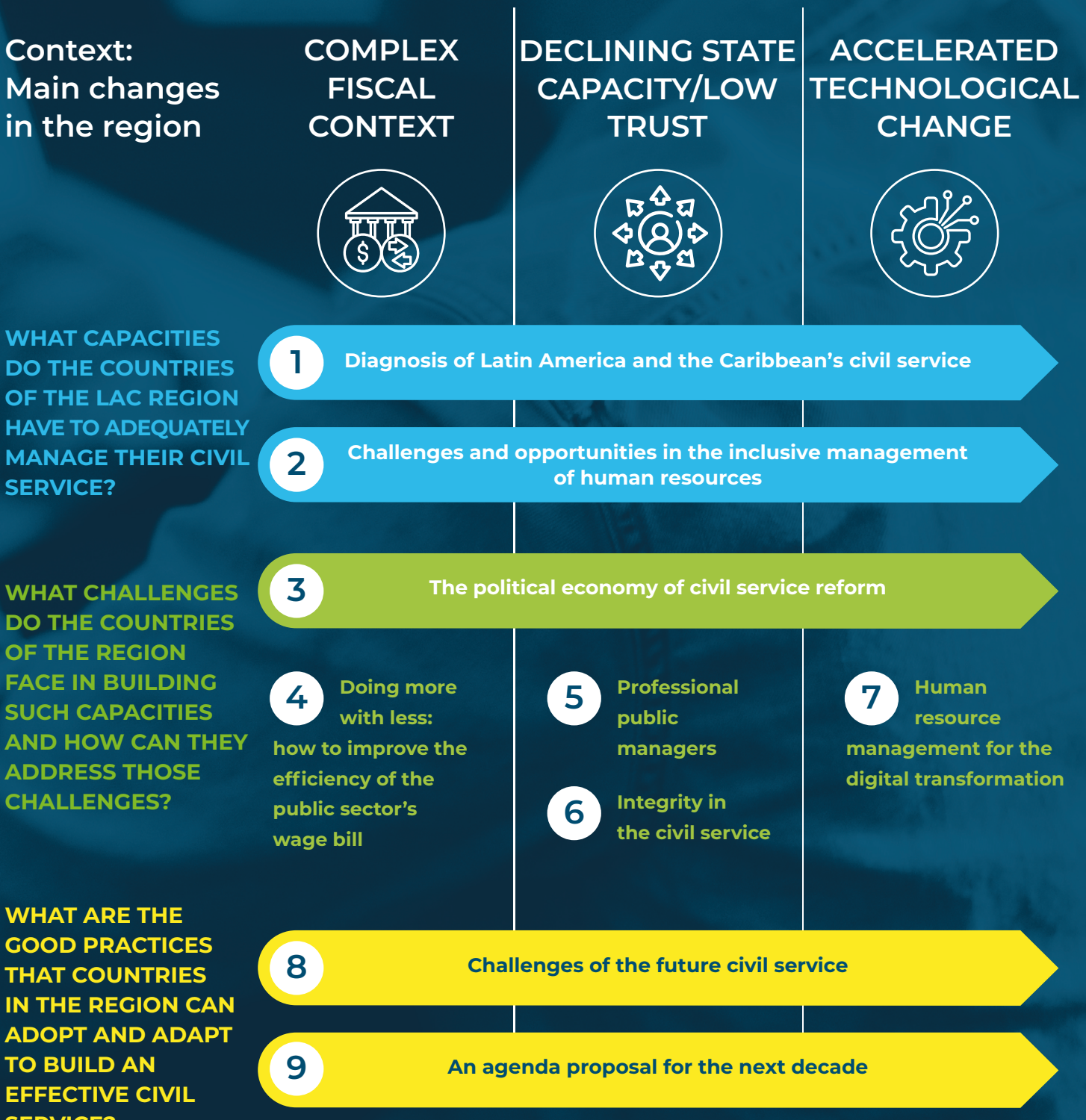
1. What capacities do the countries of the LAC region have to adequately manage their civil service?
2. What challenges do the countries of the region face in building such capacities and how can they address those challenges?
3. What are the good practices that countries in the region can adopt and adapt to build an effective civil service?

This publication is structured around these questions, while analyzing the interrelated challenges facing the region (see **Figure E1**).

4 In a recent survey, for example, 64 percent of 718 public managers surveyed were part of a technology project that suffered difficulties due to lack of skills of the responsible personnel, and 51 percent have a severe or very severe deficit in data analysis skills (Porrúa et al., 2021).

5 On the impact on economic growth and poverty reduction, see Evans and Rauch (1999); Henderson et al. (2003); Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell (2012); Knack and Keefer (1995); Mauro (1995); Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001); Dollar and Kraay (2003); and Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi (2004). On improved public service delivery, see Lira (2013). On improved trust in government, see Maxfield and Schneider (1997); Van de Walle, Van Roosebroek, and Bouckaert (2005); Cai et al. (2009); and Sacks (2010).

Figure E1
Overview of the Context, Challenges, and Good Practices of the Civil Service in Latin America and the Caribbean



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

What Capacities Do the Countries of the Region Have to Adequately Manage Their Civil Service?



To analyze the situation in the LAC region, the study described in this book uses the Analytical Framework for the Institutional Diagnosis of Civil Service Systems. This methodology, developed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 2004, based on the work of Francisco Longo (2002), has its origin in the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service (CIFP),[6] which contains the guiding principles and good practices for strategic and integrated human resource management (HRM). Based on these principles and practices, the methodology measures the soundness of eight HRM subsystems, resulting in five indexes that evaluate specific aspects and one aggregate index,[7] which summarizes the overall quality of HRM in the civil service analyzed (see Figure E2).

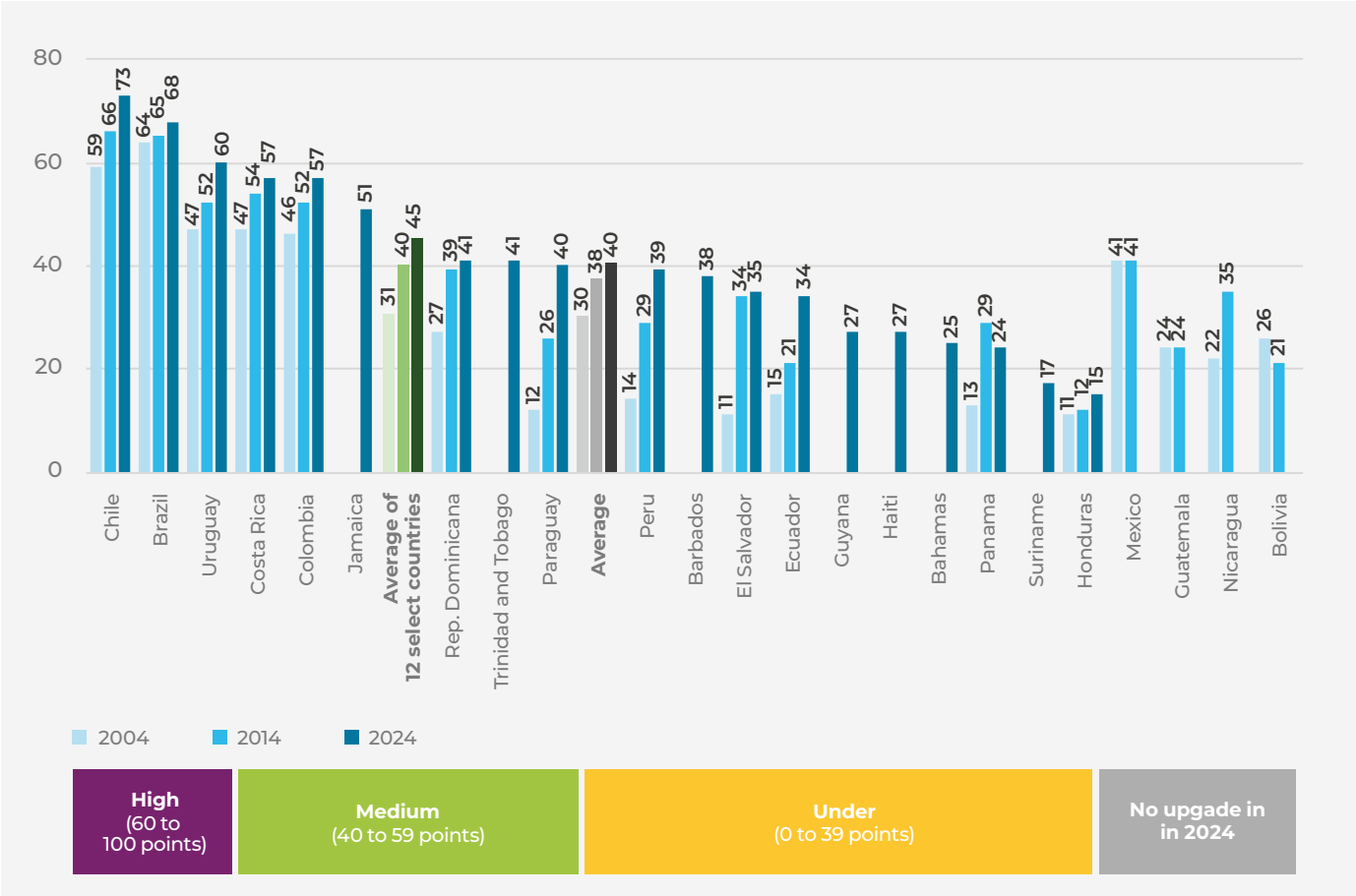
Progress in capacity building for improving civil service management in the region shows a slowdown. Regional studies using the Civil Service Development Index (CSDI) were conducted in 2004, 2014, and 2024. Between the 2014 regional studies (with data from 2011–13) and 2024 studies (with data from 2017–24), the CSDI score for the region increased only 2 points, from 38 to 40 points. This contrasts with an increase of 8 points, from 30 to 38 points, between the 2004 study and the 2014 study. The results show a recent slowdown in progress for all LAC countries studied and when limited to comparing only the same 12 countries over time.[8] In comparing the 2004 and 2014 regional surveys, the overall index rose 9 points, from 31 to 40. However, when comparing the 2014 and 2024 results for the 12 comparable countries, the increase was only 5 points, from 40 to 45 (see **Figure E2**).

6 The Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service (CIFP) was signed in 2003 by the countries of the region.

7 For the purposes of this book, this aggregate index will be referred to as the "global index" or "Civil Service Development Index" or CSDI interchangeably.

8 The 12 countries compared are Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

Figure E2
Civil Service Development Index Scores for LAC Countries, 2004, 2014, and 2024



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on IDB's evaluations of civil service systems in each country (see Map of Resources and the reference list at the end of this document).
Note: The 2004 regional study was prepared with data from the 2002–04 period, the 2014 study with data from the 2011–13 period, and the 2024 study with data from the 2017–24 period. Argentina, Belize, and Venezuela were not evaluated in 2014 and 2024, and they are not shown on the bar graph.

The results for 12 LAC countries reveal three groups with differentiated evolutions. As can be seen in **Figure E3**, the groups are as follows:

1. **Countries with a high index score** (above 60 points)—These include Chile and Brazil in both periods, and Uruguay, which made a significant advance of 8 points, going from 52 to 60 in the second period.

2. **Countries with a medium index score** (between 40 and 59 points)—The group shows stability and moderate progress. Costa Rica and Colombia remained in this range during both periods. The Dominican Republic and Paraguay joined this group, and Paraguay stands out with a notable advance of 14 points, going from 26 to 40.

3. **Countries with a low index score** (up to 39 points)—These include countries with varied progress. Ecuador added 13 points, advancing from 21 to 34, and Peru added 10 points, increasing from 29 to 39. However, in both countries, the improvement seen in an intermediate assessment in 2015 has stalled in recent years. In this grouping, some countries did not show significant progress. El Salvador climbed only 1 point, from 34 to 35, without continuing the significant improvements of the first period, in which it went from 11 to 34 points. Honduras also showed limited progress, from 12 to 15 points. Panama experienced a drop in its score, from 29 to 24 points, after improving from 13 to 29 points in the first period.



Credit: Latin American Center for Development Administration (CLAD)

Figure E3

Progress and Quality of Civil Service Development Index Scores in 12 LAC Countries, 2004, 2014, and 2024

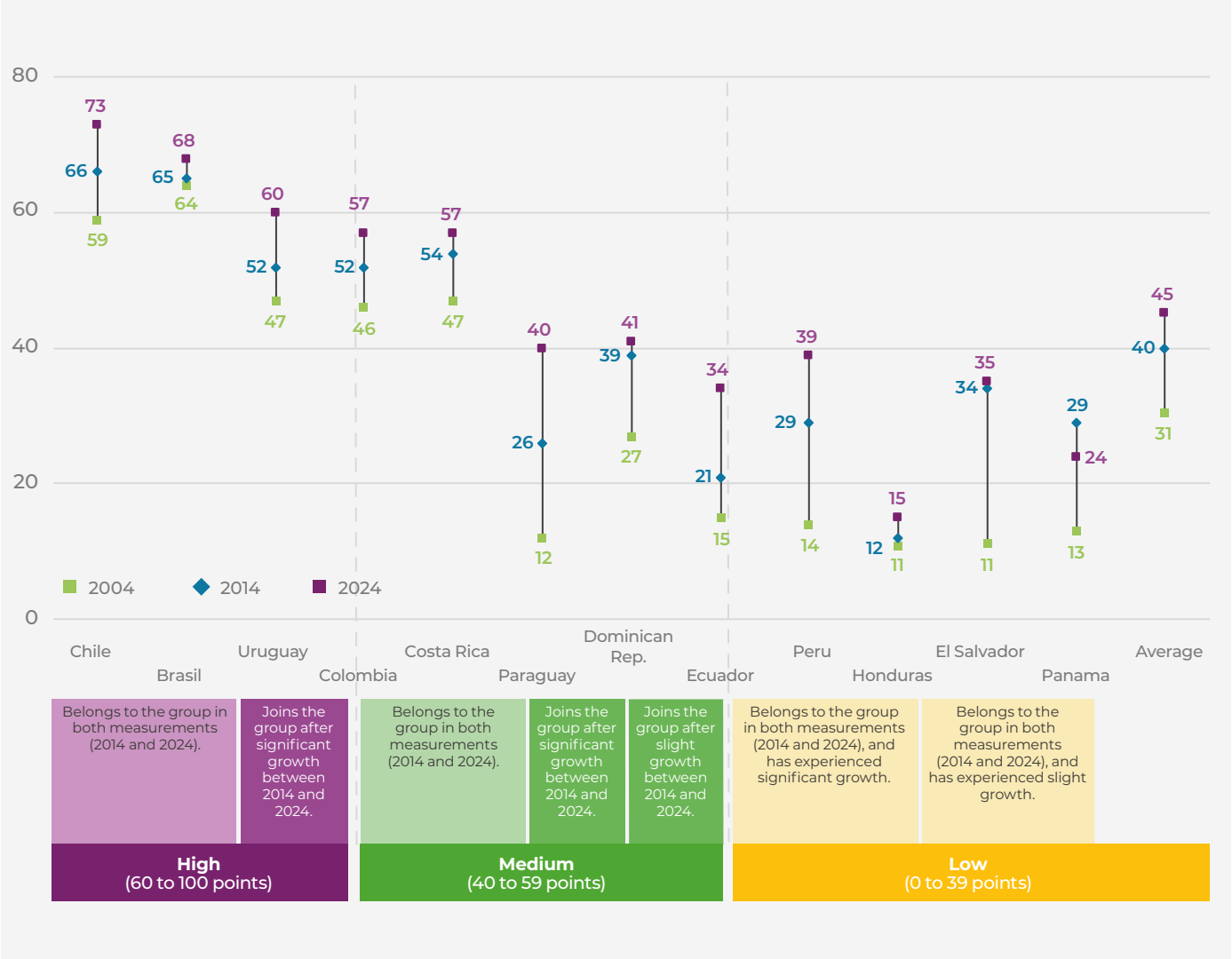
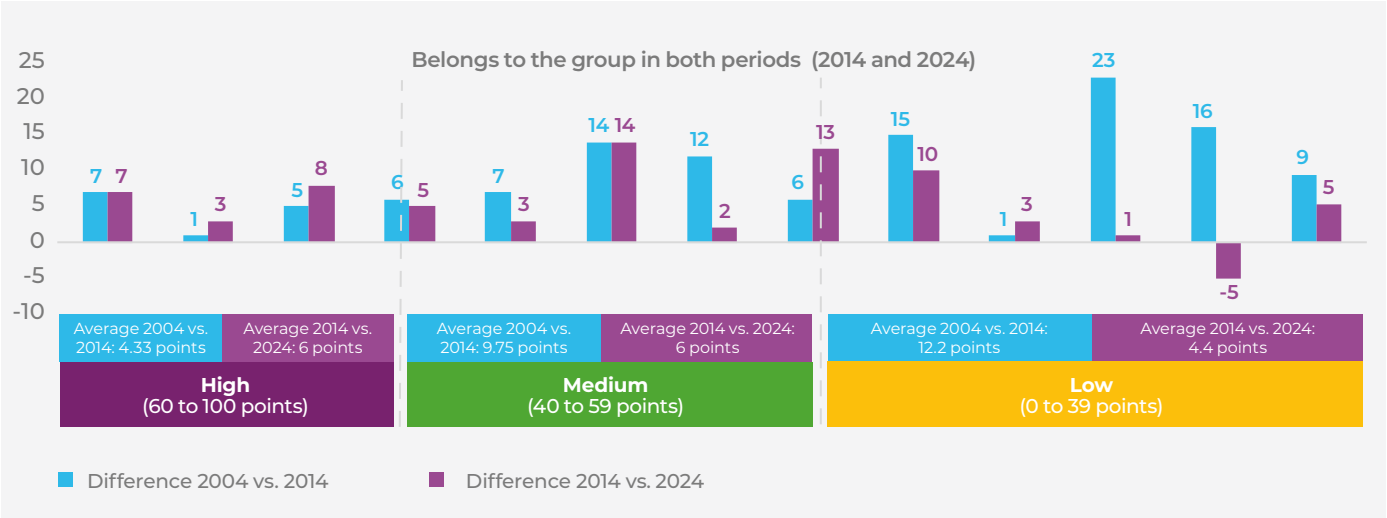


Figure E3
Progress and Quality of Civil Service Development Index Scores in 12 LAC Countries, 2004, 2014, and 2024 *(continued)*



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on IDB's evaluations of civil service systems in each country.
Note: The 2004 regional study was prepared with data from the 2002–04 period, the 2014 study with data from the 2011–13 period, and the 2024 study with data from the 2017–24 period.

"In 2017, evaluations for seven Caribbean civil services were conducted for the first time."

In 2017, evaluations for seven Caribbean civil services were conducted for the first time. The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago were added to the LAC countries studied. The results show that two civil services have a medium score, which is above the regional average (Jamaica[9] and Trinidad and Tobago), and the rest have low scores (The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Haiti, and Suriname). This shows that most of these countries face significant challenges in the process of building a strategic and integrated HRM to strengthen the quality of the civil service and the effectiveness of public management.

The results allow us to group the countries in the LAC region according to the progress each made in improving its civil service and the depth of the reforms carried out. The different elements that make up effective civil service management confirm that, although most countries in the region

9 The evaluation was updated in 2024.

have made progress in establishing regulatory frameworks (de jure), only a smaller number have managed to implement them effectively.

1. The first group of countries has focused on "order reforms" (basically, the establishment of regulatory frameworks), and the group includes the countries with low scores. These countries have taken important steps to establish basic regulations and structures, but they still face significant challenges in putting these frameworks into practice.

2. The second group has focused on "guarantee reforms," and the group includes countries with medium scores. These countries have not only established regulatory frameworks but also begun to apply the principles of meritocracy and independence of the civil service. In other words, these medium-scoring countries have moved beyond mere regulation to ensure that such principles are applied in practice.

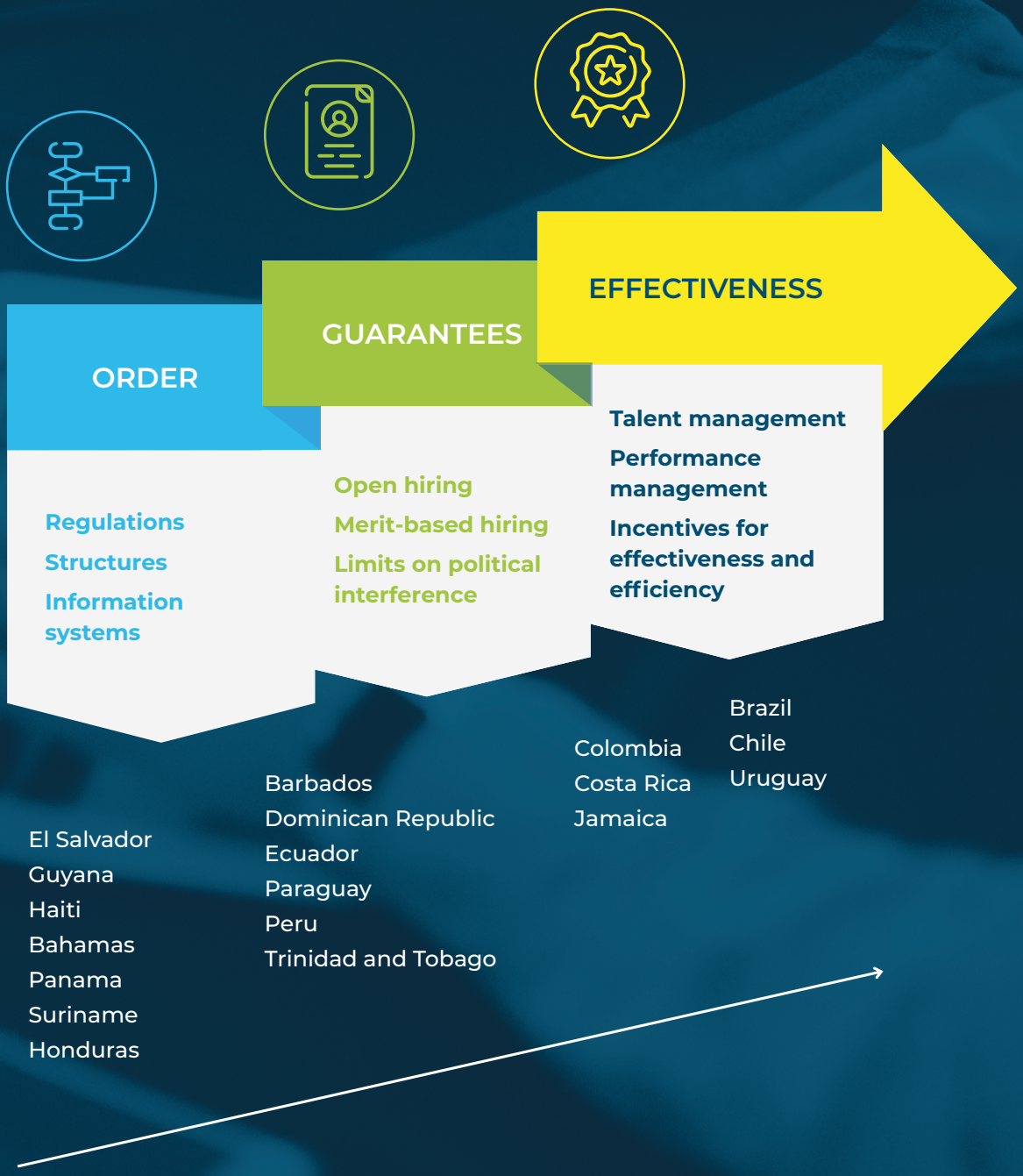
3. The third group has primarily focused on "effectiveness reforms," and the group consists of countries with high scores. These countries have managed to implement advanced management, performance, and incentive tools, ensuring effective and efficient civil service administration. They have established and guaranteed regulatory and meritocratic frameworks, and they have managed to maintain an optimally functioning civil service management.

Figure E4 presents the groups and names the countries. It shows how the ladder steps up in professionalizing the civil service.

> **"HRM is structured in several interrelated subsystems."**



Figure E4
Civil Service Professionalization Ladder of Reforms, 2024



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on Cortázar et al. (2014)

To consider how these indexes and scores are developed for LAC countries, we must first address the strategic model of human resource management (HRM) and the eight HRM subsystems. HRM is structured in several interrelated subsystems, with planning at the top.

1. planning
2. work organization
3. employment management
4. performance management
5. compensation management
6. development management
7. human and social relations management
8. organization of the human resources function



Credit: Transformation Implementation Unit, Jamaica

The subsystem of planning establishes coherent policies that guide the rest of the subsystems. The subsystems at the intermediate level are work organization, which defines the tasks and profiles required; employment management, which covers the entry, mobility, and exit of personnel; performance management, which evaluates the contribution of employees to the organization's objective; compensation management, which rewards that contribution; and development management, which fosters the growth of personnel. At the lowest level, human and social relations management connects with all of the above subsystems. In addition, the organization of the human resources function focuses on the institutional framework of the system (see **Figure E5**).

The Analytical Framework for the Institutional Diagnosis of Civil Service Systems evaluates critical points in each subsystem and their interconnections, comparing the actual situation with an ideal standard using a scale of 0 to 5, and reflecting key aspects such as merit, efficiency, and functional capacity of the civil service system.

Figure E5
Strategic Model of Human Resources Management, 2024



Fuente: Elaboración propia, con base en Longo (2022).

In analyzing each of the subsystems, five key factors stand out in the LAC region:

1. **Strategic workforce planning** in the region remains limited, with little access to and use of information for decision making, which reduces both efficiency in the use of public resources and management effectiveness. A disconnect persists between government priorities and resource allocation, both financial and human, which prevents effective alignment between government objectives and goals and the performance of public personnel. In addition, many civil services lack adequate methodologies and standards for managing and evaluating performance. The lack of interconnected information systems between public entities further hinders timely and evidence-based decision making.

2. **Remuneration** shows low strategic coherence. Horizontal and vertical salary inequalities are persistent, which affects the attraction, motivation, and retention of human resources, which in turn affects public management.

3. Regarding the **implementation of meritocratic criteria**, countries in the region are quite varied in their advances. The challenge remains to implement these criteria in contract personnel and management positions, especially in the senior public management segment, so that any flexibility in appointments and their duration must preserve quality criteria.

4. One of the areas of greatest progress in the region over recent years has been in the area of development, specifically **training**. In this regard, new technologies and the COVID-19 pandemic boosted virtual training, which substantially improved training coverage and drastically reduced costs. Of the 12 countries with comparable measurements, 75 percent improved in this area.

5. Regarding the **steering role of the civil service**, there are important differences in the level of maturity among countries in the region. Some countries have a solid steering role, and the functions of generating regulations, methodologies, technical assistance, and supervision of implementation are well developed (e.g., Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Uruguay). However, in other countries, these functions are less developed, very low, or non-existent.

A diverse public sector benefits governments and society."

Another consideration—inclusive human resources management (IHRM)—is critical for the region. This approach has become a global priority and has recently been comprehensively incorporated into civil service evaluations. Given the evidence that public administrations are not representative of the society that they serve, and that this lack of inclusiveness is linked to poor performance of those public administrations, a special analysis has been undertaken to address this issue. There is evidence that a diverse public sector benefits governments and society, and that diversity and inclusion strengthen meritocracy in the state and contribute to strengthening the trust of citizens (see Chapter 2).

In the region, IHRM is a pending issue, still awaiting attention. For example, women in the region are systematically underrepresented in management positions in the public sectors. Regarding other identities (such as racial and ethnic minorities), although the data is even more limited, it has been shown that inclusion and representation also fall short.

To measure IHRM, the Inclusive Human Resources Management Index (IHRMI) was developed, which is an expansion of the Civil Service Development Index (CSDI).[10] The IHRMI uses a scale of 0 to 100, and 10 countries were evaluated using the IHRMI (see Figure E6). The average score for the 10 countries is 34 points (low level), and no country reaches the high level. Overall, in the region, practices for an inclusive approach to HRM are only beginning to develop, although efforts in some countries stand out. The greatest progress has been made in improving work–life balance. Salary gaps persist in most countries and in some cases are close to 30 percent. The variability between organizations within the same country is also worth noting.

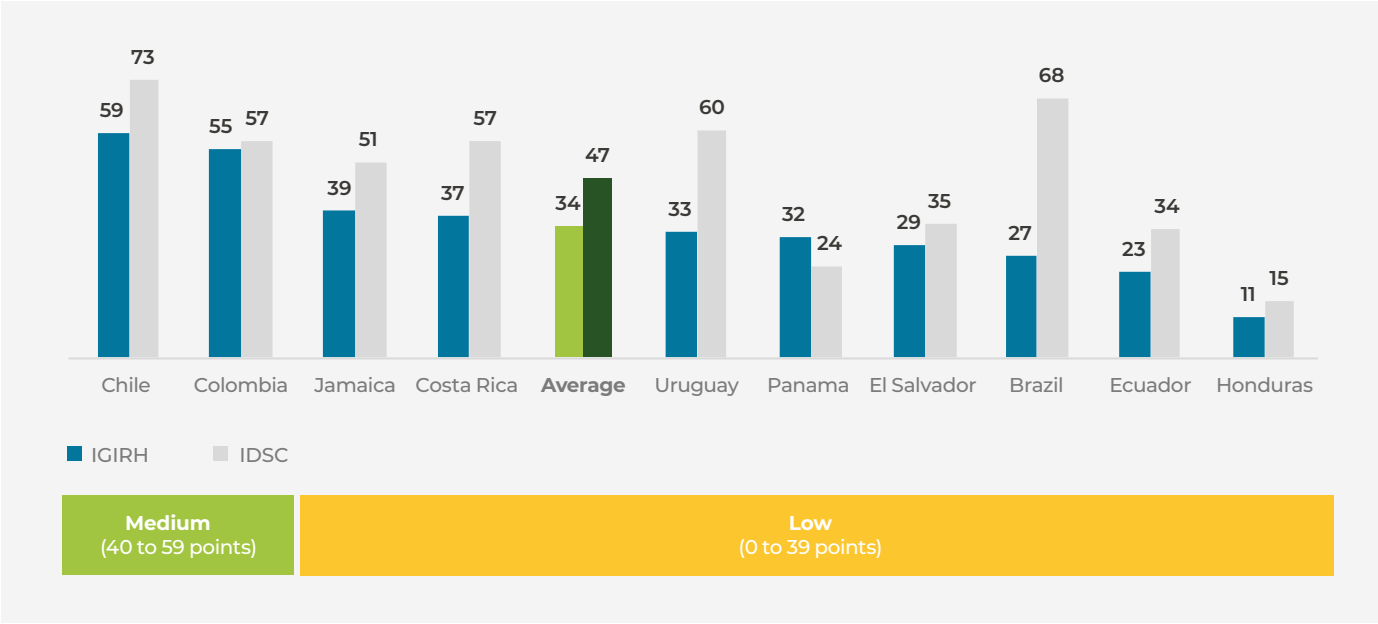
Of the 10 countries, the only two countries with scores in the medium level are Chile and Colombia, and they have different public policy approaches. Colombia is the most effective country when considering the presence of women in leadership positions and in terms of wage gaps.

As for Chile, the analysis was complemented by an in-depth study of Chile, the highest-scoring country in the region. A survey of approximately 27,000 civil servants revealed that the majority want greater diversity and inclusion, and only a minority rate current practices favorably.

10 For more information on this methodology, see Chapter 2.

Figure E6

Inclusive Human Resources Management in 10 LAC Countries, 2017–24 and 2023–24.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.
Note: CSDI data are for the period 2017–24, while IHRMI data are for the period 2023–24.

In summary, IHRM is a task pending and vital for the LAC region. There can be no question of improving the quality and professionalization of the civil service as long as inequality and exclusion persist in the public sector. It is time for the public administrations of LAC to take an active role in putting an end to exclusion so that they can take advantage of the multiple benefits that a diverse public administration generates for the public sector and society in general.

What Are the Most Pressing Challenges in Building These Capabilities and How can they be addressed?



The Political Economy of Civil Service Reforms in the Region

The success of civil service reforms depends not only on their technical design but also on political factors. The importance of this type of reform is based on the evidence that the effectiveness of the public sector, the public policies it promotes, and the quality of public spending depend on the capacity of the state. One of the key inputs of state capacity is the management of the civil service with strategic, meritocratic, and inclusive criteria in functions such as planning, employment, performance, compensation, and training. Implementing these criteria in the public sector involves a set of reforms that can be organized into three categories: (i) reforms for the adoption of technical regulatory frameworks and management practices (technical capabilities); (ii) reforms for the adoption of incentive structures that improve the management of civil service agencies and the performance of public servants (accountability framework); and (iii) understanding the conditions of the political economy, in order to facilitate consensus building (authorizing environment) that facilitate the implementation of reforms.

Six key factors influence the region's political economy (see **Figure E7**).

1. The alternation between highly polarized political regimes and the vulnerability of politically appointed positions result in high turnover. This high turnover hinders stability, professionalization, and continuity in public administration.

2. Although there are laws that prescribe meritocratic processes, their application is weak due to resistance from political actors (such as unions) who seek to maintain discretionary recruitment mechanisms and favoritism.

3. There is a vicious circle of social distrust in government. Almost paradoxically, citizen distrust reduces incentives to strengthen the civil service, which, in turn, generate weak results in public administration for citizens, which continues to increase citizen distrust.

4. Interest groups that can hinder or stop reforms (e.g., unions) are often more organized than the beneficiaries of reforms (e.g.,

Economic crises create incentives to improve the efficiency of public resource management, including the civil service, but these incentives are often focused on reducing spending, thus the quantity of spending."

citizens) and thus can often block civil service reforms.

5. Economic crises create incentives to improve the efficiency of public resource management, including the civil service, but these incentives are often focused on reducing spending, thus the quantity of spending. In contrast, complementary reforms aimed at improving the *quality* of human resource spending (e.g., reforms to strengthen strategic, meritocratic, and inclusive civil service management) are not implemented.

6. Finally, organized crime, a recent phenomenon in the region, appears to have the power to influence various aspects of the public sector and contribute to the expansion of corruption and state capture (Corrales and Freeman, 2024; Kaufmann, 2004). Indications of the impact of organized crime on the weakening of state capacity and the professionalization of the civil service need to be further explored.

Essential lessons

To understand and adapt civil service reforms to prevailing conditions of the political economy, regional experiences and the literature offer the following essential lessons (see Figure E7).

1. Take advantage of catalysts for reform. Fiscal crises, digital transformation, and the COVID-19 pandemic have emerged as significant catalysts for reform of the civil service, not so much because of the job cuts they might entail, but because of the lessons they have taught about the ability of the civil service to adapt in emergencies, improve its efficiency, and respond to political demands. This type of crisis, when accompanied by citizen demand that is dissatisfied with the management of the state, has the potential to generate important reforms. The pandemic prompted the rapid adoption of reforms, such as those introduced in the health sector to mobilize personnel to attend to health emergencies, or those introduced in other sectors to enable remote work practices. The pandemic also accelerated digital transformation as a direct response to demands for more agile and accessible public services. These catalysts have created examples and conditions for reforms aimed at a civil service that is more responsive to citizen demands. The momentum generated by these developments can still be harnessed to introduce strategic, meritocratic, and inclusive management practices.

2. Build consensus for reform (or its authorizing environment). It is critical to identify key interested parties, beneficiaries, and potential opponents of proposed civil service reforms. Understanding the interests and capacities of each of these groups makes it possible to align those key interested parties who support reforms, build collective action among beneficiaries, and design strategies to respond to those who have the capacity to obstruct them. Building consensus among these three groups in favor of reform will facilitate efforts to move beyond the passage of legislation to actually implement reforms. One example is that ministries of finance play a critical role in managing the wage bill and in guiding budget reform efforts toward results and fiscal consolidation. These ministries should be given a greater role in preparing and promoting civil service reforms.

3. Iterative, gradual, and strategic implementation of reforms. Strategies to approve reforms and implement them should have characteristics such as matching reforms to existing state capacities to implement them, learning from their implementation to incrementally adjust and expand them, and achieving quick wins.

4. Boost meritocracy flexibly, with patronage practices. Although political appointments are linked to clientelism, such appointments can also be useful to address governance problems (such as the need for governments to appoint trusted officials in strategic positions, or officials who respond to allies when political coalitions are formed). Meritocratic management of the civil service need not disappear in the face of clientelism because it is possible for those practices to function in a complementary manner. The experiences of countries such as Chile and Peru show that appointments can have a reasonable balance between political and meritocratic appointments, and that this balance can contribute to improving government efficiency. The success of reforms depends on a strategic and gradual process of consensus building, where the total elimination of political appointments may end up truncating any space, or opportunity, for reform.

Figure E7
The Political Economy of Civil Service Reforms

KEY FACTORS IN THE LAC REGION: POLITICAL AND TECHNICAL

SIX KEY FACTORS INFLUENCE THE POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE REGION



LESSONS



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

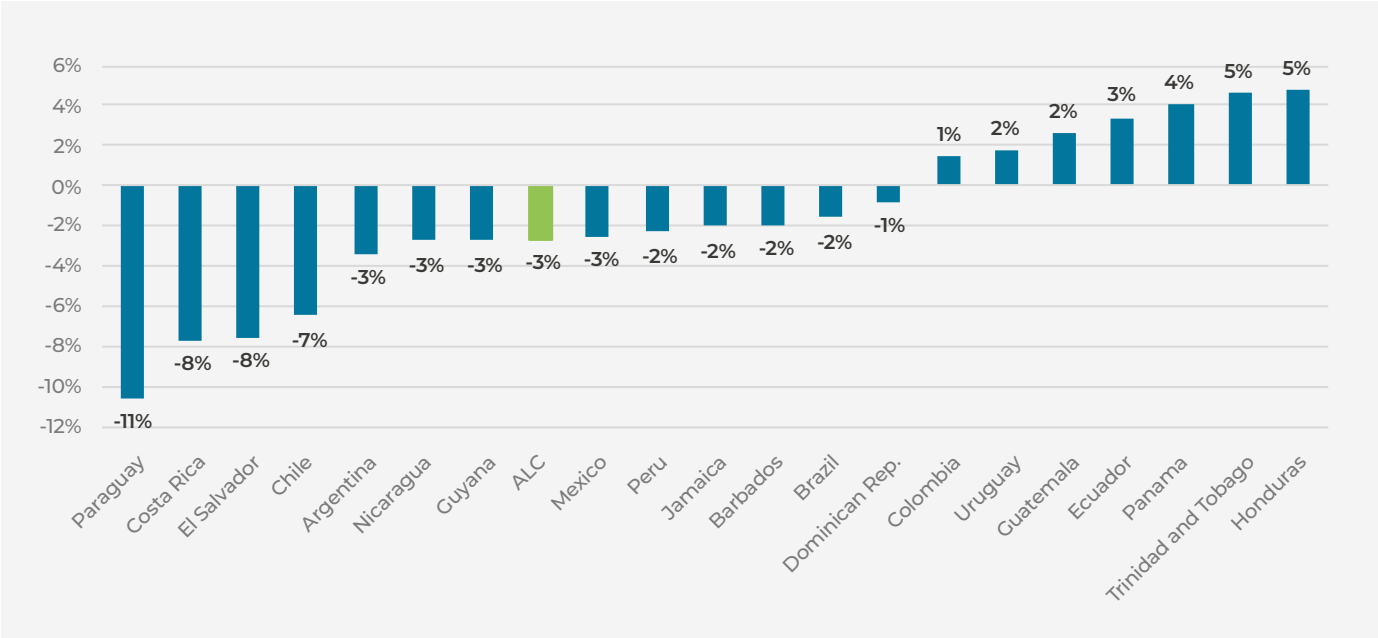
Complex Fiscal Context

Public employment and the wage bill play a crucial role in fiscal stability and service delivery, especially in a complex fiscal context. Improving HRM in the public sector is essential to increase its effectiveness (i.e., to provide services) but also to increase its efficiency (to provide them at the lowest possible cost), and thus the productivity of the state. Although during the last decade there has been a general trend toward a reduction in public employment and a relative decrease in the wage bill compared to the general labor market and other macroeconomic variables, the reality is not the same in all countries (see Figure E8). In most LAC examples, the fiscal and social situation remains delicate, with low levels of citizen trust in government. In this context, increasing the productivity of the public sector becomes the only way to expand the supply and quality of public services, and thus contributes to improving citizen trust. Increasing the productivity of the public sector requires optimizing the composition of human resources and adjusting the wage bill so that they both are aligned with the real needs of public personnel and the functions they perform, which underscores the urgency of making progress in reforms to improve the efficiency of human resources in the public sector.


Credit: ANSEC-EPAP, Honduras

Figure E8

Wage Bill as a Percentage of Total Public Spending in Selected LAC Countries, 2020 and 2021

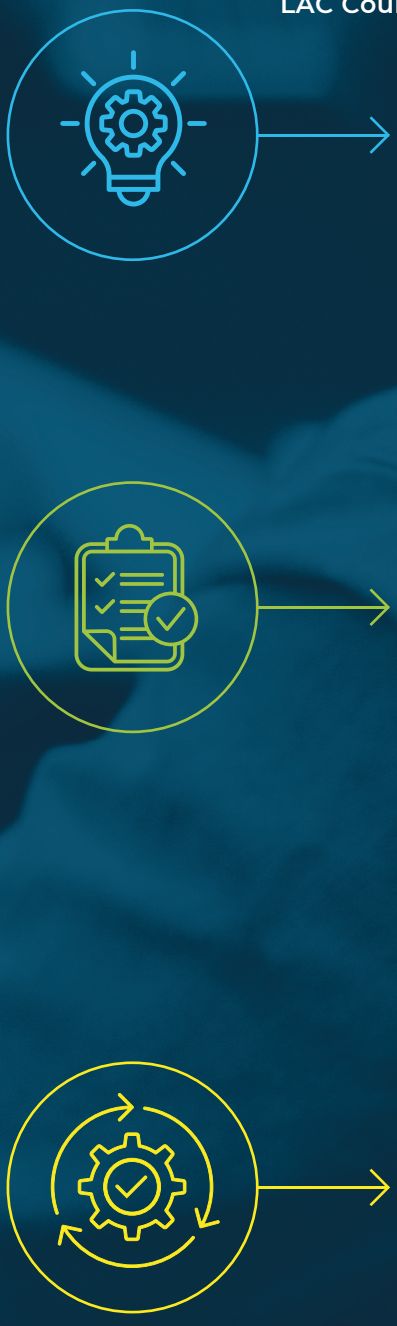


Source: Authors' own elaboration, based on IMF Government Finance Statistics (GFS) database (n.d.).
Note: The regional average of 3 percent for Latin America and the Caribbean is a simple average. Data for all countries are for 2021 with the exception of Bolivia, Honduras, Jamaica, and Uruguay, which are for 2020. Data includes spending on salaries, supplementary remunerations, and employer social contributions, except in the case of Argentina, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago, which only includes salaries and supplementary remunerations. Public sector information can be disaggregated into different levels: (i) general government, which includes the central government and subnational governments (as in the case of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru), and (ii) central government, which includes the national public administration (as in the case of The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay).

Types of Reform

In the last decade, the countries of the region have promoted five main types of reforms to promote greater efficiency in human resource spending. These actions address several of the weaknesses identified earlier, such as the lack of information, absence of planning, and low strategic coherence in compensation schemes. Some of these initiatives can be seen in Figure E9, and they are elaborated on following Figure E9..

Figure E9
Select Actions to Improve Human Resource Spending in LAC Countries



DIAGNOSIS

IDENTIFY AND MEASURE PROBLEMS

- **Payroll analysis**
  (7 countries in Central America)
- **Payroll audits**
  (Brazil, Honduras and Dominican Republic)

IMPLEMENTATION

ACTIONS TO REDUCE PAYROLL

- **Workforce planning**
  (Paraguay and Brazil)
- **Reducing public employment**
  (Brazil and Uruguay)
- **Voluntary retirement and separation programs**
  (Jamaica, Chile and Paraguay)

STRUCTURAL REFORMS

MAJOR POLICY OR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

- **Wage politicy reforms**
  (Costa Rica, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Jamaica)
- **Centralized payroll and human resource systems**
  (Jamaica and Dominican Repblic)

Fuente: Authors' own elaboration.

As mentioned, the need for LAC countries to optimize spending on human resources led the governments to adopt five main types of reforms:

- **Workforce planning and public employment containment measures—**Workforce analysis has taken various forms. For example, payroll analyses can be used to identify opportunities to improve the quality of expenditure, such as the one carried out in seven Central American countries (Pratt and Beverinotti, 2016). Paraguay and Brazil have conducted workforce planning exercises to anticipate retirements or reduce obsolete positions. In addition, countries like Brazil and Uruguay have implemented measures to downsize their workforce to lower the wage bill.

- **Payroll audits—**Countries can generate significant savings and improve the efficiency of expenditures on public sector personnel, with potential savings of up to 5 percent of the total wage bill. Brazil and Honduras have implemented physical audits to identify and eliminate "ghost workers," that is, public servants who are on the payroll long after dying. Between 2015 and 2021, Brazil implemented database cross-checking audits, which resulted in an estimated savings of US$515 million. The Dominican Republic is about to begin a similar task, which will be complemented with systemic audits.

- **Voluntary retirement and separation programs—**These are used to reduce the wage bill and improve service delivery. Chile, Jamaica, and Paraguay are examples of countries that have adopted these measures in the last decade.

- **Wide-ranging wage policy reforms—**These encompass structural and comprehensive reforms. In recent years, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Paraguay, and Uruguay have adopted such reforms, but they are still in the early stages of implementation.

- **Centralized payroll and human resources systems—**Some countries seek interoperability of systems to improve efficiency, transparency, and control of payroll management. Jamaica improved its effectiveness in payroll control, improved its public expenditure and financial accountability (PEFA) rating from

D+ to B, and generated a 30 percent return on investment. The Dominican Republic is in the process of implementing a similar system.

However, it should be noted that these five groups of strategies have been oriented mainly to reducing salary expenditure (productive efficiency) but only to a lesser extent on the strategic allocation of human resources (allocative efficiency). For allocative efficiency, it will be necessary for the strategies and/or reforms to improve performance incentives and transparency in their performance evaluations and develop clear performance objectives that align with the results pursued by public entities.

Reduced Citizen Trust



The professionalization of civil service managers is essential for achieving concrete outcomes that improve citizens' lives and strengthen trust in institutions.

The role of merit and citizen trust

Senior public administration managers responsible for implementing policy and service delivery should be merit-based appointees whose performance aligns with the objectives of the public entity. Numerous studies show that merit-based selection systems for managers enhance the performance of public organizations, particularly in crucial sectors like health and education, by boosting operational efficiency, budget execution, and service quality (Lira, 2013; Otero and Muñoz, 2022; Fernández-Vergara, Fuenzalida, and González, 2023). When they are shielded from political interference, these merit-selected managers not only raise management standards but also generate greater public trust through transparent and competent execution of their duties. In contrast, political appointments, based on discretionary criteria, have demonstrated adverse effects on organizational effectiveness, as seen in Brazil (Story, Lotta, and Tavares, 2023).

Despite its advantages, merit-based selection of public managers has not been implemented and maintained in LAC countries, except in Chile. Other countries in the region have made some effort with this reform; for example, Peru had voluntary merit-based selection of public managers, and it was progressing satisfactorily in 2014 but has shown a setback in recent years; Brazil has had voluntary pilot initiatives at the federal and state level; and legal reforms in Costa Rica and Paraguay are in an early stage of implementation (see **Figure E10**).

> **“In summary, the vast majority of countries in the region still prioritize the appointment of public managers in a purely discretionary manner.”**

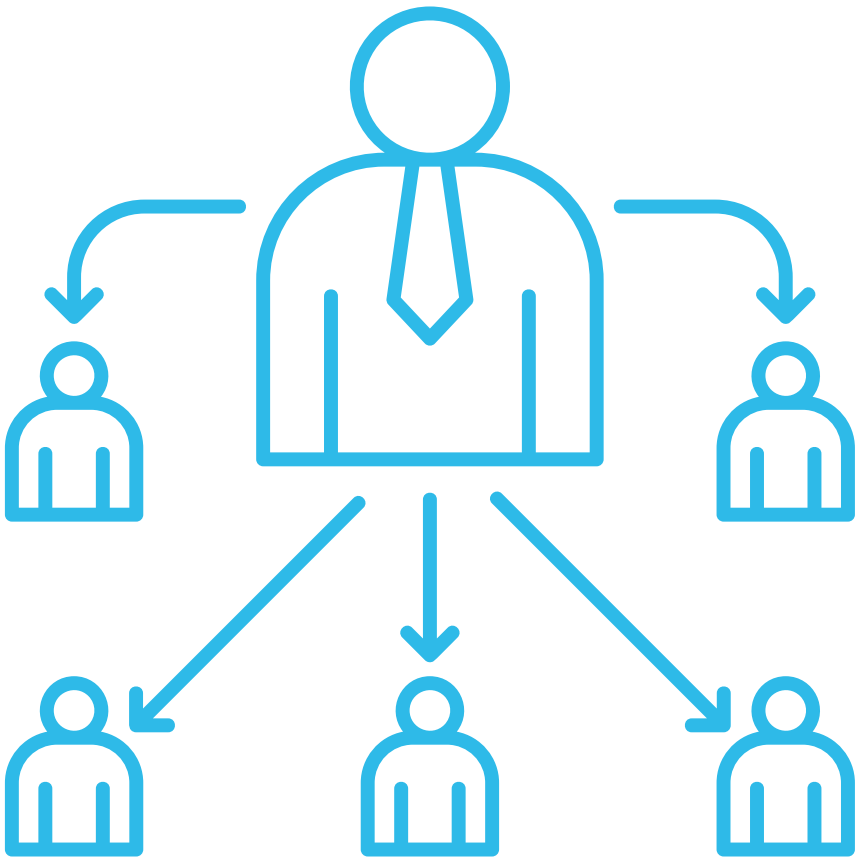
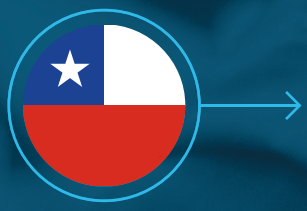


Figure E10
Meritocratic Systems of Public Managers in the LAC Region

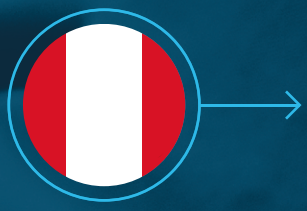
Public Managers Systems have a positive impact on organizational performance and public trust.

However, only 8% of countries in the region have them in place, compared with 90% in the OECD.

PUBLIC MANAGER SYSTEMS IN THE REGION:



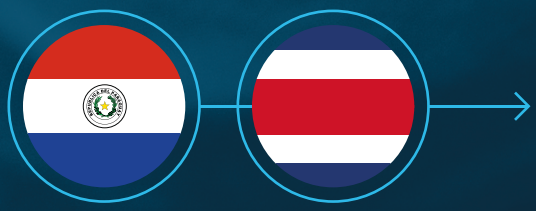
CHILE
The most consolidated case in Latin America and the Caribbean. 5,141 public managers appointed on a meritocratic basis.



PERU
Introduced in 2008, but has lost importance in recent years. 124 managers appointed as of 2021.



BRAZIL
Voluntary pilots in federal government and seven states. Not yet an institutionalized practice.



PARAGUAY AND COSTA RICA
Recent legislative reforms, currently being implemented.



ARGENTINA AND ECUADOR
Failed attempts following changes in government administration.

LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean; OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

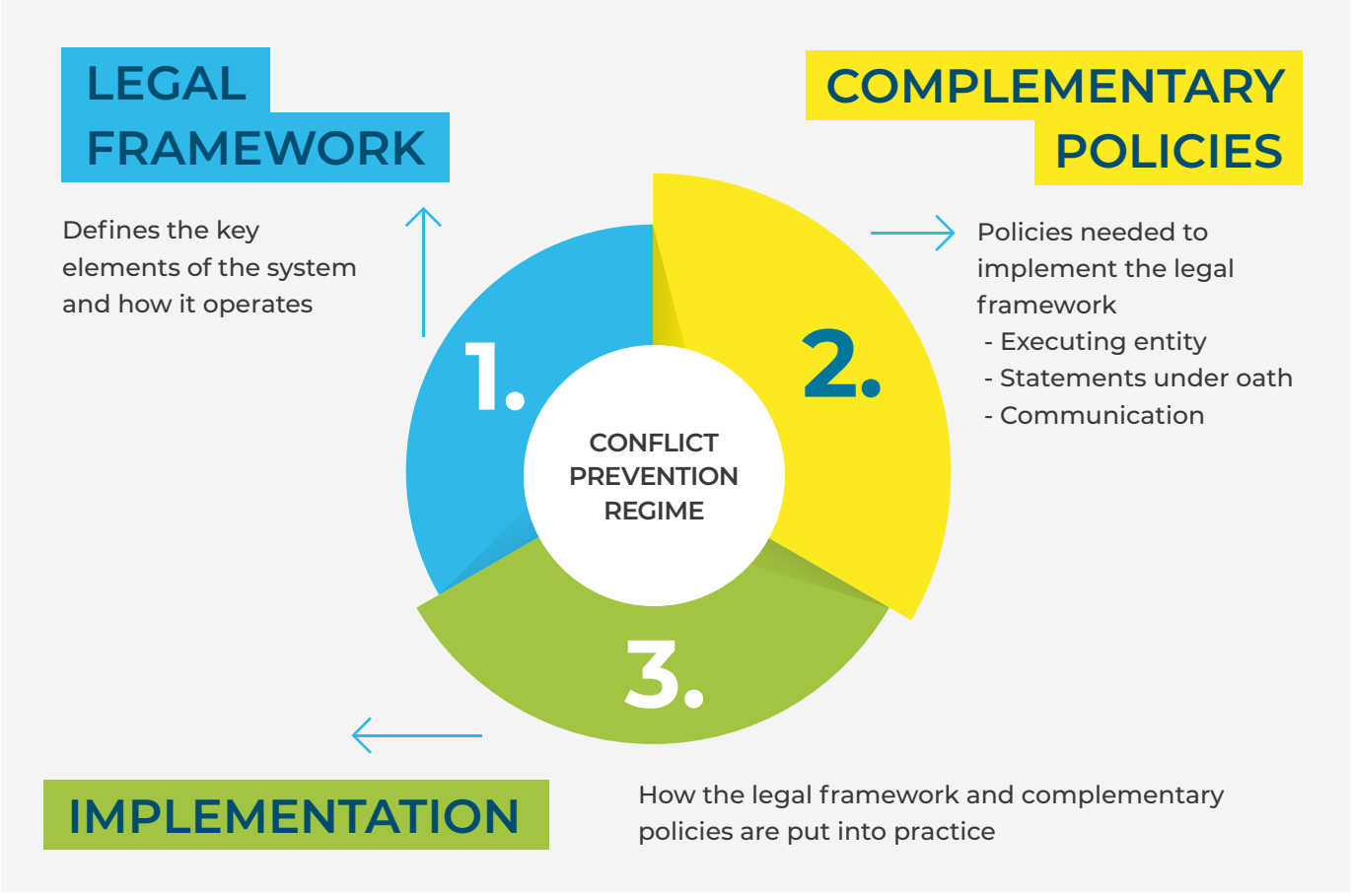
In summary, the vast majority of countries in the region still prioritize the appointment of public managers in a purely discretionary manner. Adopting a merit-based selection approach for managers in LAC is essential for improving public management, optimizing the use of resources, and increasing citizen confidence.

Integrity in Public Officials

The impartiality and integrity of public officials are fundamental to democratic governance, the rule of law, and a key agenda in civil service management. Conflicts of interest directly affect citizens' trust in government, which has been declining. Only 1 in 10 people in the region trusts others, and fewer than 3 in 10 trust their government (Keefer and Scartascini, 2022).

A policy for preventing conflicts of interest aims to strengthen trust in public institutions, and especially the legitimacy of the decisions made by public officials. To achieve this objective, there are three key elements: (i) a solid legal framework, with clear and precise definitions, that establishes the core elements of the system and its functioning; (ii) complementary policies, which facilitate the implementation of this legal framework; and (iii) the effective implementation of the two previous elements, given that a policy will only be as good as its implementation (see the **Figure E11**).

Figure E11
An Effective Conflict-of-Interest Prevention Regime



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Chapter 6 explores each of these elements in detail and presents examples of their application in the region and around the world.

Accelerated technological changes



The digital transformation of the public sector in LAC faces complex challenges that go beyond the simple adoption of technology. Despite rapid technological advances worldwide, the region continues to lag behind in terms of connectivity, innovation, and institutional productivity. The complex challenges refer not only to a technological gap but also to the critical need to adjust HRM policies to respond to the demands of a constantly evolving digital environment. This report addresses these challenges from a human resources perspective, highlighting the need for highly qualified digital professionals and an innovative civil service that drives the modernization of public management. The recruitment, development, and retention of digital talent is essential in achieving the digital transformation of governments, an aspect that must be complemented by policies that encourage innovation, dynamism, and efficiency in the civil service.

Digital talent is key to the transformation of governments. Technological skills are fundamental when it comes to understanding, designing, and implementing the actions needed to modernize public administration. However, the region faces a notable shortage of qualified professionals in this field due to insufficient labor supply, lack of adequate budget allocation, and poor adaptation of civil service management policies.

Aligning the digital agenda and public employment agenda requires implementing new HRM policies and processes. This is a key component of strategic human resource planning to anticipate and address digital talent needs. Short-term engagement models, such as “talent as a service,” have shown effectiveness in countries such as Brazil, Canada, France, and the United States through the assignment of digital specialists to specific projects. However, to ensure the continuity and deepening of the digital agenda, it is equally important to generate long-term career paths for digital talents. Models such as those in Spain and the United Kingdom, which formalize a career path for digital specialists, offer incentives for both talent recruitment and retention. In addition, it is critical to maintain a core of digital specialists within government for building cross-cutting systems, such as those aimed at interoperability, cybersecurity, and digital signatures. Reliance on external contractors and consultants poses additional challenges,

including potential conflicts of interest, salary inequities, and less opportunity to build the institutional memory. However, one of the challenges that has remained constant is the salary gap between the public and private sectors. Efforts to pay competitive salaries, without restructuring the entire public administration, are essential for attracting and retaining digitally talented human resources. Continuous training and professional development are also crucial. Programs such as Fast Stream in the United Kingdom and the information and communications technologies (ICT) career path in Spain, which include rotations, mentoring, and training, are successful models that can be adapted to countries in the LAC region (see **Figure E12**).

Figure E12
Strategies to Promote Digital Talent and Digital Transformation of Governments



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

To achieve digital transformation of the public sector in LAC requires a strategic approach to HRM. By adopting comprehensive policies that include both the attraction of new professionals, and the training and adaptation of the existing workforce, current and future technological challenges can be effectively addressed.

To help governments tackle digital talent and transformation issues, three recommendations are suggested:

- Strengthen the mechanisms for attracting and retaining digital talent, using the most appropriate mechanism for the reality of each country.
- Invest resources in an extensive digital training campaign.
- Ensure the joint work of those responsible for digital transformation—HRM and budget management.

The Future of the Civil Service

What Are the Good Practices That Countries in the Region Can Adopt and Adapt to Build an Effective Civil Service?

Public service agencies must adapt to a diverse and challenging future. In addition to a complex fiscal context, declining citizen trust, and accelerating technological change, demographic trends and political dynamics will significantly affect public services in the region. These changes are likely to alter public service in three key dimensions: the work, the workforce, and the workplace. Public service must evolve to face these changes, adopting a comprehensive and flexible strategy, and anticipating meeting future challenges (see Figure E13).

Figure E13
Changes in the Future of the Civil Service



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The work

The adoption of new technologies is changing the work in the public sector. This involves the creation of new tasks or the elimination of existing tasks in roles typically characterized by stability and governed by stringent regulations, thus making change challenging. The way in which tasks are performed will vary depending on the

technology available. For example, tasks such as speechwriting are more likely to be replaced by or supported by artificial intelligence (AI) tools, while caregiving requires a high human component and would not be replaced by AI tools. The nature of the problems may lead organizations to migrate from traditional structures to models organized for cross-cutting problem solving, a challenge that will require new coordination mechanisms, mobility, and flexibility in management processes.

Upgrading staff skills, especially in digital and data domains, is essential."

The workforce

Adapting the workforce to future needs is imperative. Strategic planning is central to anticipating needs and responding to new demands, such as changes in tasks and roles, an aging workforce, and cost optimization. A modern civil service needs to develop recruitment strategies that attract new talent and leverage the expertise of existing staff. This demands dynamic and ever faster ways of identifying and recruiting the right people, using technological innovations, and maintaining meritocratic principles. Upgrading staff skills, especially in digital and data domains, is essential. Retraining those whose functions are being displaced by automation is crucial to redirect them to new activities within the public administration. Unlike the private sector, the public sector must cultivate a culture of continuous learning. Platforms such as Colombia's Espacio Virtual de Asesoría (EVA) and Brazil's Escola Virtual Gov (EV.G) have demonstrated the viability of online training, facilitating access to training in a broad and efficient manner.

The workplace

The traditional workplace has also changed due to new technology—a phenomenon accelerated by the recent pandemic—and now offers greater flexibility in time and place. Telework has generated significant savings and improved effectiveness and service delivery. However, each institution must carefully evaluate when and where it would be beneficial to its operation and objectives. Although some countries, such as Chile, had already begun regulating telework before 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of telework globally. Functional and geographic mobility, untapped in the region, can help fill vacancies in a strategic way, specialize teams, foster learning, and generate cross-agency knowledge sharing.

In summary, the public service in LAC is at a crossroads of risks and opportunities. Governments should invest in a professional and well-equipped civil service, prepared to face the challenges of the coming decades, which will enable them to ensure the capacity of the public sector to meet the diverse and changing needs of citizens.

Looking Ahead: Recommendations for the Next Decade

The LAC region needs to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector HRM, as well as the quality of expenditure in this area. Improved effectiveness, efficiency, and quality are indispensable conditions for improving the operation of public sector functions and services. In this regard, this report proposes some recommendations aimed at optimizing the respective policies.

Countries could improve civil service management by strengthening the functional relationships between fiscal management and HRM, particularly in terms of strategic planning. These relationships exist in many countries in the region, since civil service management depends on budget allocations defined by fiscal management. However, the purpose of the relationships is essentially expenditure control.[11] What this study proposes is that this relationship between human resource planning and the budget be expanded to strategic functions, aimed at using expenditure control to improve efficiency in the allocation of spending. Some countries in the region have already assigned these types of strategic functions to finance ministries, particularly those with better HRM.[12] A better relationship

11 Finance ministries have budgetary management roles for the current expenditure that affects HRM. The functions related to the budget cycle authorize finance ministries to regulate the current expenditure, and in this way, control its growth and alter incentives for HRM in the public sector. Among these functions, it is possible to identify fiscal rules, which set limits to the growth of current expenditures, as well as those that authorize the approval of personnel allocation tables and salary scales. For more information, see Arenas de Mesa and Mosqueira, 2021.

12 Examples are Brazil and Chile. Mexico and Peru have also assigned the finance ministries the role of managing public sector human resources spending.

between planning for wage expenditure (led by finance ministries) and human resources planning (led by the various entities of the public administration) will provide the right incentives for planning to take on the following functions:

- **Estimating various possible changes in the composition of human resources—**For example, those involved in planning could develop scenarios for future retirements by age limit, which would allow actions to be taken to close unnecessary positions and replace them with others that address important gaps (such as those that need to be filled with highly trained digital professionals). Planning agencies and line ministries can also conduct other forward-looking exercises for discussing with different sectors the future needs for public service positions; for example, they could consider foreseeable changes in demographics and the impact on the volume of services.



Credit: Pensión 65 - MIDIS, Perú

> **Using centralized payroll and human resources systems that facilitate access to timely information for better decision making—**Microdata analysis or payroll audits are examples of complementary tools for governments wanting a view of the "whole of government" —that is, a view of all the human resources of the state in such a way that it is possible to identify inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement in allocative efficiency.

> **Linking the performance of public employees to expenditure in a more effective way—**The implementation processes of results-based management institutions should be used to align the roles, responsibilities, and individual work plans of public servants (starting with management positions) to institutional objectives and goals. In this way it will be possible to strengthen and make transparent the way in which performance evaluation is managed.

> **Increasing transparency in the wage bill and civil service performance to generate support for more profound reforms.—** To the extent that citizens can see that spending produces the expected results due to the good management of the public officials involved, it will be more feasible to have support for implementing more complex reforms, which face greater resistance from certain sectors (e.g., the union sector).

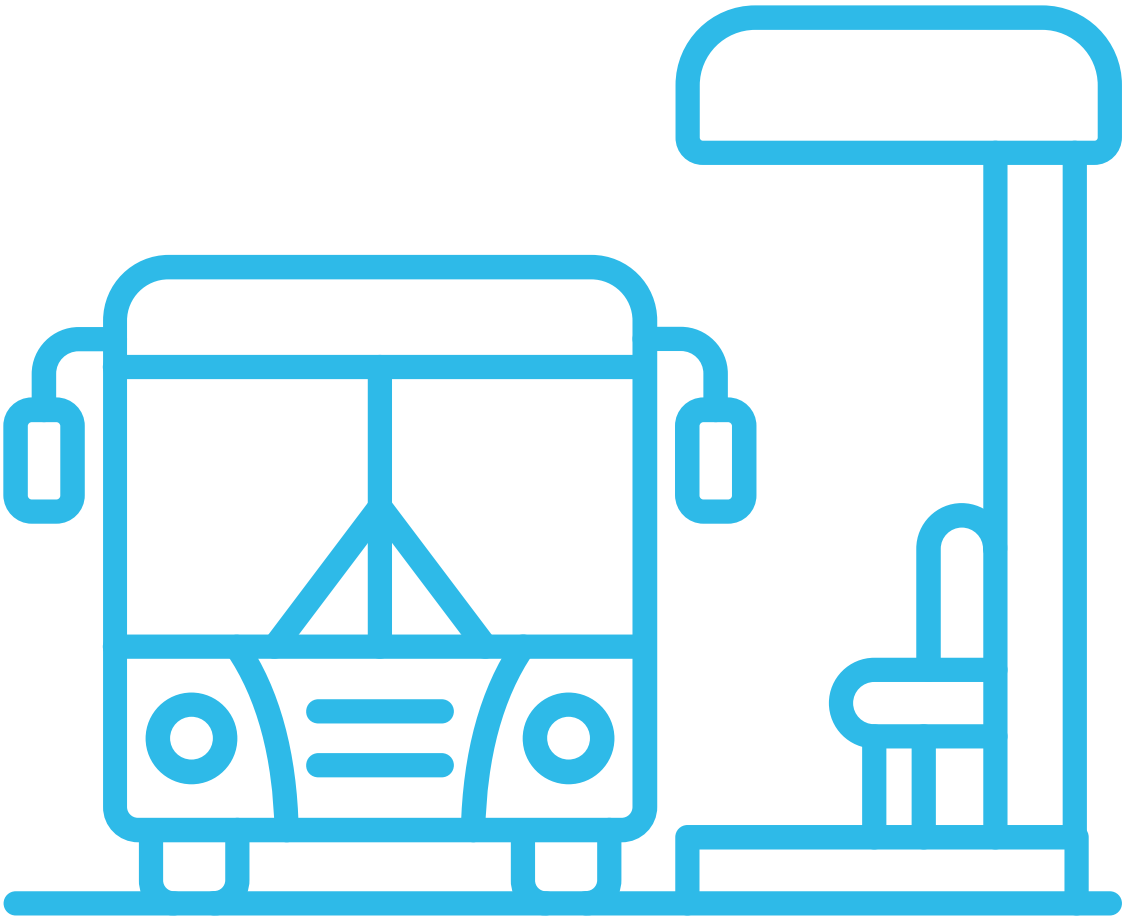
"Increasing transparency in the wage bill and civil service performance to generate support for more profound reforms."

Countries can increase citizen trust in government by enhancing public services, but this needs to start with strengthening civil service capabilities through these policy options:

> Implement reforms to ensure that the civil service is managed according to strategic, meritocratic, and inclusive criteria. This includes measures such as the professionalization of a diverse management corps and the introduction of flexible mobility and career mechanisms that allow for comprehensive (whole-of-government) management of human resources to improve their allocation, the use of technology to broaden the call for (and evaluation of) candidates, and the reform of salary policies to promote greater transparency, reduce inequities (vertical and horizontal), and attract qualified personnel.

- Leverage reforms leading to results-based management to link it with performance management of civil servants.
- Explore and understand the prevailing political economy conditions before launching reforms. Designing appropriate strategies to forge consensus in favor of reforms will ensure that legal reforms are implemented and sustainable in the long term.

> **“Countries can take advantage of the opportunities presented by the need for coordinated public sector.”**



Through policy options such as those listed below, countries can take advantage of the opportunities presented by the need for coordinated public sector action to implement complex public policies, and they can take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital transformation to plan and implement reforms aimed at having human resources with the required skills.

- **Adopt or expand the whole-of-government vision to rethink public sector organizational structure and personnel allocation.** Many reforms aim to standardize and align the operation of cross-cutting services across the public sector. This makes it possible to specialize human resources, increase their mobility throughout the public sector, and even carry out reorganizations to institutionalize shared administrative services that, if supported by technology, can lead to a more efficient use of human resources.

- **Apply a whole-of-government vision to promote joint and collaborative multisectoral work in the public sector.** The complexity of the problems faced by governments in implementing effective public policies makes it necessary to establish and ensure proper functioning of coordination and cooperation mechanisms. These require new skills to facilitate dialogue and cooperation, as well as the provision and shared use of platforms and data among public entities.

- **Update the labor and salary structures of the public sector.** State structures must be able to adapt to future needs through more flexible hiring models and incentives that favor coordination and mobility of personnel, as well as the use of emerging technologies to improve public management.

Map of Resources

Studies by Country

Civil service diagnoses by country, latest available year*



Chile National Survey of Public Servants

* National Survey of Civil Servants Chile 2023: Towards a more inclusive, meritocratic and motivated civil service*

*Available in Spanish only

Studies by Subject

Public service executives

- Merit-based Selection of Public Managers: Better Public Sector Performance?: An Exploratory Study
- How to Design and Implement a Professionalized Managerial Segment? Options for an “a la carte” Public Management.
- Leadership and Capacity Building for Public Sector Executives: Proceedings from the Second Policy and Knowledge Summit Between China and Latin America and the Caribbean

Future of work in the public sector

- Digital Transformation and Public Employment: The Future of Government Work

Diversity and inclusion

- Women Leaders in the Public Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean: Gaps and Opportunities
- Women Leaders in the Public Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean: Gaps and Opportunities - Data by Country*



*Available in Spanish only

Studies by Subject

Salary efficiency

- Social Expenditure in Latin America, Panama and the Dominican Republic. 2007–2013
- Data-Driven Innovation to Strengthen Integrity: TCU's Payroll Oversight in Brazil

Others

- Strategies for the professionalization of the civil service: Lessons learned from the Paraguayan case*
- Strategies for the professionalization of the civil service: Lessons learned from the Dominican Republic*
- When the Victor Cannot Claim the Spoils: Institutional Incentives for Professionalizing Patronage States



*Available in Spanish only

2004

Previous Regional Studies

2014

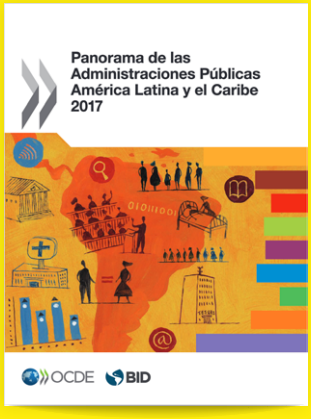
Report on the Status of Civil Service in Latin America*

Serving Citizens: A Decade of Civil Service Reforms in Latin American (2004–13).

Studies of comparative practices in Latin America and the Caribbean and from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)



Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2014: **Towards Innovative Public Financial Management***



Government at a Glance: **Latin America and the Caribbean 2017***



Government at a Glance: **Latin America and the Caribbean 2020***



Government at a Glance: **Latin America and the Caribbean 2024***

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