



*Haris Ćutahija, MA, Researcher, Foreign Policy Initiative BH*

# Public Service and Human Resource Management

## Evaluating the Effectiveness of Civil Servant Hiring Procedures in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Challenges and Opportunities for Reform

### Introduction: An Overview of Civil Service Recruitment Challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina's civil service recruitment system continues to face significant challenges, as highlighted in the European Commission's 2024 report. Despite some progress, particularly the adoption of a state-level civil service law and the establishment of the Civil Service Agencies Forum in October 2023, substantial issues remain. These include political interference, a lack of coordination across government levels, and the fragmented implementation of merit-based hiring principles. The civil service recruitment process is often influenced by political considerations, which undermine the transparency and meritocracy essential for an effective public administration. Criteria for selection are inconsistently applied, and decision-making processes frequently grant excessive discretion to heads of institutions. As a result, fair competition is compromised, and professional development among public servants is discouraged. Coordination between different administrative levels is another key challenge. The varying civil service laws, recruitment policies, and promotion criteria across the state, entities, and cantons contribute to inefficiencies and limit

the mobility of civil servants. While the action plan for public administration reform (2023–2027) aims to address these discrepancies, its success hinges on sufficient budgetary support and political commitment.

A positive development in recent years is the state's efforts to implement a digital Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS). The Federation entity has established a legal framework for HRMIS, though the Republika Srpska entity still needs to address institutional responsibilities to ensure its effective implementation.

Despite these steps forward, much work remains to depoliticize the civil service, improve inter-governmental coordination, and establish a genuinely merit-based hiring system. Ongoing efforts to align legislation and systematically monitor progress are crucial for meaningful reform.

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## **The Recruitment Process: Procedures, Improvements, and Ongoing Challenges**

The recruitment of civil servants at the state level in Bosnia and Herzegovina is governed by the Law on Civil Service in the Institutions of BiH and overseen by the Civil Service Agency (CSA). This process aims to promote transparency and merit-based selection in compliance with established legal standards.

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Recruitment begins with a public announcement, which must be published in widely accessible domestic media and on the CSA's official website, including the MojKonkurs portal. A notable improvement in this process is the integration of the MojKonkurs portal, which allows applicants to submit their applications and required documentation electronically, replacing the previous time-consuming and costly practice of mailing hard copies. This modernization streamlines application submission and enhances the efficiency of the recruitment process.

This shift aligns with broader public administration modernization efforts and reflects a move towards a more citizen-friendly recruitment system. By leveraging technology, the system promotes greater transparency and accessibility in civil service employment.

Candidates must pass a two-phase examination process. The first phase, the General Knowledge Exam, evaluates candidates' basic understanding of public administration and general competencies. Those who succeed move on to the

second phase, the Expert Exam, which assesses their specialized knowledge in relation to the specific job position. Both exams are structured to ensure a fair evaluation of candidates' qualifications.

A selection committee, composed of members from both the CSA and the hiring institution, oversees the evaluation process, which includes written tests and oral interviews. While this structure helps ensure procedural standards, concerns remain regarding political influence in committee appointments and final decision-making, which can undermine the meritocratic intent of the process.

Despite these challenges, the state-level recruitment process incorporates significant improvements, such as digital application submission and structured testing, to promote transparency and efficiency. However, further reforms are necessary to address the political influence and align practices with EU standards, which would enhance the credibility of civil service employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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### **Key Challenges in Recruitment: Barriers to Merit-Based Hiring and Efficiency**

Several challenges persist in the recruitment process for civil servants at the state level in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which undermine its effectiveness and the merit-based principles it is meant to uphold.

One of the most significant obstacles is the General Knowledge Exam. This phase is often criticized for being overly complex, leading to a high failure rate. Many candidates view this exam as a major barrier, discouraging them from applying for civil service positions. While the exam aims to ensure baseline competence, its relevance to the specific requirements of the job is questionable, as it often fails to assess practical skills or competencies that are crucial for public administration.

Moreover, candidates are required to provide proof of foreign language proficiency and computer skills through certificates, rather than through practical assessments. This approach has been criticized for its inadequacy, as certificates do not always reflect the actual proficiency of the candidates. The absence of practical testing means that the recruitment process may not accurately gauge candidates' true abilities.

The Expert Exam, which is intended to evaluate specialized knowledge pertinent to the job position, also faces criticism. It often fails to ensure that the most competent candidates are selected, with concerns about the subjective nature of evaluations. This has led to a perception that the process lacks fairness and transparency.

Another issue is the unclear application of ethnic quotas in recruitment. At the state level, positions are often designated for specific ethnic groups—Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats—but this information is not disclosed in job announcements. This lack of transparency leaves candidates uncertain about their eligibility based on ethnicity, leading to frustration and feelings of wasted effort.

Perhaps the most pervasive challenge is the widespread belief that political connections, rather than qualifications, determine hiring decisions. Many people perceive the recruitment process as being rigged to favor individuals with political backing, eroding trust in the system. This perception has contributed to a declining number of applicants, particularly among young professionals, further diminishing the pool of qualified candidates.

These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive review and reform of the recruitment system. Only through such reforms can Bosnia and Herzegovina restore public confidence and ensure that the civil service attracts and retains the most competent and motivated professionals.

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## **Recommendations for Reform: Building a Transparent, Efficient, and Merit-Based System**

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To address the ongoing challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina's civil service recruitment process and ensure that the system becomes more transparent, efficient, and merit-based, several reforms are necessary. These recommendations aim to restore public trust, improve the recruitment process, and strengthen the overall functioning of the civil service.

### **1. Simplify and Recalibrate the Examination System**

The complexity of the General Knowledge Exam remains a significant barrier to attracting qualified candidates. A review of the exam content and structure is essential to ensure that it better reflects the skills and competencies required for specific positions. Instead of an overly broad general knowledge test, a more targeted approach that assesses practical skills and relevant knowledge for the job in question would be beneficial. Additionally, introducing practical assessments to gauge foreign language proficiency and computer skills would provide a more accurate measure of candidates' abilities, replacing the reliance on certificates that do not necessarily reflect actual competence.

### **2. Enhance Transparency and Reduce Political Influence**

To strengthen the integrity of the recruitment process, it is crucial to further depoliticize decision-making. This can be achieved by introducing more stringent

rules for the selection and composition of recruitment committees, ensuring that members are chosen based on their expertise and not political affiliation. Clearer guidelines should be established to prevent political interference in the hiring process, and committee decisions should be publicly justified and documented to enhance transparency. Additionally, regular audits of recruitment processes should be conducted by independent bodies to identify and address any irregularities or biases.

### 3. Ensure Clarity and Transparency in Ethnic Quotas

The current ambiguity surrounding the application of ethnic quotas in recruitment needs to be addressed. Job announcements should clearly specify if and how ethnic quotas are applied, ensuring that candidates know whether they are eligible based on their ethnic background. While the purpose of ethnic quotas is to ensure representation of all groups in public institutions, a transparent and fair process must be maintained to avoid perceptions of discrimination or unfair advantage. Moreover, consideration should be given to developing systems that focus on merit while balancing the need for ethnic representation.

### 4. Invest in Professional Development and Career Advancement

A robust professional development and career advancement framework is essential for retaining skilled civil servants. Ensuring that civil servants have access to continuous training opportunities and clear paths for career progression would help foster a more motivated and capable workforce. Additionally, mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives could encourage young professionals to enter and stay in the public sector, reducing the tendency to seek employment in the private sector where opportunities for advancement may seem more promising.

### 5. Strengthen Inter-Governmental Coordination

One of the key obstacles to effective recruitment is the lack of coordination across different administrative levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The implementation of the action plan for public administration reform (2023–2027) is a step in the right direction, but greater emphasis must be placed on harmonizing civil service laws, recruitment policies, and promotion criteria across the state, entities, and cantons. This will not only improve efficiency but also increase the mobility of civil servants, allowing them to move between different administrative levels without facing bureaucratic hurdles. Clear inter-governmental protocols and shared frameworks for recruitment should be developed and regularly updated.

### 6. Promote the Use of Digital Tools and Platforms

The successful implementation of the MojKonkurs portal is a positive step towards modernization. Expanding the use of digital tools to streamline recruitment processes, improve data management, and facilitate communication between applicants and institutions will further enhance efficiency and accessibility. For example, integrating a centralized database for candidate profiles and evaluations could make the recruitment process faster and more transparent. Furthermore, ensuring that all recruitment-related information is readily available online will help increase public awareness and participation.

## 7. Encourage Public Awareness Campaigns

To combat the perception that political connections are the determining factor in civil service recruitment, public awareness campaigns are essential. These campaigns should focus on educating the public about the merit-based recruitment process, its benefits, and the safeguards in place to ensure fairness and transparency. Engaging with citizens and demonstrating a commitment to a truly meritocratic system will help rebuild trust in the civil service and encourage more qualified individuals, particularly young professionals, to apply.

## **Conclusion: Moving Toward a More Effective and Fair Civil Service Recruitment System**

Reforming Bosnia and Herzegovina's civil service recruitment system requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of inefficiency, political interference, and a lack of transparency. By simplifying and recalibrating the examination process, enhancing transparency, depoliticizing recruitment decisions, ensuring clarity in ethnic quotas, and investing in professional development, Bosnia and Herzegovina can move towards a more effective, merit-based civil service. Strengthening coordination between government levels and expanding digital platforms will also improve the efficiency and accessibility of the recruitment process. Finally, public awareness campaigns will help rebuild trust in the system and encourage talented individuals to pursue careers in public service, ensuring that the country has the skilled workforce necessary to meet the challenges of the future.