

RESEARCH

REPORTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

VALENTINA FRANCA

THE CENTRAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SECTOR IN SLOVENIA

CHALLENGES OF ORGANISING AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Social Policy Programme

This report is one in a series presenting the findings of research carried out in Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia as part of the project CEE CAW ‘Challenges for Organising and Collective Bargaining in Care, Administration and Waste collection sectors in Central and Eastern European Countries’, which was led by the Institute of Public Affairs (Warsaw). The other partners were the: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Sofia), Central European Labour Studies Institute (Bratislava), Lithuanian Centre of Social Sciences (Vilnius), and Centre for Democracy Foundation (Belgrade).



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1. Methodological preface

The Slovenian central public administration follows the definition of NACE code 84, which includes central, regional, and local government.¹ There are two social partners in central public administration: on the employer side, there is the government or the Ministry of Public Administration, which is usually the main negotiator in collective bargaining for the public sector. On the employee side, there is practically only one union, namely the Union of State Bodies of Slovenia (Sindikat državnih organov Slovenije). Therefore, for the purpose of this report, two interviews were conducted. One was conducted with an expert, employed at the Ministry of Public Administration, on salaries in the public sector, who regularly participates in collective bargaining for the public sector. The interview lasted 45 minutes and took place in April 2024 via Zoom. The second interview was conducted with the President of the Union of State Bodies of Slovenia, also in April, lasting 60 minutes and conducted in person. Other unions do not have members in central public administration, so it did not make sense to conduct further interviews. Both interviews were comprehensive, and the interviewees provided all the necessary information. Following these interviews, transcripts were prepared and meticulously analysed in alignment with the key objectives outlined in the project guidelines. The analysis of the report is based on data obtained through both interviews and data taken from the official websites of the Slovenian government (gov.si), the union, and other useful sources.

2. General characteristics of the sector

According to the latest available data (Ministry of Public Administration, 2024), the number of public employees in central administration (at a national level) was 17,000, while in the municipalities (of which there are currently 212), it was around 6,000 in total. All of these are considered public employees and are subject to the entire civil service legislation, with emphasis on the Civil Servants Act and the Public Sector Salary System Act as the fundamental laws. In addition to these, their status is regulated by numerous decrees, regulations, and collective agreements. All public employees have an employment contract, but there is limited discretion to alter its content between the parties. Specifically, wages, that are strictly regulated, prohibiting the employer from offering less or more than what is determined by law.

¹ Slovenia has only central and local (municipal) levels of administration.

Such a **strong regulation** negatively affects human resource management, especially for managers, who often lack the right tools for motivating and incentivising civil servants, a point on which both interlocutors agree. This makes it difficult to develop an appropriate, flexible, and modern organisational culture that would have a positive impact on both current civil servants and job candidates.

3. Major problems and challenges in the sector

Both interviewees agree that one of the main problems in the sector is **wages**. For instance, the union representative mentions that public employees with a high school diploma receive minimum wage, and when someone leaves, they are practically irreplaceable as there is **no interest in employment**. People are opting to work in retail instead of in administrative units because it means earning 600 Euro more per month. “*With such wages, an individual cannot afford a decent living,*” believes the union representative. As a result, positions remain unfilled. At the moment, it is difficult to assess the impact on service quality, but there are some indications that it has started to deteriorate.

As a result, there is a pronounced **labour shortage**, making it practically impossible to organise two-shift work in larger administrative units as it was years ago. According to data from the Ministry of Public Administration, in April 2024, over 30 public job advertisements were announced, with mostly no response. Public employees who are now retiring are finding that their pensions will be around 500 Euro, pushing them below the poverty line. With a lack of a social perspective, the union representative believes that it will be impossible to expect people to remain loyal to the state. In the current system, it is not possible to expect individuals with a university education in the central public administration sector to advance to the salaries of secretaries as they have in ministries (ranging from 2,100 to 2,300 Euro net per month); these secretaries, according to the union representative, are politically appointed.

4. Characteristics of social dialogue organisations in the sector

Social dialogue in the sector is conducted by the Ministry of Public Administration, which typically acts as the main negotiator on behalf of the

employer. In certain parts of the negotiations, the Ministry of Finance also participates, often having a decisive say, along with the government, regarding the feasibility and implications of proposed financial changes. At the level of the entire public sector, negotiations on behalf of the employees are conducted by two trade union confederations. Representing employees in central public administration is the Union of State Bodies of Slovenia, which is a member of the Association of Free Trade Unions, the largest trade union confederation in Slovenia. It has between 6,000 and 8000 members and is the representative union for public employees in central public administration, thus having the mandate for collective bargaining with the Ministry of Public Administration as the employer representative.

4.1. Challenges of organising employees

The union representative believes that employees in central public administration, who are affiliated with the union, are in practice considered as an “appendage” to other unions in the public sector, meaning of a lower importance. This is because the Collective Agreement for State Administration, Administration of Judicial Bodies, and Administration of Self-Governing Local Communities only covers **wages** and other payments for public employees. The normative part, which would regulate working conditions, is missing, putting these public employees in a worse position than other civil servants who have sectoral collective agreements, such as those in education, police, and the military, among others. The union representative is convinced that the social dialogue for central public administration is lacking, which is why they also organise strikes at administrative units.

4.2. Good practices for organising employees

The union boasts a robust membership and continues with the established practices developed over the last twenty years. There has been a recent increase in younger individuals showing interest in joining the union, prompting significant efforts to convince them of its benefits, importance, and the advantages they stand to gain from it. However, there were no specific campaigns for recruiting new members, which may be attributed to higher trade union membership in the public sector.

4.3. Characteristics of employer representation

The employer representative is convinced that the social dialogue is proceeding well, with meetings taking place regularly. However, the content and approach from both sides differ: *“Perhaps we negotiate too little, demand too much, or resort to excessive coercion and conditions.”* Even as an employer, they should move away from traditional negotiations solely focused on higher wages and instead consider the **public interest** and how to ensure quality public services. They believe that the decisions on norms and working standards are the responsibility of the employer, which they can present in the social dialogue, *“for which one must have courage”*.

The union representative believes that from the employer’s perspective, there is a strong need to significantly improve **middle management**. For example, heads of administrative units are often inadequately trained in people management and lack the ability to provide objective assessments and ensure proper employee advancement. On one hand, the problem lies in the poorly defined criteria, and on the other, it relates to the leadership’s competence in evaluation. They are often **afraid to take on responsibilities** because employee evaluations are directly linked to salaries. According to the union representative, this is largely a consequence of political appointments, where preference is given to *“my people”* over expertise. Additionally, it would be necessary to appoint negotiators on the employer’s side who are knowledgeable about these issues. The interviewees assess that the current Minister of Public Administration is not at that level, and negotiations cannot be led by the Minister of Finance as an economic perspective does not apply to all these areas.

From the employer’s perspective, the realisation of the **right to strike** is crucial, as it is a constitutional right in Slovenia that can only be restricted by law. A complete ban on strikes exists based on judicial practice in the military, while other activities of societal importance can only have their strike activities **limited by law**. It is challenging to reach a consensus on what constitutes activities of societal importance that, for example, doctors, police officers, firefighters, and similar professionals must perform during a strike. Additionally, this is further complicated by outdated strike legislation, which is based on the socialist system of former Yugoslavia and causes significant practical issues.

5. Collective bargaining and other forms of social dialogue in the sector – characteristics

5.1. Content analysis of collective agreements

For public employees in central public administration, the following collective agreements are valid: the Collective Agreement for the Public Sector (Kolektivna pogodba za javni sektor), the Collective Agreement for Non-economic Activities (Kolektivna pogodba za negospodarske dejavnosti), the Collective Agreement on the Establishment of a Pension Plan for Civil Servants (Kolektivna pogodba o oblikovanju pokojninskega načrta za javne uslužbence), and the Collective Agreement for State Administration, Administration of Judicial Bodies, and Administration of Self-governing Local Communities (Kolektivna pogodba za državno upravo, uprave pravosodnih organov in uprave samoupravnih lokalnih skupnosti). These collective agreements cover all public employees, resulting in a collective coverage rate of 100%. All of the agreements are concluded for an indefinite period and are valid in the whole of the Republic of Slovenia.

The Collective Agreement for the Public Sector primarily focuses on wage-related provisions. This includes provisions regarding basic wages, determination of pay grades for indicative job positions, holiday pay, performance-related pay components, allowances, and other content related to payment for work. Furthermore, the general collective agreement for civil servants in central public administration is specified by the Collective Agreement for State Administration, Administration of Judicial Bodies, and Administration of Self-governing Local Communities. Its content includes the classification of all positions within the public central administration into pay grades, thereby determining basic salaries for all employees.

Regarding working conditions, the main provisions are outlined in the Collective Agreement for State Administration, Administration of Judicial Bodies, and Administration of Self-governing Local Communities. It encompasses the content of the employment contract, employee deployment, and the process of assessing the achievement of expected work results, as well as leave and absences from work. Additionally, it contains provisions regarding dispute resolution and relations with unions.

The Collective Agreement on the Establishment of a Pension Plan for Civil Servants aims to establish a pension plan and provide the basis for the formulation of rules by the provider of collective supplementary pension insurance for civil servants, per the law on collective supplementary pension insurance for civil servants, as regulated by the law governing supplementary pension insurance.

5.2. Other forms of social dialogue

In central public administration, there are no alternative forms of social dialogue. By law, the establishment of a works council is not permitted, and no other form is envisaged by the legislation.

5.3. Impact of European sectoral social dialogue

Social partners are aware of the importance and influence of social dialogue at the European level. However, collective bargaining for the public sector in Slovenia is predominantly treated on a national level, making it difficult to argue that the European sectoral social dialogue has any significant impact on the social dialogue in the central public administration sector in Slovenia.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The current focus of social dialogue in the public sector in Slovenia is primarily on the **reform of the salary system**, which unions and civil servants have high expectations for. According to the representative of the Ministry of Public Administration, this reform should be approached more **selectively**, as across-the-board salary increases for all civil servants would impose a significant burden on public finances. For example, a 1% increase in wages translates to approximately 65 million Euro in additional costs for the state. Additionally, as a potential improvement, negotiations should be conducted in smaller groups² with more substantive discussions, less coercion, and

² In negotiations in the public sector, there are 46 representative unions involved, significantly complicating the effectiveness of collective bargaining. The professional community has long advocated for changes to the Law on the Representativeness of Unions, aiming for a better regulatory framework both for obtaining and maintaining the status of a representative union. However, since independence, there has never been adequate political will for this change.

more negotiation. For instance, how can negotiations proceed if the other party says, “*we won’t give in, we’ve told you that several times*”? Both sides **lack negotiation skills and culture**, perhaps more so on the employer’s side.

To enhance social dialogue, the union representative suggests that it should take place **directly in the institutions** where problems arise and where the union operates, as they could assist in resolving them. One recommendation would certainly be to establish a **permanent body** to monitor the situation, highlight issues, and propose various solutions, especially concerning the position of civil servants.

In summary, there is a need to **improve professionalism**, ensure greater expertise, and reduce political influence among negotiators. Additionally, efforts should be made to encourage unions to form confederations and significantly improve communication between social partners.

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