

23BG02 - Output A3

# **Public Sector Innovation Competency Framework and Training Design**

Strengthening the Strategic Approach and Innovation in the  
Civil Service in Bulgaria

February 2025



Funded by  
the European Union

# Public Sector Innovation Competency Framework and Training Design

## Key messages

- **Bulgaria's Civil Service Competency Framework lacks innovation as a component:** Unlike many OECD countries, Bulgaria's current competency framework lacks essential innovation skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and human-centred innovation. The Council of Ministers' Administration (CoMA) could systematically embed these competencies in recruitment, training, and performance evaluation through an updated competency framework to strengthen the country's innovative capacity.
- **Need for applied innovation skills is evident:** OECD research shows that only 27% of Bulgarian public servants have applied innovation skills, yet those who do are significantly more likely to engage in innovative projects. CoMA and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) could address this skills gap by increasing the offer of innovation training, which is critical for fostering a more agile and adaptive organisational culture within the public sector.
- **International best practice demonstrates the value of innovation competencies:** Countries such as Estonia and the UK have successfully integrated innovation skills into their competency frameworks. The European Commission and OECD also emphasise competencies like system thinking, user-centricity, and transformative leadership, which Bulgaria could adopt to enhance its public administration.
- **Adding an innovation dimension to Bulgaria's Competency Framework:** The policy brief proposes adding an innovation dimension to the country's competency framework, including competencies such as an innovative mindset, working creatively with evidence, human-centred innovation, stakeholder facilitation, and transformative leadership. These competencies would enable public managers and civil servants to lead and develop innovative solutions for pressing public challenges.
- **Scaling up innovation training to build public sector capabilities:** Inspired by international best practices from Austria, Chile, and the UAE, a three-session structured training programme and curriculum is recommended. This training, based on pilot training provided by the OECD, aims to equip all civil servants with practical innovation skills through user research, ideation, prototyping, testing and evaluation. This programme should be integrated by IPA into Bulgaria's public administration training offer, with formal certification and alignment with career development processes.

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The following policy brief explores how competency frameworks can strengthen innovative capacity of civil service in Bulgaria, drawing on OECD evidence and international examples. In coordination with the Council of Ministers' Administration (CoMA), it proposes an innovation dimension for updating Bulgaria's competency frameworks and creating a tailored innovation training design based on international best practices and OECD practical experience.

This brief builds on the recent innovative capacity assessment of Bulgaria's public sector (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>), which the OECD carried out with the support of the European Commission<sup>1</sup>. The policy proposals in this brief aim to support CoMA and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), as they implement a Public Sector Innovation Vision and Action Plan connected to the *National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030* (Republic of Bulgaria, n.d.<sup>[2]</sup>).

## 1. Competency framework for strengthening innovation

### **Competency frameworks can support the development of innovative capacity in civil service.**

Competency frameworks in the public sector are structured and organised representations of the skills, behaviours, and abilities required for general or specific roles within public administrations (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). By explicitly defining these competencies, such frameworks can guide and improve key organisational processes such as recruitment, career development and training, and performance management (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). They can also support enhancing strategic capabilities within the civil services, such as leadership, innovation, and digital transformation (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). When competency frameworks include innovation-related skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration, they can support fostering an environment that creates permission and encourages innovative behaviours to develop effective solutions to improve public outcomes (Kaur and Buisman, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

**Developing competency profiles and integrating competency management into workforce management makes it more strategic.** Establishing a common competency framework across ministries and agencies creates a shared language around capability, facilitating human resource management (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). Additionally, such frameworks serve as a foundation for evaluating organisational capability, supporting workforce planning and formulating development strategies (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). In OECD countries, competency frameworks are widely adopted at both senior leadership and professional levels. A total of 23 OECD countries have established common frameworks that define the leadership skills expected of public managers, while 17 countries report having a centralised competency framework applicable to all civil servants (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).

### 1.1. Competency frameworks in Bulgaria

**Bulgaria's centralised competency framework lacks innovative skills, abilities and behaviours** (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). The current competency framework in the *Ordinance on the Terms and Conditions for Evaluating the Performance of Employees in the State Administration (2021)* establishes a structured and centralised approach to assessing the skills and behaviours of the civil service (Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>). It categorises public servants into four groups: senior government officials, managerial staff, experts with analytical or control functions, and experts with auxiliary or technical roles (Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>). Each group is evaluated based on specific competencies that define their effectiveness in their respective roles, including a transversal digital competency (See Table 1). Innovation-related competencies, such as an innovative mindset, creativity, iteration, or human centricity, are not mentioned or developed as part of Bulgaria's current competency framework.

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<sup>1</sup> This project was funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the OECD, in cooperation with the European Commission.

**There are gaps in innovative skills within all current competency groups in the civil service of Bulgaria.** As shown in Table 1, senior government officials are expected to demonstrate strategic vision, leadership, managerial skills, results orientation, and customer focus, while for managerial staff coordination, teamwork, communication, and professional expertise are emphasised (Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>). At the leadership level, the competency framework does not explicitly incorporate an innovative mindset or transformative leadership, all of which are crucial for addressing complex public sector challenges (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>). Similarly, experts in analytical or control functions are required to apply analytical skills, communication, and problem-solving, whereas in auxiliary and technical roles, operational execution, accuracy, and customer service are prioritised (Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>). These frameworks overlook competencies such as working creatively with evidence, human-centred innovation, and stakeholder facilitation, which are essential for fostering agile and forward-thinking public administration (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>; Kaur and Buisman, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). The cross-cutting digital competence skills within the framework emphasise that most public servants, except those in technical roles, need digital literacy, information security awareness, and the ability to work with digital content (Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>). While these are essential for ensuring operation in a digital environment, they do not inherently promote innovative or transformative digital practices.

**Table 1. Bulgaria's Competency Frameworks**

The table below summarises the competency frameworks from Bulgaria's Civil Service.

Competency group	Sub-competences
<b>Senior government officials:</b> High-level officials responsible for strategic decision-making, leadership, and governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Competence: Vision for future development of the organisation, taking into account the impact of external and internal factors.</li> <li>Leadership Competence: Motivating and developing employees to achieve significant individual and organisational objectives.</li> <li>Managerial Competence: Planning, organising, coordinating and controlling the activities of the unit to ensure the fulfilment of individual and organisational goals.</li> <li>Result-oriented: Achieving high results in accordance with the set goals and requirements.</li> <li>Negotiation and Persuasion: Convincing presentation of positions and arguments for reaching agreement between different parties.</li> <li>Teamwork: Managing and participating in teams that work collaboratively towards a common goal.</li> <li>Customer Focus: Carrying out the activity in accordance with the needs, interests and expectations of customers/users of the services or activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Managerial staff:</b> Managers overseeing administrative units, ensuring efficiency, coordination, and goal alignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managerial Competence: Planning, organising, coordinating and controlling the activities of the unit to ensure the implementation of individual and organisational goals.</li> <li>Teamwork: Managing and participating in teams that work collaboratively towards a common goal.</li> <li>Communicative Competence: Effective exchange of information and clear expression in oral and written form.</li> <li>Result-Oriented: Achieving high results in accordance with the set goals and requirements.</li> <li>Customer Focus: Effectively meeting the needs, interests, and expectations of customers/users of services and activities.</li> <li>Professional Competence: Professional knowledge and skills that are necessary for successful performance of the position.</li> </ul>
<b>Experts with analytical or control functions:</b> Professionals conducting analysis, regulation, or oversight functions within government structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analytical competence: Collecting, processing and analysing information and offering effective solutions.</li> <li>Result-Oriented: Achieving high results in accordance with the set goals and requirements.</li> <li>Teamwork: Participating in teams that work collaboratively towards a common goal.</li> <li>Communication: Effective exchange of information and clear expression in oral and written form.</li> <li>Customer focus: Effectively meeting the needs, interests, and expectations of customers/users of services and activities.</li> <li>Professional Competence: Professional knowledge and skills that are necessary for successful performance of the position.</li> </ul>
<b>Experts with auxiliary or technical roles:</b> Support and technical professionals ensuring effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Result-Oriented: Achieving high results in accordance with the set goals and requirements.</li> <li>Communication: Effective exchange of information and clear expression in oral and written form.</li> <li>Teamwork: Participating in teams that work collaboratively towards a common goal.</li> <li>Customer focus: Effectively meeting the needs, interests, and expectations of customers/users of services</li> </ul>

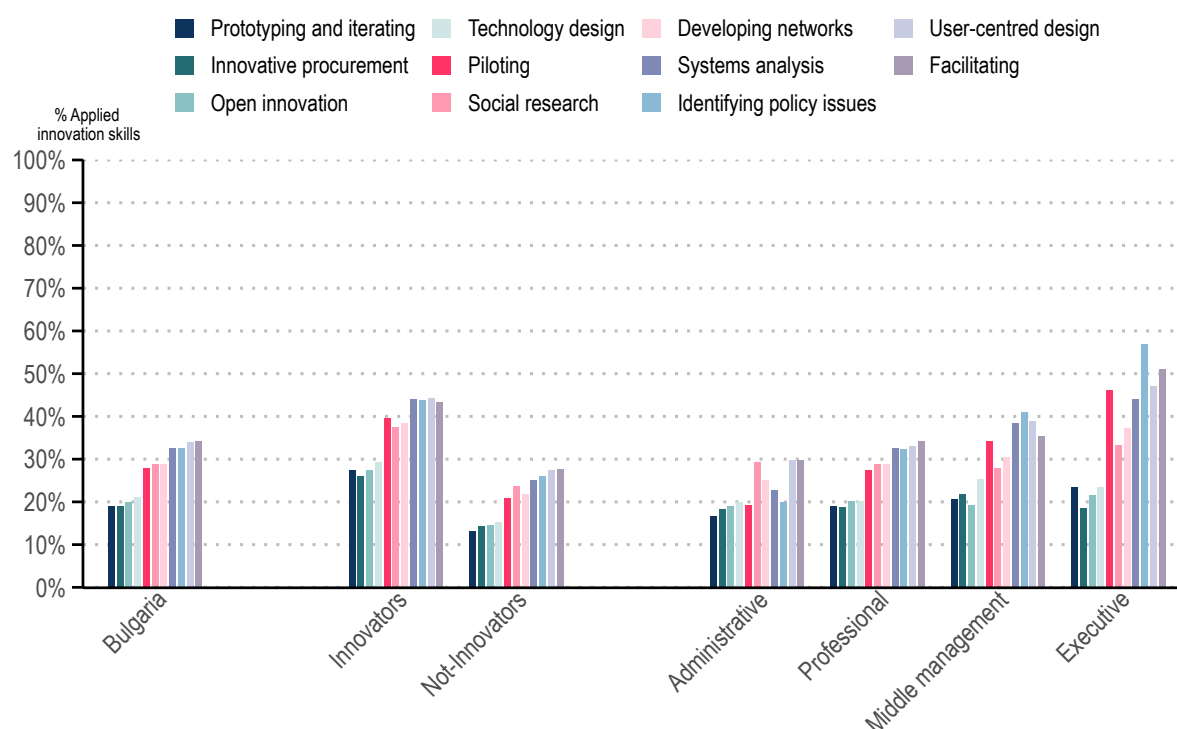
administrative and operational execution.	and activities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Competence: Professional knowledge and skills that are necessary for successful performance of the position.</li> </ul>
<b>Digital competence:</b> Cross-cutting digital and computer skills (except technical roles) necessary for effective operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital Competence: Knowledge and skills for information processing, content creation, digital communication, information security and problem-solving that are necessary for the successful performance of the position.</li> </ul>

Source: OECD based on (Republic of Bulgaria, 2021<sup>[6]</sup>)

**Evidence from OECD research in Bulgaria underscores this innovation competence gap.** Only 27% of public servants report having applied innovation skills, yet those who do are significantly more likely to engage in innovative projects than their counterparts (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). This finding highlights that innovation capabilities are not just beneficial but essential for public sector transformation. Without explicitly recognising innovation as a core competency, the State Administration fails to integrate these skills into key talent management processes, such as recruitment, onboarding, performance evaluation, and career development (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). This omission results in a fragmented approach to innovation, where only a minority of public servants possess the skills necessary to drive meaningful change (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>).

### Figure 1. Applied innovation skills and competencies

The figure below shows the share of public servants by perceived applied innovation skills and competencies, 2024.



Note: N= 2,479 to 3,633. Respondents: Public Servants (L3). Figure presents the share of respondents who assess their skills to be "High" or "Very high". The respondents are asked to answer the question: Overall, how would you assess your own skills in the follow areas? Skills related to applying innovation: Please rank statements from 1 "Very low" to 5 "Very high". [Rating].

Source: OECD Bulgaria's Innovative Capacity Survey, 2024.

### **Applied innovation skills strongly determine public servants' engagement in innovative projects.**

Bulgarian public servants report low levels of adoption of applied innovation skills (Figure 1) – only 20% have proficiency with prototyping, innovative procurement, and technology design, while around 28% report having skills in piloting and social research, and 33% have competencies in systems analysis and user-centred design (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). Notably, these skills are concentrated among those already involved in innovation projects or at the executive level rather than being systematically cultivated across the civil service (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). An OECD econometric analysis found that public servants who perceive themselves as having applied innovation skills have 32% higher odds of participating in innovation projects (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). This evidence strongly suggests that fostering innovation capabilities should be part of professional development mechanisms rather than an incidental skillset that only a few civil servants acquire through their personal experiences.

## **1.2. Competency frameworks with innovation dimensions internationally**

**OECD countries are increasingly embedding innovation skills in competency frameworks** (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Kaur and Buisman, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). A growing number of OECD countries are also integrating innovation competencies that reflect a shift from rigid, rule-based bureaucracies toward more adaptive governance (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). This includes fostering user-centred approaches, problem-solving, and innovation as core competencies for public servants. For example, as presented in Table 2, *Estonia's Competency Framework for Top Civil Service* highlights the role of public sector executives in fostering innovation, particularly under the *Leading the Organisation* competency, which includes developing strategy, leveraging technology, and organising work in ways that encourage innovative behaviours (Government of Estonia, 2024<sup>[7]</sup>). Similarly, the *UK Civil Service Competency Framework* directly integrates innovation into civil service roles, particularly under the *Changing and Improving* competency, which encourages public servants to seek opportunities for effective change and propose innovative ideas for improvement (UK Government, 2025<sup>[8]</sup>). By moving beyond compliance-focused bureaucratic models, these frameworks recognise that public managers and civil servants must navigate complex challenges with agility, creativity, and responsiveness.

**Organisations such as the European Commission and the OECD have developed guidance models that integrate innovation as a core competency of governments.** As shown in Table 2, the European Commission's framework outlines an innovation cluster which includes skills such as creative thinking, system thinking, and critical thinking (European Commission, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>). These competencies aim to equip policymakers with the ability to generate new ideas, analyse complex systems, and make informed decisions by evaluating evidence objectively (European Commission, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>). Additionally, learning and unlearning, as well as managing transformations, are crucial skills that foster adaptability and the capacity to lead change in dynamic policy environments (European Commission, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>). By embedding these competencies, the framework enables policymakers to develop innovative, evidence-informed, and citizen-focused solutions.

Similarly, the OECD defines six core skills that emphasise user-centred approaches, problem-solving, and fostering an innovation mindset. Competencies such as iteration, user-centricity, and curiosity encourage civil servants to experiment, refine policies and services incrementally, and consider user needs throughout government processes (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). Additionally, data literacy ensures that decisions are grounded in evidence, while storytelling enhances communication by framing policy changes in compelling narratives (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). The framework also highlights the importance of insurgency – challenging traditional approaches and building alliances for transformative change (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). These competency frameworks provide countries with adaptable models that support the development of their own innovative public sector capabilities, reinforcing a culture of adaptation and responsive governance.



**Table 2. Competency frameworks with innovation dimension internationally**

The table below shows international examples of competency frameworks with innovation competencies.

Competency Framework	Competencies
<b>The Competency Framework for Top Civil Service – Government of Estonia:</b> This framework for top civil service executives consists of three competencies and is used in the recruitment, selection, evaluation, and development of top managers (Government of Estonia, 2024 <sup>[7]</sup> ).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading the organisation: Setting long-term direction, developing strategy, organising work favouring innovation and considering technology, creating crisis capability, and securing resources.</li> <li>Leading people: Creating the team and collaboration, supporting individual development, making decisions, providing feedback, and serving as a role model.</li> <li>Leading relations: Initiating and nurturing networks, developing organisational culture, organising communication, pen governance, and cooperating with politicians.</li> </ul>
<b>Civil Service Competency Framework – UK Government:</b> This framework outlines essential skills, knowledge, and behaviours that contribute to successful performance within the Civil Service. The framework outlines 10 competencies, which are grouped into 3 clusters: Set Direction, Engage People, and Deliver Results (UK Government, 2025 <sup>[8]</sup> ).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeing the big picture: Understand how your role fits with and supports organisational objectives. Recognise the wider Civil Service priorities and ensure work is in the national interest.</li> <li>Changing and improving: Seek out opportunities to create effective change and suggest innovative ideas for improvement. Review ways of working, including seeking and providing feedback.</li> <li>Making effective decisions: Use evidence and knowledge to support accurate, expert decisions and advice. Carefully consider alternative options, implications and risks of decisions.</li> <li>Leadership: Show pride and passion for public service. Create and engage others in delivering a shared vision. Value difference, diversity and inclusion, ensuring fairness and opportunity for all.</li> <li>Communicating and influencing: Communicate purpose and direction with clarity, integrity and enthusiasm. Respect the needs, responses and opinions of others.</li> <li>Working together: Form effective partnerships and relationships with people both internally and externally, from a range of diverse backgrounds, sharing information, resources and support.</li> <li>Developing self and others: Focus on continuous learning and development for self, others and the organisation as a whole.</li> <li>Managing a quality service: Deliver service objectives with professional excellence, expertise, and efficiency, taking into account diverse customer needs.</li> <li>Delivering at pace: Take responsibility for delivering timely and quality results with focus and drive.</li> </ul>
<b>European Commission – Joint Research Centre:</b> This framework is designed to guide policymaking organisations on the relevant competencies for innovative, effective, and evidence-informed policymaking. The framework consists of 36 competencies divided into 7 clusters: Advise the political level, Innovate, Work with evidence, Be futures literate, Engage with citizens and stakeholders, Collaborate, and Communicate (European Commission, 2022 <sup>[9]</sup> ).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creative thinking: This competency involves the ability to generate new and valuable ideas, approaches, and solutions. It encompasses skills such as ideation, and the capacity to view problems from multiple perspectives to foster innovation in policymaking.</li> <li>System thinking: This entails understanding and analysing the complex and interconnected nature of policy issues. Policymakers with this competency can identify relationships within systems, anticipate potential consequences of actions, and design policies that consider the broader context and long-term impacts.</li> <li>Critical thinking: This competency involves the objective analysis and evaluation of information to form reasoned judgments. It includes skills such as assessing the credibility of sources, identifying biases, and systematically questioning assumptions to make well-informed policy decisions.</li> <li>Learning and unlearning: This refers to the willingness and ability to acquire new knowledge and skills while discarding outdated or less effective ones. It highlights the importance of adaptability and continuous learning in the dynamic field of policymaking.</li> <li>Managing transformations: This competency involves leading and facilitating change processes within policy environments. It includes skills in change management, stakeholder engagement, and the ability to guide organisations and systems through transitions effectively.</li> </ul>
<b>OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation – Six Core Skills for Public Sector Innovation:</b> This skills model for public sector innovation is based around six core skills areas under three levels of capabilities: basic awareness, emerging capability, and regular practitioner (OECD, 2017 <sup>[4]</sup> ).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Iteration: Incrementally and experimentally developing policies, products and services, developing and refining prototypes, and carrying out experimentation and testing.</li> <li>Data literacy: Basing decisions on data and evidence, building systems that collect the right data, and communicating data effectively.</li> <li>User centricity: Public services should be focused on solving and servicing user needs, considering users at every stage, and ensuring users say "I would do that again".</li> <li>Curiosity: Seeking out and trying new ideas or ways of working, adapting approaches used elsewhere, and reframing problems and perspectives.</li> <li>Storytelling: Using narratives to explain 'the journey', including user stories to outline benefits, and progressing the story as situations change.</li> <li>Insurgency: Challenging the status quo, working with unusual partners and building alliances for change.</li> </ul>

Source: OECD based on cited sources.

**Bulgaria's competency framework would benefit from explicitly integrating innovation competencies as a transversal dimension for public servants.** The current framework risks reinforcing bureaucratic inertia rather than promoting innovative, experimental, and adaptive capabilities necessary for navigating today's rapidly changing policy landscape (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>). As evidenced by international best practices, CoMA is advised to update its competency framework by including innovative competencies that are systematically embedded in recruitment, training, and performance evaluation (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). This can encourage widespread participation in innovative projects across all levels of government and support recognising and rewarding innovative competencies (OECD, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>). Ultimately, this would support strengthening Bulgaria's innovative capacity, leading to more effective and trusted policymaking and service delivery (OECD, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>).

### 1.3. Proposal for an innovation competency

**This proposal recommends integrating an innovation dimension into the country's competency framework to strengthen Bulgaria's civil service innovative capacity.** This new cross-cutting dimension would support equipping all public servants with essential skills to foster creativity, evidence-based decision-making, and human-centred design, ensuring that innovation becomes a systematic practice rather than an incidental occurrence.

Adapted from the abovementioned international best practices, Table 3 proposes an innovation competency for all positions in the civil service, including the following five sub-competencies: (1) an *innovative mindset*, which encourages creative and anticipatory thinking, as well as the ability to identify and implement new ideas and iterative processes (European Commission, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>; UK Government, 2018<sup>[10]</sup>). Additionally, (2) *working creatively with evidence* would enhance civil servants' ability to gather, assess, and apply diverse data sources to inform innovative policy and service design and delivery (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>; UK Government, 2025<sup>[8]</sup>). A focus on a *human-centred innovation* approach would ensure that public administration adopts methods such as design thinking and citizen participation, facilitating the design and implementation of effective, user-oriented solutions (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). The proposal includes *stakeholder facilitation* as a key capability to promote cross-sector collaboration, leveraging expertise from various stakeholders to enhance public sector outcomes (European Commission, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>; UK Government, 2025<sup>[8]</sup>).

For managerial positions, *transformative leadership* is critical to fostering an environment conducive to innovation, supporting balanced risk-taking, and driving strategic change within public administration (Government of Estonia, 2024<sup>[7]</sup>; European Commission, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>). By embedding these five competencies, Bulgaria can align its civil service with international best practices, enabling its workforce to navigate complex challenges with adaptation and agility (OECD, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>). This innovation competence would support improving policymaking and service delivery for a more innovative, impactful, and trusted State Administration as aligned with Bulgaria's Public Sector Innovation Vision and Action Plan (OECD, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>).

**Table 3. Proposal for a cross-cutting innovation competency in Bulgaria**

The table below proposes a transversal innovation dimension for Bulgaria's civil service competency framework.

Competency	Sub-competencies	Expected behaviours
Innovation: Ability to develop an innovative mindset, work creatively with evidence, conduct human-centred innovation, engage with stakeholders, and, for managerial positions, lead and	<b>Innovative mindset:</b> Proficiency in thinking innovatively, identifying new ideas and ways of working and working iteratively with users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have an innovative mindset, including experience with creative thinking, system thinking, and anticipation.</li> <li>Can identify new ideas and ways of working, adapting approaches used elsewhere to improve public results.</li> <li>Work iteratively and consider users at every stage of their work.</li> </ul>
	<b>Work creatively with evidence:</b> Proficiency in understanding, obtaining, and recognising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the importance of evidence to inform creative processes for innovative policymaking, regulation, and service delivery.</li> <li>Can identify and obtain evidence and data from different types of</li> </ul>



manage transformations to increase public outcomes.	innovative opportunities from evidence through various sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>knowledge and information, including assessing limits and uncertainty.</li> <li>Ability to change based on evidence and recognise opportunities for innovation.</li> </ul>
	<b>Human-centred innovation:</b> Proficiency in understanding different methods and tools, conducting an innovation process, and advising management level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to understand different methods and tools such as design thinking, service design, and citizen participation to deliver human-centred innovative solutions.</li> <li>Can identify and frame problems to innovate, design, and iterate innovative solutions, as well as test, escalate, and manage innovative projects.</li> <li>Ability to advise management level on the innovation process and communicate innovation results.</li> </ul>
	<b>Stakeholder facilitation:</b> Proficiency in collaborating effectively, identifying relevant expertise, and facilitating stakeholder exchanges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the importance of developing networks and collaborations.</li> <li>Can identify and engage with internal and external expertise.</li> <li>Can map stakeholders and engage regularly with them in their area of work.</li> </ul>
	<b>Transformative leadership</b> (for managerial responsibilities only): Proficiency in creating innovative behaviours, supporting an innovative environment, and leading transformations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand and encourage their team's innovative behaviours through balanced risk-taking.</li> <li>Support a team environment conducive to innovation, overcoming barriers, and creating opportunities for collaboration.</li> <li>Manage different innovative projects and transformations, ensuring increased public outcomes and creating space for learning.</li> </ul>

Source: OECD

**Bulgaria is advised to integrate this updated competency framework into key HRM processes including performance assessment, recruitment and professional development** (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). Innovation competencies should be reflected in job descriptions, job posting selection criteria, and training programmes (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). Performance evaluations should also measure civil servants' ability to apply these competencies through the mentioned expected behaviours (Table 3), ensuring innovation becomes a core element of public servants' conduct (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). Innovation should also become a key variable in determining professional advancement.

**A cross-government working group on HRM should be established to coordinate adopting the competency framework across ministries and agencies** (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). As included in the Public Sector Innovation Vision and Action Plan (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>), this group would be important for standardising best practices, developing guidelines, and facilitating knowledge sharing to ensure consistent framework application. This will help address implementation challenges and support ministries in embedding innovation in HR processes while fostering collaboration (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>).

The working group should also provide guidance to senior leaders on fostering an innovation-driven culture to drive strategic adoption of the competency framework (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). By equipping public leaders and managers with innovative competencies, experimentation, risk-taking, and continuous learning practices can be further embedded into organisational strategies (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). Regular evaluations should be conducted to assess its effectiveness, allowing for continuous improvement of the innovation competence (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>).

## 2. Innovation training for strengthening innovation

**In Bulgaria, there is limited and sporadic training on public sector innovation** (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). Capacity-building programmes and training in public sector innovation equip public sector leaders and public servants with the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in innovative practices (Kaur and Buisman, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). In Bulgaria, public sector innovation training has focused on senior management staff, concentrating on skills related to advising political leaders (e.g., research and framing policy issues, developing policy solutions) and engaging citizens and stakeholders (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). By focusing

innovation training solely on senior staff, the Administration misses the opportunity to leverage the full potential of public servants at all levels (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). Furthermore, the scale of such trainings has been limited compared to size of the civil service and the target groups involved.

**Both OECD member and non-member countries have implemented various initiatives to build innovation skills and capabilities in the public sector.** [Austria](#)'s GovLab training programme, in collaboration with the Federal Academy of Public Administration, offers workshops, seminars, and events to disseminate knowledge, promote innovative projects, processes, and methods, and foster cultural change across the public sector (Government of Austria, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). In [Chile](#), the Government Lab's Public Innovators School aims to empower public officials with the knowledge and tools to drive innovation within their institutions through online courses (Government of Chile, 2024<sup>[13]</sup>).

Similarly, the UK Government runs an annual capacity-building initiative for all civil servants, *One Big Thing*, to take action around a cross-government change priority (UK Government, n.d.<sup>[14]</sup>). Reaching about 500,000 civil servants, the 2024 call focused on innovation, providing an e-learning course, team conversations about learning and sharing ideas for small changes, and experimentation spaces to take action in concrete projects (UK Government, n.d.<sup>[14]</sup>). [Sweden](#) has developed targeted support for adopting public sector innovation management, enhancing specific capacity-building efforts (Government of Sweden, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). Lastly, non-OECD countries such as the [United Arab Emirates](#) designed a flagship programme, in partnership with Cambridge University, to empower future government leaders with knowledge and practice to address real problems in innovative ways (United Arab Emirates Government, n.d.<sup>[16]</sup>).

**Targeted innovation training programmes can effectively support the development of innovation skills matching the desired competences set out in public sector competency frameworks** (Kaur and Buisman, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>; OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). Large-scale training is needed to ensure that civil servants in Bulgaria understand concepts connected to innovation and develop the skills to apply innovative projects in their roles (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). The training should be implemented by the IPA to reinforce key competencies such as creative problem-solving, data-driven decision-making, human-centred design, and stakeholder facilitation, as seen in the abovementioned international best practices in the section 1.2. Workshops, case studies, and interactive learning methods would be highly beneficial for helping public servants build an innovative mindset and learn how to implement iterative, user-focused solutions to complex policy challenges.

## **2.1. Proposal for an innovation training**

### *2.1.1. Training format*

**This proposal outlines a structured modular innovation training programme consisting of three sessions.** To promote integrating innovation competencies into Bulgaria's civil service, the curricula aim to equip public servants at all hierarchical levels with the essential tools, skills, and knowledge needed to implement innovation projects. Aligned with Bulgaria's Public Sector Innovation Vision and Action Plan (OECD, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>), the training focuses on practical application and guides participants through key stages of the innovation process: user research, ideation and prototyping, and testing and evaluation. By embedding international best practices and OECD practical experience, this curriculum ensures that Bulgaria's civil servants can apply innovation processes effectively in their roles. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) should deliver the programme, in both in-person and digital formats, through experienced external facilitators with at least ten years of expertise in innovation, co-creative methodologies, and implementing transformation projects in the public sector.

**This innovation training should be integrated into current training offers for all hierarchical levels in the administration** (OECD, 2024<sup>[1]</sup>). A formal certification process could reinforce the training value, linking completion to performance evaluations and career advancement through the competency

framework's innovation competence (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). To measure its effectiveness, IPA should track participation and outcomes through regular assessments, using feedback to refine and enhance the programme over time. Annual targets for the number of civil servants completing the programme should be set. Graduates of the training could also participate in complementary initiatives such as mentoring and peer-learning programs, fostering knowledge exchange and strengthening innovation capabilities through the existing IPA Innovation Network.

**The OECD has successfully tested this training curriculum in Bulgaria in both digital and in-person formats, yielding positive results.** Delivered to public sector managers and experts from the State Administration, the training received positive feedback, with 100% of participants reporting that the content was moderately to strongly relevant to their job responsibilities (OECD, 2025<sup>[17]</sup>). Overall satisfaction was rated at 4.45 out of 5, with all participants stating they could apply the knowledge and tools in their roles (OECD, 2025<sup>[17]</sup>). Additionally, nearly 40% of participants indicated they could transfer the content to a colleague, demonstrating the program's potential to enhance innovation capabilities across the public sector (OECD, 2025<sup>[17]</sup>). The materials previously developed by the OECD for activities in Bulgaria are enclosed within this deliverable. A link to the slide deck, video recordings, and additional resources is provided at the end of this document.

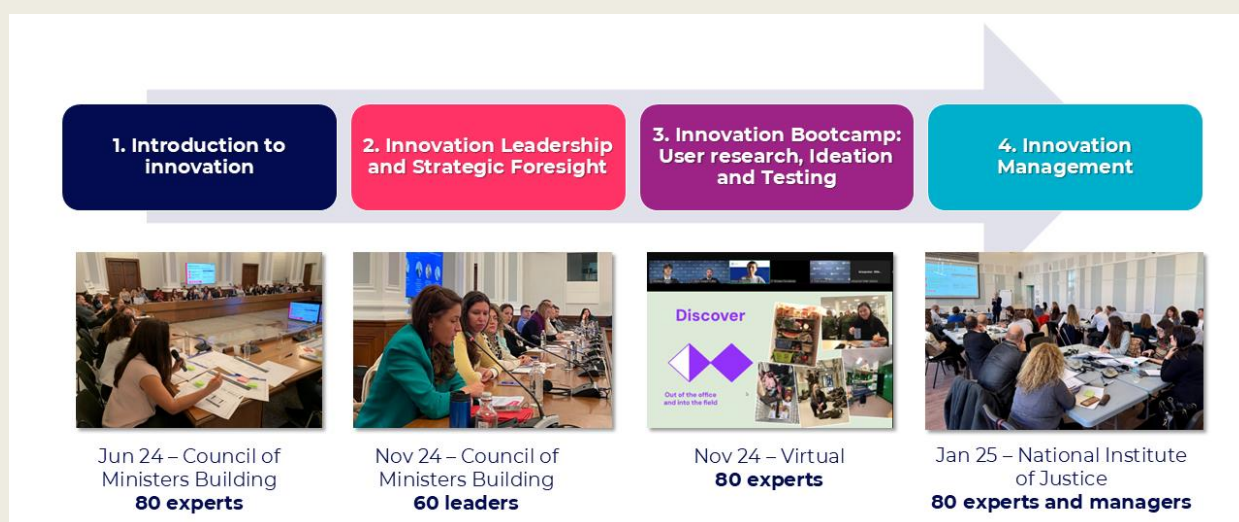
### Box 1. Innovation capacity-building in the State Administration

#### Four targeted training sessions for 300 civil servants in Bulgaria

As part of the EU-funded project “Strengthening the Strategic Approach and Innovation in the Civil Service in Bulgaria”, the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, the European Commission, and the Council of Ministers’ Administration organised four training sessions on diverse innovation topics for 300 civil servants.

The training sessions aimed to equip participants with essential knowledge and practical tools to carry out innovation projects and lead transformation within their organisations. Key topics included user research, ideation, prototyping, testing, and evaluation. Specialised sessions for leaders and public managers also provided more profound insights into managing innovation portfolios, public managers’ innovation competencies, and strategic foresight concepts and tools for proactive governance.

Delivered both in person and online, the training fostered high engagement through interactive exercises and real-world case studies, ensuring participants could apply their learning in practice.



Source: OECD.

#### 2.1.2. Training curriculum

**The first module provides participants with a foundational understanding of innovation concepts, frameworks, and methodologies used in public administration.** As presented in Table 4, the session *Introduction to Public Sector Innovation and User Research* introduces key concepts, including the different types of public sector innovation and real-world examples, such as Estonia’s Public Sector Innovation Team. Participants will learn about the Double Diamond Model, a structured innovation process that guides the development of user-centred solutions. Additionally, the module will cover techniques for user research, including problem identification, the use of cause-effect diagrams, user profiling, and research planning. Ethical considerations and the role of AI in research preparation will also be addressed.

Through interactive activities, participants will engage with a case study on addressing delays in patient care and service delivery at Sofia Public Hospital (if deemed pertinent these examples can be updated over time). Hands-on exercises will include developing a cause-effect diagram, creating user profiles, and

defining an innovation challenge. These activities will reinforce key competencies, such as an innovative mindset, working creatively with evidence, human-centred innovation, and stakeholder facilitation (see Table 3). By the end of the session, participants will have a clear understanding of how to diagnose complex policy problems and apply user research techniques as a foundation for developing innovative solutions.

**The second session will equip participants with the skills and methodologies needed to generate, refine, and prototype innovative solutions to public sector challenges.** Building on the foundational knowledge from the first session, the session *Ideation and Prototyping* will introduce the role of ideation in the Double Diamond Model, demonstrating how structured brainstorming and co-creation techniques can lead to public sector innovations. As shown in Table 4, participants will explore various ideation methods, including generative, exploratory, analytical, and prioritisation techniques, while learning to map stakeholders and incorporate diverse perspectives into the innovation process. The session will also cover the concept of prototyping, outlining different types – such as conceptual, exploratory, functional, and final prototypes – and their application in government settings.

Through real-world case studies, such as the Centre for Collective Intelligence Design at NESTA UK, participants could see how public administrations apply ideation and prototyping to address policy challenges. Interactive activities, including developing an idea concept and using generative AI for rapid prototyping, will allow participants to put their learning into practice. This session will strengthen key competencies such as an innovative mindset, human-centred innovation, stakeholder facilitation, and leading transformation (see Table 3), ensuring that civil servants are prepared to experiment, iterate, and implement user-focused solutions.

**The third session will provide participants with the knowledge and tools needed to design and implement structured testing and evaluation activities in public sector innovation.** Participants will explore key concepts, learn about different evaluation methods, define testing expectations, and understand the role of evidence in refining and scaling solutions. As seen in Table 4, the session will introduce frameworks for planning testing and evaluations, covering hypothesis development, audience identification, and resource constraints such as time, participants, and data reliability. Additionally, participants will learn about common evaluation methods – including interviews, focus groups, surveys, A/B testing, and Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) – and how to select the most appropriate approach for different policy contexts. Real-world case studies, such as the UK's Evaluation Taskforce, could illustrate how governments apply testing and evaluation strategies to improve public service delivery. Participants will engage in hands-on activities, including defining evaluation expectations and developing a testing and evaluation plan.

The session will also emphasise the importance of using and communicating findings effectively, translating insights into action, and building accountability for innovation outcomes. By the end of the session, participants will have strengthened competencies in an innovative mindset, working creatively with evidence, human-centred innovation, and leading transformation, ensuring they can implement evidence-driven improvements and sustain a culture of continuous learning and adaptation in the public sector.

**Participants could submit a real project concept for a public sector innovation initiative within their job responsibilities as a training evaluation method.** This final submission would require them to apply the methodologies covered in the training using the standardised templates for each stage. The project could include problem identification through research tools (e.g., cause-effect diagrams and user profiles), idea generation and prototyping using co-creation techniques, and a structured testing and evaluation plan outlining hypothesis formulation, data collection, and success metrics. This approach reinforces applied learning and creates a portfolio of innovation proposals that could be considered for actual implementation as part of IPA's Innovation Competition.

**Table 4. Proposal for an innovation training curriculum**

The table below shows a proposal for a three-session innovation curriculum, including content, activities, and competencies in practice.

Session aim	Curricula content	Activities	Competencies in practice
1. Introduction to Public Sector Innovation and User Research: equip with an understanding of the innovation process and tools for user research activities, such as the cause-effect diagram, user profiles, research plan and techniques, and innovation challenge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual definitions, types and examples of public sector innovation.</li> <li>• Case: How do public administrations use user research tools in innovation project delivery? Example, Estonia's Public Sector Innovation Team</li> <li>• Innovation process: Double diamond model</li> <li>• User research conceptual definitions and steps</li> <li>• Planning and Scoping: Characteristics of problems to innovate, causes and effect diagram, users and users profiles, reframing problems, and research plan.</li> <li>• Preparation: Research tools and techniques, ethical considerations, and using AI to prepare research tools.</li> <li>• Data collection: Conducting research, observing and recording, and iterative feedback.</li> <li>• Analysis and synthesis: organising data, identifying patterns, developing user personas, declaring reformulated problems and innovation challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case: example, Addressing delays in patient care and service deliver in Sofia Public Hospital.</li> <li>• Activity 1: Causes and effect diagram</li> <li>• Activity 2: User profiles</li> <li>• Activity 3: Declaring the problem and innovation challenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative mindset</li> <li>• Working creatively with evidence</li> <li>• Human centred innovation</li> <li>• Stakeholder facilitation</li> </ul>
2. Ideation and prototyping: offer knowledge for ideation and prototyping, including tools for brainstorming, ideation concepts, the service journey map, wireframes, and digital prototyping tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation Facets: Tackling policy challenges through public sector innovation</li> <li>• Innovation process: Double diamond model</li> <li>• Ideation: conceptual definitions and steps.</li> <li>• Planning and scoping: Innovation challenges and considerations, identifying participants, planning the process with policy canvas model, and selecting tools and resources.</li> <li>• Ideating: Methods for co-creation and biases: generative, exploratory, analytical, prioritisation, and perspective methods. Principles for co-creation and stakeholder maps.</li> <li>• Building a concept: Develop a concept and validate with stakeholders.</li> <li>• Prototyping: conceptual definitions, types of prototypes: conceptual, exploratory, functional, and final prototypes.</li> <li>• Case: How do public administrations use ideation and prototyping in innovation project delivery? Example, Centre for Collective Intelligence Design at NESTA UK</li> <li>• Using Gen-AI for ideation and prototyping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case: example, Addressing delays in patient care and service deliver in Sofia Public Hospital.</li> <li>• Activity 4: Idea concept</li> <li>• Activity 5: Role-playing using Gen-AI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative mindset</li> <li>• Human centred innovation</li> <li>• Stakeholder facilitation</li> <li>• Leading transformation</li> </ul>
3. Testing and evaluation: Equip with knowledge and tools to design and implement testing and evaluation activities, including common testing methods, and resources and time constraints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing and evaluation: conceptual definitions, examples, and steps.</li> <li>• Defining expectations: testing stages, hypothesis, audiences.</li> <li>• Planning: Evaluation plan, common methods, constraints: time, participants, confidence, comparisons.</li> <li>• Common methods: interviews, focus groups, survey, observations, A/B testing, Randomised Controlled Trials.</li> <li>• Case: How do public administrations testing and prototyping in innovation project delivery? Example, UK's Evaluation Taskforce: Supporting evaluation from the centre of government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case: example, Addressing delays in patient care and service deliver in Sofia Public Hospital.</li> <li>• Activity 5: Defining evaluation expectations.</li> <li>• Activity 6: Developing a testing and evaluation plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative mindset</li> <li>• Working creatively with evidence</li> <li>• Human centred innovation</li> <li>• Leading transformation</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implementation and analysis: Testing checklist, administrative data, evaluation roles, incentives for participation.</li><li>• Using and communicating findings: insights into action, accountability for actions, value of compiling evidence over time.</li></ul>		
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Source: OECD

### Enclosed

1. [OECD folder with slide decks, video recordings, and additional materials.](#)

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