



**Fostering Innovation  
Amid Global Challenges:**  
A Public Sector Perspective

**24-26 June 2024**  
Incheon, Republic of Korea

**- Concept Note -**

## Introduction

The 2024 United Nations Public Service Forum and Awards Ceremony will take place in Incheon, Republic of Korea from 24 to 26 June 2024, under the theme *'Fostering Innovation amid Global Challenges: a Public Sector Perspective'*. Held in and around United Nations Public Service Day<sup>1</sup> (celebrated annually on 23 June), the Forum provides a platform for public administrators and those working in the field to come together to build capacity and share experiences in the realm of public administration and service delivery.

The Forum is co-organised by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) and the Ministry of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea (MOIS). Several partners will also be engaged in co-organising parallel workshops and/or side events.

## Context: Fostering innovation amid global challenges: a public sector perspective

As the deadline for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches, the world is faced with increasing complex and interconnected global challenges. While still recovering from the far-reaching consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the world has become increasingly uncertain and volatile. Numerous political and economic crises, rising inequalities, the increasing impacts of climate change, and regional conflicts threaten to derail hard won gains in achieving sustainable development objectives. On top of this, distrust in government has left many people disillusioned with the ability of public institutions to effectively deliver on basic public services.

At the SDG Summit held in September 2023, global leaders recognised the threat that these challenges pose for sustainable development. The Political Declaration of the high-level forum on sustainable development notes<sup>2</sup>, *'The world was already off track in achieving the majority of the SDGs before the COVID-19 pandemic. Without immediate course correction and acceleration of progress toward achieving the SDGs, our world is destined to face continued poverty, prolonged periods of crisis and growing uncertainty.'* The critical role of public institutions, set out in SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda, is also reaffirmed in the declaration, which notes the necessity of *'good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions.'*

Similarly, the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) during its 22<sup>nd</sup> session<sup>3</sup> noted its concern: *'while Governments are coping with a cascade of simultaneous crises, this may result in relative neglect of long-term thinking, risk management, use of the best*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/observances/public-service-day>

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/78/1 Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/306/65/PDF/N2330665.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>3</sup> E/2023/44-E/C.16/2023/9 <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=e/2023/44&Lang=E>

*knowledge, stakeholder participation, promotion of collaborative mindsets and use of public financial management mechanisms to bridge financing gaps*". In this context, the Committee stressed the importance of forecasting and planning, as well as stimulating public sector innovation through digital technology.

Within the context of these global challenges and a call from global leaders to do more, the public sector is at a critical juncture, and must respond. As the public sector plays a crucial role in tackling societal challenges and fostering inclusive and sustainable development, governments must transform to be better equipped to anticipate future development needs and position themselves to be more responsive and adaptive to the communities they serve in real time. The public sector must, at its foundation, become more agile, innovative, inclusive, responsive and adaptive.

However, this has proved to be challenging in many countries. The setup and working processes of public institutions and structures often impede agility and innovation. Lack of flexibility, bureaucratic 'red tape', a focus on hierarchical structures, centralised decision-making, challenges in adapting to rapid technological change, lack of human resource diversity, and the absence of a culture of collaboration, amongst others, can stifle the very conditions needed for innovation and agility to thrive. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has vividly illustrated the capacity for adaptation and innovation of public institutions across the world.

## Looking to the future: Readyng the public sector

As we strive for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and navigate increasingly fragile and uncertain conditions, institutions must actively cultivate innovation and embrace forward-thinking mindsets to effectively address both current and future challenges.

Recognising this, and in an effort to help get the world back on track to meet the SDGs, in September 2023 the United Nations launched a number of High Impact Initiatives<sup>4</sup> aimed at reinvigorating and accelerating action towards the Goals through concrete solutions. Amongst these is the High Impact Initiative on 'FutureGov' which aims to build public sector capabilities for the future and '*unlock accelerated delivery of the SDGs*'. The Initiative '*calls on Member States to adopt a renewed sense of purpose and urgency to public sector development – improving the way they design, finance, deliver and evaluate people-centred public services*'.<sup>5</sup>

With a focus on fostering innovation, building public sector skillsets, and changing mindsets, the FutureGov Initiative is designed to support member states through their public sector 'transformation journeys'.<sup>6</sup> The aim is to rally the public sector to transform governance and public

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<sup>4</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023/SDG-Action-Weekend/futuregov>

<sup>6</sup> [https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FutureGov%20Brochure\\_0.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*629iwr\\*\\_ga\\*NTUzNDAzNjg5LjE2MTY3NzA5ODM.\\*\\_ga\\_TK9BQL5X7Z\\*M\\_TcwNTUxNDA3Ni4xMS4xLjE3MDU1MTU0NDQuMC4wLjA](https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FutureGov%20Brochure_0.pdf?_gl=1*629iwr*_ga*NTUzNDAzNjg5LjE2MTY3NzA5ODM.*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*M_TcwNTUxNDA3Ni4xMS4xLjE3MDU1MTU0NDQuMC4wLjA).

administrations so as to better meet and respond to the evolving needs and challenges of society today and in the future.

With this context in mind, the United Nations Public Service Forum 2024 will focus on the role of fostering innovation and transformation in the public sector, with a view to enhancing the current and future capabilities of public administrations so they are readied to be more adaptative, anticipatory, agile, inclusive, and responsive in meeting development objectives amid complex global challenges.

The Forum will provide a platform for Ministers, senior level decision-makers, and working level public servants to reflect upon and develop the skills needed to devise tangible actions to foster innovation and transformation at the local and national levels. Participants will have the opportunity to debate emerging issues and trends, and discuss good practices, strategies, accelerated actions, and innovative approaches for enhancing effective service delivery and transforming institutions.

The Forum will also provide the opportunity to highlight innovative public sector initiatives through its 2024 United Nations Public Service Awards Ceremony, which recognises initiatives at the national and local levels which contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development (see below).

## **Structure and methodology**

The Forum will be comprised of plenary sessions, capacity development workshops, side events, and the UNPSA Awards Ceremony, through which participants will witness successful innovations, discuss and share ideas, experiences, knowledge and practices.

Through plenary sessions and thematic capacity development workshops the Forum will provide a platform to examine and enhance the capacity of public servants and leaders in key areas, with a focus on bolstering the skills and fostering the mindsets needed to accelerate innovative action to transform public administrations.

The Forum will also provide the opportunity to promote enhanced cooperation and partnerships through sharing of experiences and peer-to-peer learning.

## **Substantive plenary sessions**

### **Plenary 1: Artificial intelligence and the future of government**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly recognised as a facilitator in enhancing the efficiency, accessibility and effectiveness of services in nearly every aspect of our lives, including the delivery of government services. As governments look to incorporate AI into their online tools and platforms, consideration must be given to ensure that services are ethical, transparent, unbiased and accountable. This session will discuss the increasingly central role that AI will

play in government over the coming decades, exploring its great potential while also discussing steps necessary to mitigate potential risks.

## **Plenary 2: Revitalising global partnerships for sustainable development**

Amid intricate and interconnected global challenges, this plenary session will delve into strategies for rejuvenating global partnerships to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Challenges such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inequality, growing nationalism, and diminishing trust in national and multi-lateral institutions, have posed immense threats to global cooperation. There is a pressing need to intensify efforts to revive partnerships for sustainable development by recommitting to multilateral collaboration, leveraging technology for the achievement of sustainable development, and harmonising policies and efforts. The multi-stakeholder panel will explore the concrete and tangible actions needed to revitalise partnerships for sustainable development.

## **Capacity development workshops**

Seven workshops will focus on the following thematic areas:

### **Workshop 1: Gender-inclusive Leadership and Public Sector Innovation for Sustainable Development: Empowering Women Leaders for Future-ready Public Administration**

*Co-organised by DPIDG/ISDGB and UNDP*

The increased presence and leadership of women in both national and subnational public administration not only advances gender equality but is also essential for fostering responsive and accountable public governance. Amidst the concerning lack of tangible progress on gender equality, enhancing women's involvement in leadership and decision-making within the public sector gains added significance in expediting change by 2030. Yet, significant underrepresentation of women persists, particularly in decision-making roles, hindering progress towards gender parity. According to the [2021 Gender Equality in Public Administration report](#), less than 30 per cent of women hold senior management positions in many countries, highlighting a substantial gap in leadership opportunities.

The urgency to address this disparity is underscored by the [2023 Sustainable Development Goals Report](#), estimating 140 years for equal representation of women in workplace leadership positions. In this context, the workshop offers a collaborative platform to showcase capacity development outcomes and share insights on advancing gender responsiveness in public administration. It aims to promote women's involvement in leadership roles in government and enhance responsiveness in public agencies. The workshop will contribute to the overarching theme of developing institutional, human, and technological capacities within the public sector to support SDG implementation, fostering innovation, and ensuring responsive service delivery amid global challenges.

Situated within the framework of the project titled ["Building capacities for promoting the presence and leadership of women within public institutions at national and local levels,"](#) this

event serves as a nexus for collaboration, experience-sharing, and catalysing the implementation of gender-centric policies within public administration in Mauritius, Senegal, Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic - the project countries - and other countries in Asia and Africa.

## **Workshop 2: Young Public Servants: Engaging Young People for a more Innovative, Effective and Future Ready Public Service**

*Organised by DPIDG/PSIB*

Reliable data on the share of young people in government, and public administration in particular, is difficult to come by. But where data does exist, the signs are that proportion of young people in all forms of government remains low. For instance, the average share of young public servants aged 34 and under in central public administrations of OECD countries sits at 18%<sup>7</sup>. There are many reasons behind such low representation, including budget cuts that limit the hiring of new employees and an inability of the public sector to compete with the private sector in job attractiveness, flexibility, and salaries.

As the world struggles with complex interlocking social, economic, and political crises engaging young people in government is more crucial than ever. Not only does doing so help foster an active and engaged citizenry, for now and the future, but it also allows public administrations to exploit the vastly untapped resource of youth talent, skills, insights, and capacity to innovate, particularly, but not only, in the technological realm.

As public administrations look to the future and work to transform to meet current and future challenges, it is crucial that they adapt so that they are more attractive to young employees. This requires dynamic workforce planning with modernised recruitment processes, flexible workplace arrangements, attractive benefits, job security, and importantly, investment in and strategic use of young public servants' talents, skills, and innovations.

The workshop will look at how to better engage young people in a life of public service. In doing so it will: discuss the unique talents and insights that young recruits can bring to the public service; examine the barriers to young people's recruitment and career growth; explore how to attract and retain young public servants; discuss how to foster and leverage young people's distinct perspectives and capacity to innovate and lead in government settings; and will share experiences and good practices globally.

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<sup>7</sup> Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations? <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1a587081-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/1a587081-en>

### **Workshop 3: Changing mindsets: Cultivating Systems Thinking, Foresight and Innovation in Public Sector Leadership**

*Organised by DPIDG/PMCDU*

Recognising the urgency highlighted by global leaders during the 78th session of the General Assembly and the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, as well as the High Impact Initiative on 'FutureGov' to build public sector capabilities for the future and 'unlock accelerated delivery of the SDGs,' the workshop on 'Changing Mindsets: Cultivating Systems Thinking and Foresight' aims to bring about a paradigm shift in public sector leadership. By championing systems thinking and foresight, the workshop's goal is to empower leaders to navigate crises, foster collaboration, and stimulate innovation in the public sector.

Against the backdrop of global challenges and eroding trust in government, the workshop will address the urgent need for changing mindsets towards agile, innovative, and anticipatory governance. New mindsets, capacities, and competencies are critical to ensuring that the principles and values of the 2030 Agenda guide public servants' behaviours and actions in delivering services and spearheading programs to improve people's quality of life, as highlighted by UN DESA's publication on "Changing Mindsets to Realise the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." The workshop will provide a platform for leaders to gain insights on how to develop the capacities needed to promote agile, foresight, and experimental/innovative mindsets in the public sector.

Additionally, the workshop will examine strategies and roadmaps to promote these mindsets through changes in the public sector at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels. The workshop is expected to strengthen public sector leaders' capacities to become responsive agents of change in the face of evolving challenges, by meeting current needs while also anticipating and adapting to an evolving landscape, contributing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Workshop 4: Fostering Innovation through Digital Sandboxes and AI Sandboxes**

*Organised by DPIDG/DGB*

The world is entering the digital-hybrid age. Digital transformation is now unleashing previously unfathomable opportunities for sustainable development. Recent crises have also revealed the vitality of digital solutions to address isolation and keep people informed and engaged, as seen in the recent development trends and analytical data revealed through the UN E-Government Survey. Given that there are both immense opportunities and inherent risks on what digital innovation can bring about, the need to address emerging requirements, risks and challenges for digital public policies and to ensure inclusive multistakeholder engagement has become more critical, especially for countries with special needs, including the least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing States (SIDS), landlocked developing countries (LLDC), and economies in transition.

This workshop will explore policy options and use cases on how countries can leverage on innovations through digital transformation, enhancing institutional, policy and technical capabilities and capacities in the process. It will share lessons learned, including both success

and failure in addressing innovation strategies in the age of digital transformation. In this regard, it will develop the innovation capacity of developing countries, in particular LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and economies in transition, to participate in, and benefit from, the growing opportunities of digitalisation while mitigating the risks.

### **Workshop 5: Enhancing Global Resilience to Disasters and Climate Change**

*Organised by the Ministry of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea*

As the world faces more frequent and intense natural disasters and the profound impacts of climate change, its related dramatic events are already being felt around the world and are only expected to worsen in the coming years. These changes not only exacerbate the frequency of disasters but also heighten their severity, affecting vulnerable communities disproportionately.

Recognising the interconnected nature of climate change and disasters, there is an urgent need for a collective, cross-border response. Simultaneously, the advent of digital technology provides unparalleled opportunities to strengthen resilience against disasters and climate change. From early warning systems and predictive analytics to remote sensing and data-driven decision-making, digital solutions are integral in preparing communities and mitigating the impact of disasters.

The primary objective of the workshop is to explore existing frameworks for international cooperation in disaster management, assess their effectiveness, and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, the workshop will discuss how digital tools can be harnessed to tackle immediate disaster challenges and proactively mitigate potential risks. By bringing together diverse perspectives, expertise, and experiences, the session seeks to uncover innovative solutions that have the potential to revolutionise disaster response mechanisms, fostering resilient and sustainable communities. Topics include tailored cutting-edge technology for landslide response, integrated systems for water-related disasters, and effective disaster response governance, etc.

The overarching goal of the workshop is to enhance disaster response and prevention capabilities on a global scale, paving the way for a more adaptive and robust framework.

### **Workshop 6: Navigating the Future Government: AI and Public Administration**

*Organised by the Ministry of the Interior and Safety (MOIS) and the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM) of the Republic of Korea, National Information Society Agency (NIA) and Korean Local Information Research & Development Institute (KLID)*

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into public administration is fundamentally reshaping the governance landscape, offering enhanced efficiency and citizen services. Generative AI-based administrative services have revolutionised the way of service delivery by providing timely and accurate service to citizens while empowering public officials to enhance overall productivity and convenience.



A stable implementation of AI-based administrative services demands a systematic, step-by-step approach. Governments are tasked with navigating the intricate intersection of technological advancement, privacy considerations, and ethical principles to ensure the successful deployment of AI systems in public administration. The core principles of AI ethics - fairness, transparency, and trustworthiness - are more actively required in the public sphere, as they also correspond to the main purpose of public administration.

This interactive workshop will look into key themes critical for understanding the impact of AI integration in public administration. Topics of focus include the dramatic transformation in public service, identifying AI opportunities, AI-based HR digital transformation, citizen engagement, and collaborative solution development, amongst others.

### **Workshop 7: Strengthening Public Institutions for Climate Action**

*Organised by DPIDG/UNPOG*

SDG Goal 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, underscores the critical need to address this global challenge. The effects of climate change are now affecting every country on every continent, particularly the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS. It disrupts national economies and profoundly impacts lives, incurring significant costs for individuals, communities, and countries, both today and into the future. Progress towards the attainment of Goal 13 has encountered stagnation or regression globally, largely due to institutional issues, including the fragmented distribution of responsibilities for addressing climate change and ensuring the sustainable management, protection, and restoration of natural resources in many nations.<sup>8</sup>

Tackling climate change demands a paradigm shift in mitigation and adaptation measures, financing, institutional arrangement and coordination across national, regional, and local levels. Frontier technologies and digital transformation have emerged as powerful catalysts to facilitate this shift, fostering collaboration, transparency, and data-driven decision-making across governance levels, as highlighted by the UN E-Government Survey 2022. The UN system has identified six transitions where game changing interventions are needed. Rooted in the 17 Goals, these transitions represent a useful organising frame that can spotlight investment pathways to accelerate SDG progress within and across countries, with the prevailing country context determining the priority level and action accorded to each area. To drive these transitions, government actors at all levels are urged to work collaboratively across ministries and engage civil society and private sectors in an inclusive and participatory manner, incorporating principle of effective governance, to identify synergies and trade-offs. One of the transitions is climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution which requires strengthening public institutions through transformed policy and regulatory frameworks and through enhanced national public sector capabilities to deliver and implement climate policy action. This hands-on workshop aims to equip public institutions at all levels in developing countries with tools to effectively address climate change through improved multilevel governance practices, innovative digital solutions, and strategic foresight.

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<sup>8</sup> Expert paper commissioned by CEPA Secretariat, Afreen Siddiqi, "Building strong institutions for addressing climate change and for the sustainable management of natural resources" 2022

## United Nations Public Service Awards Ceremony

The Forum will host the 2024 UN Public Service Award Ceremony. Held annually since 2003 and updated most recently in 2023, the United Nations Public Service Awards is an international award recognising excellence in public service. It rewards the creative achievements and contributions of public institutions for effective and responsive public administration. The Awards offer diverse insight into how governments at all levels are innovating and transforming service delivery and institutions to advance towards the SDGs.

2024 initiatives are being awarded in three categories, all of which work to accelerate action towards the SDGs:

1. Innovation in public institutions
2. Gender-responsive public services
3. Special category on tackling climate change

The expertise of the public servants who have worked actively in implementing the 2024 UN Public Service Award winning initiatives will be drawn upon in the aforementioned capacity development workshops. An innovations exhibition will also be organised during which the UNPSA winners will showcase their successful innovations. You can learn more about the UN Public Service Awards here: <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/UNPSA>.

## Ministerial Roundtable

A Ministerial Roundtable will take place on the last day of the event. During a question-and-answer roundtable, Ministers will respond to the key messages emanating from the Forum and highlight what follow-up actions they will take in their countries.

## Study Tour (25 June)

The Ministry of Interior of the government of the Republic of Korea has organised a study tour on the second day of the event (25 June) where participants can learn more about the innovations in public service delivery being undertaken in Korea. More information can be found on the website <https://2024unpsf.or.kr/study-tour>.

## Side Events

Throughout the Forum (24 and 25 June), a number of side events will be organised by partners, the UN and the government on the sidelines of the Forum. Side Events will explore issues relevant to the theme of the Forum. A full list of side events together with details will be available on the website closer to the date.

More details on the focus and structure of the Ministerial Roundtable, workshops and, where available, side events can be found on the website <http://www.2024unpsf.or.kr>

## Objectives

The primary objective of the UNPSF is to contribute to the development of institutional, human and technological capacities of public sector institutions and public servants to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and to build the future capabilities of the public sector.

## Expected Outcomes

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- Enhanced understanding of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the actions needed over the next six years for its realisation while leaving no one behind;
- Enhanced understanding of how the public sector can develop its capacities and resources for the future challenges in the context of the High-Impact Initiative on FutureGov;
- Increased capacity to meet the challenges and opportunities in realising the SDGs through an effective focus on innovation and transformation in the delivery of services and in institutions, including on the means and methods of advancing gender responsive public service delivery;
- Increased capacity to actively support women and young people as public servants, including on how to attract young people to the public service, how to foster the skills and innovation of young public servants, and how to foster youth transformational leadership;
- Exchange of information on innovative practices through networking and building partnerships with government officials, experts, academics and practitioners in attendance.
- Renewed public sector leadership commitment and inspiration to promote creativity and innovations in public sector institutions and increased effectiveness, inclusiveness, and accountability of institutions to achieve the SDGs, leaving no one behind.

## Organisation

### Venue

Songdo Convensia, Incheon, Republic of Korea

### Participants

Around 500 participants are expected to attend the Forum, including world leaders, ministers, senior government officials, mayors, supreme audit institutions, civil society representatives,

academia, the private sector, and representatives from international and regional organisations.

## Languages

Simultaneous interpretation for the plenary sessions of the meeting will be available in Korean, English and French. Simultaneous interpretation for workshops will be available in English and Korean.

## Contact Information

For overall substantive and organisational enquiries, please contact:

### **Ms. Elizabeth Niland (UN Public Service Forum)**

Governance and Public Administration Officer,  
Public Service Innovation Branch,  
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government,  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat,  
[nilande@un.org](mailto:nilande@un.org)

### **Ms. Victoria Kim (UN Public Service Awards)**

Programme Management Officer  
Public Service Innovation Branch,  
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
[kim47@un.org](mailto:kim47@un.org)

### **Mr. Enkel Daljani**

Programme Management Assistant,  
Public Service Innovation Branch,  
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government,  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Secretariat,  
[daljani@un.org](mailto:daljani@un.org)