[REFORMS IN REVIEW PART 5: REFORMING THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION AND PUBLIC SECTOR](http://policymof.gov.af/home/reforms-in-review-part-5-reforming-the-civil-service-commission-and-public-sector/)

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| “Successful applicants will see the results of their hard work. They are qualified on the basis of open competition and their own merit. They are thus indebted to none.” – Ahmad Nader Nadery, IARCSC Chairman |

One lasting legacy of violence in Afghanistan was the capture of state institutions by strongmen, resulting in deeply entrenched patronage networks. Foundational reforms have been underway since 2014 to address the damage done by this legacy in order to restore transparency and fairness to government recruitment, and ensure service-delivery as a basic right of Afghan citizens. Goals of public sector reforms under the National Unity Government, as laid out in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the National Strategy for Combatting Corruption include 1) building a responsive and effective public administration system, and 2) replacing patronage with merit in the civil service.

**Reforms at the Civil Service Commission**

The Independent Administrative Reforms and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), under the leadership of Chairman Nader Nadery, has been at the core of implementing reforms and has undertaken sweeping changes across the civil service since 2016 to professionalize government and cut patronage and corruption from the system.

***Legislative reforms***

Legislative reforms laid the legal foundation for creating a level playing field. A number of public administration laws were reviewed and revised, and new laws and policies enacted, with further laws in pipeline. [An extensive list of laws can be found here.](https://iarcsc.gov.af/en/legal-documents/)

Some of the key ones include a new Civil Servants Law endorsed by President Ashraf Ghani in March 2018, which reinstated the authority of the IARCSC Appointment Board to recruit civil servants in the Rank B Grades 1 and 2 and to monitor recruitment of lower grades by respective institutions, including civil servants in the Judiciary. The law states that civil servants who are terminated from duty or sentenced to a term of imprisonment of more than one year for corruption crimes are barred from serving in the civil service for five years. In addition to instituting merit-based recruitment procedures, the amendments also outlined a performance appraisal system and disciplinary sanctions for civil servants. The Law on Administrative Procedure was published in the Official Gazette, Extraordinary Issue No. 1298 on April 4, 2018, and helps resolve disputes between employees and employers.

Gender equality and integration has also been a focus. An anti-sexual harassment policy was implemented in 2016 across the public sector, and an anti-sexual harassment law passed in 2018. The IARCSC introduced a Gender Integration Policy in 2018 to increase the number of women in government. Estimates show that roughly 22.5 % of government employees are women (a 0.6% increase from 2015)—the goal is to increase that to 30% over the next 5 years. The goal for 2018 is to increase the number of women by 2%. In the recruitment process, women are awarded five extra points.

***Structural and procedural reforms, namely instituting a transparent recruitment system***

A core aim of reform is to institute systems and procedures that ensure a level-playing field. The most relevant has been professionalizing the civil service recruitment process, which has restored citizens trust in the government’s hiring system.

*Merit-based recruitment, including for teachers*

Merit-based, transparent mass recruitment processes have been implemented across the country for all government bodies and institutions, to cut patronage practices. All civil servant positions are now advertised publicly via an [online recruitment platform](http://www.csjobs.gov.af/job_vacancy/job_list) launched in early 2018 and all applications must be submitted through the online platform. This allows the recruitment process to be more effectively and efficiently monitored, more transparent and less susceptible to corruption.

Results of mass recruitment efforts so far have included hiring 697 new staff across government procurement departments; introduction of merit-based recruitment for teachers at the Ministry of Education; and 177,00 positions (rank 5 & 6) including 8,000 teacher positions advertised for open competition. Of note is the reformed recruitment process for teachers, which used to be centered on  bribe-taking. The collective exam was administered in 34 provinces in the presence of civil society representatives. Around 280,000 people applied, of which 225,670 applicants were eligible to take the tests. To ensure transparency and prevent any undue interference, the applicants were biometrically registered and exam papers were evaluated electronically.

*Expanding reforms to government ministries and institutions*

The IARCSC is also spearheading efforts to institute such reforms in all government ministries and bodies. So far, the following Ministries have been evaluated and had reform efforts initiated: Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Public Health, Mines and Petroleum, Commerce and Industry, Refugees and Repatriation, Hajj and Endowment, Energy and Water, Counter Narcotics, Education, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, the Kabul Municipality, the Central Statistics Organization, and the Afghanistan National Standards Authority.

Of note is the work that IARCSC has been doing with the Independent Directorate for Local Governance on recruitment and performance assessment of deputy governors, district governors, and mayors. For the first time in the country’s history, mayors are being recruited through a transparent, competitive process instead of being appointed directly by the President. To date, 15 new city mayors (Nili, Mazar-e Sharif, Faizabad, Mahmud Raqi, Aibak, Sar-e Pol, Qalat, Maidan Shahr, Bazarak, Kunduz, Tarinkot, Jalalabad, Zaranj, Pol-e Khomri and Ghazni) have been recruited via a new transparent and merit-based recruitment process.

The IARCSC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) recently signed a joint reform agreement. As a result, 16 MoFA staff members were retired in accordance with the provisions enshrined in article 138 of the Labour Law and approved by the Promotion and Retirement Commission.  Furthermore, 49 MoFA staff members who failed to present their bachelor’s degrees were dismissed through a presidential decree.

*Allowing space for citizen feedback*

On November 26, 2017, the IARCSC leadership’s initiated face-to-face meetings with citizens. Since then, 2,424 people from all of Afghanistan’s provinces have participated in these meetings. Women constitute 10.5 % of participants. The number of recorded complaints is 1,266, of which 1,173 have been addressed and the remaining under investigation. A special committee was established to oversee the recruitment process and ensure further transparency, which includes representatives of several government offices, foreign diplomats, development agencies, members of civil society, and media.

***Using performance-based management, rewarding excellence and disciplining under-performance***

Aside from amending the Civil Servants law in 2018 to include a merit-based recruitment procedure, a performance appraisal system and disciplinary sanctions for civil servants, the IARCSC also houses the Capacity Building for Results Program, an Afghan-led institutional reform and capacity building program that extends civil service training, technical assistance, and project management assistance to improve the capacity and performance of the core line ministries. Under the National Unity Government, the CBR was integrated into the IARCSC and reformed, merging two CBR units into one that is structurally and organizationally smaller and more effective. In 2017, significant progress was made in expanding the CBR, with 1,273 positions selected through the program post-2016 in comparison to only 144 positions before 2016.

In May 2018, the IARCSC also launched an awards program, the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award, to recognize and award excellence, efficiency, productivity and creativity in public service.

The Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) is in development, which provides previously unrecorded statistical information on civil servants. The HRMIS records accurate information about civil servants in the capital and provinces as well as information about personnel affairs. The IARCSC has recently purchased 94 biometric registration kits to record civil servant information which will begin in 2019.

**Reforms across the public sector**

*Enhancing the effectiveness of service delivery across government*

Recognizing the centrality of convenient delivery of quality services to the Afghan people, the National Unity Government initiated a number of reforms to increase effectiveness of service delivery, heavily utilizing technology.

[Asan Khedmat](http://www.asan.gov.af/)is the the government’s landmark consolidated service delivery center to facilitate public service delivery for public entities under one roof in a quick and easy manner, and is modeled after Azerbaijan’s consolidated public service delivery model. A new building to house Asan Khedmat is currently being constructed in Kabul city, with branches planned throughout the provinces. To date, 12 processes and services have been streamlined and digitized,  including electronic passports that comply with International Civil Aviation Organization standards, work permit application, visa extension, and population registration. Mobile salary payments have been implemented at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled and are now being rolled out across government.  Work in on-going to roll out further services, and multiple trainings have been delivered across government to institutionalize Asan Khedmat systems.

The Ministry of Communications and Technology has also made significant reforms to the national postal service. Afghan Post is launching the country’s first post office box program in Kabul in Macroyan neighborhood, and a new postal law is being developed to privatize the industry to increase competition and fairness.

Critical steps have been taken to digitize national identification. Roll-out of electronic identification starts (e-tazkira) commenced in February 2018, which is a major step toward streamline service delivery to citizens, and cutting opportunities for bribes, fraud and corruption in public administration and election. Now, Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan are now able to get e-passports**,**and services for Hajis (religious pilgrims to Mecca) now include the distribution of smart bracelets, electronic passports, and a reduction in fees.

The education sector has also undergone reforms designed to level the playing field for students seeking university admission. In 2017, Kankor, the national university entrance exam, once notorious for being rife with corruption, underwent rigorous scrutiny and reform. Managerial and technical reforms, as well as digitizing the exam and assigning each applicant with a biometric identification number, have cut opportunities for patronage and increased transparency. The exams were also assessed electronically. As a result, the percentage of failed applicants dropped from 45% in 2014 to 13% in 2015. 147,000 out of 169,000 applicants who sat for the Kankor passed the exam.

**Moving Forward**

The following are reforms priorities for the IARCSC over the next two years:

* In order to reduce the number of existing pay grades and harmonize the whole pay structure, IARCSC will unify the Pay and Grade scale, payroll management and merit-based appointments systems.
* All remaining vacant civil service positions will be announced and will be filled through a competitive process.
* Human Resource Management Information System developed and integrated with Afghanistan Financial Management Information System payroll module.
* Merit-based appointments procedure for deputy ministries and cadres developed and approved by IARCSC.
* Grade 1 and 2 appointments procedure applied for all new recruitment and all vacant posts filled, resulting in 10% of female civil servants in Grade 1 and 2 positions
* Initiation of the annual Civil Service Performance Index covering all government budgetary units (except the security sector) and evaluation of their performance based on specific indicators and sub indicators including: Strategic Planning; Organizational Leadership; Financial and Procurement Management; Human Resource Management; Monitoring and Evaluation; Public Relations and Access to Information; Transparency and Accountability.