



2023 ACSH ANNUAL CONFERENCE MERITOCRACY. INTEGRITY. INNOVATION

Date: 17-19 May 2023 (Wednesday – Friday)

Place : Astana, Kazakhstan

CONCEPT NOTE

Context

The Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH, Hub), in partnership with the Agency for Civil Service Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan will hold its 2023 Annual Conference on May 17-19 in Astana, Kazakhstan. This occasion which marks the ACSH's tenth anniversary offers an excellent opportunity for national, regional, and international stakeholders to review the ACSH's accomplishments, and to consider its legacy and future role in promoting public service excellence in the region and beyond. The three-day gathering will bring together a multitude of culturally and geographically diverse experts, practitioners, decision-makers, and scholars.

Evidently, states governed by **meritocratic principles** enjoy a better performing civil service which is at the heart of government effectiveness required for the sustainable development of any country. In fact, civil servants – who lead and improve major government functions – directly impact the quality of governance. Furthermore, the recent pandemic has once again highlighted the critical importance of **integrity** in civil service, which is imperative to deal with the public and their affairs fairly, efficiently, and sensitively, and thus, to ensure public trust in governance. Another valuable tool to increase government efficiency in the new reality is **innovation** boosted through the application of modern technologies accelerated by the pandemic worldwide.

In light of this, this year's conference will focus on *Meritocracy, Integrity, and Innovation*, outlining participating countries' efforts towards their implementation. The ACSH will assume its familiar role as a multilateral platform for the exchange of knowledge and experience in line with its three main pillars of activities, i.e., capacity-building and peer learning, research and knowledge management, and cooperation and partnerships.

The upcoming Conference encompasses several activities aimed at encouraging its participants to exchange their views and experiences in employing merit systems, promoting integrity, and boosting innovation in new settings, and reinvigorating the Hub's partnerships of knowledge and experience exchange on improving governance systems and government efforts to better respond to current and future challenges. Moreover, it is expected that such partnership schemes will play a pivotal role in introducing new opportunities for collective action contributing towards more inclusive, resilient, and peaceful societies and thus accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals' objectives.

Objective

The goal of the conference is to facilitate dialogue, and debate, and raise awareness about the ACSH's successes and challenges it has faced over the past decade. The gathering is also expected to provide the Hub with direct input from practitioners and academic communities about their expectations from the ACSH's future activities.

The Conference also aims to initiate a vigorous exchange of knowledge and experience among the participants, and to expose them to successful practices and solutions in employing merit systems, promoting integrity, and boosting innovation, while strengthening cooperation in the field of civil service and enhancing ACSH experts' network of partnerships.

Conference Structure and Components

The conference will be held over three days, and its structure has been designed with the aim of ensuring targeted deliberations and a broader debate on key topics, encompassing everyone in attendance. The keynote presentations will set the tone for the conference and lay some of the groundwork for all its debates and discussions. The conference will also include four panel sessions, a workshop, and three roundtables, to facilitate further exchange and discussion on the main conference topics.

Speeches:

- The conference will begin with welcoming remarks by the ACSH leadership, high-level stakeholders, and partners.

Keynote presentations:

- The conference will feature four expert talks by prominent international experts whose expertise falls into the main theme of the Conference, followed by a 10-minute question and answer session.

Panels: The conference will include five panel discussions lasting for 1,5-2 hours each, including extensive time for questions and discussion. They will be chaired by experienced moderators, who are expected to actively facilitate discussion. Panel members will present for about 10 minutes each, and the remaining time will be open for deliberations.

Panel 1 – Meritocracy in action: best practices and the experience of Hub's participating countries (with the Agency for Civil Service Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the HR Association Qazaqstan)

The Astana Civil Service Hub and the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs will hold a joint panel session aimed at revealing current merit-based approaches for attracting, selecting, and retaining civil servants. A keynote speaker from Belgium and leading practitioners from Canada, Maldives, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Tajikistan, and USA will share their experiences, as well as best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of principles of meritocracy in their civil service systems.

- Panel 2 – Presentation of ACSH’s recent research initiatives

The findings of recent studies commissioned by the ACSH will be presented for panel discussion. Prepared by prominent experts from Greece, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, UK, and USA, these studies are focused on various aspects of the Conference theme, including public human resource management, public management, civil service compensation, behavioural public policy, and others.

- Panel 3 – Prevention of Corruption and Promotion of Ethics in Civil Service: Best Practices and Unique Cases

The ACSH will organise this joint session in cooperation with the Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Some practical mechanisms for setting and institutionalizing high standards of ethical conduct integrity, as well as best anti-corruption approaches will be shared by a keynote speaker from Slovenia and leading practitioners from China, India, Kazakhstan, and the Philippines. The session will also address the emerging challenges to transparency and accountability, access to information and eroding safeguards, integrity violations, fraud and corruption and restrictions to participation.

- Panel 4 – Building effective communications

While the first part of the Roundtable will be dedicated to the discussion of findings of the recent analysis of “Communication Channels Used by the Government Agencies with the Population”, commissioned by the ACSH and prepared by the Public Opinion Research Institute; in the second part leading practitioners from the Hub’s participating countries will engage the attendees into an active discussion of how to build effective government communications in the context of the new reality.

- Panel 5 – Digitalisation in HR

This panel discussion will be built around transforming traditional HR processes using digital technology. Global and regional best practices of adopting digital human resource tools and strategies to improve the employee experience and enhance operational performance through data-driven, automated practices will be shared by leading civil service and private sector practitioners from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Korea, and Uzbekistan.

Roundtable 1:

- Cultural and civilizational aspects of the development of public administration: from Lagash and Al-Farabi to the present day

This panel aims at exploring civilizational knowledge to advance the understanding of public governance and possibly helping toward the solution of contemporary challenges. Using cultural legacy as a source of experience, it is expected to enable participants to look beyond contemporary administrative behaviour and systems and investigate the roots and branches of modern government. The panel speakers include experts from Austria, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.

Roundtable 2:

- Teaching public administration and public policy: sharing good practices

This activity provides a platform for the exchange of teaching experience in the field of public administration and local government, and for networking among professors and heads of departments / schools of universities.

Workshop:

- Change Management for Digital Transformation (with the Ministry of the Interior and Safety and the National Information Society Agency of the Republic of Korea)

A two-day capacity development workshop will be organised as part of the regional development project – “*Capacity Building for Innovation in Governance and Digitalisation of Public Services*”, funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea, and jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, and the Astana Civil Service Hub, and the Ministry of the Interior and Safety and the National Information Society Agency of the Republic of Korea. The workshop is aimed at mid- and high-level public officials from the seven participating countries to provide them with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face in their digital transformation trajectory, and how these can be better managed by taking advantage of change management concepts, frameworks, and innovative practices.