

## “Independent, accountable, meritocratic and professional recruitment in Kosovo”

### Recruiting senior positions in the civil service and independent institutions

#### Project Update – March 2020

#### Introduction

This British Embassy project has run since October 2016, with the objective of assisting the Kosovo government with the recruitment of senior positions within the civil service, publicly owned enterprises and in independent agencies. Specifically, the project aims to prevent nepotism and strengthen transparency, meritocracy, and good governance, and to help restore trust in public bodies. Phase 2 of the project began in September 2018, with an expanded remit to include Municipal and Assembly positions. Phase 2 of the project runs until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

Memoranda of Understanding between the British Embassy, Assembly, the Government of Kosovo and Prishtina and Peja Municipalities provide the terms of the project, and list the recruitment processes for which assistance will be provided.

The Implementation Partner for the project is the UK firm BDO, in partnership with PSI. The project team comprises specialists in human resources and work psychology with experience of recruitment of senior managers in the civil service and private sector in the Western Europe, and experience in Kosovo.

Further detail on the project can be found at the project website – [www.kosovoselection.org](http://www.kosovoselection.org)

This paper provides a project update for participants in the project conference on 18 March 2020.

#### The Assessment Process

The Implementation Partner is engaged throughout each assessment process, from the drafting of the advertisement through to the final scoring of candidates at interview.

The methodology draws on internationally-recognised practice for implementing high-stakes selection processes such as Kosovo senior public appointments.

The selection process includes the following two key stages:

- **Shortlisting** of candidate applications against minimum requirements for the role.
- A **competency-based interview** process, including:
  - a presentation on strategic and technical knowledge about the role, organisation and sector.
  - technical interview questions specifically designed to assess the unique requirements of the role.
  - a competency-based interview, exploring the candidate’s past experience and their readiness for a senior leadership role
  - a psychometric test, objectively assessing the candidate’s cognitive ability.

The input provided by the Implementation Partner for each recruitment is as follows:

- consultation and guidance on the advertisement and job description for the role (including any role-specific criteria being considered);

- providing training and briefing documentation for commission members in both the current methodology and wider assessment principles;
- guidance and advice for the secretariat team co-ordinating the assessment;
- monitoring and reporting on the candidate shortlisting processes;
- guidance in selecting relevant competencies to be addressed; and appropriate interview questions (which are drawn from sources provided by the Implementation Partner);
- provision of guidance documentation for each shortlisted candidate on how to prepare for the interview process;
- administration and scoring of psychometric test (included in each selection process);
- monitoring and independently scoring each candidate interview;
- reporting to the British Embassy on outcomes of the interview process, including observations on the objectivity and impartiality of the process.

The process is designed to ensure that each candidate has a consistent experience in the interview, and has equal opportunity to demonstrate their readiness for the role. Evidence is gathered from the candidate in relation to their past experience, behaviours, understanding of the role, and vision of what they can contribute to the organisation. The process then requires Commission members to complete an objective and independent assessment and scoring of each candidate.

Commission members need to take detailed notes at each stage of the interview. When the interview has finished and the candidate has departed they should then independently assess the candidate on each of the competencies and assign a score. At the end of each interview, scores are compared and discussed and an overall Commission score is calculated.

The Implementation Partner carries out the same scoring process in parallel. This enables them to provide an independent evaluation of the process, and also identify any areas in which they believe there are discrepancies between the evidence provided by the candidate and the scores awarded. This provides a basis for discussion with Commission members on the scores awarded, exploring how they have arrived at their conclusions, and querying any areas in which significant discrepancies have arisen. The Implementation Partner's scores are not included in the Commission's overall final score.

Once the interview process has been completed, the Commission reports its conclusions to the relevant Minister, and the Implementation Partner has no further involvement with the final appointment decision.

The Implementation Partner provides an independent report to the British Embassy for communication to the Prime Minister and Speaker. In addition to this, within 48 hours of the conclusion of the process, the Implementation Partner publishes details of the candidates it has deemed to be appointable from the process. Given the independent scoring process completed by the Implementation Partner, these names may not align with the names recommended by the Commission for appointment.

### **Achievements of the Project to Date**

The key achievements of the project to date are outlined below:

- During the full project, a total of 48 recruitment processes have been completed – 36 for Central institutions, 7 for Municipal institutions (Pristina & Peja), and 5 for the Millennium Foundation of Kosovo. Further details of the specific processes can be found in the Annex.
- A broad range of senior stakeholders has now been trained in the competency-based interviewing methodology, and the pool of those trained in the methodology continues to grow. It is notable that following this training, some stakeholders have used key features

of the approach in other selection processes outside the direct remit of the British Embassy project. In these cases we have provided support with advice and materials.

- The website [www.kosovoselection.org](http://www.kosovoselection.org) was launched in December 2018. This has increased the transparency around the selection processes, and it has enabled the Implementation Partner to openly publish its own evaluation of candidates after each selection process has finished. During the past twelve months the functionality of the website has been improved by the inclusion of a candidate guidance section and a resource toolkit for public sector professionals, to help them evaluate their existing recruitment and selection procedures, and adapt procedures where necessary to meet the principles of merit-based assessment.
- Increasing consistency of practice across recruitment Commissions. The standardised assessment format advocated by the project has ensured that the practice used by different Commissions for recruiting into senior positions has become more aligned.
- For a number of recruitment processes, Commission members have taken a detailed and professional approach and effectively implemented the assessment methodology in order to reach a clear, merit-based set of recommendations.
- In terms of outcomes, a total of 826 applications have been assessed, of which 86.1% were male and 13.9% female. In total, 52.6% (432) of these were shortlisted for interview. Male candidates had a higher success rate at shortlisting (54.0%) than female candidates (41.7%). This is likely to be at least partly attributable to widely used minimum term experience requirements (e.g. 5 years' experience in a management position). Historical restrictions of the number of women recruited into such positions is likely to have consequential effects on the number of women eligible to progress onto interview, which highlights the potential problems of continuing to apply such criteria.
- A total of 376 candidates have been interviewed, of which 40.4% (152) were evaluated by the implementation partner team as suitable for appointment. Female candidates had a much higher recommended rate at interview (53.5%) compared to males (38.7%). This highlights that when female candidates do make it to interview stage, they tend to demonstrate greater readiness for appointment to senior positions.

## **The Future**

Turning from the achievements of the present to the possibilities of the future, it is clear that there are both opportunities and challenges.

### **Opportunities:**

- **New Government, New Political Will.** The election of a new government presents a window of opportunity to step up the progress made by the project to date, and directly challenge situations in which non-meritocratic recruitment is still occurring.
- **Ongoing Public Support.** The findings of a recent independent project review commissioned by the British Embassy have shown continued widespread support for the project.
- **Ongoing Training, Mentoring and Support.** We have continued to extend the range and number of staff who have been trained in the principles and methods of merit-based recruitment. We have recently trained almost 100 HR Managers across both central and municipal Kosovo institutions. We are continuing to mentor a broad range of public leaders and administrative teams in the running of fair and evidence-based selection processes.

- **Attraction of New Applicants.** Some recently appointed candidates have stated that they had not previously applied for roles in the public sector, and would not have considered doing so without the involvement of the British Embassy project. This provides some evidence of a positive shift in perceptions around public sector appointments, with a broader range of applicants considering putting themselves forward.
- **Practical Evidence of Success.** The project has resulted in a number of very successful appointments, in which there has been complete consensus between the commission and project representatives on the top performing candidates. These candidates have gone on to demonstrate their capability and suitability for the role, and have provided a clear example of where meritocratic appointments can work successfully.
- **Cascade Effect.** The more senior appointments that are made through merit-based practices, the more senior officials there will be in post who are committed to merit-based appointments throughout their organisation. As the momentum of this continues to grow, appointments based on political influence and nepotism will become increasingly difficult.
- **Independent Monitoring and Challenge.** The project has had close alignment with Civil Society organisations, which has enabled scrutiny of both the Commissions' selection decisions, and also our own. We are continuing to work with a range of civil society organisations to equip them with the resources to continue to monitor recruitment processes after the end of this project.
- **Transparency.** The project website, and ongoing independent monitoring, have given the opportunity for members of the public to gain an insight into the quality of candidates entering the assessment processes.
- **Making the Right Appointment.** As the project has progressed, there has been a growing recognition of the need to acknowledge and manage the situation where *none* of the applicants are of a sufficient quality to make an appointment. While this can be frustrating and can cause delays and potential disruption of the institution, it has helped send an important message that commissions are willing to re-advertise and temporarily delay an appointment in order to ensure that a candidate with the right skills, experience and aptitude is selected.
- **Law on Public Officials & National Admissions Commission** The new legislation offers the opportunity to build on existing practices, and gives the potential to appoint a dedicated appointment commission that is highly skilled and makes consistent, evidence-based selection decision.
- **EU Accession.** There is an EU requirement that selection processes will be merit based – and there is a need to demonstrate compliance with this in order to fulfil the European Reform Agenda.
- **DMPO.** The role of the new Department for the Management of Public Officials presents both opportunities and challenges. Success will depend upon getting the right expertise and people who can operate and influence others to act in line with the law and best practice.

## Challenges:

- **Continued Attraction of Quality Applicants.** While some progress has been made on this, there remains a significant challenge in terms of attracting quality applicants, particularly those from outside the traditional pool of candidates who apply for senior public appointments. Kosovo has a rich and diverse range of talented professionals, who have the potential and skills to make a real difference in senior public sector roles. Further work to genuinely understand the range of factors deterring potential candidates from applying for roles, and addressing these factors, will help to ensure that the quality of appointments continues to rise.
- **Public Trust and Confidence.** The country has not yet reached a position where there are high levels of public trust and confidence that recruitment and selection processes will be applied fairly and based on merit. During the last twelve months there have been instances of appointments or delays that undermine such trust. Future practice will no doubt be watched closely.
- **Continuing vested interests / interference in processes.** We have worked with many talented and committed professionals who are committed to achieving the right outcome from appointments. We have also seen situations in which scores awarded to candidates do not match the evidence, and it appears that factors other than meritocracy are influencing evaluations. The independence of commission members, and the political will for this to be maintained, will be a critical success factor for long-term positive changes to appointment practices.
- **Understanding of Professional Practice.** The project has helped build an understanding of how the principles and practices used in the project produce merit-based outcomes – however, there is some way to go for that understanding to be translated into sustainable application.
- **Diversity & Inclusion.** During the course of the project, there have been a number of successes, for example with female candidates demonstrating exceptional performance at interview, and subsequently being appointed into senior roles. This represents the early steps of a long journey towards greater gender and ethnicity balance in senior public appointments. This is despite eligibility criteria sometimes impacting disproportionately on some minority groups (e.g. opportunity to have accrued 5 years senior managerial experience) which may have been exacerbated in a system that has not previously operated based on merit.
- **Attraction Strategies.** These will need to continue to actively encourage applications from under-represented groups, and an increasing number of postholders from these groups will help to demonstrate the importance and value of women and ethnic minorities applying for positions. The ongoing use of merit-based recruitment practices will also help ensure that bias does not undermine the progress in this area.
- **Ongoing Culture Change.** The role of legislation is important in establishing fair and meritocratic selection processes, but legislation can only go so far in preventing nepotism and unfair practices. There is an ongoing need to continue in changing behaviour and organisational culture, so that everyone involved in the selection process is ultimately trusted and accountable for their own actions and decisions. In turn, candidates will need to feel sufficiently confident of the integrity of the process that they are willing to apply for advertised positions.

- **Legislation.** Detailed legislation can provide some safeguards against corruption of selection processes, but it can also place undue restrictions on innovation and development within the selection practices used. Striking the right balance between legislation / regulation, and genuine behavioural change and trust, will be critical to the long-term success of meritocratic appointments.
- **Continuing to Interview Unsuitable Candidates.** The minimum shortlisting standards for many roles mean that candidates are reaching interview who fall far short of the standard needed to perform effectively in the role. This results in time wasted for both the candidate and the commission, and makes the overall assessment process unnecessarily lengthy. Raising the standard of who is invited to interview will help ensure that the selection processes remain focussed and efficient. The provisions of the updated Law on Public Officials to apply role-specific shortlisting criteria could help to address this challenge.
- **Expectations around Time / Resource Commitment.** We have heard many anecdotes of 10-15 minute interviews being used to select for high profile, critical senior appointments. This runs contrary to internationally-recognised assessment good practice, and will not provide a commission with sufficient information to make an informed selection decision. There needs to be continued recognition that time invested in a quality selection process will pay important dividends for the future leadership and success of the institution.
- **National Admissions Commission.** The appointment of the single group to take responsibility for all senior civil service appointments presents an opportunity, but also a risk, as far greater responsibility is concentrated in single group. The selection of the best possible officials to become members of the commission is crucial, if it is to be credible and effective.
- **Final Appointments not Reflecting Selection Outcome.** Even when there is agreement between the Commission and the Implementation Partner, this has not always resulted in the top-performing candidate being appointed. If a merit-based selection process has been approved and completed, it undermines the integrity of the overall process if the outcomes of the selection process are not observed and an alternative appointment is made. The long-term success of merit-based recruitment rests on the shared political will (across all parties and views) to respect the outcomes of a meritocratic selection process.
- **Tolerance of corruption.** With a history of political interference or nepotism being accepted as a norm, there has to be a wide-spread and shared desire to want to change this for the future – for this to be real and sustained change. It needs to become the norm that people do the right thing, even when there isn't independent oversight.

## RECRUITMENT PROCESSES COMPLETED BY MARCH 2020

## 1. Positions in Central Institutions

Organisation	Position	Date
Kosovo Customs	Director General	Jan-17
Kosovo Employment Agency	Director General	Mar-17
Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK)	Members of The Board	Apr-17
Post and Telecommunications of Kosovo (PTK)	Members of The Board	May-17
Ministry of Justice - Campaign 1 (shortlist only)	Secretary General	May-17
Kosovo Correctional Service - Campaign 1	Director General	Jun-17
Ministry of Justice - Campaign 2	Secretary General	Nov-17
Agency for Industrial Property – Campaign 1 (shortlist only)	Director	Dec-17
Kosovo Accreditation Agency – Campaign 1 (shortlist only)	Director	Dec-17
Energy Regulatory Office of Kosovo	Executive Board Members	Dec-17
Ministry of Trade & Industry	Secretary General	Dec-17
Agency for Vocational Educ & Training & for Adults in Kosovo	Director	Jan-18
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Secretary General	Jan-18
Institute of Legal Medicine – Campaign 1 & 2 (shortlist only)	Director	Feb-18
Kosovo Correctional Service - campaign 2	Director General	Mar-18
Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency (1)	Director	Mar-18
Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency (1)	Deputy Director	Mar-18
Board of Telekom	Directors	Mar-18
Agency for Energy Efficiency (shortlist only)	Chief Executive	Mar-18
Central Procurement Agency	Director	Mar-18
Kosovo Health Insurance Fund	Director	Jul-18
Energy Regulatory Office of Kosovo (Board)	Chair	Jul-18
Kosovo Police	Director General	Aug-18
Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency (2)	Director	Sep-18
Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency (2)	Deputy Director	Sep-18
Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK)	Managing Director	Oct-18
Kosovo Accreditation Agency	Director	Oct-18
Ministry of Innovation & Entrepreneurship	Secretary General	Nov-18
State Advocate General	State Advocate General	Nov-18
State Aid Commission	Commission Members	Dec-18
Kosovo Transmission System Operator (KOSTT)	Board Members	Jan-19
Kosovo Police	Deputy Director General	Jan-19
Tax Administration	Director General	Feb-19
NKEC	Board Members	Mar-19
Kosovo Employment Agency	Director General	Apr-19
Independent Oversight Board	Board Members	Apr-19
National Agency for the Protection of Personal Data (1)	Commissioner	May19

Procurement Review Body (shortlisting only)	Members	May-19
Independent Oversight Board - non-majority communities. Campaign 1. (shortlisting only)	Board Members	Jun-19
RTK - majority communities	Board Members	Jun-19
RTK - non-majority communities	Board Members	July-19
National Agency for the Protection of Personal Data (2)	Commissioner	July-19
Independent Media Commission	Member	Jun-19

**Completed fully: 36**

**Partially completed (shortlisting only): 7**

## 2. Municipal Positions

Pristina Public Housing Enterprise	Board Members	Dec-18
Pristina Bus Station	Chief Executive	Jan-19
Pristina Parking Enterprise - 1	Board Members	Feb-19
Peja Bus Station	Board Members	Mar-19
Prishtina Parking Enterprise - 2	Board Members	Jun-19
Termokos	CEO	Jun-19
Prishtina Parking Enterprise (shortlisting only)	CEO	Feb-20
Prishtina Housing Enterprise	CEO	Feb-20

**Completed fully: 7**

**Partially completed (shortlisting only): 1**

## 3. Millennium Foundation Kosovo Positions

Millennium Foundation Kosovo	Chief Executive	Dec-17
Millennium Foundation Kosovo	Director Admin & Finance	Jan-18
Millennium Foundation Kosovo	Procurement Manager	Jan-18
Millennium Foundation Kosovo	Director Governance	Mar-18
Millennium Foundation Kosovo	Director Energy	Mar-18

**Completed fully: 5**