



Ministry of the Interior and  
Kingdom Relations

# Top Public Managers in Europe

Management and Employment in Central Public Administrations

Management Summary



*This is the management summary of a study published in 2016, titled:*

**“Top Public Managers in Europe.**

**Management and Employment in Central Public Administrations”**

This study is available on the EUPAN website: [www.eupan.eu](http://www.eupan.eu).

**Authors:**

Herma Kuperus and Anita Rode

**Place and date of publishing:**

The Hague, the Netherlands, December 2016

**Copyright:**

Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

**Disclaimer:**

This document has been prepared for the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands. It reflects the views of the authors and the content does not necessarily represent the point of view of the Minister of Housing and the Central Government Sector.

# Top Public Managers in Europe

Management and Employment in Central Public Administrations

Management Summary



Now more than ever, worldwide developments are having an impact on society and the political agenda in each country. With the economic crisis, high unemployment rates, migration, and environmental and security challenges across Europe and the wider world, the role and responsibilities of public administrations are also changing. This globalised world demands new and different public leadership. Top Public Managers (TPM) are a uniting force between developments in society, political governance and the civil service.

This study focuses on the Top Public Managers in Europe, exploring how their role and characteristics have changed together with the global challenges over the last seven years since the original study was published in 2008<sup>1</sup>. TPM have a crucial role in bringing forward and implementing reforms in the public administration. Issues that public administrations deal with have become more global and complex, and interconnected with other policy areas and sectors. Therefore, different qualities in top managers and in their recruitment, selection and development are required.

By looking at changes that public administrations will have to embrace, there is a greater awareness in Member States (MS) that strategic and forward-looking leadership is needed. Due to the fast changing world, top managers have to adapt to situations faster, and be able to understand and react in a complex environment where many topics and issues are interconnected. They need to be able to collaborate with other stakeholders and to actively involve citizens. In many Member States this has led to more special conditions and organisational models for TPM, such as:

- 1) Different selection process to recruit the right qualities, as promotion from the career track often takes too long to acquire the right competencies in TPM
- 2) Fixed-term appointments to ensure learning and development through changing positions, and ensure objectivity, professionalism and ‘whole of government approach’ of the TPM
- 3) Knowledge of ‘leadership’, know-how to work together, combining different policy areas on complex issues and leading permanent change.

This has also led to more mobility and necessity for lifelong learning and development. Through mobility, TPM broaden their options for career pathways, and learn and develop new skills and competencies on the way. More mobility also improves the merit-based appointments in TPM positions, when the long years in civil service are no longer a good enough criterion on their own to be selected as TPM.

This can also be seen in the changes over the last seven years in the civil service **employment systems** across the EU, which show an enormous shift from career civil service systems to the position-based recruitment system on the TPM level. The simple distinction between career-based, hybrid and position-based systems is not appropriate anymore, as purely career-based systems have almost ceased to exist in the EU Member States, especially for the top managers’ group. Almost all Member States that previously had career-based system for TPM have adopted some elements of the position-based system.

**Table 1: Civil service employment systems in Europe in 2008 and 2015<sup>2</sup>**

Number of Member States	Mainly career-based (No. 1)	Career-based + position elements (No. 2)	Real hybrid (No. 3)	Position-based + career elements (No. 4)	Mainly position-based (No. 5)
<b>Civil servants in general</b>					
<b>2008</b>	13		8		7
<b>2015</b>	8	5	2	7	7
<b>Top Public Managers</b>					
<b>2008</b>	11		10		7
<b>2015</b>	1	4	3	7	14

Source: H. Kuperus and A. Rode, *Top Public Managers in Europe*, 2016

<sup>1</sup> Kuperus, H. and Rode, A., *Top Public Managers in Europe. Management and Working Conditions of the Senior Civil Servants in the European Union Member States*. Study commissioned by the French EU presidency. EIPA: Maastricht, December 2008.

<sup>2</sup> In 2008 the table contained only three columns of career, hybrid and position-based systems. However, due to the complexity of hybrid systems, in 2015 an additional questionnaire was sent to the Member States to determine the type of hybrid system that exists in each country, and a more complex overview table was made for 2015 results.

Furthermore, a movement can be seen towards special status and special conditions for TPM, especially towards more centralised elements in TPM recruitment and selection. A couple of countries have also moved from ‘no special conditions’ to ‘special conditions’ for their TPM, which shows the acknowledgement of the differences in TPMs’ work, and therefore the necessity to differentiate their recruitment, employment conditions and organisational matters from that of other civil servants.

**Table 2: Main trends in Member States’ movement in the TPM typology 2008 - 2015**

	Formal TPM status	No formal TPM status
<b>Special Conditions</b>	No.1: 3 MS	No.4: 13 MS
	No.2: 11 MS	
<b>No Special Conditions</b>	No.3: 1 MS	No.5: 1 MS

Source: H. Kuperus and A. Rode, *Top Public Managers in Europe*, 2016

The most commonly used **authority** for the central public administration is the State Chancellery or Prime Minister’s Office or a specific Ministry of Public Administration, Reform or Modernisation of Public Administration.

**Table 3: Responsible authority for (central) public administration (2015)**

	Prime Minister’s office/ State Chancellery	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Interior	Ministry of PA/ Reform/ Modernisation
<b>Responsible for central PA (28 MS)</b>	8	7	5	8
<b>Same (coordinating) institution/ DG for the whole PA</b>	Yes	3	5	4
	No	5	2	4

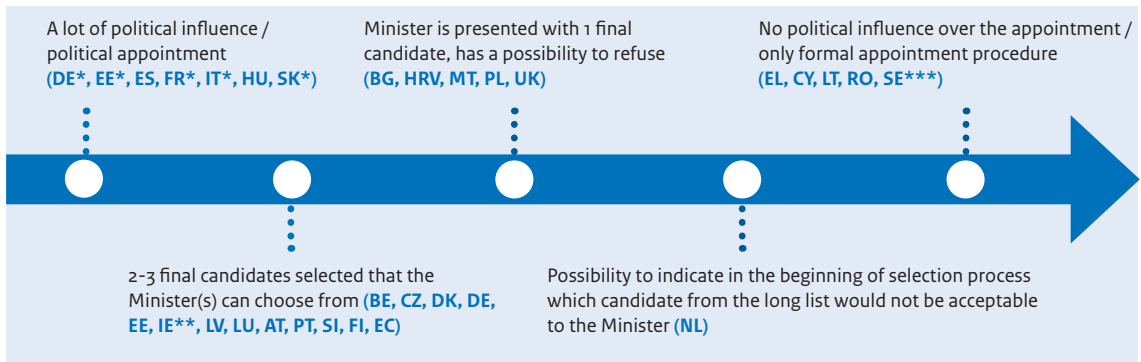
Source: H. Kuperus and A. Rode, *Top Public Managers in Europe*, 2016

In more than half of the Member States, the same authority is also the coordinating body for the whole public administration (including local and regional public administration), although this is often another DG or department within the ministry or it is responsible only for the civil service in general.

Although most TPM have a **permanent employment contract** as a civil servant, a majority of countries (18 MS) use a **fixed-term appointment** for a specific top position, which does not coincide with the election term, in order to minimise the political influence on the TPMs’ work. Fixed-term appointments for TPM positions are also preferred to ensure the permanent development of their professional competencies according to the new challenges and developments and to increase mobility among top managers and breaking silo’s within the public administration. The fixed period of appointment differs between three to seven years, and there are some differences for different TPM levels. In ten Member States on the highest level (1+) and in 11 Member States on the lower levels of TPM positions, the person can be reappointed to the same TPM position at least once. There are several Member States (8 on the highest-level positions and 5 on the lower-level TPM positions), where legislation has ruled that top managers cannot be re-appointed in the same TPM position for another term. Two Member States use a probationary period for TPM of one to two years.

Generally, there tends to be some **involvement of politicians** in appointing the highest level top public managers, as a measure to ensure the TPMs’ competency of responsiveness to the elected officials. TPM work for, and in close cooperation with, their ministers. Therefore, in most cases, politicians will need to be – to some extent – involved in the selection and assessment of the highest-ranking civil servants. The levels of political involvement, however, differ a lot among the countries. This is related both to a country’s history, public administration system and the civil service recruitment system that each country has adopted. It is important to take into account that there might be the right legislation and rules in place, but their implementation can be difficult. Countries with long democratic tradition can afford to possibly have more political involvement in TPM appointment than countries with new democratic traditions. The graph below shows the scale of political influence based on the legal picture seen in countries’ fact sheets.

**Graph 1: Political influence during the selection and appointment of TPM, level 1+ & 1**



Source: H. Kuperus and A. Rode, *Top Public Managers in Europe*, 2016

\*Refers to level 1+ (or the highest level) TPM positions only.

\*\*In Ireland when selecting a TPM for level 1+ position, minister can choose from 3 candidates; for levels 1 and 2, only formal appointment by the minister of the one final selected candidate.

\*\*\* In Sweden can be transferred to another position.

While adjusting to the fast changing environment in which TPM work today, it is even more crucial to ensure merit principles and objective decision-making in the public administration.

It is important to decrease the influence of temporary politics, follow principles of merit, and focus on **recruitment and selection** of the most qualified persons for the TPM jobs. Member States focus much more on selecting TPM candidates on the basis of their competencies, and many countries use central selection committees (in 13 MS) and independent bodies overseeing the selection process (in three MS) to ensure that the most qualified candidate is selected. This is especially important for the highest levels of TPM in order to avoid favouritism and political influence at the level where TPM can exert the most influence; however, the same approach is often used for the lower levels of top management as well. Therefore, in most Member States recruitment is no longer limited to internal candidates but is also open to external candidates. TPM often need to have broader experience in different work areas and environments, as well as in different sectors and organisations. Such experience contributes largely to the TPM's overall knowledge and skills for working in such a challenging environment with different topical issues.

**Performance assessment** is one of the most prominent ways to keep TPM accountable, depending on their role and level of management. In a nutshell, performance assessments need to focus on assessing the results TPM have achieved. Therefore, they should be clearly defined at the beginning of the appointment term or annually, related to the role on each TPM level. It is important that TPM can show how their actions have contributed to achieving an organisation's goals, and show examples of their skills and competencies used in the process.

Also, good measuring tools need to be used, and there have to be defined consequences for good and bad performance alike. Overall, fixed term appointments to TPM positions are beneficial for assessing TPMs' performance and achieved goals during their term in office. They allow for assessing a TPM's work during the appointment term and help in deciding whether the term should be prolonged, if allowed by law, or not.

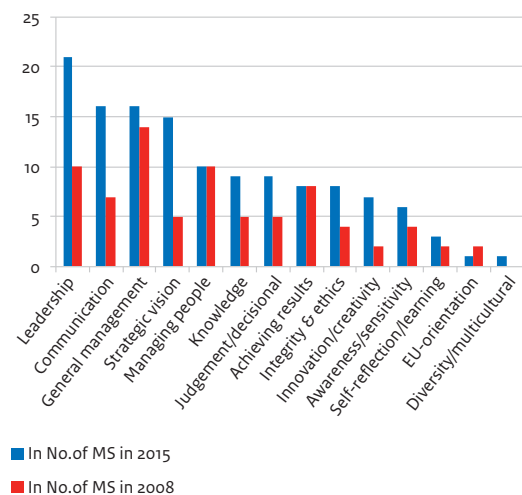
It can be difficult to develop the right appraisal criteria for TPM evaluation due to the political environment and policies that they cannot (always) control. Most countries are trying to reduce the role of politicians in the recruitment and assessment of TPM.

In the EU Member States, the assessment results are most commonly used for career advancement, pay increase, contract renewal, and training needs and individual development for TPM. The main focus of performance assessment could be to limit the possibilities for an automatic system of promotion or prolonging a TPM contract without showing agreed-upon results. In addition, performance assessments could be used to assess how TPM permanently have to improve their competencies in order to be prepared for future challenges. Because the world is changing rapidly and continually, with increasing requirements for interaction, collaboration and communication, internally as well as externally, TPM need to grow and develop accordingly. This starts with the awareness that everybody, including TPM, needs lifelong learning. To realise the gaps in their own skills and knowledge, self-reflection is a crucial competency for TPM.

Many more Member States have introduced (central) **competency profiles** for TPM and they are more often linked with the training and development programmes as well, assuring a follow-up approach to competency management through recruitment of the right competencies until assessment and training for their improvement and development.

Most European Member States have introduced **leadership** competency for top managers in the competency profiles. Also, requirements for **strategic vision** and **communication** skills have increased. On the other hand, such important competencies as self-reflection, EU-orientation and diversity are still not very common in the Member States. This is surprising, as TPM today need to act in ever-changing, complex and interlinking environments, involving people of different nationalities, ages, genders and disabilities. Also, very few Member States assess TPM on self-reflection, self-learning and awareness competencies, which are the basis for good leadership and leaders. See graph 2 on the most commonly used competencies in TPMs' competency profiles in 2008 and 2015.

**Graph 2: Changes in TPM competencies 2008 – 2015**



Source: H. Kuperus and A. Rode, *Top Public Managers in Europe, 2016*

According to the literature, competencies such as learning agility, self-awareness, comfort with ambiguity, and strategic thinking will be needed to lead within a VUCA world. However, although there is progress in Member States in implementing competency profiles and some of the more general leadership and strategic vision competencies, the focus on self-awareness, **self-reflection and self-learning, environmental awareness, diversity** and multicultural competencies, as well as EU-orientation is still very low. If European public administrations want to prepare their top managers for the challenges ahead, there is a need for greater focus on developing self-understanding, willingness to learn (even if through mistakes) and awareness of inter-linkages between sectors and different stakeholders for top public managers that can be part of a solution to a complex problem.

The study results show that the majority of Member States have included the topic of leadership as part of TPM **training and development**. Further, the topics of general management

are still highly on the TPM training agenda. Training focussed on Public Administration policy (including topics of good governance, transparency and effectiveness) has grown in popularity over the last few years, showing increasing importance for TPM to understand public policy processes and the specifics of working in the public administration sector. Specific skills training, e.g. in communication and public procurement as well as ICT and innovation, were seen in less than half of the Member States. Also, very few countries are training and developing their TPM on topics of self-reflection or self-learning and self-management, which form a crucial part of leadership competencies, as they help leaders to see their shortcomings and to grow further.

In general, it can be observed that Member States with a long position-based tradition are now focussing less on basic general management knowledge and skills, and more on personal development of specific skills and behaviour.

Training in EU-orientation and diversity is still rare in EU Member States, which seems odd in today's globalised environment, where countries have similar challenges and populations and the workforce has become more diverse (in age, ethnicity etc.). There seems to be room for a more common exchange between European colleagues, so that EU-related topics and issues, as well as the common challenges that all TPM face in the EU, are more prominent and visible in public administrations. It is incomprehensible in today's world where people from different nationalities, races, ages and genders work together, in an ever more European and international environment, that no specific attention is given to these topics in the development of TPM. For example, diversity should be a basic competency for all civil servants, but TPM in particular need to show their ability to steer, and work with, diverse groups within their organisation and networks. Dealing with different cultures is essential both within national public administration and internationally.

Changes have also occurred in regard to **training and development methods**. Experience sharing among TPM has become a rather common way of training and development and takes place in twelve Member States. Such informal training methods are easier to fit in TPMs' schedules and give them more chance to learn from each other. A new trend in some Member States is also to tailor-make and adjust training to the individual needs of TPM. This training focus was not present in 2008. It shows that there is greater focus on assessing a TPM's performance and ways to improve TPM competencies to bring them to the next level. E-learning, however, takes place in only nine Member States. While this method could easily be adjusted to a TPM's timetable and individual needs, its low presence in the Member States might be related to the organisational culture and difficulty to change the traditional ways of learning to which people are accustomed.



With more complex problems emerging for public administration to solve, expertise from different areas is needed. One of the ways to gain this expertise is by hiring people with the necessary competencies; another way is by breaking silos in the organisations and encouraging mobility between them. Furthermore, it is preferred for TPM not to stay in the same position for long periods of time so that they do not become politically attached. Fixed-term appointments are one of the ways that **mobility** is encouraged for TPM. Another way is by guided mobility schemes for civil servants or top civil servants, such as in the European Commission.

In the EU Member States, the most common mobility scheme takes place between ministries and agencies in the central public administration. This is closely followed by mobility within one ministry. There seem to be a lot of differences in possibilities to exchange between public and private sectors, depending on the public administration culture and historical attitudes towards each of the working sectors. International mobility occurs mainly within the European Union and mostly concerns secondment of national civil servants to the EU institutions or the European Commission officials to EU delegations, EU agencies or other EU institutions.

Mobility in public administration organisations and between sectors or even internationally could offer opportunities for TPMs' lifelong learning, especially since TPM cannot always continue their career in an upwards trajectory within the organisation. Lateral moves on the same or even lower level in a different organisation offer plenty of challenges to develop new skills and competencies and to learn. Continuous learning and development are crucial for becoming and remaining a good top manager. Cross-ministerial, cross-sector and even cross-border mobility are good ways to encourage lifelong learning and variety in career paths for top public managers.

It is increasingly recognised that civil service should be inclusive, also that TPM should represent the **diversity** of the society they serve and public administrations should use all the qualified workforce available on the labour market. Four main areas on which **diversity** policies in the EU Member States focus are:

- Women
- Ageing workforce in the public administration, especially policies on older workers (DK, AT), but also on age distribution across public administration (AT), and inclusion of youth (FR).
- Disabled, including targets/quotas and sanctions (BE, CZ, DE, IE, ES, FR, IT, NL, AT, PL, PT, SI).
- Other ethnicities and immigrants (non-western) (BE, DK, SE, UK).

So far not all countries embrace these diversity topics, but with the challenges of ageing population, youth unemployment and migration flows, it is highly likely that they will be on the government's agendas sooner rather than later. Also, inclusion of diversity in the workforce will lead to a mixture of skills, competencies and perspectives that will help governments work more efficiently and innovatively.

Most of the EU Member States target two of the same elements in their diversity strategies: gender diversity and people with disabilities. With regards to female representation, in comparison to 2008, there were generally more women in top public management positions in 2015. Most of the Member States have increased female representation in TPM positions at least by ten percentage points. At the same time, for the majority of the EU countries there are at least 10% more women at level 2 (director/ head of department) than at level 1 (secretary general and director general) TPM positions. In three Member States (EE, HRV, LT) the number of women in

**Table 4: Distribution of women in TPM positions in EU Member States (%) in 2015\***

Level 1		Level 2
>60%		Slovenia
>50%	Slovenia	Romania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Sweden, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal
>40%	Greece, Romania, Poland, Latvia, Sweden, Slovakia	Greece, Finland, Slovakia, Poland
30-40%	Spain, Bulgaria, Portugal, Finland, Italy	Austria, Cyprus, Malta, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands, Luxembourg, France
20-30%	Lithuania, France, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, United Kingdom	Ireland, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Hungary
10-20%	Germany, Denmark, Hungary	Belgium
<10%	Belgium, Ireland	
None	Luxemburg	

Source: European Commission database on gender equality in National public administrations. Data collected between 03/07/2015-15/12/2015 FR: Data refer to situation as of 31/12/2013; EL: Data refer to situation as of 04/11/2014 ([http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/public-administration/national-administrations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/public-administration/national-administrations/index_en.htm))

\*Note: within each group, countries are ordered by decreasing share. Shares exactly on the border between groups are promoted to the higher group.

level 2 positions is almost double of the number of women in level 1 positions. This seems like a lot of existing potential is already there for level 1 positions in the future, but it could also mean that there is some kind of blockade impeding women from reaching the very top positions. The table below shows a more detailed overview of female representation in TPM positions in the EU.

To sum up, a diverse workforce in the EU Member States could be seen as a valuable resource to improve public service delivery in more diverse societies. Such diversity policies in EU Member countries can be largely dependent on each country's specific political focus, and national and cultural situation.

When working towards more efficient and effective public administration, **flexible working arrangements** can be helpful. Today, flexible working arrangements are still not common for TPM in several EU countries. The least popular flexible work arrangements are part-time work and telework, which are not explicitly defined in legislation or not allowed in eight and ten Member States respectively.

The most common flexible measure in the workplace is flexible working hours (in 21 MS). This mainly refers to different start and end times of work, and a different number of hours worked per day or week. It is interesting to see that, in several countries where there is no possibility to work part-time and/or from home, if any flexibility is allowed it is for flexible working hours or times. This can be explained by the fact that it is the easiest measure to introduce and manage, with the fewest costs and investments/changes needed, as well as having an easier control mechanism over the employees' actions (than for working from home for example).

There are still gaps between regulated arrangements and their practical availability, especially on the TPM level. Even if there is a legal right, implementation of flexible working arrangements can be difficult due to the working or organisational culture in the particular country or public administration sector. Flexible working arrangements are also very much linked with the result orientation and definition of the outputs that the (top) civil servant should achieve in a certain period. In order for flexible working arrangements to work, there needs to be trust between the employee and his/her superior, as well as defined measurable outputs.

In regard to the **future** and what awaits public administrations and top managers, this is difficult to predict. But some trends are visible. Member States are all going in a certain direction, but they do not just follow one particular model. Instead, they adjust the reform trends to their particular civil service system, public administration traditions and/or level of acceptance on the political level and in society. Also, because each country is in a different stage of reform or developments, the actions can differ,

but there is some convergence in Europe, such as a similar direction and end goal for the majority of Member States. This can be seen, for example, in the trend towards having more and more position-based employment systems, at least for TPM. But will this trend continue in the future or will there be a turning point, with Member States again introducing some elements of career-based systems, for example to offer a career perspective for TPM? Can the fact that some Member States introduce pools of merit-based selected potential TPM candidates, from which TPM are exclusively selected, be seen as a way for the future? What can talent management initiatives offer their participants beyond training and development activities? And how does one ensure that everybody who fits the selection criteria is able to apply?

Most Member States focus their TPM-related reforms on transparency and political neutrality in recruitment and selection procedures, the importance of the right competencies for TPM and their training and development, as well as emphasising the role of performance assessment and TPMs' accountability, which have an impact on TPMs' future careers. Furthermore, some changes in the legal system for civil service can be observed. For example, the special employment conditions for civil servants have been changed so that they are more like other employees on the labour market and are governed by labour law. The reverse is also happening. This will also have an impact on the formal status of and special conditions for TPM.

Due to cost saving and the rise in the pension age, smaller public administrations, an ageing workforce and the need to work longer could lead to fewer TPM positions and more candidates. This can have an impact on TPMs' salaries and position in the labour market. As more and more countries appoint TPM for a fixed period, and public administrations are willing to save costs and support horizontal mobility and 'zigzag careers', in the future TPM salaries will possibly be raised only for the appointment period to a TPM position and afterwards decreased to the previous level or to that of the following position.

With the further overhaul by internet and digital technologies, as well as new competencies and relations with stakeholders, it is likely that competency development for TPM is permanently needed. Working conditions will need to become more flexible in public administrations as well. New technologies could be of particularly good use in supporting teleworking arrangements. However, for such arrangements to work, a culture of trust and result-orientated management needs to be embedded. Result orientation for TPM is not only important for the TPMs' own performance, but also for being able to assess the capacities and performance of their staff. Therefore, it can be concluded that result-orientation and ways of assessing results, especially on the TPM level, will be increasingly important in the future. Full-fledged competency management models could help in assessing the performance of TPM.

Furthermore, focus on merit principles and transparency in public administration should remain important, and not only focus on the recruitment and selection phase but be applied throughout the entire HR system. This is very important for the quality of public administration, equal treatment and transparency to increase society's trust in public administration. In order to safeguard public administration values and the professionalism of civil servants, to boost innovation and deal with further demographic changes and migration, life-long learning and mobility, diversity and inclusion, as well as European and international awareness, need to be better integrated in recruitment, selection and development of TPM. Top public managers have to stay informed about, and able to deal with, the newest developments in both the national and international sphere.

Finally, for top managers it is important to be permanently alert to signals and new trends, anticipate new challenges for the public organisations and new competencies needed for themselves and their employees, as well as to be able to adapt to changes and future challenges. Strategic vision, self-awareness, self-reflection and innovativeness as preconditions for permanent learning are crucial competencies for TPM in the future. Lastly, in addition to encouraging innovativeness for change, continuity should also be ensured for citizens.

There is no uniform solution to the challenges ahead. But strong top management is needed everywhere and Member States can learn from each other to further improve their own system for top management. This starts by knowing each other's approach, to which this comparative European study seeks to contribute.

*To Cope with the Challenges of a Complex society ahead TPM need to balance Change and Continuity. Therefore they need to have enough Curiosity, Creativity and Courage to innovate, and at the same time they have to remain aware of the basic values of public work to guarantee the best public administration and services for the Citizens. This requires permanent investment in their Competencies. These 10 C's can guide us into the future!*

Published by:

Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations  
P.O. Box 20011 | 2500 EA The Hague  
[www.rijksoverheid.nl](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl)

© December 2016 | 97076

