

Satisfaction with and confidence in public administration

ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



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SUMMARY

- Respondents in Hungary were mainly negative about the Hungarian public administration, saying it is complex, cumbersome (according to 48%), and a third of respondents said it is not transparent and slow.
- Hungarian respondents were also dissatisfied with the performance of public administration compared to other EU countries because of its complexity and cumbersomeness.
- More than half of those surveyed think that less bureaucracy and more transparency in decision-making and spending of public money could increase trust in public administration.
- Relatively few respondents (23%) mentioned the need for increased local decision-making, although centralisation is a recurrent criticism of the Orbán governments.
- In terms of policy reforms, Hungarian respondents ranked health care as the most important area (74%), where institutions and public services need to be improved.
- The second policy area to be reformed, which also receives significantly more mentions than other areas, is education (65%).

INTRODUCTION

Citizens come into contact with the state primarily through public administration and public services. The expansion of state functions and the increasingly detailed state regulations mean that the state is not only a regulator but also a provider. For citizens, the quality of services is a measure of the state's performance in specific policy areas. Another aspect is trust in public administration, which may ultimately have an impact on compliance with regulations.

In the 2010-2014 government cycle, the second Orbán government implemented a wide-ranging public administration reform under the supervision of Tibor Navracsics, Minister of Public Administration and Justice. As part of the reform, certain local government functions were transferred to county and district administrative offices. The so-called one-stop shop was designed to make administration more efficient and faster. However, critics argue that the aim of the administrative reform was government centralisation at the expense of local government.

The analysis below¹ examines citizens' satisfaction with the public administration, what improvements they would like to see and which areas they consider to be in need of comprehensive reform. For some questions, we looked at how Hungarian respondents felt about certain issues compared to citizens in other EU Member States.

¹ The analysis was carried out using the April 2023 Eurobarometer survey. The sample size is 1000 respondents per country, which is representative of the population aged 15 and over living in each surveyed country, regardless of the nationality of the respondents. The selection of the sample was random, and the representativeness was determined by demographic and geographical weighting.

RESULTS

Respondents were given a list of characteristics, from which they had to pick three to describe their country's public administration. Respondents in Hungary described their country's public administration mainly in negative terms, such as complex and cumbersome (48%), and a third of them said it was not transparent and slow (Figure 1). While they do not consider public administration as an “attractive employer” (6%), relatively few (11%) have a negative opinion of the professionalism of public servants.

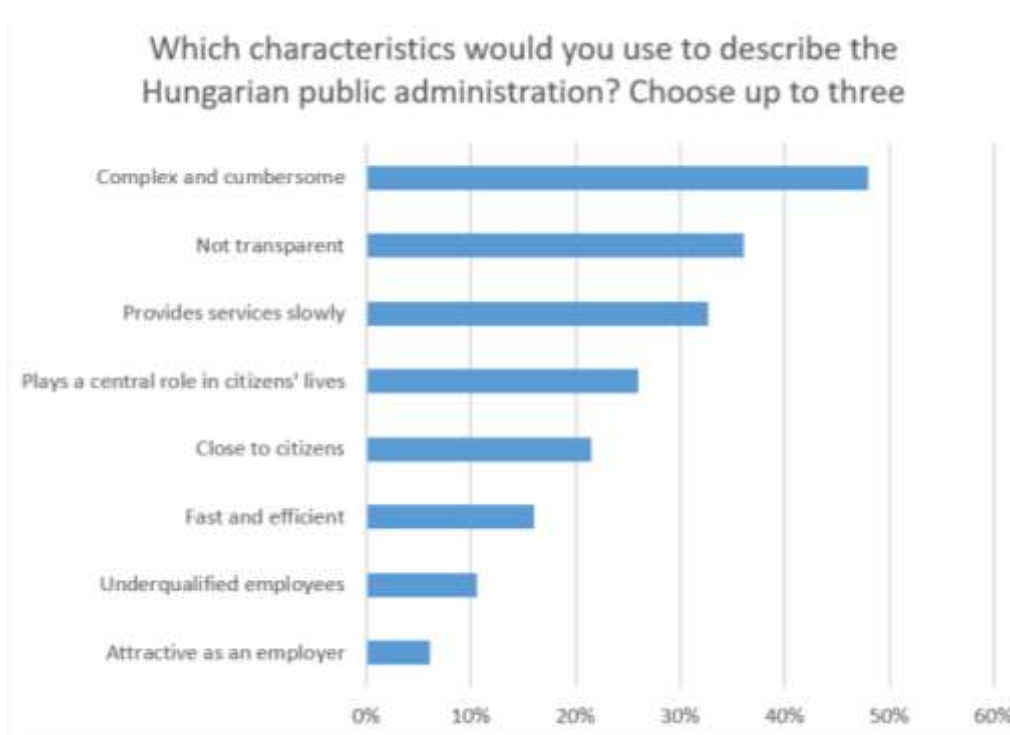


Figure 1: Characteristics of public administration in Hungary

The general expectation of the citizen towards public administration is that it should be fast and efficient. We therefore looked at the proportion of citizens in each EU Member State from the previous set of questions who perceived their country's public administration to be complex and cumbersome (Figure 2). Around two thirds of Bulgarian respondents felt this way about their own public administration, compared to 19% of respondents in Luxembourg. Hungarian

respondents were also considered to be quite dissatisfied by international standards, with a ratio above the EU average.

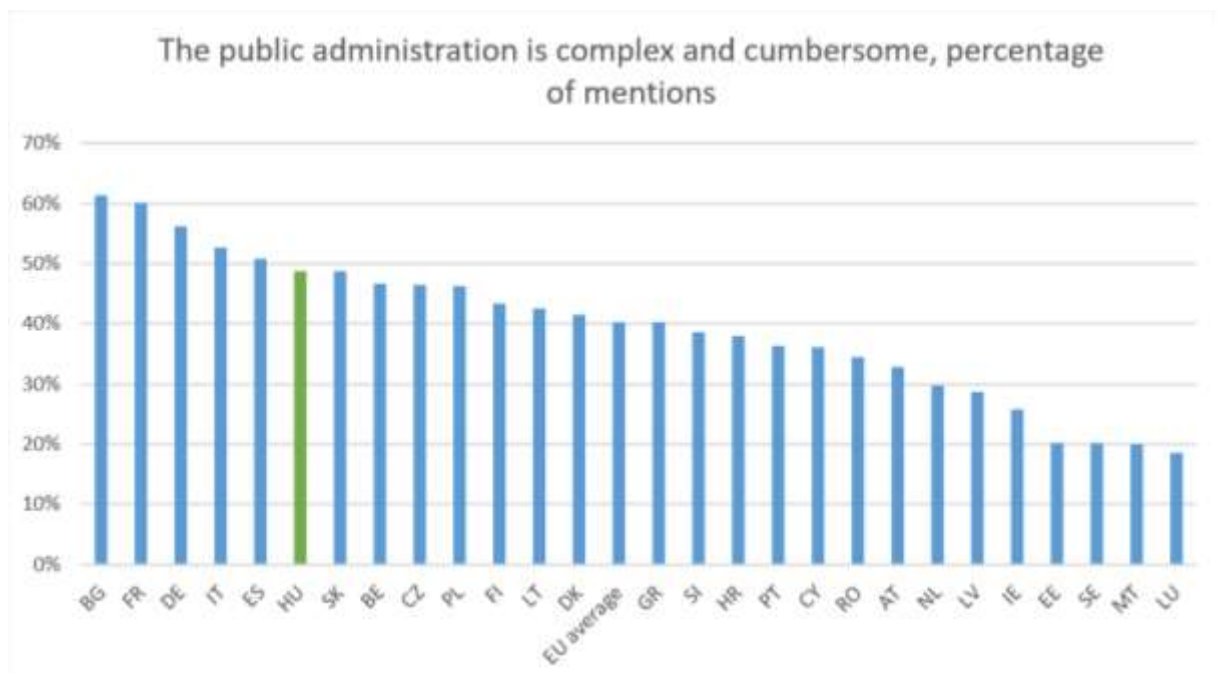


Figure 2: Complex and cumbersome public administration mentions in the EU

The survey also gave respondents the opportunity to identify specific improvements that would increase their confidence in public administration (Figure 3). More than half of the respondents mentioned less bureaucracy, i.e. simplified administration, and greater transparency in decision-making and spending of public money. The professionalism of civil servants did not come into question in this respect. While centralisation of government is a recurrent criticism of the Orbán government, only 23% of respondents mentioned more local decision-making as a factor of trust.

Which, if any, of the following improvements would increase public confidence in public administration in Hungary?
 Choose up to three answers.

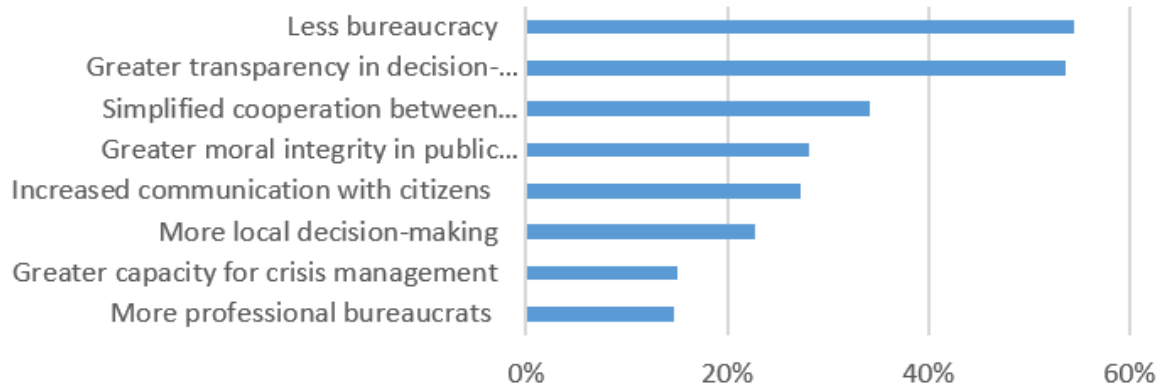


Figure 3: Improvements and trust in public administration

As shown in Figure 4, in line with the results of previous surveys, the most important policy area to be reformed by Hungarian respondents is health care (74%). The second most frequently mentioned policy area is education, which was cited by two thirds of respondents. Housing and social policy, and the environment were mentioned more than the other themes (27-27%).

In your opinion, which areas are most in need of reform in Hungary?
Choose up to three

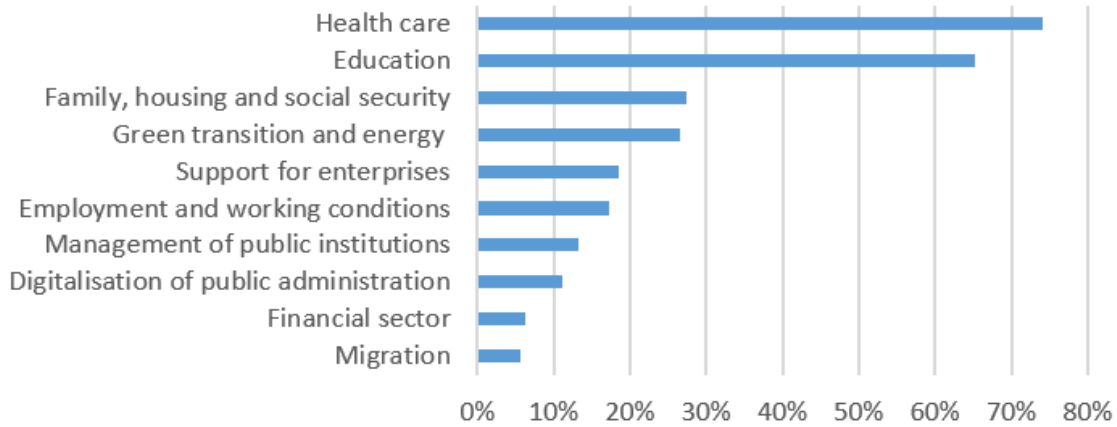


Figure 4: The need for policy reforms in different policy areas

Finally, we wanted to know the proportion of respondents in other EU Member States who mentioned the need for health care reform (Figure 5). The EU comparison shows that Hungary is second only to Slovakia in this respect. The EU average is 57%, which is typically exceeded by the Eastern Member States and by France (63%).

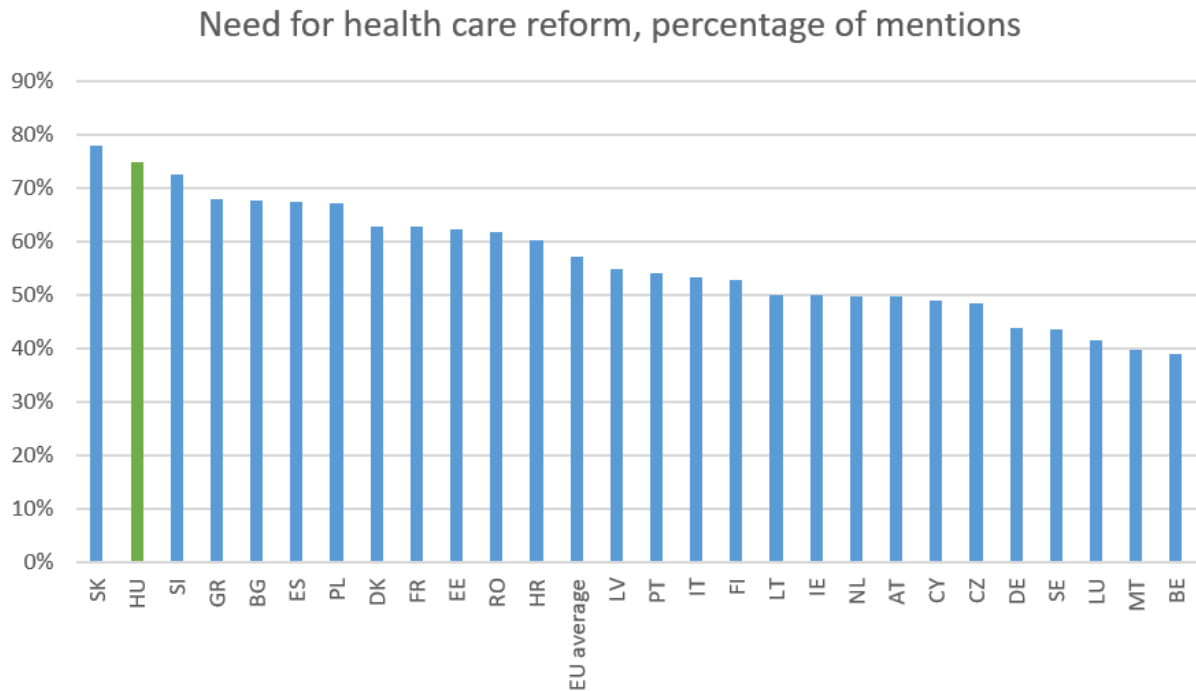


Figure 5: Need for health care reform in EU member states

Hungarian respondents describe the Hungarian public administration with overwhelmingly negative adjectives, and they are dissatisfied with the performance of the public administration even in comparison with the EU, due to its complexity and difficulty. Respondents want less bureaucracy and more transparency, but there is no demand for local decision-making, although centralisation is a recurrent criticism of the Orbán governments. Of the policy areas, health and education reforms are the most pressing. In the health sector, the dissatisfaction of Hungarian respondents is outstanding even in an EU-wide comparison.