

Key Findings & Policy Messages

Study on Integrity Assessment in Senior Civil
Service Recruitment in Ukraine

Key Messages | May 2025



Why this study?

Ukraine has made significant progress in building a transparent, merit-based recruitment system for senior civil service positions (Category A) since 2016, in line with OECD and EU standards. However, under current wartime conditions, public trust in this system is eroding. The pool of high-quality applicants is shrinking, especially from the former leaders in public sector and top managers private sector.



This study explored a key question:

Does maximum transparency in recruitment — including full public disclosure and livestreamed interviews — help or hurt Ukraine's ability to attract high-integrity, competent leaders?

To answer this, we conducted **25 in-depth interviews** with **27 individuals** from all key stakeholder groups involved in or affected by senior civil service recruitment.

These included: *former and potential Category A candidates (successful and unsuccessful), current and former senior civil servants, HR and executive search professionals, civil society (anticorruption) observers, members of selection commissions, and top-level public and private sector managers.*

What we found



- **Transparency matters for all categories, but the current format has unintended consequences.**

Many qualified professionals, especially from outside government, are discouraged by early and extensive public exposure. This includes fear of reputational harm, politicized attacks, potential issues at current workplace, and long-term digital traces of unsuccessful applications.

- The main concerns related to the **public disclosure of the list of candidates and their asset declarations at the early stages** of the selection process. Many potential candidates are discouraged by the fact that such early publication might **create problems for them at their current place of employment**. At the same time, while all respondents acknowledge the necessity of submitting asset declarations, **they question the appropriateness of publicly disclosing such declarations at the early stages** of the competitive selection process.
 - Many potential candidates perceive early disclosure as disproportionate and high-risk, especially when the likelihood of appointment is low.
 - Respondents suggested exploring legal and procedural options to keep both asset declarations and candidate lists confidential during the initial stages of the selection process, with full disclosure introduced at the shortlisting or final interview stage. This, combined with a shorter first-stage timeline, could preserve transparency while reducing the deterrent effect.
- **The system is built to *exclude* risky applicants, but fails to attract the best.** Recruitment often avoids scandal, but doesn't always identify talent. Integrity is treated as "absence of wrongdoing", not as a leadership and professional strength.
- **A fair selection process begins with a procedurally sound and trust-building composition of the commission.** Across all respondent groups, the composition of the selection commission was viewed as one of the most critical factors influencing the fairness, legitimacy, and outcomes of a competition. Respondents emphasized that selection bodies should be composed of competent, independent, and high-integrity members, chosen through clear and transparent procedures. Many noted that when commission members are perceived as lacking either impartiality or professional qualifications, trust in the entire process diminishes — even if formal procedures are followed. While some respondents shared concerns about specific cases where certain candidates appeared to be informally supported throughout the process, the key issue raised was not individual misconduct, but the absence of institutional safeguards that ensure balanced and professional decision-making. Trust in commissions rises significantly when

their formation involves international partners or external expert nominations, with the highest levels of trust observed in cases where such representatives hold a decisive vote.

- **Integrity checks are essential, but too narrow.** The system focuses on anti-corruption red flags, not on identifying ethical leadership, public interest motivation, knowledge, and experience in managing integrity risks within organizations. This undermines trust in outcomes and misses strong candidates.
- **There is growing disengagement among reform-minded professionals.** Many former officials and private-sector leaders no longer consider public service viable. Only 4 out of 27 interviewed said they would apply for a senior role, 13 clearly stated that they wouldn't.
- **The problem is broader than transparency.** Respondents consistently emphasized that focusing only on disclosure rules will not fix the system and engage a sufficient number of professional and high-integrity senior managers, both public and private sectors.
 - At the **procedural level**, trust depends primarily on the composition of the selection commission and the professionalism of its secretariat, not just on livestreams and declarations.
 - At the **recruitment level**, top professionals will only apply if there are clear institutional mandates, strategic goals, and protections for their integrity and careers. Critically, **salary gaps remain one of the major deterrents**, yet direct increases may not be feasible. Instead, alternative incentives and **non-linear solutions** (e.g., post-service guarantees, public recognition, legal protections) are needed to attract and retain talent.
 - At the **systemic level**, Ukraine needs a coherent vision for the civil service — one that supports reform-minded leadership, provides continuity, and rebuilds institutional trust.

There is no silver bullet. Reforms must address transparency and these deeper structural issues to unlock the full leadership potential available to Ukraine in wartime.

What needs to change?



1 Make transparency smarter.

- Carefully re-consider scope and timing of livestreams and public vetting.¹
- Protect early-stage applicants' privacy to reduce reputational risks.
- Shift civil society's role toward oversight and feedback, rather than direct exposure.

2 Redesign integrity checks.

- Go beyond red flags: assess values, ethical reasoning, leadership and competence traits.
- Introduce a structured integrity interview format, beginning with a closed written response phase and allowing for limited public questioning where appropriate.
- Use structured interviews, references, ethical dilemmas — not just declarations.
- Train commissions or delegate to certified, world-renowned experts.

3 Professionalize selection procedures.

- Create a permanent, trusted selection body (like in judicial appointments).
- Ensure high-quality commission members, vetted for their own integrity and professionalism.
- Build a professional secretariat and standardized methods for all selections on Category A positions.

3 Attract stronger candidates.

- Reform post-service restrictions and reduce stigma around public roles.

¹ While livestreaming alone does not build trust in the commission or fully resolve concerns about the credibility of the selection process, the majority of respondents, including those who support optimizing transparency, agreed that it should remain part of the process. This view was also shared by most of potential candidates, candidates with practical experience, incumbent and former senior civil servants and politicians, who emphasized its relevance given the Ukrainian political context and the consistent demand for openness from both expert and broader public audiences.

- Use targeted outreach and tailored support (e.g., application help, legal guidance).
- Clarify and limit PEP risks, especially for candidates' families.

Bottom line



To ensure Ukraine's transformation, we need top-level civil servants with ethics, competence, and courage. **But the current recruitment model deters them.**

This study provides a roadmap for restoring trust by shifting from risk *elimination* to *ethical leadership and competence selection*.



Full version of the study

"Integrity Assessment and Senior Civil Service Recruitment in Ukraine"

Review

