



The institutionalisation of Quality Management in the EU Member States and candidate countries with a focus on the CAF model

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Executive summary

For decades, public administration in Europe has been navigating the complex task of balancing citizen expectations, government accountability, and the unpredictability of global challenges. The pursuit of efficiency, trust, and excellence has shaped the reform trajectories of both EU Member States and candidate countries. Against this backdrop, quality management (QM) has emerged as a necessity for good public governance – a framework through which governments can adapt to crises, meet demands for transparency, and improve performance.

In this context, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), a Total Quality Management (TQM) model specifically tailored for public administrations, has proved its relevance and resilience. Yet, the extent to which QM principles, and the CAF model in particular, have been institutionalised across countries remains uneven. This study delves into these variations, seeking to uncover what drives QM adoption, how it can be sustained, and why it matters now more than ever.

Quality Management: A Necessary Evolution

The idea of managing quality began as a private-sector practice, eventually finding a foothold in public administration through New Public Management reforms in the 1990s. But what started as a transfer of tools has since evolved into a nuanced approach that integrates citizen satisfaction, transparency, and continuous improvement. QM is not about ticking boxes – it is about embedding a culture of quality, where every process, policy, and public service contributes to trust and effectiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing geopolitical tensions in Europe have further highlighted the importance of QM. As governments grapple with economic recovery, digital transformation, and public trust, the capacity to institutionalise quality is increasingly tied to their ability to govern effectively.

The Study: Mapping Institutionalisation Across Europe

Commissioned by DG REFORM under the EIPA EPSA Grant, this study offers a systematic analysis of QM institutionalisation across 27 EU Member States and selected candidate countries. Using the CAF model as a focal point, the research spans desk research, surveys, and in-depth case studies of eight countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Slovakia, and Spain.

The framework guiding this analysis evaluates three core dimensions: the internal enabling environment, the organisation of quality, and the support functions required to sustain QM. By scoring these elements, the study identifies patterns of maturity and offers a comparative lens through which to view QM's impact on governance outcomes.

A patchworked map

A clear dichotomy emerges between the maturity of QM systems among EU Member States, and between EU members and candidate countries. In candidate countries, QM often begins with centralised directives,

driven by political will and supported by external donors and international organisations such as SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management), a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU, principally financed by the EU¹. These nations view QM as foundational for aligning with EU governance standards and meeting accession requirements. This approach leads to structured funding, coordinated efforts, and a focus on national performance indicators, ensuring compliance with benchmarks for public administration quality.

Meanwhile, Member States reflect the next stage in the evolution of QM: a more mature culture of quality in public administration, where the promotion of excellent performance empowers individual public entities to lead quality improvements, often without explicit top-down mandates or support. However, in some countries, political will for QM as a holistic framework has waned. Instead, political agendas increasingly prioritise isolated elements of quality frameworks – such as digitalisation, innovation, and leadership – emphasising performance excellence but often neglecting comprehensive quality management models.

Despite these contrasts, a shared truth persists: the institutionalisation of QM depends on strong leadership, strategic policy integration, and sufficient resources. Without these, even the most robust frameworks risk stagnation. Recognising this, the European Commission emphasises the importance of quality public administration as a cornerstone of effective governance, both pre- and post-accession. It seeks to ensure coherence in its policy approach by promoting frameworks that assess and measure the quality of public administration across all countries.

To reinforce institutionalisation, the research highlights the establishment of competence centres for quality as a crucial mechanism. These centres provide stability and continuity, ensuring the institutionalisation process remains resilient to shifts in political leadership and changing priorities.

What the numbers reveal

Through a scoring system, the study categorised countries into four QM maturity levels: exploratory, elemental, established, and mature.

Austria and Belgium exemplify maturity, with robust competence centres and integrated training programmes supporting continuous improvement.

Bulgaria and Slovakia demonstrate centralised, regulated approaches, though political will has fluctuated.

Italy, Montenegro, Poland, and Spain highlight the complexities of decentralised systems, with frequent shifts in political priorities, and mixed levels of investment and adoption.

The analysis also revealed first indications of a possible correlation between QM maturity and broader governance indicators.

Three overarching conclusions from this study

Leadership matters: Sustained political support is a decisive factor in embedding QM. Where leaders champion quality, resources follow, and systems flourish.

¹ More information on [SIGMA - OECD](#).

Adaptability is key: While centralisation provides stability during the early stages of QM adoption, decentralisation can enhance long-term innovation and responsiveness. The challenge lies in managing this transition effectively.

Knowledge sharing fuels progress: Events, publications, and networks such as the CAF correspondents and the European CAF RC play a vital role in building capacity and fostering a culture of quality across borders.

Recommendations for the road ahead

To consolidate and advance QM institutionalisation, this study offers the following recommendations:

Reinforce leadership commitment: Align QM with national and European priorities, and secure stable political backing.

Invest in capacity building: Expand access to advanced training and certification programmes to empower public officials at all levels.

Promote inclusive policies: Embed QM principles in broader public sector reforms to ensure they remain integral to governance.

Foster collaboration: Strengthen platforms for knowledge exchange, both within and across countries, to accelerate learning and innovation.

At its heart, quality management is about more than processes or certifications – it is about building trust. As Europe navigates an uncertain future, the institutionalisation of QM offers a pathway to more agile, accountable, and effective public administrations. The CAF model, with its proven adaptability, remains a cornerstone of this journey.

By investing in quality today, governments can ensure they are not only meeting the challenges of the present, but are also building a foundation for the challenges yet to come.

1. Introduction

The pursuit of enhanced efficiency and effectiveness within public administrations has long occupied a central place on the political agendas of EU Member States and candidate countries. However, progress has been more forthcoming in some countries than in others. Public sector reform efforts across the EU, articulated through a variety of strategies, programmes, and laws reflect this shared ambition for improvement. Part of these reforms centre around total quality management (TQM), a management approach that originated in the private sector². Major features of private-sector quality management (QM) were adapted to the public sector environment, such as emphasising citizen satisfaction, performance monitoring, continuous improvement, and staff and stakeholder involvement.

Quality management in public administration can be an important determinant in each country's pursuit of enhanced governance indicators, notably in areas such as government effectiveness, and citizen satisfaction and trust. Systematic QM initiatives can also play a substantial role in enhancing the agility of public organisations to respond to crises and sudden shifts³ – an imperative underscored by the recent and profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the ongoing war in Ukraine. In this light, renewed public action may be warranted, as underscored by recent findings in *Public Administrations in the EU Member States, 2022 Overview*⁴ pointing to a subtle but persistent decline in average EU government effectiveness from 2017 to 2021. This suggests the urgency of action across the EU in the interest of bolstering the performance and resilience of public administrations.

To effectively address these emerging trends, systematic evidence-based actions are needed. In alignment with this goal, DG REFORM has commissioned this study under the broader EPSA grant for the European Institute for Public Administration (EIPA). The purpose of the study is to examine the extent of institutionalisation of TQM models across the EU and candidate countries. In so doing, the research seeks to establish a foundational mapping providing timely, country-specific insights into critical questions such as:

- How do governments and public sector leaders facilitate the usage of QM in public administrations?
- What policies and financial resources support these efforts?
- What organisational structures of support units are conducive to the promotion of QM in public sector organisations?

² Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Quality management on the European agenda. *EIPAScope*, 2005(1), 33-41.

³ In relation to COVID-19: OECD (2023). *More resilient public administrations after COVID-19 – Lessons from using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)*, 2020. Policy paper. Paris: OECD.

⁴ European Commission: Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. Stimpson, A., Moretti, C., & Lemmik, J. (2023). *Public administrations in the EU Member States – 2022 overview*. Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2887/626706>

- How is the institutionalisation of QM supported by efforts regarding capacity development, awareness raising, and reward mechanisms?

The following steps were taken to reach the primary goal of this study, to assess in a systematised manner the current level of institutionalisation of QM, with specific attention to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model.

- Initial information on the current situation (spanning the timeframe 2008–2024) of the countries in scope was collected through desk research and a first survey round (the main findings are reported in section 5.1.).
- The initial information, complemented by a second survey round and semi-structured interviews in eight ‘focus countries’ analysed in more detail, resulted in a foundational mapping (shown in Annex B), which showcases how respective governments and public administrations promote, facilitate, and support a quality culture in the public sector.
- The collected information was categorised within a unifying framework to ease national comparisons; the most important findings are reported in section 5.2.
- Finally, concentrating exclusively on the eight focus countries, a comparative analysis was carried out aiming to explore, in a quantitative manner, the connection between the institutionalisation of QM, and indicators of public sector performance and citizens’ trust and satisfaction.

This approach builds upon the efforts undertaken throughout recent decades by several organisations under the auspices of different presidencies of the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN). Influential works in this regard include the initial comparative review matrix on QM implementation in the Public Administrations of EU Member States by the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG)⁵, and the comparative analysis published under the Slovenian Presidency⁶ and the Portuguese Presidency⁷. Recurring elements of the frameworks used for this respective analysis were combined with information gathered via recent and relevant publications⁸ to create a unifying framework. This is presented in more detail in section 3.1.

In summary, the study seeks to create a foundational mapping of the level of institutionalisation of quality management in public administration, based on research and reports from experts and practitioners in the field. The foundational mapping is created with current information (as available to the researchers at the time of publication), aiming to allow its continuous update and enrichment.

2. Terminology and historical context

⁵ Žurga, G. (ed.) (2008). *Quality Management in Public Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Public Administration.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Asensio, M., Evaristo, C., & Martins, M. (2021). *CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity*. Lisbon: DGAEP.

⁸ For example: ReSPA (2022). *Periodical Regional Quality Management Analysis – Final report*. Danilovgrad: Regional School of Public Administration.

2.1 Terminology

This section provides definitions and context for the fundamental concepts discussed in this report, which informed the later work during the desk research and construction of the theoretical framework described in section 3.1. The definitions are presented from broad underlying concepts that build on each other and at the end, the specific definition of QM Competence Centres utilised in this report.

Definition of public administration utilised in this report

Bearing in mind the significant differences across countries, there is agreement in the relevant literature that there is no universal definition of 'public administration'. Nevertheless, it seems important to adopt a working definition to clarify the scope of the present study. In the chapter on public administration of the International Benchmarking Study by EIPA, it is defined as 'all those activities and procedures related to the formulation and implementation of policy and governmental and other public programmes, and to the management of the organisations and activities involved'⁹. Moreover, it is important to mention that this study focuses on the central government, with limited references to the regional and local levels.

Definition of quality in public administration

Walenia and Bednárová¹⁰ present several defining elements of quality in public administration. They can be summarised in the following points:

- contributing to the well-being of society;
- acting in line with the law and with rules of fairness, integrity and transparency;
- optimising the link between costs and results;
- delineating the requirements to assess efficiency and performance;
- delivering services satisfying citizens' expectations in an efficient, effective, timely, and reliable manner.

Definition of quality management in public administration

⁹ European Institute of Public Administration. Klika, C., Lovell-Prescod M., & Giovanetti, P. (2023). Public Administration. In: *Public Sector Performance Programme 2022–2025. An International Benchmarking Study – Sub-Study 2022*. Maastricht: European Institute of Public Administration, 20.

¹⁰ Walenia, A., & Bednárová, L. (2015). Implementation of quality management systems in public administration. *Journal of Environmental Protection, Safety, Education and Management*, 6(3), 110.

The concept of quality management in public administration has been defined in a variety of different ways, which have evolved over time. According to Wynen et al.¹¹, the concept was first defined as 'taking actions to fulfil either previously established specifications or customers'¹² expectations', and subsequently as 'taking actions with the aim of embedding awareness of quality in all organisational processes'. According to Moldoveanu and Dobrin (as cited in Matei and Lazar), the main objective of quality management is to achieve citizens' satisfaction, by affecting in a comprehensive way the functioning of public administration.

Walenia and Bednárová¹³ propose a definition of a quality management system. They consider it as 'a set of rules, principles and standards of conduct', an instrument for improving quality, a learning tool, and a foundation of the adoption of a total quality management philosophy. In the context of total quality management, which can be considered as a management approach that takes a holistic view of an organisation but also is focused on constantly enhancing the quality of products and services by means of continuous organisational adjustments¹⁴, this has been simplified to 'the sustained effort for a high-quality service delivery'¹⁵.

Definition of institutionalisation

The Cambridge Dictionary¹⁶ states that institutionalisation is 'the process of becoming a permanent or respected part of a society, system, or organisation'. The Britannica Dictionary¹⁷ further elaborates that 'Institutionalisation is a process intended to regulate societal behaviour (i.e. supra-individual behaviour) within organisations or entire societies. At least three actions in the process can be distinguished: (1) rulemaking or instalment, (2) rule adaptation, or developing best practices, and (3) rule change, or replacing old rules with new ones'.

Definition of QM Competence Centres and CAF National Centres

An important concept throughout the report is that of competence centres for quality management. These centres often operate on a national level, either as units of a ministry, or they operate semi-independently. Their main task is usually to support the capacity building of public officials on a wide set of skills through offering training possibilities, for example. Such organisations are classified as QM Competence Centres in this research if their offering includes or is mandated specifically to support quality management in

¹¹ Wynen, J., Verhoest, K., & Demuzere, S. (2016). Quality management in public-sector organizations: evidence from six EU countries. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 39(2), 3.

¹² Customers here reflect the definition given by the publication, while in this report the term users, citizens, or stakeholders have been used for the public sector.

¹³ Walenia, A., & Bednárová, L. (2015). Implementation of quality management systems in public administration. *Journal of Environmental Protection, Safety, Education and Management*, 6(3), 108.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ INSTITUTIONALISATION – Cambridge English Dictionary

¹⁷ Institutionalisation | Definition, Sociology, & Theories | Britannica

public administration in their respective country. A QM Competence Centre often works towards the goal of building the necessary capacity for the adoption of TQM by offering training, and facilitating a network of practitioners for the exchange of best practices. In addition, they are often facilitating or even overseeing certification activities in their countries, related to the TQM models they support.

Such centres are often designated as the CAF National Centre in the countries where CAF is widely used and promoted. In those cases, the government designates a CAF National Correspondent representing their country in the CAF network. This network is supported and coordinated by the European CAF Resource Centre, hosted by EIPA. (see point 2.2.1).

2.2 Historical development and adoption of TQM models with special attention to the CAF model

This section provides a brief overview of the history (1990s–2020s) regarding the introduction of QM approaches in the public sector, with a focus on the three most common approaches (European Foundation for Quality Management – EFQM, CAF, and ISO 9001) for the sake of brevity. Additionally, more detailed information regarding QM systems active in a country can be found in their respective country profile in Appendix B.

The notion of quality in society gained interest after the two World Wars, as a result of the growing importance of industrial production¹⁸. Concepts such as quality control, which were initially exclusively related to physical production, started being adopted in the private service sector and, eventually, in the public sector.

A more holistic approach of QM was developed, a management approach that has been defined in several different ways. For instance, according to Dahlgaard et al.¹⁹, TQM ‘involves the understanding and implementation of quality management principles and concepts in every aspect of business activities. [TQM] demands that the principles of quality management must be applied at every level, every stage and in every department of the organization’²⁰. According to Ciampa²¹, TQM aims to ‘install and make permanent [a] climate where employees continuously improve their ability to provide on-demand products and services that customers will find of particular value’.

The focus on quality was initially limited to production, then it was extended to the internal processes, and finally reached the outcome dimension, in which the satisfaction of end-users – the customers – plays an important role²². The new public management (NPM) approach represented the translation of TQM in the public administration sphere by borrowing management practices from the private sector and

¹⁸ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Quality management on the European agenda. *EIPAScope*, 2005(1), 33-41.

¹⁹ Dahlgaard, J. J., Kanji, G. K., & Kristensen, K. (2008). *Fundamentals of Total Quality Management*. New York: Routledge.

²⁰ Dahlgaard, J. J., Kanji, G. K., & Kristensen, K. (2008). *Fundamentals of Total Quality Management*. New York: Routledge.

²¹ Ciampa, D. (1992). *Total Quality: A User's Guide for Implementation*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

²² Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Quality management on the European agenda. *EIPAScope*, 2005(1), 33-41.

trying to apply them to the public sector²³. NPM was particularly successful in Anglo-Saxon countries, as exemplified by the administrative reforms of the 1990s implemented in the UK and the USA²⁴. NPM-style reforms were also adopted in continental Europe, with adaptations to each country's legal and political system²⁵.

By the first decade of the 2000s, every EU Member State had taken steps towards the promotion of quality management and the adoption of related models and tools²⁶. These included the establishment of units coordinating the implementation of quality management (QM Competence Centres), the collaboration with supporting organisations, and the use of quality models such as CAF, EFQM, and ISO²⁷. Moreover, to fulfil citizens' expectations and to listen to their inputs, citizen charters and satisfaction surveys were introduced²⁸. To strengthen the engagement and attractiveness of the introduced QM practices, some Member States launched quality prizes for public sector organisations, and initiatives to share best practices within the networks of practitioners²⁹. More information on these efforts is available in sections 3.1 and 4.2 of this report.

The following is a short description of the three most commonly used QM approaches (EFQM, CAF, and ISO) and a brief comparison table. The comparison in Table 1 depicts a simplified summary of the work in-depth work done by Bernadette Tropper-Malz and Eva Sejrek-Tunke in their article "Many ways to improve – quality management models by comparison". The sections closes with an elaboration of the CAF.

European Foundation for Quality Management – (EFQM)

The European Foundation for Quality Management was founded in 1988 by private companies in Europe aiming to promote the concept of business excellence. The foundation created the **European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model**, which consists of a framework for evaluating quality based on three questions related to the organisation: 'Why?' (corresponding to 'Direction'), 'How?' (corresponding to 'Execution') and 'What?' (corresponding to 'Results')³⁰. Figure 1 illustrates the EFQM model and its criteria. EFQM is a full TQM model centred around self-assessment, with the goal of

²³ Haynes, P. (2015). *Managing Complexity in the Public Services*. New York: Routledge.

²⁴ McLaughlin, K., Osborne, S. P., & Ferlie, E. (eds.) (2002). *New Public Management: Current Trends and Future Prospects*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Matei, A. & Săvulescu, C. (2011). Convergence of the policies for promoting total quality management in the public administrations of Balkan states – European Union Member States. *Theoretical & Applied Economics*, Vol. 18, 556(3), 41–76.

²⁷ Staes, P. and Thijs, N. (2005). Quality management on the European agenda. *EIPAScope*, 2005(1), 33-41.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ <https://efqm.org/the-efqm-model/>

recognising points of strength and opportunities for improvement in an accountable manner³¹. The model was updated several times, with the most significant updates in 2020. Based on the rapidly changing environment, the EFQM 2025 has been discussed and published.

Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

The **Common Assessment Framework (CAF)** is a TQM model based on the EFQM Excellence Model and has been specifically designed for the development of QM in public sector organisations. CAF includes all major phases of TQM (from self-assessment of performance, prioritisation of improvements, and external evaluation) and as a TQM model, it aims to analyse and support focused continuous improvement in all areas of an organisation. The full model is depicted graphically in Figure 2. TQM models often operate within similar frameworks although with different focus points, as visible in comparison with the EFQM model in Figure 1. The evidence-based CAF is compatible with other tools and methodologies (such as human-centred design and agile management), and is therefore a versatile tool for the optimisation of processes and services in any single public entity.

International Standard Organisation (ISO)

The ISO 9000 standard family was created by the International Organization for Standardization³² in 1987 and was initially mainly concerned with quality assurance in the delivery of products and services. **ISO 9001** is not strictly speaking a TQM model as this QM approach is primarily designed around auditing specific processes or services, and relies more on external rather than holistic self-evaluation.³³

Figure 1 – The EFQM model

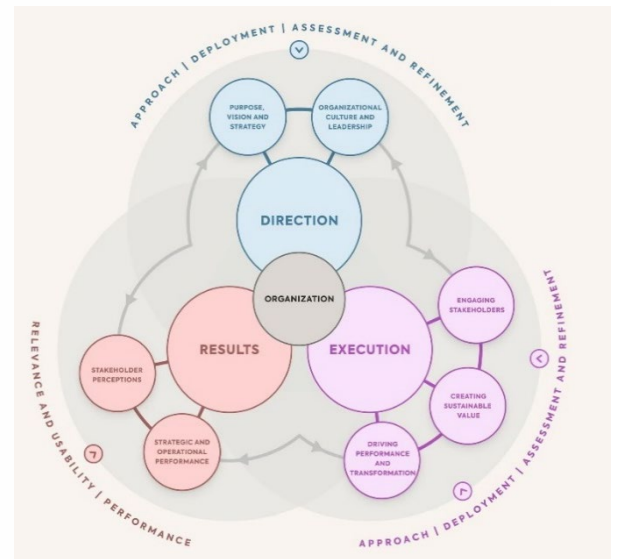
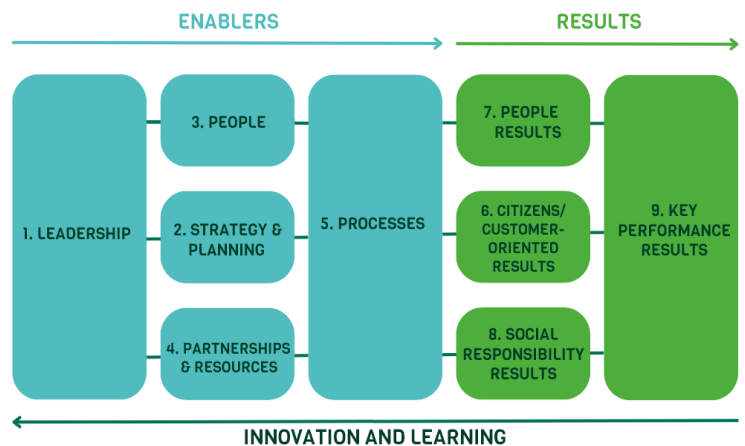


Figure 2 – The CAF model



³¹ Matei, L., & Lazăr, C. G. (2011). Quality Management and the Reform of Public Administration in Several States in South-Eastern Europe. Comparative Analysis. *Theoretical & Applied Economics*, 18(4).

³² ISO (2024) *Homepage*. Available at: <https://www.iso.org/home.html>

³³ Quality Management Models by Comparison. In: Prorok, T., & Parzer, P. (eds.) *Transforming Public Administration with CAF – 20 years of the Common Assessment Framework*, Vol. 23. Vienna: Centre For Public Administration Research.

Table 1 – Comparison of QM approaches

	CAF	EFQM	ISO 9001
Self-assessment	yes	yes	no
External consultancy	not obligatory	not obligatory	yes
Certificate	CAF - Label	validated, qualified, recognised by EFQM	ISO certificate
Staff involvement	high	medium	low
Costs	low	medium	high
Content	nine dimensions	seven dimensions	customer, products
Method	consensus SWOT	1,000 points	deviation and conformity with the norm

Source: Quality management models by comparison. In: Prorok T., Parzer P. (eds.) 2021. *Transforming Public Administration with CAF – 20 years of the Common Assessment Framework*, Vol. 23. Vienna: Centre For Public Administration Research.

2.2.1 The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the European CAF Resource Centre at EIPA

At the end of the 1990s, EU Member States felt a sense of urgency to join forces with the aim of improving and renewing public service delivery in a more structured manner³⁴. In 1997, this translated into the establishment of an advisory group later called the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG), with the support of the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN)³⁵. Following this, it was decided that a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) – as it was later called – should be jointly developed under the aegis of the IPSG, an informal working group to promote exchanges and cooperation where it concerned innovative ways of modernising government and public service delivery in EU Member States.

The basic design of the CAF was then developed in 1998 and 1999 on the basis of joint analysis undertaken by specialists on the EFQM, representatives of the Speyer Academy (which organises the Speyer Quality Award for the public sector in the German-speaking European countries), and EIPA. The work of the group resulted in the creation of CAF, a shared European quality model tailored to the application to the public sector and centred on the concept of self-assessment. Its purpose was to assist

³⁴ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Quality management on the European agenda. *EIPAScope*, 2005(1), 33-41.

³⁵ Staes, P. & Thijs, N. (ed.) (2010). *Growing Towards Excellence in the European Public Sector. A Decade of European Collaboration with CAF*. EUPAN and EIPA.

European public administrations in becoming acquainted with, and using, the latest management methods³⁶. The first pilot tests were conducted in several public sector organisations and the completed initial version of the CAF was presented during the *First Quality Conference for Public Administration in the EU* in Lisbon, May 2000³⁷. Information on the quality management model is freely available with the goal to enable public institutions across the globe to boost, transform, and efficiently manage their performance.

In 2001, the EUPAN Directors General in charge of public service established the European CAF Resource Centre at EIPA. The Centre received the mandate to function as a European centre of expertise in the implementation of CAF. The Centre coordinates with the national quality hubs and offers training modules and consultancy. It also conducts research on QM, keeps the European network of CAF national correspondents engaged, and provides guidance to the wider CAF community. Finally, it was tasked with creating and maintaining a database containing information on CAF users³⁸ (in cooperation with the national representatives). The following year saw improvements to the model aimed at making it even more suitable for the public sector³⁹. In 2004, a CAF expert group was established by the IPSG. It is made up of CAF national correspondents, the European CAF Resource Centre at EIPA, and representatives of EFQM. Its main purposes are to enhance and update CAF, launch support tools, tailor the model to different users, and exchange best practices⁴⁰. In addition, CAF users' events were organised starting in 2003, with the aim of fostering knowledge sharing and mutual learning, as well as promoting the model⁴¹. The initial period, marked by enthusiasm and high political interest, resulted in the number of organisations that actively use CAF rising from 200 up to 2000 (between 2003 and 2010)⁴². The model was continually revised and enhanced during the following years, in part as a result of EIPA studies on the use of CAF⁴³.

The number of CAF users rose markedly during the decade 2010–2020⁴⁴ and the network of CAF national correspondents worked together with EIPA towards the publication of the 5th version of the CAF model – CAF 2020 – designed to function as the European guideline for good governance and excellence in public sector organisations⁴⁵. It was created with the ambition to make it more user-friendly (by simplifying the language used within text and examples), and to modernise the model by introducing six new focus areas (digitalisation, agility, innovation, sustainability, diversity, and collaboration). The CAF

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Engel, C. (2002). The Common Assessment Framework: the state of affairs. *EIPAScope*, 2002(1) 1-5.

³⁸ Staes, P. & Thijs, N. (ed.) (2010). *Growing Towards Excellence in the European Public Sector. A Decade of European collaboration with CAF*. EUPAN and EIPA.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Asensio, M., Evaristo, C. & Martins, M. (2021). *CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity*. Lisbon: DGAEP.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ European CAF Resource Centre database evolution 2010–2020.

⁴⁵ Prorok, T., & Parzer, P. (eds.) (2020). *Transforming Public Administration with CAF – 20 years of the Common Assessment Framework*, Vol. 23. Vienna: Centre For Public Administration Research.

2020 model is available in 23 languages, from within and outside the EU, and can be freely downloaded from the EIPA website⁴⁶.

The last eight years (2018–2024) have been marked by a number of paradigm changes, from the impacts of the war in Ukraine, to pushes towards further digitalisation due to COVID-19 and accelerating developments in technology. This meant that national governments and international public organisations had to put their focus on these urgent topics, which in turn has led to some degree of stagnation or even backsliding in the field of quality management in public administrations across EU countries⁴⁷.

However, these challenging years also presented opportunities to look into the impacts that effective QM can have on public administrations, as shown in recent examples. The OECD study 'More resilient public administrations after COVID-19 – Lessons from using the Common Assessment Framework 2020'⁴⁸ from 2023 highlighted that implementing CAF influenced organisations to adopt a number of crucial actions that increased organisational resilience, well in advance of the pandemic. For instance, this included actions to improve management and leadership capacity, as well as the digitalisation of certain procedures and trials of remote working. Similar positive effects are also reported at the national level, such as the section 'Impacts of the CAF' in the publication of the Austrian QM Competence Centre KDZ (2020)⁴⁹, which highlights success cases from across EU countries. QM implementation efforts also bear fruit beyond EU boundaries, as shown in the 2022 'Periodical Regional Quality Management Analysis' of ReSPA⁵⁰.

There is also a renewed commitment and increased efforts by the European CAF Resource Centre at EIPA to facilitate stronger knowledge sharing in the QM and CAF community, to strengthen the possible positive effects this community can have. This research report is one of the outcomes of this increased commitment.

⁴⁶ <https://www.eipa.eu/caf-resource-centre/what-is-caf/>

⁴⁷ Asensio, M., Evaristo, C., & Martins, M. (2021). *CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity*. Lisbon: DGAEP

⁴⁸ OECD (2023) *More resilient public administrations after COVID-19 – Lessons from using the Common Assessment Framework 2020*

⁴⁹ Prorok, T., & Parzer, P. (eds.) (2020). *Transforming Public Administration with CAF – 20 years of the Common Assessment Framework, Vol. 23*. Vienna: Centre For Public Administration Research.

⁵⁰ ReSPA (2022). *Periodical Regional Quality Management Analysis – Final Report*. Danilovgrad: Regional School of Public Administration.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following section introduces the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The creation of the framework was informed by reviewing literature on the topics of institutionalisation of change and the implementation of quality management, published between 2002 and 2023.

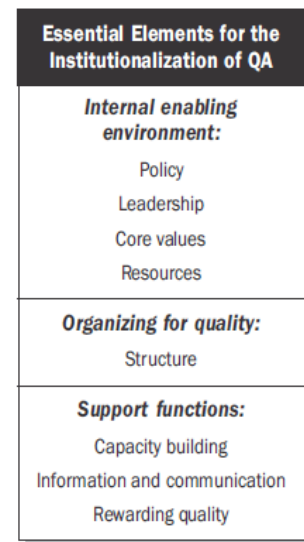
While several frameworks to assess the level of institutionalisation have been developed over the years, the initial desk research showed that the developed frameworks focused either on organisational level analysis and/or focused on the private sector. Therefore, a three-step process was implemented to derive a theoretical framework that better reflects the situation in the public sector at the national level.

First, the fundamentals are inspired by the Institutionalisation Framework of Cummings and Worley⁵¹ as it 'identifies organisation and intervention characteristics and institutionalisation processes affecting the degree to which change programmes are institutionalised'⁵². However, that framework is geared towards the institutionalisation of changes at an organisational level; therefore, in a second step, suitable elements were used to inform the work with a framework more tailored to the needs of the public sector in general and the subject matter of quality management in particular.

Informed by the first step, a basic theoretical framework was chosen and the decision was taken to build upon the framework for 'institutionalising quality assurance' of Silimperi et al.⁵³, which is depicted in summarised form in Figure 3. The reasoning is built upon three elements:

- A)** The stated objective of their conceptual model is to 'develop a framework to support the institutionalisation of quality assurance (an integral subprocess of quality management) in healthcare systems (and organisations)';
- B)** This model was chosen because the environment of public healthcare resembles more closely the environment where public organisations operate in general (e.g. with directives from the central government) rather than the broadly applicable model from the first step;

Figure 3



QA Project 2000

⁵¹ Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2009). *Organization Development and Change*. New York: Wiley.

⁵² Ibid., 204.

⁵³ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D.R., Zanten, T. V., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1), 14.

C) Because, as stated by Silimperi et al (2002, p. 68⁵⁴): ‘Furthermore, in delineating the process of institutionalising QA (Quality Assurance), the framework introduces the possibility of ongoing assessment of developmental stages of quality systems in health care at organisational or macro system levels’.

Table 2 – Elements of the framework for the institutionalisation of QM

Internal Enabling Environment	
Element	Classification criteria and range of categorisation
Strategic documents and policies	QM is not , is vaguely or is clearly defined in the strategic and/or policy documents. Regulatory status: The adoption of QM is mandatory/voluntary/recommended.
Leadership	Perception of the trend in political support during the last 10 years can be categorised as decreasing, stable, or increasing.
Quality culture as a core value	There are reports of no, or irregular, or regular measurements of service quality and customer/citizen satisfaction of public administrations at the national or organisational level.
Resources	There is no, or indirect, or direct financial support for QM implementation by the government available in the country.
Organising for quality	
Element	Classification criteria
Structure/coordination of QM practitioners	The QM support structure is organised in a centralised or decentralised manner. If existing, what type of National Competence Centre is installed?
Support Functions	
Element	Classification criteria
Capacity building	The extent to which expert support and training activities are available to QM practitioners.
Information and Communication	The extent to which promotional activities and publications, conferences, and possibilities for best-practice exchange are available to QM practitioners in the country.
Rewarding quality and engagement of people	The presence, frequency and focus of quality awards ; the presence of active and established certification schemes.

Thirdly, the elements of this basic framework were then cross-referenced with several publications that analyse the efforts of governments and institutions to strengthen the utilisation of QM at the European and national levels. This was done by adding a final layer of detail to the framework, by more specifically and concretely defining what each element consists of in the domain of QM in public administrations. Two of the major sources consulted in this step were the 2008 study Quality Management in Public

⁵⁴ Silimperi, D. R., Franco, L. M., van Zanten, T.V., & Macaulay, C. 2002. A framework for institutionalizing quality assurance. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* 14 (Supplement 1): 67-73.

Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis, published by the Slovenian Ministry of Public Administration⁵⁵, and CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity⁵⁶ by Asensio et al. (2021). This final step led to the framework that will guide later steps within the research and is depicted in Table 2. Examples of other sources that were consulted can be found in the footnotes^{57,58,59}.

3.1 Description of the elements within the framework

Table 2 shows the framework for institutionalisation underlying this research, adapted to the context of the institutionalisation of QM in public administration. It is mainly based on the essential elements to institutionalise QM, as defined by Silimperi et al., which are subdivided into three main categories and are presented in the first column. The second column is more specific to this research and lists the different actions related to institutionalising QM in public administration, which were derived from the process described in step 3 of the previous subsection.

3.1.1 Internal enabling environment

According to Silimperi et al., '[t]he internal enabling environment includes those organisational features that encourage the growth of a sustainable QA programme and that senior managers of an organisation generally can control or change'⁶⁰ and is here extended to the public sector as a whole. The sector's internal environment is about its leadership, and strategic and cultural values, which can facilitate or hamper the institutionalisation process.

It is also related to what Cummings and Worley define as 'intervention characteristics', especially regarding the specificity of goals and the level of support and sponsorship for the institutionalisation process which, as explained below, is define here as 'leadership'⁶¹.

⁵⁵ Žurga, G. (ed.) (2008). *Quality Management in Public Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Public Administration.

⁵⁶ Asensio, M., Evaristo, C., & Martins, M. (2021). *CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity*. Lisbon: DGAEP.

⁵⁷ ReSPA (2022). *Periodical Regional Quality Management Analysis – Final Report*. Danilovgrad: Regional School of Public Administration.

⁵⁸ European CAF Resource Centre. (2005). *Study on the use of the Common Assessment Framework in European Public Administrations*.

⁵⁹ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (ed.) (2010). *Growing Towards Excellence in the European Public Sector. A Decade of European Collaboration with CAF*. EUPAN and EIPA.

⁶⁰ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. 2002. Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1), 14.

⁶¹ Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2009). *Organization Development and Change*. New York: Wiley.

The internal environment might be helped or hindered by a wider external environment, which includes factors such as the country's political and administrative structure, its level of political stability, and its budgetary resources⁶².

Four elements are included in this category:

Strategic documents and policies

This element encompasses all government documents and decisions on the adoption of QM. This includes both widely defined strategic documents, often part of public administration reform efforts, and more targeted policy decisions, for instance mandating the adoption of a specific TQM model. In short, they lay out the role of each organisation in adopting QM, the related objectives, the assignment of staff, and finances and the necessary actions⁶³.

The effectiveness of policies largely hinges on the extent to which they are implemented and enforced. Moreover, decisions by themselves are not enough to institutionalise QM. It is also necessary to put in place support systems and to adequately prepare and inspire employees⁶⁴.

In line with Cummings and Worley, who claim that the level of 'goal specificity' is positively related to the institutionalisation process, countries are categorised according to whether QM is clearly or more vaguely defined in policy and strategic documents. More specific goals help to better target the necessary activities, such as training, to the steps and practices that are instrumental to the successful implementation of quality-related actions and make it easier to reward effort⁶⁵.

The 'policy and strategic documents' element is closely related to other components of the framework. The issuance and successful implementation of policy and strategic decisions are affected by the leadership, political will, organisational values, and the availability of the necessary resources and capacity.

Countries are classified in the framework of this report in one of three levels, according to whether QM and the related models are:

1. **not mentioned at all;**
2. **clearly and directly mentioned in relevant strategic and policy documents;**
3. **only indirectly mentioned**, for instance by using terms such as 'performance' and 'outcome orientation'.

Silimperi et al. do not mention regulatory status as a term in their framework (as it is more focused on the organisational level); however, **regulatory status is a manifestation of policy on the macro level**. It was therefore included as a criterion for the analysis. This is in line with what was done by the authors

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2009). *Organization Development and Change*. New York: Wiley.

of the 'Quality management in public administrations of the EU Member States: comparative analysis' study as well as Staes and Thijs (2005)⁶⁶. However, it is only used later in the analysis to create country groups and not to score them. Although it being used as a distinguishing factor between countries, there is no evidence in the consulted research as to whether it is preferable to mandate the adoption of QM by law, or simply leave it on a voluntary basis for organisations in public administration.

Leadership

Institutionalising QM warrants a change in organisational behaviour. A steady and reliable leadership is therefore necessary to motivate and support the entire organisation towards that change⁶⁷. According to Staes and Thijs (2010) '[l]eaders establish a clear mission statement, a vision and values and create and maintain the internal environment in which people can become fully involved in achieving the organisation's objectives'⁶⁸. They also 'demonstrate the capability to maintain constancy of purpose in a changing environment'⁶⁹. Finally, as highlighted by Cummings and Worley, leadership (or 'sponsorship', which is the term they use) should originate from a sufficiently high level of the organisation, with the ability to distribute the necessary resources and promote the institutionalisation process in the long term⁷⁰.

In the comparative analysis, the focus is on the level and trend of political support for the adoption of QM, taking inspiration from Staes and Thijs (2005)⁷¹. The adoption of QM models heavily depends on the availability of financial resources and the building of the necessary capacity of employees. Whether quality is a political priority or not is a crucial factor in determining if budgetary and other types of resources are assigned to QM.

Countries are classified in the framework of this study according to whether **the political will for the adoption of QM in the last 10 years has been stable, is increasing, or can be classified as decreasing**, for instance due to the pivot towards other priorities.

⁶⁶ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Report on the state of affairs of the common assessment framework (CAF) after five years. *EIPAScope*, 2005(3).

⁶⁷ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁶⁸ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (ed.) (2010). *Growing Towards Excellence in the European Public Sector. A Decade of European Collaboration with CAF*. EUPAN and EIPA, p. 69.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Cummings, T. G., & Worley, C. G. (2009). *Organization Development and Change*. New York: Wiley.

⁷¹ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Report on the state of affairs of the common assessment framework (CAF) after five years. *EIPAScope*, 2005(3)

Quality culture as a core value

An additional step in the institutionalisation process is to move from the advocacy of QM by policy documents and actions of leaders to the establishment of a 'quality culture'. The concept of quality should become a guiding principle in all parts of the organisation, ideally in an autonomous way, without being the direct result of a certain policy decision.

It was decided to assess the level of maturity in the development of a quality culture by considering the QM elements of measuring customer satisfaction and quality⁷². According to Staes and Thijs (2010), 'it is essential to create a measurement-friendly organisational culture: a culture which attaches importance to a disciplined use of criteria for continuous performance improvement and which does not regard this effective, useful measurement as a threat'⁷³.

Several aspects inform the categorisation of countries within this element, and they were summarised in three groups, as follows:

1. **The measurement of quality and customer satisfaction is just mentioned in strategic and policy documents** without being carried out in practice;
2. Such measurement can be **autonomously conducted by different government organisations**, without national coordination.
3. Quality and customer satisfaction can be **measured by central government organisations at the national level**.

Resources

As mentioned previously, financial, human, and other types of resources are essential for the successful adoption of QM. The necessary amount of those resources may be higher in the initial stages of the institutionalisation process; however a certain amount is also required to sustain the use of QM over time⁷⁴.

For the purpose of the comparative analysis, financial resources are the primary measurement, meaning whether there is (or there was in the past) a specific budget allocated to QM at the national or regional level or whether EU funds are available (or were available in the past). 'Material' support is also included in the theory of some of the sources; however, their provision is closely linked to the 'Information and Communication' efforts considered further below.

Countries are categorised by **whether there is no funding, direct funding for the implementation of QM (either from the government budget or other sources), or whether such funding is only indirect**. Indirect

⁷² Žurga, G. (ed.) (2008). *Quality Management in Public Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Public Administration.

⁷³ Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (ed.) (2010). *Growing Towards Excellence in the European Public Sector. A Decade of European Collaboration with CAF*. EUPAN and EIPA, 127.

⁷⁴ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

funding is defined here to occur when there is a government-funded national Competence Centre supporting QM-related practices in public administration. That is also the case when government officials actively carry out quality-related tasks as part of their official job tasks (for instance, when the CAF National Correspondent is an employee of a Ministry).

3.1.2 Organising for quality

Structure/Coordination of QM practitioners

The second category of elements for the institutionalisation of QM is concerned with organising for quality, specifically in regard to structure and coordination. This includes primarily the roles and responsibilities when it comes to the promotion of QM⁷⁵, in terms of people and which organisations, departments, or ministries they belong to.

The comparative analysis also takes into account **the degree to which the promotion of QM is centralised** (for instance, being driven by a ministry and/or a National Competence Centre) **or decentralised** (meaning that each government organisation decides whether and how to implement and promote QM). Finally, as this analysis focuses specifically on the CAF model, it always considers how the National QM Competence Centre is connected to the National CAF Centre/Correspondent. However, this connection does not influence the categorisation within the framework of the research. There, the important distinction is whether the tasks of a Competence Centre are organised centrally or are decentralised.

The different types of National QM Competence Centres warrant attention. The paragraphs below propose a categorisation of centres in the eight countries analysed more in detail in this study (see section 4.3.1 for the reasoning behind their selection).

Starting in the 1980s, under the impulse of New Public Management-style reforms, certain government functions such as the delivery of public services, regulation, and the implementation of policy have been delegated to semi-autonomous agencies. Such agencies have been subject to different classifications by academia over the years. For the purpose of this research, four main categories will be used, according to their degree of autonomy and their legal status⁷⁶. Each of these categories influences how quality management (QM) support, promotion, and implementation will evolve in a country. The presence of a dedicated quality centre, with permanent staff and allocated resources, indicates strong political backing and ensures continuity in the strategy and structure developed within the country. In contrast, the absence of a designated QM centre leads to a more unstable framework, vulnerable to political shifts and changing priorities.

⁷⁵ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁷⁶ Verhoest, K., van Thiel, S., & De Vadder, S. (2021). Agencification in Public Administration. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Retrieved 4 Oct. 2024, from <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1466>.

The first category comprises those countries where there is no specific agency dedicated to QM promotion. Then, the three agencies model comprise:

Type 1: 'have some managerial autonomy but do not have their own legal personality separate from the state or their parent ministry'⁷⁷;

Type 2: 'are organisations and bodies with managerial autonomy that have their own legal personality separate from the state or their parent ministry'⁷⁸;

Type 3 : 'have their own legal personality vested in, and defined by, private law and are established by, or on behalf of, the government in the form of a private law corporation, company, or a foundation, but they are predominantly controlled by government and are at least partially involved in executing public tasks'⁷⁹.

This classification is used here to categorise the institutional models of the National QM Competence Centre of the eight countries, if existing.

Poland and Spain are the only two Member States under consideration without a National QM Competence Centre. As mentioned in section 5.1, in Poland the functions of the CAF Centre are carried out by the CAF National Correspondent, who operates within the Civil Service Department of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, and by the National Organiser on CAF for self-government units, who operates within the National Institute of Local Self-Government, a state budgetary unit under the Ministry of the Interior and Administration⁸⁰. Similarly in Spain, after the closing of the Spanish Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies in 2016, such functions are carried out by a small unit of civil servants, including the CAF National Correspondent, within the Ministry of Finance and Public Function.

The Bulgarian Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing fit the description of 'Type 2' agencies. IPA was established by the Bulgarian Civil Servant Law of 1999 (Art. 35), and is an independent institution with its own legal identity under the Council of Ministers, which approves and monitors the implementation of its budget. The Institute, officially founded in 2000 by a special act of the Council of Ministers (Regulation 82/2000), independently fulfils its mission, which is stated in the Civil Servant Law and consists mainly of providing training and professional development for employees in the state administration⁸¹. The Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing operates as a public entity independent of any Ministry with a separate legal identity, meaning that it can act autonomously, settle legal agreements, claim legal rights, and possess properties. Its actions are ruled by the Act on the Organization of the Activities of the Government and on the Organization of the Central State Administration (Act No 575/2001). The Office relies on funding from the Ministry of Finance, with supervision from the Government. As a central administrative body

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Interview PL_1

⁸¹ Bulgarian Civil Servant Law

established by the government, it is subject to reorganisation whenever there is a change in the executive. The President of the Office is accountable to the government, which appoints and dismisses them⁸².

The National CAF Centres of Austria (KDZ) and Italy (Formez) can be classified as 'Type 3' agencies. KDZ is a 'non-profit association [...] offer[ing] applied research, advice and training to the public sector'⁸³, appointed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sports to serve as the Austrian CAF Centre. KDZ is independent of the Ministry; however, it receives funding from it and together they agree on a yearly plan of activities, outlining its tasks. Formez 'is a recognised association with legal personality under private law, in-house to the Presidency of the Council – Department of Public Administration and associated Administrations. The Institute is subject to the control, supervision, and inspection powers of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department of Public Administration, which holds the majority share of the association'⁸⁴.

No countries under consideration fit the characteristics of the 'Type 1' model.

This classification is summarised in Table 3, where the last column indicates whether the mentioned National QM Competence Centres also function as National CAF Centres.

⁸² Interview SK_1

⁸³ <https://www.kdz.eu/en/kdz>

⁸⁴ <https://www.formez.it/chi-siamo> (Translated from Italian)

Table 3: Institutional models of National QM Competence Centres

Model	Characteristics	Countries	CAF Centre
No separate National QM Competence Centre	A number of civil servants are assigned with the task of QM promotion, as well as other functions, and are under the mandate of the hierarchy in the Ministry.	Poland (Chancellery of the Prime Minister), Spain (Ministry of Finance and Public Function)	The functions of the National CAF Centre are carried out by civil servants within a ministry/government institution.
Type 1	The National QM Competence Centre is an agency with managerial autonomy but without its own legal personality.		If available, the functions of the National CAF Centre are likely carried out by this organisation as part of their mandate.
Type 2	The National QM Competence Centre is an agency with managerial autonomy with its own legal personality under public law, receiving funding from the government and fulfilling the mandate assigned by the government.	Bulgaria (IPA), Slovakia (Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing)	The functions of the National CAF Centre are carried out by public officials in this organisation as part of their mandate.
Type 3	The National QM Competence Centre has its own legal personality, based on private law, but is at least partially funded and dependent on the direction of the government.	Austria (KDZ), Italy (Formez), Belgium (Bosa)	The functions of the National CAF Centre are carried out by contracted employees of this organisation as part of their mandate.

3.1.3 Support functions

To successfully institutionalise QM and to ensure its structural adoption within the organisation, a range of other support activities are necessary. Those activities can be divided into three categories: **capacity building, information and communication, and rewarding quality and engagement of people.**

Capacity building

As previously noted, the institutionalisation of QM requires behavioural change in the entire organisation; thus, developing the necessary capacity extends beyond the mere procedural application of a particular model. According to Silimperi et al., three kinds of capacity building are conducive to the successful institutionalisation of QM: firstly, some basic QM knowledge; secondly, guidance and tutoring during the execution of QM activities; and thirdly, monitoring of QM-related actions⁸⁵.

Therefore, in the comparative analysis training activities are considered to be the most important component of the capacity-building element. In addition to whether training on QM is offered or not, other aspects of interest are who is offering this, **their level of complexity, whether they concentrate on a specific TQM model, and whether they are offered free of charge or on a paid basis.**

Secondly, there is an assessment of whether **support from experts in the field of QM is available**, an element which is included in several of the reviewed papers and studies⁸⁶. Experts guide employees in the initial stages of the implementation of QM, provide them with mentoring and coaching and, towards the end of the institutionalisation process, supervise the correct application of QM principles and activities. Moreover, the analysis attempts to ascertain how the work with such experts is facilitated e.g. whether a database of experts is maintained.

Information and communication

The element of information and communication is of crucial importance for the success of the other elements and, in the end, of the institutionalisation process. It allows the setting of priorities, the strengthening of a quality culture, the acknowledgement of progress, and the practice of mutual learning. According to Silimperi et al., information can be defined as the consolidation of lessons learned and

⁸⁵ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁸⁶ Žurga, G. (ed.) (2008). *Quality Management in Public Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Public Administration.

Asensio, M., Evaristo, C., & Martins, M. (2021). *CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity*. Lisbon: DGAEP. ReSPA (2022). *Periodical Regional Quality Management Analysis – Final Report*. Danilovgrad: Regional School of Public Administration.

achievements of QM-related actions, while communication can be considered as the dissemination of information throughout the organisation and beyond⁸⁷.

The comparative analysis investigates **whether there are publications on the topic of quality further supporting the promotion of QM** and, if written in the national language, are helping the creation of a local terminology for quality⁸⁸. In addition, the availability of publications in English, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge and best practices, is also taken into consideration.

Further, it considers **whether there is a centralised source of information, promotion of QM and dissemination of best practices**, such as the website of the National CAF Centre.

Finally, it looks into **events that aim to promote QM, disseminate best practices and lessons learned, and facilitate networking between experts and practitioners in the domain of quality**, such as conferences and other types of activities⁸⁹. The frequency of such events is used as a classification criterion for the level of institutionalisation of QM.

Rewarding quality and engagement of people

The final element under consideration is centred on the importance of establishing a culture in the organisation that celebrates and rewards achievements in the domain of QM. This helps create a sense of ownership among public administration employees of their accomplishments, and motivates them to continue their efforts in the area of QM and/or TQM⁹⁰.

Holding quality awards and competitions has been an established practice for a relatively long period of time. A 2002 survey on quality activities in the public administrations of EU Member States published by EIPA stated that '[t]he organisation of quality awards or contests is one of the standard instruments used to promote quality, innovation, and organisational learning in the public sector, to encourage public administrations to use instruments of quality management and also introduce an element of competition into the public sector'⁹¹. The comparative analysis considers **whether awards are given to recognise**

⁸⁷ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁸⁸ Žurga, G. (ed.) (2008). *Quality Management in Public Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Public Administration.

⁸⁹ Žurga, G. (ed.) (2008). *Quality Management in Public Administrations of the EU Member States: Comparative Analysis*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Public Administration.

Asensio, M., Evaristo, C., & Martins, M. (2021). *CAF Challenges to Promote Public Sector Capacity*. Lisbon: DGAEP ReSPA. (2022). *Periodical Regional Quality Management Analysis – Final Report*. Danilovgrad: Regional School of Public Administration. Staes, P., & Thijs, N. (2005). Report on the state of affairs of the common assessment framework (CAF) after five years. *EIPAScope*, 2005(3).

⁹⁰ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁹¹ EIPA. (2002). Survey regarding quality activities in the public administrations of the European Union Member States, Maastricht, p. 95, as cited in Staes, P., & Thijs, N. 2005. Report on the state of affairs of the common assessment framework (CAF) after five years. *EIPAScope*, 2005(3).

excellence in the domain of QM, their frequency, and who organises them. In particular, countries are subdivided according to whether such awards are specifically focused on the topic of quality management in public administration or whether they are concerned with broader themes that are related to quality (for instance, awards on public sector best practices in general).

Consideration was also given to **the existence of an external certification system**, who organises it, whether it is free of charge or on a paid basis, and whether support is offered to organisations seeking to participate in the certification procedure.

As a final note, it is important to highlight the holistic nature of the framework. It should not be seen as a collection of separate elements that lead in isolation to the effective introduction and establishment of QM and a broader quality culture. It is not sufficient to enact the requirements of each element, given that the institutionalisation process continues until quality principles are entirely absorbed into the daily business and work of the organisation⁹².

4. Research Methodology and Design

This study aims to comprehensively examine the current state of the usage of QM and quality management models (with a focus on CAF) in the public administrations of the EU Member States and candidate countries, and subsequently delve into an in-depth analysis of eight selected countries. For candidate countries, given the large scope of the study, it was decided to focus only on members of the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), a regional organisation in the Western Balkans whose mission is to join forces in improving public administrations in the area. This choice was based on the greater availability of information on those countries, thanks to the partnership between ReSPA and EIPA. For ease of reading, those countries will be referred to throughout the report as 'candidate countries'.

The study followed this described four-step mixed-method procedure, to conduct a comparative analysis based on a foundational mapping of the institutionalisation of QM in public administrations in EU Member States and candidate countries.

- 1) **Laying the foundation:** Desk research that reviewed relevant literature published in the period 2008–2024 and was supported by a first survey that aimed to chart the current situation QM practitioners face concerning the institutionalisation of QM in their respective countries.
- 2) **Broad mapping of the current situation:** A second, more in-depth survey to create country profiles, supported by insights from the first survey and more in-depth desk research.
- 3) **Detailed mapping of the current situation in the eight countries:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the selected eight focus countries for the in-depth analysis.
- 4) **Comparative analysis**

⁹² Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

- Stage 1: Insights gained from steps 2 and 3 were utilised in a comparative analysis.
- Stage 2: Scores were assigned to the eight focus countries according to classification criteria, to explore a possible relationship between QM and indicators of public sector performance, and citizens' trust and satisfaction, by utilising elements of quantitative analysis. Here, the countries were also assigned a classification in the QM maturity categories of 'exploratory', 'elemental', 'established' and 'mature'.
- Stage 3: Countries were grouped according to the non-scorable elements 'structure' and 'regulatory status' of the framework, then compared to their indicators of public sector performance and citizens' trust and satisfaction, by utilising elements of quantitative analysis.

The methodology for each part of the research is explained in detail below.

4.1. Laying the foundation

After reviewing the relevant literature published between 2008 and 2024 on the state of affairs of the institutionalisation of QM in the countries under consideration, a first survey was sent to experts in the field of QM. This covered the EU Member States and candidate countries, and aimed to chart the current situation QM practitioners face concerning the institutionalisation of QM in their respective countries.

The survey was sent in the first quarter of 2024 and recipients were given around six weeks to respond. The survey distribution was facilitated by the network of CAF correspondents, the EUPAN (European Public Administration Network) members, and the ReSPA network. The questionnaire used can be found in Annex C. The survey was sent to the experts, with the request to fill in one survey and forward the questionnaire to at least two of their contacts.

In total, there were **79** responses from **EU Member States** and **28** from **EU candidate countries**. The response rate and characteristics of the responses were judged to be not representative enough for detailed insights. However, the gathered information was used as further guiding points for the detailed desk-research concerning the country profiles, helped to optimise the second survey and delivered possible distinguishing trends between EU Member States and candidate countries (presented in 5.1).

4.2 Broad mapping of the level of institutionalisation of QM in the EU and candidate countries

A second, more in-depth survey was utilised as well as ongoing desk research to fill the gaps and update information in the country profiles, with the ambition of providing a comparative overview of the state of affairs of QM in all the countries under consideration. The unifying framework for institutionalisation presented in Section 3.1 was followed; the country mapping is presented in its entirety in Annex B.

A questionnaire comprising 11 questions (see Annex E) was developed based on the lessons learned from the first survey. It was decided to contact all country representatives in the QM network of EIPA (to

CAF National Correspondents or alternatively, representatives from the EUPAN network) in a more targeted way to fill gaps in the country profiles and specifically to gain more information on the focus countries of this study. This selective approach had the advantage of a near-complete response rate, albeit with the downside that the insights came from a smaller pool of QM practitioners. It was distributed during the second quarter of 2024, allowing a six-week period for responses.

4.3. Detailed mapping of the current situation in the eight target countries

The case studies of eight countries involved a more in-depth analysis via nine semi-structured interviews (one per target country, and one follow-up interview in Austria). Each interview was conducted with the CAF National Correspondent and members of their quality team in the country, digging deeper into the elements of the theoretical framework.

The interviews aimed firstly to obtain a more precise indication of the level of maturity of the institutionalisation of QM, and then to explore the underlying reasons behind different levels of adoption of QM across countries. Finally, they aimed to uncover relevant best practices and challenges in relation to the institutionalisation of QM.

4.3.1 Country selection criteria

The selection of countries for the in-depth analysis was based on five different criteria, aiming to capture the diversity of the EU Member States and candidate countries under consideration. First, a rough balance was sought in terms of geographical representation, with the inclusion of EU Member States from Western, Eastern, Southern and Northern Europe and the inclusion of one EU candidate country located in the Western Balkans.

Another criterion was the availability of data and information, in terms of the ease of contacting experts from the country who are willing to assist with the analysis (often facilitated by the existence of a national CAF Centre).

Countries were also selected according to their level of institutionalisation of QM, which could be inferred from the surveys, aiming to include countries with different levels of adoption of QM. It was also decided to consider the state structure of countries, concerning the distinction between centralised and decentralised states. Approximately half of the selected countries are characterised by a centralised structure, whereas the other half is characterised by a decentralised one. The final criterion is based on the indicators of government effectiveness (from the World Bank) and satisfaction with public services (from the Eurobarometer). The sample is balanced in terms of including countries with different levels in the scores for government effectiveness and satisfaction with public services.

Table 4: Selected countries and indicators informing the selection

Country	Satisfaction with public services (2024) ⁹³	Government effectiveness (2022) ⁹⁴ ranging from -2.5 to 2.5	State structure ⁹⁵
Austria	78%	1.47	Unitary; decentralised
Belgium	66%	1.23	Federal; decentralised
Bulgaria	43%	-0.27	Unitary; centralised
Italy	34%	0.45	Unitary; decentralised
Montenegro	65%	-0.03	Unitary; centralised
Poland	65%	0.26	Unitary; centralised
Slovakia	62%	0.38	Unitary; centralised
Spain	54%	0.92	Unitary; decentralised

4.4 Comparative analysis

As mentioned above, the comparative analysis was divided into three major stages.

In the first stage, the information gained during the detailed mapping of the eight countries was consolidated within the classification criteria of the framework presented in section 3.1. Identified patterns, trends, remarkable insights, and commonalities from these countries were summarised and are reported in section 5.2 according to the elements of the theoretical framework. This set of insights was then compared to the country profiles of the non-focus countries to glean if the situation is reflected in them as well. The outcome of this is clearly stated within the reporting of section 5.2.

⁹³ Percentage of 'Very good' and 'Rather good' responses to the question 'How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?' in relation to 'The provision of public services in (OUR COUNTRY)'. Source: Spring 2024 Standard Eurobarometer 101.

⁹⁴ The indicator measures perceptions of the quality of public services; the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures; the quality of policy formulation and implementation; and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. The indicator ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance. Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators.

⁹⁵ The structure of the state can be perceived as having two fundamental dimensions: a vertical and a horizontal dimension. First, the vertical dimension refers to the distribution of power between different levels of government. The main feature of the vertical dimension is the distinction between unitary and federal states. The second feature of this dimension is the level of centralisation. Whereas some countries are highly centralised with power concentrated at the federal level, other countries are decentralised with significant powers vested in regional and local levels of government. Source: EIPA (2023). Public Administration. In: *Public Sector Performance Programme 2022–2025. An International Benchmarking Study – Sub-Study 2022*, 22. For Montenegro the classification is based upon the country profile from United Cities and Local Governments in cooperation with OECD: <https://uclg-localfinance.org/sites/default/files/MONTENEGRO-EURASIA-V3.pdf>

The **second stage** was to use the consolidated information from the eight focus countries, due to the richness of the available information, and categorise it according to the theoretical framework. The full outcome of this is reported in Appendix A and summarised in Table 10 in section 5.3.

This provided the basis to assign scores on the maturity of the level of QM institutionalisation (this step is explained in more detail in section 4.4.1) and to group countries into maturity levels as explained in section 4.4.2. These scores are then correlated with indicators of government effectiveness, trust in government, and satisfaction with public services. The reasoning for using these indicators is described in section 4.4.3 and the results of the analysis are presented in section 5.3.2.

In the **third and last stage** (section 5.3.3), countries were grouped according to the non-scorable elements 'structure' and 'regulatory status' of the framework and then correlated again to the indicators of public sector performance and citizens' trust and satisfaction, by utilising elements of quantitative analysis.

4.4.1 Scoring for the maturity of QM institutionalisation

To quantify the level of maturity of each country in relation to the level of institutionalisation of QM, a scoring system has been developed. Table 5 provides an explanation of the scoring for each classification criterion. As mentioned in the theory section 3.1, it became evident that these categories, although distinct, are closely interconnected. The application of theoretical categories on real-life circumstances had the effect that scoring in one category was sometimes one of the considerations for the scoring in another. These are practical manifestations of what is already documented at the end of theoretical section 3.1, which suggests the interconnected impact of efforts within the elements of the framework.

Table 5: Range of scoring within the framework for the institutionalisation of QM

Internal enabling environment	
Element	Classification criteria and range of scoring
Strategic documents and policies	<p>The scoring ranges from 0 to 2, and points are allocated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if QM is not mentioned at all in strategic and policy documents; ▪ 1 point if there is some mention of QM, albeit vague, or there are indirect mentions, for example of elements that are related to QM; ▪ 2 points if QM is defined clearly and in a detailed manner as guiding documents for public administration within the respective country. <p>'Regulatory status' is excluded from the scoring since consulted research does not indicate a higher or lower level of institutionalisation maturity. However, as</p>

	mentioned in section 3.1, the classifications ‘ non-mandatory ’ and ‘ mandatory ’ are used in the third stage of the comparative analysis to group the eight countries.
Leadership	<p>The scoring for countries ranges from –1 to 2, and points are allocated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ –1 in case of decreasing political will in the past ten years; ▪ 0 points in the case of volatile political will; ▪ 1 point if political will can be classified as stable; ▪ 2 points where the political will in the last 10 years can be categorised as increasing. <p>The country reports are diverse, so possible indications for categorisation within this element were sourced, for example from: A) the scoring within the first element on documents and policies; B) if there is support for a national QM Competence Centres, or other forms of governmental support for QM; C) country-specific indications during the interviews, such as the position of QM on recent political agendas.</p>
Quality culture as a core value	<p>The scoring for this criterion ranges from 0 to 3, and is based on the practices of countries when it comes to measuring quality and customer satisfaction. Points are allocated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if quality/customer satisfaction measurement is only part of strategic and policy documents without being carried out in reality (yet); ▪ 1 point is assigned when quality/customer satisfaction measurement take place at the organisational level in different government bodies according to their discretion; ▪ 2 points if measurements take place at the national level, and they focus only on either quality or satisfaction; ▪ 3 points if both quality and satisfaction are measured at the national level.
Resources	<p>The scoring ranges from 0 to 2, and points are allocated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if no funding (not even indirect) is available for QM (this includes countries with schools for public administration which do not specifically function as competence centres for quality); ▪ 1 point for countries where there is a government-funded competence centre for QM; ▪ 2 points if direct funding for QM is available.
Organising for quality	
Element	Classification criteria
Structure/coordination of QM practitioners	The structure/coordination of QM practitioners is excluded from the scoring since it does not inherently suggest a higher or lower level of institutionalisation maturity. However, as mentioned in section 3.1, the classifications ‘ centralised ’ and ‘ decentralised ’ are used in the third stage of the comparative analysis to group the eight countries.

Support functions	
Element	Classification criteria
Capacity building	<p>The scoring ranges from 0 to 2, and points are allocated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if no specific training activities on QM are offered; ▪ 1 point if only basic training is offered, or training activities are planned but not yet implemented; ▪ 2 points if both basic and advanced training is organised.
Information and communication	<p>The scoring ranges from 0 to 3, and points are allocated as follows:</p> <p>For publications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if there are no publications on QM; ▪ 1 point if only basic implementation information in the national language is published; ▪ 2 points if more advanced documents in the national language are published; ▪ 3 points if more advanced documents in English and in the national language are published. <p>The logic of the three-point scoring is based upon the argument that countries with the highest score are likely to be more invested QM as they seem to share their lessons learned on QM with the wider QM community.</p> <p>For gatherings of QM practitioners, points are allocated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if no gatherings take place; ▪ 1 point if gatherings take place less than once per year; ▪ 2 points if gatherings take place once per year; ▪ 3 points if gatherings take place more than once per year
Rewarding quality and engagement of people	<p>The scoring ranges from 0 to 2, and points are allocated as follows:</p> <p>For certification schemes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if there are no certification schemes; ▪ 1 point if certification schemes are present but their scope is relatively limited, for example if they are available only to local governments or if they have been losing resources and support; ▪ 2 points if schemes are active and well established. <p>For quality awards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 points if no awards are held for public administrators; ▪ 1 point if awards are held that recognise related topics such as effective management in public administration, but they do not have a specific focus on QM; ▪ 2 points if awards are centred on QM.

4.4.2 Grouping of countries

The scores for each criterion are added up to obtain an overall score by country, which informs the subdivision of countries into four sub-groups, corresponding to the quarters in which the range of scoring can be subdivided. In principle, the minimum total score a country could be assigned is -1, while the

maximum is 21. Countries can only earn full points (there are no 0.5 points awarded in this scheme). The conception of these sub-groups has been inspired by Silimperi et al.⁹⁶ and adapted to the topic of the institutionalisation of QM in public administration. The resulting subdivision is shown in Table 6, along with a description of the level of institutionalisation found in each sub-group. The results of the scoring and subdivision into groups are presented in section 5.3.1.

Table 6: Scoring ranges and country sub-groups

Range of scoring	Sub-group	Characteristics
-1 to 4.5	Exploratory	Initial stages of the institutionalisation process, with public administrations starting to gain awareness of the advantages of implementing QM.
4.5 to 10	Elemental	A basic set of QM-related activities has been implemented, with a limited level of support by decision-makers and supporting infrastructure.
10 to 15.5	Established	Efforts in the domain of QM have been scaled up, as a result of evidence that backs up the benefits of QM and support by leadership.
15.5 to 21	Mature	QM has been successfully consolidated into the different activities performed by public administrations adopting a continuous improvement mindset.

4.4.3. Rationale for the comparison of QM institutionalisation scores and indicators of public sector performance, trust and satisfaction

The second and third stage of our comparative analysis aims to unearth some indications for a possible relationship between mature quality management in the public administration of a country and performance on internationally recognised metrics. The chosen indicators are **trust in public administration, government effectiveness, and satisfaction with public services**.

The reasoning for this choice is as follows. A fundamental determinant of citizens' trust in public administration is a well-functioning public sector, which efficiently delivers good quality services⁹⁷. At the same time, trust can be considered as the most crucial piece of evidence of good performance delivered

⁹⁶ Franco, L. M., Silimperi, D. R., Veldhuyzen van Zanten, T., MacAulay, C., Askov, K., Bouchet, B., & Marquez, L. (2002). Sustaining quality of healthcare: institutionalization of quality assurance. *QA Monograph Series*, 2(1).

⁹⁷ Bouckaert, G. (2021). Public performance: Some reflections and lessons learned. In: Holzer, M., & Ballard, A. (eds). *The Public Productivity and Performance Handbook* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge, 68-73.

to the citizen⁹⁸. In other words, good performance is necessary to obtain trust which, in turn, can be considered as the final result of an efficient and effective public administration. The positive association between government effectiveness and trust in government has been highlighted by previous studies such as the 2022 comparative study by the European Commission on public administrations in the EU Member States⁹⁹ and the 'Public Administration' chapter from the international benchmarking study by EIPA¹⁰⁰.

The concept of performance has been widely adopted in the public sector, for example in the domains of human resources, finance, organisation and communication¹⁰¹. This is closely linked to the practice of total quality management and, therefore to the underlying notion of quality management, which was previously defined as 'the sustained effort for a high-quality service delivery'¹⁰². According to Wynen et al.¹⁰³, public administrations which have adopted performance management tend to function in a way that is more conducive to producing measurable data on performance and, at the same time, they are more likely to use quality management techniques.

These facts informed the decision to attempt to correlate the institutionalisation maturity scores with the **government effectiveness indicator**¹⁰⁴ from the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators and question QA6a.6¹⁰⁵ from the Summer 2022 Standard Eurobarometer 97, on **trust in public administration**. (This is with the exception of Montenegro, for which a question on trust in government¹⁰⁶ from the 2022 Balkan Barometer is used instead). Moreover, it was decided to also take into account question QA1.7 on **satisfaction with public services**¹⁰⁷ from the Spring 2024 Standard Eurobarometer 101, which is closely related to the topic of quality in public administration.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support; Stimpson, A., Moretti, C., & Lemmik, J. (2023). *Public Administrations in the EU Member States: 2022 Overview*. Publications Office of the European Union, p. 14. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2887/626706>

¹⁰⁰ European Institute of Public Administration. Klika, C., Lovell-Prescod M., & Giovanetti, P. (2023). Public Administration. In: *Public Sector Performance Programme 2022–2025. An International Benchmarking Study – Sub-Study 2022*. Maastricht: European Institute of Public Administration, 59.

¹⁰¹ Bouckaert, G. (2021). Public performance: some reflections and lessons learned. In: Holzer, M., & Ballard, A. (eds). *The Public Productivity and Performance Handbook (3rd ed.)*. New York: Routledge, 68-73.

¹⁰² Wynen, J., Verhoest, K., & Demuzere, S. (2016). Quality management in public-sector organizations: evidence from six EU countries. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 39(2), 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ The indicator measures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service, and the degree of its independence from political pressures, It includes the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. The indicator ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance.

¹⁰⁵ Percentage of 'Tend to trust' responses to the question 'How much trust do you have in certain institutions? For each of the following institutions, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?', in relation to 'Public administration in (OUR COUNTRY) (%)'.

¹⁰⁶ The chosen measure is the sum of responses 'Tend to trust' and 'Totally trust' to the question 'How much trust do you have in government?' from the 2022 Balkan Barometer.

¹⁰⁷ Percentage of 'Very good' and 'Rather good' responses to the question 'How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?' in relation to 'The provision of public services in (OUR COUNTRY)'.

On the government effectiveness indicator, it is important to mention that the underlying methodology of the indicator allows for comparisons between different countries, with different levels of economic development (as in the case of this study, where we compare candidate countries with EU Member States). The indicator is weighted by means of an unobserved components model, a statistical method accounting for the effect of confounding variables when comparing different countries. For more details, the Methodology for the Worldwide Governance Indicators from the World Bank can be consulted¹⁰⁸.

5. Findings

The presentation of the findings mostly follows the structure as presented in the Methodology section:

- 5.1 Notable findings observed during the ‘**Setting the scene**’ step are presented first.
- 5.2 The notable outcomes from the **detailed mapping of the eight countries** are presented and compared with insights from the **overall mapping** of the EU and candidate countries.
- 5.3 The outcomes of the **comparative analysis stages two and three** are presented.

5.1 Setting the scene

During the **first step of the research (setting the scene)**, an initial survey was conducted, alongside the initial desk research, to inform the further steps in the research process. The aim of the survey was to chart the situation QM practitioners face concerning the institutionalisation of QM. The outcome is reported in two response groups: **EU Member States and candidate countries**. The findings presented in this subsection should be regarded as indicative rather than representative findings, due to the nature of the response rate and their spread across countries. The listing of notable trends, findings, and differences between the observed groups follows the elements of the framework introduced in section 3.1.

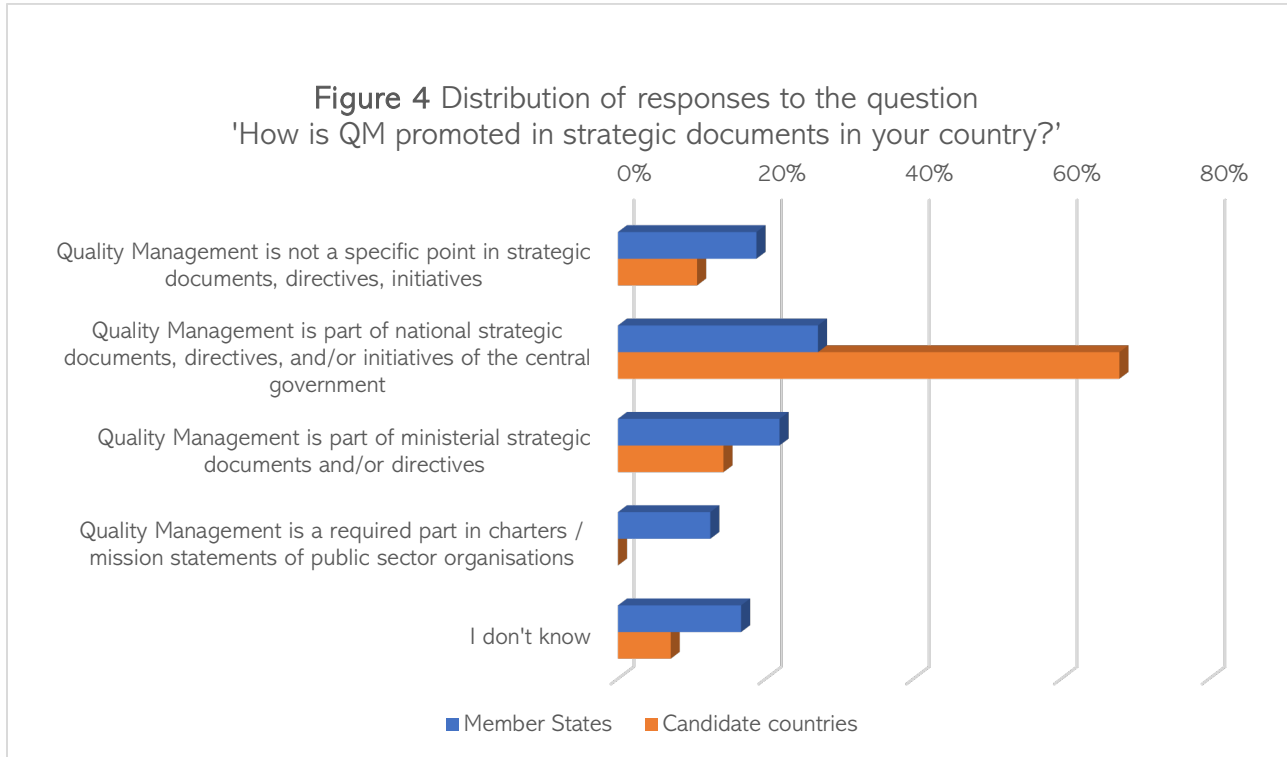
Strategic documents and policies

Member States’ promotion for quality models is embedded in individual ministerial practices and mission statements by different organisations (ministries, public sector entities), while candidate countries are promoting QM from the central level, via directives and initiatives for the whole nation. There are several

¹⁰⁸ Kaufmann, D., & Kraay, A. (2024). The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and 2024 Update. *Forthcoming in Policy Research Working Paper Series 10952, The World Bank.*

contributing factors to this situation in the candidate countries, one of them likely being the effect of the extensive work of SIGMA¹⁰⁹.

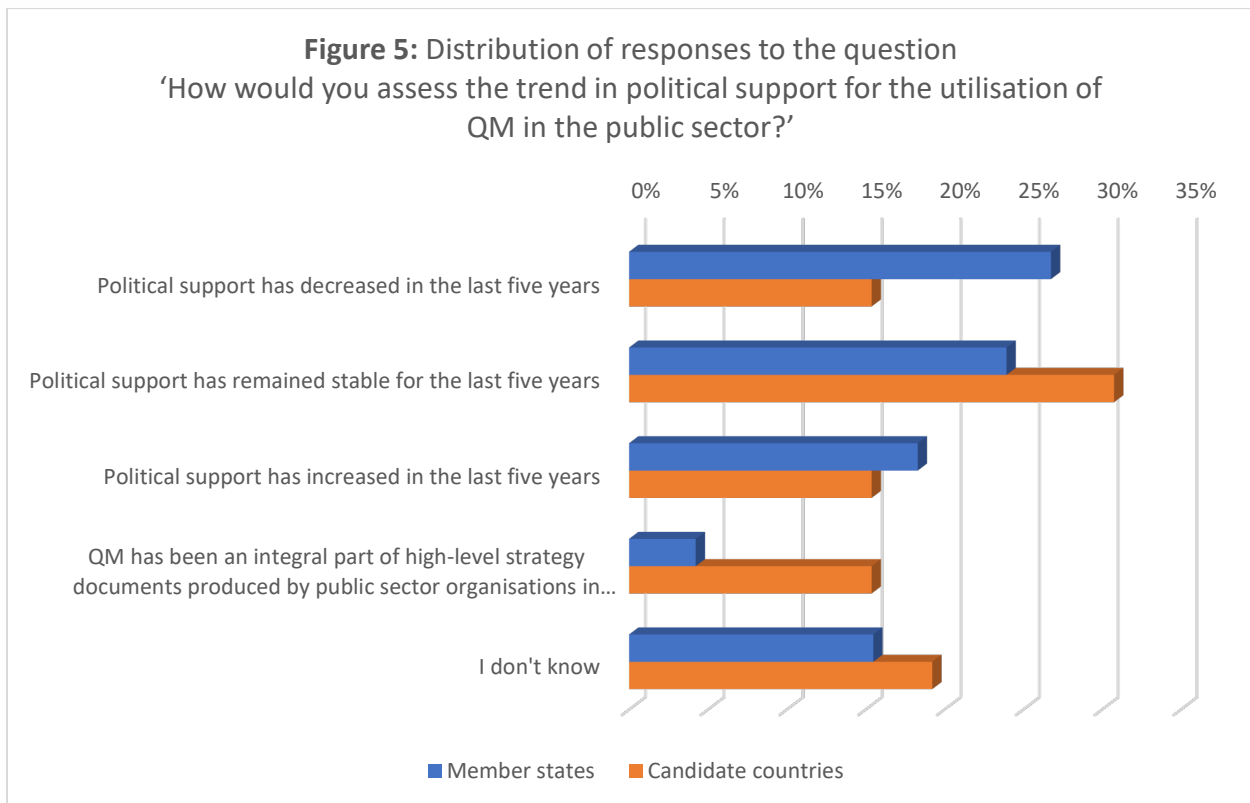
This analysis reflects the longer engagement with the topic of QM in EU Member States and is a sign that it has already permeated deeper into public administrations at various levels.



¹⁰⁹ SIGMA is a joint initiative of the OECD and EU to strengthen the capacity of public administrations in the respective countries by supporting the national governments in creating their own initiatives.

Leadership

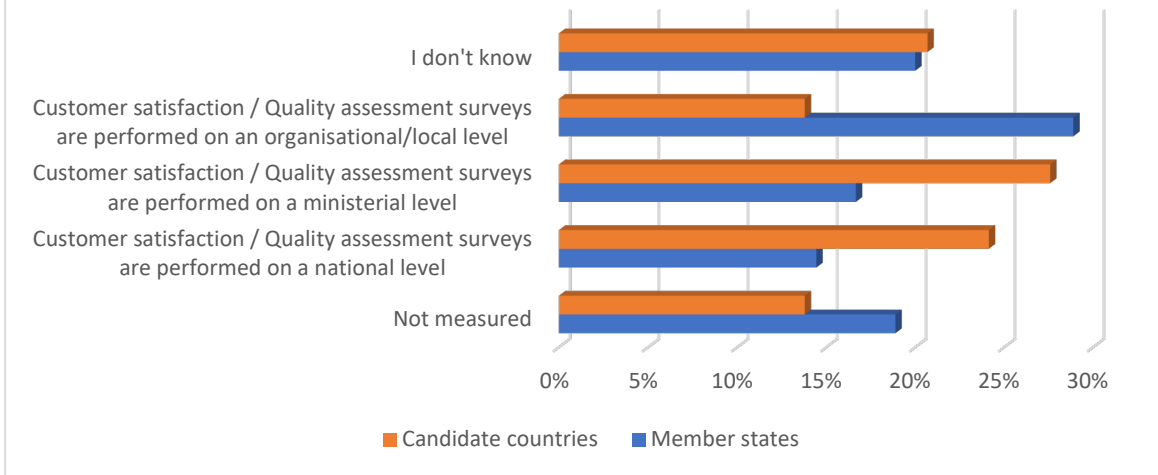
For leadership, measured as the level and trend in political support for the promotion and adoption of QM, there seems to be a slight difference between candidate countries and Member States, as shown in Figure 5. The responses indicate an overall stronger political support in the candidate countries while several EU Member States seem to experience a decline in such support. This trend suggests that QM might not be a priority on the political agendas in these countries.



Quality as a core value

There appear to be slight differences in terms of how customer satisfaction and quality assessment surveys are conducted in Member States and candidate countries, as shown in Figure 6. While MS monitoring is decentralised (based on individual entities' surveys), candidate countries seem to measure in a more centralised manner (based on surveys at national and ministerial level). This analysis coincides and builds upon the previous finding on a centralised policy and stronger political support (leadership) in the candidate countries.

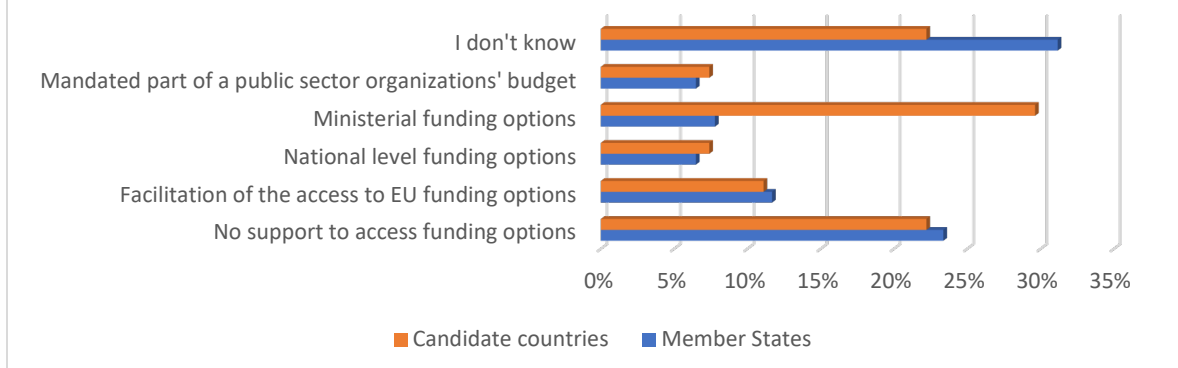
Figure 6: Distribution of responses to the question 'To what an extent has the quality of public services been monitored and evaluated over the last 7 years by a central government authority?'



Resources

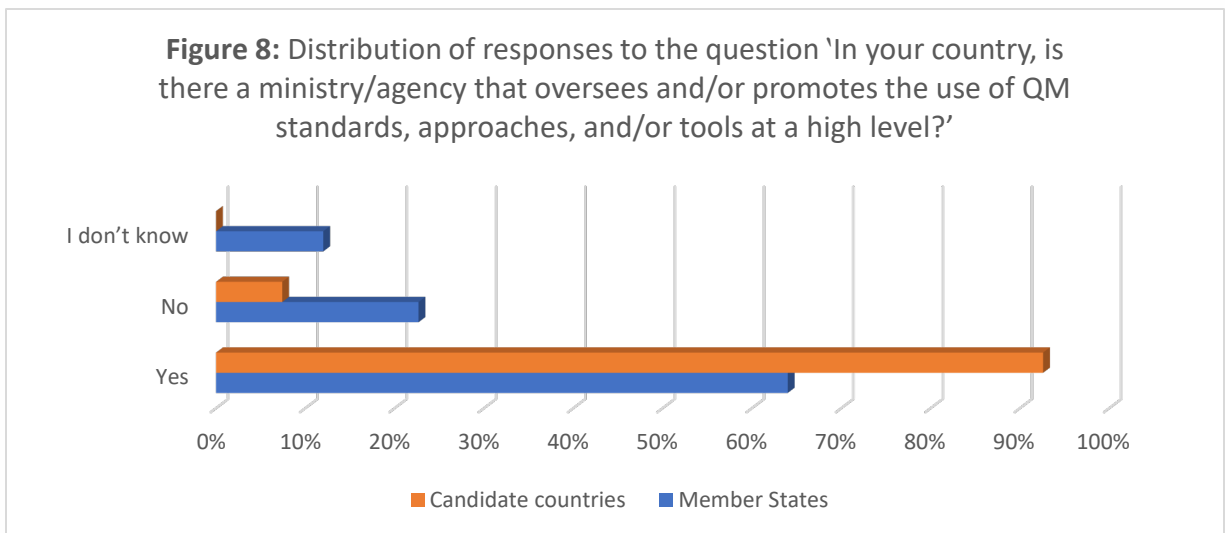
The respondents indicated a markedly divergent situation between the two groups about the availability of funding for the implementation of QM, as highlighted in Figure 6. In Member States, more than half of respondents (54%) indicated that there is no funding or that they are unaware of it. In candidate countries, a relative majority responded that there are funding options from the central government, while the 'no' or 'I don't know' answers amounted to less than half (44%). In total, answers indicating that there is regional or national funding, or the possibility to access EU funds amounted to 47%, as opposed to 26% in Member States. This suggests that knowledge regarding funding options for QM is scarcer in Member States. These initial insights and implications for the institutionalisation of QM are explored more in detail in sections 5.2 and 5.3.

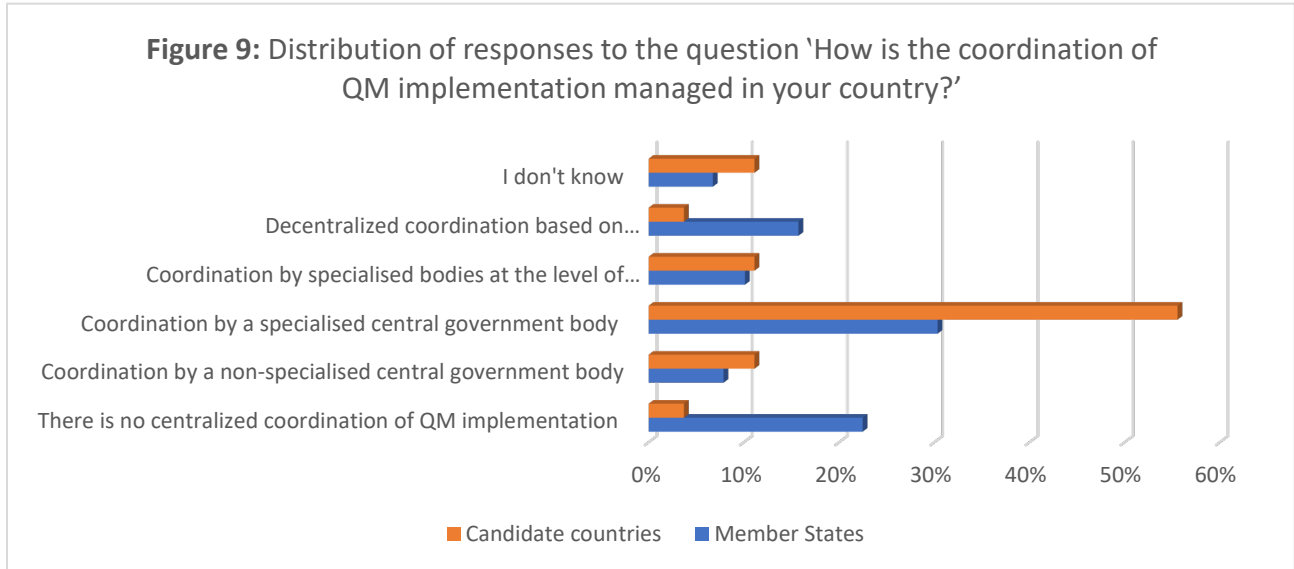
Figure 7: Distribution of responses to the question 'Are there funding options for Quality Management (QM) implementation available in your country?'



Structure/coordination of QM practitioners

In relation to the structure for coordinating and promoting QM-related activities, we first observe (Figures 10–11) that according to the overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) in candidate countries there is a ministry or agency in charge of overseeing and promoting QM. In Member States the percentage is lower (64%), with the rest indicating that there is no such ministry/agency, or that they are unaware. This may response data may be a reflection of the theoretical progression that new initiatives often take: being introduced by an initial top-down approach and then later being managed in a decentralised manner. Member States, compared to candidate countries, started the process of institutionalising QM several years prior with top-down political prioritisation, which has become more decentralised and led by individual entities over the years.





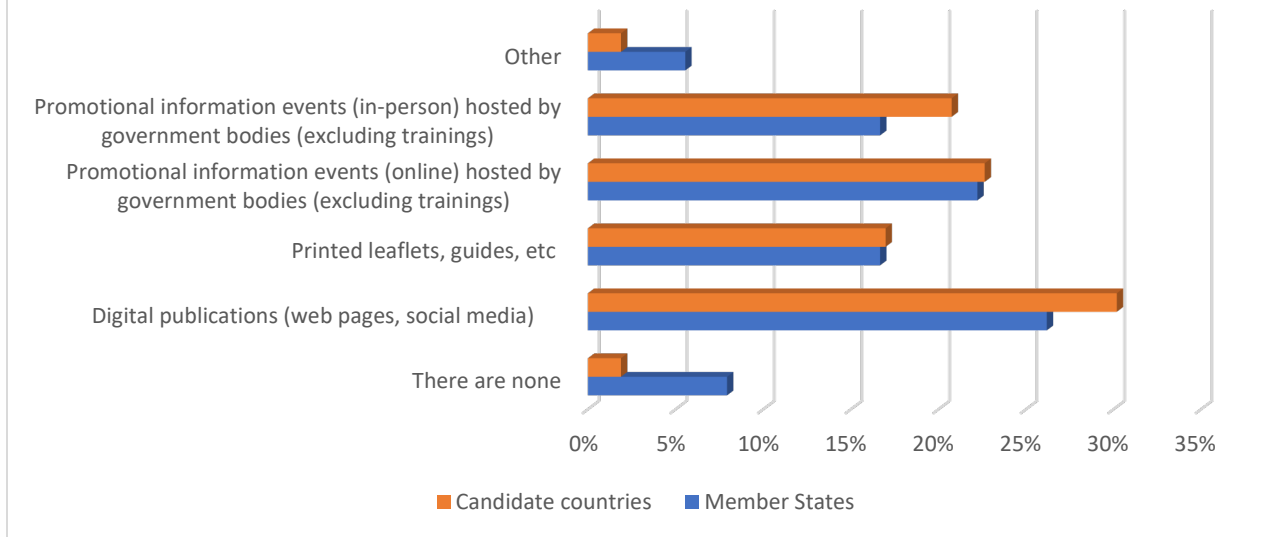
This is even more evident when looking at Figure 9, based on a specific question on the coordination of QM implementation. In candidate countries, according to 66% of respondents, either a specialised or a non-specialised central government body coordinates QM implementation. By contrast, that is the case in Member States only according to 38% of respondents, while the coordination is decentralised or completely missing according to the same percentage of respondents.

Information and communication

Regarding the efforts to disseminate information and raise awareness on QM, there are no big differences between the two country groups. This is likely due to the economics of information distribution and the exchange of best practices among experts within their respective country groups. In the case of the Member States, this exchange reflects their established practices. In the candidate countries, it has been influenced by recent initiatives and guiding principles from organisations such as OECD/SIGMA like the “Principles of Public Administration”¹¹⁰, as well as project-related work supported by international donors and technical assistance.

¹¹⁰ OECD (2023) Principles of Public Administration, accessed via [Principles of Public Administration - OECD](#)

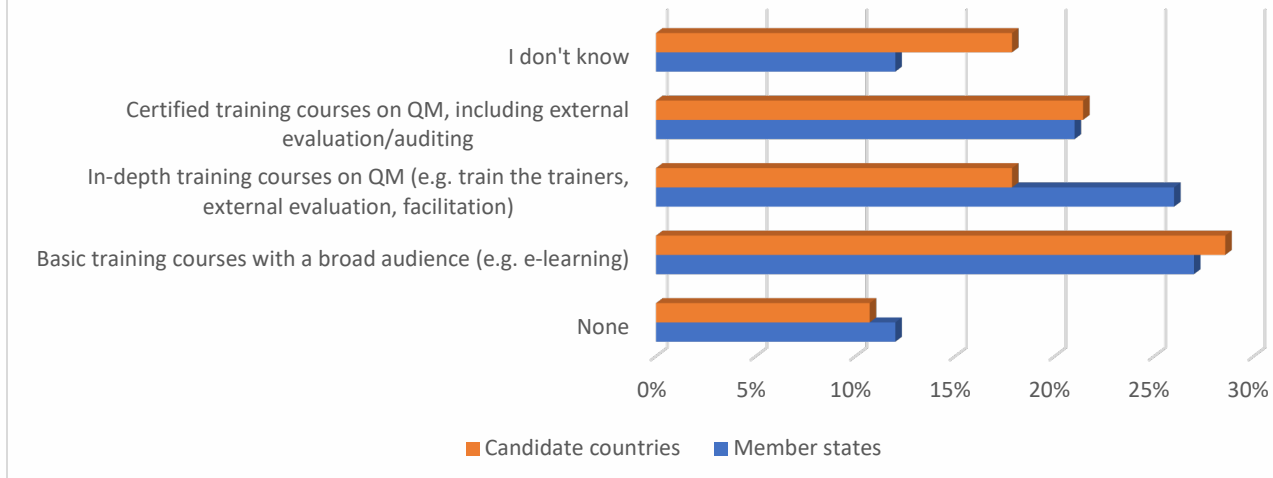
Figure 10: Distribution of responses to the question 'What forms do the efforts for communicating/raising the awareness take in your country (regarding the importance of QM)?'



Capacity building

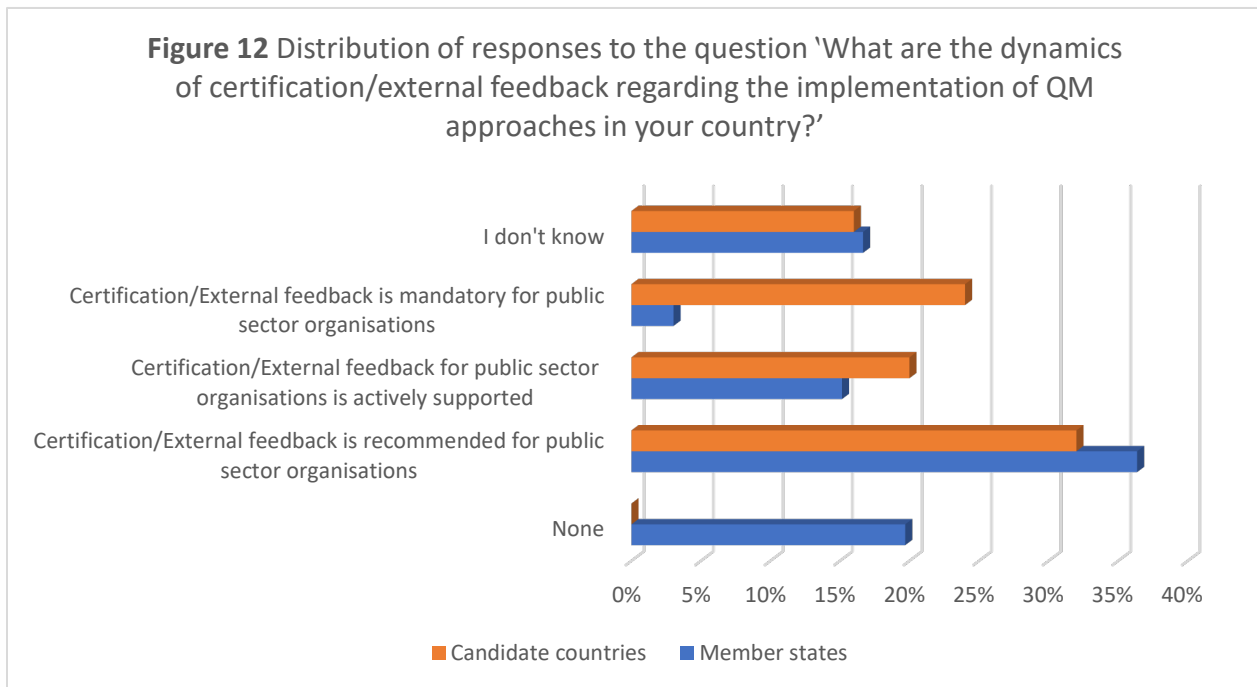
For efforts to build the necessary capacity for the implementation of QM, differences between the two groups are minor. In both Member States and candidate countries (Figure 11), basic training is offered to a similar extent while in-depth courses (train the trainers, coaching, external evaluation) are 10% higher in the MS compared to the candidate countries. This reflects to a certain extent the diverse levels of maturity, as QM in MS has been more embedded in the administrative culture for a longer time.

Figure 11: Distribution of responses to the question 'How is training offered in your country regarding Quality Management (QM) implementation?'



Rewarding quality and engagement of people

Finally, when considering efforts to reward quality, specifically in terms of certification and external feedback, it appears that more activity is taking place in candidate countries (Figure 12). Here, almost half of all respondents (44%) indicated that certification or external feedback for public organisations is either mandatory or actively supported. In Member States the certification is voluntary, and the approach focuses around recommendations and some active support for public sector organisations to certify their QM efforts.



As a conclusion, the initial survey proves that while there are similarities in the approach towards supporting the implementation of QM between Member States and candidate countries, there seem to be several differences. In candidate countries there is a stronger tendency to promote and support QM in a centralised manner. This is likely because earlier stages of institutionalising change require stable and substantial backing from leadership, and centralised coordination often proves to be efficient in the scenarios. Furthermore, **SIGMA, a joint initiative of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the European Union**, primarily funded by the EU, to support public administration reforms and good governance in EU candidate and neighbouring countries. SIGMA integrates QM as a core element of the public administration principles, which encourages a focus on building an inclusive, citizen-centric public administration, starting with foundational QM practices, such as those advocated by the CAF model. This more active steering by the central governments seems to align with the generally higher political support for QM in the candidate countries, as well as greater availability of direct funding options for QM implementation.

Signs of a more mature institutionalisation of QM in the Member States include a broader availability of in-depth training, publications, and a slightly higher prevalence of certification support.

5.2 Findings of detailed mapping of the eight countries and insights from the overall mapping of the EU and candidate countries

The complete country mapping can be found in Annex B; the summary table of the eight in-depth countries can be found in Annex A. The following subsections report on the stages of the comparative analysis, and the outcome of stage one is presented as a summarised outcome of the detailed mapping in Tables 7, 8, and 9, and a more in-depth analysis and comparison to findings from the complete mapping in the paragraphs below.

Table 7

Internal enabling environment					
Country	Strategic documents/policy	Regulatory status	Political will	Customer satisfaction and quality measurements	Fundings
Austria	Vaguely defined	Recommended (mixed approach: recommended for public administration and mandatory for higher education / health)	Stable	National level (measuring quality and customer satisfaction)	No direct funding, indirect funding via centralised Competence Centre
Belgium	Clearly defined (although indirect)	Mandatory (although indirect through mandatory risk assessment report)	Stable (slightly positive)	National level (measuring quality and customer satisfaction)	No direct funding, indirect funding via centralised Competence Centre
Bulgaria	Clearly defined	Mandatory	Decreasing	National level (measuring quality and customer satisfaction)	No direct funding, indirect funding via centralised Competence Centre

Italy	Vaguely defined	Voluntary	Decreasing	National level (measuring quality; customer satisfaction on paper but no evidence of application)	No direct funding, indirect funding via centralised Competence Centre
Montenegro	Clearly defined	Voluntary	Increasing	Customer satisfaction part of Public Administration Reform strategy	EU funding, indirect funding via centralised Competence Centre
Poland	Clearly defined	Voluntary	Volatile	National level (only satisfaction)	No direct funding, indirect funding via decentralised Competence Network
Slovakia	Clearly defined	Voluntary	Volatile	Organisational level (only satisfaction, voluntary)	No direct funding, indirect funding via centralised Competence Centre
Spain	Clearly defined	Recommended	Decreasing	National level (customer satisfaction – last in 2018 – and quality)	No direct funding, indirect funding via decentralised Competence Network

Table 8

Organising for Quality	
Country	Coordination
Austria	Centralised
Belgium	Centralised
Bulgaria	Centralised
Italy	Decentralised
Montenegro	Centralised
Poland	Decentralised
Slovakia	Centralised
Spain	Decentralised

Table 9

Support functions					
Country	Type of training	Information and communication (language of publications)	Information and communication (meetings of QM practitioners)	Type of award	Awarding quality (certification in particular)
Austria	Basic and advanced	Basic implementation information in national language and publication of materials beyond implementation guides (in English as well)	Events more than once per year	Awarding Quality in Public Administration indirectly	Active and established certification scheme
Belgium	Basic and advanced	Basic implementation information in national language and publication of materials beyond implementation guides (in English as well)	Events more than once per year	Awarding Quality in Public Administration indirectly	Active and established certification scheme
Bulgaria	Basic and advanced	Basic implementation information in national language and publication of	Annual event	Awarding Quality in Public Administration	Active and established certification scheme

		materials beyond implementation guides (in English as well)		ation indirectly	
Italy	No specific training on QM	Basic implementation information in national language	No events	No awards	Active but less established certification scheme
Montenegro	Basic and advanced (in the future)	Basic implementation information in national language	One event in 2022	Awarding Quality in Public Administration directly	Active but less established certification scheme
Poland	Basic	Basic implementation information and publication of materials beyond implementation guides in national language	Events more than once per year	Awarding Quality in Public Administration indirectly	Active but less established certification scheme
Slovakia	Basic	Basic implementation information and publication of materials beyond implementation guides in national language	Annual event	Awarding Quality in Public Administration directly	Active and established certification scheme
Spain	Basic	Basic implementation information in national language	Biannual event	Awarding Quality in Public Administration directly	Active but less established certification scheme

Countries can be split into two groups on how QM is promoted in strategic and policy documents. In certain countries, QM is mentioned prominently and explicitly with clear targets, guidance, and definitions. In other countries, there are more vague or indirect references to QM, which has often been replaced by other concepts such as performance and efficiency. A listing of these differences is shown in Table 7.

In most countries, with few exceptions such as Bulgaria and Belgium, the adoption of QM is voluntary and not mandatory. The Bulgarian and Belgian cases are similar to the extent that in Bulgaria, the implementation of a QM system is legally required under Article 64 of the Bulgarian Law on Administration. However, the law does not mandate the use of any specific QM system, leaving the choice up to individual administrations. In Belgium, reporting to the Federal Internal Audit is legally required. Fulfilling this requirement is greatly facilitated by QM and TQM systems, but there is no legal mandate specifying which QM system should be used.

(For more details, see page 16 in Annex B)

Political will

QM is not seen as a top priority in the observed countries with the exception of Montenegro, where political support is notably high. There are some differences in **the level of political support** for adopting QM, allowing countries to be divided into three main groups.

In **the first group of countries, which includes Bulgaria, Italy, and Spain**, support for QM may be somewhat limited in recent times due to **frequent changes in government and lack of continuity in agendas on QM across successive administrations**. As a result, it is challenging to draw the attention of leaders to the benefits of investing in the adoption of QM systems and to develop long-term strategies and plans of action to that effect. Especially in the case of Italy, it emerged that an important obstacle to the adoption of QM is the lack of a systematic approach. Initiatives have been taken in certain domains such as leadership, digitalisation, and simplification, yet they were taken separately from systematised change models such as the CAF model. This also reflects that during the last decade, the topic of QM has generally given way to other topics which started gaining more interest from political leaders, such as digitalisation, innovation, and performance in general. For more details, see page 67 in Appendix B.

In the **second group of countries, which includes Austria, Poland, and Slovakia, although QM is not a top priority it is seen as a potentially helpful tool for the achievement of other priorities**. Consequently, they are classified as having a stable level of support.

Belgium and Montenegro are examples of countries where quality management is **formulated clearly and highly in the government priorities**. Belgium is classified in our framework as stable because the government has an established requirement for assessments around quality and risk management. Montenegro is even classified in the framework in the category of 'increasing political will', because its government clearly pushes further developments in their quality culture. This is paired with financial and expert support from international donors and organisations, as shown on pages 83–84 in Appendix B.

Quality as a core value

The practice of **measuring the quality of public services and the satisfaction of citizens** can be considered largely consolidated, with all countries being to some degree active in this regard. Nonetheless, there are some differences in terms of, for example, how such practices are conducted. In certain countries this is not a **systematic requirement**, thus each public organisation decides whether and how to carry it out. In other countries there is a more **standardised approach**, with instructions and guidelines applicable across different government levels and organisations. Examples of these are candidate countries where the approach is often guided by the OECD/SIGMA Principles of Public Administration¹¹¹. Finally, there are differences in the **frequency** of such measurements, with some countries conducting them on a more regular basis than others. The differences are listed in more detail in Table 7.

Resources

A **key finding for EU Member States is that** nearly all other countries lack dedicated **funding sources for QM adoption**. Exceptions are Greece, where the National Recovery and Resilience Plan directly supports QM implementation, and Croatia, which provides direct funding for a quality management IT system. It is worth noting that in several cases (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, and Slovakia) **EU funding was available** (until 2022 or 2023), to support **QM adoption or to develop methodologies for measuring quality and customer satisfaction**. However, **this funding is now no longer available** and both survey respondents and interviewed expert practitioners indicate that the end of EU funding has significantly reduced the capacity to promote and expand QM (see page 23 and 111 in Annex B). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that despite no **specific funding dedicated to QM**, many countries have established a **National Competence Centre for QM**, often designated as the **national CAF Centre**, which typically receives public or semi-public funding. This can be regarded as an indirect funding source for QM efforts.

A contrasting picture emerges when looking at the situation in the examined candidate countries, such as Montenegro. Here a **strong political support for the adoption of QM by the Ministry for Public Administration** is combined with the **support by the EU and international organisations** like ReSPA, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), leading to a higher level of activity and initiative. However, an important lesson for candidate countries from the experience of Member States could be to **plan ahead for when direct funding decreases**. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, **most Member States have at least a stable form of indirect funding** via their National QM Competence Centres to guard against their initial efforts being nullified.

Structure/coordination of QM practitioners

The approach for **coordinating the promotion and implementation of QM** also presents some differences that allow the subdivision into two groups. Countries such as Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Slovakia follow a **more centralised approach**, in which typically a ministry or

¹¹¹ OECD (2023) Principles of Public Administration, accessed via [Principles of Public Administration - OECD](#)

government department is in charge of QM-related policies. There is an established National QM Competence Centre, often designated as the National CAF Centre.

On the other hand, countries such as Italy, Poland, and Spain have a **more decentralised approach**, with more autonomy given to public organisations at different levels of government. The case of Spain is noteworthy (for more details, see page 120 in Appendix B), since for ten years there was a specific state agency for the evaluation of public policies and quality promotion. The agency closed in 2016, and its two main objectives were taken on by two different ministries, separating the evaluation of public policies from QM implementation.

In the broader analysis beyond the eight in-depth case studies, a **centralised coordination** of QM activities was observed in most countries, typically led by a specific Ministry or government entity. This trend holds true across EU Member States (with the exceptions of Estonia and Cyprus) and candidate countries (with the exception of Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Information and communication

Efforts to **disseminate information and promote the use of QM** usually take place in a **centralised manner**. This is thanks to a dedicated government website, portal, or page within the website of the Ministry in charge of promoting quality management, or the dedicated QM Competence Centre. Specifically in relation to the CAF model, communication efforts are typically under the purview of the CAF National Centre if existing, or the CAF National Correspondent otherwise. Some of the countries from the broader sample appear to be less proactive in this domain, possibly due to the lack of necessary funding.

Capacity building

Similarly, QM Competence Centres (often the CAF National Centres) are active in providing **training**, which is usually **offered free of charge at a more basic level** (implementation and certification) and **on a paid basis at more advanced or specialised levels**. In the two countries under consideration where there is no Centre (Poland and Spain), training is offered by the respective national schools of public administration.

Rewarding quality and engagement of people

The practice of **rewarding quality in public administration** appears well established, with **awards for exceptional efforts typically organised on an annual or biannual basis**. Notably, the terminology in award categories was more closely aligned with QM concepts in the past. Today, **while award categories**

often relate to QM outcomes, they tend not to mention QM explicitly. Current categories frequently include terms such as 'effective public administration' and 'effective change management/innovation'.¹¹²

Certification and external feedback procedures are generally either **facilitated or directly controlled by national QM Competence Centres** (often through the CAF National Centre). Under the CAF framework, certification is usually provided free of charge or at cost price, while certification under other QM frameworks can incur significant fees due to the involvement of private entities.

In the areas of quality rewards and certification, however, some countries in the broader sample have shown limited activity, likely due to constrained financial resources.

5.3 Comparative analysis

The detailed information on the eight focus countries is the subject of the **comparative analysis**, aiming to assign **scores for institutionalisation maturity**, **group them**, and to **correlate them with indicators of governance and citizens' trust and satisfaction**.

5.3.1 Scoring for the institutionalisation of QM in the public administration of a country

The information gained through the **detailed mapping** is categorised using **numerical scores**. Information on the criteria for the scores, ranges, and sub-groups is provided in sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

Table 10 shows the scores assigned to each country and the resulting assignment to sub-groups. The countries under consideration are assigned to three out of the four possible sub-groups, as no country belongs to the 'Exploratory' sub-group. Half of the countries are part of the 'Established' group, while the remaining half is split between the 'Elemental' and the 'Mature' groups.

Table 10

Country	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Italy	Montenegro	Poland	Slovakia	Spain
Strategic documents and policies	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
Political will	1	1	-1	-1	2	0	0	-1

¹¹² Interview AUT_1. and Interview BE_1

Customer satisfaction & quality measurements	2	2	3	2	0	2	1	2
Funding	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0
Training	2	2	2	0	1	1	1	1
Information and Communication (Type of publications)	3	3	3	1	1	2	2	1
Information and Communication (Meetings of QM practitioners)	3	3	2	0	1	3	2	1
Type of Award	1	1	1	0	2	1	2	2
Awarding Quality (certification in particular)	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1
Total Score	16	17	15	5	12	12	13	9
Country grouping	Mature	Mature	Established	Elemental	Established	Established	Established	Elemental

The results of the systematic scoring according to the framework introduced in section 3.1 are largely in line with the expectations formed during the desk research, surveys, and in-depth interviews. Only Bulgaria can be considered as an outlier, because its high institutionalisation score does not reflect the recent decline in support for QM reported in the profile of that country. Support for QM was fairly consistent but largely based on EU funding. With the end of EU funding in 2022, the situation has changed significantly. However, this is not yet visible in the scoring, as the framework accounts not only for funded activities but also for factors related to government intent and policy.

The case of Italy and Spain is also noteworthy because the two countries are currently assigned to the 'Elemental' group. They would likely have received a significantly higher score had this analysis been carried out in previous decades. A higher level of activity in, and support for, QM was reported there for years in the past, but this does not reflect the current situation. The last decade saw a sharp decrease in systematic activity in QM in both countries.

In Spain, this was exemplified by the closure of AEVAL (the National QM Competence Centre) in 2016. Its functions were transferred to a small unit at the Ministry for Public Function (*Ministerio para la Transformación Digital y de la Función Pública*), which made it more difficult for the dedicated staff to offer the same level of activities and services, as reported in the country profile for Spain in Annex B.

In Italy, the focus of the national competence centre that supports the development of public administration (Formez) has shifted towards other topics, severely limiting the scope of its quality-related activities, as reported in the country profile for Italy in Annex B.

As a result, both countries seem to have regressed on their measured level of institutionalising QM. This contrasts with the cases of Austria and Belgium, whose institutionalisation scores are the highest. Their QM competence centres, KDZ (Austria) and BOSA (Belgium) have succeeded in maintaining the funding they receive from the respective governments over time, and in continuing to promote QM. This continued support may be based on QM being seen in these countries as a platform to reach other priorities, in contrast to the approach in Italy and Spain.

5.3.2 Relationship with government effectiveness, trust, and satisfaction

Table 11 shows the situation in the eight countries for the three macro-indicators chosen to be correlated with the scoring for institutionalisation. The reasoning for the choice of indicators is described in section 4.4.3.

Table 11: Macroindicators

Country	Government effectiveness ¹¹³ (2022)	Trust in public administration /government ¹¹⁴ (2022)	Satisfaction with public services ¹¹⁵ (2024)
Austria	1.47	66%	78%
Belgium	1.23	55%	66%
Bulgaria	-0.27	35%	43%
Italy	0.45	31%	34%
Montenegro	-0.03	28%	65%
Poland	0.26	45%	65%
Slovakia	0.38	47%	62%
Spain	0.92	45%	54%

Figures 13, 14, and 15 present via scatter plots the relationship between institutionalisation scores and the three macro-indicators. The country sub-groups presented in Table 11 are shown by each country's dot accordingly.

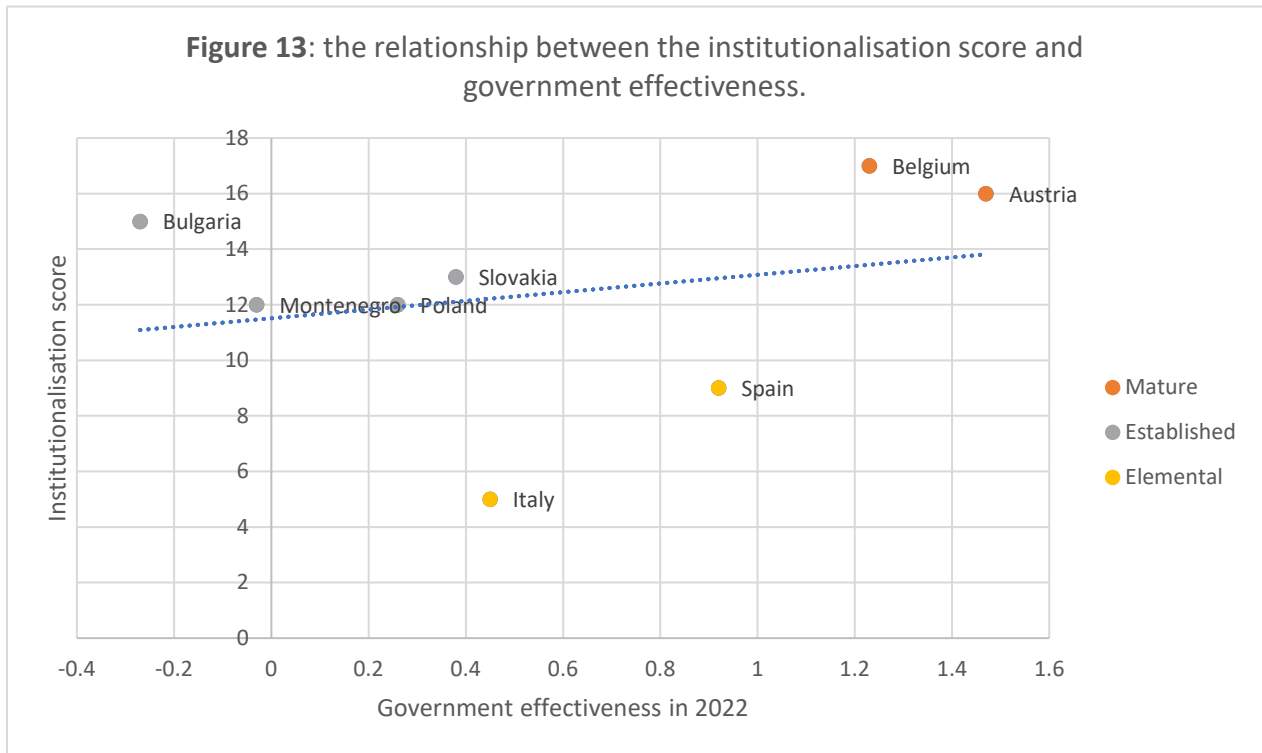
¹¹³ The indicator measures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures. It includes the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. The indicator ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance. Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators

¹¹⁴ Percentage of 'Tend to trust' responses to the question 'How much trust do you have in certain institutions? For each of the following institutions, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?', in relation to 'Public administration in (OUR COUNTRY) (%)'. For Montenegro: The chosen measure is the sum of responses 'Tend to trust' and 'Totally trust' to the question 'How much trust do you have in government?' from the 2022 Balkan Barometer.

¹¹⁵ Percentage of 'Very good' and 'Rather good' responses to the question 'How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?' in relation to 'The provision of public services in (OUR COUNTRY)'. Source: Spring 2024 Standard Eurobarometer 101.

Correlation between the institutionalisation score and government effectiveness

Figure 13 reports a **weak but positive relationship between institutionalisation and government effectiveness scores**, suggesting that a higher level of maturity in the process of institutionalising QM may be associated with a marginally higher level of perceived government effectiveness.



The countries appear to be clustered according to the established grouping related to the *institutionalisation score*. However, the better performance of the ‘Elemental’ countries compared to the ‘Established’ countries runs counter to the expected relationship. It should be mentioned that Italy and Spain (the two Elemental countries), would likely have received higher scores had the analysis been conducted in previous decades, as discussed in section 5.3.1. Other explanations could lie in the presence of unobserved country-specific factors, and follow-up research is warranted to find more definitive answers.

As mentioned in section 5.4.1, Bulgaria also appears to be an outlier with regard to this metric, with a high institutionalisation score in comparison to a lower score for government effectiveness. Future in-depth research would be warranted to look into whether the observed discrepancy can be explained by the recent developments in Bulgaria concerning the support for QM, as presented in the previous sub-section. Alternatively, it would be worth exploring whether there is evidence of more countries where it is challenging to translate higher degrees of institutionalisation of QM into metrics of better governance.

Montenegro could be considered a slight outlier as well, given that it has a relatively high institutionalisation score paired with a lower government effectiveness score. However, given that it is the only non-EU country in the current analysis, this should not be treated as definitive, and it should not be regarded as a judgement on the efforts undertaken in recent years towards the institutionalisation of QM. This is because – although as mentioned in section 4.4.3, the government effectiveness indicator can be utilised in international comparisons – the data that the institutionalisation scores are based upon misses the crucial dimension of time. Consequently, the measurements of both indicators can only deliver one snapshot, which is likely not fully capturing the dynamics and efforts undertaken in recent years.

Correlation between the institutionalisation score and satisfaction with public services

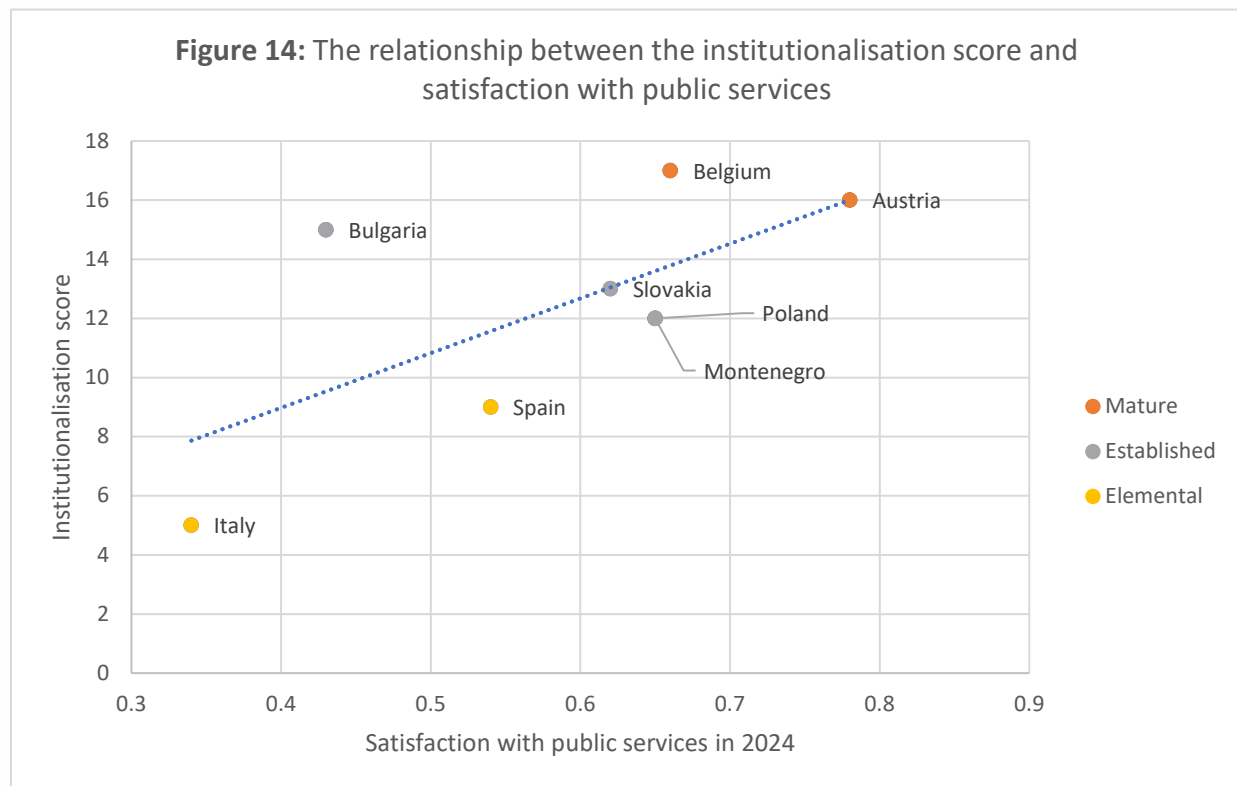


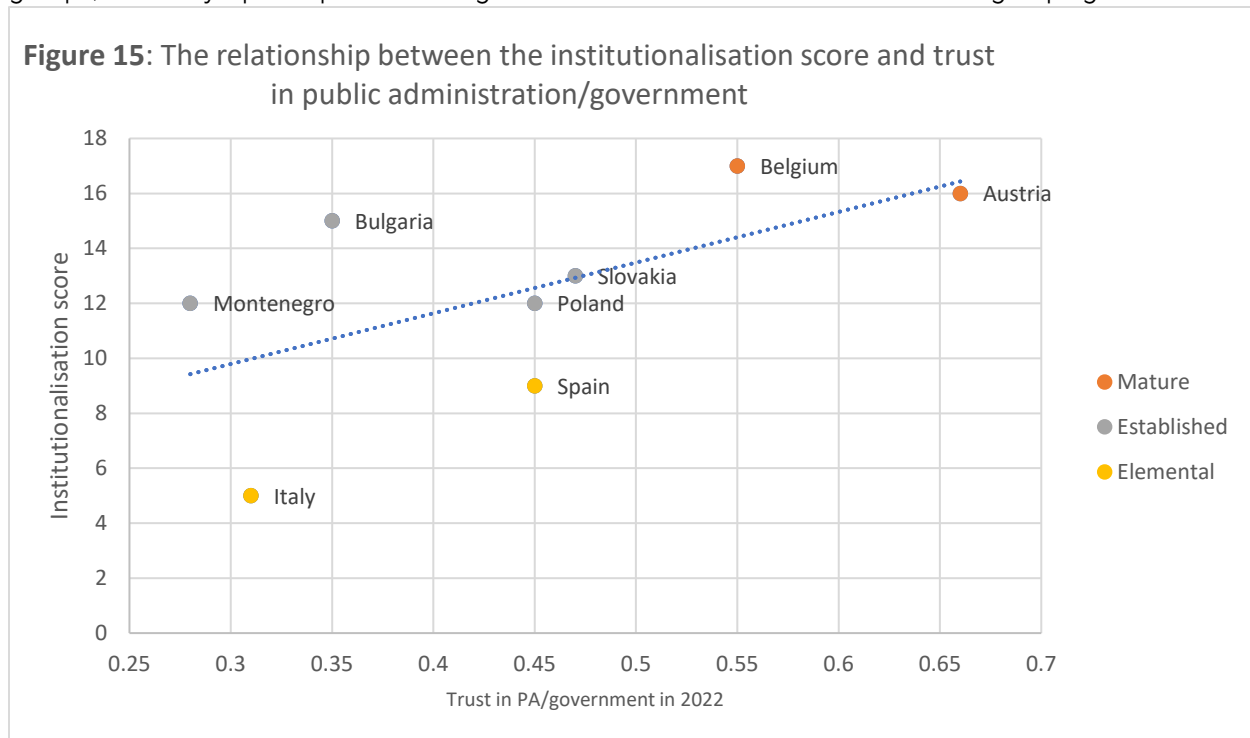
Figure 14 displays a considerably stronger relationship, indicating a potentially closer association between institutionalisation maturity and satisfaction with public services.

As in Figure 13, Bulgaria emerges as an outlier. ‘Mature’ countries have the highest scores for both indicators, followed by ‘Established’ countries and ‘Elemental’ countries, characterised by some of the lowest scores for both indicators.

Correlation between the institutionalisation score and trust in government/public administration

As shown in Figure 15, there is again the suggestion of a **potentially positive relationship between the level of institutionalisation and citizens' trust in public administration or government.**

Also in this case, there is a general homogeneity in the positioning of countries according to their sub-groups, with only Spain's position being closer to the cluster of the 'Established' grouping. This did not



come as a complete surprise as Spain's score is very close to the boundary between the groupings. 'Mature' countries have the highest scores for both indicators, while Established countries have slightly lower institutionalisation scores, but lower scores for trust. However, not unlike in Figure 14, Montenegro and Bulgaria appear to be outliers, given their relatively high institutionalisation scores and, at the same time, their low level of trust in government/public administration.

As previously mentioned, **it is important to emphasise that these should not be interpreted as causal relationships**, given the high likelihood of the presence of confounding variables. This is due to the nature of the macro-indicators, which are affected by several different factors. Furthermore, the small sample size has the effect that the choice of countries has an oversized influence on the presented relationship. Further research can alleviate these two downsides of the current analysis, by increasing the sample size of countries and then by including more control variables, ideally in a regression analysis.

5.3.3 Analysis according to country groupings based on the categorical criteria

As mentioned in section 4.4.1, two categories were excluded from the institutionalisation scoring: the type of coordination (centralised vs decentralised) under 'Organising for quality' and the regulatory status (mandatory vs non-mandatory) under 'Internal enabling environment'. That is because they are not, according to the literature consulted for this report, indicative of a higher or lower level of institutionalisation maturity.

For the type of coordination, it appears that **countries promoting QM in a centralised way** (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Slovakia) **have generally higher scores for institutionalisation, government effectiveness, satisfaction with public services, and trust in public administration**. In contrast, **countries whose promotion of QM is more decentralised** (Italy, Poland, and Spain) are characterised by the **lower institutionalisation scores and are typically situated in the lower half for the three chosen indicators**.

These findings should be interpreted with caution due to the limited number of countries involved and the nature of the used indicators. However, they suggest that a centralised promotion and coordination of QM, often associated with the presence of National QM Competence Centres, is potentially related to positive results in terms of governance and citizens' trust.

The other category excluded from the scoring, **the regulatory status, does not allow for clear deductions**. Six out of the eight countries analysed in more detail do not mandate the adoption of QM. The remaining two countries (Belgium and Bulgaria) are characterised by similar medium-high institutionalisation scores; however, they differ widely in terms of the three indicators.

6. Limitations and Future Research

The primary goal of this research project was to create a contemporary foundational mapping on the implementation of quality management in Member States of the EU and beyond that can be easily updated and expanded on. The secondary goal was to explore avenues for future research on the impact of the institutionalisation of quality management in the public sector. Both goals were addressed by creating a solid base for future endeavours that is presented in this report.

As mentioned throughout the report, this study has limitations stemming from the wide scope of the project, from the approach taken and availability of sources. These limitations can be overcome by adjustments to future research endeavours and are now listed with their respective solutions.

Regarding the primary goal of the current research

The initial survey aiming to obtain an overview on the situation QM practitioners face in their countries turned out to be too extensive and broad, due to: A) replies frequently included the 'I don't know' option because one respondent could not be informed about all relevant subjects; B) respondents of a small number of countries being overrepresented [summary of response statistics in Appendix C)]. A) and B) could have been mitigated with higher response rate per country. The recommendation therefore is to utilise the current mapping as a basic framework and to focus on updates/expansions of the content on a country-by-country basis.

The second survey significantly helped the compilation of the country reports had nevertheless one limitation. The richness of inputs varied heavily depending on the function and experience of the respondent, and their ability to answer in rich enough detail depended as well on the degree of centralisation of QM related efforts in their respective country. Therefore, again the recommendation for future research on the topic is to use this general mapping as basic framework to inform future country by country updates. A more focused approach allows for the collection of a richer amount of information per country e.g. by conducting more rounds of consecutive interviews.

Moreover, it is important to point out that EIPA, as the European CAF Resource Centre, has inevitably more access to information and contacts specifically related to the CAF model, compared to information on other QM approaches used within public administrations. An effect of this was for example that the eight focus countries did not include a Northern European country. This was not a major impediment for the current research project as the objective clearly defined a focus on CAF. However, future country-based updates should aim to be more inclusive of different QM approaches and to expand on the richness of information included in the current country profiles.

Regarding the secondary goal of the current research:

The authors are aware that an analysis including macro indicators has the caveats of confounding variables, that would need to be accounted for, and that the situation is complicated by the small sample size considered in this research report.

The goal of this research was to explore possible avenues for future research that would ideally build on the current framework. The institutionalisation scores constructed via the proposed framework were indicated to be slightly positively related to the three metrics (government effectiveness, satisfaction with public services, trust in government and public administration) they were compared with. This was not a clean correlation as the sample included outliers in all three comparisons and is generally heavily influenced by the choice of countries in the sample. There is likely one remedy for both factors that complicate the current approach, to include more datapoints from a wider sample of countries. The possible recommendations for future research on this topic are therefore: A) to develop more institutionalisation scores based on rich, updated country profiles and B) to aim to account for more confounding variables by including more metrics into more sophisticated approaches for quantitative analysis such as regression analysis; and maybe in the long term to introduce the dimension of time, if enough consecutive country scorings are available.

At last, the European CAF Resource Centre aims to treat this research as a first step on a more comprehensive journey of understanding in the field of quality management and that the study will function as a first edition of a 'living document', meaning that it will be published on the EIPA website with the possibility for representatives from the concerned countries to suggest corrections or updates

to the presented information. This is aimed at facilitating the sharing of knowledge among QM practitioners in EU Member States and candidate countries.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The following section presents conclusions and recommendations, shedding light on the strengths and gaps within existing institutional frameworks for quality management across the analysed countries. Although the outcomes were often similar, there are some notable differences between the EU Member States (MS) and the candidate countries.

Internal enabling environment (policy, leadership, core values, and resources)

Strategic documents and policy

Conclusions: In Member States (MS), the promotion of quality models is largely embedded within the mission statements and decentralised practices of individual ministries and public sector entities. This reflects a need to respond to the challenges facing society today and tomorrow and the need for responsive and agile public administrations to address evolving political priorities and citizens' demands. Candidate countries on the other hand – faced with accession demands – adopt a more centralised approach, guiding the implementation of quality management (QM) through national directives and initiatives. This difference may be influenced by the significant role of initiatives such as SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) in candidate countries. However, the promotion and support via QM Competence Centres is in nearly all cases organised in a centralised manner (more details on this later, in 'structure').

Recommendations: To strengthen QM implementation in the analysed countries, it may be beneficial to centralise its promotion aligning with European and national strategies, similar to the approach seen in candidate countries. To ensure the successful integration of QM in the public sector, it is essential to align European recommendations such as the ComPAcT Communication¹¹⁶ and the latest Commission reports on quality and public sector performance with national policies. By harmonising the specific goals and practices of individual Member States with the EU-level strategies and frameworks, it is possible to strengthen the implementation of QM practices. This should ensure that national administrations are fully aligned with European standards, fostering better governance and enhanced public service delivery across the EU.

¹¹⁶ Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPAcT), https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/public-administration-and-governance-coordination/enhancing-european-administrative-space-compact_en
More resilient public administrations after COVID-19; lessons from using the Common Assessment Framework

Leadership

Conclusions: Political support for QM appears to be stronger in candidate countries compared to Member States. Candidate countries show more consistent backing for QM at the political level, while many representatives from Member States report a decline in support. It is likely that this decline does not signify a waning commitment to quality, but rather a general sentiment that QM in public administration is an established reality and a shift in focus towards newer priorities such as digitalisation, leadership, and innovation is happening. As highlighted in recent Commission¹¹⁷ and OECD reports¹¹⁸, digitalisation in public administration is enabling measurable improvements in performance, the development of skills, and retention of valuable employees. While the term ‘quality’ may not be explicitly featured in political agendas, the components of QM – such as performance measurement, accountability, and efficiency – are increasingly demanded to drive public sector reform.

Recommendations: QM should be better aligned with broader governance and public administration priorities, ensuring its integration into national strategies and communication. For this, it becomes essential to support further research and best practices dissemination, showcasing the ability of QM models to support, promote, and reinforce organisational adaptability and growth towards excellent performance. Moreover, Member States should make the connection between QM and the contemporary goals of performance management more explicit, reflecting the growing demand for quality-driven reforms, as emphasised in the referenced recent European Commission and OECD documents.

Core values – QM monitoring

Conclusions: While the practice of measuring the quality of public services and the satisfaction of citizens is by and large consolidated, there are some differences both within Member States and between Member States and candidate countries. In several Member States such monitoring is decentralised and up to the discretion of individual entities, whereas candidate countries tend to use a more centralised approach at the national or ministerial level. This difference reflects broader trends of centralised policy and political support in candidate countries. Efforts for data-driven performance management in the candidate countries go beyond just collecting and analysing data. They involve frequent reviews of performance metrics, the promotion by international donors of quality models (CAF) to reach excellence, and continuous support with key stakeholders (including donors) and enabling governments and partners to use insights collaboratively to continuously improve outcomes.

Recommendations: Member States not already doing so could benefit from adopting a more centralised approach to QM monitoring, aligning it with European and national priorities, and integrating data-driven performance management to drive ongoing improvements in public administration. This could ensure more consistent and collaborative efforts in refining service delivery. By incorporating real-time data

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ More resilient public administrations after COVID-19; lessons from using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) 2020, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/more-resilient-public-administrations-after-covid-19_8d10bb06-en.html

analysis in performance management implementation, public sector entities can better assess and enhance their effectiveness in delivering services. This falls in line with the Commission's ambition to enhance the European Administrative Space by promoting a common set of overarching principles underpinning the quality of public administration and reinforcing its support for the administrative modernisation of the Member States.

Resources

Conclusions: A recurring theme in the study highlights the critical role of stable funding in the successful and enduring adoption of total quality management (TQM) and QM practices in general. The presented examples indicate that disruptions in funding frequently lead to significant setbacks, resulting in severe downsizing or abandonment of quality management initiatives, even when these efforts were in advanced stages of implementation. The research highlights that direct funding for QM implementation is utilised more in candidate countries compared to Member States, where targeted resources have often been directed towards other priorities and other funding options may be underutilised. Furthermore, in the candidate countries, financial support from the EU and other key donors provides a stable foundation for the adoption of TQM frameworks, with specific support for adopting CAF in the public sector. This is done in the context of the accession preparations.

Recommendations: Member States should as well explore additional funding sources for QM, including regional, national, and EU options (TSI applications for example). Clearer communication about available resources would also help alleviate uncertainty and encourage broader participation in QM initiatives.. In both candidate countries and Member States, the integration of QM into policy papers and national strategies plays a crucial role in securing government funding. These findings highlight the importance of raising awareness about funding opportunities and the strategic value of prioritizing QM in public sector initiatives. Reestablishing the implementation of QM as a priority in future Commission programming periods would ease the path to support initiatives in a more sustainable way.

Organising for quality

Structure

Conclusions: The responses collected during the study from representatives of national Competence Centres reveal a common wish to strengthen the effectiveness and resilience of public institutions through integrated approaches, rather than isolated, single initiatives. On the other side, budget constraints due to diverging political priorities were often cited as prohibitive factors for actions beyond their immediate mandate.

Pooling the efforts and lessons learned from individual organisations and countries through organisations that facilitate such exchanges could prove a way to reach these aspirations, while staying within current

budgets. This need for increased coordination and bench learning among the users of different quality models and practices showcases the importance of international forums and Competence Centres that support National Centres in their important function of facilitating knowledge transfer within the QM practitioners' community.

In this context, a secondary finding was that the structure and autonomy of QM agencies or Competence Centres (at the national and European level at EIPA), play a crucial role in shaping QM support, promotion, and implementation within a country. Countries with a dedicated National QM Competence Centre – staffed with permanent employees and supported by allocated resources – demonstrate continuity in their QM efforts and higher scoring in the metrics that were considered in the study. In contrast, countries without a designated QM Competence Centre reported that the support that they could provide was highly susceptible to shifts in political priorities.

Recommendations: For all Member States, centralise QM functions where possible, and invest in dedicated QM Centres to support efforts against shifts in political priorities, to ensure that gains from the past are not nullified with time.

For Member States without a National QM Centre (such as Poland and Spain), consider establishing a dedicated QM agency to promote continuity and enhance political support for QM.

Candidate countries and Member States with (semi-) independent Competence Centres should continue leveraging their centralised support structure to drive QM as a national priority, with a focus on consistency and operational efficiency across public administration. Collaboration should be leveraged more extensively to prevent isolated efforts and reduce costs for individual organisations. Interviewees underscored the importance of a centralised knowledge-sharing approach, highlighting the need to strengthen existing networks that support the CAF model and broader quality management initiatives. In this context, the role of institutions such as the European CAF Resource Centre is viewed as pivotal in fostering connections and advancing excellence across public administration communities.

Support functions (capacity building, information and communication, and rewarding for quality)

Conclusions: All parties interviewed highlight the need for investment in human resources and training for the promotion and expansion of the adoption of the different QM models.

The outcomes in **capacity building in QM** for both Member States and candidate countries show minimal differences, likely due to the efficiency of information distribution and the active exchange of best practices within each group. Established practices characterise Member States, while candidate countries have benefitted from recent initiatives by organisations such as OECD/SIGMA and project-based support from international donors.

Advanced, in-depth courses (such as 'train-the-trainer' coaching, and external evaluations) are slightly more common in Member States, while candidate countries show a preference for certified training programmes. These differences may reflect the greater maturity of QM in Member States, where it has been embedded in the administrative culture for longer.

The practice of rewarding quality is generally well established, however there has been a shift in the terminology, with more emphasis on concepts such as ‘effective public administration’ and ‘effective change management/innovation’. Similarly, there is evidence of sustained efforts on certification and external feedback procedures. It should be noted, however, that some countries have been considerably less proactive in rewarding quality and certifying the successful implementation of QM.

Recommendations: **For Member States:** Continue facilitating the exchange of best practices, leveraging the well-established QM culture and infrastructure. Encourage advanced capacity-building programmes that foster in-depth expertise and sustainable quality improvements, and enhance the organisation of awards and recognitions.

For candidate countries: Strengthen partnerships with organisations such as OECD/SIGMA and expand access to international project funding and technical assistance, which are valuable resources for developing QM expertise. Additionally, consider increasing in-depth training initiatives to support sustainable QM implementation.

For both groups: Prioritise the economics of training by exploring efficient, scalable training methods – particularly for complex, advanced QM programmes. This will ensure broad access to capacity-building resources and support long-term quality improvements across diverse administrative environments.

Scoring of the countries

Conclusions: Several countries, such as Poland and Spain, have faced challenges in maintaining consistent progress in institutionalising QM, influenced by fluctuating funding levels and shifting prioritisation within their national agendas. This contrasts with Austria and Belgium, where institutionalisation of QM has remained high, supported by sustained government funding and active QM competence centres (KDZ in Austria and BOSA in Belgium). In these countries, QM is perceived as a strategic platform for achieving broader public administration goals, rather than an isolated objective.

Recommendations: For countries with lower institutionalisation maturity, promote the reinforcement of consistent funding streams and try to integrate QM into broader national strategies as a key enabler of public sector improvement. Demonstrating the linkage between QM and other governmental priorities may help garner stronger political and financial backing.

Relationship with government effectiveness, trust, and satisfaction

Conclusions: There are some signs that the institutionalisation scores from this framework are slightly linked to three measures: government effectiveness, satisfaction with public services, and trust in government and public administration. The strongest link was with satisfaction with public services. However, the results are limited by the small sample size and the influence of unobserved factors. These findings suggest there might be a positive connection, but more detailed research with larger data and better analysis methods is needed.

Recommendations: Evidence-based actions are needed to adapt effectively in times of change. One of the outcomes of this research study is a lead on a positive relationship between QM institutionalisation and metrics for public administration effectiveness, observable in the consulted macro-indicators. This supports recommendations presented in this chapter, to reinforce the mechanisms conducive to a strong institutionalisation of QM in a given country, and the call for stronger financial and political support to QM models at EU, national, and regional levels. This evidence may warrant further, more in-depth research that includes more data points and more sophisticated methods of analysis.