Familiarising Romanian Public Administration with ISO 9001: A Way to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract: In the context of public administration, the adoption of robust quality assurance systems is increasingly critical for aligning service delivery and institutional processes with the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this paper, we argue that an evidence-based approach to quality assurance—grounded in the principles of ISO 9001:2015, especially the requirement for "decision making based on evidence" (one of its core quality management principles)—offers a strong framework for public sector organisations to advance multiple SDGs simultaneously. In particular, we emphasise how such an approach may support: (i) SDG 9 ("Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure") by promoting process innovation and infrastructure resilience; (ii) SDG 12 ("Responsible Consumption and Production") through continual improvement of administrative processes and resource‐efficiency; (iii) SDG 3 ("Good Health and Well being") via evidence informed health system decisions; (iv) SDG 8 ("Decent Work and Economic Growth") through improved public services and institutional efficiency; (v) SDG 10 ("Reduced Inequalities") by fostering equitable access to services; (vi) SDG 11 ("Sustainable Cities and Communities") by enhancing municipal service quality and responsiveness; and (vii) SDG 13 ("Climate Action") by embedding monitoring and improvement into environmental and administrative processes. Romania provides several illustrative examples of how evidence-based quality assurance is being implemented in the public sphere. First, the Romanian Authority for Digitalisation (ADR) became one of the first public digitalisation bodies in Romania to obtain ISO 9001 certification, demonstrating a commitment to structured process management, stakeholder focus, and data-driven improvement. Second, in the health domain, the World Health Organisation (WHO) – Europe's "EVIPNet" initiative prepared a policy brief for Romania on antimicrobial resistance that explicitly adopted a systematic evidence synthesis approach to guide public health decisions. Third, Romania's national review of SDG progress emphasises the need to strengthen national data systems, databases and platforms to monitor progress across multiple SDGs. These examples underscore the following key points: (1) establishing a quality management system (QMS) aligned with ISO 9001 helps embed evidence based decision making into administrative routines; (2) measurement, monitoring and analysis of key performance indicators enable learning cycles (plan do check act) that drive continuous improvement; (3) transparency, reliable data and stakeholder engagement strengthen public trust and institutional legitimacy; (4) by doing so, public administration can better contribute to multiple SDGs rather than addressing them in siloes. However, the Romanian case also reveals persistent challenges: progress toward SDG 9, SDG 10, and SDG 12 remains moderate, indicating the gap between ambition and effective implementation of evidence-based quality assurance in public organisations. Consequently, we will conclude by proposing that public administrations should prioritise (a) building robust measurement and feedback loops, (b) training management and staff in interpreting and acting on evidence, (c) embedding ISO 9001 (or public‐sector adapted standards such as ISO 18091:2019) into governance frameworks, and (d) explicitly linking quality assurance systems to SDG monitoring and reporting mechanisms.