The COST WG-2 Dataset on Careers in the Executive Triangle: Comparative Evidence on Politicians, Advisers and Senior Bureaucrats in More than 30 Countries

Meyer-Sahling Jan-Hinrik
Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary

Abstract: This paper introduces the COST Working Group 2 Dataset on Careers in the Executive Triangle, the first cross-national dataset to systematically map the personal and professional backgrounds of those who govern from the executive branch of government. Covering more than 7,000 individuals across over 30 countries, the dataset includes information on executive politicians, political advisers, and senior bureaucrats as the three core actors of the executive triangle. For each individual, it records demographic characteristics, educational background, political experience, and their career trajectories. Compiled by country teams of experts (cf. members of the COST Working Group 2 on Careers and joint authors of the Dataset) using a shared codebook, the dataset fills a major empirical gap in the study of modern executive governance, where comparative evidence beyond ministers remains scarce. It enables new analyses of elite recruitment, politicisation, gender representation, and career pathways across diverse political and administrative systems. By extending elite research to advisers and top bureaucrats, the dataset offers a unique foundation for understanding who holds executive power, how they arrive there, and what this reveals about contemporary political regimes.