

# The Distinctive Features of Public Sector in Europe: A Comparative Study Based on the Social Morphology of Wage Earners

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## Abstract

This article aims to point out that there are still substantial differences between public and private workers. Using the Eurostat Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community, we define the public workers as those who are employed in Administration, Health and Education. The measure of targeted jobs is provided by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which is a large sample survey among private households. By following this approach, we can present several significant results. In every European country, public workers have an average aggregate employment tenure higher than private workers, a higher proportion of women and a higher proportion of high skilled workers. Beyond these global differences, we point out that the divide between

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\* This article comes as part of the research conducted in the ESSnet EseG on behalf of Eurostat; however, the positions advocated in this paper are those of the authors alone.

public and private sector is differently shaped, according to the country and to the social status.

### Keywords

public sector – social stratification – cross-national comparison – class position – Labour Force Survey

Since the 1970s, numerous scientific studies have highlighted differences in values and practices between public and private sectors' employees. For instance, this difference is obvious in political orientation (Knutsen 2001; Rouban 2005; Knutsen 2005), cultural practices (Savage et al. 1992), or in school strategies (Power et al. 2003). This cleavage is particularly relevant among the middle class; some sociologists even consider public sector's middle classes as a class or as a class fraction (Bourdieu 1984; Hoff 1985; Hoff and Jørgen 1989; Hoel and Knutsen 1989; Edgell and Duke 1991).

However, this divide has been challenged by the managerial State reforms developed in all European countries since the 1980s. These reforms have had two types of effects. On the one hand, public and private sectors tend to be closer in their modes of organization and in terms of working conditions (Emery and Giauque 2005). On the other hand, there is a process of harmonization between public sectors of European countries. In this article, we want to discuss these evolutions by comparing social morphology of public and private sectors in Europe. 30 years after the introduction of managerial reforms, we can wonder if the European public sector is still composed of specific categories of the population compared to the private one. To what extent are the public sectors of various European countries are composed of wage earners from different social groups in each national space?

To account for the differences between public-sector and private-sector wage earners, our article proposes to cross the employment sector (public/private) and the sociological characteristics of workers. A number of works covering various European countries show that even after the turning point of New Public Management, there are still differences in employment conditions between the public and private sectors. Public-sector employees enjoy greater job security (Dieckhoff 2011) and greater working autonomy allowing them to reconcile family life and professional life more easily (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Scherer and Steiber 2007). In terms of compensation, in Europe wage inequalities across professions or between sexes are not as marked in the

public sectors as in the private sectors (Oesch 2006a: 113; Lucifora and Meurs 2006). As well as these differences in working conditions there are other dimensions relating to the values and representations shared by those who act in the name of the general interest. Some authors, mostly American, adopt the expression “public sector motivation” in relation to this phenomenon (Perry 1996; Crewson 1997), while others, more often British, prefer to use the term “public sector ethos” (Needham 2006). For example, a tax office clerk can, in terms of activity and tasks, be compared to a bank teller: they both obey a hierarchy and work in face-to-face situations. Yet the social representations and the relationship they have with their job are different in many respects.

This paper aims to show that the sociological particularity of European public sectors goes further than the mere question of employment of workers. The public/private divide is a secondary yet important dimension of the relationships between social groups in Europe and can also be considered as an issue for social stratification research (Hugrée, Penissat, Spire 2015). This is a point that has been emphasized by certain studies focusing on a particular country, but rarely has it been shown comparatively and at European level.<sup>1</sup> In order to study the range of public sectors in Europe, we based ourselves on the 2011 edition of the Labour Force Surveys (LFS) of European countries.

In the first part of this article we highlight the relatively specific nature of the European public-sector workforce stemming from two series of factors:

- 1 occupational factors, relating to the particularity of occupations and the job stability that the public sector offers;
- 2 sociological factors, stemming from the specific features of public sector workers, who are older, more highly qualified and most often women.

These public-sector wage earners have a specific relationship with the State, with their role and with their future. Along with these commonalities there are differences from one space to the next. In the second part of this paper we look in more details at the variations within public sectors in Europe according to types of social stratification, institutional context and the national history specific to each country. We then put forward a typology of European public-sector workforces which emphasizes both the convergences and the divergences between national public sectors across Europe.

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1 For an exception, see Knutsen (2005).

## Method

### *How to Give a Statistical Definition of the European Public-sector Workforce?*

According to the European Working Condition Surveys (EWCS, Dublin Foundation), public sector workers represent 30% of the European workforce in 2010. This source gives the relative share of the public sector in each country and its weight in northern Europe: the proportion of wage earners who state that they work in the public sector or in a mixed organization is 39.8% in Sweden, 37.9% in the Netherlands, 36.4% in Denmark and 35.5% in Finland. But based on the answers given to the question on the sector of employment,<sup>2</sup> these values are still highly dependent on the different national definitions of the public sector. In education for example, the border is particularly poorly demarcated: in Italy, schools run by local administrations are considered as private (Barone 2009) while in Germany they are more associated with the public sector.

In most of the papers devoted to the distinction between the public and the private sector, the belonging to the public sector is analyzed regardless of social position. This choice can be problematic for two reasons. On the one hand, belonging to the public sector does not mean the same thing in each European country. On the other hand, belonging to the public sector may have different effects according to the position in the social scale. For instance, the public sector middle classes do not have the same values and practices than their colleagues of the upper classes.

Additionally, the sector of employment (public versus private) is not mentioned in any European public statistical survey. We could use ESS and EWCS which contain harmonized public/private variable but their samples are too small to be crossed with the social status in a relevant way. That's why we have chosen to use the Labor Force Survey produced by national statistical institutes under the Eurostat control. This is one of the only survey tall enough to analyse the sociological dimensions of the European people at work, according to demographic, socio-occupational and educational variables. The 2011 edition of these surveys comprises a large sample of people aged over 15: more than 1.5 million people are selected each quarter, with rates that vary from 0.2% to 3.3% depending on the country. It covers all 27 member States of the European Union. This data is thus a crucial statistical source for describing and

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2 The following question is asked: "Do you work in: the private sector, the public sector, a mixed organization/enterprise, the non-profit sector, non-governmental organization, other, do not know, refusal to answer."

comparing European socio-occupational structures.<sup>3</sup> But, despite a very large sample and a very rich set of socio-occupational variables, this survey does not have direct question on the belonging to the public sector.

So, we adopted a proxy to measure the belonging to the public sector, using the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE). As already did other researchers (Audier and Bacache-Beauvallet 2007) and the European Central Bank (Giordano et al. 2011), we consider that “public sector” refers to all workers whose job fulfils “public interest functions”. This approximation of the public sector covers all wage earners in the general government and defence, education, healthcare and social work sectors. This definition is thus based on the assumption that States and governments contribute to a differentiation of social positions, either directly (as an employer) or indirectly (as an originator or as a regulator of public interest functions such as education or healthcare). Indeed the State has conserved certain sovereign missions and for these missions it intervenes directly in the recruitment and selection of certain types of profile. This is the case of magistrates, police officers and tax officers. But the State may also delegate certain functions to agencies or non-profit organizations (Di Maggio, Anheier 1990), whilst continuing to regulate and keep responsibility for them, as is often the case in the healthcare field.

Although it is an approximation (Giordano *et al.*, 2011: 8–9; Audier and Bacache-Beauvallet, 2007: 327–331), this definition of the European public sector very largely matches that of wage earners who state that they belong to the public sector. According to the 2010 European working condition survey (2010 edition), wage earners working in government, education and healthcare represent 28.5% of the paid workforce in the 27 European Union member States. Among them, 70.5% state that they work in the public sector, to which we can aggregate those who say they work in mixed organizations (6.5%) and in the non-profit sector (4%). In all, of the European wage earners who work in public interest functions, more than 4 out of 5 state that they belong to the public sector. We can then conclude that the approximation of the public sector through the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European is reliable.

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3 The scope of LFS surveys is restricted here to wage earners aged over 15. We thus excluded the self-employed, inactive people and the unemployed, and focused our comparison on the characteristics of public and private sector wage earners.

### *How to Characterize the Public/Private Difference in Europe?*

For the first time, the 2011 LFS surveys afford the possibility of a description of the socio-occupational structure of these countries derived from the 2008 edition of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO 2008). This international classification organizes “jobs into a clearly defined set of groups according to the tasks and duties undertaken in the job.”<sup>4</sup> At the most aggregated level, it comprises 10 major groups (MG): Managers (MG 1), Professionals (MG 2), Technicians and associate professionals (MG 3), Clerical support workers (MG 4), Services and sales workers (MG 5), Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers (MG 6), Craft and related trades workers (MG 7), Plant and machine operators and assemblers (MG 8), Elementary occupations (MG 9) and lastly, Armed forces occupations (MG 0).

We cross-referenced this variable characterizing socio-occupational position with that of seniority in the job, broken down into two forms: average duration (expressed in months/years) and proportion of wage earners with at least one year’s seniority in the job occupied. We also used more traditional sociological variables such as age, sex and level of education. This latter variable is aggregated here and presented in three modalities: “low” designates primary and lower secondary education, “medium” upper secondary education, and “high” higher education.

## **1 Relevance of the Public/Private Split after the Turning Point of New Public Management in Europe**

Europe is still characterized by the numerical size of its public sector, which represents between 25% and 30% of its workforce against an average of 15% in all OECD countries.

The spread of New Public Management in Europe is often analysed as one of the drivers of the rapprochement between public and private sectors, whereby Western societies have adopted a new entrepreneurial paradigm of public management (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Various governmental bodies have imported a number of human resource management methods already in use in private companies: hierarchical relations based on target-setting, performance-based compensation, or labour market flexibility according to needs (Ferlie et al. 1996; Pollitt and Talbot 2004). Yet even after these reforms, stark differences remain between public and private sector.

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4 <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/>.

### 1.1 *A Public-sector Workforce which is Older, more Feminized and Better Educated*

Public-sector wage earners are different by their particular social characteristics.

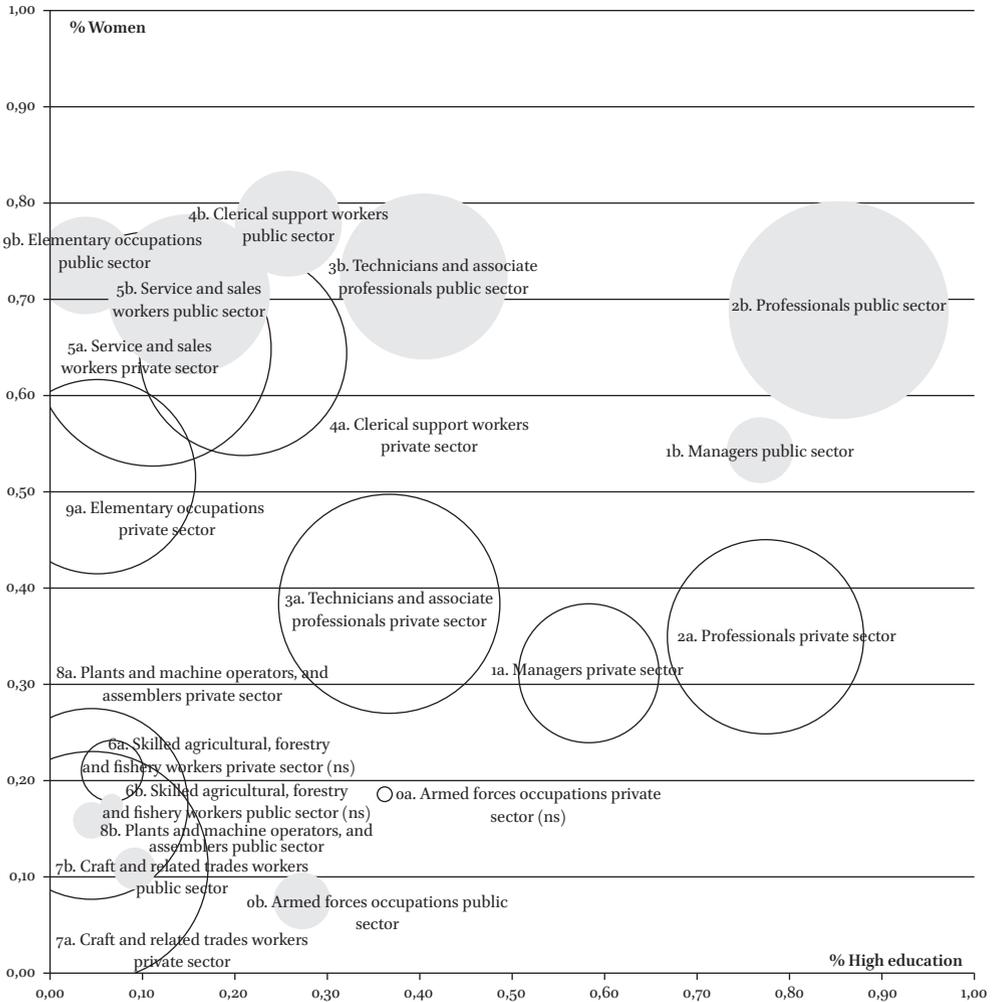
First, public-sector wage earners are older on average than other workers (42.6 years versus 39.5 years). A study of the age structure highlights the older generations that have benefited from the expansion of public-sector employment in several countries. For example, there is no age difference between the quarter of younger wage earners in the two sectors (32 years). However, half of public-sector wage earners are aged over 42, against 37 in the private sector.

Public-sector wage earners are also more likely to be women: on average across all European countries, the proportion of women is 67% in the public sector against just 40% in the private sector. This broader feminization of public-sector employment is nothing new. In the Scandinavian countries in particular, it has been analysed as a sign that the States have played the role of social ladder for women: equally qualified women are given more responsibility and receive better compensation packages in the public than private sector (Kolberg 1991).

Lastly, public-sector employees also stand out because they are better qualified: the proportion of individuals with a level of higher education is 51% against just 24% in the private sector. This difference is large even when controlled for the type of job held by public-sector workers. Hence the proportion of individuals with higher-education qualifications is always higher among public-sector wage earners than their private-sector counterparts.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true among Managers (19-point difference) and Professionals (8-point difference). Similarly, the proportion of poorly-qualified individuals is systematically lower among public-sector workers than in the private sector. The greater feminization of public-sector groups is also patent: with the exception of skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers and plant and machines operators and assemblers (who are strongly underrepresented in the European public sector), public-sector occupational groups are systematically more feminized than the private sector. This is illustrated by Figure 1 which shows the gender and qualification composition of the European public-sector workforce.

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5 Private-sector wage earners in the Armed forces occupations have not been included, however, because there are too few of them in the sample.



How to read it: In 2011, 85% of European wage earners in the public-sector Professionals category have higher level of education, and 69% of them are women. This occupational group accounts for 10% of European wage earners at that date.

Comment: The shaded Major Groups correspond to the public sector.

Scope: occupied workforce in the EU (of 27)

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2011 (Eurostat)

FIGURE 1 *Share of higher-education graduates and of women in the public and private sector Major Groups*

### 1.2 *Components of the Boundary between Public and Private Sector in Europe*

The split between public- and private-sector wage earners is thus multidimensional. To evaluate the respective weight of the variables composing this divide, we performed three logistic regressions (binomial logit model with standard weighting) to model the probability of being a public-sector wage earner rather than a private-sector wage earner, covering the 27 member countries of the European Union (Table 1). In these three models the unequal probability of being or not being a European public-sector wage earner, when all characteristics are similar, is given by the odds ratio (OR) which is the ratio between two probabilities: that of being a public-sector wage earner; and its complement, that of being a private-sector wage earner. The first model (74.2% concordant pairs) evaluates the relevance of the distinction between European public-sector wage earners and those in the private sector by taking into account gender and occupation from the ISCO 2008 classification. It was found that being a man significantly reduces the probability of working in the public sector in all 27 European countries (OR of 4.11). However, all else being equal, belonging to the group of Professionals (OR of 2.75) and to a lesser extent Technicians and Associate Professionals (OR of 1.28) has a significant effect on the probability of working in the public sector in Europe. The second model (Mod. 2, 76.3% concordant pairs) includes the level of education of wage earners in three modalities. It confirms the previous results and reveals, all else

TABLE 1 *Distinguishing between public- and private-sector wage earners at the European level*

	Mod. 1		Mod. 2		Mod. 3	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Intercept	0.691		0.677		0.535	
Men	0.411	***	0.411	***	0.405	***
Women	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Managers	0.535	***	0.443	***	0.357	***
Professionals	2.751	***	2.141	***	1.891	***
Technicians and associate professionals	1.28	***	1.156	***	1.034	***
Clerical support workers	0.513	***	0.49	***	0.439	***

	Mod. 1		Mod. 2		Mod. 3	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
<i>Service and sales workers</i>	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0.414	***	0.429	***	0.407	***
Craft and related trades workers	0.1	***	0.103	***	0.096	***
Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	0.104	***	0.107	***	0.095	***
Elementary occupations	0.504	***	0.531	***	0.48	***
Lower secondary			0.908	***	0.848	***
<i>Upper secondary</i>			<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Third level			1.4	***	1.49	***
< 25 years old					0.869	***
25 ≤ x ≤ 35 years old					<i>Ref.</i>	
35 ≤ x ≤ 45 years old					1.337	***
45 ≤ x ≤ 55 years old					1.889	***
> 55 years old					2.267	***
Started to work < 1 year					0.784	***
<i>Started to work &gt; 1 year</i>					<i>Ref.</i>	
% concordant	74.2		76.3		79.3	

The results are presented in the form of odds ratios.

\*\*\*: Significant at the 1% threshold.

\*\*: Significant at the 5% threshold.

\*: Significant at the 10% threshold.

Ns: non-significant.

Scope: EU (of 27), Occupied workforce

How to read it: this is a *logit* type model. The reference situation is given in italics. The model is used to evaluate that in 2011, a man rather than a woman, presenting all the characteristics of the reference situation, and all else being equal, was 0.4 times less likely to belong to the European public sector workforce. Weighted data. – Sources: LFS 2011 (Eurostat).

being equal, the strong effect of higher-education qualifications on the probability of working in the public sector in Europe (OR of 1.4)

The last model (Model 3, 79.3% concordant pairs) includes the variables already mentioned, but also age and seniority on the labour market. According to this model, the characteristics most closely associated with public-sector wage earners in Europe (Model 3) are, all else being equal, age, belonging to the “professionals” group, and having a higher-education qualification. Thus in Europe the characteristics most strongly associated with public-sector wage earners are, all things being equal, being aged over 55 (odds ratio of 2.27), being aged over 45 (odds ratio of 1.889), belonging to the professionals group (odds ratio of 1.891), and lastly having a higher qualification (odds ratio of 1.49). Being aged between 35 and 45 and being in the group of technicians and associate professionals also increases the probability of belonging to the public-sector workforce, although to a lesser extent. At the other end of the scale, belonging to the group of craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers or managers, and being a man, are all characteristics that significantly reduce the chances of working in the public sector.

The study of the differences between public and private sector naturally leads to an analysis of social stratification, combining occupational characteristics and more sociological indicators linked to the social properties of the individuals concerned. Public-sector employees mainly belong to the groups of Professionals and Technicians and display singular characteristics: they are most often women, relatively older, and better qualified than in the private sector. Within the same social group, individuals working in the public sector always have a higher level of qualification than those working in the private sector. This specific sociology of public-sector wage earners can partly be explained by the stability of the tasks and occupations most represented in the public sector in most European countries.

This convergence, linked to the pace of development of the Welfare State, does not preclude variations from one country to the next. Using the sociological characteristics of wage earners, we now propose to build ideal types which account for the different forms in which the split between public- and private-sector social groups may come in Europe.

## 2 A Typology of European Public-sector Workforces

Having highlighted the main social characteristics of the split between public-sector and private-sector workers, we propose to study the differences

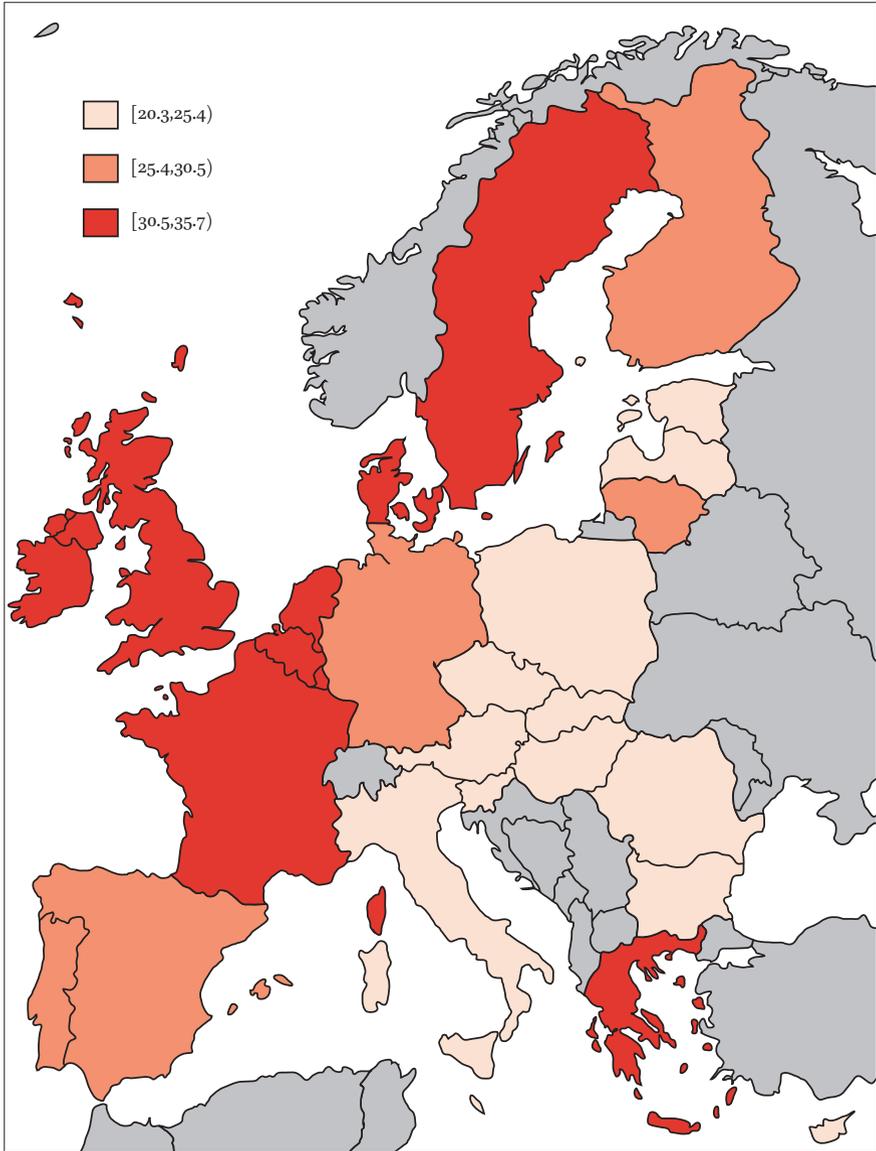
within the European public-sector workforce. The reference typology is that elaborated by Gosta Esping-Andersen, which distinguishes three Welfare State regime-types: the liberal regime, the conservative-corporatist regime, and the social-democrat regime (Esping-Andersen 1996). But this model cannot account for the way jobs are structured within each public sector: gender-based and part-time work-based segregation is invisible in this model (O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993).

The other typologies of European States are mainly linked with the organization modes of the civil services and have little to do with the social properties of these wage earners. They set the "career" civil service, which is characterized by the centrality of the competitive examination and the guarantee of a job for life, against an "employment civil service" in which employees are recruited without a competitive exam and on the basis of a contract (Bekke and Van Der Meer 2000). However, this distinction is increasingly being challenged due to the possibilities of hybridization between the two systems (Bezes and Lodge 2007). The approach with the European public sector, which is broader than the civil service alone, completes the traditional opposition between employment systems by adding other characteristics that are specific to the sociology and history of each country.

### 2.1 *Larger Public Sectors in the Continental and Nordic Countries*

The European public sector is strongly marked by the weight of State tradition in the three main imperial powers. Half of all wage earners exercising public interest functions in Europe are hired in three countries: Germany (19.2%), the United Kingdom (15.8%) and France (14.2%). Looking beyond this first observation, the composition of the European public-sector workforce aggregates many other countries in which the scale of State power is highly variable.

On Map 1 we distinguish a group of 8 countries where the share of the public-sector workforce is the largest: Denmark (35.6%), Sweden (35.5%), Belgium (35%), the United Kingdom (32.8%), the Netherlands, Greece (32.3%), France (32.2%), Luxembourg (31%) and Ireland (30.6%). In contrast, there is a group of 7 countries which have the lowest proportion of public-sector wage earners: Romania (20.2%), Bulgaria (20.8%), Cyprus (21.5%), the Czech Republic (22.8%), Estonia (23.4%), Latvia (23.9%) and Slovenia (24.1%). This introductory approach to the European public sectors reveals a first opposition. On one side, one can find countries with the most public-sector employees, and these are the countries with a civil service tradition (Continental Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries). On the other side, the countries with the fewest such wage earners are mainly former eastern bloc countries for which the transition to the market economy has been characterized by a decline or even a privatization



How to read it: public-sector wage earners in Denmark represent 35.7% of the Danish workforce.

Scope: occupied workforce in the EU (of 27) *Source:* Labour Force Survey, 2011 (Eurostat)

MAP 1 *Share of public sector workers in each country (EU of 27)*

of the civil service. Within this dichotomy, the countries of southern Europe occupy an intermediate position. These findings also illustrate the interest of adopting an extensive definition of the public sector (see above). Indeed, the Continental and Nordic countries have undergone numerous reforms aiming to reduce the perimeter of their civil service. But this mapping of the weight of public sectors in Europe shows that this is more a case of redeployment of the missions handled directly and indirectly by the State than a reduction of its sphere of intervention (Audier and Bacache, 2007).

### 3 Four Types of European Public-sector Workforces

To build a typology of European public-sector workforces, we used ascending hierarchical clustering derived from a principal component analysis of the socio-occupational characteristics of European public-sector workforces. In order to accurately define the scope of these different public sectors, we based ourselves on the most detailed level of description of occupations (Isco 2008 level 3).<sup>6</sup>

These two statistical techniques turn out to be highly complementary in synthesizing the data. The process consists in first clustering the two closest individuals into the same class. Next, the two closest classes are clustered using a Ward distance. This is repeated until a single class is obtained. A hierarchical tree and a histogram of the level indices then illustrate the switch from a configuration of  $n$  classes to  $n-1$  classes, and hence the intra-class inertia gain and the degree to which the partition loses homogeneity. The greater this loss, the more it is considered that the configuration with  $n$  classes is statistically a “right” configuration. We observed that the inertia gain becomes negligible after clustering into four classes. This is why we decided to cluster the national public sectors into four classes. In order to stabilize these clusters we performed a K-means procedure to re-aggregate the individuals in the four classes starting with the individuals in the centre of the classes. This process allowed us to build more stable clusters and thus associate and dissociate the different types of employment sector more robustly. The outcome is four clusters of countries to which four types of public sector correspond.

The largest group (Cluster 3) represents 53% of the European public-sector workforce. It encompasses the public sectors of Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy and Portugal. Compared

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6 We were however forced to exclude the countries for which information on level 3 of the Isco 2008 classification was not collected: Bulgaria, Malta, Poland and Slovenia.

to the European average of public sectors, what makes this group specific is a larger proportion of technicians and associate professionals (Isco 3), skilled and unskilled workers (Isco 7–8–9) and graduates of secondary education. On the other hand, it is marked by the relative underrepresentation of higher-education graduates and professionals (Isco 2) compared to the European average for this sector of employment. The distribution of the various sectors of activity in this group is close to the European average, with the weight of the healthcare sector being greater than that of education and government. The singular feature of this group, notably in relation to that in the Nordic countries and United Kingdom (Cluster 1), is that it is structured essentially around associate professionals and administrative employees. For example, administrative secretaries (8% in Germany, 7% in Slovakia), regulatory government associate professions (5% in Hungary, 4.5% in Belgium, around 3.5% in Germany, the Czech Republic and Austria), legal associate professionals (6.5% in Germany, almost 4% in Hungary and Austria) and clerical support workers (over 3% in Germany and Austria, 4% in Portugal, 5% in Belgium, 6% in Italy) or the other administrative professions (6.5% in France) represent a considerable weight there. Likewise, these countries still have more unskilled workers and, above all, clerical support workers (such as cleaners, for example) than the others do, as government administration reform is probably less advanced there than in the Nordic countries. In particular, these countries have kept some public companies and large government administrations. This group could be referred to as the *public sector of street-level bureaucrats*.

The second-largest group (Cluster 1) represents 26% of the European public-sector workforce. It concerns the public sectors of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands) and the United Kingdom. It is characterised primarily by a higher proportion of service and sales workers (Isco 5) than the average in the European public sectors. It can be explained by the predominance of education and, above all, healthcare, and a relatively high proportion of the wage earners in this sector in the workforce as a whole (33.71% on average in this cluster). In Sweden, for example, the Social-Democrat regime (Esping-Andersen, 1996) has resulted in one-third of jobs being in services, notably in the areas of healthcare, education and social work (Oesch 2006b: 272). With the exception of the Netherlands, where the breakdown between the groups is more nuanced, the public-sector wage earners in this group are concentrated among nursing and midwifery professionals (3% to 7.5%), secondary education teachers (2% to 5%) and primary education teachers (4% to 15%) on the one hand, and child care workers (4.5 to 11%) and personal care workers in the healthcare sector (5% to 25%) on the other. These public sector workers, however, are not necessarily directly at the service of the

State, but occupy a role as mediators between the interests of different social groups (Knill, 2001, p. 73). This group is also distinguished by a higher proportion of very young workers (under 25) and by a high proportion of women. It could be described as the *public sector of care workers*. Its particular feature is that in terms of employment relations, it is not very different from the private sector. In the Nordic countries and United Kingdom, many of the workers fulfilling general interest functions do not have civil-servant status, as they are employed by executive agencies. They nonetheless enjoy a high level of job security. In Sweden, the New Public Management reforms of the 1990s put an end to civil-servant status and imposed a status comparable to that of the private sector on most State officials (except the judiciary). The same applies to Denmark where most public-sector workers are subject to similar work agreements to those in the private sector, and to the Netherlands, where half of the country's teachers do not have civil-servant status (Demmke, 2004: 107). This porous nature of the boundary between public and private-sector statuses that is to be found in the majority of the countries of Northern Europe no doubt explains why these countries have kept very high proportions of workers fulfilling public-interest functions.

The third group (Cluster 4) represents 12% of the European public-sector workforce. It is composed of the countries of Southern Europe (Cyprus, Spain, Greece) plus Romania. This group is distinguished primarily by overrepresentation of men and of the 25–45 age group. This can partly be explained by the specific weight of the armed forces (Isco 0). For example, in Greece, Romania and Cyprus, commissioned and non-commissioned officers are overrepresented in comparison to other countries (3% to 5%, whereas the figure is below 1.5% in the other countries). Likewise, protective services workers represent a large weight (between 6.5 and 8%) in these countries. This group could be referred to as the public sector of *law enforcement and protection* in which the governing functions make up a significant share of the wage earners in the public sector (army and police). The majority of these have civil-service status: in Spain, 60% of the public-sector workforce have civil-servant status, and the rate hits 75% in Greece (Demmke and Moilanen 2010: 90); they are therefore relatively well protected from the ups and downs of the short-term economic outlook. This type of public-sector workforce seems to be putting up more effective resistance to the process of modernisation and the shift towards the tertiary sector. In these countries, outsourcing of these tasks to the private sector is less frequent than elsewhere in Europe (Hondeghe, 2011).

The last group (Cluster 2) represents 9% of the European public-sector workforce. It encompasses the Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) and some of the Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Slovenia and Poland).

These public sectors are marked by a higher than average presence of professionals, managers, higher-education graduates and women and, on the other hand, a lower representation of men, those with low levels of qualification and general and keyboard clerks (Isco 4). In these countries, the switch from a centrally-planned to a market economy gave rise in the 1990s to substantial investment by the population in education and training. In Poland, the number of universities more than tripled in the space of twenty years, rising from 122 to 455 between 1990 and 2008, while the number of higher-education graduates rose from 56,000 to 410,000 over the same period (Domanski 2011: 402). Some of these graduates have opted for the private sector and its more advantageous earnings, while others have given preference to the stability of public-sector employment: some of them have passed the examination of the National Public School of Administration and gained civil-servant status in the major government departments and inspectorate positions (Demmke and Moilanen 2010: 77). Others have gone into the social services (Rutkowski 1998: 41), education or healthcare: they are ranked among the professionals and managers of the public sector but are subject to the rules of the labour market. This last group could be described as a *restricted public sector of highly-qualified personnel*. The point in common between these countries is that they have relatively limited public-sector workforces with almost no unqualified people. The importance of professionals and managers is illustrated by the more pronounced representation of administration managers and experts. In many of these former socialist republics, notably the Baltic States, the 2008 crisis even slightly accentuated the overrepresentation of graduates in the public sector, as many of them saw it as a way of escaping the unemployment that hit the private sector hard (Masso and Krillo, 2011: 63).

This classification can therefore serve to draw up a typology of European public sectors based on the socio-occupational characteristics of public-sector wage earners in Europe, rather than on criteria of public or social policies or formal employment systems. This typology goes some way towards confirming the familiar geographical polarisation. The countries of Continental and Southern Europe are closer to a traditional public-sector model structured around administrative occupations (cluster 3) or the armed forces (cluster 4), with more men and an average-to-low level of qualifications. In contrast, the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom (cluster 1) embody a model with more advanced tertiary emphasis (greater weight of healthcare and education), a higher proportion of women, and clear polarization between unskilled and very highly-skilled professions. These are also the countries in which the similarities between the public and private sectors are the greatest. However,

the geographical differences are not quite as clear-cut as they might seem, with the Eastern European countries being divided into two groups (or even three, given that Romania is in cluster 4). The dividing line is clear between those that are characterized by a public sector of street-level workers and those with a small but highly-qualified public sector (cluster 2), closer in this respect to the group of Nordic countries. Likewise, while the four groups are distinguished by the different weights of the professional groups – associate professionals for the first group, personal care workers for the second, armed forces and the police for the third, managers for the fourth – these distinctions must be put into perspective. In the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom, certain occupations, mainly nurses and midwives, are afforded an economic and cultural capital that ranks them among the professionals (Isco 2), whereas in the countries of group 1 they are positioned with the associate professions (Isco 3). In other words, the differences shown by this typology are not so much occupational in nature as linked to the position of these professions in the national social hierarchy.

### Conclusion

While the modes of organization of the public and private sectors are increasingly convergent in Europe, the wage earners occupied in these two sectors still have specific characteristics: all else being equal, it is mainly highly educated, older women with greater seniority who are employed in the public sector. Thanks to these results, we also show how different are these two sectors concerning their social structure: the European public sector is almost composed of Professionals and Technicians compared to the private one.

Should we conclude from this that there is a unified, homogenous public-sector workforce in Europe? Probably not. The diversity of national histories, governmental configurations and political balances of power contributes to maintaining specificities within each public sector. There are more and more studies that try to point out what are the social and national characteristics of public sector employees (Tonin, Vlassopoulos 2014). The development and improvement of a source such as the LFS offer us an original tool for describing and analysing the convergences and divergences which persist at the European scale. It shows an element that is both secondary and central to the relationship between social groups at European level. Our approach represents a further step on the way to understanding the difference between public and private workers, through a typology. We distinguish four main types of public-sector workforce: a public workforce of “street-level bureaucrats”,

a public workforce of care workers, a public workforce of law enforcement officers, and a public workforce of highly qualified personnel. Such a typology allows us to go further than the hypothesis of a single public ethos that could be common to the whole European public sector. In general, workers in the public sector are more often unionized than their counterparts in private firms but this gap differs considerably across Europe. Among the public sector of street-level bureaucrats (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy), roughly half of the public sector employees are union members. By contrast, among the public sector of care workers – that is to say the Nordic countries – (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) unionization rates are extremely high, reaching around 90%. At the opposite, we find the public sector of highly-qualified personnel which encompasses the Baltic States and some of the Eastern European countries where we can observe the lowest rate of unionisation. These national specificities come mainly from social structure of each type of public sector and from the collective bargaining practices within each nation state (Scheuer 2011). There is a comparable impact of sector employment on political orientations: belonging to the public sector is strongly correlated with left party orientations in Denmark but this effect is moderated in France, Italy, Belgium and Germany (Knutsen, 2005). Given the continued difference in the occupational and educational plan, one would expect other differences in behaviour or in cultural practices with location. But until now, there is a lack of statistical tools to improve our knowledge about the distinctive features of the different public sectors in Europe.

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