

France's Eco-responsible public services: Speeding up the current ecological transition



Gwenaël Roudaut, ESDN Advisory Board Member, Ministry for the Ecological Transition, France

In February 2020, the French Government updated its overall existing scheme to incorporate sustainable development policies into the day-to-day operations of its state administrations, agencies and public operators. Previously known as *Administration exemplaire* (Exemplary administration), the program was rebranded in 2020 as *Services publics écoresponsables* (Eco-responsible public services) - SPE for short – and given a broader scope. SPE's general aim is to speed up the current ecological transition by anticipating and adapting the functioning and missions of the French state public administrations in line with the requirements of ambitious environmental policies.

The SPE program is mandatory for all State administrations, while regional and local authorities, as well as public hospitals, may participate on a voluntary basis. Decentralized services of the State

administrations will be encouraged to develop their own local eco-responsible networks at a regional level. The program is divided into 20 measures, which address the following topics : sustainable mobility, the end of single-use plastic, a zero deforestation public procurement policy, an environmentally friendly nutrition plan for State organisation canteens, the reduction of public buildings' energy consumption, a plant protection action plan, circular economy, and the reduction of digital equipment's carbon footprint. Each ministry and regional prefecture nominates a correspondent whose role is to monitor the program's implementation and submit an annual report on the measures' progress. Overall, 200 000 working sites and 2.4 million public state employees are affected by the measures. A comprehensive effort has been undertaken to mobilise the public sectors' networks and to actively involve the maximum number of public agents in the program.

The eco-responsible transformation of the French public authorities is also conceived as a tool for reaching the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development French roadmap.

The SPE program relates to the process of public transformation impelled by the Government with the aim to make national public services more accessible and efficient. While the program is managed by the Ministry of the Ecological Transition, its implementation relies on a close partnership with the Ministry of Public Transformation and Civil Service. With the aim to strengthen the synergy between government

endeavours, SPE links to the "Services publics +" scheme launched in January 2021 by the Inter Ministry Department for Public Transformation, setting eco-responsibility as a part of Government employees' daily commitments and training courses. Services publics + includes a series of commitments, the ninth of which, "We are eco-responsible", explicitly refers to the SPE program.

In February 2021, on SPE's first anniversary, a monitoring committee chaired by the Minister of the Ecological Transition and the Minister for Public Transformation and Civil Services drew a positive balance of the program's first year: in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic, 80 % of the measures met their deployment timelines. The sanitary situation even proved beneficial to some measures, whose ambitions have been upgraded in line with the Government's stimulus package. Among the positive outcomes in 2020, France can highlight the uptake of sustainable mobility package for public employees, a strong increase of the proportion of recycled paper (now up to 88%) in public purchases, a strong reduction in the use of chemicals in state-managed open spaces and forests, including privately owned state spaces, the saving of 139,000 tons of CO₂ emissions in public buildings, and the significant percentage of quality and sustainable products purchased for civil servants catering.

Consolidated results, following the February 2021 monitoring committee, are expected next May. A summarized version of the report on SPE's first year of implementation has already been published. The report's detailed version is currently awaiting validation.

The SPE program is currently working on several tools aimed at taking the present momentum to the next level. A series of indicators for monitoring and evaluating the measures' implementation is soon to be released. An eco-responsible public service award, created in connection with Services publics +, will allow for new initiatives to emerge, along with an open call for the expression of interest to identify and help develop innovative projects. An online tool will be made available to foster eco-responsibility through trainings.

Members of the now-structured "SPE community" have been praised by the monitoring community for their achievements by the chairing Ministers, who also encouraged them to accelerate the current momentum, to support public agents' personal involvement in the measures, and to rely on the SPE program as an efficient tool for France's ecological transition.

Links :

<https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/services-publics-ecoresponsables> (in French)

<https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/Bilan%20SPE.pdf> (short version of the report ; in French)

Gwenaël Roudaut

ESDN Advisory Board Member, Ministry for the Ecological Transition, France

