


# Governance and Institutional Dynamics of Human Resources in Armenia's Unified Social Service: Recruitment and Performance Management Practices


*Hambardzumyan Vahagn S.*

*PhD in Economics, President of the Association of Accountants of Armenia,  
President of the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia (Yerevan, RA)*

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0647-0732>  
[founderhgh@gmail.com](mailto:founderhgh@gmail.com)

*Aghajanyan Martin A.*

*PhD student, Chair of Political Science,  
Faculty of International Relations, YSU (Yerevan, RA)*

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4260-217X>  
[martinaghajanyan9@gmail.com](mailto:martinaghajanyan9@gmail.com)

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## **Մարդկային ռեսուրսների կառավարումը Միասնական սոցիալական ծառայությունում. հավաքագրման և կատարողականի գնահատման պրակտիկաների ուսումնասիրություն**

*Համբարձումյան Վահագն Ս.*

*Տնտեսագիտության թեկնածու, Հայաստանի հաշվապահների ասոցիացիայի նախագահ  
Հայաստանի գործատուների հանրապետական միության նախագահ (Երևան, ՀՀ)*

*Աղաջանյան Մարտին Ա.*

*Քաղաքագիտության ամբիոնի առկա ստալիրանտ,*

*Միջազգային հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետ, Երևանի պետական համալսարանի (Երևան, ՀՀ)*

**Ամփոփագիր.** Ինչպես պետական կենսագործունեության այլ ոլորտներում, այնպես էլ սոցիալական ծառայությունների տրամադրման ոլորտում մարդկային ռեսուրսների կառավարումը (ՄՌԿ) առանցքային նշանակություն ունի. 21-րդ դարի տնտեսական առաջընթացի հիմքում մարդկային կապիտալի արդյունավետ և նպատակային օգտագործումն է: Մարդկային ռեսուրսների զարգացման հիմնահարցը հատկապես կարևոր է ՀՀ սոցիալական ծառայությունների տրամադրման գործընթացի արդյունավետության բարձրացման համատեքստում, որի համար պատասխանատու կառույցը ՀՀ աշխատանքի և սոցիալական հարցերի նախարարության ենթակայության ներքո գործող Միասնական սոցիալական ծառայությունն (ՄՍԾ) է: Սույն հոդվածի ուսումնասիրության դիտարկում են մարդկային ռեսուրսների կառավարման գործընթացի մաս կազմող աշխատակիցների հավաքագրման և կատարողականի կառավարման գործընթացները: Տվյալ հիմնահարցերի վերաբերյալ անհրաժեշտ տեղեկատվության աղբյուրը սոցիալական պաշտպանության ոլորտի մասնագետների հետ կատարված հարցազրույցներն են: Հոդվածում վերհանվում են ՄՍԾ-ի մարդկային ռեսուրսների հետ կապված հիմնական մարտահրավերները, մասնավորապես՝ աշխատակազմի հավաքագրման գործընթացի դժվարությունները, որոնք պայմանավորված են ցածր աշխատավարձերով, բյուրոկրատական խոչընդոտներով և կարերիային աճի ոչ գրավիչ հեռանկարներով: Ավելին, հոդվածում անդրադարձ է կատարվում նաև ՄՍԾ-ի կատարողականի կառավարման համակարգի այնպիսի բացթողումներին, ինչպիսիք են առանցքային արդյունավետության ցուցանիշների և հետադարձ կապի կառուցակարգերի բացակայությունը: Ուսումնասիրությունն ընդգծում է, որ անհրաժեշտ է կիրառել հավաքագրման առավել արդյունավետ մեթոդներ և բարեփոխել ՄՍԾ-ի ՄՌԿ համակարգը՝ ծառայությունների որակը և աշխատակիցների արդյունավետությունը բարձրացնելու նպատակով: Վերոնշյալ փոփոխությունների կիրառմամբ ՄՍԾ-ն բավականաչափ ներուժ կունենա բարելավելու տրամադրվող ծառայությունների որակը, բավարարելու բնակչության կարիքները և բարձրացնելու աշխատակիցների մոտիվացիան ու արդյունավետությունը: Սույն հոդվածի գիտական նորույթը պայմանավորված է համատեքստային մոտեցմամբ, որը մեծամասամբ անդրադառնում է Հայաստանի սոցիալական հատվածին հարմարեցված բարեփոխումների և կատարողականի գնահատմանը: Այն տրամադրում է հավաքագրման մարտահրավերների տեղայնացված պատկերը՝ կենտրոնանալով գործնական քայլերի վրա, որոնք բխում են Հայաստանի սոցիալ-տնտեսական միջավայրի առանձնահատկություններից: Համեմատելով մասնավոր հատվածի կատարողականի գնահատման մոդելները Հայաստանի սոցիալական ծառայությունների հետ՝ հոդվածում ընդգծվում է հանրային ոլորտին հատուկ մոտեցման անհրաժեշտությունը՝ խուսափելով

մասնավոր հատվածի ուղղակի կիրարկումից: Առաջարկվող բարեփոխումները նույնպես նորարարական բնույթ են կրում, քանի որ դրանք հարմարեցված են Հայաստանի նորմատիվ-իրավական և սոցիալ-տնտեսական իրողություններին՝ անդրադառնալով ՄԱԿ հիմնախնդիրներին՝ Հայաստանի սոցիալական պաշտպանության համակարգի համատեքստում:

**Հանգուցարաներ և բառակապակցություններ՝** Մարդկային ռեսուրսների կառավարում (ՄՌԿ), Միասնական սոցիալական ծառայություն (ՄՄԾ), սոցիալական ծառայություններ, Քաղաքացիական ծառայության մասին օրենք, հանրային ծառայությունների մատուցում, հանրային կառավարում

### Управление человеческими ресурсами в Единой социальной службе: обзор практик подбора персонала и управления производительностью

*Амбарцумян Ваагн С.*

*Кандидат экономических наук, Президент Ассоциации бухгалтеров Армении,  
Президент Республиканского союза работодателей Армении (Ереван, РА)*

*Агаджанян Мартин А.*

*Аспирант кафедры политологии, Факультет международных отношений,  
Ереванский государственный университет (Ереван, РА)*

**Аннотация.** Как и в других сферах государственной деятельности, управление человеческими ресурсами (УЧР) играет ключевую роль в предоставлении социальных услуг, поскольку эффективное и целенаправленное использование человеческого капитала является основой экономического прогресса в XXI веке. Вопрос развития человеческих ресурсов особенно актуален в контексте повышения эффективности процесса предоставления социальных услуг в Республике Армения, за который отвечает Единая социальная служба (ЕСС) при Министерстве труда и социальных вопросов РА. В рамках данного исследования рассматриваются процессы подбора персонала и управления производительностью, являющиеся неотъемлемыми частями управления человеческими ресурсами. Основным источником информации по этим вопросам являются интервью, проведенные с экспертами в области социальной защиты. В статье выделены основные проблемы, связанные с кадровым обеспечением ЕСС, в частности, трудности в процессе подбора персонала, обусловленные низким уровнем заработной платы, бюрократическими барьерами и ограниченными перспективами карьерного роста. Кроме того, в статье также рассматриваются пробелы в системе управления результативностью, такие как отсутствие ключевых показателей эффективности и механизмов обратной связи. Кроме того, в статье говорится и о серьезных пробелах в системе управления производительностью труда ЕСС, например, об отсутствии ключевых показателей эффективности и механизмов обратной связи. В исследовании подчеркивается необходимость внедрения более эффективных методов подбора персонала и реформирования системы управления персоналом ЕСС с целью повышения качества услуг и эффективности работы сотрудников. С применением вышеуказанных изменений у ЕСС появится достаточный потенциал для улучшения качества предоставляемых услуг, удовлетворения потребностей населения и повышения мотивации и эффективности сотрудников. Научная новизна статьи заключается в ее контекстно-ориентированном подходе к управлению человеческими ресурсами в рамках ЕСС Армении, фокусирующемся на реформах и оценках эффективности, специально адаптированных к социальному сектору Армении. Она представляет локализованный взгляд на проблемы подбора персонала, предоставляя действенные идеи, которые чувствительны к уникальной социально-экономической среде Армении. Сравнивая модели эффективности частного сектора с государственными социальными службами Армении, статья подчеркивает необходимость подхода, специфичного для сектора, а не прямого применения в частном секторе. Предлагаемые реформы являются особенно инновационными, поскольку они адаптированы к нормативно-правовой и социально-экономической базе Армении, решая вопросы УЧР исключительно в контексте системы социальной защиты Армении.

**Ключевые слова и словосочетания:** Управление человеческими ресурсами (УЧР), Единая социальная служба (ЕСС), социальные услуги, Закон о государственной службе, предоставление государственных услуг, государственное управление

#### Introduction

Since human resources form the fundamental core of every organization, their efficacy and efficiency are crucial for maintaining them. Human resource management (HRM) is the creation of structured processes that guarantee the optimal utilization of human talent while also acting as a means to accomplish an organization's mission and objectives [12, pp. 367–374]. In order to boost performance in both the private and public sectors, an effective HRM is invariably beneficial. This is

highly pertinent to social services, which are among the top priorities for governments to maintain social cohesion and stimulate economic growth. Thus, it is more appropriate to consider the HRM in the context of the recently established Unified Social Service (USS) in Armenia. In this article, based on key informant interviews with field specialists, the HRM in the USS is viewed through its two main components: Recruitment and Performance Management.

The purpose of this article is to examine the recruitment and performance management procedures used by Armenia's USS and to pinpoint systemic issues with HRM. Examining the problems affecting personnel recruitment, evaluating performance management procedures, and making specific recommendations to improve HRM in Armenia's social service industry are the main goals. By concentrating on these elements, the article aims to offer fresh perspectives on HRM tactics that are relevant to Armenian public social services.

This article presents a novel examination of HRM within Armenia's USS, focusing on recruitment and performance management challenges specific to the Armenian public social sector. This study offers a fresh viewpoint on HRM in social services in Armenia by addressing locally specific concerns, including staffing issues related to regional poverty levels and an inadequate performance reward structure.

The research for this study was conducted using primary data collection through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with social service specialists. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of recruitment and performance management challenges from professionals directly involved in Armenia's social service sector. Interviews focused on identifying key obstacles, including compensation issues, bureaucratic limitations, and structural challenges within the USS.

The USS in Armenia has a set of rigorous obligations in the field of social protection and necessitates reliable, proficient, and well-organized personnel. While effectively carrying out its primary objective of delivering essential social services nationwide, the USS encounters highly specialized human resource obstacles that impact its mission effectiveness. The USS oftentimes faces difficulties when attracting highly skilled individuals for critical roles. These obstacles are exacerbated by the complexities of employee retention, which are influenced by factors such as possibilities for professional advancement, job satisfaction, and working environment.

Throughout Armenia, the main structural goal of the USS is to ensure the efficient provision of social protection services. The USS operates within a centralized structure, with its central apparatus situated in Yerevan and 49 territorial centers dispersed throughout the nation, where it provides services to both urban and rural communities [13]. This structure is distinguished by a hierarchical organization that enables the coordination of national social protection programs at the local level by means of a well-defined chain of command. Hierarchical discretion, especially when addressing

current or emerging societal challenges, can contribute to a cautious approach, which may sometimes lead to slower decision-making processes.

The staffing configuration of the USS is established by a decision issued by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs [14]. It envisions a diverse array of responsibilities, including civil service positions, administrative positions, and discretionary roles, all of which are essential for the service's operation. The Republic of Armenia's Law on Civil Service regulates the rights and obligations of personnel in civil service jobs [15].

As per Ministerial Decision No. 46-A/1, the USS has been assigned a total of 1,631 intended positions. Out of them, there are 1,151 positions specifically allocated for the Territorial Centers. The centers are responsible for providing services at the local level throughout Armenia. The territorial centers are responsible for the provision of services at the local level throughout Armenia. The Central Apparatus is responsible for strategic planning, coordination, and policy execution at the national level and is designated 480 roles out of the total [14].

However, there are substantial challenges linked to this staffing list. Although the USS's current staffing list is primarily based on the functions designated to the organization, it fails to account for other critical factors that have a substantial impact on service demand and employee workload. Local poverty levels, unemployment rates, migration patterns, the number of individuals in difficult life circumstances, demographic trends, and other pertinent socio-economic indicators are not adequately considered in the staffing allocations. The consequence of this approach is the potential for inefficiencies and imbalances in the distribution of workload among employees. In areas with a higher concentration of individuals in difficult life situations or with higher poverty or unemployment rates, the demand for services may exceed the capacity of the staff, resulting in overburdened employees and the potential reduction of the quality and timeliness of service delivery. On the other hand, resources may be underutilized in regions with lower demand. This discrepancy between the staffing levels and the actual service requirements underscores the necessity of a more data-driven approach to determining the personnel structure of the USS.

### **Methodology**

The rationale for pursuing a qualitative research approach was due to the limited quantitative data on the internal processes of the HRM system within Armenia's USS, a relatively

recent institution that lacks comprehensive institutional data on its activities. To address this gap, we employed a purposive sampling method in order to identify key informants with the necessary expertise and knowledge who could potentially provide detailed insights into recruitment and performance management challenges. Using this specific sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of such interviewees who had direct involvement in or substantial understanding of HRM processes, particularly in recruitment, staffing, and performance evaluation. The study engaged 8 participants selected for their specialized comprehension of social service HRM. The final interview count was stopped at eight since data saturation was achieved at this point. After the eighth interview, it was apparent that no new substantive ideas or additional qualitative insights emerged, indicating that the responses had reached a level of consistency. As for data collection, it was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Each interview comprised not only core questions on recruitment and performance management practices but also provided space to discuss specific challenges and solutions. To interpret the interview data, thematic analysis was utilized, involving coding interview transcripts into themes and patterns, such as “compensation issues,” “bureaucratic bottlenecks,” or “lack of career pathways.” The results of the thematic analysis are backed by a document analysis elucidating current regulations related to the HRM of Armenia’s USS, as well as a literature review on prior studies of HRM practices, social service recruitment, and performance management.

### **Recruitment Procedures in the Unified Social Service**

Recruitment plays a crucial role in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of government agencies [1, pp. 142-156]. These organizations must adapt the scope and caliber of their services to meet the changing requirements of citizens. The nature of public service delivery is strongly influenced by the ability to attract and retain the necessary expertise to satisfy these evolving needs [4].

Recruitment entails the proactive pursuit of qualified candidates and the encouragement of them to submit applications for available positions. This procedure is essential for the development of a pool of candidates who have the potential to fill critical roles within the organization. The selection process commences upon the establishment of a cohort of candidates [8, pp. 18-34].

Government organizations require an efficient recruitment and selection process by eliminating politicization and strengthening the merit basis of

the recruitment process [7, pp. 49-51]. It ensures that only persons who have the necessary qualifications, skills, and professional expertise are chosen to take on public obligations [3, pp. 103-118]. This not only enhances the organization's ability to deliver services effectively but also ensures that the public receives the highest level of service quality.

Recruitment is of paramount significance to social organizations like USS. Operating with a mission-driven focus, these organizations address social issues, provide essential services, and improve community well-being. However, there is a range of obstacles in the public service related to the application of recruitment and selection processes and procedures, such as non-compliance with policy, allegations of nepotism during recruitment and selection processes, as well as inconsistency in the implementation of legislative frameworks and policies [6, pp. 424-448].

The perceived problems of recruitment in civil service could be attributed to factors such as inadequate and invalid standards for evaluating job candidates as a result of the absence of job analysis, sources of locating the potential applicants, transparency and independence of the recruiting authority, and weak administrative system for determination of qualifications [10, pp. 571-588].

Recruitment within the USS adheres to a standard procedure that is consistent with Armenian public sector standards. Candidates are typically subjected to a rigorous selection process, which includes interviews and testing, and positions are predominantly advertised through official government channels. The pertinent department reviews the electronic applications that applicants submit to ensure their completion before advancing to the next stage. Professional knowledge is evaluated through a point-based system during the testing process, which is followed by an interview that covers civil service priorities, professional knowledge, competencies, personal qualities, and IT skills. The interview is conducted by a committee of five members, and decisions are made in a collegial manner. Successful applicants, particularly those who are new to the state system, may be required to complete a probationary period.

### **Performance Management Procedures in the Unified Social Service**

Performance management systems in the public sector are essential for determining and influencing the overall performance of an organization [11, pp. 131-146]. Private sector businesses prioritize performance assessment as a means to enhance profits and fulfill the demands of their owners or shareholders. In contrast, public sector organizations

have the distinct goal of efficiently delivering public services. Therefore, it is imperative that performance management in public enterprises is synchronized to achieve these public service goals [2, pp. 314-320].

A new concept named “New Public Management” (NPM) further pinpoints the significant role of performance management in public sector organizations [9, pp. 247-266]. This concept discusses the optimization of the efficiency and efficacy of public services by employing performance management techniques in the private sector. Through the utilization of these strategies, public sector organizations can enhance the organization and effectiveness of their performance management procedures, hence prioritizing efficiency and aligning with the public's requirements [5, pp. 93-109].

Performance evaluation within the USS is one of the processes aimed at assessing employee performance, establishing responsibility, and pinpointing areas for professional development. This procedure, which takes place every semiannual, impacts both employee compensation and the making of training and development strategies.

**INDIVIDUAL WORK PLANS** | The work plan specifically customized to the function and responsibilities of each employee within the USS already exists. There is also a comprehensive tool called Mulberry that enables task management and performance monitoring and is used to develop and monitor work plans. Being a structurally hierarchical system allows managers to assign tasks to staff members, subsequently monitor their progress, and submit completed work for approval.

**TASK ASSIGNMENT AND COMPLETION** | Within the USS, the tasks and responsibilities are assigned based on a hierarchical structure, which enables only supervisors or high-ranking staff members to assign new tasks and further monitor them in the mentioned Mulberry system. Employees must adhere to the specified timelines and restrictions for completing the task. The responsible individual clicks "checked out" on the pertinent field as soon as the task is completed to indicate that the task is ready for evaluation.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA** | After the tasks are finished, they are evaluated by either the supervisor or the employee who delegated the assignment. The review is all about the main aspects

of the task, mostly covering the quality of performance and punctuality. The managers evaluate these factors by employing a point system (100 points). If the task achieves a minimum score of 60 points, it is deemed satisfactory.

**IMPACT ON REMUNERATION AND DEVELOPMENT** | After the evaluation is finalized, a scoring system is employed, which can have a direct impact on salary and professional growth:

- **Below 60 points:** If an employee scores below 60 points, their performance is deemed dissatisfactory, and they face a decrease in the natural progression of their salary. These serve as corrective measures that necessitate proceeding with immediate improvement of employees' performance.

- **60-90 points:** The scores within the 60–90-point range indicate that, despite meeting fundamental performance standards, there is room for improvement, particularly in professional knowledge and competencies. There occurs an identification process for employees who require additional training, and then a specific training is designed to address the specific deficiencies that were identified during the evaluation.

- **Above 90 points:** A score of 90 or higher entails exceptional performance. On top of being rewarded, the employees are granted the opportunity to enroll in a retraining course of their choosing, which serves to further develop their careers and abilities.

**Challenges of Recruitment and Performance Management in the Unified Social Service**

The USS encounters substantial obstacles in recruiting qualified candidates and managing the performance of the staff despite the formalization of its procedures. The social service sector, by and large, is perceived as less appealing than the private sector due to the demanding nature of the work, limited career advancement opportunities, and lower salaries compared to the market average. Accordingly, there is constantly a shortage of qualified personnel in critical roles, particularly those necessitating a deep understanding of social protection policies and procedures. The following challenges in the recruitment procedure were identified during the interviews:

**Table 1. THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES OF THE RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE IN THE ARMENIA'S USS**

<b>Compensation Disparity</b>	<b>Bureaucratic Bottlenecks</b>
The USS faces significant competition from the private sector, where higher remuneration and employee benefits are standard. The compensation	The hiring process inside the USS is frequently hindered by outdated hiring procedures that entail numerous levels of authorization, significant

disparity presents a challenge for the USS in attracting and retaining highly competent professionals, since numerous qualified employees may opt for more lucrative positions in the private sector. This leads to a loss of competence within the service.

**Unattractive Image**

The USS is perceived as bureaucratic, slow-paced, and resistant to change, which renders it less appealing to dynamic professionals who are seeking innovative and nimble work environments. Consequently, the USS is plagued by an image problem.

documentation, and inflexible regulations, which serve as demotivating elements for employees, particularly the younger generation who are new to the job market and wish to apply. Furthermore, these administrative obstacles result in significant delays in the recruitment of essential personnel, which hinders the USS's ability to promptly complete critical positions and effectively meet the needs of the communities it serves.

**Understaffed HR Department**

The observations during the interviews shed light on the circumstance that the Human Resources Recruitment and Development and Personnel Administration Divisions within the USS HR Department encompass very few positions, while the entire USS system comprises dozens of territorial offices across Armenia. The understaffed situation puts the HRM capacity and the extent of staffing requirements within the organization in very stark contrast, being quite a major issue since the department answers not only to recruiting but also to administering and managing a large and geographically dispersed workforce. The relatively small size of the HRM team may rather lead to inefficiencies, delays in hiring processes, and overburdened staff, ultimately affecting the quality and timeliness of HR services provided.

As to performance management, the present system is accompanied by a myriad of challenges. According to respondents, employees frequently voice apprehensions about the equity of the evaluations and the uniformity of the feedback provided. The effectiveness of the performance

management system may be compromised by the feeble connection between performance evaluations and financial incentives or career progress. In order to further elaborate on the specifics of the USS performance management procedure, we have identified the following challenges:

**Table 2. THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES OF THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN THE ARMENIA'S USS**

**Lack of KPI System**

There are certain challenges in the USS that owe their existence to the lack of a KPI system, hindering the establishment of precise and quantifiable staff goals. The absence of clearly defined performance measures results in inefficiencies, as it obstructs the capacity to accurately evaluate and enhance organizational effectiveness.

**Uniform Reward System**

The uniform compensation structure of the USS is a dilemma, as supervisors frequently bestow comparable salary increments to all employees, irrespective of their individual achievements. This method cannot motivate all the employees since while inadequately rewarding great achievers it fails to provide incentives for improvement among poorer performers.

**Lack of Feedback Mechanisms**

A major issue in the USS is the lack of institutionalized feedback mechanisms. After performance evaluations, employees are not provided with formal feedback, leaving them without the necessary insights to enhance their skills or address areas of weakness, which ultimately affects overall productivity.

**Absence of Career Paths**

The absence of clear career advancement prospects in the USS is a significant challenge. Reviewing and evaluating the performance provides no career progression or skills advancement perspectives but rather leads to employee stagnation and diminished job satisfaction.

## Actionable Solutions for Identified Challenges

Based on the interview results and existing literature on how to tackle modern HRM challenges in the public sector, herewith are presented the solutions for the aforementioned identified challenges. In terms of addressing recruitment challenges, attracting skilled candidates to Armenia's USS will involve:

- **Competitive compensation** - adjusting salaries to better align with private-sector rates could help bridge the compensation gap, signaling a commitment to valuing employee expertise;
- **Streamlined processes** - simplifying recruitment procedures, such as digitalizing applications and reducing bureaucratic delays, would make the USS more appealing to younger professionals;
- **Improved organizational image** - rebranding efforts to highlight the USS's mission and impact on social welfare, along with partnerships with universities, could help reshape the institution's image and attract talent motivated by public service.

As for enhancing performance management within the USS, the institution requires:

- **Clear metrics** - implementing KPIs would establish measurable goals, create an objective basis for evaluations, and align employee efforts with organizational objectives;
- **Regular feedback** - regular feedback sessions, ideally held quarterly, could support employees' professional growth and clarify expectations;
- **Differentiated rewards** - a tailored reward system would recognize high achievers through merit-based bonuses or development opportunities would foster motivation;
- **Structured career pathways** - creating clear career advancement pathways would provide employees with tangible goals for progression, reducing turnover and building long-term commitment to the organization.

## Conclusion

The USS in Armenia is crucial for the effective execution of the social protection policy across the entire country. The USS frequently faces substantial human resource challenges that detrimentally affect the overall effectiveness of the organization. The disparities in compensation, administrative hurdles, and an antiquated hiring process hinder the organization's ability to attract and retain skilled individuals. A key hindrance to the recruitment of highly skilled individuals for major posts in the USS is the relatively lower competitiveness of the public sector in comparison to the private sector.

Consequently, this has an impact on the caliber and efficiency of the service rendered.

In addition to the challenge of recruiting new staff, there are other obstacles, such as the inefficiencies in the performance management system of the USS, that require prompt attention and resolution. These concerns encompass the absence of a KPI system, the deficiency of organized feedback mechanisms, a rudimentary incentive system that fails to incentivize high performance, and ambiguous career growth opportunities, among other contributing factors. The aspects mostly affected by the lack of HRM techniques and tools are the motivation and learning opportunities of the employees, which hinder the organization's overall performance in meeting the needs of society.

To surmount these challenges, the USS must undergo a comprehensive overhaul for better human resources and performance management systems. Some of the critical steps should be as follows: defining potential for upward shift, providing objective wiring and resolving mechanisms, basing staffing decisions on evidence, reengineering recognition and rewards system to promote and reward achievers, and clearly defining KPIs. The operational efficacy of the USS will be enhanced, resulting in the provision of high-quality services to the citizens and the preservation of the effectiveness and dedication of all human resources to the cause of social safeguarding. This can be achieved by concentrating on the particular areas mentioned above.

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