

National Competitiveness and Productivity Council

Bulletin 25-5 Benchmarking the Performance of Ireland's Public Administration, 2024



- According to the recently published Blavatnik Index of Public Administration for 2024, Ireland ranked 14th out of 16 Western European countries and last among a peer group of six small, advanced economies.
- The Council has noted, however, that this is a new Index and should be seen primarily as a diagnostic tool at this point. Caution is recommended in interpreting the rankings. A greater variety of high-quality data on public administrations is required to foster an evidence-based approach to improving their performance.
- Ireland's overall global ranking of 24th (out of 120 countries) displays sharp contrasts in performance across domains. This index shows Ireland as excelling with regard to HR Management (4th), Diversity & Inclusion (5th), and Tax Administration (3rd).
- The Index suggest that Ireland struggles under several indicators – Digital Services (83rd), Procurement (77th), and Technology & Workplaces (108th) – but as the Council's own analysis shows, the rankings presented by this Index are limited by the use of outdated information and do not take cognisance of many recent Government strategies and reforms such *Harnessing Digital* or the Digital Transition Fund.

BACKGROUND

A well-functioning public administration is essential to the direction of an economy, the effective delivery of services in line with policy objectives and the broad support of societal wellbeing. In this regard, it also plays an important role in providing an ecosystem which supports national competitiveness and productivity. In particular, it provides the institutional stability and efficient operating environment which are essential to supporting investment, innovation, and sustainable growth.

Figure 1: Competitiveness and Productivity Framework



The importance of an effective public administration can also be seen through the prism of the various constituent elements of NCPC's own framework (Figure 1). For example, it contributes to policy certainty under *Macroeconomic Sustainability* and to ensuring the timely delivery of public capital projects under *Infrastructure*. This reflects the fact that the capacity and effectiveness of the public sector are essential.

In its work, the NCPC regularly uses a wide variety of international benchmarks to contextualise Ireland's performance and support evidence-based policymaking. These include the IMD Competitiveness Indicators and the OECD Innovation Indicators. Benchmarks are useful in identifying the Irish economy's comparative strengths and vulnerabilities. One area where there have been limited bases for international comparisons is public administration. An effective public administration system can support competitiveness and productivity growth while an ineffective system can be a drag on the environment facing businesses in an increasingly competitive world.

Recent research by The Productivity Institute¹ sets out the case for a reassessment of appropriate measures of public sector productivity. For example, Jörden, Hampton, and Alayande (2024) have argued for a move away from an exclusive focus on fiscal efficiency (or cost-cutting). They advocate a sharper focus on two key areas with the capacity to enhance public sector productivity – digital transformation and effective human resources². The

¹ Based at the Alliance Manchester Business School, the Productivity Institute is a UK-wide research organisation dedicated to understanding and addressing the country's longstanding productivity challenges.

² [Public Sector Productivity Review: Fifteen questions - The Productivity Institute](#)

NCPC shares this view and consequently, it welcomes the generation of new international indices in this area so that we can use these as benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness and productivity of public administration in Ireland.

One such set of indicators is the new *Index of Public Administration*, produced by the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford University, which specifically deals with the productivity indicators referenced by The Productivity Institute. Another set of indicators, the Public Sector Capabilities Index, is currently being developed by University College London (UCL). It has a particular focus on city government capacity but does not yet cover any city in Ireland.

Each set of international indices, which have gone through robust development processes, still have their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to looking at particular countries. In a rapidly changing environment, data coverage and timeliness will make a difference, and so attention must be paid to the detailed data on which the indicators sets are constructed. So, interpretation of data needs to keep that caveat in mind, especially when a new benchmark is launched. This is relevant to the *Index of Public Administration*, where Ireland is graded **B** for data coverage³. We now look at this new index in more detail.

Blavatnik Index of Public Administration

The Blavatnik *Index of Public Administration* (or IPA) was published in late-2024, with the objective of comparing public sector performance globally. The Index builds on earlier work – the International Civil Service Effectiveness Index (InCISE)⁴ – which was published in both 2017⁵ and 2019. In the case of this earlier index, Ireland ranked 16th (of 31 countries) and 14th (of 38 countries) in 2017 and 2019, respectively.

The new index is significantly more comprehensive than its predecessor, measuring civil service performance across 120 countries. It also uses a newly-developed analytical framework based on c. 82 metrics from 17 different data sources. These 82 metrics are grouped into 36 indicators – up from just 12 in the 2019 version. Similar indicators are combined to create the 20 themes in the

framework, but, at present, only 16 are measured⁶. Finally, the results under each of the 16 themes are then classified into the following four domains that represent broad areas of public administration activity:

- i. **Strategy and Leadership** – the setting of strategic direction, institutional stewardship, and the core public service values and behaviours.
- ii. **Public Policy** – core public administration functions and activities that are fundamental for any national government.
- iii. **National Delivery** – direct public service delivery at the national level, and oversight of the wider range of public services delivered by others.
- iv. **People and Processes** – the realities of working in or for the public administration.

IRELAND'S 2024 RANKING

While Ireland's public administration performs reasonably well in a global context, according to this particular index it is a laggard among what it would see as its high-income peer economies. Specifically, Ireland ranks 24th out of 120 countries overall but poorly within a Western European context (placing 14th out of 16 countries (Figure 2)).

Table 1: Ireland's performance across four Domains, 2024

Domain	Ireland's Ranking	Scoring		
		Ireland	Western Europe	SAE
Strategy and Leadership	23 rd	0.71	0.75	0.80
Public Policy	8 th	0.78	0.74	0.79
National Delivery	28 th	0.71	0.81	0.80
People and Processes	57 th	0.62	0.71	0.74

Source: Blavatnik School of Government

Compared to other high-income nations⁷, Ireland ranks 23rd out of 40, indicating a significant gap in performance. Furthermore, among a peer group of six small, advanced economies (SAE)⁸, Ireland is positioned last.

Ireland's ranking is due to a relatively poor performance across three of the four assessed domains (Table 1). The

³ Each country has been given a grade from A to D to reflect their data coverage; countries with grade A have the highest availability of data in the sources that make up the Index while those with grade D have the lowest availability of data (as sourced by the compilers of this Index).

⁴ Produced by the Blavatnik School and the Institute for Government

⁵ A pilot exercise

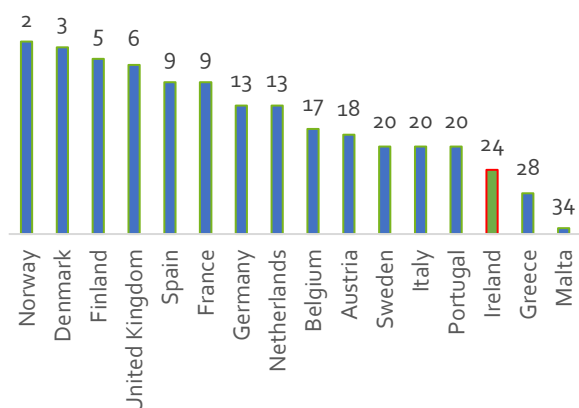
⁶ Sufficient, robust data with broad international coverage was not identified for the remaining four themes.

⁷ World Bank's (2023-24) classification GNI per capita > \$14,005

⁸ IMF defined advanced economies that have populations 5-10 million. The SAE Group includes Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Singapore, and Switzerland. Switzerland is not included in the Blavatnik Index

country's strongest showing is in the *Public Policy* domain; while Ireland ranks 8th internationally, it still marginally trails the SAE average. Ireland's reported performance is notably weaker in the three other areas, ranking 23rd under *Strategy and Leadership*, 28th under *National Delivery*, and 57th under *People and Processes*. As we shall see below, data coverage, namely missing data or the use of outdated data, would appear to have contributed to the recorded performance.

Figure 2: Western Europe Rankings, Blavatnik Index of Public Administration, 2024



Source: Blavatnik School of Government

DOMAIN I: STRATEGY & LEADERSHIP (23rd)

This domain is based on four thematic areas: Strategic Capacity; Openness and Communication; Trust and Integrity; and Innovation. These are assessed through nine indicators and 24 underlying metrics. Figure 3 presents a breakdown of Ireland's performance across these four components.

Ireland's best results are recorded under **Strategic Capacity** (15th) and **Trust and Integrity** (16th). These themes seek to measure whether the Central Government can plan strategically and maintain an effective institutional structure, and if public officials act impartially and avoid corruption. By contrast, Ireland's public administration performs much less well under **Openness and Communication** (27th), and **Innovation** (35th). These latter themes are intended to gauge how effectively Government engages citizens, shares information transparently, and has the freedom to adopt new policies.

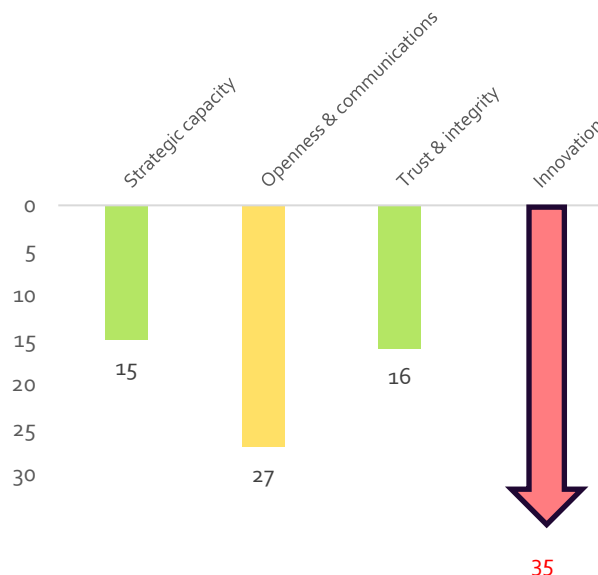
Openness and Communication is assessed using three indicators: Access to Information (14th), Open

Government (19th), and Engagement and Feedback (63rd). It is this final indicator which impacts particularly negatively on Ireland's ranking, but it should be noted that the underlying data here is out-of-date. Specifically, this metric was sourced from the World Bank's 2022 GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI) survey. However, given that Ireland did not participate in the survey⁹, it is our understanding that proxy data was sourced from the 2022 UN e-Participation Index (EPI)¹⁰ which ranked Ireland as 47th (out of 193 UN countries).

Ireland has, however improved significantly since 2022, rising from 47th to 15th in the EPI for 2024. Since 2022, the Irish Government launched the [Harnessing Digital](#) strategy and [Digital for Good: Ireland's Digital Inclusion Roadmap](#). These strategies introduced measures to create new digital portals for citizen engagement and implement measures to improve digital inclusion.

Finally, Ireland's lowest ranking within the Strategy and Leadership domain was recorded under **Innovation**, where it ranks 35th internationally. This is assessed using two indicators: Digital Innovation Support (76th) and Innovative Tax Agency (9th).

Figure 3: Thematic rankings – Strategy and Leadership



Source: Blavatnik School of Government

Digital Innovation Support measures policies and practices that encourage digital innovation. Given Ireland's major economic focus on digital innovation, it is unfortunate that the data sourced here come from the

⁹ For non-participants, data is collected either remotely (through Government webpages) or externally (drawing on other indices). It is difficult to tell specifically as the Blavatnik Index used raw data that they

reprocess, making it difficult to tell which indicator in the GTMI it pulls from.

¹⁰ This is listed as an external indicator in the GTMI, and measures Government readiness to ensure participatory decision-making.

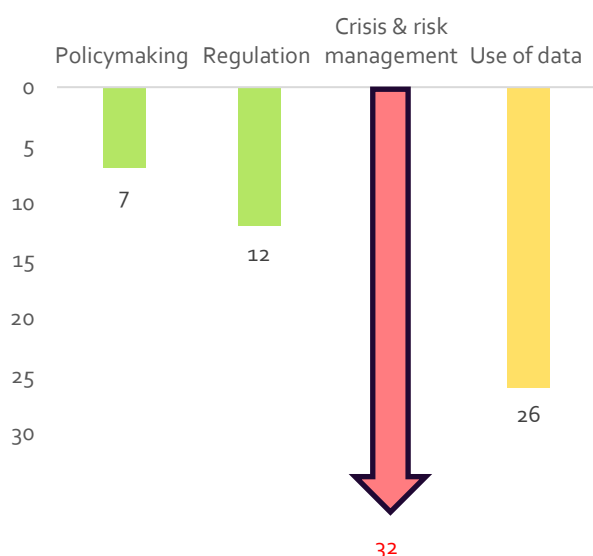
2022 GTMI. Other more recent data sources capture Ireland's current position better. For instance, the 2024 UN Online Services Index¹¹ gives Ireland a perfect score for its institutional framework, and the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2025 ranks Ireland 10th for institutions that encourage innovation¹².

This better position reflects Ireland having recently implemented a number of supports and initiatives to boost digital innovation in small businesses, including the [Digital Transition Fund](#) and the [Grow Digital portal](#). This improvement should continue as the [Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity](#) sets out measures to support innovation and to promote the digitalisation of tourism SMEs.

DOMAIN II: PUBLIC POLICY (8TH)

This domain is based on four thematic areas: Policymaking; Regulation; Crisis and Risk Management; and Use of Data. These are assessed using eight¹³ indicators and 23 underlying metrics. Figure 4 illustrates Ireland's performance across these components.

Figure 4: Thematic rankings – Public Policy



Source: Blavatnik School of Government

Ireland posts good results for **Policymaking** (7th) and **Regulation** (12th). These themes assess how well Government develops effective policy and regulations that include impact assessments and are properly enforced. By contrast, Ireland ranks very much lower for

Crisis and Risk Management (32nd) and **Use of Data** (26th). These results suggest the Government does not prepare adequately for critical societal and economic risks and has gaps in the data and capabilities needed to formulate policy and deliver public services.

Crisis and Risk Management is assessed using a single indicator for Cybersecurity where Ireland is ranked at 42nd. This indicator is, however, based on the Global Cybersecurity Index for 2020. This, in turn, was based on data collected and submitted by a nominated country representative, known as a country focal point. Since 2020, several newer editions of this particular index have been published. The latest edition gives Ireland an overall score of 93.6 in 2024 (up from 85.86 in 2020). Although Ireland improved its overall performance on the Global Cybersecurity Index, the results do still highlight persistent weaknesses in Government preparedness for cybersecurity threats. This is a concern, which has been previously highlighted by the NCPC (most recently in this year's *Competitiveness Challenge*¹⁴ report).

Use of Data was assessed using three indicators: Data Availability (30th), Data Coverage¹⁵ (59th) and Data Re-use (42nd). The Open Data Inventory for 2022 was the primary source of data used here. The most recent edition of this inventory (2024) actually shows that Ireland improved its scores under these indicators. By contrast, a recent update to the PARIS21 Statistical Capacity Monitor— used as the source for the Data Re-use indicator — shows Ireland's use of statistics in national policy documents as having disimproved between 2021 to 2023.

DOMAIN III: NATIONAL DELIVERY (28TH)

This domain is based on four thematic areas: System Oversight; Digital Services; Tax Administration; and Border Services. These are evaluated using eight indicators and 18¹⁶ underlying metrics. Figure 5 shows the considerable variation in Ireland's rankings across each theme. Ireland performs exceptionally well under **Tax Administration** (3rd) which assesses the operational quality of the country's tax system.

Ireland performs less well for **Border Services** (17th) and **System Oversight**¹⁷ (21st). These rankings suggest that there is room for improvement in terms of our border

¹¹ [Online Services Index](#)

¹² [Global Innovation Index 2025 Ireland Profile](#)

¹³ 8 indicators included in framework but only 6 are measured.

¹⁴ [irelands-competitiveness-challenge-2025.pdf](#) – p.83

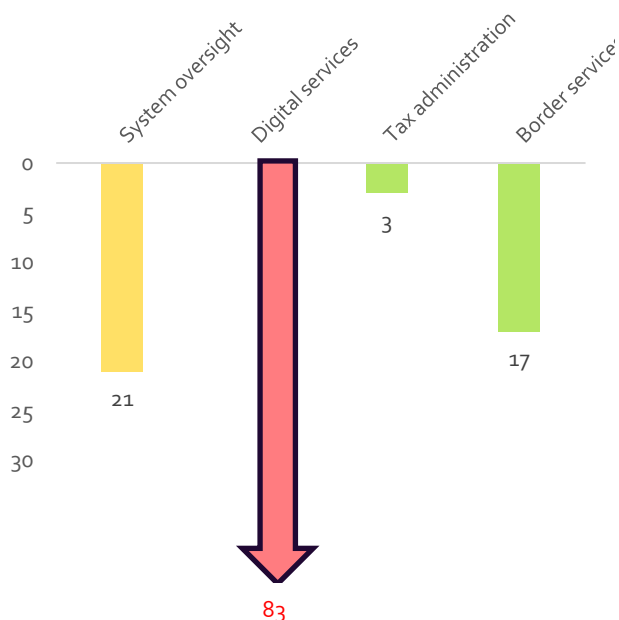
¹⁵ Or the publication of detailed, timely economic statistics

¹⁶ 18 metrics are included in the framework but only 17 metrics are measured.

¹⁷ This theme seeks to measure the extent to which the government can achieve its policy objectives through its own means and through leadership and stewardship of wider delivery systems.

operations and our ability to achieve policy goals through direct action and leadership.

Figure 5: Thematic rankings – National Delivery



Source: Blavatnik School of Government

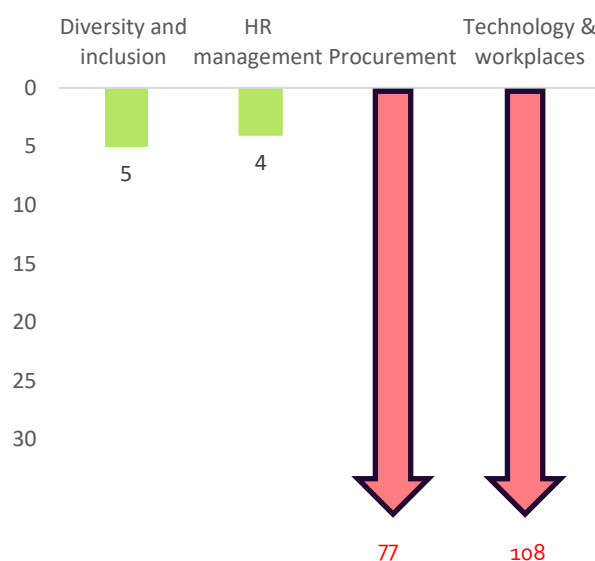
Ireland's performance under **Digital Services** (83rd), however, is notably weak. This theme assesses Government support for digital public services through strategy development, enabling technologies, and user-centred design. This is assessed using three indicators sourced – once again – from the GTMI (for 2022): Digital Government Strategy (55th), Technology and Infrastructure (82nd), and Digital Service Portals (94th). The vintage of this data means that it is important to look to other detailed metrics to get a clearer picture of where Ireland stands. To the extent that Ireland has increased investment in these areas, its absolute performance may have improved, but its relative performance will also depend on what other countries have done in the meantime.

For example, the progress in Government digital services since 2022, is captured by its ranking improving from 11th (2022) to 9th in 2024 on the DESI 2025 Index: Digital Decade ranks Ireland 9th in the EU for digital public services for citizens¹⁸.

DOMAIN IV: PEOPLE & PROCESSES (57TH)

This domain is based on four thematic areas: Diversity and Inclusion; HR Management; Procurement; and Technology and Workplaces. These are assessed using seven indicators and 17 underlying metrics. Figure 6 shows that there is substantial variation across these themes. Ireland is ranked amongst the global leaders for **Diversity and Inclusion** (5th) and **HR Management** (4th). In the case of **Procurement** (77th) and **Technology and Workplaces** (108th), Ireland scores amongst the worst countries across the entire index.

Figure 6: Thematic rankings – People and Processes



Source: Blavatnik School of Government

At first glance, it would seem hard to reconcile such a degree of variability within the performance of a single country. **HR Management**, where Ireland ranks exceptionally well, assesses openness and security of recruitment in the appointment of public administration jobs, and to what degree those appointments are based on merit rather than patronage. In the case of **Procurement**, our performance is assessed based on the operational quality of public purchasing, whilst **Technology and Workplaces** assesses the environment that enables public employees to do their work. These low rankings are concerning, but it must be recognised that each theme comes from just a single indicator source, and in Ireland's case these are somewhat dated. For example, the underlying data on public procurement was sourced from the Global Data Barometer (GDB) for 2021, whilst data on administrative IT systems was sourced from the GTMI (for 2022).

¹⁸ The DESI 2025 Index also gives Ireland a perfect score for public service provision to businesses. Furthermore, the Government of Ireland has

published several recent strategies, including *Harnessing Digital: Connecting Government 2030*.

We have already detailed the limitations of using GTMI data for Ireland. This notwithstanding, the primary limitation here is that a single aspect of Procurement (Data Availability) and a single aspect of Technology & Workplaces (administrative IT systems) have been used to determine the score and ranking for the entire theme. Undoubtedly, these aspects are important, but they cannot be seen to give a complete picture of Ireland's performance under these themes.

The results point to the appropriateness of recent and significant developments in digitisation of public procurement in Ireland since 2021, including the major overhaul by the Office of Government Procurement of the e-Tenders platform in May 2023, and the publication of an open dataset on public procurement in 2025.

LIMITATIONS OF THE INDEX

It has long been recognised that it is difficult to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of public administration. Comparisons of public and private sector productivity usually do not make sense and need to be very specific to have any value. The value of this international benchmarking exercise is that it can enhance visibility on key aspects of public administration performance across public administrations internationally. As with all indices, however, *caveat emptor* applies. The user needs to look in detail at what lies underneath the high-level index.

The NCPC has cautioned previously that benchmarking is context-sensitive, especially when using international indices to inform national policy. This means that international indices should be interpreted critically, understanding their underlying assumptions, and where necessary, supplementing them with further analyses that better capture national circumstances. Undoubtedly this index represents a useful starting point, to prompt further assessment of the performance of Ireland's public administration.

CONCLUSION

The current *Blavatnik Index of Public Administration* offers a mixed assessment of the performance of Ireland's public administration. Ireland ranks 14th out of 16 Western European countries and last out of six small, advanced economies it treats as global peers. The data would seem to suggest an uneven profile, but it does indicate areas of

considerable strength, such as HR management, diversity, and tax administration. It also suggests an appearance of significant weaknesses in digital service provision, procurement efficiency, and technology adoption within public sector workplaces. As we have outlined above, however, there is a more nuanced picture to be seen when we look beyond the headline results or use alternative evaluation methods and benchmarks. For example, *Government at a Glance 2025*¹⁹, an OECD publication, characterises Ireland's public administration as enjoying high levels of public trust and efficacy and performing close to best practice in Digital Government.

While the Index faces significant constraints due to data availability, this issue reflects the current state of public sector data and is not a flaw in the Index itself. The Blavatnik Index represents a positive first step toward empirically evaluating public administration. This index points to the benefits of having more timely, transparent, and comprehensive data on how public administrations function.

Further Reading: The Blavatnik School of Government's 2024 Index of Public Administration is available at: [Homepage | Blavatnik Index of Public Administration](#).

The NCPC reports to An Taoiseach and the Government, through the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, on the key competitiveness and productivity issues facing the Irish economy and makes recommendations to Government on how best to address these issues. The latest NCPC publications can be found at: www.competitiveness.ie.

This Bulletin has been issued by the Chair, Dr Frances Ruane, and was prepared by Jordan O' Donoghue, Patrick Connolly, Dr. Dermot P. Coates and Dr. Keith FitzGerald of the NCPC Secretariat.

¹⁹ It should be noted that the methodology of the Blavatnik Index differs from this publication in three main ways: (1) The Blavatnik Index is primarily an aggregation of existing aggregated metrics. (2) The

development of the index has not involved direct country participation. (3) The index focuses exclusively on public administration performance without considering broader contextual factors, such as adherence to democratic values.

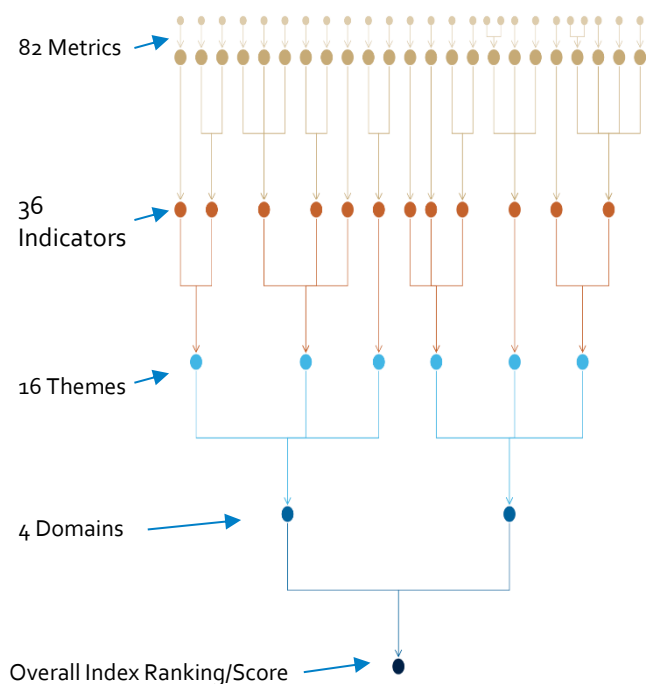
ANNEX

I. CONSTRUCTING THE BLAVATNIK INDEX

The model used draws on data from 17 distinct sources, comprising four quantitative datasets, six assessment-based inputs (i.e., expert evaluations and government self-assessments), and seven opinion-based measures (including business, expert, and general public perceptions).

This source data is transformed into 82 metrics, which serve as the foundational layer of the model. These metrics are systematically grouped and averaged to produce 36 indicators, each capturing a specific aspect of public administration. The indicators are then aggregated into 16 thematic categories, each representing a distinct dimension of administrative capacity.

Data Model



Source: Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford University

These themes are further consolidated into four overarching domains, offering a high-level perspective on the capabilities and characteristics of public administration systems. The domain scores are averaged to generate the overall Blavatnik Index score and rankings, providing a comparative assessment of public administration performance across countries.

It is important to note that rankings exhibit considerable differences both across and within thematic domains. Ireland's position under each pillar is influenced not only by its own performance in a given year but also by the

relative performance of other countries. The following sections provide a more detailed examination of Ireland's performance across these domains.

II. INDEX RANKING – TOP 25 COUNTRIES

Rank	Index Score	Country
1	0.85	Singapore
2	0.84	Norway
3	0.83	Canada
3	0.83	Denmark
5	0.82	Finland
6	0.80	New Zealand
6	0.80	UK
8	0.79	Australia
9	0.78	Estonia
9	0.78	France
9	0.78	Spain
9	0.78	United States
13	0.77	Germany
13	0.77	Netherlands
15	0.76	Lithuania
15	0.76	South Korea
17	0.75	Belgium
18	0.74	Austria
19	0.73	Latvia
20	0.72	Italy
20	0.72	Portugal
20	0.72	Sweden
20	0.72	Uruguay
24	0.70	Ireland
24	0.70	Israel
24	0.70	Slovenia

Source: Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford University