Policy on determining the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies in Vietnam

Pham Dinh Kien

Faculty of Law; Academy of Public Administration and Governance

Abstract: From the perspective of the Party, the determination of civil service staffing levels is not merely a technical exercise in adjusting headcounts within administrative agencies it is intrinsically linked to the broader goals of sustainable national development. An effective civil service system requires a well-structured and balanced workforce, one that reflects diversity in professional skills, competencies, and capacities. Such a structure is essential for enhancing the operational efficiency and responsiveness of state administrative bodies. However, the practical implementation of the Party's orientations and regulatory frameworks demands a high degree of sensitivity, ongoing interaction between institutions, and policy flexibility. In reality, the process of determining civil service payrolls reveals considerable complexity. Major challenges include ensuring transparency in staffing decisions, accurately assessing the qualifications and capabilities of personnel, and continuously adapting to evolving administrative demands and working conditions.

Keywords: Staffing; Civil servants; State administration; Party's viewpoint; State regulations; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and rapid national development, determining the appropriate number of civil servants within state administrative agencies is a pivotal factor in advancing a streamlined, effective, and sustainable public administration system. This task is not merely administrative in nature—it embodies the strategic realization of the Party's orientations and the State's regulatory principles in personnel governance.

As Vietnam accelerates its integration and modernization efforts, reforming the personnel structure in administrative bodies has become a critical objective. Such reform aims to enhance institutional efficiency, reinforce transparency and fairness, and establish clear, standardized procedures for staffing decisions. In this process, a deep understanding of the Party's directives and the State's legal framework is essential not only to maintain political coherence but also to ensure alignment with the nation's broader socio-economic development goals.

This article sets out to examine the foundational principles and policy context behind civil service staffing in Vietnam. It introduces the strategic significance of staffing determination, explores the interplay between Party guidance and state regulation, and outlines

the key analytical themes the paper will address, thereby providing a roadmap for deeper discussion and policy evaluation.

2. Theoretical basis for determining the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies

2.1. Concept of civil servant establishment

The civil service payroll is an important concept in the field of human resource management of state administrative agencies. Simply put, the civil service payroll is a synthesis of job positions in state administrative agencies, including the number and structure of these positions.

The civil service payroll reflects the specific organization of the administrative agency, from determining the quantity and type of work to be performed to assigning people to each specific position. The payroll also determines the ranks and positions in the civil service management system, from the highest management level to the lower levels. The payroll structure also reflects the division and assignment of tasks, responsibilities and powers of each position in the agency.

Determining the civil service payroll requires careful consideration to ensure that the state administrative agency has sufficient human resources to perform its tasks and functions effectively. It must also be based on many factors such as the agency's development goals, financial capacity, diversity in staff skills and abilities, as well as changes in the working environment.

In some countries, civil service payrolls are often regulated and managed through legal regulations and state policies. Transparency, fairness and efficiency in determining civil service payrolls have a great impact on the operation of state administrative agencies and the development of the country.

2.2. The role of determining the civil servant payroll in state administrative agencies

Ensuring efficiency and quality of operations: Civil service staffing helps determine the number and structure of job positions needed to carry out the agency's tasks and functions. This ensures that the agency has the right people and talent to operate effectively, following proper guidelines and work processes.

Division of Duties and Responsibilities: Civil service payroll helps to divide the duties, responsibilities and authority of each position in the agency. This creates clarity about who is responsible for specific tasks and helps to optimize the division of work.

Creating opportunities for growth and advancement: Civil service can define ranks and positions within the civil service management system. This creates career development

opportunities for employees, from lower to higher levels, based on their abilities, skills and performance.

Ensuring transparency and fairness: Determining the civil service payroll based on clear and transparent criteria helps ensure fairness in recruitment, promotion and salary. This helps avoid bias and injustice in the human resource management process.

Adapting to change: Civil service staffing can be adjusted to adapt to changes in the working environment, needs and goals of the agency. Flexibility in staffing helps state administrative agencies adapt quickly to change and optimize performance.

Financial Management: Determining the staffing needs to be done within the agency's budget and financial framework. This helps ensure that the agency uses resources efficiently and is able to sustain its operations in the long term.

3. Overview of the current status of civil servant staff in state administrative agencies in Vietnam

Changes in staffing according to economic and political situation:

According to data from the Vietnamese Ministry of Home Affairs, in recent years, there has been an adjustment of civil servant staffing levels according to the economic and political situation. For example, after the administrative reform in 2015, some central agencies reduced their staffing levels to optimize operations and save resources.

Challenges in allocating and meeting human resource needs:

In reality, the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies does not fully reflect the distribution and meet the actual human resource needs. Data from the 2019 Population and Housing Census Report shows that some local agencies lack staff in important areas such as education and health.

Difficulties in recruitment and promotion:

According to the official document of the Government, the determination of the payroll must ensure transparency, fairness and objectivity. However, in reality, there are often difficulties in implementing the recruitment and promotion process based on real capacity. Data from the 2020 Administrative Reform Index Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs shows that some agencies still have difficulties in implementing transparent and fair recruitment.

Challenges of transparency and fairness:

Based on research documents and reports from international organizations such as Transparency International, Vietnam is facing challenges regarding transparency and fairness

in managing public employee payrolls. Data from Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Index Report shows that Vietnam still has some problems related to handling damages from corrupt acts in the payroll determination process.

Efforts to improve and adjust:

Vietnamese authorities have made efforts to improve and adjust the current state of civil service payrolls. For example, the Ministry of Home Affairs has implemented many training and consulting programs on human resource management to improve the payroll determination process and promote transparency and fairness.

The current situation of civil servant staffing in state administrative agencies in Vietnam shows complexity and diversity, with challenges and difficulties that need to be overcome to ensure transparency, fairness and efficiency in personnel management and agency operations.

4. Viewpoint of the Communist Party of Vietnam on determining the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies in Vietnam

In the process of building and developing the country, the civil service establishment has played an important role in implementing policies, managing, and providing necessary public services to the people. The viewpoint of the Communist Party of Vietnam on determining the civil service establishment in state administrative agencies focuses on building a team of high-quality civil servants who are ethical, responsible, and dedicated to the people, serving the cause of building and defending the Fatherland.

The important role of civil servants:

According to the Party's viewpoint, civil servants not only play the role of managing and implementing State policies but also act as a bridge between the government and the people. They undertake the important task of providing necessary public services to the people, helping to improve the quality of life and promote socio-economic development.

Building and managing civil servant team:

The Communist Party of Vietnam emphasizes the need to build a team of high-quality civil servants with good ethics, solid professional knowledge, and professional working skills. To ensure this, the Party promotes the selection and training of civil servants based on their capacity, moral qualities, and ability to perform their duties.

Quality and ethics of civil servants:

The Communist Party of Vietnam considers ensuring the quality and ethics of civil servants an important factor in ensuring transparency, honesty and efficiency in management

and policy implementation. This reflects a deep awareness of the importance of those working in state administration and their impact on people's lives.

The Party's focus on personal ethics and character is not only reflected in recruitment and training, but also in the building of organizational culture. For example, regularly organizing study sessions on revolutionary ethics, rotating "asset declaration" to prevent corruption, and building a system for testing and evaluating capacity and ethics demonstrate the importance placed on each category of civil servants.

Ethical standards and responsibilities:

According to the Party's view, civil servants must adhere to high ethical standards, be honest, not be corrupt, not harass, and not abuse their power for personal gain. This helps ensure transparency, fairness, and efficiency in management and policy implementation.
Devotion to the people:

The Communist Party of Vietnam's viewpoint is that civil servants must have a spirit of dedication and responsibility to the people, always listen, sympathize, and solve people's problems in the best way. This helps build a good relationship between the people and the government, and at the same time promote the country's sustainable development.

Ensuring fairness and transparency:

The Communist Party of Vietnam emphasizes the need to ensure that the selection, appointment, and promotion process for civil servants is fair and transparent, avoiding bias and curiosity. Fairness in civil service payroll ensures diversity, encourages creativity, and fosters interaction between generations .

The Communist Party of Vietnam's viewpoint on determining the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies focuses on building a team of civil servants who are ethical, responsible, and dedicated to the people. This plays an important role in implementing policies, managing, and providing public services to the people, thereby contributing to promoting the country's sustainable development.

5. State policy in Vietnam on determining the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies in Vietnam

Reality in recent years has shown that the state administrative apparatus in our country is still cumbersome and operates inefficiently. Therefore, the policy of streamlining the payroll in administrative and public service agencies has been proposed as a solution to overcome this situation.

Resolution No. 16/2000/NQ-CP dated October 18, 2000 of the Government on streamlining the payroll in administrative agencies and public service units has determined:

"Streamlining the payroll is carried out together with reviewing and clearly defining the functions, tasks, and organizational structure of the apparatus, aiming to improve the quality of the staff, civil servants, and public employees, improve the quality of operations, effectiveness, and efficiency of the organization and apparatus, as a premise for fundamental innovation of the state administrative system in the coming time" and the goal: "From now until the end of 2002, strive to reduce about 15% of the payroll in state administrative agencies and indirect payroll in public service units".

However, after 16 years of implementation, this policy has not been implemented as expected. Not only has the target of reducing the payroll by 15% not been achieved, but the apparatus of state agencies and public service units has increasingly tended to "bloat". In the state administrative agencies alone, the number of new civil servants added to the payroll in 7 years was 36,952, an increase of 15.48% from 238,668 (2007) to 275,620 (2014). The payroll of public service units has increased rapidly, from 1.63 million in 2010 to 2.31 million in 2014, an increase of 680,000. According to the report of the Ministry of Home Affairs, after 5 years of implementing Decree No. 132/2007/ND-CP on the policy of streamlining the payroll, by the end of 2012, the total number of cadres and civil servants from the central to district level was 388,480 people (an increase of more than 42,000 positions); cadres and civil servants at the commune level were 257,675 people (an increase of more than 14,000 positions). Within 10 years (from 2003-2013) of implementing the policy of streamlining, the number of payrolls not only did not decrease but also increased by 20%.

Due to the pressure of increasing staffing, according to state budget calculations, for every 100 VND collected, 65% is spent on salaries for cadres, civil servants, and public employees, and those who are not cadres, civil servants, or public employees but receive salary-based allowances. The concern is that the budget is having to pay salaries to a group of cadres and civil servants who are limited in capacity, lack public ethics, lack the spirit of serving the people, and lack awareness of training. Therefore, streamlining staffing is a direct and drastic solution to remove unsuitable cadres, civil servants, and public employees from the public service, create conditions for virtuous and talented people to enter the public service, and build a contingent of cadres and civil servants with reasonable structure, sufficient capacity, ethics, and public service responsibilities to meet the requirements of state administrative management in the context of globalization and industrialization and modernization of the country.

To realize the determination to streamline the payroll and apparatus, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 39-NQ/TW on streamlining the payroll and restructuring the staff, civil servants and public employees. On December 10, 2015, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 2218 on the Government's Plan to specify and implement Resolution No. 39-NQ/TW dated April 17, 2015 of the Politburo on streamlining the payroll and restructuring the staff, civil servants and public employees. Previously, since 2014, the Government issued Decree No. 108/2014/ND-CP dated November 20, 2014 on the payroll streamlining policy, providing specific and detailed guidance on a number of articles of Decree No. 108/2014/ND-CP. On that basis, ministries and branches also have documents guiding the implementation of specific staff streamlining policies within the scope of their assigned management areas.

Resolution No. 39-NQ/TW of the Politburo sets the target of streamlining at least 10% of the payroll of all units by 2021, and many ministries, branches and localities have implemented the implementation plan, demonstrating a great determination to streamline the apparatus and restructure the staff, civil servants and public employees. The participation of the entire political system in the process of implementing the payroll streamlining policy is a great advantage to ensure the success of this policy.

However, in reality, the results of the implementation of the policy of streamlining the payroll have not yet met expectations. According to the report of the Ministry of Home Affairs, in the first month of 2016, the whole country reduced 10,000 payrolls. The achieved payroll reduction rate is still low compared to the requirement of 1.5% per year, equivalent to 40,000 payrolls out of the total of more than 2.6 million civil servants and public employees currently. In addition, there are cases where the payrolls that have been streamlined do not meet the standards and conditions.

6. Conclusion

The determination of the number of civil servants in state administrative agencies is not merely a technical or quantitative issue it is a strategic task deeply rooted in Vietnam's orientation toward building a streamlined, efficient, and modern public administration. The current policy framework, while grounded in legitimate principles such as "task-based staffing" and institutional autonomy, still faces multiple limitations in implementation, including overlapping functions, vague task assignment, and the lack of a dynamic and evidence-based workforce assessment mechanism.

To move forward, Vietnam must reconcile the Party's vision of administrative reform with the practical demands of governance in an era of digital transformation and global integration. This requires enhancing the transparency, flexibility, and accountability of civil service staffing policies. Moreover, the integration of technology especially data-driven planning tools can serve as a catalyst for optimizing personnel structure while maintaining political and legal coherence.

Ultimately, improving the policy on determining the number of civil servants is not only a matter of administrative discipline, but a reflection of the country's commitment to institutional integrity, public service excellence, and sustainable development. As such, this policy must be continuously reviewed, refined, and adapted to serve the long-term strategic goals of national governance reform.

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