

New Public Management and Good Governance in the Republic of Moldova: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between New Public Management (NPM) and Good Governance in the Republic of Moldova through a comparative analysis of the SIGMA Report 2023 and the European Commission Report 2025. NPM is approached as a reform framework aimed at improving public-sector performance through efficiency, transparency, accountability, and results-oriented management. Using qualitative document analysis, the study compares the two reports' analytical frameworks and key findings to assess how NPM-related reforms are reflected in administrative practice and how they intersect with Good Governance principles. The results suggest that progress is more visible in areas such as strategic planning and public service digitalization, while limitations persist in performance management, institutional accountability, and administrative capacity, particularly in human resource management and coordination. Overall, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of NPM reforms depends on their integration with Good Governance mechanisms and on the consolidation of implementation capacities, which remain essential for advancing a more efficient, transparent, and citizen-oriented public administration in the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: *New Public Management, Good Governance, public administration reform, SIGMA Report 2023, European Commission Report 2025, Republic of Moldova, institutional modernization, digitalization, public service performance, European integration.*

JEL classification: H11, H83

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1. Introduction

The reform of public administration in the Republic of Moldova is closely linked to the European agenda on Good Governance, institutional modernization, and the strengthening of administrative capacity. In this context, New Public Management (NPM) represents one of the most influential paradigms guiding contemporary reforms, promoting efficiency, performance orientation, transparency, accountability, and a focus on citizens' needs. NPM involves the transition from a rigid administrative model, primarily based on procedures, to a results-oriented

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model that values managerial autonomy, performance evaluation, and the quality of public services. This transformation is essential for states undergoing European integration, where public administration must align with international standards of governance and institutional efficiency.

The Republic of Moldova is currently undergoing a broad process of administrative transformation, driven by its European path and the need to strengthen institutional resilience, transparency, and public trust. The modernization of public administration can no longer be reduced to simple normative adjustments; it requires a profound change in managerial practices, organizational culture, and governance mechanisms. In this context, NPM plays a strategic role by promoting performance management, digitalization, citizen-oriented services, and data- and evidence-based decision-making processes.

In this context, the present article aims to examine how the principles of New Public Management are implemented in the Republic of Moldova, through the lens of the Good Governance assessments presented in the SIGMA Report 2023 and the European Commission Report 2025. The analysis is based on correlating the methodological frameworks and key findings from these documents, with the purpose of highlighting the degree of alignment of national administrative practices with NPM standards, the progress achieved, and the persistent institutional dysfunctions.

At the same time, the study gives priority attention to the areas where the convergence between New Public Management and Good Governance is most relevant, namely strategic planning, public service delivery, the digitalization of public administration, human resource management, and the strengthening of integrity systems, considered essential benchmarks for the modernization of public administration in the Republic of Moldova.

The article argues that the effective implementation of New Public Management in the Republic of Moldova depends not only on the introduction of modern managerial tools, but also on strengthening a governance culture based on transparency, accountability, and citizen orientation. In this regard, the SIGMA and European Commission reports constitute essential strategic benchmarks for guiding administrative reforms, grounding public policies in evidence, and increasing the credibility of public institutions. Through this comparative analysis, the article contributes to understanding how managerial modernization and the principles of Good Governance can jointly shape a more efficient, transparent, and public-interest-oriented administration in the Republic of Moldova.

2. Literature Review

New Public Management is established in public administration literature as a set of reform ideas and tools oriented toward efficiency, performance, managerial accountability, and the quality of public services (Hood, 1991; Lynn, 2006; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). By introducing management by objectives, performance indicators, results evaluation, and a stronger orientation toward the “beneficiary” of

services, NPM aimed to reduce the rigidities of traditional administration and increase the public value generated by institutions.

In parallel, the concept of Good Governance evolved as a normative and institutional framework focused on legality, transparency, integrity, accountability, participation, and public trust. In contemporary literature, the two approaches are often treated as complementary paradigms: NPM contributes to how administration functions (mechanisms, instruments, performance), while Good Governance clarifies under what conditions it should function (values, rules, democratic accountability) (Pollitt & Dan, 2011; OECD, 2015).

The specialized literature highlights that New Public Management represents a transition from traditional, bureaucratic public administration toward a model focused on results, performance, and efficiency, inspired by private sector management practices (Hood, 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).

At the same time, the concept of Good Governance, promoted by international organizations such as the UN, OECD, and the World Bank, adds a normative and ethical dimension to public administration reform, emphasizing transparency, accountability, the rule of law, participation, effectiveness, and equity (UNDP, 1997; OECD, 2015). While NPM is primarily centered on managerial efficiency and performance, Good Governance focuses on democratic legitimacy, institutional integrity, and strengthening public trust (OECD, 2015; Osborne, 2006).

Several studies emphasize that integrating the principles of New Public Management with those of Good Governance leads to a more balanced model of administrative reform, combining managerial efficiency with public accountability and institutional transparency (Pollitt and Dan, 2011). This hybrid approach is particularly relevant for transition countries, where reforms must simultaneously address both administrative performance challenges and issues related to governance and institutional credibility (Nemec, 2010; Drechsler, 2015).

For states in the process of rapprochement with the European Union, including the Republic of Moldova, the relevance of these concepts increases, as reforms are assessed not only in terms of internal efficiency but also in relation to compliance with European standards of governance and public administration. Existing research highlights significant progress in areas such as strategic planning, digitalization of public services, and central public administration reform, as well as the persistence of challenges related to policy coherence, transparency, effective implementation, and institutional stability (SIGMA, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Most studies address New Public Management and Good Governance separately, without conducting an in-depth comparative analysis of the interaction between the two concepts in the national context. Therefore, analyzing NPM and Good Governance in the Republic of Moldova through the lens of the SIGMA 2023 report and the European Commission Report 2025 is useful for understanding not only the level of progress, but also the coherence of reforms, their sustainability, and their impact on the quality of governance.

Therefore, the present article aims to contribute to the specialized literature through a comparative analysis of the relationship between New Public Management

and Good Governance in the Republic of Moldova, highlighting both the elements of complementarity and certain existing tensions, as well as their effects on the activity of public institutions. The study seeks to address a less explored aspect by examining how managerial efficiency tools are combined with the principles of accountability, transparency, and legality in the process of modernizing public administration.

3. Research Methodology

The research uses a qualitative and comparative approach to analyze the relationship between New Public Management and Good Governance in the Republic of Moldova and their impact on the performance of public institutions. The objective is to highlight both the similarities and the differences between the two paradigms in the process of modernizing public administration.

The methodology is based on documentary analysis of the specialized literature, reports of international organizations (SIGMA, 2023; European Commission, 2025), and national strategic documents in order to outline the theoretical and institutional framework. The comparative method is applied by examining the principles, mechanisms, and instruments specific to NPM and Good Govern.

A central role is played by the SIGMA Report 2023, the European Commission Report 2025, and the 2024 monitoring reports of the State Chancellery, which provide complementary perspectives: technical diagnosis, political-strategic evaluation, and implementation analysis. These constitute the main empirical basis of the research.

The analysis is complemented by reference to international best practices used as benchmarks for comparison, while the analytical–synthetic method allows the integration of results and the formulation of conclusions regarding the effectiveness of combining the principles of NPM and Good Governance in strengthening institutional capacity and improving the quality of public governance in the Republic of Moldova.

4. Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to assess how the principles of New Public Management and Good Governance, reflected in the SIGMA reports and the European Union reports on the Republic of Moldova, are reflected in the practice of national public administration and contribute to modernization and increased institutional performance.

The specific objectives are:

- To analyze the recommendations formulated in the SIGMA and European Union reports from the perspective of the principles of New Public Management and Good Governance.

- To assess the degree of compliance between administrative reforms in the Republic of Moldova and European standards of governance and high-performing public management.
- To highlight how the principles of NPM (efficiency, performance, results orientation) and Good Governance (transparency, accountability, rule of law, participation) are reflected in the institutional evaluations carried out by SIGMA and the EU.
- To identify the main gaps, challenges, and imbalances in the coherent implementation of New Public Management and Good Governance in the public administration of the Republic of Moldova.

5. Results and Discussion

The research results show that in the Republic of Moldova the principles of New Public Management and Good Governance are well reflected at the strategic and normative level, but their practical application remains partial and uneven.

To ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis of the public administration reform process in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of Good Governance and New Public Management, the research is based on correlating several types of reports with complementary roles. These capture administrative reform from different but convergent perspectives: technical-diagnostic, political-strategic, and operational-applied. In this regard, the empirical framework of the analysis is built on the following fundamental documentary benchmarks:

- SIGMA Report 2023 – provides a detailed technical diagnosis of administrative capacity and the level of compliance with public administration principles. The SIGMA Report 2023 was published on 24 October 2023 by the SIGMA Programme (OECD/EU) and is part of the official series of Monitoring and Assessment Reports on administrative capacity. It offers a technical diagnosis of the administrative capacity of the Republic of Moldova, evaluating the degree of compliance with public administration principles and the actual level of reform implementation (SIGMA, 2023).

- State Chancellery Monitoring Reports 2024 – provide the implementation perspective, reflecting how the recommendations and commitments undertaken are translated into administrative actions and operational results. The reports were prepared and made available throughout 2024 as part of the official process of monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan for fulfilling the recommendations of the SIGMA Report 2023, tracking the progress of public institutions in implementing the agreed measures.

- European Commission Report 2025 – provides a political–strategic assessment of the Republic of Moldova’s progress in the EU accession process, including public administration reform. The report was adopted and published by the European Commission on 4 November 2025 as part of the European Union’s annual Enlargement Package. It is part of the official set of documents through which the Commission evaluates the progress of candidate countries in implementing the

reforms required for EU accession and offers a political–strategic assessment of the Republic of Moldova’s trajectory in key areas, including public administration reform (European Commission, 2025).

These documents provide an objective and standardized framework for assessing institutional performance, administrative capacity, and the degree of convergence with European standards, making them essential for a rigorous analysis of administrative reforms from the perspective of efficiency, accountability, transparency, and results orientation—core dimensions of both Good Governance and New Public Management (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Christensen & Lægread, 2015).

Building on this integrated analytical basis, the evaluation of the results makes it possible to highlight how the principles of New Public Management are reflected and applied in current administrative practice.

The SIGMA Report 2023 on public administration in the Republic of Moldova reflects the situation for the period 2021–2023 and uses official data, strategic documents, and relevant institutional information. For this reason, it represents the main empirical benchmark for analyzing the state of public administration in the Republic of Moldova and is used as a basis for assessing the application of the principles of Good Governance and New Public Management.

The assessment is structured around six areas: the strategic framework of public administration reform, public policies, human resource management, institutional accountability, public service delivery, and public financial management. Each area is evaluated through indicators scored from 0 to 5, reflecting both the existence of regulations and the level of practical implementation.

The SIGMA Report consistently highlights the need for a clearer link between planning, budgeting, and performance evaluation, which remains one of the major vulnerabilities of the administrative system in the Republic of Moldova. According to the report, progress has been observed in the application of Good Governance principles, particularly in the areas of transparency, access to information, and the use of digital tools. However, the level of real citizen participation in the decision-making process remains low, and institutional accountability mechanisms are not yet applied in a consistent and effective manner.

In 2024, the State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova published the Monitoring Report on the implementation of the Action Plan developed based on the recommendations of the SIGMA Report 2023, a document that reflects the level of progress achieved by public authorities in carrying out the assumed administrative reforms.

This report has a predominantly operational character, focusing on assessing how the technical recommendations formulated by SIGMA are translated into concrete measures, public policies, and institutional actions. In this sense, the document complements the SIGMA Report 2023 by transforming the diagnostic-type evaluation into a practical tool for monitoring progress and strengthening institutional accountability.

From the perspective of Good Governance and New Public Management, the 2024 State Chancellery report is relevant because it allows the observation of the transition from the level of strategic recommendations to that of effective implementation. It provides an updated empirical framework for assessing the degree of institutional ownership of the reform and the capacity of public administration to operationalize the principles of efficiency, accountability, transparency, and results orientation.

The report is not only a technical monitoring tool but also an indicator of the maturity of the administrative reform process, as it shows the extent to which the recommendations of the SIGMA Report 2023 are transformed into public policies, administrative measures, and concrete operational mechanisms.

Based on these general findings, the detailed analysis highlights a series of trends and particularities of the reform process, which can be summarized through the following key indicators and aspects:

1. Public administration reform has entered an operationalization phase but remains unbalanced across pillars.

After the publication of the SIGMA Report 2023, the Government of the Republic of Moldova initiated the transposition of the recommendations into concrete actions by approving an Action Plan structured around six pillars and 133 measures. Monitoring by the State Chancellery indicates moderate overall progress, with 47.37% of the actions completed by the beginning of 2025, confirming institutional ownership of the reform. The launch of public consultations in January 2026 on adjusting public administration reform suggests the authorities' intention to reassess priorities and strengthen the implementation framework. However, progress remains uneven across pillars and institutions, confirming limited administrative capacity and the fragmented nature of reform implementation.

2. The strategic framework is normatively strengthened, but performance evaluation tools remain incomplete.

Both the SIGMA Report 2023 and the State Chancellery reports show that the strategic architecture of the reform is well defined through the adoption of key documents such as the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2030 and the Public Financial Management Development Strategy.

However, performance indicators are not yet fully operationalized, and some strategic reports have not been prepared or published on time due to inadequate deadline setting and the lack of indicator “passportization.” This situation limits the effective application of New Public Management principles, particularly results-oriented management.

3. Public policy coordination represents one of the most visible post-SIGMA progress areas.

One of the clearest advances highlighted by the State Chancellery reports concerns Pillar II – public policy development and coordination. The implementation rate of actions for 2024 exceeds 75%, with the adoption of modern policy costing tools, new regulatory impact assessment methodologies, and strengthened government coordination mechanisms. These developments confirm a gradual

alignment with New Public Management principles, particularly in terms of evidence-based decision-making, strategic planning, and the predictability of the decision-making process.

4. Human resource management remains a structural vulnerability.

Despite important legislative changes in the field of the civil service, the analyzed documents show that Pillar III – civil service and human resource management remains one of the most problematic areas. Although 75% of the planned actions for this pillar were completed in 2024, many measures are still ongoing and have exceeded their deadlines.

This situation confirms the SIGMA 2023 assessment, according to which managerial instability, the low attractiveness of the civil service, and the limited capacity to retain qualified staff affect the sustainability of the reform.

5. Accountability and control mechanisms are evolving slowly, with an emphasis on formal compliance.

Pillar IV – institutional accountability – shows moderate progress, with approximately half of the actions completed or in progress. The State Chancellery reports indicate improvements in access to information, civil servant training, and updates to the regulatory framework; however, the overall impact remains limited.

6. Public service delivery represents the most advanced dimension of the reform.

Both the SIGMA Report 2023 and the State Chancellery reports highlight that Pillar V – service delivery – is the area with the most consistent results. The digitalization of public services, the expanded use of electronic platforms, and the simplification of administrative procedures demonstrate the practical application of New Public Management principles focused on citizens and efficiency. However, the documents emphasize the need for a more inclusive approach, especially for vulnerable groups, and to ensure equal access to services.

7. Public financial management is well regulated but insufficiently integrated with performance.

In the area of public financial management, the reports confirm the existence of relatively solid budgetary discipline and functional control mechanisms. However, the integration of budgeting with strategic objectives and institutional performance evaluation remains limited, maintaining a focus on compliance and control.

In the same vein, another relevant document, the European Commission Report 2025 for the Republic of Moldova, confirms these findings and complements the analysis with a perspective focused on the administration's overall capacity to transform the strategic framework into concrete results.

➤ The European Commission Report 2025 for the Republic of Moldova is an official document prepared within the European Union's annual Enlargement Package, with the role of assessing the country's progress in meeting the accession criteria. The document reflects the institutional position of the European Commission and provides a political-strategic analysis of the reforms undertaken, including in the field of public administration and good governance.

The report approaches public administration reform as part of the fundamentals of the enlargement process, alongside the rule of law, the functioning of democratic institutions, and administrative capacity. Unlike the SIGMA Report, the European Commission Report 2025 emphasizes the dynamics of reforms and future directions of action rather than the detailed measurement of administrative performance. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the document acknowledges progress in strategic planning, public service delivery, and digitalization, but highlights the need to strengthen administrative capacity, institutional coordination, and human resource management.

The EU Report 2025 is particularly relevant for the analysis of New Public Management and Good Governance, as it reflects the European Union’s expectations regarding results-oriented, accountable, and efficient public administration. Through its forward-looking character, the document provides a useful framework for formulating reform recommendations and for assessing the evolution of public administration in the Republic of Moldova in the post-SIGMA 2023 period.

To synthetically highlight the convergences and differences between the two documents, as well as the way they reflect the application of the principles of New Public Management and Good Governance, a comparative table between the SIGMA Report 2023 and the European Commission Report 2025 is presented below.

Comparative Analysis: SIGMA 2023 – European Commission Report 2025

Table 1

Dimension analyzed	SIGMA 2023 (assessment/score)	EU 2025 (qualitative assessment)	Evolution 2023–2025	Analytical interpretation
Strategic reform framework	Strategy in place (score 3)	Reform recognized as a priority	Stable	Normative framework consolidated
Implementation and monitoring	Score 0 – very low score	Needs acceleration and consolidation	Procedural progress	Implementation still weak
Performance management	Lack of results orientation	Emphasis on results in recommendations	Emerging	Transition toward NPM, without clear results
Public human resources	Non-competitive salaries (score 1)	Need to strengthen capacity	Stagnation	Structural bottleneck in NPM
Civil service stability	Managerial instability (score 2)	Continued EU concern	Stagnation	Politicization persists

Dimension analyzed	SIGMA 2023 (assessment/score)	EU 2025 (qualitative assessment)	Evolution 2023–2025	Analytical interpretation
Institutional accountability	Score 2 – effective institutional accountability	Deficient application of recommendations	Limited progress	Good governance incomplete
Transparency	Access to information – score 4	Legal framework appreciated	Stable	Strength of governance
Justice	Score 3, long examination durations	Concerns regarding efficiency	Stagnation	Risk for the rule of law
Public service delivery	Citizen orientation – score 4	Progress acknowledged	Operational progress	Most advanced NPM dimension
Financial management	Solid budget execution (score 5)	Need to strengthen audit	Selective progress	Ex-post control > performance management

Source: Author's creation

Table 1 presents a synthesis of the main indicators used by the SIGMA Programme (OECD/EU) to assess public administration in the Republic of Moldova, relevant for analyzing the implementation of New Public Management and the principles of Good Governance. The indicators are grouped into key thematic areas—strategic reform framework, public policy development, human resource management, institutional accountability, public service delivery, and public financial management—reflecting the systemic approach to evaluating administrative capacity.

The indicator values highlight an uneven implementation of New Public Management principles. While certain areas, such as citizen-oriented public services and budget execution, record relatively high scores, the fundamental components of performance management, financial sustainability, and managerial accountability remain underdeveloped. This situation suggests the existence of a significant gap between the normative framework of the reform and its practical application.

The comparative table allows for a longitudinal analysis of the evolution of public administration reform. The comparison of the two assessments indicates that, during the period 2023–2025, progress has been predominantly procedural in nature, consisting of institutional adjustments and the strengthening of the strategic framework, without yet being reflected in a substantial improvement in administrative performance and accountability mechanisms.

Overall, the data synthesized in the table confirm that the Republic of Moldova is in a transition phase toward a results-oriented public governance model specific to New Public Management. However, Good Governance remains only partially achieved due to persistent limitations in implementation, monitoring, and managerial control. These findings justify the need to formulate reform

recommendations focused on strengthening institutional capacity and operationalizing the principles of NPM and Good Governance.

Used together, the two reports provide a solid analytical basis for a comparative and longitudinal approach: the SIGMA Report 2023 provides a technical diagnosis of the state of public administration, while the European Commission Report 2025 allows for the assessment of the direction and pace of reforms in the context of European integration.

The study's results also highlight that the effectiveness of New Public Management is closely conditioned by the quality of Good Governance. The absence of consolidated mechanisms of accountability, managerial control, and institutional continuity limits the capacity of the reform to produce lasting effects. Therefore, NPM and Good Governance must be approached as complementary dimensions of the same administrative modernization process, rather than as independent directions (Pollitt & Dan, 2011; OECD, 2015).

A central element is administrative capacity, particularly human resource management, which remains one of the most vulnerable components of the reform. Managerial instability, the low attractiveness of the civil service, and the incomplete application of meritocracy directly affect both the implementation of New Public Management and the functioning of Good Governance mechanisms. In the absence of a stable and competent professional body of civil servants, reforms risk remaining fragile and reversible.

Overall, both reports highlight that public administration reform is well grounded from a normative perspective but insufficiently operationalized. A structural gap persists between planning and implementation, between the existence of strategies and the real capacity to produce measurable results. Performance management, the integration of budgeting with strategic objectives, and indicator-based monitoring mechanisms remain consistent weaknesses during the period 2023–2025.

The reform is affected by vulnerabilities related to financial sustainability, institutional coordination, and managerial accountability, as well as by a deficit of effective institutional accountability. The only area showing clear progress is public service delivery, where digitalization and citizen orientation best reflect the application of New Public Management principles, although a more inclusive and equitable approach is still needed even in this field.

In conclusion, the comparison of the two reports shows that, during the period 2023–2025, public administration reform in the Republic of Moldova has progressed mainly at a procedural level, without deep structural transformations. SIGMA 2023 identifies the underlying vulnerabilities of the administrative system, while the EU Report 2025 confirms that these continue to condition the state's capacity to function as a modern, high-performing administration compatible with European standards.

The results of the analysis highlight the need to accelerate the transition from predominantly normative reforms to reforms with real impact on institutional

performance, so that public administration in the Republic of Moldova can become a functional and credible actor in the European integration process.

6. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the SIGMA Report 2023 and the European Commission Report 2025 shows that the Republic of Moldova has made significant progress in strengthening the strategic and normative framework of public administration reform. However, the effective implementation of the principles of New Public Management and Good Governance remains limited, marked by a persistent gap between regulation and practice.

Overall, the analyzed documents confirm the political and institutional ownership of the reform, reflected in the transposition of SIGMA recommendations into action plans and monitoring mechanisms. However, the application of New Public Management and Good Governance principles remains partial, characterized by imbalances between reform pillars, insufficiently consolidated administrative capacity, and a still modest orientation toward results and impact.

The reform is marked by predominantly procedural progress, with operational effects more visible only in certain areas, especially public service delivery. The core dimensions of NPM -performance management, managerial accountability, and the professionalization of the civil service - remain insufficiently developed and applied.

The study confirms the interdependence between New Public Management and Good Governance, demonstrating that administrative efficiency cannot be sustainable in the absence of transparency, accountability, and institutional legitimacy.

The Republic of Moldova is thus in a transition phase from normative reform to institutional performance. The success of this process depends on the administration's capacity to transform the formal instruments of NPM into functional results-management mechanisms, integrated into a coherent and stable framework of good governance.

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