



SIGMA POLICY SEMINAR

PUBLIC SERVICE AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

28 April 2020
(Virtual Meeting)

SIGMA organised a virtual meeting with IPA countries on Managing civil servants during COVID-19 crisis on 28 April 2020. Over 60 participants from six Western Balkan administrations and Turkey took part in the online discussion, along with representatives of the European Commission, EU Delegations to the region, ReSPA and SIGMA experts (Annex 1).

Introductory remarks from the Head of the SIGMA Programme were followed by a brief presentation of key observations and conclusions from the project of *mapping the EU member states' public administration responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (for EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries)* conducted early April (Annex 2). The presentation (Annex 3), which focused on teleworking, flexible working arrangements and key challenges, helped structure the discussion.

1. Teleworking:

- a) Following government measures related to confinement and physical distancing, most public administrations in IPA countries smartly and rapidly moved to teleworking. To a large extent, IPA countries have had similar experiences to that of the EU/OECD countries. This shift took place even in countries with no legislative framework for this mode of work (Montenegro) or where governments allowed employees to choose whether they want to work from home or at the office (Turkey).
- b) Although introduction of the home office did not pose any technical problems (households possess IT equipment and internet connection), many employees are required to use their personal home equipment for professional use, which may also be needed by other family members (schools moved to the online mode as well). A deficit of IT equipment has therefore been an issue in some countries.
- c) While basic communication was ensured via email and online meeting tools, actual work on electronic files requires remote access to corporate IT systems and in numerous cases, this functionality had not been installed prior to the crisis. Hence the need to come to the office and scan necessary documents when possible (it is considered a legitimate reason for commuting and in some countries an obligation for civil servants). This, however, cannot substitute fully digitalised work processes.
- d) Lack of remote access to documents, databases and corporate IT systems is the primary reason for allowing some physical presence at the offices. Only Turkey seemed to have an electronic management system in place prior to the crisis.
- e) Work at the office is organised in line with physical distance requirements: usually one person at the office and to this purpose, introduction of daily shifts, staggered hours or rotation (one day at the office, one day teleworking).

- f) Managers seem to be coming to office more often than employees do. Often, they have some discretion regarding organisation of work and teleworking arrangements and in such cases, they give priority for teleworking to vulnerable employees.
- g) Like elsewhere, some types of duties require physical presence (on-site inspections, border controls, customs) and this is ensured.

2. Flexible working time arrangements

- a) Decisions about how to organise work of civil servants most efficiently to large extent have been decentralised to individual sectors or even institutions. Some governments issued guidance about annual leave usage or centrally sent vulnerable employees on administrative leave by virtue of a circular universally applied.
- b) Although in some cases employees working from home are expected to be available to their direct managers and colleagues during standard working hours, those who come to the office see their working time significantly adjusted (e.g. they are allowed to go home when the tasks are finished or come to office for 2 hours per day only). It was stated by one participant that managerial staff were working full time and other employees worked depending on specific needs and this was sufficient to ensure smooth functioning of the organisation.
- c) Obliging employees to use their accumulated annual leave from 2019 during the crisis is not universal, but some administrations expect this in particular from the employees working from home (in one case by May 2020, in another by June 2020).
- d) None of the countries introduced staff reduction programmes or salary cuts resulting from reduced workload or inability to perform tasks in teleworking mode – all employees receive full salary and enjoy all employee benefits (apart from medical staff who are prohibited from taking annual leave during the health crisis).
- e) Extra bonuses for employees working at the front-line or those with increased workload are applied by numerous administrations. On the other hand, overtime is not always paid and some austerity measures have already been taken (North Macedonia).

3. Key challenges:

- a) The future is uncertain, so is return to “normal”. Therefore, teleworking may remain needed over a longer period of time. It is therefore indispensable to regulate this mode of working and support it, as well as other interlinked processes (document sharing, supervision, overtime, etc.) with adequate instructions and guidance.
- b) Remote access to IT systems seems to be the biggest challenge. Apart from technical arrangements, fully paperless workflows should be introduced to run smoothly (without the need to print, sign and scan back documents – this substitute of physical presence only increases the workload).
- c) Human resource management in times of physical distancing is a challenge for two reasons: first, numerous processes are regulated by laws in detail and require specific actions often carried out in person (e.g. a meeting between an employee and the supervisor in the framework of goal-setting or performance appraisal). Second, this new situation requires different managerial skills to properly supervise employees working from home, to ensure equal distribution of work, setting short-term objectives and deadlines and ensuring timely delivery.
- d) Ongoing recruitment procedures have been suspended in most countries and vacancies are no longer advertised. Only Albania has successfully introduced fully digitalised (on-line) recruitment for the civil service (a separate note on Albanian experience has been prepared by SIGMA and will be shared with participants together with this summary). Most countries are yet to figure out how to re-interpret (or amend) legal provisions requiring interaction in person or provision of documents that cannot be obtained during the confinement (as some administrative services are also suspended) to become fully operational in new circumstances.

- e) Administrations are looking forward to re-opening their premises and introducing adequate “health prevention measures” in administrative practices. This will need to take place in line with protocols that are to be drafted by national health authorities. Public institutions are exploring how to ensure the safety of their staff, especially when citizens return to work and in particular concerning a heavier workload as these services had been suspended during the crisis the demand will significantly increase.

Annex 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS ZOOM SEMINAR PSHRM 28 APRIL 2020

	INSTITUTION	NAME	EMAIL
ALBANIA			
1	Albania - DoPA	Arvena Deda	arvena.deda@dap.gov.al
2	Albania - DoPA	Albana Koçiu	albana.kociu@dap.gov.al
3	Albania – EU Delegation	Sybille.SCHMIDT	Sybille.SCHMIDT@eeas.europa.eu
BOSNIA			
4	Bosnia EU Delegation	Heidi HOOK	Heidi.HOOK@eeas.europa.eu
5	Bosnia EU Delegation	Branka.BAJIC	Branka.BAJIC@ext.eeas.europa.eu
6	Bosnia EU Delegation	Azra TABAKOVIC-KEDIC	Azra.TABAKOVIC-KEDIC@ext.eeas.europa.eu
7	Bosnia EU Delegation	Dusko GLODIC	Dusko.GLODIC@ext.eeas.europa.eu
8	Bosnia - FBiH - Agency for Civil Service	Samra Ljuca	samra.ljuca@adsfbih.gov.ba
9	Bosnia - State level - Agency for Civil Service – head	Neven Aksamija	Neven.Aksamija@ads.gov.ba
10	Bosnia - State level – Ministry of Justice	Dragan Granzov	Dragan.Granzov@mpr.gov.ba
11	Bosnia - State level – PARCO	Enida Seherac	Enida.Seherac@parco.gov.ba
12	Bosnia - State level – PARCO	Onahti Cerkez	Onahti.Cerkez@parco.gov.ba
13	Bosnia - RS- Agency for Civil Service – head	Aleksandar Radeta Mikan Davidovict (with interpreter)	aleksandar.radeta@adu.vladars.net M.Davidovic@mul.s.vladars.net
14	Bosnia - RS- Agency for Civil Service – head	Aleksandar Radeta	aleksandar.radeta@adu.vladars.net
15	Bosnia - FBiH – Ministry of Justice	Harun Pindzo	Harun.Pindzo@fmp.gov.ba
16	Bosnia - FBiH - Agency for Civil Service – head	Refik Begic	refik.begic@adsfbih.gov.ba
17	Bosnia - Brcko District - PAR Coordinator	Vesna Misovic	Vesna.Misovic@bdcentral.net
KOSOVO*			
18	Kosovo - EU Delegation Pristina	Malgorzata SKOCINSKA	Malgorzata.SKOCINSKA@eeas.europa.eu
19	Kosovo - EU Delegation Pristina:	Mikaela GRONQVIST	Mikaela.GRONQVIST@eeas.europa.eu
20	Kosovo	Naser Shamolli	Naser.Shamolli@rks-gov.net
21	Kosovo	Bekim Demiri	Bekim.Demiri@rks-gov.net

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

	MONTENEGRO		
22	Montenegro	Jadranka Djurkovic	jadranka.djurkovic@hrma.me
23	Montenegro – EU Delegation	Ana Stanisic Vrbica	Ana.STANISIC@eeas.europa.eu
24	Montenegro – EU Delegation	Eleonora Formagnana	Eleonora.FORMAGNANA@eeas.europa.eu
NORTH MACEDONIA			
25		S Gligorov	s.gligorov@aa.mk ;
26		Biljana Zagar	biljana.zagar@mioa.gov.mk ;
27		Laura Idrizi	laura.idrizi@mioa.gov.mk ;
28		Amina Shkrjelj	amina.sh@mioa.gov.mk ;
29		Ljupa Ivanovski	ljupka.ivanovski@mioa.gov.mk ;
30		Rebeka Rakip	rebeka.rakip@mioa.gov.mk ;
31		Aleksandra Lulkoska	aleksandra.lulkoska@finance.gov.mk ;
32		Aleksandra Givesvska	aleksandra.gichevska@mioa.gov.mk
SERBIA			
33	Serbia	Danilo Roncevic, HRM Service, Director,	danilo.roncevic@suk.gov.rs ,
34	Serbia	NAPA- Ivana Ajtic Kurmazovic (Human Resources),	ivana.ajtickurmazovic@napa.gov.rs ;
35	Serbia	Valentina Andjelkovic, MPALSG, Sector for Professional Development,	valentina.andjelkovic@mduls.gov.rs ,
36	Serbia	Ivana Jokovic, MPALSG, Sector for HRM,	ivana.ercevic@mduls.gov.rs ;
37	Serbia	Natasa Golubovic, MPALSG, Sector for EU integrations,	natasa.golubovic@mduls.gov.rs
TURKEY			
38	Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Çağrı Çakır (Head of the department)	ccakir@ab.gov.tr
39	Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	İpek Çiçekdağ Ayhan (EU Affairs Expert)	icicekdag@ab.gov.tr
40	Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Demet ÖZKAN BALTAT (EU Affairs Expert)	dozkan@ab.gov.tr
41	Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Çiğdem DOĞAN	cigdem.dogan@TCCB.GOV.TR
42	Turkey Head of Department	Ali Yavuz Birincioglu -	ayavuz.birincioglu@TCCB.GOV.TR
43	Head of Department	Muhammed Emin Yıldız -	memin.yildiz@TCCB.GOV.TR
44	Reporter	Suleyman Yüksel	suleyman.yuksel@TCCB.GOV.TR
45	Turkey – EU Delegation	BISCALDI Chiara (EEAS-ANKARA)	Chiara.BISCALDI@eeas.europa.eu
46	Turkey – EU Delegation	PRZYWARA Bartosz	bartosz.przywara@eeas.europa.eu

47	Turkey – EU Delegation	GENTILE Giulio (EEAS-ANKARA)	Giulio.GENTILE@eeas.europa.eu
EC			
48	European Commission	Chloe Berger	Chloe.BERGER@ec.europa.eu
49	European Commission	Inma Perez	Perez-Rocha.MARIA-INMACULADA@ec.europa.eu
RESPA			
50	ReSPA	Dragan Djuric	d.djuric@respaweb.eu
SIGMA			
52		Lech Marcinkowski	
53		Gregor Virant	
54		Annika Uudelepp	
55		Bagrat Tunyan	
56		Alastair Swarbrick	
57		Bianca Breteche	
58		Jesper Johnson	
59		Kaido Paabus	
60		Marian Lemke	
61		Martins Krievins	
62		Timo Ligi	
63		Wojciech Zielinski	
64		Primoz Vehar	
65		Andrew Davies	
66		Roula Sylla	
67		Xavier Sisternas	
68		Maggie Redmond	
69		Susannah Mevel	

Annex 2

[Public administration: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic – Mapping the EU member States' public administration responses to the COVID-19 pandemic \(for EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries\)](#)

Annex 3

[Key observations and conclusions](#) (SIGMA presentation)