



SIGMA

Creating Change Together



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CIVIL SERVICE MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) CRISIS

Virtual seminar for European Neighbourhood countries

19 May 2020

SUMMARY REPORT

SIGMA organised a virtual meeting with ENP East countries on the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis on the management of the civil service. Almost 40 participants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and SIGMA took part in the online discussion.

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 in early April. The presentation (attached below) helped to structure the discussion. It focused on changes in human resource (HR) management in the civil service and in particular on the use of teleworking, flexible working arrangements and e-recruitment.

A second presentation focused on presenting the SIGMA Guidelines to prepare “back to work” and roadmaps for reopening services to users in public bodies (attached below).

Two key topics related to civil service management were discussed.

HR solutions used in the civil service that helped countries to adapt to the context of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (teleworking, flexible working arrangements, making HR processes more flexible, etc.)

All countries from the region were affected by Coronavirus (COVID-19) and applied related measures. Belarus did not shut down their public offices, but still applied some measures, for instance increased social distancing, encouraging civil servants to use leave or increased use of IT communication tools, such as online interviews during recruitments.

While many civil servants teleworked, it was emphasised that telework was not an optimal solution in all situations, so countries were applying differentiated measures – they combined teleworking with flexible working time arrangements, staggered hours or working in shifts to minimise the risk of contamination for employees who continued to be physically present in offices.

Effective teleworking also depended on the level of advancement of the IT solutions available. For example, Georgia reported that thanks to well-developed digital solutions, teleworking did not pose any important technical challenges. In general, most participants signalled psychological problems and ensuring work-life balance as the main challenges during the confinement period. While access to databases was also perceived as a challenge, access to internet was not.

Regarding recruitments, while sometimes they were delayed or organised in work premises with the application of social distancing measures (for example in Armenia), many countries reported organising them partly (for example interviews in Moldova) or totally online. During the confinement period Azerbaijan managed to develop adequate digital solutions to support online recruitments.

Preparing for the return to work and reopening services to users.

Some countries pointed out to the need to review civil service provisions and – if necessary – adjust them to the new context by introducing solutions that are more flexible – this may be a task for the months to come.

Participants also had an interesting discussion on increased use of teleworking after the confinement period. In general, the participants were favourable to having increased recourse to teleworking; however, some of them were worried about a potential drop in efficiency of work. According to some participants this would require the application of adequate monitoring mechanisms (already applied in the Civil Service Agency in Ukraine), whereas others proposed managerial solutions based on trust.

After the confinement period, most participants declared their intention to maintain increased use of new IT solutions developed during the period and flexible working arrangements. Participants were more sceptical as regards the increased use of teleworking (although almost half of them supported this option) or introducing more flexibility in HR procedures.

Main conclusions

- 1) Never waste a good crisis, it is a good opportunity to implement reforms and innovate.
- 2) ENP East countries applied different measures during the confinement period. Many of them advocated for a decentralised approach, where the HR measures applied depended on management decisions, or the situation in different regions. Teleworking became a solution for many civil servants, and it was accompanied by other measures to minimise the risk of contamination for those who worked in the office.
- 3) The process of ending confinement should be gradual to avoid the risk of a second wave of the virus.
- 4) Many solutions developed during the confinement period or used in an increased manner will continue to be used in the future. While enhanced use of teleworking is planned in some countries, there are also some doubts on how to ensure that work productivity does not drop. Most participants declared their willingness to use flexible working time arrangements to a greater extent in the future.
- 5) The majority of participants would expect SIGMA to organise events/webinars related to flexible working time arrangements and e-recruitment in the coming weeks and months.
- 6) Various countries have introduced and reported on innovative service delivery solutions. SIGMA invited the countries to inform the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation about these practices: <https://oecd-opsi.org/projects/covid-19innovation/> (as some IPA countries did).
- 7) Participants were invited to visit the OECD webpage dedicated to research related to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its consequences for many areas of economic and social life. <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/>

Presentations:

- 1) [Human resource management transformations in the civil service](#), Roula Sylla, SIGMA
- 2) [Preparing coronavirus \(COVID-19\) post-confinement roadmaps for public bodies](#), Xavier Sisternas, SIGMA

Annex 2

List of participants

	Country	First Name	Last Name
1	Armenia	Armine	Matosyan
2	Armenia	Lusine	Sargsyan
3	Armenia	Anna	Hayroyan
4	Armenia	Anna	Gharibyan
5	Armenia	Naira	Sargsyan
6	Armenia	Nune	Kirakosyan
7	Armenia	Ekaterina	Asatryan
8	Armenia	Lusine	Navasardyan
9	Azerbaijan	Vali	Huseyn
10	Belarus	Valery	Borodenya
11	Belarus	Oleg	Efremov
12	Belarus	Tatsiana	Prannik
13	Georgia	Nino	Kamarauli
14	Georgia	David	Bujiashvili
15	Georgia	Nino	Grdzelishvili
16	Georgia	Mikheil	Sulaberidze
17	Georgia	Maia	DVALISHVILI
18	Georgia		
19	Georgia	Lili	Lejava
20	Georgia	Diana	Endeladze
21	Georgia	Ana	barisashvili
22	Moldova	Galina	Vranceanu
23	Moldova	Rodica	Secieru
24	Ukraine	Andriy	Bega
25	Ukraine	Volodymyr	Kuprii
26	SIGMA	Angelique	Dartagnan
27	SIGMA	Carole	Guerrier
28	SIGMA	Jesper	Johnson
29	SIGMA	Martins	Krievins
30	SIGMA	Marian	Lemke
31	SIGMA	Lech	Marcinkowski
32	SIGMA	Xavier	Sisternas
33	SIGMA	Alastair	Swarbrick
34	SIGMA	Roula	Sylla
35	SIGMA	Gregor	Virant
36	SIGMA	Wojciech	Zielinski
37	SIGMA	Piotr	Gorecki