



SIGMA News

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Gregor Virant, Head of the SIGMA Programme



Dear friends and partners of SIGMA,

We are all hopeful that, thanks to massive vaccination, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is slowly coming to an end. During the pandemic, we have learned many lessons that will shed a new light on all aspects of our lives – including SIGMA's main area of interest and activity, public administration.

During the pandemic, SIGMA was no less productive than before. Not only have we stayed connected with our partners and friends, the new *modus operandi* has even intensified our communication and relationships. We have held more than one hundred online events. This number includes 36 regional or cross-regional webinars, which served as an excellent opportunity to strengthen our ties with the regional networks of practitioners, to offer a platform for exchanging experience and to share the findings of our work and good practices from the EU and OECD member countries.

To a large extent, we have been focusing on providing advice to partner public administrations on how to best respond to the new situation with the aim to ensure continuity of operation and service delivery. We were thrilled to witness how swiftly public administrations in our partner countries adapted to the new situation. Public administration reform projects were rapidly back on track, as was our work related to supporting them. As usual, we complemented bilateral projects with numerous multi-country products.

In January this year, we kicked off the monitoring of public administrations of the Western Balkans against the Principles of Public Administration. It is a complex exercise that will result in comprehensive reports with analysis and recommendations in all areas of public administration reform, corroborated by fresh data and evidence. Our monitoring work aims at informing the European Commission, as well as EU Enlargement partners in the Western Balkans in planning and implementing their policies.

We look forward to the challenges of the post-COVID world. The shock of the pandemic has opened our eyes in so many ways that I have no doubt we will not simply go back to the old normal. Public administrations will build on the lessons learned to become more resilient and to better respond to the demands of the citizens and businesses. We in SIGMA are excited to accompany you on this journey.

2021 monitoring exercise



The 2021 monitoring exercise was launched in January and the indicator values were consulted and validated with government officials during June. This exercise will show trends against 2017 and 2019 values in the Western Balkans in all areas of the [Principles of Public Administration](#), based on the indicators established in the [Methodological Framework](#). Performance is analysed against standard benchmarks and performance criteria, establishing both the state of play at a point in time and the subsequent progress made in relation to the standards for good governance and requirements for successful European integration, as set out in the Principles and its indicators.

Approximately 300 public officials have provided around 10 000 documents (laws, regulations, strategies, plans, action plans, etc.) and administrative data from a wide range of sources and public registries, which 20 SIGMA analysts and 57 external experts have been analysing to study developments since the last full-scope monitoring exercise in 2017 and the partial-scope exercise in 2019. Interviews were conducted virtually this time. During June, national administrations fact-checked the analysis. We thank everyone involved for the smooth process despite the pandemic. The results will be launched at the next SIGMA Ministerial event.

Supporting public administrations during the COVID-19 crisis



SIGMA has continued to support EU Enlargement and European Neighbourhood partners in addressing urgent needs with regard to the functioning of the government and the public administration during the pandemic. Related material is available on the [dedicated webpage](#). As well as [an approach for the re-prioritisation of the public administration reform agenda in response to COVID-19](#), SIGMA published further work on managing public services and human resources, including an inventory of ideas for [human resource management in the context of coronavirus](#) and a [survey on teleworking](#) with a sample questionnaire to analyse employee perceptions. SIGMA examined [public financial management responses to coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the Western Balkans](#) and published [risk assessment guidelines](#) with a related toolkit for risk management.

Special focus: service delivery



Public sector organisations are being reformed in order to provide better, faster and more services. The pandemic has highlighted the pivotal role of the public sector once more. However, quality, quantity and speed are not the only new competences that society requires from government. As the pace of societal change is accelerating rapidly, government needs to be able to respond to changing demands by offering new (on and offline) solutions. Services should be delivered in an effective, predictable, reliable and user-friendly manner. Secondly, as reform has the purpose of re-establishing trust in government, governments need to provide more choice, democracy and transparency by interacting with citizens/users at all stages of the policy and service delivery process. The topic of service delivery is one of the key professional areas of expertise in SIGMA, where besides a wide range of country support projects, several regional initiatives were recently launched.

In the course of March 2021, SIGMA organised a series of three webinars on [End-to-end public service delivery in the Western Balkans](#). In these webinars, concepts, methodologies, approaches and digital building blocks were presented and illustrated with examples from public administrations from the EU and the Western Balkan region. Analysis and measurement of public service delivery is becoming more and more widespread, including in Western Balkan administrations. For the user, accessing a service typically involves multiple contacts with more than one public administration, whether for a service they would like, are entitled to, or are obliged to receive in the case of registrations, permits, taxes, charges and duties. While individual public services can be assessed at specific points, a more dynamic analytical approach is to evaluate users' experiences of 'life events'. These are common, crucial moments or stages in the lives of citizens (having a baby, starting a job, buying, building, renting or renovating a property) or the lifespan of a business (starting and registering a business, hiring an employee, paying tax and social security contributions). The fundamental point is to understand each event as a whole and as the citizen or business sees it, thus not being limited to administrative services only.

On 30 March 2021, SIGMA hosted a [Ministerial conference for the ENP South region on putting citizens and businesses at the centre](#). As part of the OECD MENA Governance Forum, this high-level event provided a platform for representatives of the region to consider and discuss recent developments, key success stories and common challenges in relation to the service delivery area. The event included comparative insights from a regional and international perspective through the participation of representatives from all of the European Neighbourhood South partners, the EC and OECD on service delivery issues. Over 150 participants from the region attended this online event. It was unanimously agreed that good public administration is an essential component in promoting sustainable and green economies, creating jobs and attracting investors. Administrative simplification leads to a less burdensome environment for economic growth, while modern service delivery methods, such as e-government solutions and one-stop shops, increase the accessibility of services.

SIGMA events continue online



From January to May 2021, SIGMA held a series of online workshops for representatives of the public procurement review bodies from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) administrations to present and share experiences from the implementation of various review systems. The participants reflected on improvements to procedures and pathways towards better remedies systems. As part of the new cycle of annual reporting on progress achieved with public administration reform, in February SIGMA organised a webinar dedicated to improving annual reports drawing on comparative analysis of reports from previous years. A workshop was held in March 2021 on *Risk management in times of COVID-19 and beyond*, for representatives from across the IPA administrations, to present SIGMA's new guidelines and to share practical experiences in risk management during the pandemic. From December 2020 to June 2021, SIGMA held a series of three webinars for the Network of Supreme Audit Institutions of Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries and European Court of Auditors. The aim of these webinars was to present, share and discuss planning and executing audits in the context of the pandemic. [Read more about events](#).

SIGMA Papers



SIGMA Paper No.62, [Implementation of laws on general administrative procedure in the Western Balkans](#), provides a comparative analysis of the implementation of laws on administrative procedure adopted recently in the Western Balkans. It examines their compliance with the Principles of Public Administration, reviews the application of these principles in practice and identifies implementation challenges, their causes and measures for overcoming them.

SIGMA Paper No.61, [Regulatory Impact Assessment and EU Law Transposition in the Western Balkans](#), provides a comparative analysis of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) systems in place in Western Balkan administrations, showing how they have been used in policy making and EU law transposition. The regulatory and methodological frameworks, institutional set-ups and arrangements for RIA and EU law harmonisation have been analysed to identify strengths and weaknesses and share good practice.

SIGMA Paper No.60, [Central public procurement institutions in the Western Balkans](#), offers a comparative overview of central public procurement institutions in the Western Balkans and several examples of good practices in EU countries. It intends to demonstrate how properly designed central public procurement institutions can support the development of a sound and efficient national procurement system.

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