



**SIGMA**

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## 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)*

### SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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# SLOVAK REPUBLIC

## **Centre of Government, policy coordination and decision-making process**

### **1. How is the Government (Council of Ministers) functioning (organisation of virtual meetings, remote sessions etc.)?**

*A state of emergency was declared by the outgoing Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini a week before he left office. The response to the crisis in the Slovak Republic has been strongly influenced by the coincidence of the crisis with this political transition. The new Government is a complex coalition of different parties with very different priorities.*

*The outgoing Prime Minister Pellegrini, who was also Minister for Health, had been praised for reacting quickly to contain the spread of the virus through a declaration of a state of emergency several days before many of its neighbours. The Government implemented a range of measures to delay the spread of coronavirus, including social distancing, and closing borders, schools, and entertainment and hospitality premises. Despite this, the new Government has been quick to criticise the lack of preparation of its predecessor, citing lack of preventive clothing and medical equipment and a poor purchasing strategy. The new coalition Government, which was sworn in on 21 March, has pledged additional measures to both contain the spread of the disease and limit the economic fallout, which are expected to be approved shortly.*

*Some ministers have been appointed and Government meetings have been held in person with all participants wearing facemasks. However, appointments to senior positions are still being made and most key policies are still being developed and negotiated among the coalition partners. As yet, no coalition agreement has been published.*

*In practice, the response to the crisis is led directly by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for Investment, and details of economic and social measures are starting to be announced, but the Government's strategy is still in flux and depends on political negotiation. A Central Crisis Staff unit has been set up composed of staff from the CoG and key line ministries (Health, Interior...) to ensure the smooth implementation of the basic rules relating to the state of emergency, and this body will be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the Government's strategy once it is developed.*

### **2. How are the crisis management and external communications co-ordinated within the Government? What is the role of the CoG in this? Is there a central strategy/guidance?**

*The Central Crisis Staff, which is co-ordinated by the CoG, is responsible for developing guidance, instructions and draft decrees to implement measures relating to the crisis under the powers provided for by the state of emergency. The Central Crisis Staff, composed of senior officials from key ministries endorse the need for a particular action and then the relevant authorities are tasked with preparing the legal texts and related communications. For example, after the meeting of the Crisis Staff on 28 March, the Chief Health Officer was mandated to develop instructions on quarantine arrangements for persons coming to the country from abroad. The Ministry of Health was instructed to prepare a proposal for legislation to allow pharmacies to develop antiseptic liquids and another to require hospital administrators to extend the working hours of doctors and nurses currently working part-time. As such, there is an overall co-ordination body that takes strategic decisions about priorities and then issues instructions to implementing bodies.*

Communication is still handled by the CoG via daily press briefings, with journalists attending in person (though limited to one person per newspaper plus one photographer/cameraman).

**3. Any arrangements (rules, working procedures) which aim to streamline and accelerate the Government decision-making process (as regards deadlines, public consultations, transparency, impact analysis)?**

According to the OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook, Slovakia has, in general, an advanced regulatory system, with Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and consultation provisions that meet average OECD standards. The state of emergency provides the executive with the usual powers to issue decrees without the normal legislative or judicial scrutiny nor the normal process of public consultation or RIA. So far, the volume of decrees has been limited because of the political transition.

One extremely sensitive issue is the treatment of the Roma population, where some mandatory testing has been carried out, which has raised some human rights concerns.

**Public service and human resource management**

**1. What arrangements regarding teleworking? What is the share of civil servants teleworking? What is the share of civil servants still coming to the office?**

All staff whose duties permit them to telework are encouraged to do so. The working arrangements are agreed at the level of the employing organisation.

**2. What other flexible working arrangement (part time work, distribution of working hours over 7 days...)?**

As yet, no formal instructions have been developed except in specific sectors such as health and social services. For example, medical staff who work part-time are expected to move to full-time work. Any inactive medical staff who wish to work will be offered temporary contracts. There is also a proposal being developed to hire Slovak medical staff currently working abroad using temporary contracts.

**3. If civil servants cannot telework, how are they paid?**

No information currently available.

**4. Are civil servants being sent on mandatory annual leave? If not, is use of annual leave recommended? Any other special arrangement on absence management?**

No. The Government is trying to work through staff transfers to relocate staff to areas where they are needed most.

**5. Any new, special regulations for working overtime (removing limitations to overtime work e.g. for medical staff)?**

No information currently available.

**6. Arrangement for paying for extra workload (health care)?**

No information currently available.

**7. What measures have been introduced to create fiscal space to fund health care, economic measures etc. against COVID-19 (salary cuts, freeze of recruitment, promotions...)?**

*No action as yet, but this is likely to come once the Government has assessed the fiscal situation.*

**Accountability**

**1. How did you keep the national parliament operational? Any simplification of parliamentary procedures?**

*The Parliament is not sitting due to both the state of emergency and the recent election.*

**2. How about the Ombudsman (e.g. overseeing the situation in prisons)**

*The Slovak NHRI (Slovak National Center for Human Rights) has posted an update about the state of emergency measures in the country, stressing that fundamental rights and freedoms must be guaranteed for all people, without exception. In its message, the NHRI outlines how the measures taken must respect the principle of equal treatment in areas such as employment, social security, health care, the provision of goods and services and education.*

**3. Does administrative justice work? Have deadlines changed?**

*Deadlines have been extended but normal procedures are still in place.*

**4. Any public debates on respect of principles of good administration (legality, proportionality, predictability) of protective measures?**

*The new Prime Minister has floated the idea of a national 'blackout' – a strict lockdown to 'kill off' the virus -- and has proposed to organise a national referendum on the issue, despite the opposition of coalition partners.*

*In general, the fight against corruption is the subtext for most action by the new Government and in early pronouncements has stressed its integrity and values.*

**Service delivery**

**1. Which services are being delivered (all, some, only the essential)?**

*Slovakia closed all schools and most other public buildings following the declaration of the state of emergency. Online services are still available.*

**2. Are there any modifications done to the obligations of:**

- i. *the administrations towards citizens/businesses (e.g. freezing of deadlines)?*

*Deadlines for income tax and corporation/business tax declarations have been frozen.*

*Other similar measures are expected in the coming days.*

- ii. *citizens/businesses towards public administration (reporting, payments of taxes, contributions, fees...)?*

*A full package of economic measures is still being discussed by the Government. The measures that have already been announced include reductions in contributions and direct wage support.*

**3. Has the crisis initiated any simplifications or enhanced the use of alternative tools:**

- i. *in the internal procedures of the Government (e.g. acceptance of formal approvals over e-mail)?*

*No information currently available.*

- ii. *in the administrative procedures with citizens and businesses (e.g. replacement of handwritten signature with scanned copies or simple exchange of mails)?*

*No information currently available.*

**Public Financial Management**

**1. Are COVID-19 response measures being introduced within the framework of or with reference to existing fiscal rules (budget deficit or public debt ratio limits etc.)?**

*The first fiscal measures approved in response to the pandemic are new rules in the sickness insurance system to help those affected by school closures and quarantine. Parents who are at home with their kids will get 55% of their gross salary from the state during school closure (instead of 10 days maximum). Employees in quarantine will get 55% of their gross salary from the state (first 10 days were covered by the employer previously). This measure is estimated to cost EUR 400 million.*

*On 3 April, the Prime Minister announced that individuals, the self-employed and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can request a nine month postponement of loan repayments. Contactless credit card payments are being raised from EUR 20 to EUR 50.*

*Among the specific measures already announced:*

- Support for employees: The state will pay 80% of wages at firms forced to shut. The state will also contribute help to self-employed people and employees in firms that suffer falling revenue, with payments linked to the size of the revenue drop.*
- Support for businesses: Employers will be allowed to postpone their contributions to state social and health systems and delay some tax payments if they suffer a 40% drop in revenue. Firms can also offset accumulated losses from past years going back to 2014 against corporate income tax.*

*Other key measures currently under consideration include (i) deferral of various tax payments (including PIT, CIT and VAT) and temporary relief from social security and health insurance contributions; (ii) enhanced support for affected workers and businesses through easing conditions of social insurance programmes and state subsidies for retention of jobs; (iii) negotiations with banks to postpone repayment of loans for citizens and businesses; and (iv) measures to ease administrative burdens on businesses and relax labour code requirements.*

*It is worth noting that Slovakia has the highest dependence on the car industry in the world, and all four major production sites are now at a standstill. This is the major economic challenge facing the Government with respect to the long-term stability of the economy.*

**2. Are the cost of these measures being published?**

*There are currently no estimates of the size of these fiscal measures, though the Government suggested that the cost could be around 1% of GDP per month.*

*The Deputy Prime Minister made a statement saying the EU funding streams currently in place through various Operational Programmes would be tapped to provide funding for emergency measures.*

**3. Have budget users been asked to identify cost-saving measures to partially offset the cost of the response measures?**

*Not yet, but this will probably happen in the coming weeks, once the Government takes stock of its fiscal position.*

**4. Are internal controls continuing to operate smoothly (electronic signatures)?**

*No information currently available.*

**5. Does each budget user or at least ministry have a risk management strategy that envisaged emergency measures in response to a sudden crisis? How is staff and customer safety balanced against the need to deliver required services?**

*In principle, public sector organisations should have a risk strategy.*