



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)*

FINLAND

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FINLAND

Centre of Government, policy co-ordination and decision-making process

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

The Government is meeting regularly, however, the meetings are held in bigger rooms. External experts are consulted using remote connections.

- 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 Government of Finland has set up a COVID-19 co-ordination group at the central Government level in February 2020 and it was expanded at the end of March.

The group is responsible for 1) implementing the decisions made by the Government to curb the coronavirus epidemic and 2) co-ordinating co-operation between the ministries.

In addition, under the Prime Minister's office, three bodies (operations centre, communications co-ordination and Government situation centre) are responsible for monitoring implementation made by the COVID-19 co-ordination group, co-ordination of external and internal communication and providing situation updates. Some of these bodies are a permanent function in the Prime Minister's Office, but their monitoring of the current picture has been channelled to a large extent to monitor the coronavirus situation.

- 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)?**

The Government has set up a COVID-19 Co-ordination Group, which is responsible for implementing the decisions made by the Government to curb the coronavirus epidemic and to coordinate co-operation between the ministries.

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?**

Where permitted by the nature of the work duties, working remotely is recommended. A majority of civil servants are able to work remotely. The Government has increased the teleworking capacity by reducing some non-essential services and functions. Civil servants that are not able to telework due to the nature of their work are still able to work at the office.

No official data is available on the proportion of people teleworking. Half of civil servants are working for the security sector operative functions and most of them cannot telework.

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

No information available.

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

If a civil servant cannot telework due to the nature of their work, they can work from the office.

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?

Generally, the employer and employee agree on when the annual holidays are taken. The employer can decide on the timing of annual leave within the time limits determined in the Annual Holidays Act. The time when the annual leave is taken may be changed by a mutual agreement between the employer and employee, excluding workers in the health care sector.

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

No information available. However, under the Emergency Powers Act, the employment authority (TE office) has the power to issue an order to work to a person covered by the obligation to work. A work order may be issued for a maximum of two weeks at a time, and it may be renewed once. Under the Act, health care workers may be asked to work overtime.

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

Finland has no corona-specific supplements in wages. Already existing supplements are used when needed.

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...)?

None of the reasons mentioned above have been used to fund the fiscal space to fund health care etc. The Government has announced that it will increase the national debt to fund these functions.

Accountability

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

National parliament remains operational remotely and on essential issues on site. Many of the parliamentary committee meetings are held virtually. However, members of the parliament are not able to vote electronically. The Government is looking for possibilities to give members of the parliament the right to vote remotely.

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

Only changes are made to the customer service by the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman as customer service is restricted for the foreseeable future. In addition, personal advisory services will no longer be available. The Office will continue to provide service by telephone as normal.

There is no information about overseeing the situation in prisons.

3. Does administrative justice work? Have deadlines changed?

Administrative justice remains operational; however, deadlines may have been postponed due to the crisis.

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

The Government's decision on isolating the Uusimaa-region around Helsinki has been criticised for violating freedom of movement.

Service delivery

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

Most of the services are delivered either by using digital platforms or on site. The state has closed schools and public places (e.g. museums, libraries), however, schools and day care centres remain open for children of parents working in essential professions (health care etc.). Instead of contact teaching, the teaching will be organised to the widest extent possible in alternative ways, including distance learning, various digital learning environments and solutions and, where necessary, self-learning.

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

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

Service providers have more flexible deadlines and obligations concerning certain non-urgent healthcare and social welfare services. In the case of delivering social welfare services, the services are concentrated on the benefits that are intended to secure people's income and therefore there may be delays in the processing of applications. Courts may have to postpone hearings and cancel some already scheduled hearings.

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

Generally, deadlines for filling tax returns has not changed. Businesses can request an extension to a tax return's filing deadline, and late-filing penalties may not be imposed for a justified special reason. In addition, deadlines for insurance payments for businesses can be extended. For citizens, the recovery of overpaid benefits can be suspended for six months if a customer experiences economic hardship due to the crisis.

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 available.

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

Electronic signatures have been in place since 2010. You can also use electronic ID card to access public services.

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 Government submitted the first supplementary budget proposal for 2020 to Parliament on 20 March. The supplementary budget is intended to cover expenses incurring from the coronavirus as well as for easing the financial situation of companies.

The General Government Fiscal Plan for 2021-2024 will be published on 16 April 2020. Measures to support the economy will be taken into consideration in the preparation of the 2021 budget proposal in mid-2020.

In April, the Ministry of Finance will provide the basis for the Government's decision on spending limits.

2. Are the cost of these measures being published?

Cost = EUR 397.89 million

The cost of the measures can be found :

<https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2020&lang=fi&maindoc=/2020/ltae1/hallituksenEsitys/hallituksenEsitys.xml&opennode=0:1>

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

The Government has not yet discussed the cost-saving measures.

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

No information 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?

No information about individual risk management strategies.

The Government has set up a COVID-19 Co-ordination Group, which is responsible for implementing the decisions made by the Government to curb the coronavirus epidemic and to co-ordinate co-operation between the ministries.

On 17 March the Parliament adopted the Emergency Powers Act, which took effect in late March. The Act defines various emergency conditions, including an attack on Finland, a particularly serious major accident or a widespread infectious disease, such as the coronavirus pandemic. The purpose of the Act is to secure the livelihood of citizens and the economy, to maintain legal order and fundamental and human rights, and to safeguard the territorial integrity and independence of Finland in emergency conditions.

Access to some services are limited or made available to citizens by appointment only to secure the safety of the staff as well as its customers.