



# Guidelines for preparing post-confinement roadmaps for public bodies

## ANNEX ON SERVICE DELIVERY

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- [Drafting plans for the return to on site work and the reopening of ministries and agencies to users after Coronavirus \(COVID 19\) confinement](#) (separate document)

## Introduction

As periods of confinement, shelter-in-place or work suspensions due to coronavirus (COVID 19) end, all ministries and public bodies will face the challenge of gradually reopening premises and resuming services, preparing full recovery of services over the mid-term.

Following requests from a number of beneficiaries, SIGMA issued Guidelines for preparing post-confinement roadmaps for public bodies on 11 May 2020, to help prepare the complex process of reopening public bodies after lockdown. In Section 5 of the Guidelines, several key elements regarding reopening public institutions to users and resuming service delivery were included.



Resuming service delivery involves many challenges. These challenges arise not only from the need to guarantee the health and safety of staff and users, but also because public institutions might experience impact on supply (increased absences, supply chain disruptions) and demand (increased number of users, users with new needs). Public institutions will have to manage these risks in order to provide the best possible services to citizens.

The present Annex to the Guidelines aims to help public institutions to prepare roadmaps for resuming service delivery by presenting a number of questions and examples to help managers to anticipate risks and to respond more effectively to specific challenges regarding service delivery.

This document is structured in two sections: Section A summarises the main risks of reopening to the public and resuming service delivery, while Section B introduces measures to reduce risks of resuming service delivery or to minimise their consequences.

## A. Expected risks

### A.1. Increased and unexpected front line staff absence

There is a risk of front-line staff absence provoked directly or indirectly by coronavirus (COVID 19). People might not be able to attend work for different reasons, such as:

- a) Staff experiencing coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms.
- b) Staff who might need to stay in confinement due to close and recent contact with coronavirus (COVID-19) cases.
- c) Staff who are especially vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19) due to age or pre-existing health conditions (e.g. respiratory diseases, heart conditions, diabetes, etc.).
- d) Staff who have to look after family members (e.g. staff with small children if schools are not open, staff who have to take care of older family members).
- e) Staff who are afraid of contracting the virus.



Moreover, national coronavirus (COVID-19) containment measures might establish flexible measures regarding civil service, like the following:

- a) Partial or total teleworking for some staff<sup>1</sup>.
- b) Staggered hours schemes<sup>2</sup>.
- c) Different working shifts in order to ensure physical distance between public employees.

As a **service delivery provider**, you should try to evaluate how absence will affect your service, estimating the extent and effects of the risks. We strongly advise you to co-ordinate with your human resources department to draft a *roadmap for resuming service delivery*. **You might consider the following questions:**

- **What are the critical positions** that should be covered to provide services to users?
- **What is the minimum number of staff of each category necessary to open the premises to the public?**
- **Can you estimate the likeliness of front-desk/critical staff absence?** (e.g., age, family status, etc.) Answer this question in co-ordination with the human resources department.
- **Do you have the necessary front-desk/critical staff in each shift?**
- **How do work flexibility and physical distancing measures impact service delivery?**

These examples are not exhaustive and other issues may need to be addressed.

<sup>1</sup> Most International and national guidelines for adapting workplaces propose to organise work to allow for physical distancing of at least 2 meters from other people or another distance as prescribed by the relevant competent authority. They also propose implementing teleworking, different working shifts for different employees, avoiding face-to-face meetings, giving preference to phone calls, e-mail or virtual meetings.

For more information, please consult the ILO (2020) website: COVID-19 and the world of work: [www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>2</sup> For more information, please consult the ILO guidelines: ILO (2004) Staggered hours schemes, Information Sheet N°. WT-9, International Labour Office, Geneva, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_170720.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_170720.pdf).

**Example 1: In the Unprepared Ministry/Public Institution, the Office for Approving and Renewing Gun Licenses (OGL) reopened on 15 June.** The deadline for gun licences for professional security guards has only been extended until 22 June. The only branch of the OGL in a medium-sized city counts the following staff:

- **Two front-desk employees**, who inform the public about requirements for obtaining a gun license, including the necessary theoretical, practical and medical tests. They also take the applicant's fingerprints, receive and stamp the documentation provided by the applicant and charge the fee in cash or with a credit card. They also give permits to the citizens who have obtained them, after checking their identity.
- **One back-office employee**, who processes the applications and registers them using a computer. The back-office employee prepares a preliminary proposal of approval to be checked by the manager. The back-office employee is also in charge of answering phone calls and e mails from citizens.
- **One manager**, who directs the office, checks the validity of the application and propose a response to the Ministry of Interior.

On the first day of opening, no front-desk employees come to work.

The manager asks the back-office employee to serve customers at the front desk. However, the back-office employee refuses to serve the public, claiming that front-line work is not his job, that he is vulnerable because he is asthmatic and 57 years-old and that there is a high risk of contagion serving people who come to the office not wearing a mask.

There is a queue outside of about 25 users waiting to enter the office. The manager goes out and tells the users that they should come back tomorrow, as they are not open today. Most users complain in an angry manner, shouting that they need their licence for working in private security.

Questions:

*Could the manager foresee the absence of personnel in his office?*

*Could the manager prevent the absences?*

*Could the manager diminish the effect of absences in service provision?*

*Could the Ministry segment and prioritise users to decrease demand during the first days?*

*Could the Ministry extend expiration dates of licences?*

Keep reading the materials for further ideas on these topics.

## A.2. Supply chain disruptions and IT problems

Public bodies reopening after a period of activities being suspended due to coronavirus (COVID 19) might face some supply chain disruption<sup>3</sup>. Some input necessary for service delivery might not be available temporarily, and some private contractors and suppliers of generic and specific goods<sup>4</sup> and services might be not fully operative or may even have gone bankrupt. Some public institutions whose administrative

<sup>3</sup> Many international consultancy firms are publishing studies on supply chain disruption, for more information see: PWC (April 2020) Supply chain and third party resilience during COVID 19 disruption, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, UK, <https://www.pwc.com/ig/en/issues/covid-19/pwc-supply-chain-resilience.pdf>, or Oliver Wyman (March 2020) COVID-19 Managing supply chain disruption: setting up immediate response capabilities, Oliver Wyman, USA, <https://www.oliverwyman.com/content/dam/oliver-wyman/v2/publications/2020/March/managing-extreme-supply-chain-disruption.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Generic goods and services are produced irrespective of the customer who will buy them (e.g. paper, toner, generic office software...). Specific goods and services are made for a particular public institution only (e.g. Passports, official stamps, software that has been designed or customised for the institution...).

procedures are pre-requirements for services might experience unusual delays. IT systems might collapse due to peaks in demand.

It is highly advisable to co-ordinate with procurement, logistic and facilities departments to assess these risks and how they might affect service delivery. Your **roadmap for resuming service delivery** should try evaluate the probability of experiencing supply chain disruptions. **You might consider the following questions:**

- *Is our IT system strong enough to deal with peaks in demand?*
- *Does our supply chain depend on a unique supplier of specific goods or services?*
- *Are all our key suppliers fully operational and able to react to our needs?*
- *Is our procurement process able to react rapidly to disruptions or new needs?*
- *Are other public bodies whose procedures are pre-requirements for our services likely to experience processing delays?*

**Example 2: In the Unprepared Ministry/Public Institution, the Municipal Population Registry Office (MPR) of a city with high numbers of tourists planned to reopen on Monday 1 June. Office cleaning is provided by a small company called *Cleaning Solutions for Hotels (CSH)*, who won the last tender. The cleaning contract has been suspended for four weeks, while the office was closed.**

CSH experienced severe financial problems as its customers (most of them hotels) were not paying its invoices. Therefore, CSH had to lay-off many cleaners, and it owes two payrolls to all remaining cleaners.

The previous week, some public servants gradually came back to work, physical barriers were installed, and one CSH cleaner came every day to clean. CSH was supposed to send 10 cleaners for deep cleaning and disinfecting the office during the weekend of 30-31 May. Everything seemed ready for reopening on 1 June.

However, the cleaners went to the MPR Office on 30 May and asked to speak with the manager. They told the manager that, despite working non-stop, they had not received their salaries for the last two months. They also asked the manager to ensure that the City Council would pay their wages directly, as they did not trust their boss to pay them.

The manager explained that the City Council could not pay their wages directly and they all left. The owner of CSH promised to send other cleaners in the afternoon, but was not able to deliver on this promise.

Thus, the manager contacted the Procurement Office of the City Council asking them to contract a different cleaning company. The Procurement Office answered that they would formalise an urgent contract, as fast as they could, but that it was a Saturday and they could not confirm when the new contract would be ready.

The manager decided that the premises could not be opened without a cleaning service. Therefore, citizens who needed a Municipal Registration Certificate came to the office on 1 June to find it closed, with a poster saying that it would open as soon as possible.

### A.3. Increased number of users

Increased number of users: After weeks of confinement, some services might be overwhelmed by demand. User demand might increase due to several reasons:

- a. **People whose scheduled appointments were cancelled as activity was suspended** due to coronavirus (COVID-19) might go to public offices in the first days after reopening. Similarly, people who had planned to apply for a public service but could not due to activity being suspended might also attend during the first days of reopening.

- b. Licences or **permits might have expired** during confinement, or they will be close to expiring, thus more people will request over a shorter period than usual:
- Identity cards
  - Passports
  - Driving licences and vehicle inspections
  - Working visas
  - Professional licences, etc.
- c. **Certain life events had to be postponed** and might increase demand for some services:
- Civil, commercial and local registries might experience an increase of procedures (e.g. registering in a different city after moving, proof of marital status, registering donations or sales of property...)
  - Government-run schools might have to register students in a shorter period than usual, etc.
- d. **Unemployment and economic downturn** might increase demand for certain services:
- Social security and social assistance providers might experience a high number of applications for benefits.
  - Tax agencies might face many requests for deferment of tax debt.
  - Business and commercial registries might face an increased number of applications related to company sales, dismissals, bankruptcy, etc.
- e. **Consumer protection agencies, arbitration and legal courts might face an increase of procedures.**
- Consumer protection agencies might face a high number of claims by consumers due to cancellation of services provided by private companies.
  - Legal courts dealing with labour law, commercial law and company law might receive a higher number of cases than usual, etc.

**Some causes of increased demand will disappear over the short-term**, as the public institution is able to serve those users who could not be served during the coronavirus (COVID-19) Work Suspension.

**However, other causes will last over the medium/long-term**, such as those related to the economic crisis or the social consequences of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The roadmap for resuming service delivery should try to estimate how likely it is that the institution will face increased demand and/or special needs. **You might consider the following:**

- *Can we estimate the likeliness of an increased demand?*
- *Can we estimate how many users were not being served during the suspension of activities?*
- *Is demand for the service provided by the institution higher during economic recession?*
- *Is the service provided by the institution necessary input for other public services whose demand will peak due to the social and economic consequences of coronavirus (COVID 19)? (e.g., tax certificates might be a pre-requirement for companies applying for subsidies. Thus, the office issuing tax certificates might face an increase in demand).*

#### A.4. Users needing special attention

Coronavirus (COVID-19) will mean that for the near future, **some users will need special attention**. For example, elderly people and people with pre-existing health conditions might need stricter physical distancing and protection measures. Therefore, **they cannot be served as regular users**.



**Parents of small children** will also need special attention while kindergartens and primary schools are still closed. **People facing difficult financial instability** will also require specific attention, as they might have difficulties complying with the normal requirements of service delivery (e.g. they might not be able to pay an administrative fee). **Quarantined users** many need urgent public services, but they will not be able to attend public premises.

Your roadmap for resuming service delivery should try to evaluate how likely it is that the institution will face users needing special attention. **You might consider the following:**

- *Can we identify users who need special attention?*
- *Will all our users be able to comply with the normal requirements of service delivery?*
- *Do we need to segment users and create personalised procedures for some?*

## B. Measures to reduce risks of resuming service delivery or to minimise their consequences

Public institutions might reduce the probability of the risks materialising or minimising their consequences by taking pre-emptive measures and ensuring a rapid monitoring of risks and a fast reaction.

In order to do so, it is advisable to draft a roadmap for resuming service delivery using risk-management techniques. This document proposes some examples of possible measures to reduce risks or to minimise their consequences:

### B.1. Adapting workplaces and customer circuits to the new health and safety regulations

- The first requirement for reopening is to adequately prepare your workplace to comply with all new coronavirus (COVID-19) **health and safety regulations** for staff, but also for users<sup>5</sup>.

- **Service delivery managers should contact colleagues** in charge of building maintenance and health and safety and explain the specific requirements for their service delivery unit. Each service delivery unit may have specific needs in order to comply with physical distancing and other health and safety regulations.



- **Adequate physical distance** between public servants and users, and among users. Physical barriers and floor signage are standard solutions. However, from a service delivery point of view, many other solutions might produce better results: redefine your customer circuit trying to reduce physical presence and physical contact with users as

much as possible.

- **Reduce the number of desks** a user should go to in order to finish an administrative procedure. Fewer desks mean less contact.
- **Promote e-services and phone services.** If physical documents are required, think of creative solutions such as “internet/phone + post<sup>6</sup>” or “internet/phone + collect<sup>7</sup>”.

### B.2. Increase availability of staff in critical positions:

- The human resources department is responsible for minimising absence. **However, for a service delivery unit**, it is important to **identify critical positions** for service delivery **and share this information with human resources**.
- Training your staff to be **multifunctional** might be useful to address absences. Staff may replace absent front-desk employees or other critical positions.
- **Reallocate staff between agencies and/or services.** Temporarily moving staff from some agencies or services to other agencies or services. Ask the human resources department about implementing this temporary mobility.
- Ask the human resources department for **additional staff** if needed (offering temporary positions, speeding-up the process of incorporating new recruits, offering traineeships, using volunteers, etc.).

<sup>5</sup> For more information on adapting workplaces: ILO (2020), An employers' guide on managing your workplace during COVID-19, International Labour Office, Geneva, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_740212.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_740212.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Some administrative procedures might be applied by post (e.g. the user might apply over the phone for a stamped property certificate, and can get it delivered by post to their home).

<sup>7</sup> For example, if postal delivery is not available, the user might only go to the premises to collect a certificate that they applied for by phone.

**Example 3: In the Well-Prepared Ministry/Public Institution, the Office for Unemployment Benefits expected a high increase in user demand** due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Rapid processing of the applications is a key requirement, as many families count on unemployment benefits to live.

Even though online application had existed for a long time, the agency counted a high number of applicants in branches, as many unemployed people do not have access to a computer or to the electronic signature required. The agency also **foresaw a high degree of absence in some branches**.

The agency borrowed personnel from other **areas of social security who were not that overloaded** (e.g. personnel working to register new companies with the social security services). These employees were temporarily transferred to the unemployment benefit agency to process unemployment benefit applications.

### B.3. Guarantee availability of all critical goods and services, and build robust supply chains:

- **Supply chains** are the responsibility of procurement departments. However, **for a service delivery unit**, it is very important to **identify the critical goods and services needed to provide your public service**, and to share this information with procurement bodies.
- **If possible, contact suppliers in advance**, to confirm that they can guarantee their services and they can respond to peaks in demand.
- **Contact the procurement office** and ask them to **build a robust supply chain for all critical goods and services**.
  - **Avoid dependence on a sole supplier** for critical goods or services. Ensure your institution can contact **an alternative supplier** if the main one cannot respond your requests without having to issue a new tender.
  - Sign flexible contracts, or **add flexibility clauses to your existing contracts**, thus your institutions can increase or decrease orders if needed.
  - Ensure the **public procurement process is flexible enough** to respond to shocks in the supply of critical goods and services<sup>8</sup>.
- **Contact the procurement office to ensure availability of personal protective equipment (PPE)** to ensure your staff and users are safe in the event of an interruption of supply of PPE.
- **Perform stress tests on your IT systems**. Ensure IT maintenance teams (either internal or external) are working and able to respond to IT system breakdowns.

### B.4. Extend administrative deadlines for applications and expiration dates for licences:

- **Extend deadlines for applying, appealing or paying fees**, as much as possible. Longer application periods can help to avoid overcrowding of premises and to avoid peaks in demand for services.
- **Extending licence expiration dates is also an effective solution** to reduce excessive demand once confinement is lifted and to respond to supply chain disruption. There are several possibilities:
  - **Temporarily extending licence expiration dates automatically**. For example, all national identification cards expiring in March, April and June 2020 will be automatically renewed for six months.
  - **Temporarily extending licence expiration dates automatically for some applicants**. For example, vehicle inspection deadlines are automatically expiring in March, April and June 2020 are automatically renewed for six months for all private cars seven years-old or newer.

<sup>8</sup> For more information: SIGMA/OECD (2020), Application of public procurement rules during the COVID-19 crisis from the perspective of the European Union's Procurement Directives and the Government Procurement Agreement, [www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Public-procurement-COVID-19-crisis-SIGMA-April-2020.pdf](http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Public-procurement-COVID-19-crisis-SIGMA-April-2020.pdf).

Older private cars and vehicles for public transportation (buses) will not be extended automatically. Thus, owners of buses and older cars need to renew the licence as usual.



- **Temporary renewal of licences asking citizens to meet certain requirements.** It might be the case that automatic extensions are not optimal if the expiration date of the licence is based on meeting certain requirements. For example, a gun permit might be extended without the yearly shooting qualification exercise. However, extending the gun permit without psychological and medical examinations might be risky.

- **Please note that extensions might not always be feasible.** For example, extending the expiration date of passports will not work if other countries do not accept the

extended validity period.

- **Entirely rethinking expiration dates** is also a good practice. Why do certain permits/licences/documents expire? Is it only for fee collection purposes or is there a substantial motive for expiration?

**Example 4:** In the **Fast Deciding but Unwise Ministry**, the validity of all technical inspections of vehicles was extended for one year. Thus, people could continue driving their vehicles and insuring them with no problem, despite the fact that most certified mechanics had a long waiting list for examining vehicles.

However, four months after the confinement ended, a very old bus (23 years old) with many passengers had an accident due to brake failure, killing several people.

*Could this problem be avoided by extending the technical inspection of vehicles for only relatively new vehicles but keeping the existing deadlines for very old ones and prioritising the inspection of public transport vehicles?*

### B.5. Certificates and other administrative requirements: reduce the burden and be flexible:

- Public services often **require users to fulfil prior requirements**. Some of these requirements necessitate the use of other public or even private services. For example, in order to obtain/renew a driving licence, citizens are required to pass a medical assessment. If clinics that perform these assessments are not working, or have a long waiting list, then drivers will not be able to renew their licences.
- Responsive **public bodies should find temporary solutions** for citizens who cannot fulfil these prior requirements due to disruption of public or private service providers. There are many solutions for these problems, such as the extension of the validity of permits and licences already mentioned. However, there are other possible solutions, such as



**substituting official documents for sworn declarations<sup>9</sup> or even issuing “conditional decisions<sup>10</sup>”** to be revised after the full documentation is available.

- It is also advisable to implement the **Once Only Principle<sup>11</sup>**. The Once Only Principle entails that citizens and businesses provide diverse data only once in contact with public administrations, while public administration bodies take actions to internally share and reuse the data. The **Once Only Principle** can be implemented through shared interoperable databases between ministries and agencies. However, there are **cheaper solutions to implement this principle**, such as asking applicants for permission to check their registered data in different public institutions. Usually, this permission can be granted just by ticking a box in the application form.
- It is also possible to **change who should provide certain information** to the public administration. For example, instead of asking unemployed people to provide a certificate issued by their previous employer with the necessary data to process unemployment benefits, it would accelerate the administrative process if companies were obliged to provide the unemployment benefits office with all relevant data.

**Example 5:** In the **Well-Prepared Ministry/Public Institution**, they were drafting the procedure for applying to new job vacancies to be covered soon. All previous job selection processes required candidates to hand a criminal record certificate in order to register and take the tests/interviews.

However, the team in charge of drafting the application rules noticed that the institution issuing criminal record certificates was overwhelmed, and was taking three months to send criminal record certificates to citizens. Thus, applicants could not send the criminal record in time to participate in the recruitment process.

The Well-Prepared Ministry, after amending the bylaw in co-ordination with the Ministry of Public Administration, established that **criminal record certificates might be substituted by “sworn declarations” of not having criminal records by the candidates** along with proof of having applied for the criminal record certificate.

Thus, job candidates are allowed to continue the selection process. If the applicant is selected for the job, and the criminal record certificate has not yet been issued, then he/she gets a **“conditional resolution of appointment” and can start working**.

- If the criminal record certificate arrives and the applicant has no relevant criminal offences, then he/she will be given a “final resolution of appointment” naming him/her for the job.
- If the criminal record certificate shows the applicant has committed criminal offences, then he/she will be fired immediately and sanctioned for lying in his/her sworn declaration.

**Example 6:** In the **Well-Prepared Ministry/Public Institution**, the **Office for Unemployment Benefits expected a high increase in user demand** due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Rapid processing of the applications is key, as many families count on unemployment benefits to live.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding service delivery, sworn declarations, sworn statements and affidavits are written statements where the applicant of an administrative procedure makes a statement about a factual situation (e.g. my earnings last year were less than EUR 10.000). For a comparative study of written statements as evidence in some European countries: Deloitte/EUIPO (2008) Written statements as evidence, European Union Intellectual Property Office, Spain, [https://euipo.europa.eu/tunnel-web/secure/webdav/guest/document\\_library/contentPdfs/about\\_euipo/boards\\_of\\_appeal/studies/Written\\_Statements\\_as\\_evidence\\_en.pdf](https://euipo.europa.eu/tunnel-web/secure/webdav/guest/document_library/contentPdfs/about_euipo/boards_of_appeal/studies/Written_Statements_as_evidence_en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Conditional decisions are those administrative decisions that may be revoked as they were granted subject to conditions.

<sup>11</sup> EC/ CEF Digital, Once Only Principle: Reduce administrative burden for individuals and businesses (online resource), Connecting Europe Facility, <https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/Once+Only+Principle>.

The **minimum and maximum amounts of unemployment benefit** depend on the number of dependent children/elderly living in the same house as the applicant. This also depends on the income of all other household members.

The normal procedure requires the applicant to provide the Office for Unemployment Benefits with a municipal certificate of the people registered as living in the house and a tax certificate of the income of every household member. Both the tax authority and municipal registries are facing problems, and **it has become difficult for unemployed people to get these certificates quickly**. The standard procedure also requires the applicant to provide a certificate and/or a letter of dismissal issued by their last employer.

Moreover, the Office for Unemployment Benefits has experienced long delays in processing the large number of applications received, checking all the documentation and requesting more documentation from applicants if needed.

**Thus, the waiting time for applying for and receiving benefits was very long and many unemployed faced financial problems.**

The Office responded by changing the regulation. Every applicant can now ask for a conditional approval of benefit. In order to do so, the applicant must make a sworn declaration stating he/she fulfils all the requirements for receiving benefit, including sworn statements of household income and how many dependent minors/elderly live in the household.

Once the applicant has signed this declaration, then the Office for Unemployment Benefits **will conditionally approve the benefit and will start paying it to the applicant immediately**. The applicant agrees to provide the municipal and tax authority certificates in the next four months.

The Unemployment Benefit Agency checks all the applicants' documentation.

- **If the applicant does not provide the certificates**, then the Office immediately revokes the conditional approval, stops paying the benefit and asks for reimbursement of the benefits already paid plus interest and a fine.
- When the applicant sends the official certificates:
  - **If the information given by the applicant in the sworn declaration is false** according to the certificates or the public sector databases and the **correct information shows that the applicant was not entitled to the benefit**, then the Office **immediately revokes the conditional approval**, stops paying the benefit and asks for reimbursement of the benefits already paid plus interest and a fine.
  - If the applicant provides the certificates, but the information given by the applicant in the sworn declaration **showed minor mistakes according to the certificates, resulting in a shorter period or a smaller amount of unemployment benefit**, then the **Office issues a final resolution correcting the conditional resolution** and the applicant may have to partially refund with interest but without a fine.
  - If the certificates confirm the information in the sworn declaration, then the **Office issues a final resolution confirming the conditional resolution** and the applicant continues receiving benefit.

Of course, this “**conditional approval mechanism**” is not compulsory, as people can opt out and use the traditional approval mechanism, if they prefer to wait to receive the benefit but to be sure their application is definitively approved before doing so.

**Example 7: Changing the procedure for applying for unemployment benefits to workers subject to temporary closures of companies.**

In a Well-Prepared Country, the Government is foreseeing that many companies will close temporarily. Some closures, especially for businesses related to tourism, might last several months after confinement is lifted.

The standard procedure is that the company should file for temporary closure to the Labour Ministry and to the Social Security Agency, in order to obtain certain benefits such as exemptions from social security contributions or state subsidies. Once the Labour Authority approves the temporary closure file, individual workers affected by the temporary closure should individually apply for unemployment benefit.

The standard procedure implies that the Unemployment Benefit Agency will face an excessive number of individual applications at the same time, putting personnel and computer systems under pressure. Therefore, the Government issues a Bylaw changing the procedure. Companies asking the Labour Ministry for authorisation for temporary closure should communicate all affected employee's data (including bank account number, number of dependent children of the worker, etc.) to the Unemployment Benefit Agency. Thus, the Agency, instead of receiving a large number of individual worker applications, receives only one collective application with all of the relevant data, improving efficiency and reducing the number of interactions between the Agency and the beneficiaries.

**B.6. Create or reinforce e-services and telephone services:**

- **Electronic services and telephone services should play an important role** in the *post coronavirus (COVID-19)* context of the public sector. E-services and telephone services have many advantages, in particular in the current situation:
  - Reduce traffic congestion and use of public transport, as citizens do not have to travel to public sector premises
  - Eliminate or reduce physical contact between public servants and users
  - Reduce costs for the public administration
  - Allow remote working or flexible working times for civil servants, etc.
- However, it is important to guarantee that **in-person user service is still available** for the digitally excluded or less IT literate (such as the elderly, people in social exclusion, etc.)
- If your institution already uses internet channels to provide services, **please consider measures to reinforce e-services**, promoting their usage through better information and awareness campaigns, simplifying the customer journey through the e-service, improve online or phone assistance for users facing difficulties with e-transaction, etc.
- **Establish or reinforce the telephone channel.** All or some of the administrative procedures a citizen has to carry out in order to apply for a public service might be done by telephone, avoiding unnecessary visits to the institution premises. If physical documents are required, think of creative solutions such as “internet/phone + post<sup>12</sup>” or “internet/phone + collect<sup>13</sup>”.

<sup>12</sup> Some administrative procedures might be carried out by post (e.g., the user might apply over the phone for a stamped property certificate, and they can get it delivered by post to their home).

<sup>13</sup> For example, if postal delivery is not available, the user might only go to the premises to collect a certificate that was applied for by telephone.

**Example 8: In the Well-Prepared Ministry/Public Institution, the Office for Unemployment Benefits expected a high increase in user demand** due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Rapid processing of the applications is key, as many families count on unemployment benefits to live.

Even though online application has existed for a long time, the Agency counted a high number of applicants in the branches, as many unemployed do not have access to a computer or to the electronic signature required.

Thus, the Office for Unemployment Benefits created a **new telephone-based application process** and promoted it through newspaper and social media. Citizens could schedule a telephone appointment with a civil servant to apply for unemployment benefit, with extended hours of service.

People asking for unemployment benefits can communicate all relevant data by telephone (e.g. name and fiscal number of the company they last worked for, how many hours they worked per week, when they lost their job, their bank account number, etc.).

Civil servants check all data with social security databases, contacting companies to verify data if necessary, and checking with banks that the applicant is the holder of the bank account number provided.

If a civil servant needs documentation from a user, they can ask the user to send it by e-mail, to post it or bring it to the office with a reference number. Special reception desks for providing documentation were created.

This new telephone application process also helped to introduce remote working for front-line staff with small children and reduced overcrowding of offices.

### B.7. Adopting opening hours to the new context:

- **Keeping the same opening hours as usual might not be feasible**, or might not be desirable in the new context. For example, physical distancing might mean that not all staff can work the same shift. **Service delivery units** should consult with health and safety officers and with human resources departments, in order to inform them which changes in office hours might be needed to guarantee high quality and safe service delivery.
- **Extended opening hours might decrease overcrowding** in agency premises. Thus, they facilitate maintaining physical distance.
- Extended office hours **might help citizens who need to take care of small children** while kindergartens and schools are closed.
- Extended office hours **might help reduce absences**, if some civil servants could stay at home in the mornings taking care of small children, but they could go to work in the afternoon, while another adult in their family could watch the children.

OPENING TIMES	
MON	9 am - 5 pm
TUE	9 am - 5 pm
WED	9 am - 5 pm
THU	9 am - 5 pm
FRI	9 am - 5 pm
SAT	8 am - 6 pm
SUN	- CLOSED -

- Nevertheless, extended **working hours might bring some undesirable effects** if the number of active personnel is restricted. For example, if new personnel cannot be contracted, and existing personnel are split over more shifts, **staff absences might mean that some shifts cannot operate at all**, if the critical number of staff is not present. Before extending office hours, **availability of critical staff for all shifts should be guaranteed**.

- Communication and process should be taken into account before extending office hours. For example, if the only **middle manager works in the mornings**, officers working in the afternoon shift might not have anyone to consult or to approve certain decisions. Thus, the service may become more inefficient, and members of the public might have to come back a second time to finish the procedure.

- **Reducing opening hours might also be necessary if there is a shortage of staff.** In fact, if most critical staff are absent, it might make sense to reduce opening hours to ensure quality service to citizens attending during these reduced hours.
- **Reserving certain hours for people especially vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19)** (e.g. the elderly, or people with pre-existing health conditions) is useful to guarantee the health and safety of users, reducing the risk of asymptomatic people passing the virus to vulnerable citizens. Work during these special opening-hours for highly vulnerable people might be adapted (e.g. disinfecting the office before these hours, enforcing even more rigid social distancing during these hours, etc.). The segmentation might also be spatial. For example, a specific office or desks for vulnerable citizens. Disinfection and social distancing will be enforced more rigidly in these spaces.
- **Reserving certain hours/certain spaces for people with special needs.** For example, if schools are still closed when public offices open, some hours/spaces might be reserved for people who need to attend public offices accompanied by their children.

**Example 9: In the Fast Deciding but Unwise Ministry,** the Ministry of Justice decided that after confinement, in order to reduce judicial delay, **legal courts would hold trials every day, including national holidays and the traditional court holidays.** Due to financial constraints, the Ministry of Justice said that it was not possible to hire more judges, so the new objective of 365 trial days would be carried out with existing personnel.

Associations of judges and civil servant trade unions protested. The Ministry responded by guaranteeing that if a judge or a civil servant had to work during a national holiday, then they would have one extra day of vacation that they might take any other day of the year.

**Bar Associations quickly reacted to oppose the proposal.**

If no more judges are hired, this measure will not have any effect. In fact, if every judge has the same working days per year than before, he/she will be able to hear the same number of cases. Making some judges go to work during national holidays will not increase productivity.

Moreover, national holidays improve efficiency, as all personnel rest at the same time. If court personnel have more free days and each member of staff can freely choose a greater number of vacation days, co-ordination is more difficult and judicial delay might increase.

Finally, it will be more difficult to conduct a trial on a national holiday, as necessary witnesses might not be able to attend a trial, thus the trial might be postponed.

#### **B.8. Establish an appointment scheduling system or reinforce your existing one:**

- **Create an appointment scheduling system** if you do not have one. An appointment scheduling system may help to control the number of people in your premises, ensure physical distance, help segment and prioritise users to provide a better service. It is very important **to inform citizens of the new requirement to schedule appointments** for accessing services.
- Attendance without appointment should be limited to people with urgent needs, especially during the first days after reopening your premises. Nevertheless, it is important to **show some flexibility with people who show up without an appointment.** Either serve them if they have an urgent request, or book a scheduled appointment in the next available slot so they do not experience the “come back tomorrow” feeling.
- **Even basic appointment scheduling systems,** such as giving appointments to the users who show up at your office, can be of **great help to provide a safe and satisfactory service.** In this case, **try to place the appointment scheduling system next to the main entrance,** so people can queue outside, avoiding overcrowding your service.

- **Reinforce your existing appointment scheduling systems.** If the system is telephone based, be sure you have enough personnel to avoid unanswered calls. If the system is e-mail based, be sure you respond to e-mails in a timely matter. If the system is automated, ensure IT maintenance is ready to respond to breakdowns.
- **Rethink your system for requesting an appointment.** If you only use an automated web system, you might need to establish a telephone based one too, so you can schedule appointments for digitally excluded citizens.
- **Rethink the information requested from the user** when he/she books an appointment. You might need to add new questions to the forms, in order to obtain the necessary information to segment and prioritise (e.g. reason why the citizen needs the service, reason for urgency, etc.).
- If you implement prioritisation criteria to give earlier appointments to some users, be **sure to establish clear criteria and inform your users about them.**

#### Discussion 1: How to manage appointments cancelled during work suspension?

- During confinement, some citizens had their scheduled appointments with public servants cancelled. For example, Citizen A had an appointment for 14 April for renewing his/her passport. This appointment was cancelled due to the work suspension.
- Some other citizens already had scheduled appointments for the days after reopening. For example, Citizen B has an appointment for 27 April <sup>for</sup> renewing his/her passport, just after the end of the work suspension.

→ Therefore, how to reschedule the service appointments Agenda?

#### Who should have priority to renew his/her passport? Citizen A or Citizen B?

##### 1. First solution: respect all previous appointments scheduled for dates after the end of work suspension and try to accommodate cancelled appointments in free slots

- This is the most basic solution. It implies **keeping all previous appointments scheduled for dates after the work suspension is over**, and trying to schedule new appointments for people who had cancellations when there is availability.

→ This solution presents a **basic advantage**. It affects fewer people, as only people with appointments scheduled during work suspension will be affected.

→ This solution also presents **some inconveniences**. **If there are not many free slots to schedule appointments** for those who faced cancellations, then these citizens might face a long delay before they can get a new appointment.

Of course, this delay might be reduced by contracting more personnel or extending office hours, thus there would be more free slots to offer appointments to those who faced cancellation.

##### 2. Second solution: postponing the whole agenda

- An alternative solution would be **postponing every appointment by one month** (or the necessary time, depending on the duration of the work suspension in the country). Therefore, when offices are operative again, they start receiving the people who had appointments cancelled due to coronavirus (COVID-19) first.

→ This solution presents a **basic advantage**. It preserves **horizontal equity**. All people face the same delay (e.g. one month) to their appointment.

→ This solution also presents **some inconveniences**. **People book their appointments** with the public sector at a certain time **for a reason**. Therefore, postponing appointments can produce even more distortion, as some people might not be able to attend the new appointment for many reasons, so they will cancel. It also increases the number of dissatisfied users.

### 3. Third solution: rescheduling some existing appointments over the next months, prioritising more urgent appointments.

- This is a mixed solution. Most previously booked appointments over the next months will be kept. However, **some of them will be cancelled, to make room for the more urgent cases who suffered cancelation during the work suspension.**

→ This solution presents a **basic advantage**. It promotes vertical equity. Those who face a greater need for a fast appointment can get it. For example, in a passport renewal office, managers could ask all applicants for bookings of airplane tickets or hotels in foreign countries. Therefore, those travelling sooner will have priority getting their appointment.

→ This solution also presents some inconveniences. **It requires clear and fair criteria for prioritising**, and these should be explained to the public.

## B.9. Segment users and prioritise them:

- It is important to **segment users and prioritise them**, especially if the public institution faces reduced production capacity (e.g., due to absence) or peaks in demand (e.g. more users applying for services).
- **Prioritisation requires good knowledge** of why the users need the service. Consider the following:
  - **Is the service provided equally important for all users?** Some users might need the service for work reasons (e.g., gun permit renewal for a private security guard) while others might need the service for leisure (e.g. gun permit needed for recreational hunting). Does it make sense to prioritise users in a more vulnerable economic situation? (e.g., processing first unemployment benefit applications for those people living in households where all members are unemployed and have dependent children).
  - **Is the service equally urgent for all users?** Some users might face shorter deadlines than others (e.g. if a driving licence expires next week this more urgent than if it expires in three months. It is more important to renew the passport for someone flying in two weeks than for someone flying in three months).
- Proper segmentation allows an institution **to reduce demand during the first phase of reopening**, by serving only priority users during the first days, while establishing that non-priority users should wait until further notice (when the service is fully operational).
- **Ensure that criteria for prioritising are objective** and **inform the public** about them.
- **Avoid discriminating against users who face similar needs** (e.g. both a taxi driver and a delivery driver face the same need to renew their driving licences). Defining the segment correctly is very important to avoid discrimination.

**Example 10: In the Fast Deciding but Unwise Country**, the Head of the Motor Vehicles Office, foreseeing higher demand for renewing driving licences and staff absence, issued an **executive order stating that during the first two weeks only professionals** (taxi drivers and bus drivers) **could renew their driving licence**. All other users must wait two weeks to renew their license.

This measure was very much contested by messengers, Uber and similar platform drivers. Especially as some of them had problems renewing their car insurance with an expired driving licence. Citizens who depend on their private car to commute to work also complained.

The Minister had to intervene amending the Executive Order the next day. The new Order established that people who proved that they need to use their private car to work were also allowed to renew their permit during the first two weeks of opening.

The result was overcrowded offices and many complaints, as there was not a clear procedure for a person to prove that they urgently needed their private car to work.

Moreover, national holidays improve efficiency, as all personnel rest at the same time. If court personnel have more free days and each member of staff can freely choose a greater number of vacation days, co-ordination is more difficult and judicial delay might increase.

Finally, it will be more difficult to conduct a trial on a national holiday, as necessary witnesses might not be able to attend a trial, thus the trial might be postponed.

## Useful Materials

Tackling coronavirus (COVID-19) – Contributing to a global effort (accessed 25 May 2020), <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/>.

EU-OSHA (24 April 2020), *COVID-19: BACK TO THE WORKPLACE – Adapting workplaces and protecting workers*, April 2020, (accessed 25 May 2020), <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/covid-19-back-workplace-adapting-workplaces-and-protecting-workers/view>, [https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/COVID-19: Back to the workplace - Adapting workplaces and protecting workers](https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/COVID-19:_Back_to_the_workplace_-_Adapting_workplaces_and_protecting_workers).

ILO (March 2020), *An employer guide on managing your workplace during COVID-19*, [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS\\_740212/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_740212/lang--en/index.htm).

ILO (April 2020), *Prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 at work: Action checklist* (in different languages), [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS\\_741813/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS_741813/lang--en/index.htm).

ILO (2020), *COVID-19 and the world of work*, (accessed 25 May 2020), <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/lang--en/index.htm>.

WHO (19 March 2020), *Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19: How COVID-19 spreads*, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331584>.

ILO (May 2004), *Staggered hours schemes*, [https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/fs/WCMS\\_170720/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/fs/WCMS_170720/lang--en/index.htm).

ILO (2019), *Guide to developing balanced working time arrangements*, [https://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS\\_706159/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_706159/lang--en/index.htm).

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### SIGMA papers on public administration under Coronavirus (COVID-19)

SIGMA (2020), *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)*, SIGMA/OECD, Paris, <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/SIGMA-mapping-public-administration-response-EU-members-coronavirus-COVID19.pdf>.

SIGMA (2020), *Application of public procurement rules during the COVID-19 crisis from the perspective of the European Union's Procurement Directives and the Government Procurement Agreement*, SIGMA/OECD, Paris, <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Public-procurement-COVID-19-crisis-SIGMA-April-2020.pdf>.

### OECD website on Coronavirus (COVID-19) response

The OECD is compiling data, information, analysis and recommendations regarding the health, economic, financial and societal challenges posed by the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19). Please visit our [dedicated page](#) for a full suite of coronavirus-related information, including a chapter on Governance and the paper *Public servants and the coronavirus*.

## The SIGMA Programme

SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union (EU), principally financed by the EU. SIGMA has been working with partner countries on strengthening public governance systems and public administration capacities since 1992.

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- Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, Morocco, Palestinian Authority<sup>1</sup>, Tunisia and Ukraine as EU Neighbourhood countries.

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4. Accountability
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- Progress in reform implementation.

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