

The Slovenian response to the COVID-19 crisis: its impact on state administration

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Abstract

This paper analyses the official response of Slovenia to the Covid-19 crisis and the impact this has had on state administration. The goal is to provide an insight into the measures undertaken to alleviate the consequences of the crisis and the impact of such measures on organisational change at the central level of governance in Slovenia. Hence, the paper, on one hand, provides a better understanding of the general legal and normative context, and, on the other, maps the main areas within state administration where the (initial) pressure for change was strongest. This is achieved with the help of a systematic qualitative analysis of primary and secondary legislation, as well as soft law adopted at the central level of governance with an explicit reference to the Covid-19 crisis (for the period spanning from March 2020 to the end of October 2021). The theoretical basis of the paper is taken from the Nograšek and Vintar framework on organisational transformation, a framework which builds on Leavitt's diamond model. On this basis, the analysis of the impact of Covid-19 measures is structured according to key organisational elements referring to technology, people, processes, culture and structure.

Key words: Covid-19, state administration, organisational change, legal framework, Slovenia.

1 Introduction

Covid-19 has been one of the key defining events (Dunlop et al. 2020) of the last decade, and has significantly challenged public sectors. Their very functioning, including public service delivery, has required fast reaction times and organisational adaptation to align with the 'new normal'. Thus, the Covid-19 crisis has forced many organisations to undergo significant transformations and rethink key elements of their business processes, using technology to maintain their operations (Dwivedi et al. 2020; Nagel 2020). Hence, some scholars (e.g. Foss 2020) expect these changes to leave permanent marks on the design and future development of public organisations.

Before the outbreak of the crisis, research efforts were largely invested in exploring change within public sectors as a result of endogenous factors – 'from within' (Packard 2013, Nograšek and Vintar 2014). Thus, it has been

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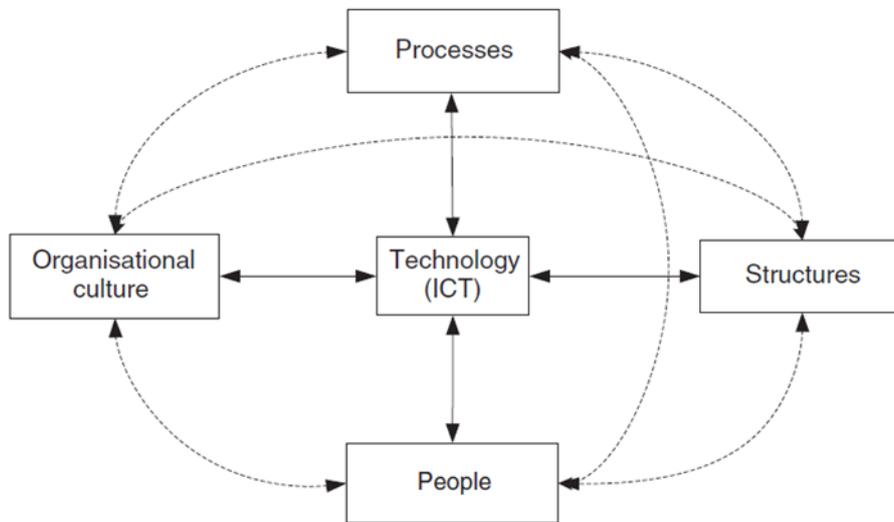
observed that in ‘normal conditions’ the successful implementation of novelties within public sector organisations depends primarily on the existence of a professional policy unit to monitor such processes holistically and ex-post evaluation (Mencinger et al. 2018). Moreover, such changes depend on a spectrum of factors at the organisational level – such as, the existence of clear strategies, political consensus and support, sufficient coordination, discretion of public managers, compatibility with existing processes; at the individual level – e.g. (dis)trust in new technologies, competency of leaders, project managers; and at the external level – e.g. EU co-funding (Špaček 2015, 2018; Špaček et al. 2020; Plaček et al. 2020). In contrast to ‘normal’ conditions, external events of such magnitude as the Covid-19 crisis affect the system elements “differently than organisational changes in a steady state” (Lozano and Barreiro-Gen 2021, 624). The problem, however, is that despite the enormous amount of research produced on the topic, we still lack an understanding of the extent and quality of the organisational changes within public administrations induced by the Covid-19 crisis as an exogenous factor.

The reason for this is that most of the research produced in the aftermath of the crisis has failed to tackle, in a systematic and holistic way, the organisational changes within public administrations. Only specific organisational aspects/features have been approached and analysed, as if they are independent and not part of a larger, closely connected and interdependent system. In such a context, the key (i.e. most ‘radical’) change to catch the eye of scholars during this period has been remote work (Inuaesiet et al. 2021; Parry et al. 2021; Rodchenko et al. 2021). Critical analysis of this issue has emphasised the key role of human resources managers by developing the agenda, determining the type of work and ways of performing it, and organising the work process (Inuaesiet et al. 2021). Moreover, focus has also been placed on finding ways to secure higher levels of labour productivity during such a work arrangement (Rodchenko et al. 2021). Other issues that have been addressed by the relevant literature refer to the effects of Covid-19 on the sustainability efforts of organisations (Lozano and Barreiro-Gen 2021); crisis decision-making (Comfort et al. 2020); impact of the institutional and administrative context on problem-solving strategies and governance modes (Kuhlmann et al. 2021); political response and its effect on the role of governments (van der Voet 2021); etc. Unfortunately, the present research approach focusing on individual features/aspects of public administrations has not been sufficient in grasping the bigger picture and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the quality of organisational changes induced within public administrations (e.g., Raghavan, Demircioglu and Orazgaliyev 2021).

Hence, the paper aims to address this research gap by analysing the legal and normative response of Slovenia to the Covid-19 crisis through the prism of its impact on state administration. Since organisational changes are highly dependent on the type of organisation (Lozano and Barreiro-Gen 2021) and national context (Kuhlmann et al. 2021), the focus of the paper is deliberately placed exclusively on the Slovenian state administration. Moreover, to secure a comprehensive approach (beyond the analysis of specific organisational aspects), the paper builds on the Nograšek and Vintar (2014) theoretical model of organisational transformation, which understands organisations as systems consisting of interdependent elements.

The Nograšek and Vintar (2014) model actually represents an upgrade on Leavitt's diamond model that sets ICT as the key driver of organisational transformation. Its main advantage is that it overcomes the limitations of both technological determinism and socio-technical theories by resting on two main assumptions: 1) that ICT has a central role as a key driver of organisational transformation and 2) that ICT is dependent on other organisational components (processes, people, structures, culture).

Figure 1: Nograšek and Vintar model of organisational transformation



Source: Nograšek and Vintar (2014)

The central role given to ICT builds on the assumption that in the e-government era, the initial input for change comes from endeavours focused on digitalisation. Although the context is different, this logic resonates strongly with the situation we have been facing due to the Covid-19 crisis, where the initial response and main strategy for ‘normalisation’ is (expected to be) pursued through the introduction of new ways of and enhanced use of technology.

Thus, the central element “Technology” is understood as a use of ICT implying regulation or encouragement of wider and/or more intensive use of ICT by state administration organisations. The other model elements are defined as follows (Nograšek and Vintar 2014, 113 – 114):

- ‘People’ capture the availability, adaptability, and productivity of staff.
- ‘Processes’ are defined as the “specific ordering of work activities across time and space, with a beginning and an end, and clearly defined inputs and outputs”.
- ‘Culture’ is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that have worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”
- ‘Structure’ is understood as: “(1) the pattern of formal relationships and duties; (2) the way in which the various activities or tasks are assigned to different departments and/or people in the organisation; (3) the way in which these separate activities or tasks are coordinated; (4) the power, status, and hierarchical relationships within the organisation; and (5) the planned and formalised policies, procedures, and controls that guide the activities and relationships of people in the organisation.”

On this basis, the paper¹ aims to provide a preliminary systematic insight into the organisational changes induced within the Slovenian state administration as a result of the legal and normative response to the crisis. This should help us better understand and identify the areas, i.e. organisational elements, where the pressure for change has

been strongest and the type of change induced. To achieve this we rely on a systematic qualitative analysis of legal acts and soft law documents adopted for the mitigation of the crisis.

The paper is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Which institution took the prime role in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis (specifically regarding issues that affect the organisation of state administration)?

RQ2: What type of documents (primary, secondary legal acts or soft law) made up the key response to the Covid-19 crisis regarding the organisation of state administration?

RQ3: Were legal acts and soft law adopted in a favourable epidemiological situation (as preventive measures), or in a deteriorated epidemiological situation (as measures addressing an acute problem)?

RQ4: Which organisational aspects within state administration were subject to the strongest pressure for change as a result of the Covid-19 crisis?

RQ5: What are the key organisational changes (expected) at the level of state administration?

In addition to this introductory chapter, the paper is structured as follows: In the next chapter, a detailed overview of the methodological approach to data gathering and analysis is provided. Then, in chapter three, we present the results of the coding according to: 1) general issues referring to key institutions, types of document and epidemiological situation; and 2) impact on organisational elements. At the end, in the conclusion, we discuss the results through the prism of the research questions.

2 Methodology

The paper relies on a systematic review and qualitative analysis of official documents. In particular, the focus is placed on legal acts (primary and secondary legislation) and soft law documents (strategies, instructions/guidelines, recommendations, communications, etc.) adopted at the central level of governance as an answer to the Covid-19 crisis. For this purpose, they were selected on the basis of the following five criteria:

1. Adopted at the central level of governance.
2. Adopted in the period between March 2020 and 31 October, 2021.
3. Adopted (explicitly) as a response to the Covid-19 crisis.
4. With clear reference to state administration, i.e., institutions at the central level.²
5. Regulating general situations (e.g., quarantine, potential Covid-19 exposure, etc.), which, although not specific to state administration, might have indirectly affected them.

The legal acts (both primary and secondary) were identified with the help of the Slovenian official national legal databases PISRS (www.pisrs.si). The initial list of 141 acts was identified with the help of the PISRS search engine based on:

- **Key word:** Covid

- **Category:** Legal order RS, Register of Regulations
- **Filter:** Laws and bylaws

126 acts contained in the special section of the PISRS webpage dedicated to ‘Covid’ regulations – called “Current Covid-19” – were then added to this list.

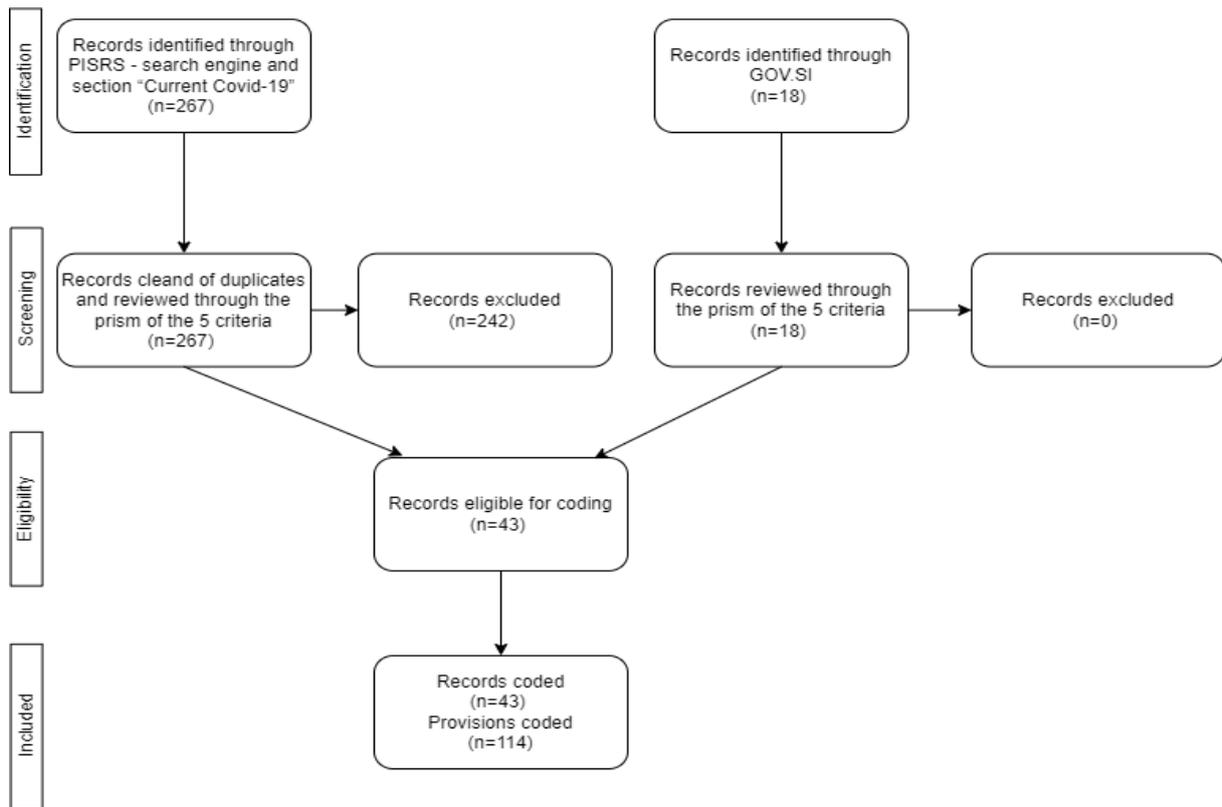
After cleaning the total 267 legal acts of duplicates and reviewing each act against the five criteria listed above, 25 legal acts were recognised relevant for coding and further analysis.

In addition, soft law documents were identified with the help of the official web page of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia – GOV.SI -> “Public employee system” -> “Activities and clarifications related to Covid-19”.³ All 18 documents listed⁴ were recognised as relevant and therefore included in the research.

The acts regulating the organisation of public administration presume strong hierarchy building on the principle of legality – the Constitution at the top, followed by laws, then decrees and eventually internal acts of public organisations (Rakar 2021). For this principle to be observed, certain (more general) issues related to the organisation of public administration are regulated at the level of the Constitution, while other more detail organisational aspects at the level of the law (e.g. number, competences of ministries) or secondary legislation (e.g. the establishment of organs directly accountable to ministries) (Rakar 2021). Although the observance of the legality principle during the Covid-19 crisis is an important aspect to be explored, it is out of the scope of this paper. Thus, this research takes into consideration only legally not problematic acts, i.e. those identified on the abovementioned bases that were not annulled or suspended by the Constitutional court during the research period.

The 43 documents (both legal acts and soft law documents) eventually identified were coded and analysed based on a predefined template containing 13 sections. The first six sections of the template contain coded information about the acts, as follows: 1. name of document; 2. date of adoption; 3. institution of adoption; 4. type of document (primary/secondary/soft law); 5. epidemiological situation at the time of adoption; and 6. brief explanation of the act. The second part of the template contains specific coded provisions of the documents according to their temporary/permanent nature and their (potential) impact on one of the elements of the Nograšek and Vintar model – technology, people, processes, culture and structure. At the end, the template contains an additional section – “Additional important information”, for coding all additional information deemed relevant which may not have been coded in the previous sections. In this second part of the template, 114 provisions⁵ from the 43 acts coded in the first part of the template are included.

Figure 2: Prisma diagram presenting the selection process of documents coded



3 Presentation and discussion of the results

This chapter presents the results of the coding analysis of the acts adopted as a response to the Covid-19 crisis.

First, we present the general results from the coding of the 43 acts, which capture information about the leading institutions responsible for organisational changes within state administration; the main types of documents used for regulation of this area; and the epidemiological situation at the time of adoption. Then, in the second part of this chapter, we approach the results from the view of the impact these documents have had on different organisational elements within the Nograšek and Vintar model – i.e., ‘Technology’, ‘People’, ‘Processes’, ‘Culture’, and ‘Structure’. Thus, instead of the 43 official documents previously mentioned, here the unit of analysis is their provisions – precisely 114 provisions that (directly or indirectly) affect different organisational aspects of state administration. This approach is not only expected to help us identify which organisational elements have been subjected to the highest pressure for change as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, but also to provide an insight into the type/quality of change.

3.1 General results

The results show the prevalence of the executive branch in shaping the new post-Covid-19 organisational reality within state administration organs. Notably, the Government adopted 33% of the acts, while specifically the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA), as the horizontal organ responsible for the quality of public administration, adopted an additional 28 % of the acts. The Parliament, as the legislative body, adopted 23% of

the acts analysed. However, this ratio between the executive and the legislative branch in favour of the former does not automatically imply negative connotation as legislation needs to be regulated more in detail by executive organs in order to be properly implemented on the ground.

Figure 3: Percentage of acts adopted by different institutions

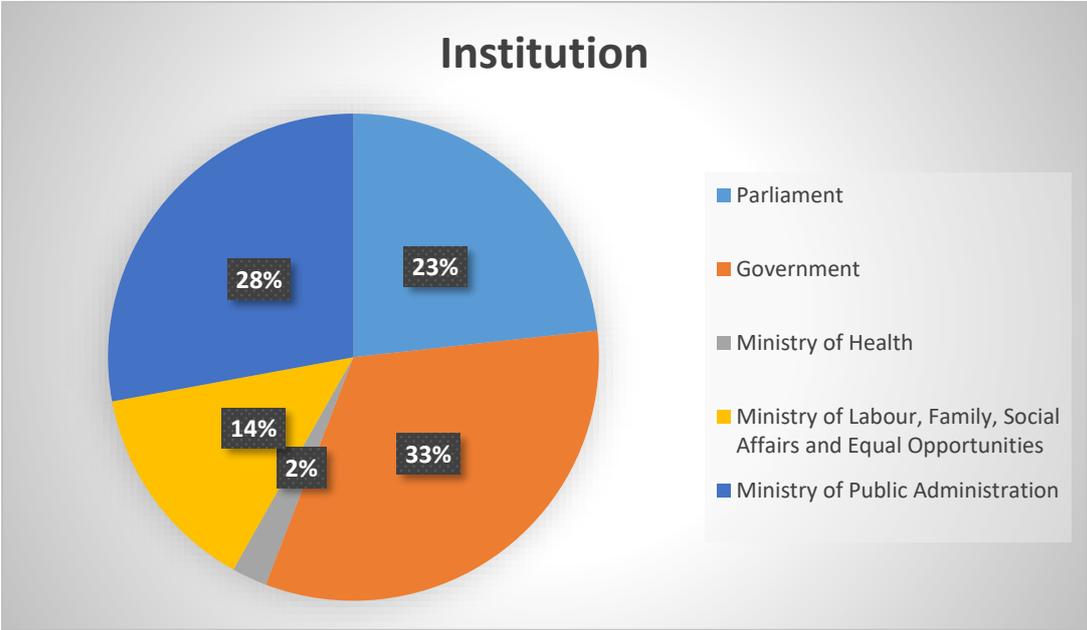
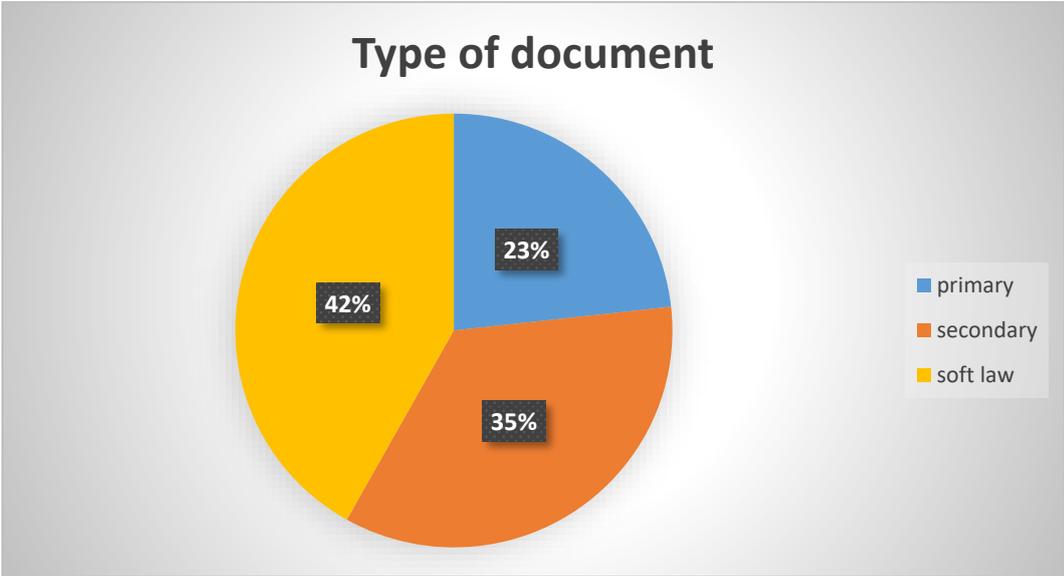


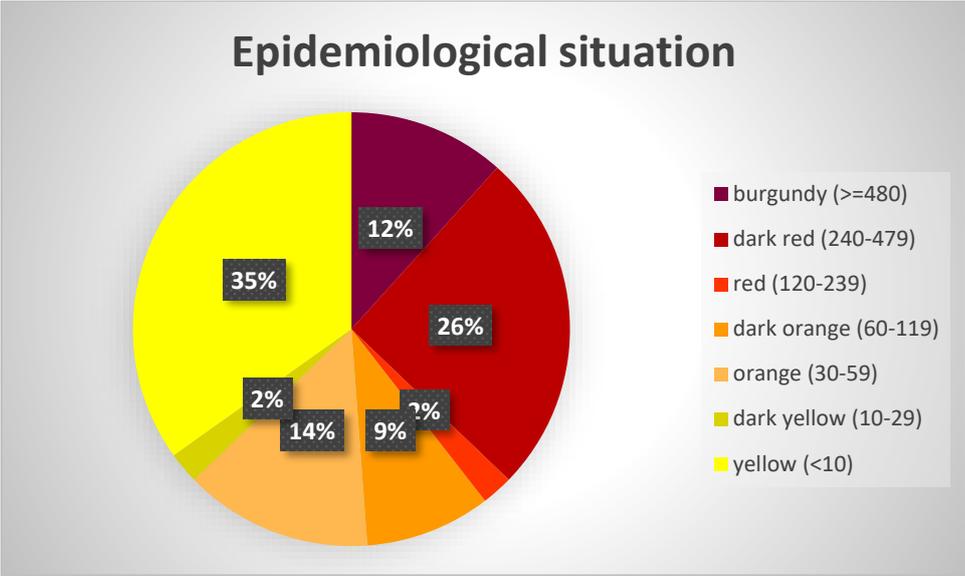
Figure 4 provides an additional insight into the results by presenting the dominant type of documents used to regulate the (re)organisation of state administration during the ‘Covid’ period. On this basis, we observe a more soft approach to the regulation of this issue, as soft-law documents have the highest share (42 %) among the acts adopted, followed by secondary law acts with 35 %. The lowest percent referring to primary law (not surprisingly) matches the percentage of acts adopted by the Parliament as the legislative body (see Figure 3).

Figure 4: Overview of the types of documents regulating the organisation of state administration



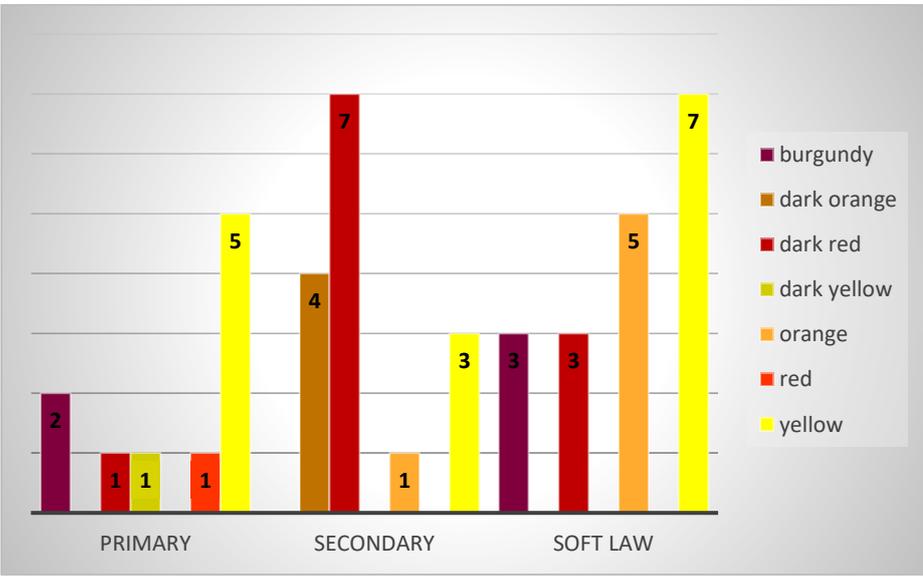
In order to better understand the context in which these acts were adopted, for each of them, the epidemiological situation at the time of adoption has been recorded. This captures the ‘7-day notification rate of cases per 100,000 people at the time of adoption – as recorded by the COVID-19 Situation Dashboard of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The initial conclusion on this basis is that the highest percentage (35 %) of acts were adopted in a rather favourable (‘yellow’) epidemiological situation. However, a closer look at the data shows that, cumulatively, acts adopted during the two worst epidemiological levels (i.e., ‘burgundy’ and ‘dark red’) have the highest share, with 38 %.⁶

Figure 5: Percentage overview of adopted acts according to the epidemiological situation



Moreover, Figure 6 shows that in a more relaxed epidemiological situation (‘yellow’), mainly soft law documents and primary legal acts were adopted, while secondary legislation was adopted when the situation was rather serious (‘dark red’). Interestingly, during the worst epidemiological situation (‘burgundy’), a few soft-law and primary legal acts were adopted, but no secondary legislation.

Figure 6: Type of document adopted according to the epidemiological situation

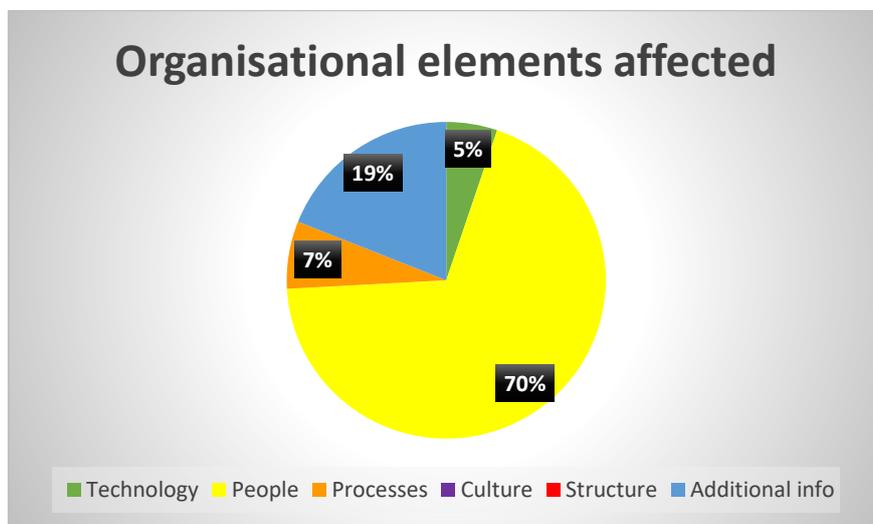


3.2 Impact on organisational elements

In addition to the five organisational elements ('Technology', 'People', 'Processes', 'Culture', and 'Structure') of the Nograšek and Vintar model, in the coding scheme we included the section "Additional important information" for coding other relevant information beyond the official model elements. Specifically, this section refers to all those provisions, which although not addressing state administration organs in particular, have still affected their organisation and work (e.g., quarantine, potential Covid-19 exposure, etc.).

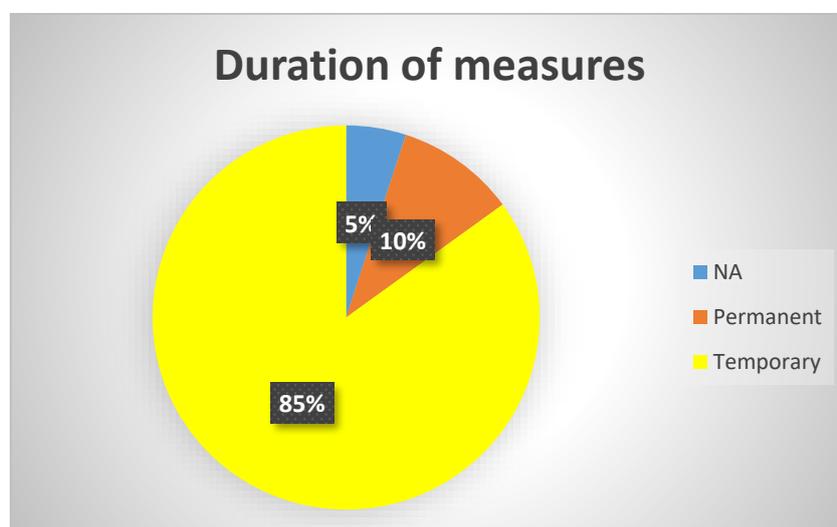
On this basis, the most affected element, with 70% of the provisions analysed, is 'People' (see Figure 7). This is followed by "Additional important information" (19%), then 'Processes' (7%) and at the end 'Technology' (5%). Interestingly, the analyses did not identify any provisions affecting the elements 'Culture' and 'Structure'.

Figure 7: Organisational element affected by the provisions analysed⁷



Moreover, most of the provisions analysed refer to measures that had a temporary effect (85%). Only 10% of the provisions are permanent, which raises the question over long-term effects of the changes implemented as a response to the Covid-19 crisis.

Figure 8: Share of the provisions according to their duration (temporary or permanent)



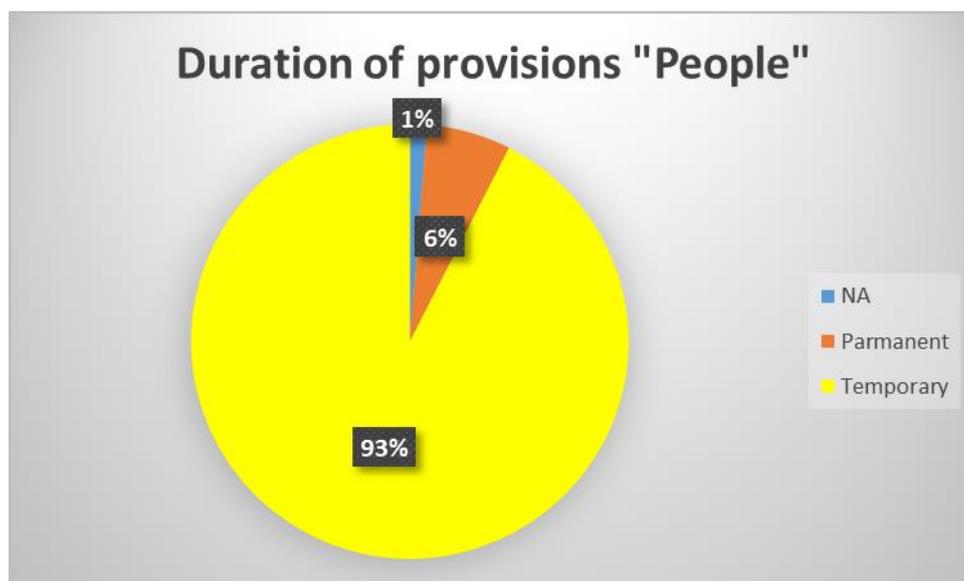
3.2.1 Impact on technology

The results show that the changes introduced as a response to the Covid-19 crisis did not significantly affect the aspect of technology – only six provisions out of 114 regulate the use of technology in state administration organs. Their common denominator is a reference to electronic communication between institutions. Some of the provisions refer to electronic notifications about working from home that employers need to provide to the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia – via the information system managed by the Ministry of Public Administration. Others refer to the electronic submission of applications by employers to claim the right to reimbursement of salary for employees who are not working due to quarantine or force majeure. As a specific response to the Covid-19 crisis, these measures are of temporary nature – with the exception of one provision (of permanent nature) referring to the use of technology during oral hearings in the context of the issuance of building permits.

3.2.2 Impact on people

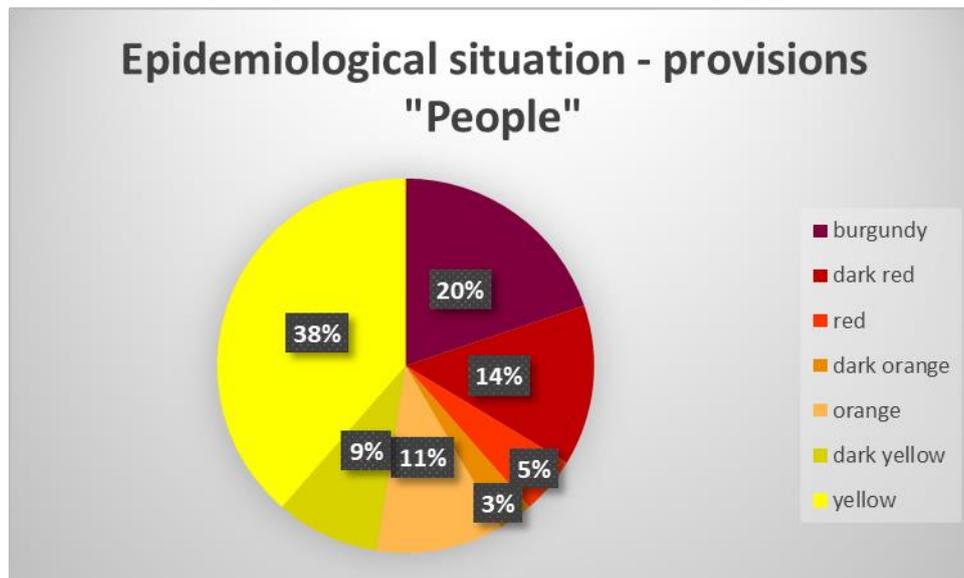
The results show that the changes introduced during the analysed period had the greatest impact on the element 'People' (see Figure 7). Namely, 70% of all provisions analysed regulate issues related to the status of employees (their rights and duties), workplace change and change of the extent and complexity of work. Moreover, most of them (93%) were temporary measures.

Figure 9: Duration of provisions "People"



By looking into the epidemiological situation at the time of their adoption, we see that most of them (38%) were adopted in a rather favourable epidemiological situation ('yellow'). However, if we calculate, cumulatively, the provisions adopted during the least favourable epidemiological period ('burgundy' and 'dark red'), we get a similar percentage of 34%. These numbers strongly correspond to data on the general epidemiological situation discussed in the previous subchapter 3.1.

Figure 10: Epidemiological situation during the adoption of the provisions - “people”



A closer look at their content led us to categorise them into seven groups according to specific issues/areas they address. This not only enables a more structured analysis, but also an insight into the topics that were most often addressed (and thus, prioritised). The following list presents these groups (from the highest to lowest number of provisions), followed by a brief discussion of their content:

1. salaries and crisis allowances;
2. (re)organisation of work time according to work needs;
3. work from home;
4. temporary transfer of employees;
5. more flexible use of the right to sick leave;
6. more flexible procedure regarding new temporary employment; and
7. training and exams of the Administrative Academy.

We note **salaries and crisis allowances** as the key issue tackled in this context. Salaries were determined with regard to different situations emerging from quarantine, force majeure, temporary lay-off from work and preventive isolation at the request of the employer. Direct and indirect users of the budget of the Republic of Slovenia or municipal budgets, whose share of revenues from public sources in 2019 was less than 70%, were specifically mentioned as beneficiaries (ZIUOOPE 2020; ZIUZEOP 2020; ZIUZEOP-A 2020; ZZUOOP 2020). These provisions capture different scenarios, including infection in the workplace as a result of travel to a high risk country, etc., to determine the percentage of salary compensation received (ZIUOPDVE 2020; ZZUOOP 2020; ZIUPDV 2020; ZIUPDV 2020; ZIUZEOP 2020; Ministry of Labour 2020b; Ministry of Public Administration 2020c; 2020d; 2020k; 2021). Since they referred to temporary measures, some of the provisions explicitly stipulated their duration and deadlines (Government 2020d; 2020e; 2021e).

Moreover, with the purpose of maintaining employment numbers, the legislation defined the conditions of part-time work (ZIUOOPE 2020) and/or temporary lay-offs in case of a lack of work (ZIUOPDV 2020; Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2020e; Ministry of Public Administration 2020d; 2020g).

Civil servants who were unable to work for more than 6 months due to isolation were nevertheless evaluated in the context of regular promotions to higher salary grades (Government 2020c). A couple of provisions referred to the basis for calculation of salaries of public sector directors whose performances were negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis (ZIUPOPDVE 2020; Ministry of Public Administration 2020a). As for the crisis allowance, the provisions regulated both the conditions and scope of beneficiaries – employees exposed to above-average risk to their health in their workplace (ZIUZEOP 2020; Ministry of Public Administration 2020c; 2020d). Specifically, employees within the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, a state administrative organ (Ministry of Public Administration 2021), were mentioned.

The second issue that has received significant attention is the **(re)organisation of work time according to work needs**. In the case of increased workload and urgent work needs, the provisions defined the conditions for overtime without the consent of a worker – e.g., length; period of rest after such period; etc. (ZIUZEOP 2020; ZIUZEOP-A 2020; Ministry of Public Administration 2020h; 2020d). In various cases, superiors were given the possibility of ordering civil servants to carry out less demanding work – for a maximum period of three months (Ministry of Public Administration 2020f; 2020g). Accordingly, the use of annual leave was subjected to and made dependent on work needs. This practically meant that any civil servants for whom the employer could not organise any work from home had to use their annual leave or other form of absence (Ministry of Public Administration 2020g; 2020f; 2020i; 2020l). In contrast, civil servants pressed by urgent work needs were prohibited from using their annual leave (ZIUZEOP-A 2020). In the latter case, the deadline for using annual leave from the previous year was extended (Ministry of Public Administration 2021).

Working from home is the third area addressed in this context. Interestingly, most provisions, i.e. texts analysed here, belong to soft law documents, which take the Employment Relationship Act – relevant legislation adopted before the Covid-19 crisis - as the key legal basis. Thus, the main goal of these provisions/texts was to interpret this act in light of the newly formed situation. Specifically, the key reference was article 169, which regulates changes to the type and place of work due to natural or other disasters – standing in contrast to articles 68-72 which regulate work from home under normal conditions (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2020a). In the latter case, work from home is allowed only when explicitly regulated by the employment agreement. If the agreement does not specify, it is automatically assumed that the workplace is the employer's headquarters (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2020d).

In case of (an expectation of) a natural disaster or exceptional circumstances where the life and health of people or the property of the employer are endangered, the type and/or place of work specified in the employment contract may be temporarily changed without the consent of the worker so long as such circumstances persist (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2020a; 2020c; 2020d). On this legal basis, the employer may mandate that the employee work from home. This option was at their disposal not only during the official declaration of the epidemic, but also during the implementation of preventive measures against the spread of Covid-19. In particular, the legal obligation of the employer to provide a safe work environment was noted as the basis for giving them the right to order an employee (who is not ordered to quarantine by the official institution) to stay at home (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2020b). In cases where the employer was not able to organise work from home during this period of preventive isolation, it was considered that the employee did not perform work due to reasons on the side of the employer.

Although the issue of compensation for workers using private means and resources during work from home was addressed, the amount was not legally determined – it was left to be agreed between an employee and employer (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2020c). However, the guidelines of the Ministry of Public Administration (2020f) endeavoured to address this loophole by setting the amount of compensation to 1 euro per working day (as a cost to be covered by the budget).

The very organisation of work from home was more closely addressed by the guidelines of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (2020f), referring specifically to the following issues: type of work suitable to be performed from home; work time; means and resources for work; protection of business secrets and other sensitive information; and security and health at work. The only legal provisions coded in this context regulated: 1) the obligation of the employer to inform the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia when an employee starts working from home; 2) the type of information they need to provide for this purpose (ZIUOPDVE 2020; ZDUOP 2021); and 3) the exact period (24.12.2020 – 4. 1.2021) in which only urgent tasks were performed (Government 2020b).

Ultimately, the key takeaway from this group of provisions is that working from home is not considered a workers' right, but a decision completely in the hands of employers (Ministry of Public Administration 2020f; 2020g).

The provisions referring to the **temporary transfer of employees** regulate this possibility in case of urgent work needs resulting from the epidemic. The focus of these provisions is placed on salary and the rights of the employees temporarily transferred (ZIUZEOP 2020), as well as the conditions for employers using this option – e.g., a written decision; duration; and exemptions (Ministry of Public Administration 2020e). Thus, a civil servant can be temporarily transferred without their consent to the same/another position within the same organisation or to another employer – the pre-corona legal framework did not allow for the latter (ZIUZEOP-A 2020; Government 2020a; Ministry of Public Administration 2020 d). A couple of provisions refer specifically to the possibility of the Director General of Prison Administration of the Republic of Slovenia (as a state administration organ) transferring employees to a different penitentiary institution due to a lack of staff or increased workload (ZIUOPDVE 2020; Ministry of Public Administration 2020c).

Some provisions made **the right to sick leave** easier for employees to exercise. For example, for an absence of up to three consecutive days in a row, civil servants were not obliged to provide an official sick leave document by their physician (ZZUOOP 2020; ZDUOP 2021; Ministry of Public Administration 2020k).

In addition, provisions regulated the possibility of **new temporary employment of civil servants** without a public call (ZIUZEOP 2020; ZIUZEOP-A 2020), which was limited only to situations where deemed necessary (Ministry of Public Administration 2020d).

Finally, a number of provisions referred to the effects of the **temporary closure of the Administrative Academy** on public servants who needed training/an exam certificate as a condition for promotion or keeping their post. Thus, it was determined that employees who missed a deadline due to the closure of the Administrative Academy should not face any negative consequences and would be given an opportunity to fulfil their obligation as soon as possible, depending on the epidemiological situation (Ministry for Public Administration 2020a). Specifically, attention was paid to professional exams for inspectors as well as for management and decision-making in administrative proceedings, the deadlines of which were extended for so long as the unfavourable epidemiological situation were to continue (Ministry for Public Administration 2020b).

3.2.3 *Impact on processes*

The most important changes introduced by the provisions coded under the element “Processes” refer to the amendments of the General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP) and regulate administrative procedures in the event of natural disasters, epidemics or similar extraordinary events (ZIUOPDVE 2020). The changes enabled the submission of applications outside work hours and during non-working days; electronic submission without a secure electronic signature (with a qualified certificate) or method for identifying applicants; delivery of decisions, conclusions or other documents in an electronic mailbox that does not fulfil the standards of a secure e-mail inbox; limiting public participation in procedural actions; etc. Moreover, the deadlines of administrative procedures, as prescribed in the law (ZUP) did not apply unless they tackled urgent matters – e.g., a danger to human life and health, public order, public safety, property, etc. – and documents were to be received via the portal *eUprava* – while only in urgent cases could they be submitted in person (ZZUSUDJZ 2020). Moreover, the Tax Procedures Act was amended with the purpose of introducing the possibility for an online public auction, while the finance minister was made responsible for the regulation of this procedure in detail (ZIUPOPVE 2020). Finally, some of the provisions referred to public organs that did not provide public services during the epidemic. They explicitly stipulated that such organs cannot charge service users during this period and that the budget of the Republic of Slovenia will cover their operating costs (ZIUZEOP 2020; ZIUZEOP-A 2020).

3.2.4 *Additional important information*

Most of the provisions coded in this section are general provisions – not specifically adopted for state administration organs which indirectly affect them. They mainly refer to the regulation of quarantine as a measure that restricts free movement and imposes mandatory medical examinations of healthy people who have had or are suspected of having a risky contact (ZIUZEOP 2020; ZIUZEOP-A 2020). More specifically, they regulate quarantine exemptions due to vaccination (Government 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d) and logistical issues such as the delivery of a quarantine mandate via e-mail (ZIUPDV 2020) or accommodation provided by the government for persons who cannot be isolated or quarantined at home (ZZUOOP 2020). The latter is rather exceptional as “home” is stipulated as the prime place in which quarantine is to be carried out (Ministry of health 2021).

4 Conclusion

In the conclusion, we revisit the research questions and provide answers based on the findings of the systematic review of documents (see chapter 0).

RQ1: Which institution took the prime role in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis (specifically regarding issues that affect the organisation of state administration)?

The results indicate the **prevalence of the executive as the Government and the Ministry of Public Administration emerged as the key institutions** regulating issues affecting state administration. However, the ratio of adopted acts between the executive and the legislative branch alone in favour of the former does not tell us much (as legal acts need to be regulated more thoroughly by the executive); therefore, we need to look into the wider context to understand this outcome better.

Namely, the government of the Republic of Slovenia has been criticised for an excessive use of ‘rule by decree’, which has seriously threatened the rule of law (Pirc Musar 2021). According to some estimations, in one-and-a-half years, the government adopted over 2,700 decrees (Felc 2021) regulating different issues, not only related to state administration. Many of them lacked a legal basis, which provoked the involvement of the Constitutional Court and led to their annulment or (temporary) suspension. For instance, the Constitutional Court (2021) suspended the execution of one of the most controversial decisions affecting state administration, which required employees to meet the condition of either morbidity or vaccination in order to keep their post in the public sector.

Thus, the conclusion of our analysis corresponds to the general perception on the dominance of the executive as the key institutional actor in dealing with the crisis. However, it should be stressed that the paper refers only to acts and provisions which were not annulled or suspended by the Constitutional Court during the timespan of the research⁸ – i.e., those that were not considered problematic in terms of lack of legal basis.

RQ2: What type of documents (primary, secondary legal acts or soft law) made up the key response to the Covid-19 crisis regarding the organisation of state administration?

In contrast to the general observation that the crisis was ‘ruled by decree’, state administration was ‘ruled’ predominantly by **soft-law documents**. This might not only imply a lack of weight of the changes introduced, but also an uneven level of implementation across state administration organs. This corresponds to the perception within the Ministry of Public Administration,⁹ which notes the inconsistent approach to the implementation of measures in public administration and the lack of consensus about securing unified rules and standards as the key problems. With regard to the former, it was pointed out that employees of different ministries receive different amounts of compensation for the use of their own resources when working from home (e.g., 1 euro within the MPA vs. 4 euro within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).¹⁰ Regarding the latter, various actors have different ideas and attitudes about the unified regulations on working from home. Namely, public sector trade-unions insist on regulating this issue in the context of the collective agreement; the government is rather inclined to take the Government of the Republic of Slovenia Act (ZVRS) as a legal basis, while ministries seem to prefer the *status quo* as they want to decide about these kinds of issues independently.

RQ3: Were legal acts and soft law adopted in a favourable epidemiological situation (as preventive measures), or in a deteriorated epidemiological situation (as measures addressing an acute problem)?

A similar number of acts were adopted **under the acute pressure of deteriorating epidemiological situations as during epidemiologically ‘calmer’ periods**. In the latter case, soft-law and primary legal acts were usually adopted. This could, on the one hand, imply more detailed (soft) regulation of existing solutions, while, on the other hand, preparation for new incoming waves of Covid-19. During more challenging epidemiological periods (e.g., ‘red’), mainly secondary legislation was adopted, corresponding to the expectations for fast reaction in a time of pressing threat. Unfortunately, the data gathered is not sufficient for drawing more firm conclusions around this nor establishing correlations between the epidemiological situation and the substance/type of the measures adopted (in terms of whether they were preventive, ad-hoc or systematic).

RQ4: Which organisational aspects within state administration were subject to the strongest pressure for change as a result of the Covid-19 crisis?

The element ‘People’ is the organisational aspect within state administration that was **most affected** by the acts adopted as a response to the Covid-19 crisis – far beyond the other aspects referring to ‘Technology’, ‘Processes’, ‘Culture’ and ‘Structure’. Contrary to initial expectations, only a few provisions referring to ‘Technology’ were registered. The reason for this could be that technology was already used regularly in state administration, therefore, no need for additional specific regulation was recognised. Although Slovenia was noted among the countries that faced the greatest disturbance of public services during the crises, the level of digitalisation of public services matched the EU average (Crahay et al. 2021, 9). An additional plausible cause seems to be the fact that the issue of technology was left completely in the hands of specific state administration bodies. For instance, although the MPA provided an IT system to allow employees to work from home, its use was not mandatory – it was left to individual public servants to turn to the MPA to receive access to the system.¹¹ Moreover, the analysis did not register any provisions affecting the elements of ‘culture’ and ‘structure’. This could be explained by the fact that organisational culture is a rather ‘soft’ area, rarely defined by written rules, whereas changes in organisational structure require a more long-term, strategic approach.

RQ5: What are the key organisational changes (expected) at the level of state administration?

The key changes have occurred in the area of **rights and duties of civil servants** – specifically, regarding **salaries** and the **organisation of work**, with a special focus on **working from home**. Although it was explicitly stipulated that working from home is not a workers’ right, this particular experience is expected to have a substantial and long-term effect on state administration. The Covid-19 crisis showed that working from home is a viable alternative and thus has contributed to a significant shift in opinions at the managerial level within the public sector. This would have not been possible in ‘normal’ (pre-crisis) conditions, when the general perception was that ‘for work to be done, civil servants need to be physically present at work’.¹² According to the survey conducted by the Ministry of Public Administration (2020m), 75% of the civil servants employed in state administration organs worked from home or in a ‘hybrid’ arrangement (from home and at work) during the epidemic. Moreover, 70% felt that the existing organisational structure of state administration does not enable effective solutions for upcoming systemic challenges. They identify better flexibility within state administration and digitalisation as key measures to be adopted.

On this basis, we conclude that the paper provides a preliminary glance of the organisational changes within the Slovenian state administration resulting from the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, it reveals the type of changes, their duration and the general context in which they were instigated. Unfortunately, the methodological approach applied and the focus only on the legal and normative framework represent the key limitations that prevent a more profound understanding of the quality and depth of the changes. Specifically, this is the reason for the lack of data identified with regard to the elements of ‘culture’ and ‘structure’. Moreover, the fact that most of the changes analysed were of temporary nature requires further (longitudinal) research in order to measure the extent to which the ‘corona experience’ has left (permanent) marks on the organisation and way of operating within state administration organs.

Hence, future research should endeavour to gather more empirical and primary data with a view to providing not only explanations at the level of different organisational elements (people, technology, processes, culture and structure), but also about their interdependences and intra-element influences as a result of Covid-19. Such an approach will also provide the basis for comparative insights across different organisational, national and

administrative contexts, thus contributing to a better understanding of organisational changes resulting from exogenous vis-à-vis endogenous factors.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research was funded by the Slovenian Research Agency ARRS under grant No J5-3105.

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¹ The paper builds on the report produced in the context of task 1 of the project “Impacts of COVID-19 on organisational change and digitalization in public administration” financed by the Slovenian Research Agency ARRS.

² Public organisations capturing state administration in Slovenia refer to ministries, bodies within ministries, government offices, administrative units and agencies.

³ <https://www.gov.si/teme/usluzbenski-sistem/>.

⁴ List of soft law documents as of 21. 12. 2021.

⁵ In general, we coded individual provisions (of primary and secondary acts) or their explanation (contained in soft law documents). However, in some cases, when few provisions regulated a single/similar issue, they were coded as a set of provisions – in a single coding field. For the purpose of simplicity, the total number of provisions (114) actually refers to the number of coding fields.

⁶ This is even higher than the cumulative percentage of the two most favourable periods ‘yellow’ and ‘dark yellow’.

⁷ Two same provisions are coded in two different categories, which is the reason for a total result higher than 100%.

⁸ Annulled and suspended acts and provisions were not taken into consideration because they could not have had an actual impact on the ground in terms of the (re)organisation of state administration.

⁹ The following discussion builds on our meeting (21.12.2021) with the Director General of the Public Sector Directorate at the Ministry of Public Administration, where we presented the project and held a preliminary discussion on the challenges faced by state administration organs.

¹⁰ The amount of 1 euro is mentioned in the guidelines of the Ministry of Public Administration (2020f; see also the discussion on the provision referring to work from home in section 3.2).

¹¹ Information from the meeting (21.12.2021) with the Director General of the Public Sector Directorate at the Ministry of Public Administration.

¹² Information from the meeting (21.12.2021) with the Director General of the Public Sector Directorate at the Ministry of Public Administration.