DEdelivering
Customer Care and
Cutting Corruption
in Public Services

A case study on citizen-centric service delivery reform in Albania

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SYNOPSIS

Since 2014, the Government of Albania has pursued a pathbreaking reform that reinvents the way public administration delivers services to its citizens. The on-going reform involves a fundamental shift from operating in a narrow or isolated departmental view within the government, to a more holistic citizen-centric approach.

In the past, individuals who needed access to services faced long queues, multiple visits, hard-to-find offices that lacked service windows, red tape, delays, arbitrary denial of services, and frequent requests for bribes.

The reform relies heavily on innovation and the use of information technology to improve standards, procedures, and the organization of service delivery. In its initial three years, it has already made inroads to combat corruption, foster a customer-care culture, enhance public access, and increase efficiency in the Albanian public administration.

The reform was led by MIPA, the Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration, Mrs. Milena Harito, from September 2013 to September 2017, under the first term of Prime Minister Edi Rama. It remains a core priority also in his second term. The reform champion institution, the Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services in Albania (ADISA) was established in October 2014.

One distinct feature of the reform is the separation of front office interaction with the public from back office processing of requested public services. This facet is grounded in a specific law, which sets down rules on the delivery of public services by state administration institutions and a long-term policy document.

ADISA is the institution behind the Front Office-Back Office separation. It serves both as the “the brain” behind the citizen-centric services and “the face” of those services. It is the brain which sets the standard design and monitoring of the services across all relevant government offices. It is also the public face of the services, which means that ADISA establishes and manages customer care service windows in the ADISA Centers.

So far, its model of one-stop shops and in-one-place citizen service centers has been established in the cities of Kavaja, Kruja, Fier, and Gjirokastra. In these ADISA Centers, citizens can apply for public services from as many as eight institutions by simply going to a single location.

While the clear identification of the front and back office responsibilities streamlines services, the reform also entails digitization, and standardization of information and procedures. An important goal is to increase the number of services provided online. Other core elements of the reform involve monitoring performance of government institutions, and allowing citizens to give feedback on the quality of services they receive.

To date, more than 1400 services of 134 central government agencies have been classified and coded to support digitization and ensure efficient IT interaction. Standardized and easy-to-understand information is now available to the public for more than 500 public services with the remainder under preparation.
A revamped Government portal, www.e-albania.al, assists citizens and businesses in accessing services and information online. Registered users jumped from 170,000 at the end of 2014 to more than 300,000 by July 2017. Nearly 500 services are available to citizens to transact online through this portal, according to AKSHI, the National Agency for Information Society, a key player in the e-governance aspect of the reform.

The vision of the long-term reform is for every person in Albania to have easy access to quality public services. The ultimate aim is a transition to 100 percent e-services and availability to citizens and business anytime and anywhere, within 10 years.

Referring to the reform in a September 2015 speech at the signing of the World Bank financing agreement, Prime Minister Edi Rama said, “…this project will bring a radical and final transformation of the relations between the State and citizens, because it will enable the State to serve citizens and will enable citizens to have the State within reach on their smart phones at the end of this process.”

**INTRODUCTION**

For many years, Albanians who needed a public service would likely go to dingy and cluttered bureaucratic offices to get assistance. Citizens contended with long lines, confused procedures, and unclear instructions. Public services were marred by an entrenched institutional culture that showed little regard for the customer, and only token opportunity for citizen feedback.

“The notion of standards in the public services was non-existent,” says Milena Harito, former Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration, who was tasked with leading the reform from September 2013 to September 2017. “There was a lack of transparency. Citizens were never certain about the documentation they would be asked to present when requesting a service, nor did they know what to expect in terms of procedures.

“There was no guarantee that if you requested the same service twice, you would obtain the same result. Citizens were at the mercy of civil servants’ goodwill. Timely service was the exception rather than the rule,” she says.

The barriers to public services – multiple visits, difficult-to-find offices without service windows, delays, unjustified denial of services – contributed to a faltering trust in government institutions.

A growing perception prevailed that to get anything done “wheels had to be oiled.” The uncertainty around the services forced citizens to turn to personal connections to access a public service or pay bribes to speed up the process.

Albania needed change. Reform of public services became one of the six government priorities under newly-elected Prime Minister Edi Rama in September 2013. At the time, he told a World Leaders Forum at Columbia University, “I do not believe that it is
the citizens, the people, who corrupt the system. I am convinced that the best way to fight and prevent corruption in short term is the modernization of the state institutions.”

Piecemeal changes would not suffice. The Prime Minister began a paradigm shift that put customer care at the forefront of public services, closed loopholes for corruption and reduced inefficiencies. He appointed Minister Milena Harito to lead the reform.

When the Government program, *Innovation against corruption: Building a Citizen Centric Service Delivery Model in Albania*, was officially launched in April 2014, reform design was already in motion.

Changes gained further impetus when Albania obtained European Union candidate status in June 2014. Public administration reform is one of the areas that the EU monitors in candidate member countries. It tracks progress in human resource management, policies, and practices that improve efficiency and accountability.

To meet these requisites, the long-term vision for modernization and transformation in public administration was encapsulated in the country’s *Cross-Cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy (PAR) 2015–2020*. The plan calls for high quality and transparent services for citizens. The *Digital Agenda for Albania 2015–2020* was also aligned with this vision.

In addition, Albania’s push toward providing citizen-centric services fit squarely with the new global Sustainable Development Goals which urge countries to create accountable institutions.

From the outset, the reform was to bring transformational change in the way the government interacts with citizens and businesses to impact delivery of public services, including by local government units and independent institutions. For that to happen, innovative solutions and information technology became and continue to be crucial contributors to the process.

Specifically, the on-going citizen-centric service delivery reform in Albania focuses on services of an administrative nature. Given the broad scope of plans and activities, the first phase runs to the end of 2018 and revolves around central government services in key areas like property, transport, social and health insurance, civil registry, transport, education, construction permitting, business registration and licensing.

This current phase is only the beginning of the implementation of the Government’s long-term policy on the delivery of citizen centric services by central government institutions.

In the second phase, 2019-2025, the changes to systems and operations from the first phase will be consolidated and rolled out to all services to citizens and businesses provided by central government institutions.
CHALLENGES

The objective of the public service delivery reform was to create an administration that focused primarily on the needs of citizens. While the goal was clear, the path to getting there was not.

The job ahead was enormous with multiple challenges to tackle. Resistance to change from within the administration was a test from the start. Relevant government agencies and offices perceived their authority questioned or diminished. Others who had benefited from petty bribes and corruption in exchange for favors, did not want to give up their informal income. They also resented added scrutiny over their performance.

At the institutional level, each of the involved agencies – from property registration, to health insurance – had separate ways of doing business. Also staff in each office operated with little regard to what happened in other departments.

In addition, an engrained bureaucratic culture ran counter to customer care standards more prevalent in the private sector. Public service delivery was often considered an afterthought, illustrated by the considerable number of institutions with no dedicated service windows or service clerks.

Time-consuming and convoluted processes were considered the normal way of work, even if they made no sense. In some cases, for example, citizens were asked to bring in notarized copies of documents issued by the very same institutions where they were applying for the new service.

A commitment to standardization and harmonized procedures putting citizens in the center was a dramatic shift from existing norms and would need buy-in from all levels of civil servants.

“The first challenge was to understand what was feasible, how great our ambitions should be, and what timelines we needed to work with. The second challenge was finding the right set of allies in the government. We needed partners in the administration to make sure that the reform was being understood and accepted,” says Mrs. Harito.

Even the basics of the approach had to be hashed out internally. “Some departments insisted that we only focus on service digitization,” explains Mrs. Harito. “Having a background in ICT, I knew that problems stemming from organizational dysfunction cannot be simply solved by transitioning to an online system.”

To drive home the importance of the changes in their day-to-day work, civil servants were reminded from the start that they too were citizens who needed the same services as everyone else. They were asked to put themselves in the customers’ shoes.

That kind of empathy and attitudinal change would be needed as a reminder to keep citizens’ needs at the core of every decision. But that was only the beginning. Deep operational and managerial changes were required to kick-start the ambitious reform that was envisioned by the Government.
THE APPROACH

The design of the reform was the result of collaboration led by MIPA, with full support from the Prime Minister’s Office. “We had that commitment from the start,” says Mrs. Harito.

Next, was the needed engagement of civil servants across central government institutions. They included staff in at least nine ministries and as many as 20 government agencies at both the leadership and technical expert levels. Mayors were also approached early on.

In addition, the process to design the reforms involved tapping into the experiences of EU and other European countries, and even ones in Asia. The models that were studied had extensive involvement with citizen-centric public service delivery reforms. International development partners active in good governance reforms in Albania were also brought into the process. They included the World Bank, UNDP, the EU, and bilateral donors like Italy.

“It was a mix of local ideas and some from elsewhere,” says Mrs. Harito. “We visited countries like Georgia and Azerbaijan because they had undergone public service delivery reforms,” she says.

In Albania, a handful of civil servants in key administrative positions and local experts, who were on board and knowledgeable about the reform, began to review literature, models, and benchmarks, with the Delivery Unit (DU) of the Prime Minister’s office leading the study on the state of play of service delivery at the time in Albania. They conducted surveys and brainstorming sessions to come up with possible reform approaches.

“We started implementing the ideas while still shaping them,” says Mrs. Harito. “It was during this process that we received support from international partners like the EU Commission, UNDP, and the World Bank.”

The knowledge from local and international businesses in Albania also served as invaluable sources of ideas for shaping the reform. Those with well-established customer care practices, such as banks and retail companies, provided insights into what works.

“We borrowed the idea of a one-stop shop and how to create user-friendly space from Georgia. That model provides citizens with some of the major services they need in one place, instead of having them go from one institution to another to get those services one by one,” says Mrs. Harito.

However, Albania’s unique situation required home-grown approaches as well. “The idea of a front and back office separation was a local invention,” she adds. In Georgia, the reform started with only one institution, the Ministry of Justice, which had no need for a front and back office separation. Moreover, Georgia had limited digital options when it started its reform ten years ago. Albania could draw from more modern technological opportunities.
“We knew, for instance, that it is possible for the service clerks to access integrated databases of several organizations, and hence we adjusted the approach to benefit from such technological solutions,” she says.

**BUILDING BLOCKS**

With local innovations and international good practices under review on the design front, reform management structures had begun to take shape as well.

The Inter-Ministerial Public Services Committee (IPSC) was instituted in October 2013. It is chaired by the Prime Minister, involves the ministers of all stakeholder institutions including the one responsible for local government, and is organized by the reform leader. IPSC stands at the apex of the overall reform governance arrangement.

Sitting between policy-making and operations, MIPA established a steering committee. The committee makes operational decisions, and carries out oversight. It is comprised of key institutional stakeholders in the reform, and relevant departments at the Prime Minister’s Office, such as the Delivery Unit.

MIPA also assembled the reform management group, which included for the first time in Albania a combination of both local experts and government officials. This new hybrid structure has provided the requisite expertise to manage the multifaceted reform program.

To conduct cohesive reform activities among multiple stakeholders, ministerial and technical working groups were created under MIPA’s leadership. Government institutions with specific functions under the reform – ADISA as the reform champion agency, AKSHI with its e-governance mandate, and agencies that deliver administrative public services – operate in these joint working groups, and play the primary role in carrying out the reform policies.

To position reform activities on a firm legal foundation, a new law was enacted on delivering public services at front office level in the country. With no comparable model to draw from, the new Albanian law was drafted with advice from EU and other international experts, along with extensive consultations with central and local government offices, businesses, civil society, and development partners. The law creates a unified administrative system for service delivery based on clear roles across institutions.

In addition, a visionary policy document was approved after considerable consultation amongst stakeholders, beneficiaries, and international partners. It provides long-term guidance for the reform, detailing objectives, principles, and key coordinated interventions that take place over time and with multiple institutions.

While the legal grounding for the reforms was being formulated, financing had to be put in place. While state funds have been an essential element from the inception, substantial outside funding has sustained the reform program. Early fund-raising
garnered prompt assistance from international partners with donor support from the EU, UNDP, and other international partners, as well as a funding pledge from the World Bank.

A donor pool fund, implemented by the Government of Albania in partnership with UNDP, was launched in August 2014 with primary support from the Italian Government and the UN. The Austrian Government joined later. Overall pledged donor funds, including those from the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, have amounted to $4.2 million.

The World Bank loan of $32 million was approved in August 2015, by which time a project preparation facility of $2 million became available. The entire financing package, most of which is disbursed when defined indicators are reached, became effective in March 2016.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

Immediately after the reform was approved for launch by the government in April 2014, work began on making an inventory of central government administrative services as the first order of business. “I know it sounds ridiculous, but it was actually dramatic to find that the state in 2014 did not have a list, an inventory of the services it provides. To our surprise, no one even knew what those services were. We first had to agree on something as basic as the definition of a public service. The complexity of the task was huge,” says Mrs. Harito.

About 1400 services were inventoried by July 2014, and later underwent a painstaking process of EU-standard-based classification and codification, as the basis for standardization. The inventorying process was based on a detailed questionnaire for all central government institutions to catalogue the administrative services that they provide to citizens and businesses. The Delivery Unit of the Prime Minister’s Office organized the survey, which gave it political weight.

For the first phase of the reform to be effective, the more than 1400 public services had to be prioritized. Four clear criteria were used to narrow the focus of the reform in its first phase: those with a high number of transactions, those which were considered important by citizens, those that needed the most improvements, and those that were considered international best practices in service delivery reform.

The result was a “60-30-15” formula. Those selected represented almost 60 percent of all transactions for nearly 30 percent of all services provided by less than 15 percent of institutions. Prioritization was completed by September 2014.

The following month, another milestone pushed the reform into higher gear. “Creating ADISA was a game changer,” says Mrs. Harito. ADISA is the brain which sets the standard design and monitoring of the services across all relevant government offices. It is also the public face of the services which establishes and manages customer care service windows in ADISA Centers.
More broadly, ADISA is a unique state institution. It is responsible for ensuring that citizens and businesses in the country receive quality public service delivery and easy access to these administrative services.

One aspect of its work and presence are its public service delivery centers. Bright orange and white offices are the trademark “face” of ADISA. These one-stop shop and in-one-place Citizen Service Centers, known as ADISA Centers, effectively separate front-office public interaction from back-office processing.

The system is set up so that the relevant government institutions, as service owners, retain responsibility for processing applications, but the interaction with citizens is handled entirely by the ADISA Centers. This includes submission of application, provision of information about services, and tracking of complaints.

Separating the front-office interface with the public from the back-office operations was one of the biggest shifts in the reform. Such a move put an end to direct contact between applicants and the officials processing the paperwork. This cut opportunities for corruption. It also helped focus the work of the back-office staff on their core processing responsibilities. Monthly reports to the Prime Minister’s Office provided oversight and control on the back-office delivery.

“The beauty of the front and back office separation is that by professionalizing the front office, we created a pressure on the back office to professionalize too,” says Mrs. Harito.

“In most cases, the government agencies did not have front office employees for their services. So, instead of laying off workers, we hired new staff for ADISA. We focused heavily on their training, work ethic and service orientation,” she adds.

Albania’s administration is small with 90,000 people providing service to about three million citizens. This is a low administration-to-people ratio by regional standards. “We didn’t suffer from having a large government, but from having an inefficient one,” she explains.
“We knew we would need to hire more staff to make the plan work. We hired about 30 young people as the new front office workers. That immediately cut the connection between citizens and the back office. The new workers had no bad habits to break and were not accustomed to taking bribes,” she says.

They were trained in service techniques and today receive continuous instruction in customer care and the practicalities of their day-to-day work. Their standard operating procedures emphasize standardization, and fair and considerate treatment towards everyone. Even their dress code – crisp uniforms of black pants or skirts, white shirts, and a bright orange scarf or tie – reflects a positive spirit and a uniform look-and-feel at all ADISA offices.

The start of an ADISA-managed service window incubator project took place in October 2015 with the Tirana Immovable Property Registration Office (ZRPP), which handles 40 percent of all public service delivery transactions. ZRPP was long-considered problematic because of its volume of transactions, and slow and uneven service. Moreover, it was generally perceived as corrupt, and consequently received among the lowest citizen satisfaction ratings.

The decision for ADISA to take over the front office of the biggest and most difficult service, meant that if the new agency succeeded there, it could succeed anywhere. It was a gamble, but if it worked it would serve as an indication to civil servants at other institutions that the die was cast. The reform process was moving full steam ahead and was not going to stop with ZRPP.

The incubator project at ZRPP brought immediate improvement. The number of people who received a response on time and according to administrative procedures, rose from 40 percent to 80 percent in the first four months of ADISA front office management. The control on the back office also performed as envisioned. The first test of ADISA’s ‘brain’ and ‘public face’ was successful.

While the new front office system gained momentum, re-engineering of the back offices of 10 key institutions began under an ADISA-administered project in January 2016. The mapping of targeted services had started more generally soon after the inventorying process in March 2015. The process involved analyzing and remapping workflows from application time to the delivery of services to save time and lower the administrative burden for citizens and businesses (an illustration follows below; source: ADISA).
In the meantime, work on digitization and online services of the reform was continuing. AKSHI coordinated many of those activities from the start: digitizing archives; improving and building IT systems; making those systems work more seamlessly so they “talked” to each other; and increasing the number of online services accessed through a user-friendly interface.

One year into the reform process, Prime Minister Rama said, “You can serve nothing in the cafeteria, if you have no ingredients in the kitchen. Therefore, by putting all ingredients of the service where they need to be, and by creating the conditions for a quick interaction among data to provide it, we establish a prerequisite for delivering a service that is quick, of good quality and transparent. I believe that at the end of this term we will have tangible results of this process, and within five years, without the slightest doubt, the citizens of this country will have the State on their phones.”

An early milestone in the digitization was the availability of the e-health card in February 2016. Previously, for example, a retiree who wanted to get such a card needed to provide documents from several different offices. Now, a simple ID card, which has the unique individual ID number of the citizen, is the only document required. All the relevant government IT systems are connected and interoperable.

In practice, this means that when the ID card is swiped or an ID number is entered online at e-albania, at an e-albania self-service kiosk, or by a clerk at an ADISA or institutional service window, it is matched against the relevant government databases. Confirmation of the information is instant, and the health card is ready to be printed.

This kind of digitization process is key to ensuring efficient and effective service delivery. A long-term ambition of the Government is to go ‘paperless’, which will mean putting an end to the paper-based processing of all administrative public services.

The first step to going paperless is to minimize the number of documents issued by state institutions that citizens are required to submit for administrative public services. The health e-card was a move forward in that direction.

A few months later, e-permitting for construction came online. “We inherited a primitive base for digital operation,” said Prime Minister Rama. “For informal buildings, there was no system in which an agency could interact with another. Creating the basis of interaction was our first challenge. The component of building permits is new, and now all those who want to build can apply online and have a response from the system no later than 45 days,” he said.

Meanwhile, front office success at ZRPP inspired the next big stride. A feasibility study was completed by August 2016 and resulted in a nationwide coverage plan for ADISA services. Three months later, the first one-stop shop – a new pilot ADISA Center – opened in Kavaja. ADISA moved into the first floor of a newly-constructed palace of culture offered by the municipality.

Future centers would take a similar tack. The government would either refurbish space provided by local authorities or opt to invest in upgrading abandoned public buildings
so that no new construction was necessary for additional service centers. This cost-saving approach has been repeated for all other ADISA Centers.

Queue management, welcoming premises where citizens are treated with dignity, a complaint management system and simplified procedures in service windows are some of the standards at each ADISA Center. They are also equipped with clear directions, parking facilities, waiting areas children’s play rooms, and infrastructure like ramps for people with disabilities.

In addition, ADISA prepared user-friendly service passports for each administrative service to simplify and standardize information about them. The service information passports ensure that citizens have a standardized reference to everything that is required to apply for a service, including what documents are needed, what fees must be paid and the deadlines for filing. The information passports standardize the requirements for each public service so people know exactly what they can expect.

For the first time, citizens receive information in a well-structured and predictable manner. They can find instructions through several means including the in-person service windows or at the e-albania online portal. In addition, ADISA has established a unique phone number for citizens to call to obtain information on services.

Before people even leave their homes, they can now get preliminary information from a new national phone number for public services, 11800. “We set it up because we found out that many people who went to public offices were simply seeking information. They had to waste their time, leave work, their homes, their children, to go to an office just to get the necessary information on a certain service. Now, a person knows what documents they need to take before they go to apply for a property certificate, or a civil status certificate, or whatever else they need to apply for,” says Mrs. Harito.

The ADISA Centers, like the one in Kavaja, offer centralized services from various institutions in one space. There is no reason for anyone to make separate trips to the civil status office for a certificate, or the property registration office, or the pension office. All those services and more are handled in one place.
## A TIMELINE: PROCESS TO ACTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APRIL 2014</td>
<td>Approval for launch of the reform program by the Strategic Planning Committee, led by the Prime Minister. The Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration (MIPA) is the assigned reform leader.</td>
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<tr>
<td>JULY 2014</td>
<td>Creation of an inventory of central government administrative services</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUGUST 2014</td>
<td>Start of the donor pool fund project in support of the reform program, implemented by the Government of Albania in partnership with UNDP Set-up of the reform management group Prioritization of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER 2014</td>
<td>Start of the formation of ministerial and technical agency working groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCTOBER 2014</td>
<td>Establishment of ADISA</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER 2014</td>
<td>Piloting of the SMS-based Citizen Feedback Mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEBRUARY 2015</td>
<td>Completion of the set-up of nine ministerial and up to twenty technical agency working groups as a core element of the reform governance structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARCH 2015</td>
<td>Start of the mapping of services</td>
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<td>MAY 2015</td>
<td>Launch of the revamped e-albania portal</td>
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<tr>
<td>JUNE 2015</td>
<td>Classification and codification of services based on EU best practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Preparation of a standardized application form</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Design of a unified service information passport</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUGUST 2015</td>
<td>Approval of the $32 million World Bank loan with a $2 million project preparation facility becoming available</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER 2015</td>
<td>Approval of Council of Ministers’ Decision establishing the Integrated Planning Management Group (IPMG) structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCTOBER 2015</td>
<td>Takeover of service windows at ZRPP</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANUARY 2016</td>
<td>Start of re-engineering project for all services in 10 key institutions</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEBRUARY 2016</td>
<td>Approval of Law no. 13/2016 “On the way of delivering the public services at front office level in the Republic of Albania”</td>
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<td>Launch of the e-health card</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARCH 2016</td>
<td>Entry into full effect of the World Bank $32 million loan</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAY 2016</td>
<td>Approval of long-term policy on the delivery of citizen-centric public services by the central government institutions in Albania</td>
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<td>AUGUST 2016</td>
<td>Completion of FO-BO feasibility study providing the nationwide distribution model for citizen-centric central government services by ADISA</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER 2016</td>
<td>Start of the monitoring process of the public institutions in public service delivery based on performance indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCTOBER 2016</td>
<td>Launch of the dedicated public service information call line: 11800</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER 2016</td>
<td>Opening of the first ADISA Center in Kavaja</td>
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<tr>
<td>DECEMBER 2016</td>
<td>Completion of the first nationwide third-party assessment of service delivery by a civil society organization</td>
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<td>JANUARY 2017 –</td>
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<tr>
<td>JUNE 2017</td>
<td>Establishment of ADISA Centers in Kruja, Fier, Gjirokastra</td>
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<tr>
<td>JUNE 2017</td>
<td>Completion of the design of re-engineered time-saving workflow maps for all services of 10 key central government institutions</td>
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### ENGAGEMENT & OVERSIGHT

Consultations on program policies and citizen feedback have been key components of the reform and have helped to shape improvements. More than ten roundtables were organized with stakeholders and beneficiaries on the public services law and policy documents. In the meantime, the SMS-based Citizen Feedback Mechanism, managed by the Delivery Unit at the Prime Minister’s Office, has been in place since November 2014.

Furthermore, ADISA organizes focus groups to gauge citizens’ reactions. Information from those groups help to refine operations, especially in separated front offices. The views of women, ethnic minority groups, the elderly and those with physical handicaps, are of interest in the ongoing review process.
Additionally, ADISA uses “open days” to reach out to the wider community to solicit experiences and viewpoints through online surveys. Visitors to the centers can also express their opinions through survey forms that are available in dedicated boxes in each of them.

Another performance monitoring technique used is the “mystery shopper,” whereby undisclosed visits to service windows by trained outside observers assess and help maintain quality customer service. In Albania, the first comprehensive assessment of this kind was organized by a civil society organization in December 2016.

As part of youth outreach, an ADISA queue management and service passport App began development in May 2017. It was based on an idea from an open competition among young programmers and IT students.

The reform process has been undergoing rigorous reporting. Quarterly and annual reports are produced under the Public Administration Reform Strategy and are available to the public. In addition, the World Bank Citizen-Centric Service Delivery project produces quarterly assessments that are also made public.

Periodic reporting have been taking place in meetings of the Interministerial Public Services Committee, as well as the Integrated Policy Management Group on Good Governance and Public Administration, and its thematic group on public services. Development partners are also invited to the IPMG meetings. Reports are shared with all Albanian institutional stakeholders. Donor reports are also prepared quarterly under the ISDA Support donor pool fund project implemented by the Government of Albania.

Reporting based on operational indicators have been submitted to the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit which has conducted monthly progress assessments.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF IMPACT**

Since the launch of reform activities, significant accomplishments have been achieved. The ADISA customer standards at the front office have contributed to back office implementation of uniform processing procedures. Separation of duties has meant that institutional staff in the back offices can focus entirely on performing their processing responsibilities.

In addition, lines of authority are clear. The appointment of ADISA as the standards’ authority in service delivery filled an institutional vacuum and created the responsible structure to sustain customer care standards for design of the processes, implementation, and oversight. For the first time in Albania, service delivery performance is charted through specific indicators and reported monthly.

The standardized service information passports and application forms have also improved transparency and accountability. Citizens now have easy access, either online or in-person, to specific and consistent information that is required to apply for a service, such as necessary documents, fees, and deadlines.
By June 2017, standardized information on more than 500 central government services was fully accessible to the public through multiple means, including through the dedicated call number: 11800, online at e-albania, or in person at ADISA centers.

One-stop shop public service centers have been established in the cities of Kavaja, Kruja, Fier, and Gjirokastra. In those ADISA Centers, citizens can obtain over 300 public services from as many as eight institutions, by simply going to one office. ADISA has successfully piloted co-locations with most-frequently requested local government services, including local taxes.

At Tirana ZRPP, the percentage of citizen complaints were more than halved between end of 2015 and June 2017, while applications nearly doubled. Historically, ZRPP has had one of the highest dissatisfaction rates of all central government institutions.

The impact has been even larger in the ADISA Kavaja citizen service center where customers expressing dissatisfaction with services in March 2017 were zero percent, with a marked increase in very satisfied customers compared with October 2016 before the integrated center opened.

A revamped Government portal, www.e-albania.al, assists citizens and businesses in accessing services and information online. Registered users jumped from 170,000 at the end of 2014 to more than 300,000 by July 2017, according to AKSHI.
Also, information on more than 1,220 services is available to citizens online through this portal. Overall, more services are provided online and at a higher level of automation. AKSHI reported that the number of transactional and fully connected online services rose from 119 at the end of 2014, to nearly 500 by the end of June 2017.

Digitization was an important contributor to the early successes, such as in the application for the compulsory health insurance card, which now only require the personal ID card that each Albanian citizen holds.

Similarly, applications for construction permits have been simplified because of the reforms. Construction applications are now carried out online with electronic signatures. The 2017 World Bank *Doing Business Report* noted an 80-place jump for Albania in the rankings for dealing with construction permits.

Another major accomplishment is the growing number of interconnected government databases. They have risen from 17 in 2014 to 42 by the end of 2016. Interconnected databases are essential for services to be provided online. More fundamentally, interoperability allows for automatic data exchanges and speeds processing, efficiency, and accuracy. The investment now is towards ensuring that databases exchange all relevant data automatically amongst themselves.

Integrity issues also showed improvement once the reform activities began. A nationwide household survey on service delivery was conducted March-April 2016. It covered a representative sample of 2000 households and 200 individuals from the Roma population, and examined their experiences with service delivery over the previous 12-month period. Questions included encounters related to corruption. Seven percent of those who had direct contact with at least one institution said that a bribe was either implied or requested during the interaction. Meanwhile, the Citizen Feedback Mechanism surveys at the ADISA ZRPP service windows indicated no incidences of corruption at the front office.

The service delivery reform has reduced the possibilities for bribes to expedite procedures and cut through red tape. Standardization of processes has precluded the need for such petty corruption. In the past, processing speed and transparency received the lowest ratings from citizens, followed by fairness and appropriate office locations. Now, with the overhaul of the application processes at ADISA service windows, citizens are expressing high levels of satisfaction.

The ADISA standardized services are at par with those offered at banks or telecom windows. Citizens have indicated that the customer care at ADISA Centers is comparable to what they usually receive at a private company rather than a public institution.

Monitoring and tracking performance, with specified success indicators, has put pressure on service processing to perform on time and with quality care. In addition, the regular surveys, focus groups, opinion boxes, and the Citizen Feedback Mechanism have provided a range of opportunities for individuals to report problems and make suggestions.
The needs of women, and the vulnerable, including the elderly, have been essential elements in all stages of the reform process. Their voices have been brought into the picture through forums and surveys during the planning, assessments, and feedback steps. Data disaggregation has aimed to capture the impact of the reforms on these groups so that necessary adjustment can be made.

To help increase access to services by women, the ADISA customer service center model includes a playground for children so that mothers can focus on the business they have come to take care of.

In addition, a “quota” system has been set up to ensure that men, as well as women, serve as window clerks that provide face-to-face assistance to customers, to break with preconceived gender roles. Gender concerns are also included in the training curricula for all ADISA staff that interacts with citizens.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some important factors have contributed to the continued progress in the citizen-centric service delivery reform in Albania:

High-level political support

Strong political will at the highest levels of government has been an essential factor for success. The appointment of a minister in charge of the cross-cutting reform, and the establishment of ADISA as the reform champion institution, meant that the necessary financial and human resources were readily available as the reform advanced.

With multiple offices and institutions charged with carrying out the reforms, high-level engagement has been crucial to harmonize the changes and keep up the momentum. Facilitation by the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit, combined with work of the joint teams from ADISA and other relevant agencies, have fostered coordination and sustainability.

This regular interaction between the management teams and the technical experts has meant that effective practices across institutions can be easily improved and shared. Decisions from the Council of Ministers and instructions from MIPA have provided the necessary regulatory foundations.

Finances Secured

A critical aspect of support was securing funding for the reform outside of the state budget. This included the early pledge from the World Bank and the donor pool fund implemented by the Government of Albania in partnership with UNDP, with key contributions from the UN, Italian Government, and now Austria. The commitment of state funds and seed donor support, particularly at the onset of the reform was essential to get the activities started.
Moreover, reform-related activities are now approved across institutions as part of an integrated planning and budgeting process from the start. The needs are included within individual budgets as they are set, instead of negotiated later as add-ons.

**Legal Instruments**

The establishment of the legal framework also provided the grounding for the whole process. When an activity gains momentum, even now, it is codified as legislation and co-signed with partner institutions, thus providing further legitimacy.

**Strong Policy**

Success has depended on the comprehensive long-term policy on service delivery. It has served as the foundation and clear vision for all aspects of the reform. The document has provided a coherent reference point that guides the change process rather than micro-manage it.

**Pilot Tests**

Trying new approaches, and using incubators to test new initiatives, proved effective in refining the model and building buy-in from relevant constituents, including citizens and public administration staff. This stepped method aided in breaking resistance to new endeavors.

An energetic effort from Albanian officials to build on existing examples in the EU, and effective initiatives elsewhere, has served to enrich and inform Albanian reforms. Lessons learned from similar experiences have provided a springboard for Albania to try innovative approaches.

In fact, Albania is already sharing its own practices and knowledge with others embarking on comparable paths, like Kosovo and Serbia. The Regional School of Public Administration, which Albania serves as rotating chairmanship in 2017, also facilitates sharing of the Albanian model with other Western Balkan countries.

**Ongoing Review**

With success comes added pressures to expand the scope of changes. The governance structure and citizen review mechanisms have ensured that expansion occurs organically and in line with a staged approach within the overall reform agenda.

**Looking Forward**

The story of the public services modernization reform in Albania is far from complete. The transformational shifts in the way the state serves its citizens will continue over the coming years as embedded in the long-term policy on the delivery of citizen-centric public services.
In August 2017, Prime Minister Edi Rama looked to the future of this ongoing priority reform in his second term, as he assigned the Deputy Prime Minister, Mrs. Senida Mesi, to take over as reform leader. He talked specifically about the end of the paper chase for citizens:

“Our goal in the next four years will be to become among the states with the smallest number of necessary documents required for delivering public services. The citizen must come in contact only once with the State in getting a service.”

Deputy Prime Minister Senida Mesi notes: “We have embarked upon ambitious changes, and we will continue going ‘E’, standing for effectiveness and efficiency, to impact the service delivery experience for all citizens and businesses in Albania.”