

## **Digitalization of the Macedonian public administration: a pathway to prevent maladministration and illegal activities**

**Abstract:** The global shift towards the digitalization of public administration presents a potent force in improving service delivery, efficiency, and curbing maladministration. This paper explores this transition in the Republic of North Macedonia, emphasizing the potential of digital platforms like e-governance portals and eIDs in reducing bureaucracy and fostering accessibility to public services. Despite the positive strides, a concrete evaluation of its impact remains elusive. The paper is segmented into several sections. Initially, it establishes a theoretical foundation, correlating digitalization with reduced maladministration, supplemented by comparative experiences. Following this, the focus shifts to the specific national context, discussing citizens' perceptions and other key indicators concerning maladministration and illicit activities. Subsequent sections delve into an analysis of Macedonia's recent legislation and ongoing projects, such as the National Portal of e-Services and the Catalogue of Services, assessing their efficacy and implementation hurdles like law inconsistencies and limited technological infrastructure. In conclusion, the paper underscores the necessity for a comprehensive approach to digitalization, encompassing legislative amendments and organizational reforms, alongside technological advancements. While Macedonia has initiated this process, sustained efforts are vital to surmount existing obstacles and maximize the benefits of digital technology in mitigating maladministration.

**Keywords:** digitalization, Macedonian administration, maladministration, digital transformation, electronic services

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the global paradigm shift towards the digitalization of public administration has been markedly visible. Governments worldwide are adopting digital tools to streamline their operations, foster transparency, and enhance service delivery.<sup>1</sup> This transformative force enhancing effectiveness can also be instrumental in diminishing maladministration and other illicit activities that have been an underpinning issue in many administrative sectors. Within this global narrative, the Republic of North Macedonia (hereinafter: Macedonia) finds itself at a critical juncture, where it aspires to fully realize the potential benefits of a digital future in its public administration, however does not succeed in doing so.

In Macedonia, there is an optimistic view that pivoting towards a digital future can foster a significant positive change.<sup>2</sup> Concrete steps have been observed in several fields: the introduction of the Open Finance Portal,<sup>3</sup> with the aim to guarantee the transparency and tracking of public spendings, and the complete digitalization of the process of submitting claims to access public information by the Agency for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information.<sup>4</sup> The policy creators, particularly the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, acknowledge the imperative of digitalization, envisioning a future where all public authorities would deliver services such as decisions, confirmations, and

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<sup>1</sup> Digital Mahbub (2023).

<sup>2</sup> Karai & Mojsovski (2020).

<sup>3</sup> The "Open Finances" portal enables individuals to follow all payments from the accounts of institutions funded by the central budget in Macedonia. More information is available at: <https://open.finance.gov.mk/mk/about>.

<sup>4</sup> The Agency for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information implemented a portal where the citizen can submit a request to access public information to every information holder (public institution). The portal is available at: <https://slobodenpristap.mk/>.

licenses electronically via the National Portal for Electronic Services.

However, despite being well-received as a concept, and being earmarked as a priority in strategic documents, such as the "Strategy for Public Administration Reform 2018-2022" and the draft "Strategy for Public Administration Reform 2023-2030", the implementation has been lagging. The availability of digital services for citizens and businesses remains markedly low, and the extent of the adoption of document management systems across various public authorities is unclear. Moreover, units of local self-government have been conspicuously absent in most digitalization efforts, indicating a notable gap in the approach. Therefore, this research seeks to delve deep into the intricacies of digitalization implementation in the Macedonian public administration, aiming to pinpoint avenues for improvement and explore its potential in combating maladministration and illegal activities therein.

## **2. Theoretical framework (digitalization vs. maladministration)**

Digitalization, in the context of public administration, encompasses the utilization of digital technologies to modify, enhance, and streamline the operation of governmental services.<sup>5</sup> This process involves the transformation from traditional paper-based systems to digital platforms, fostering improved accessibility, efficiency, and transparency. At the core of this transformation is the ability to integrate data and information systems which ultimately brings about electronic sharing of data between public authorities, reducing of *in vivo* contacts between them and the citizens (and businesses),

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<sup>5</sup> Similarly: Knowledge and Policy (2021).

electronic management of documents which also covers the automatic assignment of cases, *etc.*

Respectively, the advent of digital tools and platforms in the administrative domain can diminish maladministration significantly. Namely, the notion of maladministration covers all irregular administrative actions, starting from illegal, inconsistent, unfair decisions (administrative acts), other illegal and unjust actions, as well as invalid regulations and small omissions (excluding the trivial and meaningless mistakes).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, digitalization may affect maladministration in various ways, for example:

- since the *in vivo* contact between the administrative servants<sup>7</sup> and the clients are reduced, there is no possibility for the former to be rude, discourteous or ill-disposed to the latter, providing scarce or confusing information when asked for it, *etc.*<sup>8</sup>;
- if the documents are managed digitally, the higher-ranked servants can easily monitor if their subordinates perform their tasks in a timely manner, *i.e.*, if there are any delays in deciding on citizens' and businesses' applications;
- whenever there are such possibilities, citizens and businesses can monitor themselves the current status of their case and, in cases of illegitimate delays, they can signal the managers of the public authorities;
- citizens and businesses are not asked to provide documentation as proof along with their application, since the public authorities can obtain all necessary information

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<sup>6</sup> Davinić (2013) 134.

<sup>7</sup> The term “administrative servants” in the Macedonian legislation is used for all individuals employed in the public sector to perform administrative tasks such as HR, normative tasks, legal tasks, statistical tasks, etc. Other term that can be used for these individuals is “civil servants”.

<sup>8</sup> The direct contact is perceived as the main problem in terms of maladministration and failure to provide services. Viendyasari (2020).

- on the applicant digitally by accessing other authorities' registers<sup>9</sup>;
- the digitalization of the process may also point out which steps are redundant or unnecessary, streamlining the procedures.

Globally, numerous countries have successfully embraced digitalization to curb maladministration. For instance, the experiences of nations such as Estonia and Singapore stand as testimony to the transformative power of digitalization in public administration. These countries have effectively utilized e-governance platforms, digital identities (eIDs), and electronic document management systems to foster a seamless, transparent, and efficient administrative mechanism, setting benchmarks for others to follow.

### **3. National context: citizens' perception of the administration**

At the forefront of Macedonia's administrative landscape is the pressing need to modernize and streamline its public administration processes. This becomes more and more vivid, as the citizens' and businesses' perceptions are becoming worse over time. Yet, as the country moves towards a digital future, it finds itself grappling with the complexities of effectively transitioning from traditional administrative procedures to more technologically advanced solutions. This process, while marked by some successes, such as the implementation of the National

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<sup>9</sup> For better understanding, we are providing an example. For instance, it might be stipulated – in the laws or bylaws – that only companies with more than 100 employees may obtain licenses to perform certain business operations. In the case of digitalization, the company shall not need to provide lists of employees when submitting an application to obtain the license. Instead, the public authority issuing the license will be able to obtain the information on the number of employees at the applicant by accessing the registers of another public authority such as an employment bureau, trade registry, *etc.*

Portal for Electronic Services, is also characterized as lethargic, slow, and with almost complete neglect of local self-government units in the digitalization initiatives. More attention is paid to these issues in the text below. At this point the focus is on citizens' perceptions towards maladministration in the country.

One might begin with an NGO survey from 2017<sup>10</sup> which illustrated that citizens are dissatisfied with the services they get from the administration. When citizens were asked if they find that the money which is used to finance the public administration is proportionate to the quality of services, the answers were as follows:

- completely agree: 8.4%
- agree: 16.5%
- neither agree, nor disagree: 28.6%
- disagree: 26.4%
- completely disagree: 9.3%
- refuses to answer or does not know: 10.9%

Simply put, more than third of the citizens are dissatisfied with the administrative services in the country, while another third of them are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Although this question does not refer specifically to maladministration, it is quite indicative. It is a possibility that those who are not satisfied have been experiencing such practices.

Similar survey was published in 2019 as well, covering the period from 2017 to 2019.<sup>11</sup> As a general conclusion, 44.4% of respondents in Macedonia found that the work of the public administration is bad. If one goes into more details, the information is even worse. More than 60% of respondents

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<sup>10</sup> Малеска Сачмароска and Гоцевски (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Граѓанска алијанса за транспарентност (2019).

found that there is clientelism and privileges when providing services in the public administration, as well as that the only way to obtain a service is to have connections.<sup>12</sup> Answering the question “[h]ave you personally faced problems when using public administration services”:

- 46.4% of respondents answered ‘yes’ in 2017;
- 50.4% of respondents answered ‘yes’ in 2019.

Moreover, when asked which are the problems they most often face when asking for services from the public administration, respondents pointed out:

- being redirected from one counter to another/unclear procedures;
- employees not being service oriented;
- employees being unprofessional/bad attitude from the employees;
- deadlines being breached/slow pace/procedures lasting too long;
- bad quality of services.

In other words, it is becoming more and more vivid that maladministration practices are widely spread, since everything that was mentioned is in fact a manifestation of maladministration.

The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption also commissioned a survey of the citizens’ perceptions on the public administration, which was conducted by a private company, and published in October 2020.<sup>13</sup> The findings are

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<sup>12</sup> Speaking of having connections, it is vivid that illicit activities are implied. Citizens are speaking of a form of patronage (certain individuals or businesses are prioritized when providing services since they have close personal or other ties with the administrative servants or the political appointees who are on top of a certain administrative authority).

<sup>13</sup> Тим институт (2020).

(more or less) the same as the ones referred to above. The responses of question 16 – where individuals were asked to rate the transparency/openness of the central authority in the delivery of public services (services from the public institutions to the citizens) – indicated that:

- 25% of citizens found that the delivery of public services is absolutely non-transparent;
- 49% of citizens found that the delivery of public services is somewhat transparent;
- 15% of citizens found that the delivery of public services is very transparent;
- 11% of citizens did not know.

In the same survey citizens were also asked to rate the transparency of the local authorities in providing public services (services from the public institutions for the citizens). The ratio was almost identical as in question 16:

- 26% of citizens found that the delivery of public services by the local authorities is absolutely non-transparent;
- 48% of citizens found that the delivery of public services by the local authorities is somewhat transparent;
- 16% of citizens found that the delivery of public services by the local authorities is very transparent;
- 10% of citizens did not know.

Therefore, one might conclude that citizens in Macedonia do perceive maladministration to occur regularly in their country. This is a vital indicator of the progress of the country and makes the digitalization efforts even more important. Yet, even though it cannot be disputed that digitalization is vital, one cannot be overly optimistic. The slow pace of implementation of digital services and the limited reach of these services to the broader populace are quite worrisome. The government obviously needs to put more efforts and resources to enhance e-services and e-governance altogether. To have a better understanding, the



following text focuses on the current policies and laws in light of digitalization, as well as the factual success of the initiatives.

#### **4. Laws and current projects surrounding public administration digitalization in Macedonia**

Macedonia has been proactive in drafting legislative frameworks to govern and guide the digital transformation of its public administration. In this part the backbone legislation of the country's digitalization drive is examined.

The Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services: This law embodies the principle of ensuring that digital documents possess the same legal status as traditional paper documents. Furthermore, it provides the foundational framework for electronic identification (eID), ensuring secure and seamless interactions in the electronic environment. Basically, with the adoption of this law, Macedonia completely harmonized its legislation in terms of electronic documents and eID with the Regulation (EU) 910/2014 on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market.

In accordance with this law, a Rulebook on the mandatory elements of electronic documents was adopted, along with other bylaws, which additionally operationalized the provisions from the law.

The laws regulating electronic services: Two laws are vital in terms of digital services provided by public authorities – the Law on General Administrative Procedure (hereinafter: LGAP) and the Law on Electronic Management and Electronic Services. The LGAP sets out the basis for electronic

communication between the public authorities and parties,<sup>14</sup> when the latter seek services from the former. In addition, the LGAP obliged all public authorities to communicate among each other electronically, as well as to obtain all necessary documents and information which are available, either in their or on other public authorities' registers *ex officio* in the administrative procedures. This means that, according to the LGAP, citizens and businesses were no longer obliged to provide additional documents as evidence when applying for service (e.g. documents which provide their citizenship, status, etc.). Instead, public authorities were supposed to communicate amongst themselves and share documents. The Law on Electronic Management and Electronic Services further regulates digital services. In summary, this law obliges public authorities to: (a) record the services they provide to citizens and businesses to the Catalogue of Services, so that it is clear how many services each public authority provides, making it easier for the policy-coordinators (e.g. the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, as well as the Government) to monitor how many of them have been digitalized, but also making it clear for citizens and businesses how to obtain a certain service; (b) enable citizens and businesses to obtain all services (with the exception of the ones which are by law only provided in writing)<sup>15</sup> electronically, through the National Portal for Electronic Services, which means that citizens and businesses should be able to apply for the service online and to also receive whatever document that comes as an output of the procedure online; (c) issue all digital documents in accordance with the previously mentioned Law

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<sup>14</sup> Parties are the natural or legal entities who are entering an administrative procedure in which a public authority decides on their rights, legal interests (*i.e.*, provides them a service) or their obligations.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, not all administrative services can be offered online. Some laws stipulate that in order to obtain a certain service the citizen or the business must submit a written application and must undergo an interview or similar activities which have to be *in vivo*.

on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services; (d) use the National Platform for Interoperability to share information and documents – in a standardized format – with other public authorities, so that all information on citizens and businesses which are needed to provide a service and are held by in a public register, will be obtained *ex officio*.

The Law on Central Population Registry: in accordance with this law the Central Population Registry was set up. The Central Population Registry was built by integrating the data from various bases, so a comprehensive and up-to-date record of the Macedonian population was created. Thus, once a public authority receives a digital application for a service, as per the Law on Electronic Management and Electronic Services, it may enter the Central Population Registry and obtain his/her personal data.

Each piece of legislation marks a critical step towards creating a conducive environment for the seamless integration of digital solutions in the Macedonian public administration. Aside from the modern laws and bylaws, however, the ground-level implementation of administrative digitalization presents a mixed picture. Let us review the successes of the projects and initiatives we mentioned when elaborating upon the laws:

- Catalogue of Services: There are currently more than 1,200 public authorities which have recorded the services they provide in the Catalogue of Services, meaning that the mapping of the services provided by public authorities has been successful.
- National Portal for Electronic Services: Currently only 85 services are available on the National Portal for Electronic Services.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, one cannot say that the National

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<sup>16</sup> According to the home page of the National Portal for Electronic Services in September 2023: <https://uslugi.gov.mk/>. Other 200 and some services are also available online, but not through the centralized National Portal for

Portal for Electronic Services is a success. Regardless the fact that the National Portal for Electronic Services is user-friendly and has a capacity to serve many citizens, it is rather rarely used – approximately 50,000 applications have been submitted through it ever since it was established in 2019. The National Portal for Electronic Services is not used by the units of local self-government, only by the central public authorities.

- National Platform for Interoperability: Hosted by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, the National Platform for Interoperability is set up and functional. Significant resources are invested for its maintenance (hardware and software), as provided in the Strategy for Public Administration Reform (2023-2030),<sup>17</sup> yet very few institutions actually use it and share information and documents through it. To be precise, only 53 public authorities are using the Platform. Bearing in mind that the currently in Macedonia there are more than 1,300 public authorities,<sup>18</sup> this number is devastating.

Therefore, one may conclude that the public administration (and the public sector as a whole)<sup>19</sup> is not digitalized. Unfortunately, the vision laid down in strategic documents like the Strategy for Public Administration Reform 2018-2022 and the Strategy for Public Administration Reform 2023-2030 obviously clashes with on-ground realities. The improvement of this situation depends on the accuracy of the diagnosis – why is the public

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Electronic Services but through other portals used by a single public authority (e.g. the Revenue Office have their own system, etc.). This fragmentation is not positive for citizens, it would be much easier for them if all services are available on the one National Portal for Electronic Services.

<sup>17</sup> Page 35 and 36 of the Strategy for Public Administration Reform.

<sup>18</sup> Министерство за информатичко општество и администрација (2023) 4.

<sup>19</sup> The term public sector is broader than the term public administration since it covers other public authorities aside from the administrative ones, such as courts, public enterprises, state-owned companies, etc.

administration not digitalized? We shall endeavor to find the answer.

## **5. Assessment of the digitalization process: why is the public administration not yet digitalized?**

### **5.1 Legal obstacles**

The digitalization of Macedonia's public administration, while laudable in its objectives, faces several hurdles in its path. While the laws enlisted above have laid a solid foundation for the digital transformation, there seems to still be legal obstacles for digital services. Namely, there have been statements by individuals employed at the government that there are substantive laws which regulate certain administrative services, and which have provisions not yet aligned with the digitalization laws. As a former advisor to the Prime Minister pointed out in 2021: “Over 100 laws should be harmonized with the 3 laws for digitalization (Law on Central Population Registry; Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services and the Law on Electronic Management and Electronic Services)”.<sup>20</sup> The Government should encourage such research, so that the precise number of laws which are not harmonized with the digitalization laws is outlined.

A field analysis suggests that while the laws might not be such a problem, the bylaws for providing services might be. The best way to illustrate this is a case study. So, several public authorities have been taken into consideration as examples, and their bylaws have been analyzed.

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<sup>20</sup> Герзаова Мујчин, Лечевска, Колозова (2021) 5.

In the following table examples of bylaws can be found under which electronic services are not allowed and the authorities which have adopted them:

Ministry of Economy	
Rulebook on the form and the content of the license A and B for performing tourist activities.	Has a provision under which the license for the tourist agencies may only be issued in writing, on a A4 size paper in green color, with the signature of the minister.
Rulebook on the form and the content of the template of the request for categorization of an accommodation facility.	Has a provision under which the request for categorization of a hotel is submitted in a written form, on a A-4 white sheet of paper.
Rulebook on the form and content of the request for issuing a license for the sale of alcoholic beverages, the form and content of the license for the sale of alcoholic beverages and the form, content and manner of keeping the register for issued and seized licenses.	Has a provision under which the request for license to sale alcohol is submitted in a written form, on a A-4 format.
Rulebook on the form and content of the request for registration in the Registers of manufacturers of tobacco products and related products, the necessary evidence and documentation and the closer conditions for manufacturing of tobacco products and related products.	Has a provision under which the application to be registered as a tobacco producer has to be submitted in a written form on an A-4 size white paper.
Ministry of Transport and Communications	
Rulebook on the form and the contents of the request for	Has a provision which stipulates that only written

license for the development of urban plans, the form and content of the request for the issuance of an authorization for development of urban plans and the needed documentation.	requests, on an A4 size white paper, are accepted.
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy	
Rulebook on the format and content of the application for registration in the Register of Legal Entities which place garbage on the wholesale market.	As in the rulebooks before, there is a provision under which the application can only be submitted in writing.
Rulebook on the format and content of the application for registration in the Register of Legal which place garbage on the retail market.	Just as in the previous rulebook, there is a provision under which the application can only be submitted in writing.

To start off, we took into account the Ministry of Economy which provides hundreds of services to businesses. These services vary from issuing licenses to perform tourist activities (*e.g.*, to become a tourist agent or to have a tourist agency) to categorizing hotels and issuing licenses for the sale of alcohol or tobacco. The rulebooks we cited explicitly stipulate that only written applications for services are going to be accepted, as well as that only written output documents (*e.g.*, licenses) are issued. To make matters even more disappointing, the rulebooks are not old and outdated. For instance, the rulebook which regulates the issuance of alcohol sale license is adopted in 2022 and amended in 2023, yet the provisions on the written application have remained therein. The Ministry of Transport and Communications also provides hundreds of services to businesses, especially in the areas of construction, urbanism, *etc.* Still, the cited rulebook has outdated provisions which explicitly regulate that only written applications are acceptable. Again, this would be something to understand if the rulebook is

old and precedes the new laws which are the backbone of the public administration digitalization. However, this is not the case. The rulebook is from 2020. Similar case is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy. The rulebooks' provisions explicitly state that only written submission of applications is possible. Unlike the other rulebooks, these ones are at least older.

So, in Macedonia there are some laws and many bylaws which are not aligned with the laws on digitalization. Thus, the question of how to overcome this difficulty arises. There are two possible approaches.

According to the first approach, since the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services contains a provision that each digital document is equivalent to the written ones, the ministries and all other authorities should start accepting digital applications for services and issuing digital output documents (licenses, decisions, *etc.*) regardless of the provisions in the substantive laws and bylaws which require written form. The Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services may be considered as a *lex specialis* for the form of the documents, so it may derogate the rules on the forms of the documents from the substantive laws. In addition, the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services is a higher legal act than the bylaws. Therefore, the bylaws' provisions which are contradictory to the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services should not be applied. This approach would be in line with the strategic digitalization goal, it would be efficient, since no further amendments would be needed and, ultimately, would be in accordance with the service-orientation principle for the public administration, which is set out in the Law on General Administrative Procedure. To support this interpretation, the Government



might issue a conclusion which will be mandatory for all ministries and other authorities that report to it. The conclusion would be that the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services should be directly applied when digital applications have been submitted. The Government would not be able to oblige the units of local self-governments with such an instruction since they are completely independent from the central authorities, however, it might suggest they comply with it.

If the first alternative is not acceptable for the ministries and all other authorities, a process of detecting and amending all bylaws which need harmonization with the digitalization laws is initiated and coordinated by the Government. This process should not take more than a few months, bearing in mind that the bylaws are adopted/amended by the ministers, *i.e.*, no collective decisions are needed.

So, aiming not to overburden the text with legal obstacles, we might conclude that there are some legal obstacles for the digitalization of the administration in terms of providing electronic services. However, in the case where political will truly exists, these difficulties – which are of a formal nature – shall no longer be a problem. A holistic approach is more than ever necessary. The Government should enforce the digitalization agenda in the entire public administration and public sector. The holistic approach is emphasized for a simple reason: there would be no point to digitalize one or several public authorities while most of them are still functioning in an outdated way, since in that case the person or business might receive a digital document from one public authority which would not be accepted by another public authority, making it obsolete.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, the person obtains a digital confirmation that he/she is a citizen of Macedonia. The confirmation is then printed out and attached to an

## 5.2 Challenges faced by public sector employees

A significant challenge in the digitalization journey has been the response from the existing workforce in the public sector.

First, one cannot deny that there is resistance to change on the side of the public administration. In fact, this is the case with any public organization.<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to quantify and precisely assess how resistant to change the public administration in Macedonia is. Yet, it is sure that resistance to change exists, especially since the authorities are reluctant to amend and modernize their bylaws so that they would be able to provide digital services.

If the digitalization laws are in force for more than three years now, why would a ministry adopt a bylaw which still requires written applications for service, on a A4 white sheet of paper? It is hardly the ignorance that is the problem; bylaws are usually drafted by employees which work on normative issues their entire careers, and they regularly follow the novelties in the legislation. As stated in a recent Macedonian publication,<sup>23</sup> experts in a focus group found that there is “inertia of the administration itself”.

Another problem might be the capacity building and training. The employees in the Macedonian public administration and public sector are on average 46.03 years old (47.04 for men and 45.24 for women).<sup>24</sup> It is fair to say that individuals which are

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application to receive pension. If the Pension and Disability Fund does not accept printouts of digital documents with digital signature, the citizen would again have to go to the counters of the Ministry of Interior and obtain a written confirmation for the citizenship status.

<sup>22</sup> Amjad & Regman (2018).

<sup>23</sup> Blazevski (2022) 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Information Society and Administration (2023) 4.

45+ might have difficulties to get acquainted with new technologies and software solutions such as the National Portal for Electronic Services. For this, they would need additional training. The competent authority to provide generic trainings is the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, as per the Law on Administrative Servants. However, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration does not include ICT technologies trainings in its annual training programs. In the annual program for generic trainings for 2023 the Ministry of Information Society and Administration included the following topics:<sup>25</sup> problem solving, learning and development, communication skills, achieving results, working with others, strategies and innovations, client orientation, development and progress, change management, creation and defining of policies, evaluations of programs and policies, equality and non-discrimination, regulatory impact assessment, mentorship. The very same topics were covered in the annual program for 2022,<sup>26</sup> 2021,<sup>27</sup> 2020,<sup>28</sup> and probably in the years before. Therefore, a vacuum exists. The Ministry of Information Society and Administration does not provide trainings which shall improve the servants' IT knowledge and skills necessary to provide digital services. Of course, the public authorities can provide specific training for their employees aside from the generic trainings by the Ministry of Information Society and

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<sup>25</sup> Available at:  
[https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl\\_files/documents/training/gpgo\\_2023.pdf](https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/training/gpgo_2023.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Available at:  
[https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl\\_files/documents/training/gpgo\\_2022.pdf](https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/training/gpgo_2022.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Available at:  
[https://obse.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl\\_files/documents/training/gpgo2021.pdf](https://obse.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/training/gpgo2021.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Available at:  
[https://obse.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl\\_files/documents/training/gpgo2021.pdf](https://obse.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/training/gpgo2021.pdf).

Administration. But not all of them have the resources for that. Also, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration does have some specific training for cyber issues, but not many of the public sector employees are covered. To conclude, the generic trainings provided to all public sector employees should include computer skills and managing the National Portal for Electronic Services, the Interoperability Portal, etc.

### 5.3 Limited Technological Infrastructure

The infrastructural constraints cannot be understated in the journey towards a fully digital public administration. The existing technological infrastructure has been found lacking in several aspects, including:

- **Network infrastructure:** The network infrastructure required to support the increased load of digital transactions is still in the development phase. However, it seems that the network infrastructure is quite weak. Even though there is no specific information, the Strategy for Public Administration 2023-2030 refers to the lack of hardware equipment and the lack of connection of the institutions with a stable internet.
- **Hardware:** The same citation goes for the hardware, even though there is no single analysis of the current state.

The lack of specific information in this respect strongly signals the need of an analysis, coordinated by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration and the Government (and perhaps the audit authority), of the technological infrastructure in the entire public sector, so that policies are built upon evidence, not arbitrary assessments.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations for future steps**

The trajectory of Macedonia's digitalization effort holds significant promise, not only in revolutionizing the nation's administrative landscape but also as a powerful tool to drastically reduce maladministration and foster a culture of efficiency. If digitalized properly, the public administration shall be more service-oriented, and citizens and businesses shall spend significantly less time and finances to effectuate their rights and legal interests. This transition, though laden with challenges, stands as a beacon of hope for instituting systemic improvements that would significantly diminish avenues for illegal activities and bureaucratic inefficiency. There is a notable potential for digital technologies to act as catalysts in restructuring public administration into a more transparent, efficient, and accountable entity.

To fully capitalize on the potential of digitalization in mitigating maladministration, Macedonia needs to focus on the following strategies which are specifically tailored to address this core objective:

1. Overcoming the legal obstacles for digitalization: Although several laws have been adopted to ensure digitalization of the public administration – the law which regulates electronic documents and eID, the LGAP, the Law on Electronic Management and Electronic Services and the Law on Central Population Registry –, there are still substantive laws and bylaws which are not aligned. These substantive laws and bylaws contain provisions under which administrative services may only be provided in writing, which is completely inconsistent with the digitalization agenda. In order to overcome the obstacle, the Government may take one of two possible approaches: (a) to issue an instruction for all public authorities that report

to it, explaining that the law regulating electronic documents derogates all provisions in other laws or bylaws which do not recognize the digital documents as valid or (b) to initiate a process for detection of all laws and bylaws which contain provisions not aligned with the digitalization laws and to amend them accordingly.

2. Fortifying technological infrastructure: A focused initiative to bolster the technological infrastructure is vital, catering not only to the increased demand but also ensuring an environment where maladministration finds it difficult to thrive.
3. Capacity building: Instituting extensive training programs to enhance the digital proficiency of public sector employees, fostering an environment where technological advancements directly contribute to reducing maladministration.
4. Holistic digitalization: A comprehensive digitalization strategy that encompasses every tier of government, including the grassroots level, ensuring uniformity in efforts to curb maladministration through digital means.
5. Public awareness and education: launching robust public awareness campaigns to elucidate the potential of digital services in reducing maladministration, thereby encouraging active citizen participation in this transformative journey.

Ultimately, this should result with: (a) many more services available on the National Portal for Electronic Services; (b) effective electronic communication between the public authorities, *i.e.*, sharing of data and documents thorough the Interoperability Portal; (c) better experience for the citizens; (d) reduced direct contact between the administration and citizens, which reduces the possibility of maladministration and is expected to increase the positive perceptions.

At this pivotal juncture, Macedonia has the golden opportunity to transform its administrative domain into a more accountable, transparent, and efficient entity. The road ahead may be challenging, but with sustained efforts and a focused approach, Macedonia can indeed usher in a future where the administration stands as a true partner in facilitating societal growth and prosperity, free of the shackles of maladministration.

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