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National study on policy coordination processes in Albania



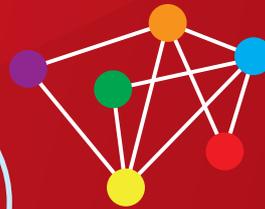
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November 2021



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Contents

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The Regional School for Public Administration (ReSPA), as the inter-governmental organisation for enhancing regional cooperation, promoting shared learning and supporting the development of public administration in the Western Balkans, helps governments in the region develop better public administration, public services and overall governance systems for their citizens and businesses, and prepare them for membership in the European Union (EU). ReSPA Members are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, while Kosovo* is a beneficiary.

ReSPA improves regional cooperation, promote shared learning and support the development of public administrations within the Western Balkans, and support the integration of the countries in the region into the EU.

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Abbreviations

Item	Description
AFMIS	Albanian Financial Management Information System
CoG	Centre of Government
CoM	Council of Ministers
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CCPARS	Cross-Cutting Strategy on Public Administration Reform
DDGG	Department of Development & Good Governance
DMRPF	Directorate of Management of PFM Reform
DIP	Development & Integration Partner
DMRPF	Directorate of Management of PFM Reform
DTS	Donor Technical Secretariat
EAMIS	External Assistance Management Information System
EC	European Commission
EI	European Integration
EI IIWGs	European Integration Inter-Institutional Working Groups
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
EU	European Union
EUD	Delegation of the EU to Albania
GG	Good Governance
GG-PAR	Good Governance & Public Administration Reform
GoA	Government of Albania
GAWP	Government Annual Work Programme
INSTAT	Institute for Statistics
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IPA SMC	IPA Sector Monitoring Committee
IPMG	Integrated Policy Management Group
IPS	Integrated Planning System
IPSIS	IPS Information System
IWM	Integrated Water Management

LM	Line Ministry
MEFA	Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs
MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
MTBP	Medium-Term Budget Plan
NPEI	National Plan for European Integration
NSDI	National Strategy for Development & Integration (2015–2020)
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PDC	Policy Development and Coordination
PFM	Public Finance Management
PFM CC	PFM Coordinating Committee
PFM TC	PFM Technical Committee
PM129	Prime Minister Order No. 129 (dated 21 September 2015)
PM157	Prime Minister Order No. 157 (dated 22 October 2018)
PPD	Policy Priorities Document
RCD	Regulatory and Compliance Department
ReSPA	Regional School of Public Administration
RoP	Rules of Procedure
SCEUI	State Committee on EU Integration
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
SMC	Sector Monitoring Committee
SPC	Strategic Planning Committee
SPC/NIC	Strategic Planning Committee/National Investment Committee
SSC	Sector Steering Committee
ThG	Thematic Group

1

Introduction

This national study on policy coordination processes in Albania is part of ReSPA's ongoing efforts to strengthen the quality of public administration reform and policy coordination in the Western Balkans, including through the provision of policy papers on specific aspects of policy coordination in ReSPA member countries.

The study provides an overview and analysis of policy development and policy coordination processes and structures in Albania, identifying key ways to strengthen policy coordination as a tool for the more efficient implementation of public administration reforms.

More specifically, the study provides an analysis of the current strategic and legal framework for policy coordination in Albania as well as the institutional set-up in place for the development and coordination of public policies. This analysis includes an explanation of the role of public administration institutions in improving coordination among the relevant bodies and institutions responsible for public policies, with concrete examples of coordination between public administration reform (PAR) and public finance management (PFM) strategies.

The aim of the study to contribute to more efficient implementation of public administration reform in Albania by offering concrete recommendations for strengthening policy coordination, especially in the case of PAR and PFM strategies. In formulating these recommendations, the study follows up and draws upon the findings of a previous analytical paper on policy coordination prepared by ReSPA in 2020.¹

¹ ReSPA. (2021). [Policy coordination in the Western Balkans](#)

1.1 Methodology

In accordance with the objectives outlined above, this study reviews the relevant literature on policy development and coordination, including previous analyses conducted in relation to this area and available reports on coordination models and mechanisms. These documents were sourced by first drawing up a list of all organisations that have prepared such material, including government officials, donors and multilateral organisations such as the European Commission (EC) and the European Union (EU), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The websites of these bodies were then searched for relevant documents, including monitoring reports on policy development and coordination in Albania developed by OECD and its Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA). Policy papers and monitoring reports produced by OECD/SIGMA on policy development and coordination systems in the Western Balkans countries were also analysed. Wherever available, statistics have been included to back up conclusions.

The study analysed the current legislative and institutional framework of the Government of Albania in relation to policy development and coordination functions. This analysis benefited from the state of play of coordination of PAR and PFM strategies in Albania.

Interviews were conducted with key government officials from Centre of Government (CoG) institutions, including the management staff in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), e.g. the Department for Development and Good Governance (DDGG) and the Regulatory Department, as well as representatives from the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA), the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE), the cabinet of the EU Chief Negotiator, and representatives from the Department of Public Administration (DoPA). The interview questions aimed to establish (i) the main characteristics of the coordinating structure, and (ii) the main challenges in vertical and horizontal coordination and how the country is addressing these challenges.

The study analyses the results of a questionnaire prepared for the “Analytical paper on policy coordination” prepared by ReSPA in 2020² and draws on the findings of this paper in setting out key arguments, conclusions and recommendations.

A complete list of the documents drawn upon for the purposes of this study is available in the Bibliography section.

1.2 Structure of the Study

The study first provides an explanation of policy coordination and the rationale for such coordination, elucidating both its theoretical and practical relevance for effective policy-making.

The main body of the study examines each of the structures and elements of the policy-making system in Albania in turn, exploring and highlighting the linkages between effective policy coordination and effective policy-making.

² ReSPA. (2021). [Policy coordination in the Western Balkans](#)

The first chapter provides an outline of the importance of policy coordination and an overview of the current policy framework in Albania. The second chapter examines the legal and institutional frameworks in place in Albania for strategic policy-making and policy coordination, including an analysis of the functioning of the centre of government (CoG), further providing references to relevant good practices from other countries. The third chapter assesses the progress achieved in Albania using benchmarks based on EU and OECD/SIGMA monitoring reports, additionally highlighting findings from reports prepared by other international organisations. Chapter four summarises the overall findings regarding Albania’s policy coordination mechanisms for PAR and PFM strategies and the alignment of policies and budget planning. The concluding section provides recommendations for further strengthening policy coordination in Albania.

The analysis and findings of this study refer to the state of play as of **the end of July 2021**.

1.3 Policy coordination and its importance

Policy-making is the process by which governments translate their political visions into strategies, programmes and actions to deliver ‘outcomes’ and ‘results’ in the real world (Ferries, 2015). Good policy-making is essential for governments to achieve their aims and deliver real change and benefits, especially as governments are invariably faced with difficult policy choices and as the world for which such policies have to be developed is increasingly complex. Good governance and effective policy coordination constitute the basis for making good policy choices and for ensuring that administrations make the best use of the powers and resources entrusted to them. Effective coordination occurs when policy decisions taken in one programme or organization take into account related decisions made in other programmes and organizations (Peters, 2018). Identifying and adopting effective ways to coordinate policies and get them working together is vital, therefore, because the success of any one programme will depend at least in part on other programmes (Peters, 2015).

Although issues of policy coordination have been present since the beginnings of modern government, there is no single uniform approach to policy-making and policy coordination that can be applied to all areas and all governments. Good policy-making must be based on evidence, setting out what the needs are and how best to intervene to meet those needs. Given that coordination is a fundamental requirement for effective public administration and policy-making, contemporary governments have long been attempting to develop more integrated and coherent approaches to policy problems, following initiatives such as “Whole-of-Government” approaches (Bouckaert et al. 2010). Policy development and coordination often requires a department or the administration as a whole to strike a balance among a wide range of competing interests without losing sight of the desired policy outcome.

This study is focused on the functions of the Centre of Government (CoG), defined here in accordance with the following definitions provided by the OECD: “The Centre of Government is the body or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to Heads of Government and the Council of

Ministers, or Cabinet”³ and thus constitutes “the administrative structure that serves the executive (president or prime minister, and the cabinet collectively)”⁴. To ensure the well-organised and competent functioning of the policy-making system, it is important to have institutional architecture in place within the CoG for carrying out policy-planning and coordination functions.⁵ OECD/SIGMA’s broader definition of the CoG includes ministries and institutions performing key horizontal functions. The functions of the CoG include the key functions typically carried out by the Government Office/General Secretariat/Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Finance, the body responsible for legal conformity, and the body responsible for European integration, *when fulfilling the policy-planning, coordination and development functions*.⁶ In order to support the head of government and the cabinet effectively, the CoG is expected to be assigned the necessary mandate and functions and the authority and capacity to perform the tasks related to the overall management of the policy system and to implement and enforce the provisions of the legal framework.

Institutional architecture is needed within the CoG for carrying out policy-planning and coordination functions to ensure the well-organised and competent functioning of the policy-making system. In addition to constituting a key pillar of a transparent and effective democratic system, a well-functioning policy-making system is also a crucial precondition for a country to make progress in the European integration process, with a key criterion for assessing the preparedness of a candidate country being that its national administration has the capacity to undertake the obligations arising from EU membership.

The role and functioning of CoG can differ across countries, including among the member states of the EU and the OECD, as well as the Western Balkan countries, which may use different models of the CoG. No matter how different these models of CoG may be, however, a number of critical functions have been identified and defined as being necessary for a well-organised, consistent and competent policy-making system. The Principles of Public Administration for EU accession countries, developed by SIGMA in co-operation with the European Commission, define the following nine critical functions to be implemented by the CoG:⁷

1. coordination of the preparation of government sessions;
2. ensuring legal conformity;
3. coordination of the preparation and approval of the government’s strategic priorities and work programme;
4. coordination of the policy content of proposals for government decision-making, including defining the policy preparation process and ensuring coherence with government priorities;
5. ensuring that policies are affordable and coordinating public sector resource-planning;

³ OECD (2014). Centre Stage, OECD Centres of Government, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/Centre-Stage-Report.pdf>

⁴ OECD (2018). Centre Stage 2, OECD Centres of Government, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/report-centre-stage-2.pdf>

⁵ SIGMA (2017). [Functioning of the Centres of Government in the Western Balkans](#), SIGMA Paper no. 53

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ SIGMA (2017), [The Principles of Public Administration](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

6. coordination of the government’s communication activities to ensure a coherent government message;
7. monitoring the government’s performance to ensure the government collectively performs effectively and keeps its promises to the public;
8. handling relations between the government and other parts of the state (president, parliament);
9. coordination of matters related to EU integration.

In many countries, CoGs now provide a range of services that include strategic planning, real-time policy advice and intelligence, leadership of major cross-departmental policy initiatives, and monitoring of progress and outcomes.⁸ Major overarching reforms, including public administration reform, require a government-as-a-whole commitment to deliver on these reforms.

1.4 Framework for policy coordination in Albania

As is the case in all Western Balkan countries, a well-functioning policy-making system is a crucial precondition for Albania to make progress in the path of European accession. The latest EU Enlargement methodology (2021) calls for more credible commitments on the part of candidate countries to the implementation of fundamental reforms, including ensuring the proper functioning of democratic institutions and the effective implementation of public administration reform (PAR). Implementing effective public administration reform thus remains a key priority for the Government of Albania in making progress on European integration, including the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. PAR is also essential for economic development, especially as preparations for EU include the need to provide evidence of improvements in the system of policy development and the coordination of government activities as well as more efficient and financially sustainable policies. The Principles of Public Administration prepared by SIGMA in close cooperation with the European Commission set out what good public governance entails in practice and outline the main requirements to be followed by countries in the process of EU integration.⁹

Improving policy coordination thus remains a high priority and a major challenge for the government of Albania within its overarching programme of reforms. Accordingly, the government has made significant efforts to establish institutional mechanisms and methodological frameworks to facilitate policy development and coordination among various stakeholders and across sectors, as well as undertaking important steps to establish a basic legal and institutional framework for improving the development and coordination of public policies.

Since the establishment of the Integrated Planning System (IPS) in 2004/05, the government of Albania has been trying to develop a more effective and inclusive system of policy development through an Integrated Strategic Planning System that includes the following elements: (i) strategic public policy planning documents (strategic documents); (ii) the participants in the planning

⁸ OECD (2018). [Centre Stage 2. The organisation and functions of the centre of government in OECD countries](#), OECD Publishing

⁹ SIGMA (2017), [The Principles of Public Administration](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

process; (iii) management of public policy planning process; (iv) alignment of the content of strategic documents with other planning documents and legal adjustments; and (v) linking the process of adopting and implementing policies with the mid-term budgeting process. The most recent Albanian government's adoption of the Integrated Planning Information System (IPGIS) is an important milestone, as IPGIS is becoming the primary system for planning, analysing, and drafting of all levels of strategic documents as well as for monitoring the performance achieved against planned policies and objectives.

In Albania, the key functions of the CoG are formally assigned to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). At political level, the overall IPS process is directed by the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), which is the highest level inter-ministerial decision-making body and is chaired by the Prime Minister, with the permanent presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and Economy, the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Justice, and the occasional presence of other ministers relevant to the topic of discussion.¹⁰ The SPC approves the main directions of the government's strategic plans and defines and approves government priorities and the framework of medium-term budget planning, as well as approving priority investments projects.

The government of Albania has embraced a highly formal policy coordination system that includes the use of written guidance (such as instruction manuals, guidelines on procedures) and formal meetings (such as cabinet meetings as an instrument for coordination, suggesting a preference for a rules-based approach to policy coordination). Albanian CoG bodies use regular formal government and cabinet meetings to agree on ways to ensure effective policy coordination, which is largely consistent with the practice in OECD-EU countries.¹¹ Albania's CoG further uses Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) as a mechanism to coordinate policy across government priority areas.

The government of Albania has improved its policy-making processes, especially through the introduction of an Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMG) system, with the establishment of the IPS Information System (IPGIS) being one of the crucial elements contributing to this development. Further efforts are needed to ensure these improvements have a lasting impact, however, and governance reforms should remain central to the overall transformation of Albania's public administration.

Albania's structured approach to planning and monitoring reforms, using integrated policy-making mechanisms such as IPMGs in addition to strategic documents, has proved effective in supporting the implementation of government priorities. Policies related to good governance are now constantly monitored and analysed through the Integrated Policy Management Group for Good Governance and Public Administration. This IPMG includes the following: Thematic Groups on Policy Making, Civil Service Reform, Public Services, e-Governance and Digitalization, Statistics, Anti-Corruption, Decentralization, and Regional Development, as well as the Public Financial Management Steering Committee.

The most recent SIGMA Monitoring Report (November 2021) states that Albania's performance in the area of policy development and coordination has been "strong" and continues to improve,

¹⁰ ReSPA questionnaire 2020.

¹¹ OECD (2020). [Government at a Glance: Western Balkans](#). OECD Publishing, Paris.

with Albania attaining higher scores than other Western Balkan countries on most of the relevant indicators. Albania's "overall average value and individual indicator values have risen from 2.6 in 2017 to 3.4 in 2021, the highest in the region."¹²

The latest reports also give a positive assessment of the key strategic documents developed in Albania for good governance, further noting that the country's integrated policy-making system has supported improvements in the government's performance in achieving its priorities and in serving the public interest. However, the recent efforts of the administration to adopt a Rulebook for the Office of the Prime Minister to improve the internal organisation and functioning of the OPM as the key CoG institution are not yet complete¹³. Coordination between the CoG and line ministries and other agencies in the planning and monitoring of government work remains limited. The medium-term policy-planning set-up is still fragmented, and the planning processes and plans are not fully aligned¹⁴.

¹² SIGMA (2021), [Monitoring Report The Principles of Public Administration ALBANIA](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

¹³ SIGMA (2021), [Monitoring Report The Principles of Public Administration ALBANIA](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

¹⁴ Ibid.

2

The State of Play in Albania's System of Policy Planning and Coordination

2.1 The institutional set-up for policy development and coordination

The coordination role of the Centre of the Government in Albania

The Centre of Government (CoG) performs several critical functions to ensure the effective functioning of the government, including providing support to the head of government's decision-making process, ensuring that individual policies are in line with the government programme and that the government only develops policies that are affordable. The findings of the 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Report for Albania¹⁵ show that the country has established all critical CoG functions. The legal framework for establishing the critical functions is in place and routines have been established ensuring the basic functioning of the system. Overall, the roles of the key institutions are well established and the Report concludes that there is sufficient clarity in assigned responsibilities.

¹⁵ SIGMA (2021), [Monitoring Report The Principles of Public Administration ALBANIA](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

Table 1. Establishment of the CoG Functions in Albania

CoG Critical Functions	Established	Functional
Coordination of the preparation of the government sessions	Yes	Yes
Ensuring legal conformity	Yes	Yes
Coordination of the preparation and approval of the government's strategic priorities and work programme	Yes	Yes
Coordination of the policy content of proposals for government decision-making	Yes	Yes
Ensuring that policies are affordable and coordinating public sector resource planning	Yes	Yes
Coordination of the government's communication activities to ensure a coherent government message	Yes	Yes
Monitoring of the government's performance	Yes	Yes
Handling relations between the government and the parliament	Yes	Yes
Coordination of European integration affairs	Yes	Yes

Source: SIGMA Monitoring Report of the Principles of Public Administration

The institution that fulfils most of the critical functions of the CoG in Albania is the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), which includes the OPM Secretary General, the Department for Development and Good Governance, and the Regulatory Department. The OPM supports the Council of Ministers as well as the Prime Minister. This model is typical for several EU and OECD countries that have a strong Cabinet Office or Chancellery, such as the United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, Hungary and Estonia.¹⁶

The OPM in Albania has a clear mandate to implement critical CoG functions. Comprehensive coordination mechanisms have been put in place at both political and administrative levels. In addition, the responsibility for fulfilling some CoG functions are shared with the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA).

Table 2. Institutions fulfilling CoG Functions in Albania

Country	Key centre of government institution	Other institutions fulfilling centre of government functions
Albania	Office of the Prime Minister	Ministry of Justice Ministry of Finance and Economy Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

Source: OECD, SIGMA Paper no. 53

Many CoG functions in Albania are assigned to the Secretary General of the OPM, who performs these functions with the assistance of various departments and structural units within the OPM. The OPM Secretary General heads the staff of the OPM and is the lead official formally designated by law as being responsible for the relevant CoG functions. The Secretary General of the OPM has sufficient authority to ensure the consistency of policy proposals with the government's priorities, as well as their compliance with the overall requirements and standards set by legislation. The OPM Secretary General is thus the most senior civil servant in Albania, which is also the case in almost half (48%) of OECD countries.¹⁷

At a technical level, the involvement of OPM Departments in policy-making is systematically ensured. The Department for Development and Good Governance (DDGG) is responsible for strategic policy planning, national programmes and strategic projects. It is empowered with the primary responsibility for translating government priorities into strategic policies and funded programmes by overseeing budget development, donor funding, and strategic business investment. The DDGG develops the Policy Priorities Document (PPD - 'Dokumenti i Politikave Prioritare') and is responsible for developing integrated policies and strategies, development programmes and strategic projects. The DDGG is responsible for the development of the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), which provides the national vision and direction for social and economic development over the medium-term period. The DDGG ensures the quality of policies and is responsible for the coordination of policies at senior levels related to national development objectives and EU integration. The DDGG plays the role of the Secretariat of the Strategic Planning Committee/National Investment Committee (SPC/NIC), which are key structures for the operation of an integrated, coherent and efficient planning and policy-making system. The DDGG has a role in all the critical functions performed by the CoG, acting as the Secretariat and being responsible for the coordination of the policy content of proposals submitted for government decisions, as well as taking part in setting government priorities together with the OPM. The DDGG also works with the MoFE in ensuring that proposals are financially affordable and with the MEFA in ensuring that government priorities are in line with EU policies.

Table 3. Institutions and Departments fulfilling the CoG critical functions in Albania

Function	
coordination of the preparation of the government sessions;	OPM/ Regulatory Department
ensuring legal conformity;	OPM/ Regulatory Department; MoJ
coordination of preparation and approval of the government's strategic priorities and work programme;	OPM/ Cabinet; DDGG
coordination of the policy content of proposals for government decision, including defining the policy preparation process and ensuring coherence with government priorities;	OPM/DDGG
ensuring that policies are affordable and coordinating public sector resource planning;	OPM/DDGG; MoFE
coordination of government communication activities to ensure a coherent government message;	OPM/ Cabinet MoSRP
monitoring government performance to ensure the government collectively performs effectively and keeps its promises to the public;	OPM/ Cabinet; DDGG
handling relations between the government and other parts of the state (the president, the parliament);	OPM/ Cabinet MoSRP
coordination of European Integration affairs.	OPM/ EU Chief Negotiator MEFA

Source: OECD, SIGMA Paper no. 53, ReSPA, Policy Coordination in the Western Balkans and Interviews with OPM Officials

The Regulatory Department within the OPM is responsible for the alignment of laws and by-laws, reviewing regulations to ensure they comply with regulatory quality standards, including ensuring that regulatory impact assessments are conducted. The MoJ and the Regulatory Department of the OPM jointly perform checks on the legal compliance and conformity of policy proposals. The CoG functions of ensuring the affordability of policies and coordinating public sector resource planning are primarily assigned to the MoFE, which is responsible for obtaining the affordability of public policies and their alignment with the Medium-Term Budgetary Programme (MTBP). The CoG is also in a strategic position to maintain relationships with other parts of government, including relations with parliament, which are the exclusive competence of the CoG. This is ensured by the Minister of State for Relations with Parliament (MoSRP) within the OPM, who leads and manages the relationship between the Government and the Assembly of the Republic of Albania (the Parliament). International coordination in general and European integration in particular are part of the CoGs'

shared responsibilities in Albania. The functions of coordinating EI affairs and alignment with EU policies and obligations arising from the EI process, which are of great importance for Albania as an EU candidate country, are assigned to the OPM, the Cabinet of the Chief EU Negotiator (within the OPM), and MEFA.

The CoG reviews whether policies have been subject to adequate consultation. The OPM DDGG & OPM Regulatory Department ensure the quality of public consultations and have the authority to require further work if they assess such consultation to be inadequate.

The CoG provides the necessary mechanisms for senior political staff and civil servants to hold relevant policy discussions. These mechanisms include the following:

- Using regular cabinet meetings as a means of ensuring policy coordination
- Using integrated policy management groups (IPMG) as a mechanism for coordinating policy across government priority areas and sectors.
- Preparing written guidance such as instruction manuals and guidelines on procedures as an instrument for coordination

Notwithstanding these reported improvements, significant challenges for Albania's CoG institutions still need to be addressed. These challenges include the need to improve the performance of the CoG institutions in planning the work of the government, analysing policy content, and monitoring the government's performance. All new processes and tools introduced by the Government should be based on evidence and should serve as the foundation for further improvements in areas of CoG coordination, strategic planning, regulatory impact assessment and public consultation. To overcome these challenges and improve the system for policy coordination, the capacities of the CoG institutions need to be increased and cooperation needs to be strengthened both within and between the CoG institutions.

It is important that any changes in government ensuing from the results of the general elections held in Albania in April 2021 should not be accompanied by changes in the structures and leadership of the CoG, since this would create challenges and risks for the continuity and stability of performing core government functions.

2.2 The legislative and framework for the integrated strategic planning system in Albania

Albania retains a legalistic tradition of governance whereby rules and responsibilities are approved through laws and by-laws. The government's decision-making system focuses primarily on the adoption of draft legal acts, including high volumes of draft legislation. The legal basis and institutional set-up are in place to ensure a consistent policy development system.¹⁸ Critical functions are also assigned to CoG institutions by legislation.¹⁹

18 Decision No. 584, dated 28 August 2003 on the approval of the rules of procedure of the Council of Ministers (DCM 584/2003), as amended

19 Law on the Organisation and Functioning of the Council of Ministers No. 9000/2003 (30.1.2003)

There are **formal rules** stipulating which institutions and stakeholders need to be engaged in policy planning. The existing legal framework sets out clear rules and procedures for the preparation, follow-up and communications of the sessions of the Council of Ministers (CoM), which is the highest level decision-making body in the Government.²⁰ The framework also stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the various CoG institutions for ensuring legal compliance, assessing the financial impacts and affordability of policies, and checking the legal conformity of policy proposals with the EU acquis. Written guidelines and written procedures are the most common instruments employed, indicating a very formal approach to policy coordination. Detailed guidance is in place to support line ministries in drafting laws and in developing the annual work plan and sector strategies.

Box 1. The government-level policy-planning functions are delegated to a CoG body

- The Government Annual Work Plan (GAWP – known also as the Government Annual Analytical Plan, or Government Legislative Plan) is delegated to the General Secretary of the CoM by Law 9000/2003 & DCM 584, dated 28.08.2003 on the approval of the rules of procedure of the Council of Ministers (DCM 584/2003), as amended – the latest amendments are made in 2018 to introduce the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and the Impact Assessment Methodology.
- Planning of the budget is delegated to the MoFE by Law No 9936 dated 26.06.2008 “On the management of the budgetary system in the Republic of Albania” (Organic Budget Law).
- Planning of strategic documents is regulated by DCM No. 290/2020, 11.4.2020, “On the creation of the state database of the IPSIS” and PM Order No 157, 22.10.2018, “On the measures for the implementation of a broad sector/cross-sector approach as well as the establishment and functioning of the sector/cross-sector integrated mechanism” (IPMG).
- DDGG is authorised to provide overall quality control for the development of national and sector strategies.

Albania’s **Integrated Planning System (IPS)** was first established by a Decision of the Council of Ministers (no. 692/2005) and constitutes a “made-in-Albania” reform that was developed in the early 2000s to address the mounting complexity and volume of policies, financial decisions and EU-related decisions facing the Prime Minister and CoM at this time. The IPS enacts a set of principles governing the ways in which policy and financial options and recommendations are conveyed to decision-makers, including the principles that policies must be coherent, clearly defined, evidence-based, affordable, and priority-focused. As such, the IPS serves as a bridge between the supporting processes and structures and the decision-makers.

Through its introduction of the IPS the government of Albania has aimed to establish a harmonised system for policy development and coordination that links the government’s strategic policy priorities with strategic planning (sector and cross-sector strategies) and with mid-term financial planning.

²⁰ The Law on Organisation and Functioning of the CoM (90/2003) and the RoP of the CoM (Decree 584/2003)

Together with several other regulations adopted in recent years, the IPS provides the underlying regulatory framework for the government’s strategic planning, establishing the role and status of each of the various strategic planning documents.

Box 2. The role of the Integrated Planning System

1. Ensures that financial and policy planning are introduced as components of a single planning system.
2. Ensures that public investment and foreign assistance are initially identified in sectoral and priority strategic documents and therefore included in the mid-term budgeting framework.
3. Ensures that the government sets strategic policy priorities within the macroeconomic fiscal framework.
4. Ensures that the Mid-Term Budget Programme accommodates the 1–3-year action plans of strategic documents within the budget program structure, thereby ensuring that decisions on programme spending are based on policy goals, objectives, and expected measures.
5. Ensures that the requirements of the Stabilization and Association Agreement for EU membership are reflected and integrated at all stages of the strategic and mid-term planning process, in particular with the legislative and MTBP planning processes.

The **system for planning the development of sectoral strategies**, as well as the hierarchy of key government planning documents, has been formally established through a series of recent legal acts,^{21, 22} including DCM No. 290/2020, 11.4.2020, “On the creation of the state database of IPSIS”, which has updated and improved the system by establishing the state database of the Integrated Planning System Information System (IPSIS).²³

²¹ 1. (for integrated strategic planning): Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 692/2005 on approval of the revised strategy “Consolidation of the Integrated Planning System in Albania”; 2. (for GAWP): Law 9000-2003 On the Organisation and Functioning of the Council of Ministers; 3. (for the Budget): Law no.9936, 26.06.2008 “On the management of the budgetary system in the Republic of Albania”, (as amended).

²² DCM 692/2005 On the approval of the revised strategy “Consolidation of the Integrated Planning System in Albania” was the first law to establish the system for planning the development of sectoral strategies.

²³ DCM 290/2020, 11.4.2020, “On the creation of the state database of the Integrated Planning System Information System”.

Box 3. The hierarchy of the key government planning documents

1. National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI/SKZHI)
2. Government Priorities
3. National and Cross-Cutting Strategies
4. Policy Development Documents
5. National Plan for EU Integration (NPEI / PKIE)
6. Policy Priorities Document
7. Action Plans
8. Performance Indicators Framework
9. Government Annual Work Plan (GAWP)
10. National Priority Measures

The **National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI)** is the key mechanism employed in Albania for translating the government's political agenda into an overarching government work programme. The NSDI is the core strategic document that combines the EU integration agenda with the country's sustainable economic and social development goals, including its correlation with the sustainable development goals. The NSDI is a key component of Albania's Integrated Planning System. The NSDI also guides annual adopted budget funds, by introducing policy objectives that are part of the guidelines of the Ministry of Finance and Economy during budget preparation. The technical process for drafting the NSDI document is coordinated by the Department for Development and Good Governance within the OPM. The NSDI 2015–2020, approved in May 2016, set out the national vision and its supporting policy framework, emphasizing a prosperous, socially cohesive future within the European Union. This national vision has been supported by the four pillars and the foundation of the NSDI:

Figure 1. The NSDI 2015-2020 Pillars



Other strategic frameworks, such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agenda 2030, the European Green Deal, as well as sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies are being integrated into the NSDI and a new NSDI is currently in the planning stages.

To assist decision-making, the government of Albania has developed the **Policy Priorities Document (PPD)** as an analytical instrument that summarizes the key priorities which are to be funded within programme budget ceilings for the medium term-period. The PPD was revived in 2020 to inform the 2021–2023 MTBP/budget process. Prepared jointly by the OPM and the MFE, with contributions from the MEFA, the PPD creates a solid foundation for priority-setting that can be strengthened in the years ahead as a core input for decision-making in the Strategic Planning Committee. The PPD describes and provides cost estimates for a range of high-profile policy reforms and a short list of potential strategic public investment projects. The PPD also sets out the medium-term macro/fiscal framework.

The introduction of the **IPSIS platform** is a major innovation with the potential to strengthen the development, harmonization and monitoring of strategic planning documents. Individual modules have been developed for all key IPS-related processes, thereby enabling strategic goals, policy goals and specific objectives to be aligned and easily monitored in all key processes.

Clear procedures and rules have been established for **drafting legislation**. Progress has been made in enforcing the guidelines on regulatory impact assessments across line ministries, as well as in developing the legislative package related to policy planning. Scrutiny of the quality of laws is strongly embedded in the policy-making and law-drafting processes, and the OPM and the MoJ perform this role effectively.

The use of basic analytical tools and techniques is required by regulations and is followed routinely in practice for **evidence-based policy making**. Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) of new or amended policies is required by regulation and is carried out in practice. RIA is now formally required by DCM No. 584/2003 in accordance with the latest amendments to this decision in 2018. The Government's **Rules of Procedure**²⁴ require that each draft legal act, with only a few exceptions, must be accompanied with an impact assessment, including any acts that partially or fully transpose the EU Acquis.²⁵ Albania's Methodology for Impact Assessment (2018) provides guidance on both impact assessment (IA) and regulatory impact assessment (RIA). The current RIA process and template derive from the Impact Assessment Methodology, stating that the objective of RIA is to make obligatory by means of this document a system of ex-ante assessment of legislation, regulations and major policies in order to promote and strengthen evidence-based policy-making and legislative drafting within central government. RIAs are published in Albania on an electronic register alongside draft legislation as part of the public consultation process whereby the general public and stakeholders have the opportunity to comment on draft legislation, high-level strategic and policy documents, in accordance with the Law on Public Notification and Consultation.²⁶ RIAs are also published on the

²⁴ Decision No. 584, dated 28 August 2003, as amended in 2018.

²⁵ Article 16 of the Rules of Procedure stipulate that: *The responsible structures shall draft in cooperation with the legal structure, the impact assessment report of the draft act.* Exceptions to this requirement are specified in Article 45.1.

²⁶ Law on Public Notification and Consultation No. 146/2014

Albanian Parliament's website with the relevant draft Act. Depending on the complexity of the issue at hand, comments must be provided within 20 to 40 days of the draft's publication. Quality control of the impact assessments is also regulated by DCM No. 584/2003 and the Impact Assessment Methodology introduced in 2018.

The **Government Annual Work Programme (GWAP)** is an instrument that establishes an advance schedule for the upcoming year of draft legislation, draft decisions and draft instructions requiring CoM approval. The process is coordinated by Regulatory and Compliance Department within the OPM. Recent GWAP instructions have requested that ministries focus on draft legal acts that support the Government Programme, the National Plan for European Integration (NPEI), national and sectoral strategies and relevant items from performance contracts agreed between the Prime Minister and Ministers. In future years, it is anticipated that GAWP will be prepared and monitored through IPSIS. A module and user manual for GAWP have been included as part of the system design.

The **Legislation Drafting Manual**, updated in 2008, provides extensive guidance on producing high-quality draft legislation. Co-issued by the Ministry of Justice, the manual is entitled "A Guide to the Legislative Process in Albania"²⁷ and specifies guidelines for line ministries and other government bodies on how to develop policy proposals and draft legal acts so as to ensure their legal conformity.

EU integration remains Albania's highest strategic objective and thus constitutes a cornerstone of the country's internal and foreign policy. The **National Plan for European Integration (NPEI)** identifies needed reforms and sets out the plan for approximating domestic legislation with the European acquis. The three-year plan is annually revised and follows a broad approach covering the 33 accession negotiation chapters.²⁸ For each negotiation chapter, priorities and plans need to be established to support related policy documents and legal acts. The Office of the EU Chief Negotiator within the OPM works with in the MEFA in jointly coordinating the preparation of the NPEI by establishing the methodology and providing guidance to line ministries and other central bodies regarding the preparation and monitoring of their sectoral contributions. Linkages with related government processes are important because transposition priorities need to be aligned with government priorities and all associated costs must be clearly established for inclusion in MTBP/budget requests. The most recent Methodology for Drafting and Monitoring of the NPEI acknowledges the progress made in Albania's path towards accession and provides an improved structure for elaborating preparation and monitoring arrangements. The new methodology provides a more focused approach to support the following objectives:

- Ensuring the integration and consistency of the NPEI with the national strategic framework.
- Ensuring the convergence of national policies with the requirements of the EU accession process.
- Ensuring a clear and accurate assessment of the financial implications of proposed measures.

²⁷ <https://drejtesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/MANUAL-PER-HARTIMIN-E-LEGJISLACIONIT.pdf>

²⁸ The NPEI deals with 33 negotiation chapters, not reflecting the final two chapters: Chapter 34 regulates the participation of Member States in EU Institutions, while Chapter 35 (EU legal acts that are part of this chapter) regulates the final negotiating phases of accession.

2.3 The institutional set-up for policy development and coordination

The responsibilities of the Centre of Government in Policy Coordination

The Centre of Government (CoG) supports the head of government and the Council of Ministers in organising the work of the government and in policy coordination. The CoG provides the following mechanisms necessary for senior political staff and civil servants to hold relevant policy discussions:

- Holding **regular cabinet meetings** as a means of ensuring policy coordination.
- Using **Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMG)** as a mechanism for coordinating policy across government priority areas and across sectors.
- Preparing **written guidance** such as instruction manuals and guidelines on procedure as an instrument for coordination

Policy Coordination Mechanisms

As highlighted in the previous chapters, the development and implementation of whole-of-government coordination mechanisms is of fundamental importance to effective good governance and to Albania's EU accession progress. This is because decision-makers are far better served if the core policy and financial planning systems of government are harmonized and mutually reinforcing, and this requires the establishment of effective coordinating mechanisms at both decision-making and administrative levels. This is also the principle behind the establishment of the IPS. At the decision-making level, policy coordination mechanisms and structures are designed to support two fundamental accountabilities of the Executive Branch:

- The accountability of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers collectively for the government's performance.
- The accountability of Ministers for the performance of their individual ministries.

At decision-making level, Albania's primary policy coordination structures include:

- The Council of Ministers (CoM).
- The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), also serving as the National Investment Committee (NIC).
- The State Committee on EU integration (SCEUI).
- The Committee for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs).
- Sector Steering Committees (SSCs).

An underlying assumption behind IPS is that well-designed and effectively supported policy coordination structures provide a foundation for strengthening accountability for delivering results.

Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was established in 2005 by a decision of the CoM. The committee is chaired by the Prime Minister and serves as the primary decision-making body for all IPS matters.²⁹ The committee's original mandate included the following responsibilities:

- Approving the main directions of the country's development strategy.
- Setting and approving government priorities.
- Defining and approving of the medium-term budget planning framework.
- Strategically defining budgetary ceilings in support of the government's priorities.
- Strategically coordinating foreign aid with the donors' community.

In 2015, SPC's mandate was expanded to incorporate the responsibilities of the National Investment Committee (NIC) for major public investments and will now play an expanded role in performance monitoring and evaluation.³⁰

- Approving large-scale investments and regional projects of special importance for Albania and cooperation in the region
- Evaluating and monitoring progress in implementing and programming priorities, programmes and key investments.

Although there have been periods when SPC has not been active, the committee has resumed its pivotal strategic role since 2019. The SPC's current membership includes:

- The Prime Minister (chair)
- The Deputy Prime Minister
- The Minister of Finance & Economy
- The Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs
- Other Ministers depending on the agenda

The SPC typically meets several times a year at critical junctures in the strategic planning and MTBP processes, including for the purpose of establishing the government's macroeconomic and fiscal framework, policy and public investment priorities, MTBP ceilings and the NSDI. The committee is supported by the SPC Secretariat located in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

State Committee for European Integration

In 2019, the State Committee for European Integration (SCEUI) was established as the highest body tasked with ensuring the coordination of political and/or negotiating positions for each accession negotiation chapter prior to decision-making by the Council of Ministers. The SCEUI also oversees

²⁹ Established by Council of Ministers Decision 692, 2005 and Prime Minister's Order 14, 2006 and later updated in 2014 by a PM Order to reflect the new structure of the government.

³⁰ Approved by Prime Minister's Order 113, 2015.

key issues in the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The committee is chaired by the Prime Minister.

The SCEUI is supported by the EU Integration Secretariat (MEFA), while the Chief Negotiator (OPM) is supported by the EU Integration Secretariat and the Regulatory and Compliance Department within the OPM unit responsible for priority issues related to the EU acquis.

European Integration and Accession Negotiations

The institutional framework and associated European Union integration (EI) coordination mechanism are complex. Both of these political and technical structures were set up to manage the EI process, including the preparation, monitoring and reporting of the NPEI and the organization of the negotiation process. The EI coordination system was established in 2018 by a CoM Decision on the establishment, organisation and functioning of the state structure responsible for negotiating and concluding the Republic of Albania's accession treaty with the European Union.³¹

The legal framework assigns responsibility for coordinating accession negotiations by to the State Committee of European Integration and the Chief Negotiator in accordance with the following acts:

1. DCM No. 422 of 6 May 2020 on "The composition, rules of operation and financial treatment of the Negotiating Team and the Chief Negotiator for accession negotiations of the Republic of Albania to the European Union"; and
2. DCM 749/2018 of 19 December 2018 on the "Establishment, Organization and Functioning of the State Structure Responsible for Conducting the Negotiations and Concluding the Treaty of Accession of The Republic of Albania into the European Union".

Integrated Policy Management Groups

A comprehensive strategic coordination framework was established in 2018 to coordinate policy development and the implementation of the government's national, sectoral and crosscutting strategies.³² This new framework, although still complex, effectively simplified the previously unwieldy cluster of more than 70 coordinating groups supporting the delivery of strategies and/or donor projects.

In principle, the new system aims to provide a more coherent framework for reviewing and monitoring reforms and asserting government ownership of important strategies, policies and projects supported by donors. The IPMG mechanism also functions as the IPA sector monitoring mechanism (IPA Sector Monitoring Committees) and fora for sector policy dialogue with stakeholders and donors.

³¹ Decision of Council of Ministers No. 749 on December 19, 2018 "On the establishment, organisation and functioning of the state structure, responsible for negotiating and concluding accession treaty with the EU"

³² Established by Prime Ministers Order 157 on 22 October 2018. "On measures to be taken in order to implement the sector-wide approach, establishment and functioning of the integrated (cross-)sector mechanism".

The IPMG mechanism centres on the inter-ministerial IPMGs and SSCs that manage the planning, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of sectoral reforms in Albania in line with Government priorities, the Economic Reform Programme (ERP), the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), and the Medium-Term Budget Programme (MTBP), as well as the EU integration process and Albania's international obligations outlined in the National Plan for EU Integration (NPEI).

The IPMG mechanism functions under the umbrella of the Integrated Planning System (IPS) established in Albania as a major innovation with the potential to strengthen the development, harmonization and monitoring of strategic planning documents aimed at strengthening policy dialogue and coordination in Albania.

Three types of structures are involved in this mechanism:

- Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs)
- Sectoral Steering Committees (SSCs)
- Thematic Groups (TGs)

IPMGs and SSCs are generally chaired by Ministers, although the Good Governance and Public Administration IPMG is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. The majority of thematic groups are chaired by Deputy Ministers or Directors General when lead responsibility is assigned to an agency (e.g., DoPA, INSTAT, etc.).

At the administrative level, the following coordinating bodies have been established:

- The General Secretariat provides overall coordination of the IPMG and SSC mechanism. The General Secretariat is chaired by the Director of the DDGG and includes members of relevant departments in the OPM, the MFE and the MEFA.
- Technical Secretariats support specific Thematic Groups and are established by a Minister's Order in the lead ministries.

The IPMGs have their specific focus on cooperation at the steering level on good governance and public administration, competitiveness and investment, employment and skills, integrated land management. While SSCs have their focus on cooperation at the steering level within sectors of special importance for reforms and inter-institutional coordination, including justice reform, home affairs, public financial management, interconnectivity, and environment, climate, and waste management. The table below outlines the current configuration of the IPMG mechanism.

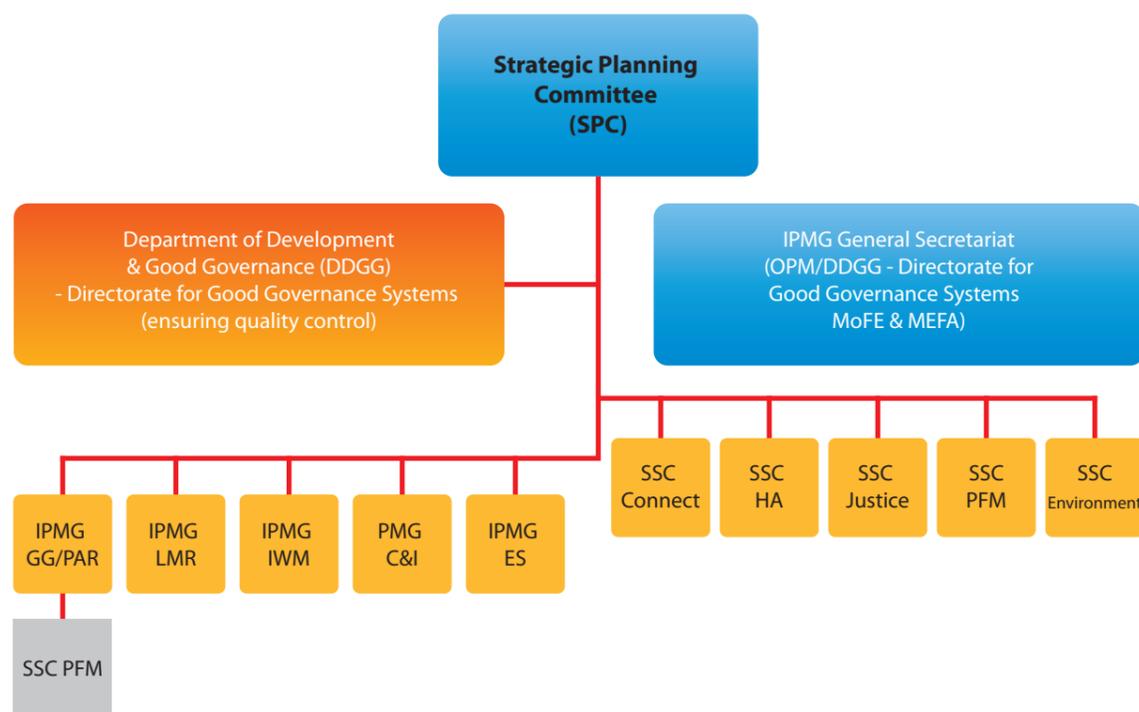
Table 4: Integrated Policy Management Groups Framework

IPMG	Thematic Groups
1. Good Governance & Public Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy-Making • Civil Service Reform • Public Services (including Health & Education) • e-Governance & Digitalization • Statistics • Anti-corruption • Decentralization • Regional Development • Public Financial Management (SSC)
2. Competitiveness & Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Reform • Foreign/Internal Direct Investment • Tourism & Culture Development • Agriculture & Rural Development • Public Investments
3. Employment & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment & Training • Social Inclusion & Protection
4. Integrated Land Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Land Management • Agricultural Land
5. Integrated Water Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Resources • Water & Wastewater Reform
Sector Steering Committees	
1. Justice	
2. Internal Affairs	
3. PFM	
4. Interconnectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Energy • Telecommunications & Broadband
5. Environment, Climate & Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment & Climate Change • Solid Waste Management

The introduction of the IPMG mechanism constituted a major reform of decision-making structures in Albania in accordance with the requirements of the SIGMA Public Administration Principles that are key to the European integration process. The IPMG mechanism has the following objectives:

- To support policy planning, development, coordination and implementation in order to enable consistent policy planning and coordination of the government activities.
- To create substantive and consistent policies that are affordable, economically efficient and financially sustainable.
- To consult with and include internal and external stakeholders.
- To ensure that policies are properly implemented, communicated and monitored.
- To support the transposition and implementation of the EU acquis in all sectors.
- To lay the foundations for operating effectively as an EU member country.³³

Figure 2: Central Implementation & Coordination Structure



The IPMG mechanism is designed to function as a well-organised, consistent and competent policy-making system. The mechanism serves as a forum in which evidence-based sectoral policies are developed, debated and monitored and aligned with the financial circumstances of the government so that they meet the government's objectives and are consistent with the medium-term budgetary framework as well as with the EU integration perspective of Albania.³⁴

33 Principles 1-7 of the Public Administration Principles, Sigma. Available at: <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Principles-of-Public-Administration-2017-edition-ENG.pdf>

34 Principle 9 of the Public Administration Principles, Sigma, *ibid*.

Table 5: IPMG and SSC Responsibilities

Nº	Attention Area	General Responsibilities [PM129]
1	IPMG Management	Setting the IPMG agenda and annual work plan.
2	Coordination & Consultation	Comprehensive and systemic consultation between sector stakeholders.
		Contributing to consistency in the integration of sectoral reforms and activities, and the coordination of sub-sectoral issues.
3	Policy Development	Leading the drafting of the sectoral policies in line with GoA priorities, NSDI, MTBP and EU integration (NPEI and EU Progress Reports)
4	Strategy	Recommendations for sectoral strategies and action plans, taking account of achievements, changing circumstances and lessons learnt, as well as progress in EU integration.
		Dissemination of sectoral strategic information to IPMG members and a wider audience.
5	Monitoring	Monitoring progress in implementing sectoral policies, strategies and programmes against relevant indicators and sector-specific targets.
6	IPA Monitoring	Playing the role of the Sectoral Monitoring Committee for IPA (IPA SMC), and ensuring reporting on the monitoring of IPA funds.
7	MTBP	Developing proposals for the most efficient use of available resources
8	SDGs	Coordinating and monitoring the achievement of SDGs using targets and indicators.
9	SPC	Developing sector-specific proposals for the SPC's consideration.
10	Institutional Capacity	Capacity development and technical assistance related to the IPMG's operations and its Technical Secretariat (and other sector entities as required).
11	Promotion	Promoting awareness of sectoral achievements and challenges to the public and DIPs.
12	DIPs	Efficient management of external assistance through regular dialogue with DIPs on sector priorities, policies, financing and problematic issues.
13	Gender	Including a gender equality approach in the IPMG mechanism.
14	Thematic Groups	Defining the composition, organisation and functions of Thematic Groups.

The 2020 Assessment report of the IPMG mechanism by the Department for Development and Good Governance³⁵ highlights the critical role of this mechanisms and the progress achieved in promoting inter-ministerial policy dialogue, though it also points out to existing challenges. The report finds that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the IPMG structures continued to play an effective role in inter-ministerial coordination, organizing a total of 232 meetings in the period under review, which constitutes a 31% increase in meetings compared to the previous year. In terms of ensuring the implementation of the planned commitments in the strategic framework, the mechanism contributed to an increase of 8.1% compared to 2019.³⁶ However, the level of applicability/ implementation of the strategic regulatory framework across the government, i.e. the extent of implementation of action plans, remains rather modest at 54.7%.³⁷ According to the monitoring report for the first semester of 2021, of the Cross-cutting Strategy on PAR (PARCS), the performance index of the IPMG mechanisms is at the level of 52%.³⁸

Like any newly established mechanism, IPMGs need time to develop, adjust and finally serve as the main forum for inter-sectoral policy dialogue in the country. The meetings conducted for this study with representatives of the IPMGs also highlighted capacity gaps and the need for changes in the structure of some IPMGs to increase their efficiency, as in the case of the thematic groups for statistics and e-Governance & Digitalisation.³⁹ This is an area the OPM should reflect upon when considering arrangements for implementing the new Government Programme.

Weekly meeting of General Secretaries

Another important coordinating mechanism in Albania is the **weekly meeting of General Secretaries** chaired by the CoM General Secretary. This body ensures that materials and issues to be reviewed at upcoming meetings of the CoM comply with standards and have been properly reviewed by the affected ministries. If problems with a particular item arise during this meeting, issues can be deferred to a future CoM meeting pending the resolution of the identified problem.

³⁵ Mechanism of Integrated Policy Management Groups, Annual Report 2020.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Mechanism of Integrated Policy Management Groups, Annual Report 2020. See p. 34 of the report.

³⁹ *The Technical Assistance to Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) inception report/analysis*, February 2020.

3

Assessment: How international organizations evaluate policy coordination in Albania

This chapter is dedicated to an analysis of assessments of policy development and policy coordination in Albania conducted by the EC, OECD-SIGMA, and other relevant organizations such as the World Bank.

The concept of “good administration” in general has been gradually defined with greater precision by EU countries over the past decades and is included in Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. In 1999, the concept of a European Administrative Space was set out by SIGMA, a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU (OECD, 1999), including components such as reliability, predictability, accountability and transparency, as well as technical and managerial competence, organisational capacity, financial sustainability and citizen participation.

In many OECD governments, RIAs gained prominence in the mid-1990s as an instrument aimed at improving the quality of regulations, reducing unnecessary burdens on business, and determining the costs of regulatory compliance. The EU has since developed an array of tools to support its Better Regulation Agenda.

Various international reports, analyses and documents have provided quantitative and qualitative data that reflect an assessment of the state of play of policy-making in Albania. Taking stock of this available data is relevant to the further improvement of policy-making in the country. Attaining an evidence-based understanding of the current state of play is of particular importance at a time when a political cycle is closed and a new government has been established as of September 2021.

EC Reports on Albania

Albania has advanced towards its strategic goal of opening EU accession negotiations and the government has continued to demonstrate publicly its commitment to advancing on the EU path, based on strong popular support for EU accession. The latest EU enlargement package for the Western Balkans introduced by the EC in 2020 calls for an “even stronger focus on fundamental reforms, starting with the rule of law, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration” in the accession process of the candidate countries (EC, 2020).⁴⁰ Given that an effective, agile and efficient administration is a prerequisite for a country’s sound management and a key driver of growth, the European Commission continuously supports improving public administration performance in Albania.⁴¹

The most recent EC Report on Albania, published on 19 October 2021,⁴² recognises that the implementation of the PAR and PFM reform strategies has continued in Albania despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report concludes that Albania is moderately prepared with the reform of its public administration, highlighting that the legal basis and the institutional set-up for a coherent policy making system are partially in place and that some progress has been made in regulatory impact assessments across line ministries and in building the capacities of line ministries to implement RIAs. The report also recognizes progress in developing the legislative package related to policy planning, adopting guidelines for public consultations, and in establishing the IPSIS. The report further observes that Albania increased its implementation rate of the National Plan for European Integration from 60% to 87% in 2020.⁴³

The EC Report provides a number of key recommendations, focusing on the need to (i) upgrade the regulatory framework on integrated policy planning and increase the capacities (in both, line ministries and OPM) for policy planning and monitoring by rolling out the integrated policy-making system (IPSIS); the need to (ii) strengthen the quality control function on public consultations and to focus more on the content rather than on the process; and the need to (iii) strengthen coordination between the OPM, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance and Economy to further support line ministries in the process of planning and more credibly costing the NPEI and its alignment with the annual analytical plan.

40 EC 2020 Communication on EU enlargement policy

41 https://ec.europa.eu/reform-support/what-we-do/public-administration-and-governance_en

42 European Commission, *Albania 2021 Report*, Brussels, 19.10.2021, pp.14–15.

43 Ibid.

Table 6. EC assessment on policy development and policy coordination in Albania

EC Report on Albania 2021	EC Report on Albania 2020	EC Report on Albania 2019	EC Report on Albania 2018
<p>Albania is moderately prepared with the reform of its public administration.</p> <p>The legal basis and the institutional set-up for a coherent policy making system are partially in place.</p> <p>Further efforts are needed to upgrade the administrative capacity in both line ministries and the OPM as well as to better define and implement policy planning and monitoring functions.</p> <p>More needs to be done to achieve results-oriented monitoring, including analysis of performance.</p>	<p>Albania is moderately prepared with the reform of its public administration.</p> <p>The legal basis and the institutional set-up are partially in place to ensure a consistent policy-making system.</p> <p>The Prime Minister’s Office needs to improve coordination with other centre of government institutions in policy processes and promote managerial accountability effectively</p>	<p>Albania is moderately prepared in what concerns the reform of its public administration.</p> <p>The legal basis and the institutional set-up are partially in place to ensure a consistent policy-making system.</p> <p>Efforts continued in several related areas, resulting in some progress in improving the regulatory framework for the impact assessment of policies.</p> <p>Consolidation of these achievements should advance further to ensure a more efficient, depoliticised and professional public administration.</p>	<p>Albania is moderately prepared with the reform of its public administration.</p> <p>The legal basis and the institutional set-up are in place to ensure a consistent policy-making system, including for European integration.</p> <p>Policy planning remains fragmented among various CoG institutions and line ministries.</p> <p>The harmonisation of central planning documents with sectoral strategies in line with government priorities remains limited.</p> <p>Alignment of policy and fiscal planning needs to be further strengthened. Institutional capacity for coordinating, reviewing and monitoring policy needs to be further improved.</p>

The EC Reports for Albania prepared between 2018 and 2021 assess Albania as *moderately prepared in the reform of its public administration*. All of these reports concur in assessing that the *legal basis and the institutional set-up are in place to ensure a consistent policy-making system*, including for European integration. The reports further conclude that *overall, some progress has been made* in various aspects of policy development and coordination, especially in the implementation of the Integrated Planning System (IPS) and its Integrated Planning Information System (IPSIS), which will help to automate strategic policy planning and budgeting. The EC Reports call for continued efforts to improve the coherence of the strategic planning and monitoring system, upgrade the existing regulatory framework on medium-term policy planning, improve coherence between policy planning and related budgeting, establish a dedicated central quality control function, and improve the effective internal control of the policy implementation phase. The reports further emphasize that the tangible results achieved to date still need further consolidation. In particular, the reports call for the government to step up efforts to upgrade administrative capacity in both line ministries and the OPM for defining better policy planning and monitoring functions. According to the reports, the OPM also needs to improve coordination with other centre of government institutions in policy processes and to promote managerial accountability more effectively. The reports underline the need for the government to increase efforts towards more evidence-based policy-making and the usage of regulatory impact assessments to inform better policies. Substantial efforts are also still needed to ensure meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society as part of an inclusive policy dialogue for reforms. These efforts should involve comprehensive feedback and follow-up mechanisms.

SIGMA/OECD assessment reports

The concept of good administration has been gradually defined by EU countries and is included in Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as the “Right to Good Administration”.⁴⁴ The notion of a European Administrative Space was set out as a unique concept in the late 1990s to meet the needs of EU enlargement, while the principles for the European Administrative Space were originally designed and implemented in 1999 through SIGMA, a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU (OECD, 1999). SIGMA was asked by the European Commission to assess the alignment of public administration in EU Candidate countries with the principles and standards that prevail among EU Member States. Through SIGMA, the *Principles of Public Administration* were developed to set standards within each of these areas for the EU integration process (OECD, 2017).⁴⁵ In 2015, SIGMA and the EC cooperated in establishing a baseline against a set of standard indicators for the Principles of Public Administration.

The Public Administration Principles developed by SIGMA/OECD in close collaboration with the EC constitute one of the key instruments used for setting the framework, standards and assessing public

44 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, TITLE V - CITIZENS' RIGHTS, Article 41 Right to good administration, accessible at: http://data.europa.eu/eli/treaty/char_2016/art_41/oj

45 The Principles of Public Administration, available at: <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/principles-public-administration-eu-candidate-countries-and-potential-candidates.htm>

administration capacity.⁴⁶ SIGMA's assessments focus on six key areas for public administration, namely the strategic framework for PAR, policy-making and coordination, civil service and administrative law, public finance management (to include public expenditure management, internal financial control systems, public procurement and external audit), as well as the mechanisms employed to protect public integrity. For each of these areas, principles are in place and specific indicators are being established. SIGMA country monitoring reports assess the fulfilment of each of these pillars and serve as important documents that inform and support the internal development of policy-making.⁴⁷ SIGMA's methodology uses a scale of 0–5 (with 5 being the best) in accordance with the EC's own scale, with point allocation constructed so that a value of 3 cannot be achieved without demonstrating that the implementation of key processes is actually happening in practice.⁴⁸

The SIGMA assessments performed in 2017, 2019 and 2021 show that the capacities and performance of public administration in Albania have gradually improved since 2015 when SIGMA first established the baseline against the set of standard indicators for the Principles of Public Administration.

The latest SIGMA Monitoring Report for Albania published in 2021⁴⁹ concludes that Albania's overall performance has been strong.⁵⁰ The country's performance in the specific area of policy development and coordination has also been assessed as strong and as having shown improvement.

SIGMA's 2021 assessment of Albania's performance in policy development and coordination:

Albania's performance in the area of policy development and coordination has been strong and has shown improvement. By comparison with other Western Balkan countries, it received the highest value for many indicators, and its overall average value and individual indicator values have risen from 2.6 in 2017 to 3.4 in 2021, the highest in the region.

46 <http://www.sigmaweb.org/byexpertise/servicedelivery/Principles-of-Public-Administration-2017-edition-ENG.pdf>

47 The Principles of Public Administration, available at: <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/principles-public-administration-eu-candidate-countries-and-potential-candidates.htm>

48 The framework consists of 52 indicators composed of more than 340 individual sub-indicators, triangulating different data sources to credibly measure the state of play in a public administration and progress in implementing reforms. For more information, consult the Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration (OECD, 2019): <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Methodological-Framework-for-the-Principles-of-Public-Administration-May-2019.pdf>

49 SIGMA (2021). *Monitoring Report The Principles of Public Administration ALBANIA*, November 2021.

50 Note: The 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Report for Albania includes findings up to June 2021.

Policy development and coordination includes strategic planning, the functioning of the centre of government, and policy coordination, development and analysis. The assessment report for Policy Development and Coordination (PDC) shows that Albania has made progress in many PDC sub-areas as well as in most of the indicators compared to 2017 (Figures 3 & 4 and Table 7). This positive assessment is largely a recognition of the establishment of all key CoG functions within the OPM, thereby ensuring an important role for the OPM, as well as the institutionalisation of ex ante tools for policy development and the development of regulations and systems for government planning. The SIGMA assessment report highlights improvements in evidencebased and participatory policy-making (including in RIAs and public consultations) and the launch of a digital planning tool (IPSIS). The report notes that an enhanced integrated planning system tool (IPSIS) was launched in 2021 but that it has not yet been fully operationalised and the actual benefits have not yet materialised. More needs to be done in terms of regulatory impact assessment to improve its quality, enhance its scope, and to strengthen its oversight and impact on final policy design. Although new guidelines on public consultation were introduced in 2021, enhanced central oversight is needed to ensure its full implementation and improve results. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of public consultation remains limited.

Figure 3: SIGMA Assessment 2021 – Policy Development and Cooperation progress in 2021 compared to 2017

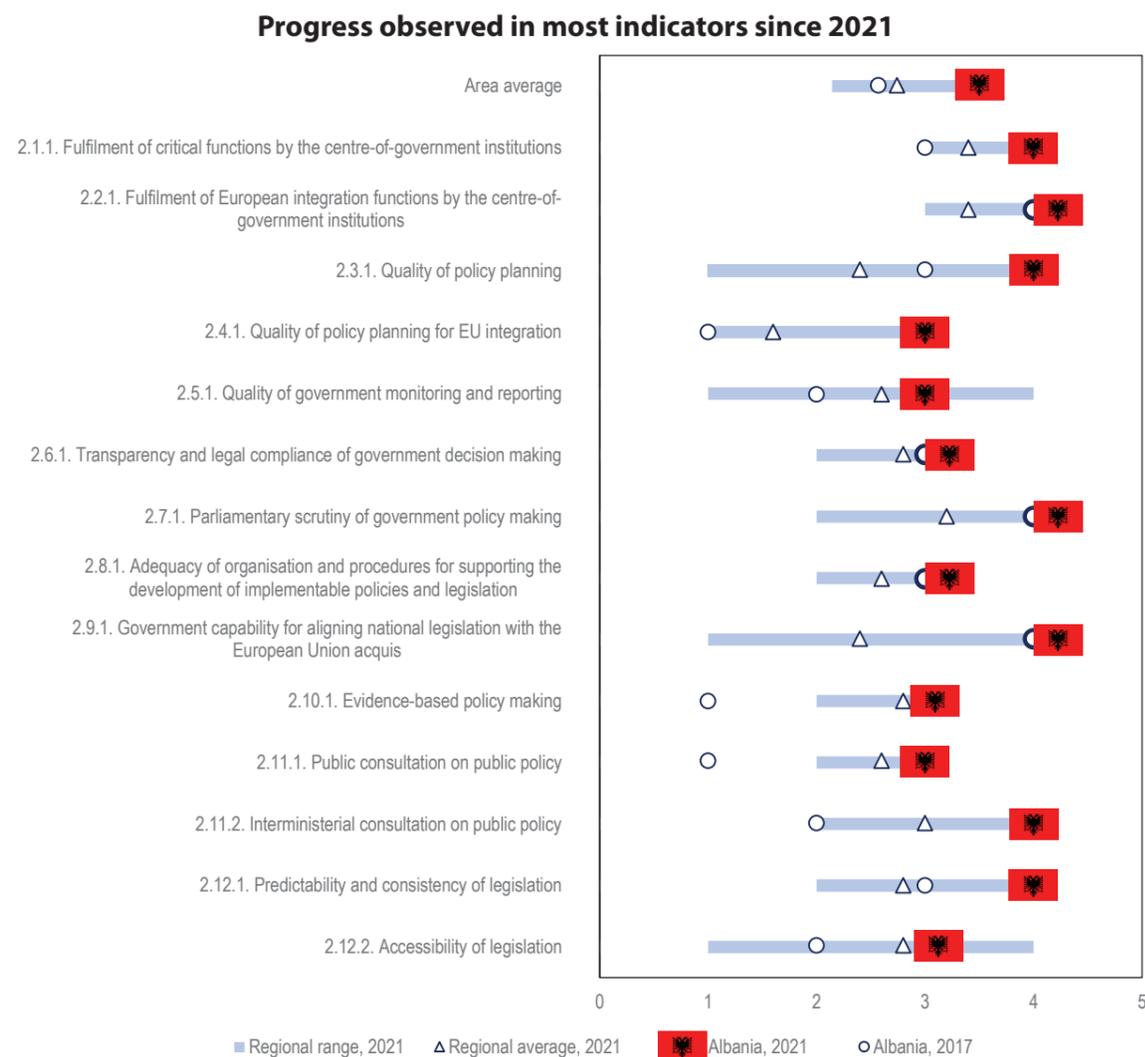


Table 7. Albania's performance in PDC area in 2021 vs. 2017

Policy Development and Coordination	2017	2021
Fulfilment of critical functions by the centre-of-government institutions	3,00	4,00
Fulfilment of European integration functions by the centre-of-government institutions	4,00	4,00
Quality of policy planning	3,00	4,00
Quality of policy planning for European integration	1,00	3,00
Quality of government monitoring and reporting	2,00	3,00
Transparency and legal compliance of government decision making	3,00	3,00
Parliamentary scrutiny of government policy making	4,00	4,00
Adequacy of organisation and procedures for supporting the development of implementable policies	3,00	3,00
Government capability for aligning national legislation with the European Union acquis	4,00	4,00
Evidence-based policy making	1,00	3,00
Public consultation on public policy	1,00	3,00
Inter-ministerial consultation on public policy	2,00	4,00
Predictability and consistency of legislation	3,00	4,00
Accessibility of legislation	2,00	3,00

Source: The 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Report for Albania

Figure 4: SIGMA Assessment 2021 – Policy Development and Coordination - Progress observed in many indicators in 2021 compared to 2017



Source: The 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Report for Albania

With regard to the key challenges for Albania in the area of PDC, the SIGMA assessment report emphasises that the *capabilities of the OPM for carrying out all key CoG functions* (policy development, coordination, oversight, “gate-keeping”) *need to be strengthened*. The ongoing preparation of an OPM Rulebook that will include and highlight all the CoG functions performed by the OPM remains to be finalised, and the full operationalisation of the new IPSIS planning system still needs to be ensured. Greater harmonisation is required in government planning, including of the Government Annual Analytical Programme, the NPEI, the budget, the NSDI and sectoral strategies. The quality of RIA needs further improvement, widening its scope to include the most important secondary legislation, expanding its quality control, and institutionalising training for continuous capacity-building. Full

implementation and enforcement of the guidelines on public consultation is also required, with improvements needed in monitoring the implementation of rules and the regular development of annual reports.⁵¹

The IPMG mechanism continues to serve as an excellent tool for ensuring comprehensive and consistent policy dialogue across the government, enhancing the government’s close cooperation with the country’s development partners and facilitating significant involvement on the part of other major stakeholders. Indeed, the IPMG’s contribution to inclusive and evidence-based policy making and the importance of this mechanism for constructive policy dialogue was recently highlighted by the donor community, which formally requested the government to ensure its sustainability over the medium term.

OECD – Government at a Glance: Western Balkans

Published in 2020, the OECD’s *Government at a Glance: Western Balkans* report confirms that Albania has established the regulatory and institutional frameworks needed for most of the Centre-of-Government (CoG) functions that are essential for effective policy-making and coordination. In Albania there is only one institution (i.e. the Office of the Prime Minister) that supports both the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers.⁵² In the Western Balkans region in general, a greater proportion of CoGs than in EU and OECD countries have exclusive competence over strategic government functions, including strategic planning and relations with the parliament. However, if both shared and exclusive responsibilities are taken into account then CoGs in EU and OECD countries actually have a broader range of functions than those in the Western Balkans.⁵³

Table 8. OECD’s *Government at a Glance: Western Balkans – 2017 and 2019 performance in public administration areas shows wide variation across the Western Balkans*

	Strategic framework for PAR	Policy making	Public service and HRM	Accountability	Service Delivery	PFM	Budget management	Public Procurement	External audit
ALB	2.5	2.4*	3.4	2.6	3.3	2.8	2.6	2.8	3.5
BIH	1	1.3	1.6	1.8	1	1.7	1.2	2.2	2.5
XKV	2.5	2.8	3	2.6	3*	2.9	2.7	3	3.5
MNE	2.3	3.1	2.6	3.4	3*	2.6	2.4	2.6*	3.5
MKD	0.8	1.8	2.8*	2.6	3	2.8	2.4	3.4	3
SRB	1.8	2.7	3*	2.6	3*	2.9	2.3	3.6	3.5
Western Balkans	1.8	2.4	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.3	2.9	3.3

51 SIGMA (2021). [Monitoring Report The Principles of Public Administration ALBANIA](#), November 2021.

52 OECD (2020). *Government at a Glance: Western Balkans*, p. 76.

53 Ibid.

Note: Blue indicates higher averages and grey indicates lower averages. The indicator averages are presented for each area of the Principles of Public Administration (based on SIGMA's methodology and using the scale 0–5 with 5 being the best). The table includes information from SIGMA's 2017 and 2019 assessments. Averages based on 2019 values were marked with an asterisk, since SIGMA's 2019 assessments did not cover all countries and areas.

Source: *OECD Government at a Glance: Western Balkans*, adapted on the basis of data from SIGMA's 2017 and 2019 monitoring reports, available at: <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/monitoring-reports.htm>

The OECD's *Government at a Glance: Western Balkans* report observes that the "capacities and performance of public administrations" in this region "have gradually improved since 2015," but that "progress has been incremental and uneven", while acknowledging that "no countries have leapfrogged to a state where their public administration systems are at the same fundamental level as the majority of EU member countries".⁵⁴ This assessment is displayed in detail in Table 7, which shows that progress is very mixed across the Western Balkan countries. Despite outperforming other Western Balkan countries in certain aspects, the table clearly shows that Albania is still not achieving an average level of 3 across all areas, confirming that further significant efforts are needed on the part of Albania to converge fully with OECD and EU standards and to achieve full adherence with the Principles of Public Administration (value of 5).

The 2020 'Western Balkan Barometer' for Albania

The 2020 Western Balkan Barometer highlighted the need for Albania to further improve its policy-making system, with the survey showing that the majority of citizens feel they have little involvement in government decision-making, reflecting a widespread lack of trust and even political apathy.⁵⁵ The 2020 Barometer results further indicate the need for increased focus on improving specific areas of good governance, including the allocation of resources.⁵⁶

Albania Systematic Country Diagnostic

The World Bank's 2020 *Albania Systematic Country Diagnostic*⁵⁷ concludes that although Albania has made efforts to ensure consistent and accountable policy-making and administrative systems, implementation remains limited. The World Bank's assessment points to policy fragmentation at all levels of government, highlighting a managerial focus on processes rather than the achievement of results and a lack of delegation of responsibility to middle management as impediments to achieving more significant improvements in the efficiency and transparency of the Albanian government.

⁵⁴ OECD (2020), *Government at a Glance: Western Balkans*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a8c72f1b-en>

⁵⁵ <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public>

⁵⁶ <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public>

⁵⁷ World Bank. 2020. *Albania Systematic Country Diagnostic: 2019 Update*. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33735> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/33735>

4

Coordination of PAR and PFM STRATEGIES

Albania's approach to improving policy-making and coordination has been assessed as coherent, systematic and appropriate. As highlighted throughout this study, the government of Albania has established Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) and Sector Steering Committees (SSC) within priority areas and sectors to improve internal policy-making and move the country closer to the European Union.

The IPMG mechanism aims at supporting and improving good governance and administration, which is one of the main principles and citizens' rights of the European Union. Economic development and democratisation, as well as political stability, all depend on good governance and effective administration, hence the importance of efforts to overcome cumbersome administrative processes, institutional overload, lack of administrative capacity and stability, limited transparency and accountability of public institutions, corruption, and disconnections between policy objectives and financial support. The IPMG mechanism is a tool for supporting such efforts, ensuring comprehensive and consistent policy dialogue across the government in close cooperation with development partners and with involvement and inputs from other major stakeholders.

PM Order no. 157 of 22.10.2018 established the IPMG Good Governance and Public Administration (IPMG GG-PAR) and Sector Steering Committee for PFM (PFM SSC), which falls under the umbrella of the IPMG GG-PAR. The organisational and individual/managerial responsibility for coordinating and steering PAR and PFM is established under the umbrella of the IPMG mechanism through the IPMG for Good Governance and PAR. Overall political leadership in coordinating PAR and PFM is provided by the Deputy Prime Minister through the IPMG GG-PAR structures.

The strategic framework for PAR and PFM includes the Cross-Cutting Strategy for PAR and the PFM Strategy.

Table 9. Key Strategic Framework in PAR and PFM

STRATEGY	Timeframe	Developments
PAR	2015-2020	extended Action Plan 2018–22 adopted
PFM	2019-2022	new strategy 2019–22 adopted

Coordination of PAR

Albania's Good Governance policy is anchored in several interrelated sector and cross-sectoral strategies. The preparation, monitoring and reporting of overall reform implementation, as well as the outcome and output indicators of the PAR Strategy and other PAR-related strategies, are now carried out through the framework of the IPMG for Good Governance and PAR structure and the relevant Thematic Groups with the support of the IPMG secretariat on Good Governance and Public Administration/ IPMG Central Technical Secretariat led by the DDGG.

Albania's strategic framework for public administration reform includes the Cross-Cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy (CCPARS), on the basis of which the Public Administration Reform is implemented and monitored. The current CCPARS is based on the vision and strategic objectives set out in the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015- 2020. A new action plan on PAR covering the period 2018–22 has been approved and the passport of indicators of the PAR strategy has been updated accordingly⁵⁸.

The government has been continuously monitoring the implementation of the PAR strategy, with data collection and reporting practices for PAR now being shifted towards results-based monitoring. The Department of Public Administration (DoPA), as the responsible institution for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of CCPARS, conducts this process every year, aiming at its continuous improvement. The 2020 Monitoring Report of the Cross-Cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy prepared by DoPA showed that 89% of all planned activities were under implementation and 58% had been completed. Progress in implementation in each of the four pillars separately was reported as follows:

- Pillar I: Policy Making and Quality of Legislation (46 sub-activities): 87% implementation progress;
- Pillar II: Organization and Functioning of Public Administration (18 sub-activities): 94% implementation progress;
- Pillar III: Civil Service: Human Resources Management (36 sub-activities: 89% implementation progress;
- Pillar IV: Administrative Procedures and Oversight (30 sub-activities): 90% implementation progress.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The draft PAR Strategy Action Plan 2020–2022, was discussed at a meeting of the Thematic Group on Civil Service on Civil Service Reform and CCPARS, held on 4 July 2019 with participation from civil society and development partners.

⁵⁹ 2020 CCPARS Monitoring Report, available at: <http://dap.gov.al/publikime/dokumenta-strategjik/204-raportet-e-monitorimit-te-strategjise>

The 2020 Monitoring Report shows that that of the 28 indicators included in the passport of indicators of the Action Plan of this Strategy, 12 indicators have been fully achieved and others are progressing.

The coordination and monitoring of the PAR strategies, including CCPARS, are envisaged through the respective thematic working groups for GG-PAR IPMG. The GG-PAR IPMG has six Thematic Groups relevant to the PAR agenda:

1. Thematic Group on Civil Service Reform and CCPARS
2. Thematic Group on Policy Making
3. Thematic Group of Public Services
4. Thematic Group on e-Governance and Digitalisation
5. Thematic Group on Decentralisation
6. Thematic Group on Anti-Corruption

In accordance with the PM Order no. 157, the PFM SC is also included under the umbrella of the GG-PAR IPMG.

PM Order no. 157 has created a General Technical Secretariat for the overall IPMG Mechanism led by the DDGG and a separate Technical Secretariat of the IPMG GG-PAR. Each of the Thematic Groups has a Technical Secretariat to coordinate the PAR agenda at administrative level. The following political and technical structures for the coordination of PAR are in place in Albania:

- The Deputy Prime Minister, through the GG-PAR IPMG structures, provides overall political leadership and coordination for PAR.
- The Central Technical Secretariat led by the DDGG is the main administrative-level structure for coordination of the PAR agenda.
- Technical support to the GG-PAR IPMG is provided by the DDGG in its role as the Technical Secretariat for this IPMG.
- Technical support to the coordination of the PAR Strategy (CCPARS) is provided by the Department of Public Administration in its role as the Technical Secretariat for the Thematic Group on Civil Service and PAR.
- An administrative-level coordination body has been formally established, composed of representatives from all institutions that are leading work areas related to the objectives of the PAR strategy

Preparation, implementation and monitoring of the CCPARS Strategy is discussed in the meetings of the Thematic Group "Civil Service and CCPARS", which is led by DoPA. Participation of international development partners and civil society participate is ensured in these meetings well aiming to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and reflection of their contributions in the PAR strategic documents.

Coordination of PFM

The government of Albania has continuously monitored the implementation of the 2014–2020 Public Financial Management (PFM) Reform Strategy. A mid-term review of this strategy was completed in March 2019. Following consultations from July to September 2019, a revised and extended PFM Strategy for 2019–2022⁶⁰ was approved in December 2019. Special attention was given to the inclusion of civil society by affording opportunities to comment on the draft strategy. The PFM Strategy Annual Monitoring Report for Albania provides detailed information on the progress made in the implementation of the PFM Strategy, with the most recent monitoring report covering the period 1 January to 31 December 2020. While general responsibility for oversight of the implementation of reforms rests with the MoFE, the PFM Strategy involves the entire government sector, the Albanian Supreme Audit Institution, and parliament. Overall responsibility for the successful implementation of the Strategy is thus shared among all these public sector stakeholders, which requires clear and strong institutional arrangements.

PM Order No.157, dated 22.10.2018, defines the PFM SSC, which is chaired by the Minister of Finance and Economy, as the oversight body for PFM reform. Preparation, monitoring and reporting of the PFM Strategy is carried out through the PFM SSC with support by Technical Secretariat of PFM SSC (established through PM Order no. 157. In addition, the MoFE has established a Technical Committee chaired by the MoFE General Secretary to coordinate PFM Strategy implementation at administrative level. This committee includes only specific objective and component coordinators in order to enable detailed planning and monitoring of Annual Workplans. The Steering Committee and the Technical Committee are supported by the Technical Secretariat, the Directorate of Management of PFM Reform (DMRPF), which is responsible for monitoring and reporting on PFM reforms. Coordination Committees have been established as a third layer of PFM coordination under the level of the Technical Committee. The MoFE has proposed to establish seven individual Coordination, i.e. one for each Specific Objective of the PFM Strategy. These coordination committees will raise matters to be solved by the Technical and Steering committees as appropriate, with the aim being to review the detailed activities undertaken to enable coordination between the stakeholders for each component of the PFM Strategy, and address issues, risks and bottlenecks to ensure that progress remains on track.

Challenges in the coordination of PAR and PFM

PAR and PFM coordination remain crucial for effective reform due to its comprehensiveness, complexity, and institutional diversity. In practice, coordination, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms encounter a range of challenges, including the need to secure technical and political support for both PAR and PFM and the associated need to ensure the financial sustainability of the overall reform of public administration.

Civil society remains formally involved in the IPMG at political and technical levels, though this

60 PFM Strategy: <https://www.financa.gov.al/strategjia-permenaxhimin-e-financave-publike-2019-2022/>

involvement is subject to being invited to the IPMG meetings. With the recent amendment through PM Order no. 157, 20 October 2018,⁶¹ the involvement of CSOs is envisaged in PAR coordination and monitoring at both administrative and political level. CSOs have been involved in the presentation and consultation stages of the preparation of the CCPARS and action plans and its monitoring through their inclusion in the Thematic Group on Civil Service Reform and CCPARS. Also, in the case of the PFM, different stakeholder groups have been involved in the PFM Sector Steering Committee in the preparation of the PFM Strategy and its monitoring reports.

Alignment between policy and budget planning

The aim of linking and aligning the process of adopting and implementing policies with the mid-term budgeting process and foreign assistance lies at the heart of the implementation of the Integrated Strategic Planning System.

The Integrated Planning System is designed to ensure the following objectives:

- Financial and policy planning are integrated as components of a single planning system;
- Public investment and foreign assistance are initially identified in sectoral and priority strategic documents and therefore included in the mid-term budgeting framework;
- Government sets strategic policy priorities within the macroeconomic fiscal framework;
- The Mid-Term Budget Programme accommodates 1–3-year action plans of strategic documents within the budget programme structure, hence decisions on programme spending will depend on policy goals, objectives, and expected measures.

The IPS and its systems (IPSIS, AFMIS and EAMIS) are embedded to the PFM Strategy for 2019–2022. The overall objective of this Strategy is to “achieve a better balanced and sustainable budget with a reduced debt ratio through stronger financial management and control and audit processes and where budget execution is properly linked to Government policies.” The focus of Specific Objective 2 of the PFM Strategy further states that the government recognises the need to further align key government planning documents with the MTBP.⁶²

The link between the adopted strategies and the MTBP have been monitored annually by the EU through SIGMA. The alignment of the objectives of the strategies with the priorities of the MTBP is assessed by identifying any non-matching priorities between the two documents.

SIGMA’s 2021 Monitoring Report for Albania⁶³ concludes that the process and content of the annual budget planning process is adequate and that improvements have been achieved in fiscal rules and in the substance of the MTBP. The report further confirms that the alignment between planned costs in sectoral policy plans and the medium-term budget has improved, scoring this aspect with 2 out

61 PM Order no. 157, date 20 October 2018, “On the measures taken to implement the broad sectoral/intersectoral approach and the establishment of integrated sectoral/intersectoral mechanism”

62 Planning documents include the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), Sector Strategies and Cross-Cutting Strategies, and other policy documents.

63 SIGMA (2021). Monitoring Report [The Principles of Public Administration ALBANIA](#).

of 3 points. The Report finds that MTBP includes outcome-level indicators for 45 of its 70 priorities (64%). The completeness of financial estimates in sectoral strategies was scored with a maximum of 5 points. The Report scores the alignment of planned costs in sectoral policy plans with the medium-term budget at 2 out of 3.

5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Albania has made significant progress in many key areas of policy-making and coordination. Further improvement is still needed, however, especially in advancing inter-institutional coordination for the implementation of Public Administration Reform. In particular, there needs to be more active engagement of municipalities and greater efforts to mobilize the necessary human resources to manage key reforms such as PAR and PFM. There also remains a need for more efficient implementation of reforms through stronger policy coordination, including improved coordination of public policies among public administrative institutions. In order to support the government in delivering a government-as-a-whole agenda, it is increasingly important to consolidate the coordinating role performed by the CoG. For public administration reforms to be effective, moreover, PAR needs to be an overarching priority of the government as a whole.

Policy Coordination Architecture

Best practices in EU and OECD countries demonstrate the need for close co-operation and coordination between the key institutions in the system, i.e. the bodies of the CoG. Such coordination is vital to ensure the integrated planning system works effectively.

Albania currently has a mixture of longstanding and new mechanisms policy coordination in place, though insufficient coordination among CoG bodies and their internal units remains a key challenge.

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), which is chaired by the Prime Minister, has a crucial role in establishing government priorities, ensuring alignment between strategies and the MTBP, and

monitoring progress in implementing the NSDI. Indeed, the role of the SPC has become even more crucial in recent years as a result of the far-reaching policy and fiscal challenges arising from the 2019 earthquake and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason it may be timely to undertake a review of the range of strategic planning and priority-setting processes that fall within SPC's mandate.

Albania's establishment of the IPMG architecture constitutes a major reform of decision-making structures in the country. The role of the IPMGs should continue to be strengthened, including by addressing the considerable variation in the current approaches of the different groups within this mechanism and the confusion that exists in many technical secretariats regarding their precise role. Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, the performance of the IPMG mechanism improved in 2020 as compared to its first full year of implementation in 2019. The mechanism has been dynamic throughout 2020, resulting in a total of 232 meetings over the year, which is a 31% increase over the total number of meetings held in 2019. The Performance Index of this mechanism in 2020 was 61%.⁶⁴ Greater efforts are still needed to strengthen the IPMG structures to ensure that they achieve their full potential.

To coordinate and oversee the IPMG/SSC architecture, the government of Albania has established a General Secretariat chaired by the DDGG within the OPM. Given that the membership of this Secretariat includes all key IPS institutions and that the DDGG is one of the main CoG institutions, this body would be ideally placed to determine how best to adapt IPS to the current policy, fiscal and administrative environment.

It is important for the SPC and the IPMGs/SSCs to consider how to improve the current way in which policy documents are compiled and presented to committee members, including the use of better analytical techniques and more user-friendly presentation methods. Albania should also explore ways in which IPSIS can further support the provision of timely and high-quality performance data. In reviewing these processes, it should be recognised that finding the most effective and appealing ways to summarize and present analytic material has been shown to be a critical success factor for evidence-based decision-making.

To ensure sustained political steering and coordination of all reforms related to good governance, it is important to convene the GG-PAR IPMG at least twice a year in close cooperation with the development partners of the country. The GG-PAR IPMG can be further strengthened and expanded as the primary forum for reviewing the full compliance of proposed policies and reforms with the principles of good governance prior to their approval by the Council of Ministers or the SPC. In addition, the GG-PAR IPMGs need to improve their coordination with other CoG institutions in policy processes and make further efforts to increase effective managerial accountability.

Strengthening the IPMG mechanism is important for high-level political inter-sectoral coordination in order to ensure adequate policy dialogue for the overall coordination of cross-sectoral policy development and IPA management. The link between technical and political support for good governance also needs to be strengthened. Finally, it is important to develop more user-friendly methods to present evidence-based analysis and options to the IPMGs/SSCs, the SPC and the CoM.

64 Annual Progress Report 2020 - IPMG Mechanism performance 2020, produced by the government of Albania

If an IPS reboot is supported, the General Secretariat should oversee the development of an updated model.

Effective Policy Development

It is crucial to preserve and further develop the capacities of the CoG for strong and integrated coordination, especially as the coordinating role of CoGs worldwide is increasingly important to help deliver on government-as-a-whole agendas. Internal coordination between CoG bodies in Albania thus needs to be strengthened and the roles and responsibilities of the various OPM units should be clarified with greater precision.

There is a need to ensure that all relevant CoG institutions and OPM units are consulted on all new draft policy proposals before any draft laws or policy packages are submitted to the CoM for final approval. All relevant CoG institutions should be fully and regularly consulted during the preparation of planning documents.

The OPM needs to improve coordination with other CoG institutions in policy processes and to intensify its efforts to increase managerial accountability. The government also needs to step up efforts to upgrade the administrative capacities of line ministries and the OPM for data collection, including better policy planning and monitoring functions.

Work should continue on improving the coherence of the strategic planning and monitoring system, upgrading the existing regulatory framework on medium-term policy planning, and improving the alignment of policy planning with related budgeting. A dedicated central quality control function should be established as part of further efforts to improve the effectiveness of the internal control of the policy implementation phase.

It is crucial to make full use of the currently scattered and limited capacities at ministerial level for ensuring policy development, EI, budget planning and donor coordination, including by ensuring that the same units and people are involved in all these inter-linked processes.

Financial sustainability also needs to be improved. A number of assessments by international organizations recommend that Albania's strategic planning process needs to be strengthened, including strengthening the fiscal impact assessments that accompany draft strategies, policy proposals and draft legal acts with greater linkages to the MTBP.

The priority-setting process also needs to be improved, including greater alignment with the MTBP. Each year, the SPC and the CoM must decide which policy or public investment proposals the require significant new or expanded funding will be reflected in the programme budget ceilings. Inevitably, the cumulative demands from all priority sources will invariably exceed available funds, meaning that difficult choices must be made by the SPC. The preparation of the PPD already benefits this difficult process and should be further strengthened in future years by sharpening the identification of policy and fiscal trade-offs. The inclusion of options on cost-savings measures could also be

helpful, since expenditure reductions can expand the pool of funding available for new or expanded policy measures, including public investments.

A very high volume of strategic documents are now in circulation in the government and the cumulative impact of these strategies needs to be considered. If dozens of strategies result in hundreds of specific policy objectives elaborated by thousands of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), it will become extremely difficult to prioritize and compare competing claims when developing the MTBP and monitoring reports. The probability of duplications, overlaps and contradictions between specific objectives increases significantly with the number of strategies, making monitoring especially burdensome. Standards accordingly need to be developed not only to govern the quality and content of strategic documents but also to control their proliferation. It should be remembered that not every policy issue requires its own national strategy, policy or programme. For example, in many countries all proposals to develop strategic documents are first rigorously assessed before they can proceed.

Greater attention should be given to situation analyses in accordance with the principle that the rationale for any proposed strategic and policy goals must be based on evidence-based analysis.

Effective Evidence-Based Policy Development

As a new instrument in its third year of implementation in Albania, it is only to be expected that the assessment of regulatory impacts (RIAs) have not yet achieved their full potential. The 2019 and 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Reports for Albania include the following specific recommendations for RIAs:

- RIAs need to be prepared at an earlier stage of the policy process.
- RIAs need to be extended to all policies, not just draft laws.
- More detailed guidance on public consultations needs to be reflected in RIA procedures.

The Impact Assessment Methodology approved in 2018 envisages a two-step process whereby RIAs would first establish preferred policy directions in order to guide the preparation of the resulting draft law or by-law. This new process would represent a major change in the way decisions are made. If RIAs are presented separately and in advance of draft legal acts, they become formal decision-making documents requiring debate and a CoM decision. At present, RIAs accompany draft legislation in the form of explanatory notes and are thus regarded by decision-makers more as informational than decision-making documents. To ensure that RIAs are treated as decision-making documents, greater care will need to be taken in their preparation and subsequent review.

The Impact Assessment Methodology highlights the need for proportionality. This means that the resources invested in undertaking any impact assessment, including human, time and financial resources, should be proportionate to the type of policy being considered, its anticipated impacts, and its current stage of development. To achieve proportionality, the focus should be on policies that are likely to have significant impacts and which have a high level of stakeholder interest.

While not every draft law requires a full RIA, the impacts and costs of any draft law with significant

policy impacts should be assessed by decision-makers so that they can evaluate the policy options and impacts before determining the preferred policy direction. One approach to minimize the burden of RIAs on ministries and to ensure that decision-makers focus only on significant policy issues would be to develop two levels of RIA (full and limited):

- Full RIAs would be applied only to major (complex, costly, contentious or crosscutting) policy issues and would be scheduled in advance of any resulting draft legislation.
- Limited RIAs would accompany draft legal acts that have no major policy implications.

Reviewing full RIAs before submitting them to decision-makers would require a more comprehensive assessment by the Regulatory and Compliance Department and the DDGG and – in select cases – by the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, in accordance with the increased role and status of full RIAs as policy documents directly linked to the NSDI and/or other strategic documents. All policy proposals must be consistently checked to ensure they comply with the requirements of evidence-based policy-making and are consistent with wider priorities.

The inclusion of the Policy Implementation Document module within the IPSIS anticipates the introduction of full RIAs, ensuring that there will be only minimal implications from this new process for the design and functionality of IPSIS.

The government of Albania also needs to develop a well-resourced and resilient regulatory management system that is capable of swiftly adapting to changes, including technological advances and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Improvements in this area should include:

- Integrating concepts of resilience into policy-making
- Renewing policies, basing them on evidence, using the ex-ante impact assessments.

It is important for Albania to continue to consolidate the tangible progress it has already achieved. In particular, the government needs to step up efforts to ensure more evidence-based policy making by building the administrative capacities of line ministries for policy planning and monitoring, data collection, and the use of RIAs to inform all policy proposals.

Substantial efforts are needed to ensure meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society as part of an inclusive policy dialogue for reforms. These efforts should involve comprehensive feedback and follow-up mechanisms. Communications to citizens regarding the ongoing reforms also needs to be enhanced.

Results-oriented performance for Good Governance Reforms (PAR & PFM)

Despite progress in many areas of governance, further improvement is needed in advancing inter-institutional coordination for the implementation of PAR through more active engagement and mobilisation of the human resources needed to manage key PAR and PFM reforms. Strengthening policy coordination is crucial to support the implementation of PAR. For PAR to be effective, moreover, it needs to be an overarching priority of the government as a whole.

Coordination between the PAR and PFM reform structures should be enhanced. At present, political support is sometimes lacking due to weak links with administrative coordination bodies. The link between technical and political support for PAR thus also needs to be strengthened.

The overall coordination and management of PAR should be strengthened by enlarging the role and increasing the decision-making authority of the coordination bodies for PAR, as well as by strengthening coordination among the different government units involved in planning, monitoring and reporting processes.

PAR and PFM planning documents should have outcome-level indicators, and reports should provide information on the progress achieved towards fulfilling objectives. In terms of monitoring and reporting, data collection and reporting practices for PAR and PFM strategy need to be shifted towards results-based monitoring.

The government should streamline and rationalise existing planning documents and ensure that the various plans are all fully aligned with each other. The financial sustainability of PAR and PFM also needs to be improved.

European Integration

The 2021 SIGMA country assessment for Albania reports that coordination mechanisms for EU integration have been formally established and regulated at both political and administrative levels. As such, all elements of a functional EI planning process are formally in place, providing the necessary basis for addressing the key challenges faced by the current system both in terms of current experience and potential challenges ahead. Despite having been reorganised in 2018–2019, however, the current EI coordination structure in Albania is not functioning effectively in practice at both the political and administrative level.

The relevant structures for EI coordination, need to be streamlined. The roles and responsibilities of ministerial departments responsible for policy development, policy coordination, EI coordination, legislative drafting and implementation functions all need to be better defined.

With the launch of EU accession negotiations and the appointment of the Chief Negotiator in the OPM, it will be essential to ensure that all IPS core processes are effectively supporting EU integration. EU integration must be mainstreamed into each core IPS process. The following measures should be undertaken to mainstream EI coordination across all policy, planning and budgeting systems:

- Using the IPMG/SSC mechanism as a forum for ensuring appropriate policy dialogue, deliberations and alignment with respect to EI-related policy issues.
- Using the IPMG Thematic Groups as de facto EI IIWGs (European Integration Inter-Institutional Working Groups).
- Developing standards and procedures for core government policy and financial planning systems that reflect EI-specific requirements.

- Identifying EI-related roles, responsibilities and tasks for relevant central institutions, including but not limited to the Office of the Chief Negotiator, the OPM Regulatory and Compliance Department (the Legislative Unit for Coordinating Priority Actions and the EU Acquis), the DDGG (OPM), the EI Secretariat, and the IPA Unit (MEFA).
- Incorporating EU accession as a standing item on the CoM meeting agenda for the discussion of progress and related issues.

The NPEI should be fully aligned with other government planning documents. In particular, the NPEI should be fully aligned with and prioritized in the Government Annual Work Plan.

There needs to be better integration of IPA III programming and management within the IPMG mechanism. This could include better use of policy dialogue when IPA priorities for funding are being discussed, avoiding unnecessary duplication and the use of various inter-institutional working groups for similar purposes. (For example, the Good Governance and Public Administration IPMG currently also serves as the PAR Special Group in relation to EU integration.)

The profile of EI/ IPA-related measures should be raised through stronger political involvement from the CoG. This could be achieved, for example, by holding weekly meetings to debate the state of play, by monitoring risks and introducing an early warning system to flag up any failures to reach particular indicators. Some of these suggested improvements are already being tested, resulting in an increased level of implementation of the NPEI 2020-2022.

The importance of mainstreaming and prioritizing EU integration in all of the government's policy and financial planning systems will only increase as accession negotiations proceed. As Albania proceeds to take concrete steps towards EU membership, the EI-related agenda will increasingly merge with the domestic policy agenda, with EU-related matters increasingly coming to be seen as domestic issues. This underscores the need to mainstream EI issues into the government's existing policy review and decision-making processes. The Integrated Planning System (IPS) provides a coherent mechanism to facilitate and ensure such mainstreaming is undertaken.

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