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Launch of the Guide and of the Network of Ethics Coordinators and Advisors, Integrity Week, Tirana, 11 December 2025. Photo: IDM.

From Appointment to Practice: Co-designing a Roadmap for Ethics Advisors in Albania's Public Administration

Lessons from applying design thinking to a central-level PAR instrument

Aurora Halili – Project Officer, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)

7	21	35	~60
months from the first consultative meeting (May 2025) to formal approval (December 2025)	practitioners co-reviewed the draft: 7 line ministries, DoPA and 10 CSOs	days from the Policy Lab workshop to the DoPA order approving the guide	participants at the launch of the Network of Ethics Coordinators and Advisors

01 Summary

Albania has formally assigned ethics advice to designated staff in public institutions, but until 2025 the advisors had no operational guidance on how to do the job. Within the

WeBER 3.0 project, IDM ran a Policy Lab with the Ministry of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption (MAPA) and the Department of Public Administration (DoPA). The lab applied the **design-thinking methodology** to co-create a practical roadmap for Ethics Advisors together with the people who will use it.

The process moved from a jointly defined problem, through consultations with practitioners and a Policy Lab workshop where 21 practitioners reviewed the draft section by section, to a final version. DoPA approved the guide by order on **9 December 2025**, and it was launched on **11 December 2025** during Integrity Week, together with a Network of Ethics Coordinators and Advisors.

This brief documents how the process worked, what made it effective and what is needed for the guide to change practice. It recommends that DoPA complete and publish the appointment of Ethics Advisors, collect data on their work, embed the guide in training, and review it with its users after one year.

02 The problem: ethics advisors on paper, without a manual

Law No. 9131/2003 "On the rules of ethics in public administration" and Council of Ministers Decision No. 874 of 29 September 2021 assign ethics advice to the human resources units of each institution. These units must advise civil servants on ethical dilemmas, assess gifts, process requests for external activities and report regularly to DoPA.[1] In January 2025, a DoPA Practical Manual and Instruction designated **Ethics Advisors** within these HR units.[2]

Implementation lagged behind. In April 2025, responding to a freedom-of-information request, DoPA stated that the appointment of Ethics Advisors had not been completed in all institutions. It also reported no data so far on the number of requests for ethics advice.[2] Ethics Advisors had also been appointed in institutions under DoPA through IDM's earlier SIDA-funded integrity project, in cooperation with DoPA. They had a mandate but no operational guide on how to carry it out, and that is the need the Policy Lab set out to address.[3]

This matters beyond compliance. Ethics Advisors are one of the few preventive integrity tools that reach every civil servant. Whether they work in practice is a direct test of how well the preventive side of Albania's anti-corruption framework works.

03 The method: design thinking applied at central level

WeBER 3.0 Policy Labs use the citizen-centred design-thinking approach set out in the project's Guidelines for citizen-centred problem solving.[4] The Guidelines describe six iterative stages:

- **Empathise**: understand the problem from the users' perspective.
- **Define**: turn those insights into a problem statement about people, not technical requirements.
- **Ideate**: generate solutions with stakeholders.
- **Prototype**: build a tangible, low-cost version of the solution.

- **Test**: test the prototype with real users.
- **Iterate**: refine it on the basis of feedback.

The Guidelines illustrate the method with local-government examples. Figure 1 shows how the Albanian Policy Lab applied the same logic to a **central-level public administration reform instrument**, where the "users" are the civil servants who must apply the solution: the Ethics Advisors, HR units and DoPA.

04 How the Policy Lab worked in practice

Empathise and define: starting from the institution's own priority

The process began on 8 May 2025 with a consultative meeting at MAPA. IDM presented the findings of the WeBER PAR Monitor report on the Strategic Framework for PAR and the design-thinking plan for the Policy Lab, and the Ministry endorsed the approach. Instead of arriving with a fixed topic, IDM opened a joint brainstorming on possible problems. Follow-up meetings with MAPA and DoPA narrowed the focus to a need both institutions recognised: Ethics Advisors already appointed in institutions under DoPA had no operational guide. The problem was framed around the advisors themselves, consistent with the design-thinking requirement that a problem statement describes people and their needs rather than technical requirements.

Consult the users, then prototype

IDM held a series of consultations with DoPA and Ethics Advisors on their roles and challenges, on gaps in existing guidance and institutional practice, and on what the roadmap should contain. These inputs shaped a first draft. In design-thinking terms, the draft was the **prototype**: a tangible version that users could react to, rather than a finished policy document.

Test it with the people who will use it

The Policy Lab workshop on 4 November 2025 tested the prototype. Its 25 participants included human-resource specialists from seven line ministries (Justice; Health and Social Protection; Finance and Economy; Agriculture and Rural Development; Tourism and Environment; Culture; Europe and Foreign Affairs), four DoPA officials and ten civil society organisations. In working groups, each assigned to specific sections of the draft, participants discussed the content step by step and proposed concrete changes. Feedback was collected systematically and integrated into the document **during the workshop**, so that participants could see their input reflected immediately.

Iterate, adopt and launch

IDM consolidated the workshop input into a final draft, which went through a final review with MAPA and DoPA. On 9 December 2025, the Director of DoPA approved the *Guide for Ethics Advisors in Public Administration* by order. The order instructs the responsible structures in each institution to distribute the guide and ensure that every civil servant is familiar with it.[5] Two days later, during Integrity Week, the guide was launched together with the **Network of Ethics Coordinators and Advisors**. The launch brought together around 60 participants from ministries, DoPA, municipalities, prefectures, independent institutions and civil society.[6] The guide covers the role and mandate of Ethics Advisors,

their main functions, standard work tools and forms of cooperation between the responsible institutions.[6]

FIGURE 1

How the Policy Lab followed the design-thinking stages

1 Empathise & Define — May 2025

Consultative meeting at MAPA: PAR Strategy findings presented and design-thinking plan endorsed. Joint brainstorming with MAPA and DoPA. **Focus agreed:** an operational roadmap ("a bible") for Ethics Advisors.

2 Empathise — May–Oct 2025

Consultations with DoPA and Ethics Advisors on their roles and daily challenges, gaps in guidance and practice, and what the roadmap should contain.

3 Ideate & Prototype — Autumn 2025

IDM turns the inputs into a draft roadmap that works as the prototype: role, mandate, functions, standard work tools and cooperation between institutions.

4 Test — 4 Nov 2025

Policy Lab workshop in Tirana with 25 participants (7 ministries, DoPA, 10 CSOs, IDM). Working groups review the draft section by section; feedback integrated in real time.

5 Iterate — Nov–Dec 2025

IDM consolidates all feedback into a final draft; final review in close consultation with MAPA and DoPA.

6 Adopt & Launch — 9 & 11 Dec 2025

DoPA Director's order approves the Guide (9 Dec). Launch at Integrity Week together with the Network of Ethics Coordinators and Advisors (11 Dec).

↻ *Feedback from the test stage went straight back into the prototype: the draft was revised during and after the workshop.*

Source: IDM Policy Lab documentation (consultative meeting minutes, participant lists, DoPA approval order). Stages follow the WeBER 3.0 Guidelines.

35 days from testing the prototype with its users to formal adoption by DoPA. Policy documents drafted by civil society often wait months for an institutional response, or never get one. Here, **ownership was built into the process** from the first meeting.

05 What made the process work

A problem owned by the institution

The focus was not proposed by IDM alone but agreed with MAPA and DoPA. This secured endorsement at the start and approval at the end.

Users in the room

The HR specialists who will apply the guide reviewed it themselves, which made the content practical rather than prescriptive.

A draft treated as a prototype

Presenting the roadmap as a working draft invited critique. Real-time integration showed participants that their input counted.

Mixed groups

Bringing together line ministries, DoPA and ten CSOs combined institutional knowledge with an external, citizen-oriented perspective.

Building on earlier work

The lab built on the advisors and relationships created under the earlier SIDA-funded integrity project, rather than starting from zero.

A launch that creates a community

Pairing the guide with a network turned a document into a platform for peer support across institutions.

Limits to bear in mind

- **Adoption is not implementation.** The process ended with approval and launch. There is not yet evidence that the guide has changed how advisors work or how often civil servants seek advice.
- **Scope.** The guide was approved for institutions under DoPA's jurisdiction. Municipalities, prefectures and independent institutions attended the launch, but their advisors operate under different arrangements.
- **Citizens' perspective.** In this lab the users were civil servants. Citizens, the ultimate beneficiaries of ethical administration, were represented only indirectly through CSOs.
- **Prototype testing.** The prototype was tested in a single workshop. A short pilot of the guide in a few institutions before adoption would have added evidence on how it works in daily practice.

06 Recommendations

1. **Complete and publish the map of Ethics Advisors.** DoPA should ensure that every institution under its jurisdiction has a designated Ethics Advisor and publish an up-to-date list of advisors and their contact points, so that civil servants know whom to approach.

2. **Measure whether the guide is used.** DoPA should apply the reporting duties in DCM No. 874/2021 by collecting annual data from Ethics Advisors on advice requests, gift assessments and external-activity requests, and publishing an aggregate report. Without this data the impact of the guide cannot be shown.

3. **Make the network a working structure.** DoPA's structure responsible for integrity should run the Network of Ethics Coordinators and Advisors with regular meetings, a shared repository of anonymised cases and a contact point for difficult or unprecedented cases.

4. **Embed the guide in training and induction.** ASPA and HR units should include the guide in the induction of new civil servants and in continuous training on ethics and integrity, so that knowledge does not depend on individual advisors.

5. **Close the loop: review the guide with its users after one year.** In line with the iterative logic of design thinking, DoPA and IDM should hold a follow-up lab in 2026–2027 with Ethics Advisors to test what works, update the tools and add new cases.

6 **Extend the approach.** MAPA and the Agency for the Support of Local Self-Government should adapt the guide for municipalities and independent institutions. The Policy Lab model should also be reused for other PAR instruments that civil servants must apply in practice.

07 Conclusion

The WeBER 3.0 Policy Lab shows that design thinking is not only a tool for local service design. It can also produce central-level instruments that institutions adopt quickly, because the people who must apply them helped design them. In seven months the process turned an unclear mandate into an approved guide and a professional network. The next test is whether Ethics Advisors use the guide, whether civil servants turn to them, and whether DoPA collects and publishes the data that would show it.

Notes

1. Law No. 9131 of 8 September 2003 "On the rules of ethics in public administration"; Council of Ministers Decision No. 874 of 29 September 2021, Articles 10–15, akep.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/VKM-874-date-29.9.2021.pdf
2. Department of Public Administration, response to a freedom-of-information request of 2 April 2025, referring to DoPA Practical Manual No. 70 and Instruction No. 2 of 21 January 2025, dap.gov.al/images/RegjistriKerkesave2025/Pergjigja_nr3_E_Drejta_e_Informimit.pdf
3. IDM, Policy Lab consultative meeting minutes, 8 May 2025; IDM, project "Serving democracy and citizens through improved public integrity" (SIDA), idmalbania.org
4. WeBER 3.0, *Guidelines for citizen-centred local governance and PAR problem solving*, Small Grant Facility, www.par-monitor.org
5. Department of Public Administration, Order "On the approval of the guide for ethics advisors in public administration", 9 December 2025.
6. Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption, "Lancohet Rrjeti i Koordinatorëve dhe Këshilltarëve të Etikës në Administratën Publike gjatë Javës së Integritetit", 11 December 2025, mapa.gov.al/newsroom; IDM, list of participants of the launch event.

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