WeBER III
WESTERN BALKAN ENABLERS FOR REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

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Citizens' experiences with public administration: What needs to change?

Introduction

This analysis presents the findings of a survey on citizens' experiences with public administration, conducted among residents of three municipalities – Podgorica, Kotor and Ulcinj. The aim of the research is to assess citizens' satisfaction with public administration services and identify areas where citizens see room for improvement in service delivery. The research is part of the regional project "Western Balkan Enablers for Reforming Public Administration – WeBER 3.0", under which Institute Alternative supported three local organisation[1] in conducting research on the quality and accessibility of public services.

Montenegro's strategic framework also recognises the quality and digitalisation of public administration services as important objectives of public administration reform. Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022-2026[2] identifies improving the digital uptake of public administration services, developing the eGovernment portal, and introducing fully digital services for key life events, including eBirth, eStudent

1 Initiative of Youth with Disabilities of Boka (IYDB) - Kotor, Open Dialogue Network (ODN) – Podgorica and Punta – Ulcinj.

2 Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022-2026, Ministry of Public Administration, available at: https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/823842f4-2ffd-4a0d-936e-c1b00c669115

and eRegistration, among its prioritites. At the same time, the Digital Transformation Strategy 2022-2026[3] envisages further improvements in the quality of public services and increased uptake of electronic services. However, the pace of implementation indicates that these objectives are not being achieved to the extent or within the timeframes originally planned. Report on implementation of the Action Plan of the Digitial Transformation Strategy found that activities were not being implemented according to the planned schedule, with only 55.71% of planned activities completed in 2025.[4] The slow pace of implementation is further confirmed by 2024 Report, which recorded an equally low implementation rate of 43.14%.[5] Data for both years point to a gap between strategic commitments and their implementation in practice. This is particularly significant given citizens' expectations regarding how public services should be made available and delivered.

The survey findings reflect this slow pace of implementation. Digitalisation of public services was the area in which citizens from three municipalities (Podgorica, Ulcinj and Kotor) provided the greatest number of suggestions for improvement. These included reducing long waiting times and queues, enabling access to basic services online, improving coordination and communication between institutions and introducing the possibility of tracking the status of application online.

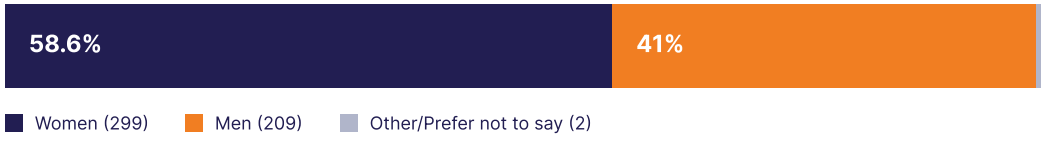
At the same time, citizens' reponses indicate that digitalisation is not the only challenge. Respondents also highlighted physical barriers to accessing public institutions, particularly for persons with disabilities, the quality of communication and courtesy of public officials, as well as insufficiently clear and up to date information on the required documentation and procedures for obtaining specific services.

Data analysis

The survey covered a total of 510 respondents across three municipalities: Podgorica, Ulcinj and Kotor. Podgorica accounted for the largest share of respondents (218), followed by Kotor (194) and Ulcinj (98). The age profile varied across municipalities: respondetns aged 18-29 formed the largest group in Podgorica, while those aged 30-39 were the most represented in Kotor and Ulcinj.

Of the 510 respondetns, 299 were women and 209 were men. Two respondents either chose not to disclose their gender or selected the „other" option.

Respondets by gender

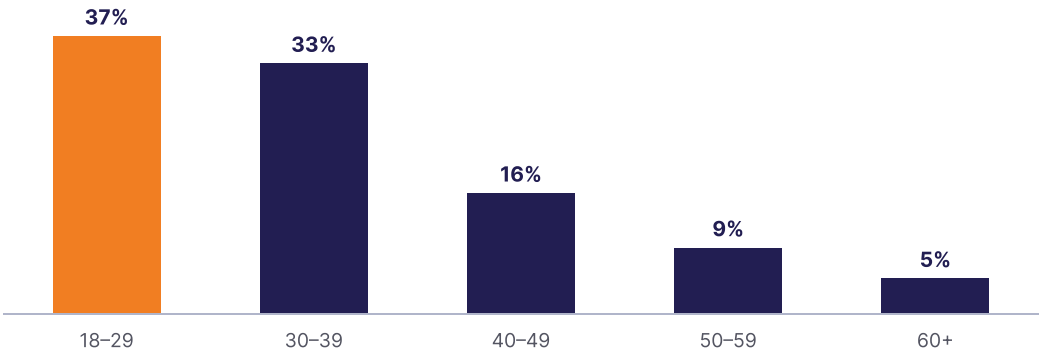


3 Digital Transformation Strategy 2022-2026, Ministry of Public Administration, available at: https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/0c802520-e016-41ee-a6e4-7af6eb66e19d

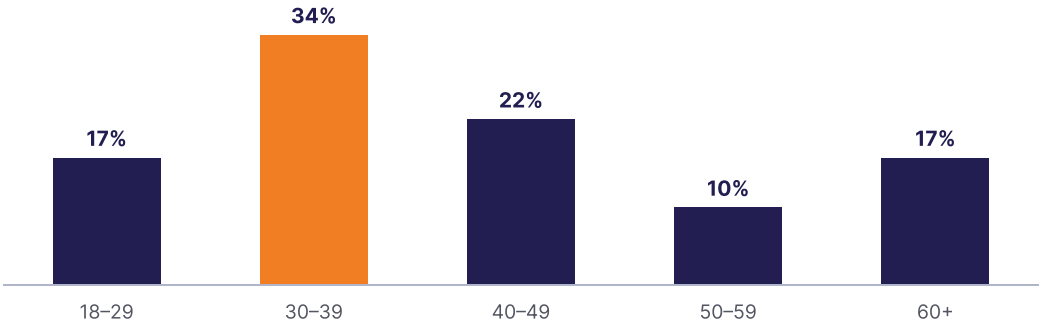
4 Report on the Implementation of the Digital Transformation Strategy Action Plan for 2025, 26 June 2026, available at: https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/6ab0d5e4-c315-4679-ae20-dca87854ce99?version=1.0

5 Report on the Implementation of the Digital Transformation Strategy Action Plan for 2024, 15 May 2025, available at: https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e49a65a7-bd45-491a-b27b-0a30f8132138

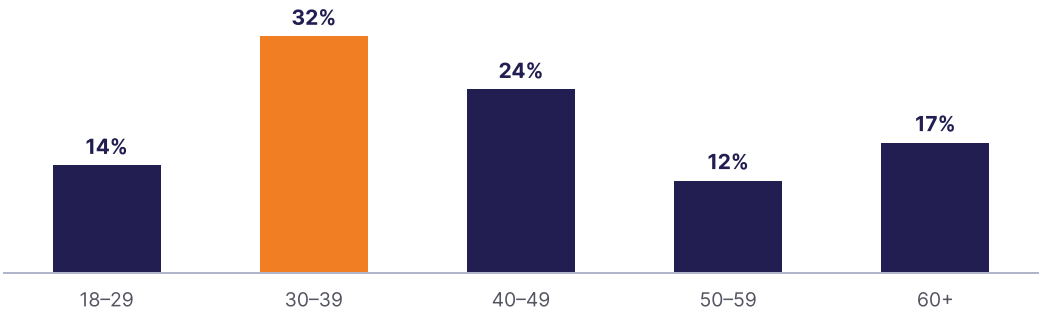
Age distribution of respondents by municipality – Podgorica



Age distribution of respondents by municipality - Kotor

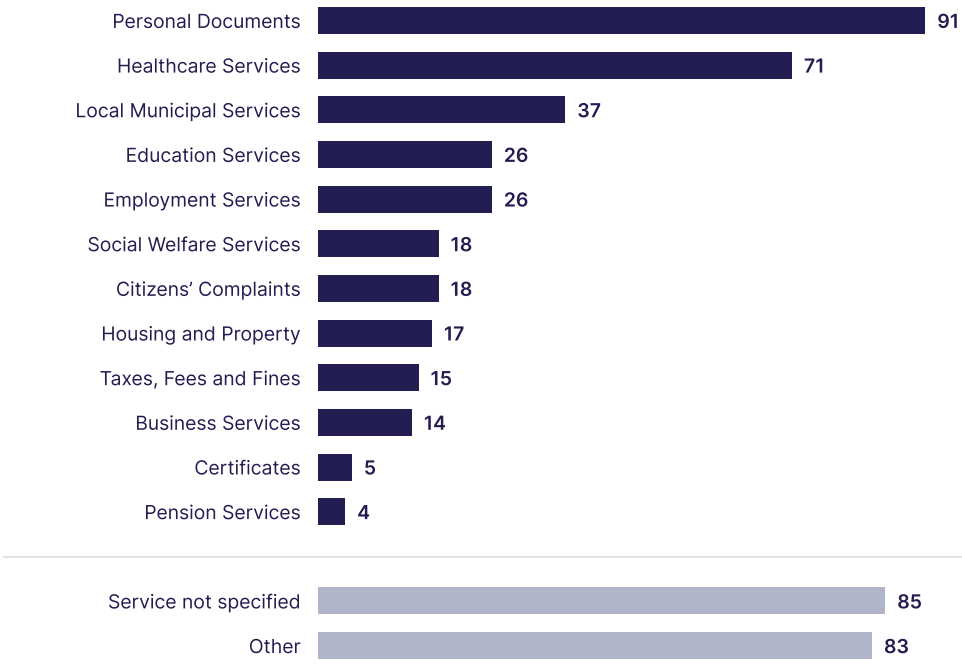


Age distribution of respondents by municipality - Ulcinj



The services most frequently used by respondents were those related to personal documents (e.g. ID cards, passports and driving licences), with 91 reported experiences, followed by healthcare services (e.g. applying for a health insurance card and scheduling medical appointments) with 71 experiences. By contrast, the least frequently used services were those related to obtaining official certificates (e.g. citizenship and residence certificates), with just 5 reported experiences and business-related services (e.g. company registration and applications for subsidies) with 14 experiences.

Types of services



The largest share of recommendations for improving the work of public administration focused on the digitalisation of public services, suggesting that citizens find existing administrative procedures cumbersome, time-consuming and unnecessarily complicated, often requiring them to visit institutions in person. Across all three municipalities, respondents reported long queues and waiting times, sometimes requiring them to take time off work or set aside an entire day to complete even a basic procedure, such as submitting an application or collecting a document. These experiences show that long waiting times create additional difficulties, as citizens often have to visit the same institution several times for a single service or adjust their personal and professional commitments to fit institutional working hours. To address these problems, respondents called for digitalisation of form and applications, email notifications about administrative decisions, the issuance of documents through the eGovernment portal, and fully functional electronic signatures and seals, all of which would reduce the need to visit institutions in person.

Citizens also raised concerns about the fees charged for individual documents and poor communication between institutions, which often forces them to submit the same documentation repeatedly when accessing different services. One respondent from Podgorica described this as a major problem: „We shouldn't have to carry a document issued by one institution to another. The institutions should be connected." Providing clear and easily accessible information about the requirements for each service, alonside simpler administrative procedures that can be completed online, would help address some of the most common difficulties citizens encounter when dealing with public administration.

Respondents from Podgorica also expressed dissatisfaction with services provided by Tax Administration, particularly those related to company registration. They emphasised the need to simplify documentation requirements and improve data sharing and coordination between institutions. As one respondent explained, setting up a company currently requires submitting documents separately to each institution, instead of having a single interconnected digital system. Another suggested that the

Tax Administration should establish a unified system in which entering a company's tax identification number (TIN) would provide immediate access to all the necessary documentation.

One respondent from Kotor pointed out that public administration often lack adequate physical accessibility, as well as information available in Braille and sign language. Other respondents from Kotor also noted that public officials are often discourteous towards persons with disabilities, highlighting the need for specialised training to improve communication skills, courtesy and ability to provide clear guidance to service users. The attitude and performance of public officials were also raised as concerns by respondents in Podgorica and Ulcinj. In Podgorica, citizens suggested introducing measures to monitor staff performance, including a system fo tracking the number of applications processed and the time taken to resolve them. In Ulcinj, one respondent called for greater courtesy among public officials, while another suggestion was to introduce a mechanism allowing citizens to rate the quality of services they receive from institutions.

Taken together, these experiences highlight the need to improve the entire service delivery process, from accessing information about procedures and completing application forms to submitting documentation, communicating with public officials and ultimately receiving the requested decision or document.

EXPERIENCE 1 | PODGORICA

Woman, 25 – Application for a women's entrepreneurship support programme

Documents should be certified only once and stored in a shared public administration database, so that citizens do not have to obtain and certify the same documents every time they apply for a new programme.

EXPERIENCE 2 | KOTOR

Man 44 – Applying for a new passport

Simplify the application process and minimise the number of in-person visits required to obtain official documents.

EXPERIENCE 3 | ULCINJ

Woman, 37 – Obtaining official documents

Speed up document issuance procedures and ensure shorter, more consistent processing times.

Conclusion

The survey findings show that citizens in Podgorica, Kotor and Ulcinj continue to face numerous obstacles when accessing public administration services. Despite improvements to the eGovernment Portal and introduction of new electronic services, citizens' experiences suggest that the benefits of digital transformation have yet to make a meaningful difference in their everyday interactions with institutions.

Respondents emphasised the need to simplify administrative procedures, reduce the amount of documentation citizens are required to obtain, improve data sharing between institutions and eliminate unnecessary administrative steps. Particular attention should also be paid to ensuring that public services are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The greates opportunities for improvement lie in the service citizens use most frequently, particularly those related to personal documents and healthcare. Citizens expect more services to be available entirely online, without the need to visit public officies in person. They also want to be able to track the status of their applications and access clear, accurate and up to date information about administrative procedures. The finding therefore highlight the need to focus the next steps of public administration reform on the services citizens rely on most and the challenges they most frequently encounter.

The priority should not simply be to increase the number of available e-services, but to ensure that they are fully functional, user-friendly and allow citizens to complete the entire process online, without having to visit a public institution in person.

Methodological Annex

WeBER 3.0 Survey

Exit Polling

1. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
   d. Prefer not to say
2. Age: _____
3. Local self-government unit: _____
4. Public administration institution you interacted with: _____
5. The service was provided by: (To be completed by the interviewer based on the response to Question 4)
   a. State administration
   b. Local self-government
6. Which category does the service you requested fall under?
   a. Personal documents (e.g. ID card, passport, driving licence, etc.)
   b. Certificates (e.g. citizenship certificate, residence certificate, birth, marriage or death certificate, etc.)
   c. Taxes, fees and fines (e.g. paying property transfer tax, applying for a VAT refund, paying a traffic fine, etc.)
   d. Healthcare services (e.g. applying for a health insurance card, scheduling medical appointments, etc.)
   e. Social welfare services (e.g. applying for social assistance, child support, etc.)
   f. Education services (e.g. enrolment in kindergarten, school or university, etc.)
   g. Pension-related services (e.g. applying for a disability pension, verifying years of service, etc.)
   h. Employment services (e.g. registering as unemployed, seeking employment, etc.)

i. Business services (e.g. company registration, applying for subsidies, etc.)

j. Housing and property (e.g. property registration, applying for construction or other permits, etc.)

k. Citizens' complaints (e.g. reporting noise disturbances, environmental violations or traffic offences, etc.)

l. Local municipal services (e.g. water supply, waste management, postal services, etc.)

m. Other: _____

7. Which specific service did you request from the public administration institution? _____

8. Is this the first time you have requested this service?

   a. Yes

   b. No

9. How would you rate your overall experience?

   a. Negative

   b. Tends to be negative

   c. Positive

   d. Tends to be positive

10. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of service delivery, on a scale from 1 to 4?

(1 – Negative; 2 – Tends to be negative; 3 – Positive; 4 – Tends to be positive)

   a. Speed of service delivery _____

   b. Organisation of service delivery (e.g. availability of information about services, appointment scheduling, queue management systems, etc.) _____

   c. Courtesy of public officials _____

   d. Convenience of the institution's location (e.g. distance, public transport connections, etc.) _____

11. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly agree; X – Don't know)

a. It takes less time to obtain the service than it did before. _____

b. The procedure for obtaining the service has become simpler compared to my previous experience. _____

c. Public officials provide clear answers to my questions. _____

d. Priority assistance is provided to vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, pregnant women, mothers with children, etc.). _____

e. The institution provides adequate accessibility for persons with disabilities and parents with children in pushchairs (e.g. access ramps, sufficiently wide doorways, etc.). _____

12. Do you have any additional comments or feedback regarding any aspect of service delivery? _____

13. Was it possible to complete this service entirely online?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Don't know

14. Was it possible to complete any part of the service online (e.g. booking an appointment, paying administrative fees, submitting documents, etc.)?

d. Yes (please specify which part): _____

e. No

f. Don't know

15. Have you used any eGovernment services before?

a. Yes

b. No

16. How satisfied are you with eGovernment services, on a scale from 1 to 4? _____

(1 – Negative; 2 – Tends to be negative; 3 – Positive; 4 – Tends to be positive)

17. Do you have any suggestions for improving the functioning of public administration and the delivery of services to citizens?

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