





Monitoring report

The state of public administration reform in the Municipality of Bitola

"Digital Municipality closer to citizens"

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INTRODUCTION

This monitoring report presents a thematic and structured analysis of the state of public administration reform at the local level, with a special focus on the Municipality of Bitola. In the context of the ongoing efforts to approach European standards for good governance, transparency and digital transformation, the report aims to assess the degree of compliance of municipal processes and practices with the principles set out in the OECD/SIGMA "Principles of Public Administration", as well as with the strategic priorities of national and local self-government. The analysis was prepared within the framework of the project "Bitola 2.0 – A Digital Municipality Closer to Citizens", which aims to promote the modernization of public services, strengthen administrative capacity and enable more efficient interaction with citizens through digital platforms and open data. In this regard, the monitoring strives to provide relevant and objective findings that will help identify challenges, but also potentials for improving municipal administration. Methodologically, the report is based on quantitative and qualitative sources, including:

- Review of official documents and bylaws of the municipality;
- Interviews with representatives of the municipal administration, councilors, public officials and relevant civil society actors;
- Analysis of public administration indicators and comparative data according to the SIGMA framework;

Application of the criteria of the European agenda for public reform, including strategic planning, accountability, digital services, human resources and financial transparency.

This analysis seeks to provide a value-based picture of the current situation, as well as a basis for making recommendations that will contribute to the systematic improvement of administrative capacities and services at the local level. This process is particularly important in light of the new legal and institutional settings that require modern standards for digital and accountable citizen-oriented administration.

1. Strategic vision and planning of the public administration reform in the context of digitalization in the Municipality of Bitola

Public administration reform is one of the key pillars for improving the quality of public services and strengthening citizens' trust in institutions. In that context, the digitalization of administrative processes is not perceived only as a technological advance, but as an essential instrument for changing the way the administration works, communicates and provides services[1].

Although the Municipality of Bitola does not yet have a formally adopted **local Strategy for Public Administration Reform,** its activities show that digitalization is strategically recognized and actively integrated as a tool for reforming administrative services and

[1] OECD/SIGMA. (2023). *The Principles of Public Administration.* OECD Publishing. https://www.sigmaweb.org

practices. With this, the Municipality of Bitola positions itself as a local government that, even without a formally defined document, demonstrates **a high level of implementation of reform measures through digital innovations.**

Specifically, the Municipality of Bitola has established and implemented significant initiatives as part of the digital transformation process, among which the following stand out[2]:

- **Integration with the national e-services portal** (uslugi.gov.mk), enabling citizens and businesses to access key municipal services online;
- **Introduction of electronic document management systems** and **digital archiving,** which significantly reduces processing time administrative procedures;
- **Developing platforms for digital reporting of problems** and monitoring the handling of citizen requests;
- **Renovating and improving the municipal website** with increased availability of information on the budget, public procurement, Council decisions and public announcements;
- **Using social media** as a channel for information and interaction with citizens, which promotes openness and accountability of local government.

Additionally, there are significant efforts to **automate internal processes** through the use of ICT solutions for human resource management, financial operations and urban planning. As part of these activities, the Municipality has introduced electronic employee file management and electronic processing of financial documents.

This indicates that **the practical approach to reform through digital tools** in the Municipality of Bitola is at a high level, although the formal aspect of strategic planning is still lacking. Instead of waiting for the complete formalization of strategic documents, the municipal administration is actively implementing innovative solutions that directly contribute to the reform of public services.

However, in the future, formalizing these activities within a **comprehensive local public administration reform strategy** will be crucial. Such a strategy would enable[3]:

- Clearly defining the vision and mission of the digital transformation;
- Establishing specific goals, success indicators and timeframes;
- Coordination of the various projects and initiatives into a single program framework;
- Attracting additional funds (state, European funds) for supporting the digitalization process;
- Strategic inclusion of citizens and stakeholders in policy development processes.

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[2] OECD/SIGMA. (2023). *The Principles of Public Administration.* OECD Publishing. https://www.sigmaweb.org

[3] OECD/SIGMA. (2023). *The Principles of Public Administration.* OECD Publishing. https://www.sigmaweb.org

It can be concluded that the Municipality of Bitola demonstrates **a high level of reform maturity through the practical implementation of digital solutions,** which represents a solid foundation for future institutionalization and systematization of these achievements within the framework of an integrated strategy for public administration reform oriented towards digitalization, transparency and civic engagement.

2. Policies and coordination

Effective policy and coordination are the main drivers of successful processes of digitalization and public administration reform. Although a formal strategic document for public administration reform at the local level in the Municipality of Bitola is missing, the implementation of specific measures and tools indicates the existence of a clear political will and coordinated operational activities that have contributed to a high level of digitalization.

In the last few years, the Municipality of Bitola has demonstrated **stable political support for digitalization processes**[4]. Although there is no specifically adopted local strategy for public administration reform, there is a continuous tendency for digitalization to be incorporated as a priority in the Municipality's annual work programs, budget plans and project activities. Political decisions to invest in IT infrastructure, improve e-services and open data to the public show that digitalization is treated as an essential instrument for improving efficiency and transparency[5].

2.1. Intersectoral coordination

Although there are no formalized intersectoral bodies for digitalization (e.g. Local Council for Digital Transformation), internal coordination between different sectors and departments within the municipal administration is implemented through the appointment of contact persons for digital projects, through joint management of project activities (e.g. digitalization of cadastral and urban services, implementation of online systems for requests and permits)[6].

With this practical approach, the Municipality of Bitola managed to integrate digital processes in various areas: urban planning, finance, inspection services, public procurement and services for citizens. This type of informal but functional coordination allowed for dynamic adaptation of processes without complex bureaucratic procedures.

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[4] OECD/SIGMA. (2023). *The Principles of Public Administration.* OECD Publishing. https://www.sigmaweb.org

[5] European Commission. (2023). *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2023.* https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/desi

[6] OECD/SIGMA. (2023). *The Principles of Public Administration.* OECD Publishing. https://www.sigmaweb.org

2.2. Creating policies based on needs

In developing digitalization initiatives, the Municipality partially used an approach based on identified needs of citizens and businesses. The engagement of administrative staff in mapping administrative services that are a priority for digitalization indicates awareness of the importance of user orientation.

Although no systematic mechanism for public consultation has been established (through public debates or systematic surveys), direct contacts with service users have been used on several occasions to collect feedback during the implementation of new electronic services[7].

3. Constraints and challenges

The main challenges in the area of digitalization policies and coordination arise from:

- **Lack of formal coordination structures** that would integrate all relevant stakeholders (municipality, public enterprises, educational and health institutions);
- **Limited system for strategic measurement and evaluation** of the results of digitalization processes (no formalized KPIs or success indicators);
- **Lack of a consolidated platform for transparent communication** of the results of reforms and digital projects to the public.

Although there is a significant degree of functional coordination, the lack of a structured institutional framework for coordination and evaluation limits the potential for greater systematization and sustainability of reforms.

Overall, the Municipality of Bitola has demonstrated significant progress in implementing digitalization as a driver of public administration reform, largely thanks to political support and practical internal coordination. Systematizing these efforts through formalized policies, coordination mechanisms, and monitoring systems will be key to maintaining and deepening the achieved results in the future.

In order to ensure systematic and objective measurement of progress in the implementation of public administration reforms through digitalization, it is necessary to establish a structured set of monitoring and evaluation indicators. Considering that the efforts to date for digital transformation in the Municipality of Bitola were implemented dynamically, but without a clear mechanism for strategic monitoring and evaluation, the integration of indicators will contribute to:

- Greater transparency of processes to the public,
- Precise definition of results and assessment of effectiveness the activities,
- Timely identification of challenges and the need for corrective actions measures,

[7] European Commission. (2023). *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2023.* https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/desi

- Increased strategic planning for future digital transformation projects.

4. Application of WeBER indicators and SIGMA standards for the Municipality of Bitola

In order to conduct a thorough and comparative analysis of the state of public administration reform and digitalization in the Municipality of Bitola, the framework of **WeBER indicators** and **SIGMA standards for good governance has been applied within the framework of this monitoring report.**

WeBER (Western Balkans Enabling Environment for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform) provides a set of indicators that aim to measurement of:

- transparency,
- accountability,
- efficiency and
- inclusiveness of public administration from the perspective of users of public services and civil society

SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is an OECD and EU initiative that defines key principles of public administration, including:

- strategic planning,
- policy development,
- public service provision,
- human resource management and accountability.

The application of these two frameworks enabled structured monitoring of the reform processes in the Municipality of Bitola and comparison with international standards for public administration.

The proposed **WeBER** indicators cover key aspects of the process, and each indicator is designed to be specific, measurable, adaptable to local context and related to the priorities of national strategic documents such as What are the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2030 and The Digitalization Strategy 2021–2026[8].

The following table provides the proposed indicators, along with a description, the method of measurement and the target values that should be achieved in order to We have alignment of reform processes until 2026.[9]

Institutionalizing such a progress monitoring system will enabled the Municipality of Bitola not only to continue to improve its digital capacities, but also to become an example

[8] European Commission. (2023). *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2023.* https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/desi

[9] European Policy Center (CEP). (2022). *WeBER 2.0: PAR Monitoring Reports for the Western Balkans.* https://www.par-monitor.org

of proactive and transparent local management within the framework of the national agenda for digital transformation[10].

Category	Indicator	Description on the indicator	Way on measurement	Target value until 2026
Strategic planning	Adopted local strategy for digitalization	Has it been adopted? formal document for digitization and reform of the JA	YES/NO	Adopted strategy to end of 2025
Coordination	Formation of Local council for digitalization	Is it formed intersectoral body for coordination	YES/NO	Council formed to the middle of 2025
Digital Services	Percent on municipal services available online	Of the total number administrative services, how much are they available online	% (measured annually)	at least 70% to end of 2026
User-friendly experience	Satisfaction of citizens with e-services	Degree on pleasure from use e-services (survey)	Scale 1-5	at least 4.0 to 2026
Openness and transparency	Number of published reports for digital transformation	Number of annual reports published publicly on the web	number	1 report annually
Consultations	Number of public consultations for digital initiatives	Number on organized citizen and stakeholder consultations	number	at least 2 annually
Evaluation of results	Percentage on fulfilled planned activities from the action plan for digitalization	Measured success in implementation of the foreseen measures	%	at least 80%

Figure 1. Proposed indicators for measurement and target values for compliance with reform objectives processes.

The application of the WeBER indicators and SIGMA standards has enabled the detection of clear positive trends in the Municipality of Bitola, especially in the area of digital transformation of services and functional modernization of the administration. However, in order to achieve a higher level of compliance with European standards, institutionalization of strategic planning processes, strengthening of public consultation and development of monitoring mechanisms for assessing reform results are required[11].

[10] European Policy Center (CEP). (2022). *WeBER 2.0: PAR Monitoring Reports for the Western Balkans.* https://www.par-monitor.org

[11] Ministry of Information Society and Administration. (2023). *Strategy for the Reform of public administration 2023–2030.* https://mioa.gov.mk

5. Public services and personnel management in the context of high application of digital services in the Municipality of Bitola

In recent years, the Municipality of Bitola has strengthened its commitment to the digital transformation of public administration, setting an example as a local government that, even without a formally adopted public administration reform strategy, has managed to integrate a digital approach into its daily operations.

The digitalization of public services in the Municipality of Bitola did not emerge as an imposed obligation by national policies or European harmonisation processes, but rather organically emerged from the need to provide a faster, more efficient and more user-friendly approach to citizens. The development of online tools for reporting utility problems, the introduction of electronic forms for administrative requests and the integration of some of the services on the national portal uslugi.gov.mk, testify to a completely new way of understanding public administration – as a service that is available always, everywhere and for everyone.

This process has not been without challenges. Some services still remain inaccessible for online use, especially for the most vulnerable categories of citizens, while mobile optimization and proactive promotion of digital services have yet to be improved. But what is most significant is that Bitola has made a real step towards creating a digital ecosystem of public services, which today represents a foundation on which further development can be built.

In parallel with the processes of digitalization of services, personnel management has also begun to adapt to the new reality. Civil servants are no longer perceived as mere administrators of paper documents, but as active actors in the process of digital transformation. The introduction of an electronic human resources management system (DMS) in the Municipality of Bitola has facilitated the recording of administrative staff, monitoring of their professional training and the management of daily activities.

Although the municipality has organized a series of trainings for officials on the use of new digital tools, the need for continuous professionalization remains a crucial challenge. The digital era requires new skills, not only technical, but also strategic – the ability to communicate through online platforms, cybersecurity skills, and analytical thinking for problem solving.

Here it becomes obvious that the next step for the Municipality of Bitola is not only to expand the list of e-services, but to invest in creating a new generation of administrative staff, who will not only use digital tools, but will actively contribute to their evolution and improvement.

In addition, transparency in the hiring and promotion processes is another segment that requires further improvement. Publicity of criteria, systematic performance evaluation, as well as recognition of innovation and digital competence as criteria for professional

development, would represent a logical continuation of the digital transformation that has already begun.

In practice, this means that digitalization should not remain limited to services for citizens, but should also extend to the way the Municipality manages its people: online performance assessment systems, e-training, digital competency certificates and internal platforms for ideas and innovations.

When looking at the overall process from the perspective of public services and personnel management, it can be concluded that the Municipality of Bitola is in a phase of maturation of its digital administration. The first results are visible: greater accessibility to services, shortened administrative procedures, more efficient internal communication. But the real test of the sustainability of these reforms will be how successfully the Municipality will invest in its people – in their digital skills, their innovation and their ability to think about administration not as a bureaucracy, but as a service oriented towards the needs of modern citizens[12].

Therefore, for the future, it will be necessary for the Municipality of Bitola to move towards institutionalizing continuous digital training programs, opening doors for young staff with high digital competencies, and setting up clear mechanisms for measuring the success of officials in a digital environment.

If the digitalization of public services represents the first half of modernization, the digital transformation of human resources is the second, even more important half – the one that will ensure that reforms are not just a momentary change, but a long-term evolution of municipal administration towards true e-government for all citizens.

[12] Ministry of Information Society and Administration. (2023). *Strategy for the Reform of public administration 2023–2030.* https://mioa.gov.mk

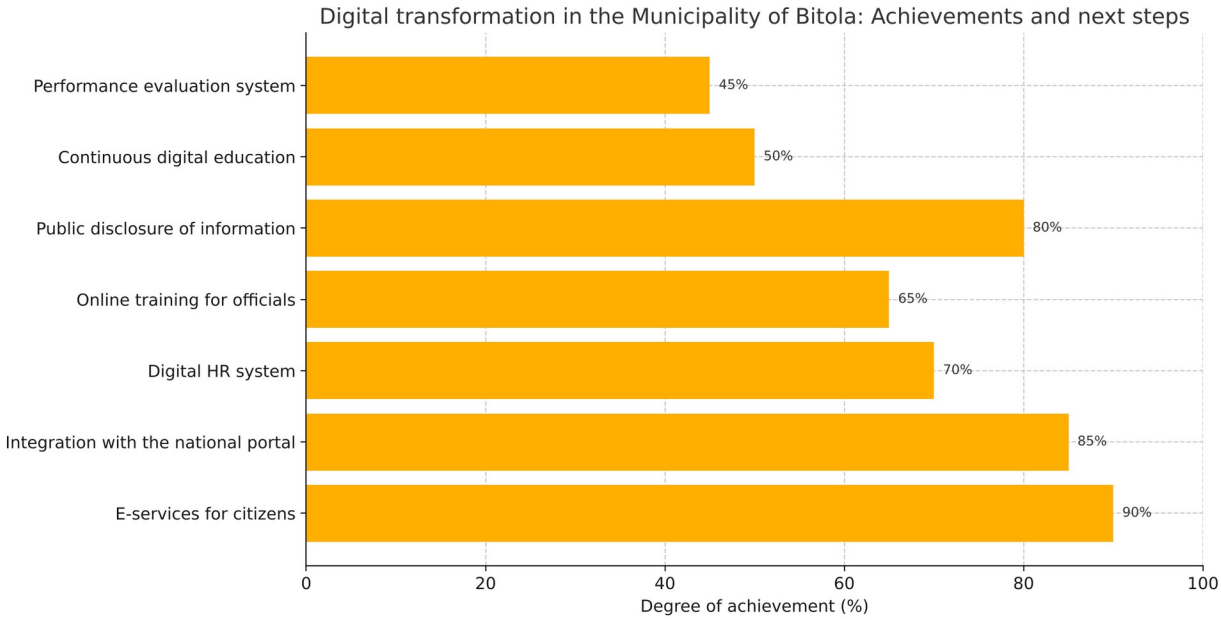


Figure 2. "Digital Transformation in the Municipality of Bitola"

The graph shows the relative degree of achievement of key activities related to the digital transformation of public services and human resources management in the Municipality of Bitola.

The highest level of implementation is observed in the development of **e-services for citizens** (90%) and **integration with the national portal for electronic services** (85%), indicating a strong focus on facilitating access to administrative processes through digital channels.

The introduction of **a digital human resources management system** (70%) and the provision of **online training for officials** (65%) represent significant progress in the internal digitalization of administrative processes. **Public disclosure of information** also records a high level of achievement (80%), reflecting the drive for transparency and accountability[13].

On the other hand, **continuous digital education** (50%) and **the establishment of a performance evaluation system** (45%) remain areas where there is room for further improvement. These results indicate that, although Bitola is making significant progress in the digital transformation of services, in the future, efforts should be intensified to institutionalize the digital culture among administrative staff and systematically measure their performance in the digital environment.

[13] Ministry of Information Society and Administration. (2021). *Strategy for digitalization of the public sector 2021–2026.* https://mioa.gov.mk

5.1. Establishing a monitoring system through KPI indicators for public services and personnel management

To ensure systematic monitoring of progress in the process of digital transformation of public services and human resource management, it is necessary to establish clearly defined **KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).** These indicators allow for continuous measurement of achieved results, assessment of the effectiveness of the implemented measures and identification of areas where further improvements are needed.

KPI indicators are designed to cover the most relevant aspects of digitalization and human resource management, including accessibility and quality of e-services, efficiency of administrative processes, level of digital competence among staff, transparency and inclusiveness of the services offered[14].

The application of these KPIs will allow the Municipality of Bitola not only to monitor its own progress in an objective and measurable manner, but also to establish a culture accountability and continuous improvement of public services and personnel practices in the digital environment.

The following are the proposed KPI indicators for public services and personnel management, with target values and measurement methods.

[14] Ministry of Information Society and Administration. (2021). *Strategy for digitalization of the public sector 2021–2026.* https://mioa.gov.mk

Area	KPI Indicator	Description	Target value by 2026 year	Measurement method
E-services	Percentage of administrative services available online	Of the total number of administrative services, how many are available digitally	at least 80%	Analysis of the e-portal and the municipal website
Service efficiency	Average time for processing of electronic requests	Time required from submission to completing an online application	30% reduction in relationship 2024	Records in electronic systems
Accessibility for vulnerable groups	Number of services optimized for people with disability	Number of services that have that version adapted for people with special needs	at least 3 services	Checking the accessibility of web services
Promotion and information	Number of promotional campaigns for Use of e-services	Active campaigns to inform citizens for digital options	at least 2 annually	Reports for activities and media releases
Digital education on the frame	Percentage of administrative officers trained for digital tools	Number of trained officers relative to the total number of employees	at least 75%	Register of trainings and certificates
Internal digital management	Percentage of internal processes digitized	Processes such as archiving, personnel records, financial operations	at least 70%	Internal administrative reports
Performance of officers	Implementation on annual electronic performance evaluations	Number of employees who passed e-evaluation	100% annually	HR reports the system
Transparency	Number of publicly released reports on digital transformation	Reports for achievements and plans in digitalization	at least 1 annually	Municipality website

Figure 3. KPI indicators for public services

To ensure the efficiency and practical applicability of the progress monitoring system, the proposed KPI indicators are defined according to SMART principles. They are formulated as follows:

- **Specific:** Each indicator is precisely targeted at a particular aspect of public services or human resource management, without ambiguity or general formulations.
- **Measurable:** Results can be objectively measured quantitatively or qualitatively, allowing clear tracking of progress through established parameters.

- **Achievable:** The goals set through the indicators are realistic and adapted to the current capacities of the Municipality of Bitola, with the potential for gradual improvement.
- **Relevant:** The indicators are directly linked to the strategic priorities of digital transformation and public administration reform, ensuring their essential importance for development of municipal policies and services.
- **Time-bound:** For each indicator, there are set specific time frames for achieving the goals, which guarantees the dynamics of implementation and the possibility of periodic evaluation.[15]

These principles ensure that KPI indicators are practical tools for managing, monitoring and improving processes, and not just formal metrics. Their application will enable the Municipality of Bitola to establish a sustainable model of continuous improvement and results orientation.

[15] Ministry of Information Society and Administration. (2021). *Strategy for digitalization of the public sector 2021–2026.* https://mioa.gov.mk

6. Organization and accountability in the process of reform and digitalization of public administration in the Municipality of Bitola

The effective organization of the administrative structure and the establishment of clear accountability mechanisms are critical prerequisites for successful public administration reform. In modern conditions, these elements gain additional importance in the context of digitalization, where the speed of processes, the transparency of services and the availability of information become standard expectations of citizens[16].

The Municipality of Bitola, as one of the more active local governments in the domain of digital transformation, demonstrates important positive steps in the reorganization of its administrative processes. Although there are still challenges related to the formalization of internal coordination and public reporting systems, the existing practices build the foundation for a modern, accountable and citizen-oriented administration.

6.1. Organizational structure and internal coordination

During the period of analysis, important trends of improvement of organizational processes in the Municipality of Bitola were observed. Although the municipal administration is predominantly centrally organized, with traditional hierarchical lines of management, in practice there is an increasing orientation towards **project work, the formation of ad-hoc teams** for the implementation of specific initiatives (e.g., projects for the digitalization of services) and **multi-sectoral coordination**[17].

It is also noted that electronic systems for internal document management have been implemented, which significantly improves the rapid flow of information between departments and enables better monitoring of administrative activities. The introduction of electronic archive, internal e-mail and calendar systems Applications facilitate planning and reporting processes within the Municipality.

However, despite these positive trends, formal intersectoral coordination is still not sufficiently developed. Regular cross-sectoral meetings are lacking, joint action plans, as well as formalized internal accountability mechanisms between different administrative units. Furthermore, there are no clearly defined **sectoral performance indicators** or **regular reports on the execution of strategic tasks,** which limits the possibility of systematic monitoring of efficiency[18].

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[16] United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Digital Governance in Local Governments: Western Balkans Overview.* UNDP Regional Hub.

[17] United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Digital Governance in Local Governments: Western Balkans Overview.* UNDP Regional Hub.

[18] World Bank. (2020). *GovTech Maturity Index 2020: The State of Public Sector Digital Transformation.* https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/publication/govtech-maturity-index

6.2. Public accountability

The digital transformation has enabled the Municipality of Bitola to make a serious step forward in terms of transparency and public accountability. The most significant Achievements in this direction include:

- Regular publication of budget information on the official website;
- Public access to the minutes of the Council and its sessions;
- Publication of public announcements and results of public procurement;
- Digital platforms for reporting problems and monitoring administrative requirements.
- Digital platforms for informing citizens about cultural events events in the city.

These activities strengthen citizens' trust in institutions and provide direct insight into the way the Municipality uses public resources[19].

However, it should be noted that the published information often remains at the level of standard information, without sufficiently developed tools for **active communication and two-way dialogue** with the public. For example, interactive reports on the progress of projects, regular online presentations of the results of reform activities, or mechanisms for collecting feedback from citizens on the quality of services are missing.

Additionally, there are limitations in the accessibility of information for certain categories of users (people with disabilities, elderly people), which imposes the need to introduce accessible formats and multimodal information channels.[20]

6.3. Challenges and areas for improvement

Although the achievements are significant, the analysis points to several key challenges that need to be addressed in the coming period:

- Formalizing intersectoral coordination through the establishment of regular joint meetings and action plans;
- Defining KPIs for the performance of administrative departments;
- Establishing mechanisms for public evaluation of the work of the services (through surveys, public consultations, perception reports);
- Expanding accessibility to information for all categories of users;

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[19] Transparency International Macedonia. (2022). *Local Government Transparency Index 2022.* https://transparency.mk

[20] World Bank. (2020). *GovTech Maturity Index 2020: The State of Public Sector Digital Transformation.* https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/publication/govtech-maturity-index

- Strengthening tools for interaction with the public through modern digital platforms.

The organization and accountability in the Municipality of Bitola is in the process of evolution towards a modern, digital and citizen-oriented administration. Initial results indicate a clear political will and institutional openness towards reforms, especially in the area of digitalization of public services and transparency of administrative operations.

The next logical step is the systemic institutionalization of internal coordination, the introduction of performance standards, and the intensification of mechanisms for active accountability to the public, which will complete the process of creating a truly efficient and accountable local self-government in the digital era.

7. Services and digitalization in the Municipality of Bitola

The digitalization of public services is an essential aspect of public administration reform and a key mechanism for improving access to public services, increasing transparency, efficiency and citizen satisfaction. The Municipality of Bitola, in recent years, has made significant progress in the process of digitalization of administrative services, positioning itself as one of the positive examples at the local level in North Macedonia[21].

The digital transformation of services is not just the introduction of new technological tools, but a fundamental change in the way public administration communicates with citizens and responds to their needs. In Bitola, this process is taking place in parallel with broader initiatives to modernize the municipal administration and strengthen the principles of good governance.

7.1. Current status of digitalization of services

The Municipality of Bitola has established a series of specific initiatives to improve the availability and quality of its services through digital channels. Key achievements in this direction include[22]:

- **Integration of some municipal services on the National Portal for Electronic Services (uslugi.gov.mk),** which enables electronic submission of requests, applications and documents for services such as building permits, urban information and inspection services;
- **Development of a municipal web platform** that enables access to electronic forms, submission of requests for public information and access to public registers;
- **Establishing platforms for reporting utility problems,** enabling direct communication between citizens and competent services;

[21] ZELS. (2023). *Annual report on electronic services in municipalities 2023.* https://zels.org.mk
[22] ZELS. (2023). *Annual report on electronic services in municipalities 2023.* https://zels.org.mk

- **Digitalization of part of the processes for paying utility fees** and other municipal fees through electronic systems.

These steps made the Municipality of Bitola accessible to citizens in a new, digital form, enabling a significant reduction in the time for obtaining services and increasing the transparency of administrative procedures[23].

7.2. Accessibility, quality and challenges

Although progress is visible, the analysis also points to several significant challenges that limit the full realization of the potential of digitalization:

- **Partial digitalization:** Some services still remain available only through physical presence, which limits citizens' opportunities for full online service.
- **Limited universal accessibility:** Digital platforms are not always optimized for accessibility for people with disabilities or for use on mobile devices.
- **Insufficient education of users:** Some citizens are not fully informed or trained on how to use available e-services, which results in their underutilization.
- **Integration and interoperability:** Further improvement of technical integration between different municipal systems and national platforms is needed.

Despite these challenges, the fact that the foundation for digital transformation has been laid is a strong guarantee for further development[24].

7.3. Guidelines for advancing the digitalization of services

In order to strengthen the digitalization process and ensure that all citizens benefit from the new services, it is necessary for the Municipality of Bitola to take additional measures:

- **Expanding the range of digital services:** Ensure that all key administrative procedures (requests, confirmations, permits) are available online, including for specific categories such as social services and support for the elderly.
- **Optimization for mobile access and accessibility:** Ensure that all web platforms are fully mobile optimized and that alternative formats are provided for people with disabilities.
- **Education and promotion:** Develop training, guides and educational campaigns for using e-services, aimed at different groups of users.
- **Interoperability:** Work on additional technical integration with national data systems and services to enable faster and easier exchange of information.

[23] European Commission. (2022). *eGovernment Benchmark 2022.* Publications Office of the EU. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu

[24] European Commission. (2022). *eGovernment Benchmark 2022.* Publications Office of the EU. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu

The Municipality of Bitola, with its work so far in the area of digitalization of services, shows a clear vision and commitment to creating a modern, inclusive and efficient local administration.

The digitalization process is already creating visible benefits for citizens, and by further expanding services, improving accessibility, and strengthening capacities for using digital tools, the Municipality has the potential to become a true example of a successful digital municipality at the national and regional level.

Creating an administration that is not only accessible online, but also understands and responds to the real needs of the community, is the vision towards which the Municipality of Bitola is successfully moving.[25]

8. Financial management and public procurement in the Municipality of Bitola

Financial management and public procurement are two of the key areas through which the transparency, efficiency and integrity of public administration are measured. Their importance is even greater in the context of reform and digitalization processes, where citizens expect higher standards of accountability, rational use of public resources and fair procurement procedures.

The Municipality of Bitola, as one of the leading municipalities in implementing the digitalization of services, has also undertaken activities to improve financial management and transparency in public procurement. Although the achievements are significant, there are areas where further improvement is necessary to fully align with best European practices. In the area of financial management, the Municipality of Bitola demonstrates important positive trends, especially in terms of public availability of key financial documents. The Municipality's budget, decisions on its adoption and amendment, as well as the final accounts, are regularly published on the official website. This contributes to greater transparency in the management of public funds and increases the possibility of public control[26].

Additionally, the Municipality has begun to implement elements of program budgeting, which allows for better linking of budget items to specific programs and projects. This increases accountability and facilitates the assessment of the effects of budget spending.

However, financial management is not yet fully optimized in terms of digitalization. The processes of planning, execution and monitoring of the budget are still partially manual, with limited use of integrated ICT systems. An interactive platform for budget transparency is missing that would provide citizens with an easier and more understandable insight into the spending of public funds. Although in addition to financial reports on the spending of

[25] European Commission. (2022). *eGovernment Benchmark 2022.* Publications Office of the EU. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu

[26] SIGMA/OECD. (2021). *Toolkit for Monitoring Public Administration Reform.* https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/toolkit-monitoring-par.htm

budget funds, the Municipality of Bitola also prepares a narrative report that is understandable for citizens in ratio of funds spent.

9. Involvement and communication in the public administration reform process in the Municipality of Bitola

Effective communication with citizens and their involvement in the processes of decision-making is an essential element of modern governance and the basis of any reform process. Especially in the context of the digitalization of public administration, community involvement and two-way communication become essential for ensuring transparency, legitimacy and sustainability of public policies[27].

The Municipality of Bitola, within the framework of public administration reforms and the digitalization of services, has made significant progress in developing various channels for informing and interacting with citizens. However, there are areas where involvement and communication with the public can still be improved, especially in terms of greater systematicity, interactivity and inclusiveness[28].

The Municipality of Bitola uses several communication tools to inform citizens[29]:

- **Official website:** Regularly updated with budget information, public announcements, Council decisions, announcements of public events and projects.
- **Social media (Facebook, Instagram):** Actively used for posting news, inviting people to public events, reporting issues, and getting feedback.
- **Physical information points:** In the municipal building and other public institutions where citizens can obtain information about services.

This multi-channel approach allows for easier access to information and promotes the institution's openness to the public.

The lack of structured mechanisms for citizen participation limits the potential for creating public policies that are based on real needs and community priorities[30].

The analysis points to several key areas where public engagement and communication can be improved:

- **Institutionalization of public consultations:** Establishing a formal calendar of consultations on key strategic documents and projects.

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[27] SIGMA/OECD. (2021). *Toolkit for Monitoring Public Administration Reform.* https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/toolkit-monitoring-par.htm

[28] Open Government Partnership – North Macedonia. (2021). *National Action Plan for Open Government 2021–2023.* https://www.opengovpartnership.org

[29] Municipality of Bitola. (2023). *Budget documents and public procurement.* https://www.bitola.gov.mk

[30] Interreg IPA CBC Programme. (2023). *Digital Local Governance Projects Overview.* https://www.interreg-ipa-cbc.eu

- **Expanding interactive platforms:** Developing online participation tools, such as public surveys, digital forums, and submission platforms ideas and suggestions.
- **Active inclusion of vulnerable groups:** Organizing targeted campaigns and consultations for specific communities to ensure equal representation of all categories of citizens.
- **Educating citizens on the use of digital tools:** Promoting online participation through educational campaigns, with a focus on increasing digital literacy.

The Municipality of Bitola has made significant progress in providing information to the public and in opening new digital channels for communication. However, the true evolution towards a citizen-oriented administration requires a shift from one-way communication to real citizen participation in the creation of local policies[31].

By establishing systematic mechanisms for public consultation and active engagement of different communities, the Municipality of Bitola can become an example of participatory governance at the local level, in line with European standards for open and inclusive public administration.

[31] European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA). (2020). *Handbook on Performance Management in the Public Sector.* EIPA Publications.

10. Concluding observations

In times of dynamic changes and growing expectations from citizens, there are rare examples of local governments that manage to establish themselves as true leaders in the modernization of the public sector. The Municipality of Bitola is undoubtedly one such example – a municipality that, with its dedication, vision and concrete results, proves its ability to be **a pioneer in the reform of public administration and the digital transformation** of the local level.

Through intelligent use of resources, a strategic orientation towards digitalization, and an unreserved commitment to transparency and accountability, the Municipality of Bitola has created a model of local governance that can serve as **an example for all local government units in North Macedonia and wider.**

✅Public Services: A New Era of Accessibility and Efficiency

Bitola has set new standards in the way citizens access public services. The development of advanced digital platforms, a potential opportunity for integration with the national portal uslugi.gov.mk, and the ability to submit requests, reports, and follow-up procedures online have enabled thousands of citizens to access services quickly, easily, and efficiently.

Through these initiatives, the Municipality of Bitola is transforming the traditional administration into **a modern, open and citizen-oriented service,** which has significantly improved the quality of life of its residents.

What is particularly worth highlighting is the innovation in the use of mobile communications, online applications for reporting problems and the efficient resolution of citizens' requests in record time. Bitola managed to show that e-Governance is not just a technological trend, but a fundamental cultural change on service.

✅Human Resources Management: Professionalization in the true sense

The digital transformation in the Municipality of Bitola did not stop only at the level of services to citizens. The administration invested significant efforts in the digitalization of internal processes, introducing modern systems for human resources management, performance monitoring and employee training.

By implementing continuous digital education programs for civil servants, Bitola is creating **a new generation of administrative staff – competent, technologically literate and results-oriented.** This approach positions the Municipality as one of the rare examples at the local level where public administration reform is based on true professionalization, and not just on structural changes.

It is particularly important that investments are made not only in technical knowledge, but also in the development of skills for innovative thinking, digital security, and proactive communication with citizens.

✅ Financial management and public procurement: An example of transparency and integrity

Financial management in the Municipality of Bitola is another segment where we can talk about real transformation. By regularly publishing budget documents, introducing an accessible system for informing about budget activities, and precise public communication of public procurement processes, Bitola is setting the standard for transparent and responsible spending of public funds.

The introduction of program budgeting and the increased use of electronic public procurement systems have reduced the possibility of unproductive spending and increased the quality of procured services and products.

With this, the Municipality of Bitola has established itself as **one of the most open and responsible municipalities in the country in the management of public resources,** setting examples that can serve as national good practices.

✅ Inclusion and communication: A municipality that knows how to listen

The digital revolution in Bitola is not limited to the availability of services and internal administration. The municipality has made serious efforts to create **a culture of active communication with citizens,** using multi-channel platforms for information, interaction and inclusion.

With an active presence on social networks, public disclosure of key information and initiation of online consultations, the Municipality of Bitola creates **an open space for dialogue,** where every citizen can participate, propose ideas and to provide feedback. Although there is still room for systematization of public participation processes, the foundation has been laid in a way that allows for a rapid evolution towards truly participatory local democracy.

The Municipality of Bitola is synonymous with modernization, digital maturity and citizen-centricity. With concrete results in all key areas – public services, human resource management, financial transparency and public communication – Bitola demonstrates what it means to be a local government that operates according to the highest standards of efficiency, accountability and innovation.

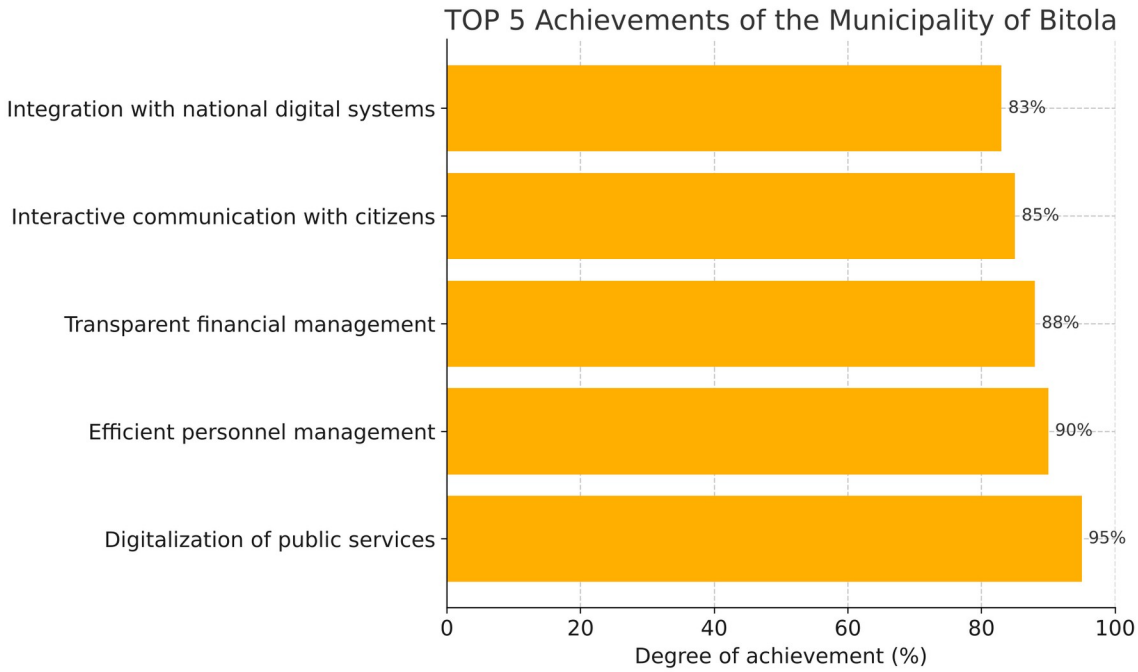


Figure 4. Top 5 achievements of the Municipality of Bitola

The graph presents the five most significant achievements of the Municipality of Bitola in the process of public administration reform and digitalization. The highest level of achievement is recorded in the digitalization of public services (95%), which positions the Municipality as a leader in modern governance. This is followed by efficient personnel management and transparent financial operations, which ensure stability and trust among citizens. Interactive communication and successful integration with national digital systems further confirm Bitola's strategic orientation towards complete digital transformation and open local governance.

What makes the Municipality of Bitola an example of successful reform?

✅ **Digitization of public services:** The Municipality of Bitola has provided fast, efficient and transparent access to administrative services through advanced digital platforms.

✅ **Professionalization of staff:** Systematic investment in digital education and modernization of human resources management.

✅ **Financial transparency:** Public and accessible information about budget processes, public procurement and spending of public funds.

✅ **Active communication with citizens:** Multi-channel digital platforms and social networks for increased interaction, involvement and trust.

✅ **Integration with national digital systems:** Strategic linkage with national e-governance and digital initiatives services.

The Municipality of Bitola unequivocally confirms that the essential reform of public administration is not perceived solely through the existence of strategic documents and plans, but above all through concrete, measurable results that improve the quality of life of citizens on a daily basis. With a clearly defined vision, a high level of commitment and proactive innovation, the Municipality of Bitola has established itself as a paradigm of modern, efficient and citizen-oriented local governance, representing an outstanding example and source of inspiration for all local self-government units that strive for digital transformation and sustainable development.

Bitola is not a passive follower of reform processes – it actively leads them, setting high standards and good practices that can serve as a reference point for other municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

By preserving and intensifying the existing pace of development, additionally institutionalizing established positive practices and continuously investing in human and technological capital, the Municipality of Bitola has the full capacity to profile itself as the first truly smart digital municipality in the country — **a municipality of the future, available today.**

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