

CONDUCTING PEER REVIEW DURING EMERGENCY -

REVIEWER'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE PANDEMIC - INSIGHTS ON REMOTE PEER REVIEW SUCCESS FROM THE SAO OF HUNGARY



CONTEXT & CHALLENGE



It is a common understanding between SAIs that every single Peer Review is unique. Taking into consideration the distinctive characteristics, the process always demands meticulous preparation whereas evaluative work phases are supported vastly by in-person meetings and on-site assessment.



WHAT IF A PEER REVIEW MUST BE CONDUCTED ALMOST INCLUSIVELY VIA ONLINE TOOLS UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES NEVER ENCOUNTERED BEFORE?

That was the exact situation in 2020, when the Peer Review of the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic had to be completed during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The review was performed by the SAIs of Finland, Hungary and Poland, and coordinated by the SAI of the USA.

The experience of the SAO of Hungary highlight that a Peer Review can be indeed successfully conducted, if needed, entirely in remote mode by maintaining regular communication and ensuring the data flow. Online assessments involve as many challenges as benefits. They turn out to be even less time-consuming and more effective than expected.



WHAT MADE IT WORK?



Robust IT Infrastructure

The existence, compliance and proper functioning of IT infrastructures including online communication platforms is indispensable. Creating a microsite or using data sharing tools ensure remote and real-time access while securing transfer of information and file exchange.



Digital Confidence

Advanced IT literacy of reviewers is not required, however confidence in using different applications is an advantage. Test capacities and different tools to be able to select the most appropriate.



Effective Communication

Online interactions are inexpensive and effective. Establishing and maintaining direct and regular communication between parties helps to overcome temporal and physical distance. To avoid data and information overload, establish a communication protocol, distribute tasks and always synchronise efforts.



Transparent Workflow

Create a transparent digital workflow supported by worksheets or matrix with regular online follow-ups. Systematically organised information effectively mitigates risks of misunderstanding and facilitates filling in information gaps.



Digital Objectivity

'Virtual reality' can have multiple favourable effects on certain peer review processes. Digital distancing contributes to clearer vision, enhances the perception of independence and impartiality.