

Data as a strategic asset for the public sector

Data are essential to improving performance management, policymaking and service design and delivery. To realise this promise, governments have to value data as a strategic asset, establish sound policy frameworks and undertake reforms to secure the availability of high-quality data, as well as allowing trusted access, sharing and use to help break down policy and service siloes.

The Digital Government Index (DGI) assesses and benchmarks the maturity of digital government policies and their implementation under a coherent and whole-of-government approach. The *data-driven public sector* dimension measures the extent to which governments have adopted and implemented a data governance approach to secure the effective management of data across public sector organisations. This is the second lowest scoring of the six DGI dimensions, with an average of 0.07 out of 0.16 (see two-pager on “Digital government: Progress towards digital competence and maturity”), which shows governments’ limited progress in creating the conditions for a data-intensive transformation of the public sector.

Many countries still lack a strategic and coherent whole-of-government approach to the development of a data-driven public sector. Most lack dedicated public sector data policies or strategies, and committed leadership. In 2019, only Canada, Denmark, Greece and the United Kingdom had a single dedicated public sector data policy. In contrast, 23 out of 29 (80%) OECD countries taking part in the DGI reported their approach to public sector data was divided across one or more related policies, such as digital government or open government data (OGD) (Figure 10.4). Central/federal and institutional leadership are two fundamental aspects of sound data governance in the public sector but only limited use is made of dedicated roles to lead the development of a data-driven public sector: only 16 out of 29 OECD countries (55%) have co-ordinating bodies, and another 10 (34%) have a dedicated leadership role (e.g. Chief Information Officer) for this purpose. Only seven countries (Denmark, France, Israel, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands and New Zealand) have both (Figure 10.5).

The DGI results show a significant gap between the availability of standards and the implementation of initiatives to strategically manage data in the public sector. Initiatives to share data allow for a more integrated and efficient public sector and 28 out of 29 OECD countries (97%) have such policy initiatives. There are however differences between countries, as 6 (21%) do it on *ad hoc* basis while 22 (76%) do it as part of a formal government programme. Nevertheless, only 8 OECD countries (28%) have a single exhaustive data inventory at the central/federal level, and another 10 (34%) have a non-exhaustive inventory (at least 60% of data) (Figure 10.6).

Alignment and adherence to shared ethical values and principles for the management of data are essential to

providing timely and trustworthy data. Ten of the 29 OECD countries taking part in the 2019 DGI (34%) reported having both formal requirements to adhere to ethical guidelines and initiatives to apply ethical principles to data-related initiatives, and another 9 (31%) have only established formal requirements. This suggests that countries should continue to work towards adopting mechanisms to secure agility, integrity and ethical management of data, such as the forthcoming OECD Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector and the OECD’s work towards a recommendation on enhanced access and sharing of data.

Methodology and definitions

Data for the DGI were collected through the OECD Survey on Digital Government 1.0, which was designed to monitor the implementation of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies and assess countries’ shift towards higher levels of digital maturity. In 2019, 29 OECD countries, and one OECD key partner country (Brazil) participated in the DGI. Survey respondents were senior officials in central and federal governments, leading and/or implementing digital government reforms, who have gathered data from different parts of the public sector as relevant.

Data-driven public sector refers to the principle under which government values data as a strategic asset and establishes the governance to secure availability, access, sharing and re-use mechanisms for improved decision making and services in the public sector.

Further reading

OECD (2020), “Digital Government Index: 2019 results”, *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 3, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4de9f5bb-en>.

OECD (2019), *The Path to Becoming a Data-Driven Public Sector*, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/059814a7-en>.

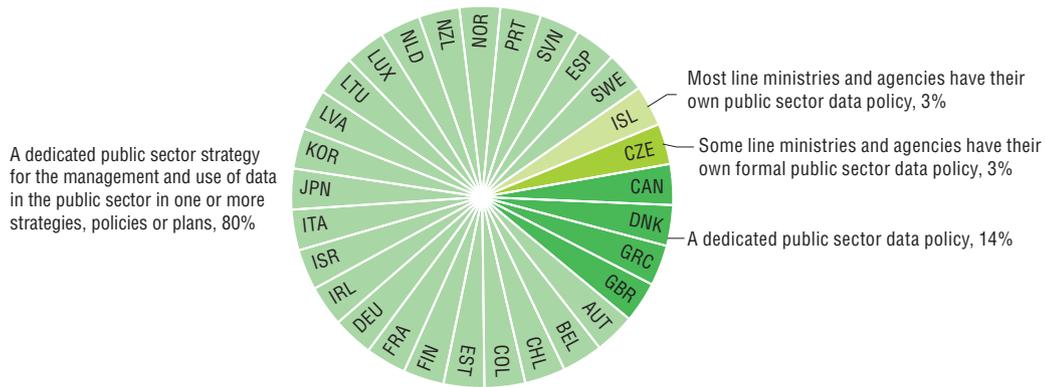
OECD (2021), “Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector”, <https://oe.cd/dataethics>.

Figure notes

Data are not available for Australia, Hungary, Mexico, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.

10.5. The outer ring shows the existence or not of a leading organisation responsible for public sector data policy/strategy, and the inner ring the existence of a dedicated role/position within the public sector to lead its implementation.

10.4. Availability of a public sector data policy at the central/federal government level, 2019



Source: OECD (2019), Survey on Digital Government 1.0.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258800>

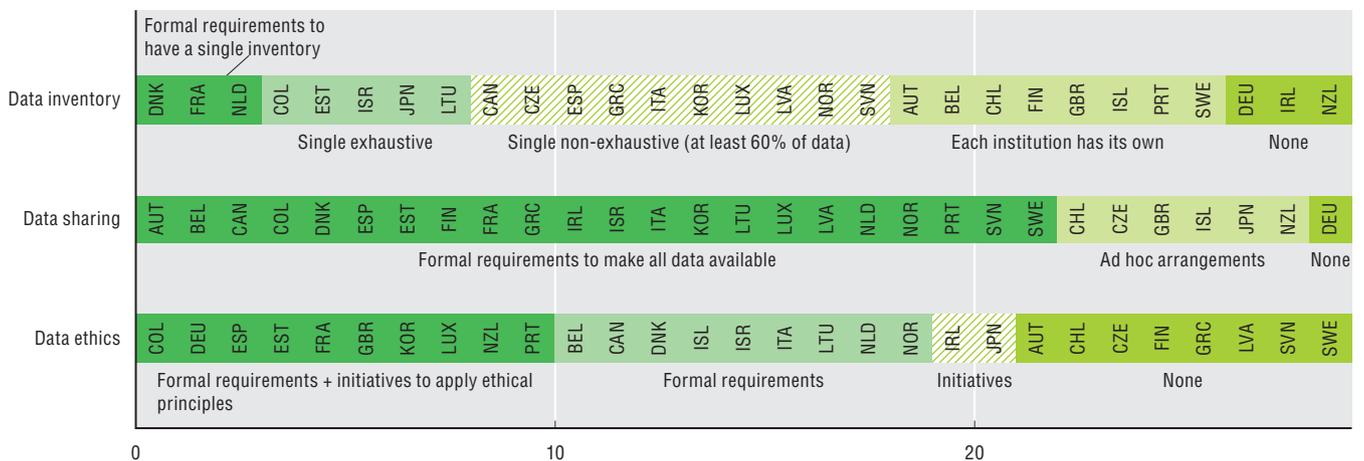
10.5. Implementing public sector data policies: Leading public sector organisation and dedicated leading role at the central/federal government, 2019



Source: OECD (2019), Survey on Digital Government 1.0.

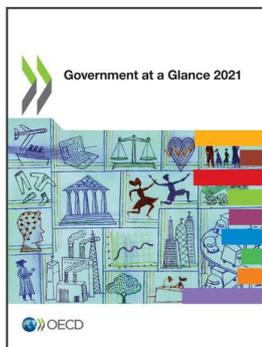
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258819>

10.6. Formal requirements and initiatives for data inventories, sharing and ethics, 2019



Source: OECD (2019), Survey on Digital Government 1.0.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258838>



From:
Government at a Glance 2021

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2021), “Data as a strategic asset for the public sector”, in *Government at a Glance 2021*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/785cb67f-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.