Digital by design: Strengthening co-ordination and skills to foster digital transformation

As rapid digital transformation changes all aspects of life, citizens expect their governments to provide services and policies that deliver on the promises of the digital age. A strategic approach to the use of digital tools and data in the public sector is fundamental to ensuring digitally competent government in an increasingly global and digital society.

The Digital Government Index (DGI) assesses the maturity and implementation of governments' digital policies. The *digital by design* dimension considers how far governments exploit the full potential of digital technologies from the outset when formulating policies and designing services, regardless of the channel used. In 2019, OECD countries scored more evenly in this dimension than in the other five, with an average of 0.09 out of 0.16 (see two-pager on "Digital Government: Progress towards digital competence and maturity"). This reflects the efforts made in the previous decades to increase the digitalisation of the public sector (e-government).

Cross-government co-ordination of digital government policies is one aspect covered in *digital by design*, as it is fundamental to breaking down bureaucratic siloes that impede the coherent and integrated use of digital tools and data across the public sector. In 2019, 21 out of 29 OECD countries (69%) had formal co-ordination bodies at central or federal level for government ICT projects, such as councils of chief information officers (CIOs) or other related bodies. However, they have limited responsibilities, in most cases acting in advisory rather than decision-making roles. On average, they had five responsibilities, three advisory ones (such as developing, co-ordinating or monitoring the implementation of national digital government strategy) and two decision making ones (e.g. *ex ante* revisions and evaluation of ICT projects or prioritising/approving projects). There are wide variations between countries, with Korea and Japan assigning all ten advisory and decision-making responsibilities to their co-ordination bodies, and Lithuania allocating only one. In most countries co-ordination bodies have more advisory responsibilities than decision-making ones, although in Austria, Colombia and Israel the opposite is true (Table 10.2).

Digital talent and skills are fundamental for an effective and sustainable digital transformation of the public sector. Most OECD countries surveyed (22 out of 29, or 76%) have strategies for the development of both user skills (e.g. email management) and professional digital skills (i.e. initiatives to attract and maintain specialists in digital technologies in the public sector) among civil servants. However, only 12 (41%) have conversion processes to increase the number of ICT professionals, and 11 (38%) have partnerships with higher education on internships for ICT careers. In addition, only 18 (62%) focus on digital complementary skills (i.e. increasing awareness of the opportunities,

benefits and challenges of the digital transformation of the public sector) (Figure 10.3).

The DGI found few training initiatives for public professionals in areas such as data analytics in policy making and service delivery (8 countries or 28%), artificial intelligence (9 countries), and usability and accessibility (6 countries each). Examples of such a comprehensive training approach for the public workforce are the GDS Academy in the United Kingdom and the School of Public Service in Canada (Online Figure G.37).

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 greater 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, who were leading and/or implementing digital government reforms, and who gathered data from different parts of the public sector as relevant.

Digital by design is the principle by which digital technologies and data are leveraged to rethink and re-engineer public processes, simplify procedures and create new channels of communication and engagement with public stakeholders.

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 (2020), "The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a digital government", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 02, OECD Publishing, Paris, *https://doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en*.

OECD (2021), "The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the public sector" *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, *https://doi.org/10.1787/4e7c3f58-en*.

Figure notes

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

10.2. Countries with no co-ordination body show as having assigned no (zero) responsibilities to such bodies. The OECD average does not include countries with no co-ordination body.

Figure G.37 (Training initiatives available for civil servants, 2019) is available online in Annex G.
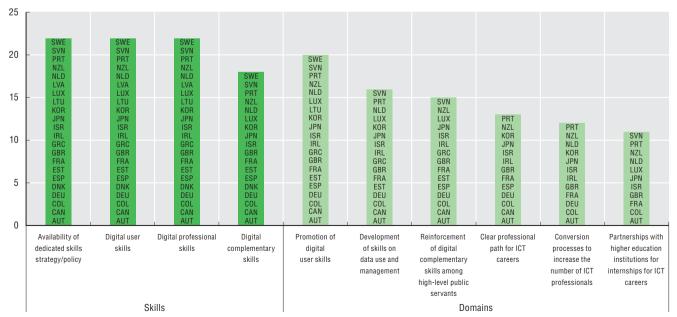
10.2. Advisory and decision-making responsibilities of digital government co-ordination bodies, 2019

	Advisory responsibilities					Decision-making responsibilities					
	Advising the development of the central/federal digital government strategy	Monitoring the implementation of the central/federal digital government strategy	Advising the development and implementation of institutional digital strategies	Developing technical guidelines for the development of ICT architecture across the central/federal government in a standardised fashion	Co-ordinating with local governments for the development of ICT projects aligned to the objectives of the central/federal digital government strategy	Prioritisation of ICT projects across the government	Ex ante revisions and evaluation of ICT projects across the central/federal government	Approval of ICT projects across the government as needed	Mandating external reviews (e.g. performance assessments) of ICT projects across the government	Provision of financial support for the development and implementation of ICT projects	No co-ordination body
Austria	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○
Belgium	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Canada	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	○
Chile	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Colombia	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Czech Republic	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○
Denmark	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
Estonia	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Finland	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
France	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○
Germany	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Greece	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Iceland	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Ireland	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Israel	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○
Italy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Japan	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Korea	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	○	○
Latvia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○
Lithuania	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Luxembourg	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Netherlands	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
New Zealand	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Norway	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Portugal	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○
Slovenia	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○
Spain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○
Sweden	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
OECD Total											
● Yes	14	14	14	13	7	10	10	9	7	7	10
○ No	15	15	15	16	22	19	19	20	22	22	19
Brazil	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○

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

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10.3. Domains and skills covered by specific strategy/policy for the public sector workforce, 2019

Bar chart (y-axis 0–25). Categories under **Skills**: Availability of dedicated skills strategy/policy; Digital user skills; Digital professional skills; Digital complementary skills. Categories under **Domains**: Promotion of digital user skills; Development of skills on data use and management; Reinforcement of digital complementary skills among high-level public servants; Clear professional path for ICT careers; Conversion processes to increase the number of ICT professionals; Partnerships with higher education institutions for internships for ICT careers.

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

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