

## Executive Summary: Key facts and data

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of public governance but has also acutely tested it. Governments had to act swiftly and adapt processes and resources to keep societies and economies afloat. While countries have generally responded to the crisis at scale and speed, not all have adjusted their public governance processes to the same degree. In some cases, transparency and public trust may have been affected. Governments must use the lessons of the crisis to become fit to meet tomorrow's public governance challenges.

### Public finances are under pressure from COVID-19 and government responses

- General government expenditures averaged 40.8% of GDP across OECD members in 2019. In 2020, expenditures rose as a share of GDP in all 26 countries for which data are available, due to COVID-19 responses and falling GDP.
- Support to households and businesses in OECD countries via additional spending and foregone revenue is around 16.4% of GDP, and support via equity injections, loans, asset purchases or debt assumptions, and contingent liabilities of up to 10.5% of GDP.
- General government revenues averaged 37.7% of GDP across the OECD in 2019. Among 26 countries for which data are available, 24 saw real per capita revenues fall in 2020, as economies shrank. In 13 countries, revenues per capita fell by more than 5%.
- Deficits have risen as a result of COVID-19 responses. The fiscal deficit in OECD countries averaged 3.2% of GDP in 2019. All 26 countries for which data are available for 2020 had higher budget deficits than in 2019; 18 had deficits of more than 5% of GDP.
- Debt has also risen: among 22 EU and OECD member countries, general government gross debt rose from 97% of GDP in 2019 to 115% in 2020.

### Most governments were unprepared for the scale of the crisis but quick to correct course

- In early 2020, more than 60% of civil servants worked remotely in most OECD countries for which information is available. About half of OECD countries for which information is available created or transformed the definition of “essential positions” that cannot work remotely.
- In response to the pandemic, 20 of 26 (77%) of centres of government (CoGs) in OECD countries reported supporting increased cross-ministerial co-ordination activities. While 20 of 26 governments (77%) consulted stakeholders on their strategies to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, only 9 of 26 (35%) actively involved stakeholders in designing these strategies.
- 33 of 35 (94%) independent fiscal institutions in OECD countries published rapid analysis of the economic and budgetary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Before the crisis, around one-third of OECD members allowed some form of exception to regulatory impact assessments in emergency responses. During the crisis, governments and regulators had to fast-track many new regulations, cutting back impact assessments and stakeholder consultation.
- Before the crisis 19 of 32 OECD countries (59%) did not have business intelligence among their e-procurement functions (i.e. information on public entities' procurement needs, contracted suppliers or available products). Governments had to innovate rapidly to address information deficits and manage supply constraints.

### **The short-term boost in trust in government sparked by the pandemic may not last**

- In 2020, 51% of people in OECD countries trusted their government, up 6.3 percentage points (p.p) from 2007 and 6 p.p. from 2019. This could mean that people rallied behind their institutions early in the crisis. In 18 of the 22 OECD countries with available information, average trust levels decreased between April/May and June/July 2020, indicating that this effect may fade quickly.
- Trust varies across institutions: on average, 72% of the population trust the police, 49% trust the civil service, 37% trust the government and about one-third trust national parliaments.
- In 2018, in OECD countries for which data is available, less than half of the population (40%) believed the political system in their countries allowed people like them to have a say in what the government does.

### **Fine-tuning consultation and engagement practices could improve transparency and trust in public institutions**

- In 2020, 27 of 32 (85%) of OECD countries had government-wide participation portals, where all central/federal ministries publish consultation and engagement opportunities. 38% of OECD countries had several portals, and 47% had a single portal.
- The use of virtual consultations in regulatory policy-making has increased since 2017; from 35% to 62% of OECD countries for early-stage consultations, and from 41% to 57% of countries for late-stage consultations.
- In 92% of OECD countries, policy makers consult early on draft regulations with selected groups; open consultations are more common only at a late stage.
- In 2020, 20 of 24 (87%) of OECD countries had a strategy to mitigate public integrity risks, particularly corruption. However, only 8 of 20 (40%) of integrity strategies underwent inter-governmental and public consultation. Less than half of countries have transparency requirements covering most of the actors that regularly engage in lobbying.

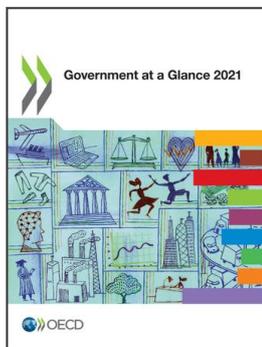
### **Public employment and politics are becoming more diverse, but could be improved**

- In 2019, women held only 37% of public sector senior management positions on average in OECD countries.
- Participation of women in politics has increased but is still far from parity. On average across OECD countries, 32% of the seats in the lower/single house of parliaments were held by women in 2021, compared to 26% a decade ago. Likewise, the share of women ministers increased from 28% in 2017 to 34% in 2021.

- Countries are setting diversity targets within their administrations. In 2020, targets were used by 24 of 33 OECD countries (73%), to employ people with disabilities (vs. 37% in 2016). Only 14 of 33 of OECD countries (42%) have targets for gender balance (vs. 29% in 2016).
- People aged 20-39 represent 34% of voting-age populations across OECD countries, but the percentage of young members of parliaments was 22% in 2020. The under-representation of young people in public life may deepen the generational divide.

### **Public governance processes could help promote environmental and social goals**

- All OECD countries have a framework to support environmental objectives in public procurement. Some have similar frameworks to support human rights (70%), gender equality (41%) or minority issues (48%).
- In 2020, only 14 of 35 surveyed OECD countries (40%) reported green budgeting efforts. Among them, most used *ex ante* or *ex post* environmental impact assessments (12 of 14, 86%) and environmental cost-benefit analysis (10 of 14, 71%).
- 22 of 30 OECD countries (73%) have aligned long-term infrastructure plans with sustainability objectives, and 17 of 30 (57%) have adapted existing infrastructure to improve environmental performance.



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