Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity

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Foreword

Globally, governments are finding themselves at a critical juncture. They are working to modernise their capacities to deliver on cross-cutting issues whilst facing unprecedented and ongoing health, geopolitical and environmental challenges. The context is further challenged by compounding crises, declining trust in public institutions, growing polarisation, challenges to information integrity, and disengagement with traditional democratic processes. In this light, governments increasingly recognise that they can no longer rely on traditional decision-making practices or siloed ways of working. Instead, they must take more co-ordinated, agile, and proactive action that is founded on trust in public institutions and evidence-informed decision-making.

Centres of government (CoGs) are pivotal in this essential transformation. With their unique central positioning, they are at the heart of steering holistic and coordinated decision-making for governments. They act as the bridge between the political and administrative spheres of government, stewards of setting countries' visions and priorities, and are pivotal in guiding robust and contemporary practices across the public administration. CoGs can be the key to making government greater than the sum of its independent elements.

Given the rapidly evolving contexts, CoGs are faced with growing responsibilities and increasing pressure, making it more difficult for them to know how to act. In a complex world with no single solutions, the power of knowledge sharing, and learning from others' experiences becomes more essential and reinforces the need for sharing experiences.

This compendium seeks to bring together the experiences and lessons learnt from CoGs globally through the work of the OECD Informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision-making at the Centre of Government. It supports policy and decision-makers in considering their own practices at the CoG, with specific, clear, and practical case examples of the work occurring in CoGs in all 26 countries surveyed.

The practices presented cover key CoG roles and functions, ranging from translating the political agenda into the public administration communications, prioritising, coordinating, and aligning actors on cross-cutting issues, responding to crises and disruptions, and enhancing the practice and culture of public administrations. It identifies themes arising from these practices, and a synthesis of common challenges and enablers countries have learnt that can help to drive good governance.

The insights collected demonstrate that a commitment to reinforcing democracy, good governance and building better policies is an ongoing journey where governments are expecting CoGs to continue acting as guides. By sharing and expanding knowledge of key enablers that can help CoGs improve their capacities, this compendium seeks to be a tool that can ultimately help governments achieve better outcomes for societies.

Acknowledgements

Table of contents

Table

Figures

Boxes

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Executive Summary

In an increasingly complex national and global context, most centres of government (CoGs) now play a pivotal role at the heart of government. In recent years, multiple, consecutive shocks have threatened economic resilience and wellbeing worldwide. Governments need to adopt more advanced practices to build trust and enhance democratic resilience to better address the challenges they face.

Considering this, CoGs can benefit from learning from each other to improve how they operate in this context. This compendium seeks to enable this learning by sharing practices CoGs are using, and lessons learnt. The compendium is underpinned by the 2023 survey of OECD member and partner countries and discussions of the OECD Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government.

The CoG is the body, or group of bodies, that advises and supports the highest level of the executive branch of government and council of ministers. Its composition takes a wide variety of forms across the OECD, ranging from a set of bodies located in a single institution to several institutions or units linked directly to the head of the executive. Despite this diversity of composition, there are some common functions across CoGs.

The OECD has recently developed and shared a framework identifying these common functions with members of the informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government. The framework outlines the roles that CoGs play and their value to government and the public.

The framework is as follows:

- CoG as a **bridge** between the political layer and the public administration, to help interactions between the political and administrative dimensions of government.
    1. Bridging the political-administrative interface
- CoG as a **steward** of cross-cutting, complex, and long and short-term issues, to drive collective, cohesive action and impactful public outcomes.
    2. Setting the vision, strategic planning and prioritisation
    3. Co ordinating and enhancing policy development
    4. Driving sound decision-making practices from the centre
    5. Monitoring and enhancing performance
- CoG as a **guide** of good public administration practices, to enhance public sector performance and efficiency.
    6. Guiding high-performing public administrations from the centre
- CoG as a **stabiliser** against crises and disruptions, to strengthen resilience and agility.
    7. Anticipating, preparing for, and managing crises
- CoG as a **communicator** to disseminate accurate information and dispel mis-disinformation, to foster trust in democracy and public institutions.
    8. Communicating from the centre

- CoG as a **system** to support the capacity of the CoG in achieving its potential, to ensure the CoG has the right design, structures, powers, resources, and enablers to perform.
  9. Building the CoG as a system

The compendium is split into nine chapters linked to each function of the CoG listed above and is written through the experiences of officials working in CoG institutions, roles and functions.

Readers may find it useful to refer to specific chapters relevant to areas of interest in lieu of reading the publication in its entirety.

1 Bridging the political-administrative interface

This chapter presents the role of the centre of government (CoG) as a bridge between the political and administrative interface. Specifically, in bridging the relationship between administrative officials and the elected government, the CoG's relationship-building abilities will be discussed. It explores various practical examples of how the CoG manages this important relationship during times of major global challenges and polarisation through deploying different mechanisms. It details the importance of clear responsibilities, a well-equipped workforce and specific mechanisms to translate political priorities into coherent and co-ordinated action to drive trust in public institutions. It further discusses the complexities for CoGs in managing the challenges of transitions and coalition governments at the interface.

Key messages

- The centre of government (CoG) often plays a particularly important role in bridging the relationship between administrative officials and the elected government.
- The CoG supports the agenda and running of cabinets and cabinet committees, is responsible for translating and overseeing the implementation of government programmes and plays a central role in managing government transitions.
- Navigating this role is particularly challenging, especially when managing major global challenges and crises alongside national agendas and geopolitical shifts.
- CoG officials should be skilled at building trust with political actors through impartial and evidence-based advice. Further, the CoG should be a safe environment in which frank and fearless advice can be given, allowing for the consideration of multiple trade-offs.
- Key areas for consideration include ensuring a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities between the administrative and political interface, using the right mechanisms to translate political priorities into action and building the skills of administrative officials.
- The CoG's role as a bridge between the administrative and political interface will be subject to various contextual aspects of the system of government, including political cycles, coalition governments, etc.

1. Introduction

Democracy is inherently messy and requires trade-offs and compromises. Helping navigate this, through bridging and fostering relationships between the political and administrative layers of government, is a key role of the CoG. Centres perform this work to translate government agendas into whole-of-government strategies to help governments work on complex issues and make policy trade-off decisions (OECD, 2018[1]). It is essential for both domestic and global policy, and responses to complex and layered geopolitical issues (Cairney, 2012[2]).

The CoGs' bridging role is critical to ensuring coherent and co-ordinated government action and smooth transitions and decision-making. In this sense, CoGs function to ensure that the public administration upholds and implements government's priorities in a way that follows the principles of openness, integrity and fairness. In doing so, CoGs can influence the overall perception of government competency and values, which drive trust in public institutions (Brezzi et al., 2021[3]). The complex issues and geopolitical shifts currently facing many governments make this role even more challenging.

This chapter will explore the role of the CoG as a bridge and an interface between the political and administrative spheres of government through the following structure:

- The political-administrative interface.
- Mechanisms used by the CoG as a bridge.
- Building the skills of CoG officials at the interface.
- Managing challenges at the interface, including coalition governments and transitions.

2. The political-administrative interface

A shared understanding of the delineation of roles between the political and administrative spheres and between the CoG and line ministries is essential. In most democratic systems, the political sphere holds primary policy decision-making authority, while the administrative sphere operates on behalf of the government in operational and related matters (Favero, 2022[4]). Yet, relationships between the political and the administrative can be challenging due to distinct cultures, competing objectives, forms of accountability and power. Under many democratic systems, politicians have the authority to decide policy that shapes action. The public administration can be bound to implement the wishes of the elected government but retains power over information and organisational resources (Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2014[5]). Yet, a lot more policy design interactions must occur in practice. While clear roles are important, processes must allow both actors to monitor (Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2014[5]) and meaningfully interact with the other (Demir, 2022[6]).

Formal agreements, the codification of relationships and roles, or cabinet manuals can be used to clarify roles (Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. Codifying the roles of the political and administrative layers

In Australia, the Public Service Amendment Bill 2023 is working to define the separate roles of the administrative and political layers further. Amongst other important reforms, the bill outlines a means to strengthen a provision in the original 1999 Public Service Act which prohibits ministerial influence on the direction of agency head employment matters. This new bill is intended to renew and strengthen understanding between ministers and agency heads on the apolitical nature of public service appointments. This explicitly reinforces the previous understanding by codifying it, demonstrating continued work in Australia to delineate the roles of the administrative and political spheres of government.

Source: Australian Government (2023[7]), *Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis*, https://oia.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/oia-impact-analysis-guide-march-2023_0.pdf.

Negotiation among both sides of the interface is critical to reaching a common framework and is an important part of the CoG's role. There is always tension between political and administrative accountability, which blurs the roles of each actor. Balancing goals, autonomy and accountability of ministers with regard to senior public officials is always a careful balance (Giauque, Resenterra and Siggen, 2009[8]; OECD, 2023[9]).

3. Mechanisms used by the CoG to translate political priorities to the administration

One of the primary reasons for CoGs to play a bridging role is to ensure that the public administration implements the government agenda. This involves alignment between strategic priorities, public administration objectives, and institutional, financial or legal capabilities. To bridge potential gaps, act as an interface and effectively translate the political vision into action, CoGs can use several mechanisms. Box 1.2 discusses mechanisms used in Australia, Denmark, Finland and Hungary. The most common mechanisms which emerge from these examples include:

- Joint consideration of objectives between the line ministries and CoG.
- Performance work which anchors government priorities.

- A detailed articulation of strategies.
- An agreement to proceed (e.g. memorandum of understanding).

Box 1.2. Translating the government agenda to the public administration through the CoG

Australia

In Australia, strategic government priorities are reflected throughout the public administration by tying them to the performance framework. The CoG, from a whole-of-government perspective, makes this a planning and reporting priority. The performance framework establishes roles, performance expectations, reporting and communication channels that prioritise responsiveness to the minister and align planning with the goals of the government in power.

This approach is more top-down, which reflects the fact that all ministers belong to the same party. However, this mechanism lacks the opportunity for the two-way negotiation present in the Danish and Finnish examples. This can create a greater need for critical discussions during each policy or event cycle.

Hungary

The CoG in Hungary – the Prime Minister's Office – plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between political leadership and the civil service. The office can co-ordinate and streamline policy initiatives to ensure alignment with overall government goals and priorities. The main political co-ordinator of the government is the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, which establishes clear and open lines of communication. This helps the administration's programme of work by clearly conveying the expectations, guidelines or any changes to government policy from a high level within the government.

Denmark

In Denmark, "settlement" agreements regarding Danish policies are used between the CoG, ministers and external parties. While the government sets the overall direction and priorities for Denmark's European Union (EU) policy, parties outside the government take part in negotiations to develop the overall guidelines for future EU policymaking.

The government develops the course of the policy, which is called the "settlement". For this proposed course to take effect, all parties involved in drafting the agreement must agree to the policy. If the parties dispute a proposed change, it cannot take place until after a parliamentary election.

Finland

A government programme is negotiated and agreed to by all ministers. They ensure the alignment of each line ministry with the broader government aims. The state secretary assists in drafting policy outlines, conducting inter-ministerial co-ordination, harmonising policy positions and implementing the government programme in the ministry's administrative branch.

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4. Building the skills of CoG officials at the interface

A key enabler for the CoG to effectively function as a bridge between the political and administrative spheres is a skilled workforce that has good relations with the rest of government. The CoG needs a diverse and well-trained set of staff to achieve successful policy outcomes in a range of areas. Administrators must serve elected governments and yet remain non-partisan. In order to so, CoG staff must be skilled in consistently interpreting, establishing and defending the line between appropriate

responsiveness and inappropriate partisanship (Grube and Howard, 2016[10]). Staff should also be skilled mediators to facilitate conversation at the interface.

The CoG also plays a key role in translating the government agenda into public service objectives. Key functions include negotiation, sharing of information, monitoring and fostering commitment. They require communication skills, monitoring expertise and the ability to translate evidence into knowledge.

The CoG also has a central role to play in transition management, as discussed later. This includes record keeping, planning for government changes, sourcing and maintaining live documents that capture performance, long-term plans and strategic outlook and developing information storage systems that are accessible to decision-makers and incoming governments. A CoG best supports this type of work with a variety of staff, including those with specialist information management skills, strategic capacity and deep process understanding of government workings. Generally, the mix of skills required suggests that the CoG benefits from a mixture of political and administrative staff. Box 1.3 outlines Hungary's approach to ensuring the right skills at the CoG.

Box 1.3. Maintaining a high-performing CoG in Hungary

In recognition of the specific expertise and increasing pressures on the CoG, the government of Hungary implements a range of initiatives to support a high-performing CoG. This includes specialised yearly training for staff and compulsory public administration entry-level examinations and for seniors in managerial-level positions at the University of Public Service to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to handle the nuances of central government functions and today's challenges. This training covers several policy areas and material needed for the professional conduct of a civil servant, so helps maintain the professionalism of the civil service.

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5. Managing challenges at the interface: Coalition governments and transitions

Managing relationships through coalition governments

Coalition governments are becoming more prominent for many reasons, including in the context of polarisation and threats to democracy. Coalition governments do not always have relationships or mechanisms to collaborate and function effectively, challenging the CoG's role. In this context, internal stakeholder management has become increasingly important (Shostak et al., 2023[11]).

Coalition governments may require the CoG to increase focus on central co-ordination and relationships due to the necessity of maintaining good relationships with all parties. This may also involve sharing co-ordination powers with line ministries and engaging in discussions outside of the government (OECD, 2018[1]). This can also differ between parliamentary and presidential systems. Boxes 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6 outline cases in Denmark, Finland and Spain, where coalition government arrangements have required the CoG to adapt.

Box 1.4. Finland – Managing CoG functions in a coalition government

In Finland, the government is formed through a coalition between a range of parties. The parties representing the new parliament negotiate a political programme and the composition of the new government, after which the parliament elects the prime minister. The president then appoints the other ministers in accordance with a proposal made by the prime minister.

In this regard, the CoG – the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) – supports the development and agreement of a government programme, which sets out the main tasks facing the incoming administration. Some discussions and decisions can also occur outside of the government and the CoG can be asked for support.

The prime minister is the political leader of the government and is responsible for obtaining agreement and co-ordinating government work with that of parliament. This includes monitoring the implementation of the programme and is supported by the PMO, plenary sessions, statutory ministerial committees and state secretaries, among others.

Government plenary sessions are held once a week and proposals are made to the president of the republic on matters that come under the authority of the president. They have the power to issue decrees and make decisions on matters under the authority of the government. Division of the government's decision-making authority between the plenary session and the individual ministries provided for in the constitution, government act and the government rules of procedure.

A state secretary may also be appointed to the PMO. The state secretary is the closest adviser to the prime minister. They direct preparatory work, promote and monitor the implementation of the government programme, manage co-operation between ministries and may assist ministers in political steering and planning. They also assist and represent the ministers in drafting policy outlines, inter-ministerial co-ordination, harmonising policy positions, implementing the government programme in the ministry's administrative branch, and handling EU and other international duties.

Source: Finnish Government (n.d.[12]), *About the Government*, https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/government (accessed on 7 September 2023).

Box 1.5. Denmark: Consensus and co-operation in a coalition government

With a high incidence of minority government and minority coalitions and a strong focus on consensus and co-operation, Denmark has made use of coalition agreements and strong centralised government co-ordination using committees to seek consensus for cabinet decisions and a collectively drafted government platform. The prime minister must drive consensus between different parties in government and ensure all relationships to support the coalition are secure. To do this, the prime minister holds many co-ordinating meetings, both with the leaders of the government parties and with the ministers.

A department comprises permanent and politically neutral civil servants, acts as the secretariat to the minister and performs planning, development and strategic work. Civil servants remain in post upon a change of government. Most civil servants work in agencies that are separate operational organisations reporting to the minister. The minister also has their own secretary and communications personnel who are partisan and do not remain when the government changes.

Each minister holds full executive power and responsibility over their portfolio. The cabinet is not a collective decision-maker. To support these arrangements and reduce the potential for ministerial

decisions that are not planned, coalition agreements are used and economic and co-ordination committees work to resolve conflicts among the parties.

The sitting government sets the direction for Denmark's EU policy. Parties outside government, however, still take part in negotiations about the overall guidelines for future EU policymaking. The parties in parliament determine the course of Danish EU policy by entering into a settlement agreement. For a Danish policy about the European Union to change, all parties who crafted the original agreement must concur. If the parties dispute a proposed change, it cannot take place until after a parliamentary election.

Source: Danish Parliament (n.d.[13]), *The Government*, https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/en/democracy/the-government (accessed on 8 September 2023); Christiansen, F. (2021[14]), "Denmark: How to form and govern minority coalitions", https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198868484.003.0005 (accessed on 8 September 2023).

Box 1.6. Bridging the political-administrative interface in a coalition government in Spain

As has been the case in Spain in recent years, the formation of coalition governments requires greater co-ordination and collaboration efforts to guarantee the coherence of government action and public policies.

This is the role of the CoG's public policy department within the president's office, which acts as the bridge and link between the presidency and the rest of the government ministries and agencies. The department supports the design and evaluation of the executive's public policies. It must provide the president with accurate information on government action to inform decision-making. It must equally promote co-ordination between ministries to drive coherence and alignment of government action.

The CoG is often remote from the day-to-day design and management of public policies, so a unit in charge of compiling all of the necessary information for the head of government as well as co-ordinating and pursuing coherence in actions, ensures better achievement of objectives. In complex societies and contexts, information gathering and management can be a challenge for this function. As part of its work as a provider of consistency, the quality of the data and the data compilation and analysis capacity of the tool used for this purpose are key factors.

Source: Information provided by representatives of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Government.

Managing smooth election transitions

Building and maintaining institutional memory is a key task for CoGs. The CoG can be effective at managing transitions due to its systemic leverage, including agreements, committees, digital record keeping and information-sharing platforms. It can also appoint permanent staff to oversee these.

Staff turnover is critical to institutional memory. The experience and issues of trust for the CoG can also be shaped by the number of political staff in critical roles within the CoG. Brazil and the United States (see Boxes 1.7 and 1.8), for example, have a high level of staff turnover with changes of government. This requires the safe transfer of information and accountability for records storage and the continuation of long-term programmes. Parliamentary systems, with numerous possible outcomes at times of transition, also require significant transition planning (Box 1.9).

Box 1.7. Brazil – Facilitating the transition of government with a high turnover of staff

Brazil's planning and managing of the transfer of power is crucial as transitions are characterised by a high degree of turnover. Over 50% of the senior staff has changed, including the head of the CoG. This creates challenges for building trust and, to ensure policy continuity, Brazil has introduced several tools to smooth the transition. These tools facilitate a more structured information flow. They include:

- **A transition portal**: A website for officials in the Special Commission, directors and superior advisers, including special government transition positions, for the dissemination of information.
- **Agenda 100**: A list of government commitments relating to legal requirements, international agreements, the parliamentary agenda and economic aspects. Developed by the outgoing government for the incoming, it outlines the long-term goals to support policy coherence. It informs the government about potential risks regarding unilateral breaches of agreements and contracts, fines, legal sanctions and diplomatic sensitivities.
- **A server's guide**: This guide is available to all members of the new government and provides information on the law that regulates the relationship between the administration and public servants, including the appointment of new civil servants, recruitment, remuneration and functions.

Source: OECD (2022[15]), *Centre of Government Review of Brazil: Toward an Integrated and Structured Centre of Government*, https://doi.org/10.1787/33d996b2-en.

Box 1.8. The United States: Supporting presidential transitions

Presidential transitions in the United States require significant co-ordination and resources. While the transition of administration is supported by the General Services Administration (GSA), the CoG has a crucial role in the White House Transition Coordinating Council and the Agency Transition Directors Council (ATDC). Both are comprised of different CoG officials, including public servants and transition representatives for each eligible candidate. Priority is given to the appointment of staff to centralise co-ordination and report all issues directly to the president.

Pre-election transition planning is used to prepare for a change in president and administration, which means that both the above-mentioned councils should be created six months prior to the presidential election. The ATDC meets at least once a year in non-presidential and regularly in presidential election years. With the help of the CoG, the outgoing administration negotiates the transition terms. By 1st November of the election year, all agreements made should be reflected in a memorandum of understanding (MOU).

If the CoG of the outgoing administration co-operates with the incoming, it can facilitate and ensure a smooth transfer of power. Additional mechanisms are in place to ensure co-operation, including a Federal Transition Coordinator appointed by the GSA and a requirement for each MOU to include an ethics plan that guides the conduct of the transition and applies to the president and transition teams of all eligible candidates throughout the transition period.

Sources: GSA (2022[16]), *GSA's Role in Presidential Transitions*, https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/mission-and-background/gsas-role-in-presidential-transitions?topnav=about-us; Kumar, M. (2021[17]), *Rules Governing Presidential Transitions: Laws, Executive Orders, and Funding Provisions*, https://whitehousetransitionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WHTP2021-05-Rules-Governing-Presidential-Transitions.pdf; information from the OECD Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government – Special Session on Transition Management, United States Congress (2020[18]), *Presidential Transition Enhancement Act of 2019*, https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ121/PLAW-116publ121.pdf.

> **Box 1.9. Canada: Managing transitions at the CoG in parliamentary systems**
>
> Transition governments in parliamentary systems can be complex due to the many possible outcomes. For example, a new majority/minority party could be elected, a party remain as a minority/minority but experience a party leadership change, or the same party could retain its majority/minority government.
>
> In Canada, government transitions involve significant consultation and preparation in conjunction with line ministries well in advance of the actual transition of power. Careful planning begins up to six months prior to the election, where the prime minister of the current administration will normally authorise the clerk of the Privy Council (secretary to the cabinet) to begin transition planning. The leader of the opposition, i.e. the potential new prime minister, receives oral briefings on the preparation work. Meetings between the leader of the opposition and the clerk and the Privy Council Office (PCO) take place in lieu of specific contact between the opposition and current line ministers.
>
> During the election, the PCO will monitor and survey election events. Normal decision-making capacities of the government are significantly reduced, with limited cabinet meetings. Following an election which results in a change of administration, the outgoing prime minister becomes head of a caretaker administration, limiting decision-making power as ministers prepare to leave office. The clerk and prime minister-designate meet regularly over the days before the formal transition, wherein the clerk briefs the prime minister-designate on key issues.
>
> Source: OECD (1988[19]), "Management Challenges at the Centre of Government: Coalition Situations and Government Transitions", https://doi.org/10.1787/5kml614vl4wh-en.

A recent OECD survey showed that there is typically some level of continuity within the CoG (OECD, 2023[20]). This creates an opportunity for the CoG to build permanent systems and organisational memory.

Figure 1.1. Change in the CoG senior management within six months following the transition
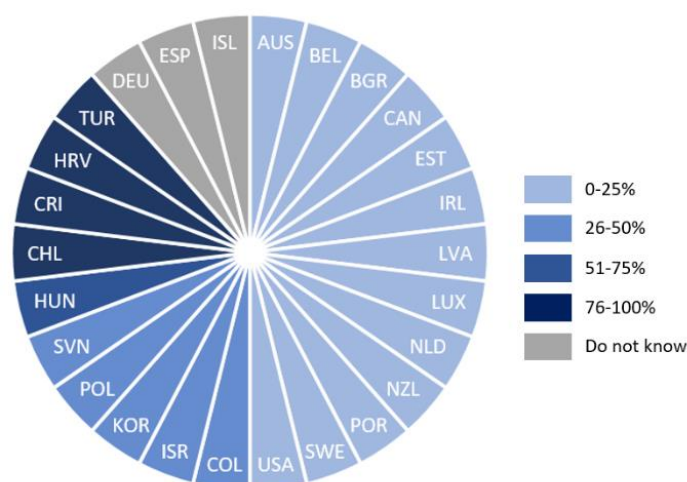
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked "What proportion of the senior management of the CoG changed within the first six months following the last transition of government?".
Source: OECD (2023[20]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

6. Common challenges and enablers

Common challenges

- The bridging role of the CoG is increasingly complex, with major global challenges and crises, alongside changing national agendas and geopolitical shifts. It can be more challenging with governments attempting to respond to declining trust and increasing polarisation.

- CoGs need to ensure a productive, two-way relationship between the political and administrative interface. This relationship must allow for political directions to be implemented by the public administration. At the same time, it needs to allow for frank advice on the feasibility of policies from line ministries to be considered by the government.

- Coalition governments may present unique challenges for the CoG. This context may require enhanced focus on communication and co-ordination mechanisms to maintain good working relationships between all parties.

- Periods of transition, as moments when institutional memory and staff expertise are frequently replaced (including within the CoG), may also require the focus of the CoG. Managing transitions – through agencies or building processes and guidelines – can be a challenge for CoG staff to pre-empt and address.

Key enablers

- Ensuring clarity between the roles, accountabilities and interaction mechanisms between the political and administrative spheres is important. CoGs can facilitate this through manuals, agreements and ongoing discussions.

- CoGs should not just focus on transactional elements of the interface but also on relational elements. Some CoGs find it effective to have regular, informal discussions between both sides of the interface, including with the line ministries.

- Building the right skills within the workforce is a crucial enabler for the continued effective functioning of CoGs. This is important to effectively manage co-ordination mechanisms, capacity building and generally leverage the expertise of the administration to execute priorities. CoG must ensure that the staff of the administration have the diverse skills necessary to perform at a high level. CoGs need to consider their overall mix of political versus non-political staff in this regard.

- Clear mechanisms to translate the government agenda to the work of the public administration are also key enablers for the functioning of the government. A range of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms to do this can be useful. The alignment between the priorities of the administration at all levels is essential for the effective implementation of the government priorities.

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2 Setting the vision, strategic planning and prioritisation

This chapter discusses the role of the centre of government (CoG) in stewarding long-term government visions and translating these into clear priorities through a strategic planning process. Balancing long-term development outcomes with immediate priorities or crisis responses is becoming increasingly important. Through fostering alignment and cohesion across ministries and different levels of government, the CoG helps avoid duplication or conflict in government action. This chapter presents specific practical examples of mechanisms the CoG can use to build good strategic planning practices, including frameworks and standards, guidance, quality reviews and capacity building for ministries. It further discusses these within the context of developing a long-term vision in an increasingly polarised environment.

Key messages

- Setting clear vision, priorities and plans is key to stewarding outcomes across the government.
- Centres of government (CoGs) steward these functions, yet are finding this more challenging, particularly in balancing long-term development outcomes with the immediate priorities or crisis responses.
- CoGs also need to foster alignment and cohesion across ministries and different levels of government to avoid duplication or conflicting government action. This requires CoGs to build trusted relationships with line ministries and navigate between conflicting agendas at times.
- CoGs utilise a range of mechanisms to build good strategic planning practices across the public administration, including setting frameworks and standards, providing guidance, quality review of plans and, indirectly, support or capacity building for line ministries.
- In this role, key considerations include balancing national and international commitments, engaging with internal and external stakeholders in planning processes, negotiating different agendas, enhancing strategic thinking capability and linking planning with implementation.

1. Introduction

CoGs are crucial in stewarding a country's vision, long-term strategy and priorities. From their unique central positioning, they set the overall vision and co-ordinate strategic planning and prioritisation across the public administration. The data collected through the OECD (2023) "Survey on strategic decision-making at the centre of government" (hereafter the Survey) demonstrate that this is a core role of CoGs. In 2023, 73% of OECD member and accession countries reported that formulating a long-term vision is a top or significant priority for their CoG and 58% of surveyed parties described setting priorities as an important function.

Translating vision and priorities into co-ordinated action benefits from a co-ordinated approach across the government and planning of the necessary resources to deliver on the priorities. CoGs are, thus, often performing these functions: 73% of CoGs reported that ensuring alignment across documents and with the budget is a significant or top priority (OECD, 2023[1]).

Strategic planning and prioritisation are activities that tend to involve actors from several areas of the administration as well as external stakeholders. CoGs, therefore, need to ensure consistent quality across the administration and build the overall planning capacity of officials: 88% of CoGs mentioned that setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity for strategic planning is a priority.

The institutional structures of CoGs vary across countries and according to their functions and priorities. "With easy access to senior government leaders, but relatively small budgets and staff, CoGs embody the 'engine room' of decision-making and are well situated to bring together both people and issues to set the direction of travel" (OECD, 2018[2]). For strategic planning activities, 18 out of 26 countries surveyed reported having a dedicated unit or team for strategic planning, while 11 indicated having a dedicated structure for visioning or foresight (OECD, 2023[1]).

Figure 2.1. Existence of dedicated units or teams in the CoG to support functions
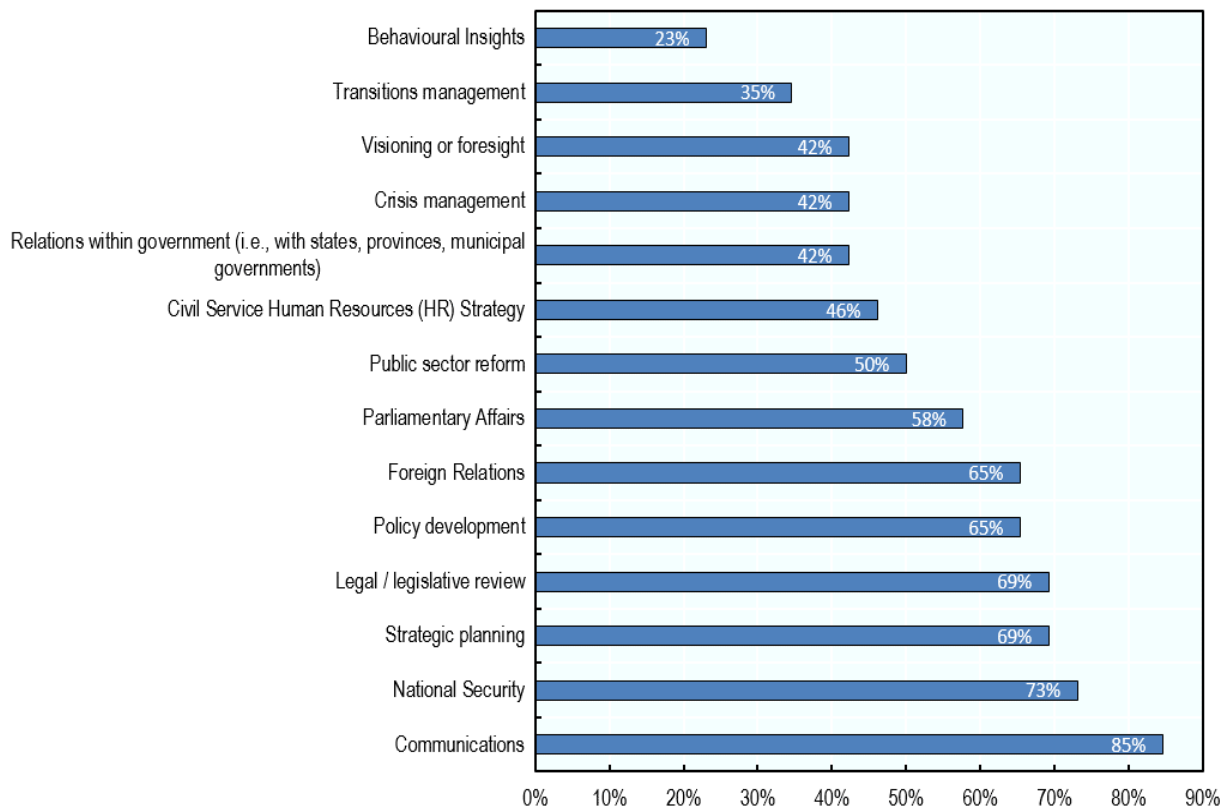
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "Is there a dedicated unit or team at the CoG to support the following functions?".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

This chapter will explore the CoG's role as a steward of setting the vision, strategic planning and prioritisation through the following structure:

- Formulating a long-term vision and strategic planning.
- Supporting priority setting.
- Ensuring alignment across strategic documents.
- Setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity.

2. Formulating a long-term vision and strategic planning

Tackling challenges through long-term policy planning and strategising is more urgent than ever (Schiller, 2022[3]). Governments are faced with increasingly cross-cutting issues and crises while operating in a growingly complex environment (OECD, 2023[4]) and tightening fiscal landscape. This can create a risk for CoGs to overfocus on short-term risks and action. Yet, maintaining long-term vision is essential for countries to combat climate change, achieve their development ambitions.

CoGs lead work on strategic planning and on the definition of the country's long-term vision. They do so by defining overall government long-term visions, then translating this into shorter-term plans and action. The specific vision for the future of the country is the element that underpins most of the strategic planning process and the content of planning documents (OECD, 2018[2]). According to the Survey, in 69% of

countries, CoGs lead the formulation of the government's long-term vision, through national development plans for example. Such plans provide a common framework for all ministries to align specific actions.

Figure 2.2. CoGs are crucial for the development of a long-term vision for the country

Legend: CoG leads | Shared lead | Varies greatly | Line Ministry leads

Activity	CoG leads	Shared lead	Varies greatly	Line Ministry leads
Development of strategic documents, plans and instruments	8%	38%	15%	38%
Implementation of selected strategic documents plans and instruments (e.g. cross-cutting priorities)	12%	19%	12%	54%
Undertaking futures thinking, foresight or modelling	19%	35%	27%	12%
Promoting accountability for the delivery of strategic priorities for government (e.g. through a mandate letter)	31%	23%	12%	8%
Coordination of the development of strategic documents, plans and instruments	35%	31%	19%	15%
Ensuring alignment of strategic priorities for government and/or documents with the public administration's performance framework	35%	31%	12%	15%
Mandating line departments to develop strategic plans in different cross-cutting areas	38%	12%	19%	12%
Setting standards, requirements, or guidance for line ministries or agencies	42%	31%	15%	12%
Identification and setting policy priorities for government	58%	38%	4%	
Formulating long-term vision for government	69%	12%	12%	8%

Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "For each of the below activities regarding setting the vision, priorities and strategic planning, please indicate who has the primary responsibility".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

In some circumstances, CoGs may be directly involved in the development of long-term plans for certain sectors, for example in infrastructure. According to data from the OECD 2020 Survey on the Governance of Infrastructure, in 2020, Finland, Greece, Lithuania, and Türkiye reported that the CoG is the primary institution responsible for assessing the country's long-term infrastructure needs.

In a rapidly moving environment marked by disruptions and uncertainty, governments need to adjust their efforts continuously. Hence, long-term visions can benefit from periodic reviews and revision updates to ensure they remain relevant to changing circumstances and national trends (OECD, 2022[5]). Boxes 2.1 and 2.2 present the case of Finland and Latvia and their long-term-vision approaches.

Box 2.1. Latvia's long-term National Development Plan

In 2020, the Latvian government and parliament approved the National Development Plan 2021-2027 (NDP2027). The plan defines the strategic goals, priorities, measures and indicative investment needs for seven years to achieve sustainable and balanced development. The NDP2027 sets 4 strategic goals for 2027 in 6 priority areas and 18 directions for key policies.

The creation of the NDP2027 was centrally led by the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre (*Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs*, PKC), a CoG entity currently integrated into the State Chancellery, with a mandate to develop a long-term strategic approach to public policymaking. The unique position of the PKC made it possible to develop the NDP coherently and collaboratively in accordance with the Latvian Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In addition, the NDP incorporates engagement with citizens, experts and other stakeholders. Over 150 different stakeholders work in 6 working groups organised by the PKC under the prime minister's authority. These activities helped the CoG gather insights from different groups, providing valuable input for the plans while building advocacy.

The plan outlines the long-term vision and how it translates into operational plans, including information on indicators, responsible authorities and funding.

Finally, the NDP2027 was created in line with the resources available in the country. Policy changes are supported by public investment from the national budget, European Union (EU) funds and other financial instruments. In this context, abrupt crises might change financial possibilities, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic and the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility response to it.

Sources: ESDN (2020[6]) , *Single Country Profile: Lativa*, https://www.esdn.eu/country-profiles/detail?tx_countryprofile_countryprofile%5Baction%5D=show&tx_countryprofile_countryprofile%5Bcontroller%5D=Country&tx_countryprofile_countryprofile%5Bcountry%5D=16&cHash=3adce4de55ca14e7ef913a0bd8b1f355 (accessed on 11 May 2023); PKC (2020[7]), *National Development Plan for Latvia 2021-2027*, https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NAP2027__ENG.pdf (accessed on 16 May 2023); Ministru kabinets (2023[8]), *Latvijas Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2021.-2027. gadam*; Latvijas Republikas Valsts kontrole (2022[9]), *Ar kādiem izaicinājumiem saskaramies, sagatavojot un īstenojot Latvijas Atveseļošanas un noturības mehānisma plānu? Situācijas izpētes ziņojums*.

Box 2.2. Adjusting the course: Long-term and targeted planning in Finland

Finland's strategic planning has been marked by a political tradition of coalition governments and a siloed public administration. As the number of parties involved in coalitions grew, attempts to capture all of their objectives in government programmes proved difficult.

In 2015, the government of Finland attempted to deviate from this trend, moving beyond siloed priorities with its new strategic government programme Finland Vision 2025. This system was built around 26 strategic objectives in 5 policy areas, complemented by a set of structural reforms. The government allocated EUR 1 billion to ensure the effective implementation of those key projects. This shift to a ten-year approach, rather than solely focusing on a single parliamentary term, acknowledged the importance of time for the implementation of major, structural reforms. The changes appear to have been effective in delivering on policy goals.

Successive governments have followed the established practice around long-term visions to date. Prime Minister Sanna Marin's 2019-23 government programme was developed based on long-term objectives, which translated into a cross-sectoral approach. The government identified and focused on four big "priority goals". These strategic themes and priority goals were further specified in approximately 64 sub-goals with 70 indicators. The CoG can shape the governmental approach toward its programme, encouraging the definition of fewer but targeted policies, while developing a long-term vision within government programmes.

Sources: OECD (2022[5]), *Centre of Government Review of Brazil: Toward an Integrated and Structured Centre of Government*, https://doi.org/10.1787/33d996b2-en; Finnish Government (2019[10]), *Inclusive and Competent Finland – A Socially, Economically and Ecologically Sustainable Society*, Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government, 10 December 2019; Ross, M. (2019[11]), "The power of priorities: Goal-setting in Finland and New Zealand", https://www.globalgovernmentforum.com/the-power-of-priorities-goal-setting-in-finland-and-new-zealand/.

Utilising strategic foresight for long-term visions and strategic planning

Approaches such as foresight and long-term insights can support the development of long-term visioning. Yet, the adoption of strategic foresight and related methodology in planning processes by CoGs remains low. According to the Survey, in 19% of countries, the CoG is primarily responsible for undertaking future thinking, foresight or modelling activities (OECD, 2023[1]).

Figure 2.3. Futures thinking, foresight or modelling are usually a shared responsibility
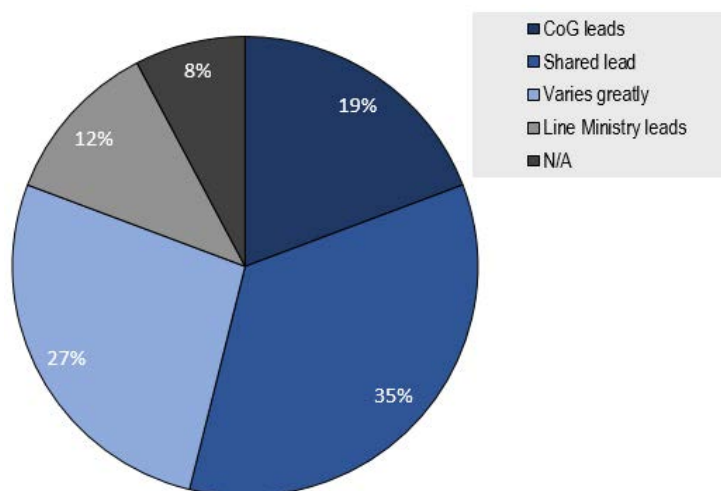
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "For each of the below activities regarding setting the vision, priorities and strategic planning, please indicate who has the primary responsibility [undertaking futures thinking, foresight or modelling]".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

In those that do, OECD research has shown that a central dedicated foresight unit can help integrate foresight into strategic planning processes, for example in Finland. Box 2.3 provides an example of New Zealand's integration of long-term foresight insights into their planning processes. Box 2.4 provides an example of their foresight approach from Portugal. Australia has also piloted a long-term insights process into their planning approaches, recently released by the Prime Minister's Office.

Box 2.3. Long-term briefings in New Zealand

New Zealand's Public Service Act 2020 requires chief executives of government departments, independently from ministers, to produce a long-term insight briefing (LTIB) at least once every three years. The LTIB should explore future trends, risks and opportunities.

Figure 2.4. Long-term insight briefing process

The first round of LTIBs were presented to parliamentary select committees from mid-2022 to mid-2023. After parliamentary scrutiny, the LTIBs were made available in the public domain. Public consultation on draft briefings is a requirement of the process. Prior to the Public Service Act 2020, New Zealand's senior policy community had discussed the challenges of building long-term issues and strategic foresight into policy formulation. It held workshops on a future policy heat map and policy stewardship. While there is no associated programme to build capability in strategic foresight, the LTIB requirement process may catalyse demand for strategic foresight capabilities. The second round of LTIBs is about to commence.

Sources: DPMC (2021[12]), *Long-term Insights Briefings*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/long-term-insights-briefings (accessed on 10 May 2023), Author's own elaboration for the figure based on DPMC (2021[12]), *Long-term Insights Briefings*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/long-term-insights-briefings ; Author's own elaboration for the figure.

Box 2.4. The Public Administration Planning and Foresight Services Network (RePlan): A lever for evidence-informed and inclusive planning and policymaking in Portugal

In 2021, the Portuguese government established an inter-ministerial network for planning and foresight services of the public administration. Its objective is to support the government in building and aligning strategies for cross-cutting issues.

Thus, in Portugal, the planning processes are underpinned by a wide range of sources of data and evidence. Yet, many inter-ministerial networks associated with the large range of planning instruments being enforced in Portugal can hinder the ability to explore synergies in the planning processes. Streamlining the number of networks and prioritising those that concern the whole-of-government are strategic priorities for RePLAN.

It acknowledges the role the CoG can play as a central leadership hub, to facilitate co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation across the public administration, including through the use of foresight in the planning process. Although RePLAN was *de facto* established in November 2022 and is still in its early stages, it has already identified some key success factors:

- The establishment of a long-awaited convening platform that brings together different practices such as foresight offers an opportunity for synergies, increased efficiency and effectiveness in core governance areas such as strategic planning and policy evaluation.
- A clear mandate, government empowerment and continuous political support.

> - The engagement of relevant stakeholders from civil society, academia and the private sector to drive evidence-informed and inclusive strategies and plans.
>
> Source: Information provided by representatives of PlanAPP, Portugal.

Engaging with stakeholders to support strategic planning

Engaging with stakeholders is crucial to informing strategic planning, for example to bring in knowledge and expertise of others and to build collective buy-in. CoGs' central positioning allows them to co-ordinate the engagement of stakeholders to integrate different perspectives and harness expertise and support from a wide range of parties (Brown, Kohli and Mignotte, 2021[13]). A structured process which engages a wide audience helps ensure effective prioritisation, which is an important component of strategic planning (Shostak et al., 2023[14]).

First, CoGs can draw on the knowledge, expertise and experience of line ministries and other government agencies in strategic planning processes. This ensures that sectoral priorities are fed into the overarching strategies and helps line ministries to understand and support the government's vision. CoGs can use different methodologies to engage with line ministries, including inter-ministerial meetings, committees and retreats/seminars at the highest levels.

Experiences in OECD member countries show that when planning and prioritisation processes are open and underpinned by external stakeholder engagement activities, they can enhance legitimacy and buy-in for high-level national goals (OECD, 2020[15]). Box 2.5 demonstrates the importance of external engagement in Estonia's long-term planning processes. While the CoG leads direct engagement in some cases, in others, it is responsible for ensuring that strategic documents or instruments prepared by other areas of the administration adhere to consultation requirements. This is the case in 62% of CoGs surveyed as part of the Survey.

Figure 2.5. CoGs review a wide range of aspects of strategy documents, plans or instruments

Aspect	Percentage
Clear implementation plans	27%
Quality, including translation	31%
Machinery of government implications	35%
Compliance with standards or requirements: evidence-based, problem identification, methodology	38%
Legal quality	46%
Compliance with standards or requirements: clearly outlined outputs and outcomes	54%
Compliance with standards or requirements: existence of baseline or target indicators	54%
Engagement with other ministries	58%
Compliance with standards or requirements: existence of a monitoring approach for the strategy	58%
Alignment with other sectoral/multi-sectoral strategies	58%
Compliance with standards or requirements: specific time horizon	58%
Compliance with standards or requirements: cost and funding sources	62%
Compliance with standards or requirements: specific format	62%
Consultation	62%
Alignment with whole-of-government strategy and priorities	88%

Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "Which aspects of strategy documents, plans or instruments does the CoG review?".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Box 2.5. Estonia 2035 action plan

The elaboration of Estonia 2035, the national long-term development strategy, was heavily underpinned by stakeholder engagement activities. It gathered views from almost 17 000 participants, including experts, researchers, politicians, business representatives and citizens, among others. Moreover, once a year, the CoG holds the Strategy Day of the Opinion Journey, an event aimed at fostering discussions among policymakers and other stakeholders to overview the achievement of the goals, co-create policies and, in particular, collect data and evidence within the framework of the Estonia 2035 strategy.

During the Strategy Day of the Opinion Journey in 2022, close to 140 discussions were chaired and organised by citizens, involving more than 1 000 people. Approximately 800 ideas and proposals on 12 topics were suggested by the participants. Evidence gathered through this activity will be submitted to the Government Office and will help inform the new version of the Estonia 2035 action plan.

The Government Office organised a roundtable seminar with discussion chairpersons and policymakers across the government to filter out the most relevant solutions and exchange views on what should be prioritised. This was also complemented by innovation sprints: around 40 public sector issues get solved annually by means of design methods facilitated by the Public Sector Innovation Unit of the Government Office.

The development of the action plan, together with a wide range of stakeholders, was important to gather the feedback, experiences and points of view from those who will be mostly impacted by the actions and priorities included in the strategy. In this context, it is important to ensure the constant inclusion and input of minorities and underrepresented groups, leaving no one behind and addressing all needs. Overall, working closely with different stakeholders can foster acceptance and support for the long-term national goals from stakeholders inside and outside the CoG.

Sources: Government Office of Estonia (2021[16]), *Estonia 2035*, https://www.valitsus.ee/en/node/31 (accessed on 10 May 2023); Government Office of Estonia (2022[17]), "The Strategy Day of the Opinion Journey brings together policy makers and discussion leaders from across Estonia", https://www.riigikantselei.ee/en/news/strategy-day-opinion-journey-brings-together-policy-makers-and-discussion-leaders-across (accessed on 10 May 2023).

3. Prioritisation

Having a long-term vision provides an overarching frame for policy and resource allocation decisions. Governments must reconcile the immediate nature of challenges, such as rising inflation or the global energy crisis, with other long-term objectives and policies. This leads to the difficult task of prioritisation, which is a priority function for 88% of the CoGs surveyed in 2023. How the role is carried out varies greatly across surveyed countries, with 56% of CoGs leading this function and 40% sharing the lead with line ministries (OECD, 2023[1]).

Figure 2.6. Climate, energy and biodiversity rank among the top priorities for CoGs in 2023
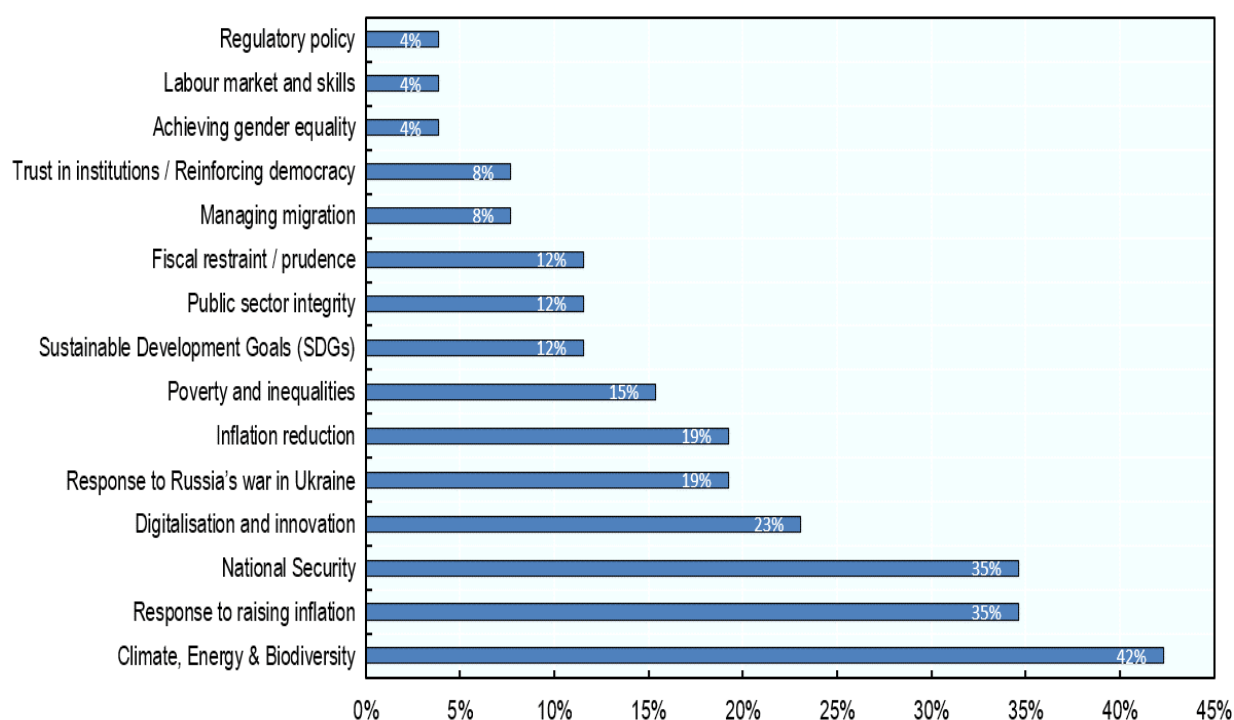
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What are the top three strategic priorities that the CoG is mandated to lead this year (2023)?".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Figure 2.7. Setting priorities is at the core of the CoG's work
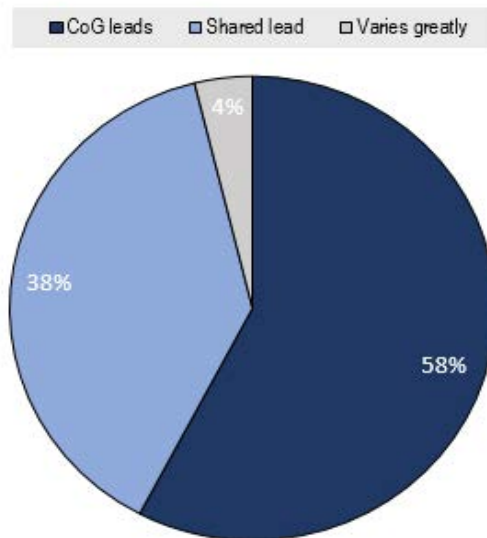
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "For each of the below activities regarding setting the vision, priorities and strategic planning, please indicate who has the primary responsibility [identification and setting policy priorities for government]".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Prioritisation is a crucial part of the early stages of strategic planning and policy formulation. It enables more realistic commitments and increases the likelihood of follow-through (OECD, 2020[15]). Inadequate prioritisation can create issues such as duplication across ministries or incomplete work (Plant, 2009[18]). Prioritisation approaches are often about creating alignment and collaboration of the public administration on what matters most.

Box 2.6. Prioritisation in New Zealand and the United Kingdom

A focus on outcomes approach in the United Kingdom

In 2010, the United Kingdom government created a dedicated cabinet sub-committee to identify the top priorities from a whole-of-government perspective. The previous approach, which asked individual departments to identify priorities, was replaced by the committee's work to create centralised vision, relying on cross-departmental agreement and progress measurements.

Outcome delivery plans (ODP), introduced in 2021, lay out specifics of how each department works to achieve its priority outcomes. Instead of the narrow departmental priorities from the previous single department plans, ODPs emphasise interdepartmental work. This enables better outcomes for cross-cutting priorities and centralised monitoring.

The ODP is a helpful tool for the prime minister to oversee performance across institutions and to hold ministers and the civil service accountable. Key enablers were setting clear responsibilities and consistent co-ordination mechanisms, and ensuring departmental equality in terms of visibility and contribution to the plans.

> **Boosting performance through focused priorities in New Zealand**
>
> New Zealand has long been considered at the forefront of public administration, experimenting with new ways of organizing and delivering public services. Even so, successive New Zealand governments had mixed results from using traditional public management tools to lift the performance of the public service and address cross-cutting problems that required multi-agency action. To address this, in 2012 New Zealand adopted the Better Public Services programme with a limited number of priorities and gathered institutions around their achievement. Better Public Services seeks to retain the strengths of our State services while addressing weaknesses such as fragmentation, government agencies working in silos, and inefficiencies.
>
> The government of New Zealand met several times to agree on the ten most persistent social problems to be addressed by the public administration over a five-year term. The plan prescribed ambitious interagency performance targets. The New Zealand government generally let each group of agencies determine how best to achieve its target, with the exception of requiring all agencies to prepare and submit an initial action plan. Public reports were published every six months, making the group collectively accountable. Performance increased in all areas.
>
> This approach required the public administration, including the CoG – the Department of the Prime Minister of Cabinet, the Treasury and the Public Service Commission – to help steer the new initiative. Commitment to the goals set out and a relatively stable political environment were key enablers.
>
> Source: Using interagency co-operation to lift government performance in Aotearoa New Zealand, ANZSOG; Scott & Ross, (2017[19]), *Interagency Performance Targets: A case study of New Zealand's Results Programme,* IBM Center for the Business of Government, https://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/Management%20Dr%20Rodney%20Scott.pdf

4. Ensuring alignment across the entire strategic planning ecosystem

The strategic planning ecosystem includes a series of processes, instruments, actors and interactions that come together to create effective strategic planning for government action. It is a priority for 92% of countries surveyed and requires consideration of the whole system (OECD, 2020[15]). In 35% of countries surveyed, CoGs play a leading role in this.

Complicated or ineffective planning systems can be a challenge, for example in cases where there is a high number of inherited plans from previous administrations in addition to new documents. Countries have identified several approaches to manage this issue. For instance, in some countries such as Finland, the Prime Minister's Office is auditing over 100 planning documents with the aim to reduce their number. Another option to address this issue is the definition of a hierarchy across different instruments. Latvia (Box 2.7) has embedded this in its legal framework with the objective of increasing policy coherence and coverage (Government of Latvia, 2018[20]).

Box 2.7. Embedding in law the hierarchy of planning documents: Latvia

The 2009 Latvian Development Planning System Law outlines development planning principles, types of planning documents, their hierarchy and relations, and allocates responsibilities to institutions in the planning process. The law outlines specific requirements for development planning documents: strategic objectives and results, a description of existing problems and solutions, an impact assessment and future implementation and evaluation. The necessary financial resources and responsible institutions are also identified.

This clear hierarchy makes the whole system of planning documents easier to understand for both policymakers and the public. If used as a practical tool in daily policymaking, it can also promote synergies among different institutions and levels, thus contributing to better policy alignment, coherence and more efficient use of resources.

Figure 2.8. Conceptual model of growth for Latvia

Sources: OECD (2018[21]), *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development Country Profiles: Latvia*, https://web-archive.oecd.org/2019-04-25/517370-Country%20Profile%20Latvia.pdf; Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs (n.d.[22]), *Politikas plānošanas rokasgrāmata*.

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5. Setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity

CoGs are naturally positioned to guide good public administration practices, including strategic planning. In 2023, 62% of surveyed CoGs indicated setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity in strategic planning as top priorities. In 42% of the countries, CoGs are the lead structure for defining the standards, requirements or guidance for line ministries or agencies about setting the vision, priorities and strategic planning. The use of new or contemporary approaches, such as systems thinking, has increased in 42% of the surveyed CoGs (OECD, 2023[1]), through offering toolkits or handbooks for example. CoGs also provide reviews and feedback on draft documents in 69% of surveyed countries. Half of the CoGs develop guidelines or templates for strategic planning.

Figure 2.9. CoGs support line ministries and agencies in several ways
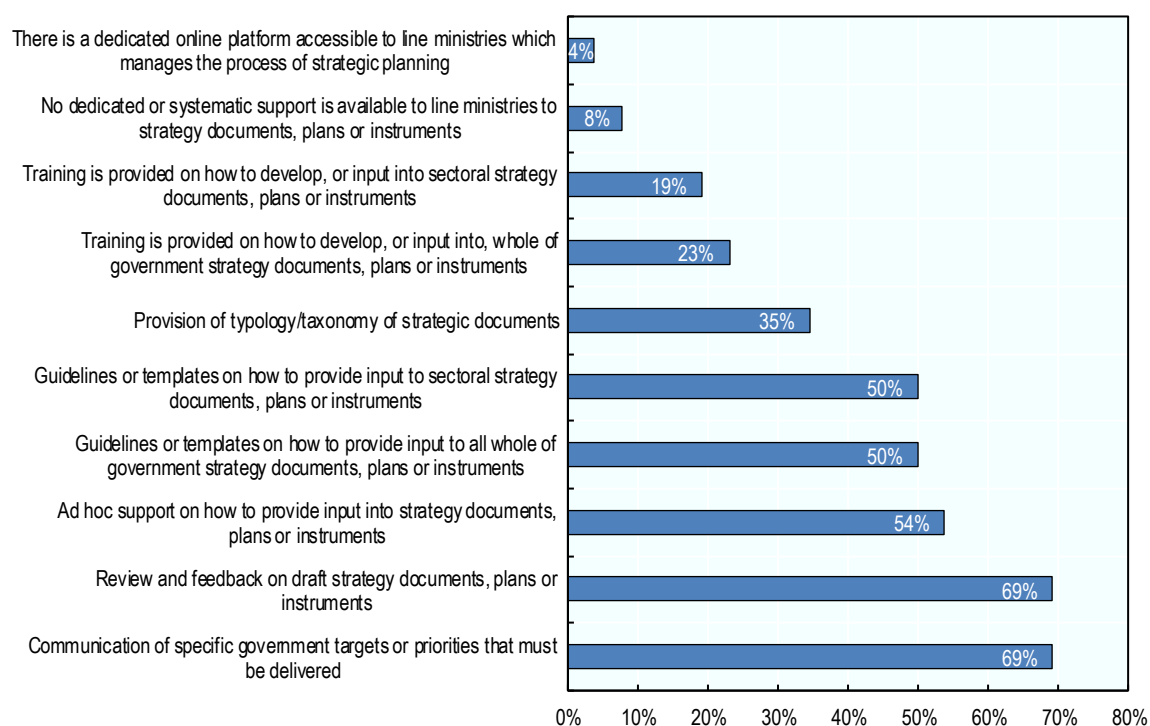
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What support does CoG provide to line ministries and other agencies to develop strategy documents, plans and instruments?".
Source: OECD (2023[1]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

6. Common challenges and enablers

Through a synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants of the informal OECD Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified:

Common challenges

- CoGs are finding it more difficult to balance long- and short-term priorities and trade-offs. This is due to shifting national agendas, policy complexity and continued disruptions and crises. Relatedly, ensuring that planning documents are aligned is difficult even where there are clear hierarchy frameworks because of shifting priorities or cross-cutting issues.

- Developing a long-term vision supported by key actors can be difficult in an increasingly polarised environment. CoGs might face a trade-off between defining a specific vision that only reflects a small share of the population and a broader vision that could be perceived as vague.

- Dealing with cross-cutting issues requires a whole-of-government approach for the development of strategies and plans. However, administrations typically work in functional silos. CoGs are increasingly trying to overcome these silos through more collaborative planning approaches.

- Engaging with citizens has proven to be a challenge for some CoGs. Several CoGs have identified low citizen participation in the long-term planning process as a challenge to inform the development of national priorities and strategies.

Key enablers

- Clear roles and responsibilities around strategic planning processes and co-ordination are key to effective strategic planning processes, along with the government's national agenda clarity.

- Putting in place the building blocks to support the CoG in addressing long-term commitments while delivering on short-term government priorities should be considered, for example in allocating budgets and resources dedicated to both long- and short-term priorities.

- A clear framework for the hierarchy of high-level strategic plans can be useful to avoid inconsistencies and promote continuity across strategies.

- CoGs should continue to use a collaborative strategic planning approach, including across ministries and with other stakeholders. The CoG's convening power can support this including through periodic, face-to-face meetings where representatives from the CoG and ministries can address relevant topics or meet with experts and stakeholders.

- Enhancing strategic thinking and planning capabilities in the administration is helpful, first and foremost for the CoG and across line ministries, through ministry planning focal points for example.

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3 Co-ordinating and enhancing policy development

This chapter focuses on the co-ordinated and collaborative approaches that the centre of government (CoG) can use to steward cross-cutting policies and overall policy co-ordination. As no single institution or area in the government is responsible for delivering on such policy challenges, it is essential that CoGs build their stewardship and co-ordination capacities. Many CoGs play key roles in enhancing policy development through co-ordination, a long-term challenge. This chapter presents cases in practice through examples of taskforces and committees, detailing functions such as quality assurance and cabinet support. More contemporary approaches, including behavioural insight units and experimentation labs, are also discussed. Finally, this chapter discusses the ability of the CoG to directly enhance the quality of policy through review mechanisms, touching on examples such as frameworks, standards and guidance.

Key messages

- Successful policymaking in today's environment requires more systemic, co-ordinated and collaborative approaches than many governments are used to. In this context, centres of government (CoGs) are well positioned to steward cross-cutting policies and overall policy co-ordination.
- CoGs are increasingly and more directly involved in driving cross-cutting policies, for instance on climate issues. Clarity of roles between central units and line ministries is key; yet CoGs need to consider how they make coherent decisions and bring a cohesive vision to these issues.
- Despite differences in the composition of CoGs, most play key roles in enhancing policy development, co-ordination and anticipation to reduce the risk of policy conflicts and coherence. Common functions include quality assurance, co-ordination and supporting cabinet decisions.
- CoGs are also increasingly engaging directly with stakeholders in policy development, including through more novel approaches such as citizen assemblies and expert groups. Yet, this is challenging and the increasing two-way distrust can act as a barrier.
- CoGs are starting to use more contemporary approaches to policy development, including behavioural insights units, experimentation and innovation labs. The goal is to make policy development more agile and responsive to public needs, reflecting the complexity of issues.
- Considerations for CoGs include ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities around policy development, engaging with the right actors, providing quality data and evidence and lifting the public administration's policy development capacity.

1. Introduction

CoGs play a crucial role in contributing to democratic resilience, particularly in a context where governments are facing complex challenges and external shocks that are further exacerbated by low levels of trust (OECD, 2022[1]). Despite variations across countries and political system, many CoGs have similar responsibilities related to co-ordination and policy development.

One way CoGs contribute to democratic resilience is by promoting whole-of-government policy responses that overcome traditional administrative barriers. The emergence of cross-cutting policy challenges such as climate change, rising social inequality and migration can no longer be addressed in silos and, as such, have proved challenging for governments (Hynes, Lees and Müller, 2020[2]). These challenges, in tandem with frequent external shocks, require whole-of-government policy responses that overcome traditional administrative barriers and institutionally-developed policy fields (Beuselinck, 2008[3]; Alessandro, Lafuente and Santiso, 2013[4]) that promote co-ordinated action (OECD, 2021[5]). The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (OECD, 2010[6]) provides guidance to this end; as do the SIGMA Principles of Public Administration (OECD SIGMA Programme, 2023[7]). Principle 3 highlights that good public administrations feature public policies that are coherent and effectively co-ordinated by the centre of government. As shown in Figure 3.1, supporting good public governance through co-ordination and policy development support touches a wide range of challenging areas for the CoG, including in particular operationalising long-term policy issues and prioritisation and trade-offs. By breaking down silos, fostering collaboration and ensuring coherent government actions, CoGs help governments reduce the risk of fragmented actions, duplication and low quality of services, and difficulty in meeting government goals and international commitments.

Figure 3.1. Challenges CoGs face in co-ordination and policy development
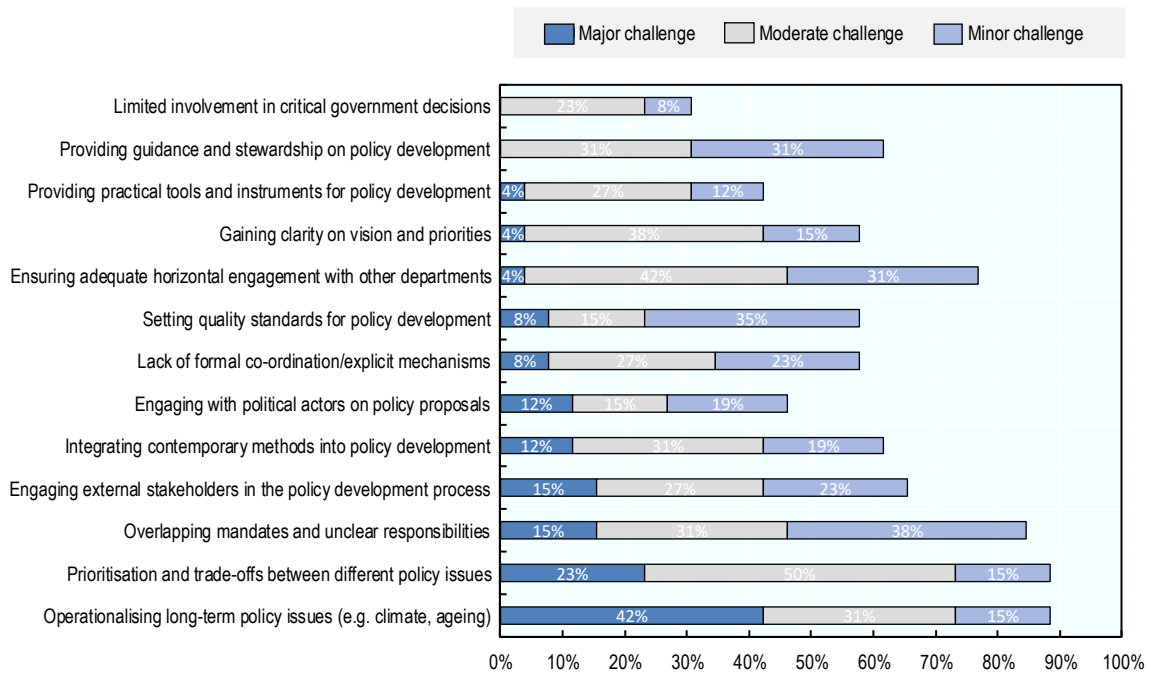
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "To what extent are the following factors a challenge for the CoG in respect to co-ordination and enhancing policy development?".
Source: OECD (2023[8]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Figure 3.2 shows key policy development and co-ordination activities and which entity (CoG or line ministries) holds the respective primary responsibility. In practice, CoGs often play a stewardship role in overcoming silos on cross-cutting policies. In response to the survey (OECD, 2023[8]), 92% of the responding countries said that leading cross-cutting and whole-of-government policies is a priority for the CoG, while 61% co-ordinate the broader implementation of policy action.

One of the CoGs' most important responsibilities is translating political commitments into policies and coherent results. In 23 out of 26 countries, co-ordination, including the alignment of policy to government priorities, is under the CoGs' leadership (OECD, 2023[8]).

Figure 3.2. Responsibility for activities regarding co-ordinating and enhancing policy development
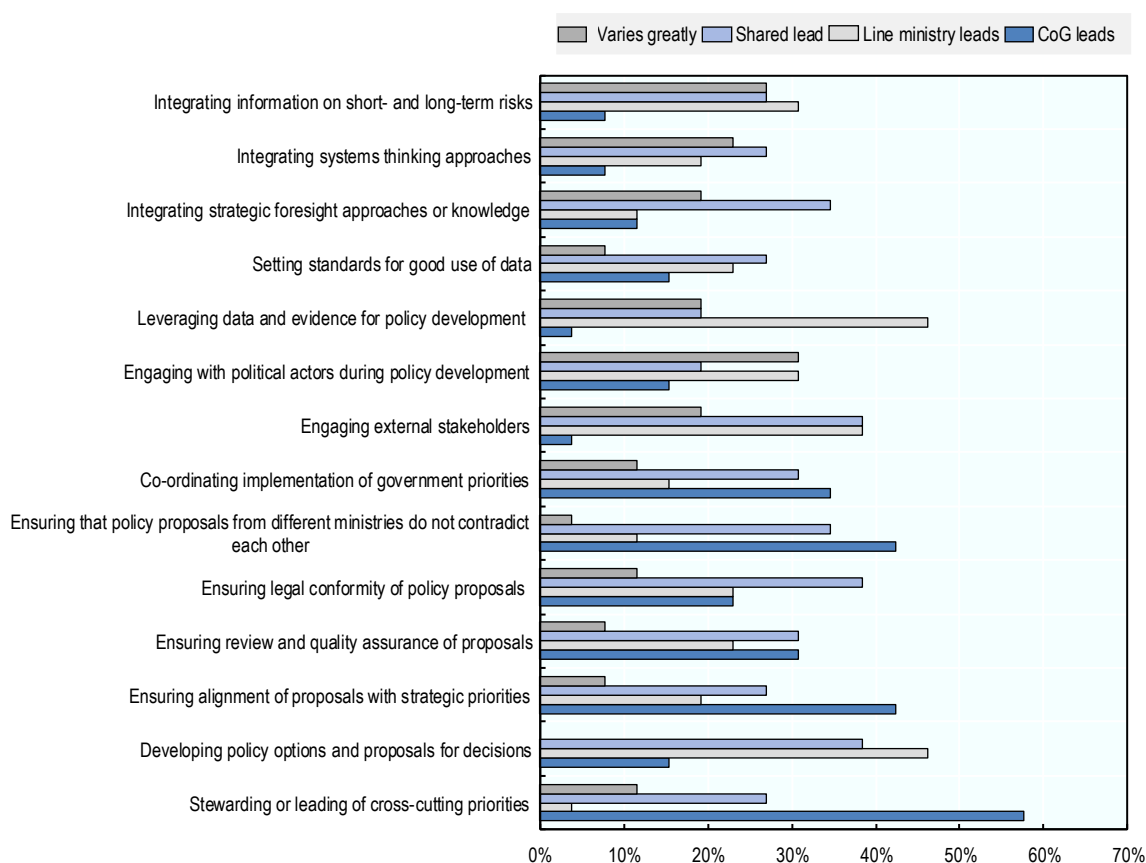
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "For each of the below activities regarding co-ordinating and enhancing policy development, please indicate who has the primary responsibility".
Source: OECD (2023[8]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

This chapter addresses CoG practices around policy development in the following structure:

- Leveraging mechanisms to support policy co-ordination and engagement.
- Enhancing policy development from the centre through contemporary approaches such as innovation, behavioural insights and experimentation.
- Enhancing policy quality through review mechanisms for policies and legislation.
- Providing frameworks, standards and guidance and building public sector capacity from the centre.

2. Levering mechanisms to support policy co-ordination and engagement

CoGs utilise a range of mechanisms to support overall co-ordination and alignment in policy development. These mechanisms can help align government action at all stages of the policy cycle and ensure there are appropriate resources. Co-ordination mechanisms can also facilitate policy coherence and peer learning.

Figure 3.3 presents the various mechanisms used by CoGs for policy co-ordination. They include permanent or temporary taskforces/working groups and councils/committees, citizen assemblies, innovation labs and special relations with parliament and elected officials. Building structures responsible for cross-cutting and sectoral analysis can strengthen the analytical function and co-ordination of analysis overall, as the CoG in Poland has opted to do.

Figure 3.3. Mechanisms used by CoGs to support co-ordination
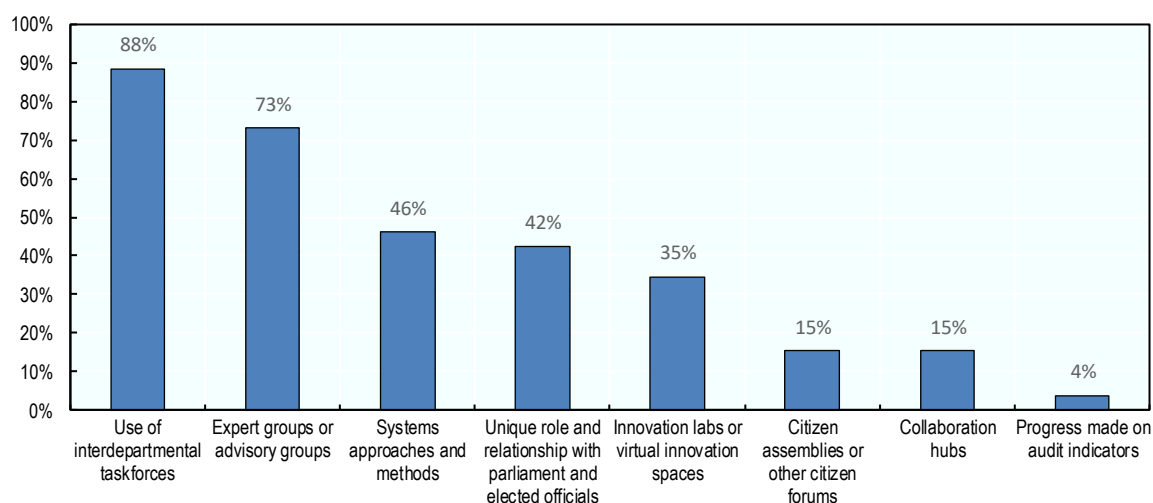
Inter-ministerial co-ordination mechanisms

Responses to the OECD survey (2023[8]) show that the three co-ordination mechanisms CoGs most frequently use are interdepartmental taskforces, expert groups and advisory groups (Figure 3.3).

Permanent or temporary taskforces or working groups typically consist of representatives who meet to co-ordinate and align on policy issues. Fifty-eight percent of countries have reported an increase in the use of ad hoc taskforces or other short-term groups to address specific issues or crises since 2019, while it has remained unchanged in 19% of cases (OECD, 2023[8]). Countries noted key considerations for taskforces including chair leadership, having the right representatives and ensuring there is a clear purpose. Box 3.1 outlines examples from Austria, Canada and Finland on the use of taskforces.

Box 3.1. Inter-ministerial co-ordination in Austria, Canada and Finland

Inter-ministerial committees for co-ordination in Canada

Cabinet committees in Canada carry out most of the day-to-day work of the Cabinet of Canada and examine proposals before they are submitted to the Cabinet. There are currently eight Cabinet committees, including one established in legislation, three sub-committees and three ministerial working groups linked to government priorities or current events. One of the committees' tasks is to study the policy proposals submitted to them and then provide their recommendations to the Cabinet, which ratifies them. The Cabinet Committee on Agenda, Results and Communications is responsible for the government's strategic programme and priority setting. It also monitors progress against the government's priorities and considers strategic communications.

Governance arrangements and mechanisms for inter-ministerial co-ordination in Finland

Finland has established a number of co-ordination mechanisms to support strategy and decision-making supported by the CoG, particularly the Government Strategic Department. They bring together

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different line ministries and are usually shared by one or two lead ministries, depending on the topic. Finland has created:

- Four permanent Ministerial Committees on Finance, Economic Policy, European Union (EU) Affairs and Foreign and Security Policy that play a key role in co-ordinating government policies.
- Thematic working groups focusing on a few government priorities (e.g. the Ministerial Working Group on Developing the Digital Transformation, the Data Economy and Public Administration) that help steer, monitor and implement those priorities.
- Functional working groups on research and foresight.

The Conference of General Secretaries in Austria

In response to a constantly changing environment, the Austrian government established the practice of the Conference of General Secretaries. Introduced in 2018, the conference brings together high-ranking officials from various federal ministries. It aims to address common challenges, share best practices and co-ordinate administrative policies across different policy areas.

The conference entails systematic preparation and monitoring of joint or overarching tasks and projects of federal ministries on presidential and cross-sectional matters, as well as on government programme issues. Such assignments and projects can also be assigned to the Conference of General Secretaries by resolution of the government as regards preparation, monitoring of implementation and monitoring.

Sources: Government of Canada (2020[9]), *Machinery of Government*, https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/mtb-ctm/2019/binder-cahier-1/1G-support-appuie-eng.htm (accessed on 31 October 2023); Government of Finland (2023[10]), *Ministerial Committees and Working Groups*, https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/government/ministerial-committees (accessed on 31 October 2023); information provided by representatives of the Federal Chancellery of Austria (2023).

There is a risk of an excessive use or proliferation of inter-ministerial taskforces and committees, and CoGs should regularly review these. Box 3.2 provides an example from Australia.

Box 3.2. Inter-ministerial co-ordination structures in Australia

In 2020, the National Cabinet agreed to review ministerial councils and fora to rationalise and reset their structure and work programmes. The report to the National Cabinet set out recommendations on the following key themes: i) a streamlined intergovernmental structure; ii) other national bodies; iii) interactions with the National Cabinet infrastructure; iv) mirroring and building on the National Cabinet model; v) encouraging delivery and good process; vi) reducing bureaucracy; vii) maintaining a streamlined and fit-for-purpose structure.

Criteria and objectives for bodies were outlined and they were required to meet at least two of the three defined objectives for continued operation, which were also used later to assess if new ministerial meetings needed to be established. Proposed new fora should meet a minimum of two objectives:

1. **Enable national co-operation and consistency on enduring strategic issues**: Focus on shared, complex and long-term policy areas where there are vertical interrelated roles between the different levels of government requiring sustained co-operation for effective implementation.
2. **Address issues requiring cross-border collaboration**: Focus on policy areas and issues where the horizontal alignment and complementarity of government policy or service provision improves delivery of and access to services or employment opportunities. A recent example was the co-ordination required to facilitate efficient movement of freight across otherwise closed intrastate borders during the COVID-19 crisis.

3. **Perform regulatory policy and standard-setting functions**: Focus on issues related to shared legislative and regulatory requirements where a cross-jurisdictional mechanism must approve and create or update requirements for policies, standards or codes.

Source: Australian Government (2020[11]), *Guidance for Intergovernmental Meetings*, https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/guidance-intergovernmental-meetings.pdf (accessed on 11 September 2023).

The use of expert or advisory groups can leverage external insights and support the co-ordination and development of policy. It is also prevalent for CoGs, with 73% of CoGs making use of expert or advisory groups (OECD, 2023[8]). Consisting of subject matter experts, academics, civil society organisations, private sector representatives and other relevant stakeholders, they can help ensure that policy decisions are based on evidence-based insights, technical expertise and practical experience.

Two examples of expert or advisory groups from Ireland and Iceland are outlined in Box 3.3. These groups are instrumental in ensuring quality policy development and providing valuable quality policies. Box 3.3 also outlines France's establishment of a think tank to act as a group of experts for policymaking.

Box 3.3. Use of expert groups mechanisms at the centre for policy development

The Policy Council for Effective Policy Development in Iceland

Since its establishment in 2015, this policy council within the Government Offices serves as a co-ordination and consultation platform to strengthen the administration's capacity for effective policymaking. Composed of representatives from all ministries, the council aims to share experiences and creates training courses, tools and data to support officials involved in policymaking. The council:

1. Formulates criteria, including best practices, for strategic planning.
2. Provides advice, recommendations and suggestions to enhance skills and knowledge among Government Offices employees.
3. Strengthens and co-ordinates working practices of ministries on policy development.
4. Establishes guidelines on how policies and plans should interact with funding, legislative proposals and parliamentary resolutions, ensuring alignment in policy implementation.
5. Serves as an active forum for promoting informed debates on future opportunities and threats.

Ireland's National Economic and Social Council for better policies

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was established in 1973 and advises the Taoiseach (the prime minister of the Republic of Ireland) on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland. The members of the NESC are representatives of business and employers' organisations, trade unions, agricultural and farming organisations, community and voluntary organisations and environmental organisations, as well as heads of government departments and independent experts. The composition of the NESC plays an important and unique role in bringing different perspectives from civil society together with the government. This helps the NESC analyse the challenges facing Irish society and develop a shared understanding among its members of how to tackle them. The Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach chairs the NESC meetings. At each meeting, the NESC discusses reports drafted by its secretariat. The NESC decides its work programme on a three-year basis, with inputs from the Department of the Taoiseach.

France Stratégie's think tank for cross-cutting policy development

In 2013, government policy analysis body France Stratégie created an exchange platform to discuss and provide recommendations on social and environmental responsibility (RSE). The platform focuses on social, environmental and economic challenges at large, looking at issues such as United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), competitiveness and climate change. Recommendations to the government and to all stakeholders, including businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), suggest priority actions and identify and disseminate good practices.

The platform gathers experts, including 50 members from the government, civil society, academia, trade unions, business organisations, NGOs, think tanks, education institutions, ministries and the Senate. Principles and rules for the functioning of the platform were formalised and agreed upon by all participants at the onset, including a charter for expressing diverging views. Mapping and identifying the right people to involve have been important tasks underpinning the platform's success. Members meet during general assemblies several times a year and during specific working meetings.

The platform has enabled France Stratégie and, more broadly, the government to engage a wide range of expert views in a co-ordinated manner for informing policy decision-making.

Source: OECD (2023[12]), *Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland*, https://doi.org/10.1787/6724d155-en.

Broader stakeholder engagement and insights for policy development

Engaging with stakeholders throughout the policy development process is just as important as during the strategic planning process. Developing interconnected policy responses has become more challenging as more stakeholders are involved (Slack, 2007[13]). From 2019 to 2023, the number of stakeholders CoGs regularly liaise with (e.g. scientific experts, business associations and civil society organisations) has increased in 16 of the 26 surveyed countries (OECD, 2023[8]). Stakeholder engagement is the third most frequently cited major challenge for CoGs (42% of CoGs noted this as a major or moderate challenge) (OECD, 2023[8]). While many countries have consultation processes, some note two-way distrust and politicisation as potential key barriers to engaging meaningfully with civil society. The 2023 SIGMA Principles for Public Administration highlight in Principle 5 that a good public administration will feature active consultation of all key internal and external stakeholders and the general public during policy development (OECD SIGMA Programme, 2023[7]).

Even though line ministries are often responsible for stakeholder engagement, the CoGs often ensure consistent involvement of stakeholders at the different stages of policy development by setting standards or providing guidance. This is reinforced through the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (OECD, 2017[14]; 2022[15]). Three such examples of CoG practices are highlighted in Box 3.4.

Box 3.4. Engaging with stakeholders for better policy development

Engaging stakeholders through the Wellbeing Economy Forum in Iceland

Over the last few years, well-being-focused economic approaches have gained momentum and Iceland has proven to be among the leaders in striving to shift to a well-being economy. In this aspiration, on 14-15 June 2023, Iceland held its first Wellbeing Economy Forum.

The forum was organised and steered by the CoG (Prime Minister's Office) together with the Directorate of Health and the city of Reykjavík. Its main objective was to connect stakeholders from different backgrounds in order to pursue innovative policy approaches aimed at improving well-being of society.

In sharing various insights and practices across sectors, the forum brought together different stakeholders, including politicians, policymakers, scholars and experts from Iceland and worldwide.

As a member of the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership, Iceland has demonstrated its emphasis on well-being and sustainability, incorporating a focus on increasing the quality of life in the government's strategic plans. Moreover, the government of Iceland has formulated the country's well-being indicators and priorities; however, a comprehensive transition requires addressing a wide range of challenges. Therefore, such types of fora can not only highlight and re-emphasise governmental ambitions but also give a platform for collaborative efforts to address pressing economic, social and environmental challenges. The innovative ideas and policies on how to deliver sustainable well-being can be later deliberated and implemented by the CoG and administration. In addition, to have an impact, the support from senior leadership that promotes the forum both internally and externally is crucial. However, strong political patronage can also cause problems when there is a change of government. Currently, the Wellbeing Economy Forum is intended to be held annually.

A centre of excellence bringing in external voices to achieve SDGs in Romania

The centre of government in Romania continues to strive for and steward a public administration that is more forward-looking, innovative and apt for dealing with complex issues in a coherent manner. For example, the CoG is creating a Centre of Excellence for Public Administration in the field of Sustainable Development (CExDD) that seeks to cultivate a forward-looking mindset of the public administration that leverages the expertise and knowledge of a diverse range of stakeholders. The CExDD is a structure that can encompass research, education and dialogue on sustainable development, and help both seek new policy opportunities while also training and building capacity for their public sector staff. There is no similar structure at the central level. Romania is seeking to be the most competitive hub for dialogue on sustainable development in relation to public administration responsibilities, exercising European regional leadership in this field.

It is important that every structure or stakeholder is involved in the CExDD creation process. For this to happen, the CoG acknowledges the importance of raising awareness and the importance of sustainable development objectives across the administration and stakeholders. Furthermore, the achievement of the SDGs and implementation of policies also depend on a competent, efficient and quality public service. The CExDD will aim to be a platform that allows more collaboration with stakeholders and across the public administration, as a more contemporary approach to the usual mechanisms of the administration and in view of building staff capacity.

There is political determination and advocacy for this work, which supports the completion of the institutional architecture and design of the CExDD and use of contemporary techniques for the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030. The CoG acknowledges that identifying and involving the most appropriate stakeholders is essential for a successful outcome of any such reform effort, and all the more so in co-creating this centre of excellence.

Driving such an ambitious effort is not easy. In setting up the CExDD, the CoG has faced a couple of challenges. First, it encountered administrative issues when identifying the legal framework for acquiring the technical assistance needed to design the architecture. The CoG then had to establish a list of stakeholders who could support this initiative and harmonise each stakeholder's role in the process. Additionally, the design of the CExDD also required careful consideration, in view of the most effective setup to drive outcomes budget and inputs. The CoG focused on co-creative processes to help work through these challenges.

> **Fostering cross-sectoral co-ordination and transformation from the centre: Germany's Alliance for Transformation**
>
> Considering a commitment to the 2021 coalition agreement and current transformation efforts, the German federal government launched the Alliance for Transformation (AFT) in 2022. As a discussion forum organised and steered by the Federal Chancellery, the main objective of the AFT is to develop a coherent long-term vision and propose ways to shape transformation efforts to make the country climate-neutral, more digital and more resilient. The AFT brings together around 45 representatives from various sectors, such as trade unions, the private sector, academia and civil society, and connects them with high-level decision-makers. This practice complements standard stakeholder meetings held in federal ministries, offering ways to have open conversations on complex issues.
>
> All meetings begin with a personal debrief by the Chancellor on the current situation and government policies. In this context, the Chancellery is responsible, as the CoG, for organising and preparing the meetings. Although meetings take place several times a year, in-depth work is also done at a more technical level between the gatherings. The analysis and actionable recommendations of the group are presented in the next AFT high-level meeting to discuss their implications and implementation. Throughout the taskforce process, the Chancellery has a moderating and monitoring role to keep track of progress and reports back to the Chancellor.
>
> The results of the first two AFT taskforces were presented in the third high-level meeting on 2 June 2023. One focused on the accelerated expansion of renewable energy and the transition to a climate-neutral economy, while the other dealt with targeting skilled labour needed for the energy transition. Both topics are fundamental for Germany's transformation process and for maintaining global competitiveness. The latest high-level event, held on 23 November 2023, addressed the circular economy and its potential for economic growth, sustainability and resilience.
>
> Fostering a successful mechanism such as the AFT can of course be challenging at times. Bringing together a range of stakeholders across sectors is no easy task; thus, the continued encouragement of open dialogues is a top priority. Translating the proposals into policy efforts is the key objective.
>
> Sources: WEF (2023[16]), *At the Forum Discussed the Conditions, Experiences and the Outcomes for Sustainable Economy*, https://www.wellbeingeconomyforum.is/2022-forum (accessed on 11 September 2023); Information provided by representatives of the General Secretariat of the government of Romania; Federal Government of Germany (2022[17]), "Focus on climate-neutral economy, digitalisation and sustainable work", https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/schwerpunkte/klimaschutz/alliance-for-transformation-2052454 (accessed on 11 September 2023).

Some CoGs are starting to use newer forms of engagement. One-third of CoGs (35%) report using innovation labs or virtual innovation spaces to support policy co-ordination. Additionally, CoGs are using citizen assemblies and fora to support more participatory and devolved policy processes. However, only 4 out of 26 CoGs surveyed (15%) report using these mechanisms for co-ordination (see Figure 3.3).

CoGs in several OECD member countries have developed guidelines or toolkits for line ministries and agencies to design and foster innovative stakeholder engagement in policy development. France has for instance established the Inter-ministerial Centre for Citizen Participation (see Box 3.5) that offers strategic and methodological support to ministries on citizen engagement. Portugal's CoG facilitates ePortugal and Portugal BASE, which provide transparency of information to citizens on government issues, services and procurement to build transparency. Further discussion on engaging with stakeholders can be found in Chapter 8.

> **Box 3.5. Supporting line ministry engagement with stakeholder engagement in France**
>
> In France, the Inter-ministerial Centre for Citizen Participation (CIPC) provides strategic and methodological supports to line ministries looking to increase stakeholder engagement in policy development. Created in 2019 within the CoG's Inter-ministerial Directorate for Public Transformation, the CIPC offers support through training and capacity building on new methods of participation, recommendations and access to staff specialised in facilitating consultations. The CIPC focuses on enabling line ministries to go further than surveys or qualitative studies, which could result in merely the expression of opinions or measures of satisfaction. Rather, the focus lies in participatory methods being used to have citizens reflect and develop perspectives amongst themselves in a collaborative manner. The CIPC has piloted a specific platform (participation-citoyenne.gouv.fr) which allows citizen access to current public consultations, information about prior consultations and the impact of citizen contributions to previous consultation projects, with the aim of encouraging further engagement.
>
> Source: Government of France (2023[18]), *Le Centre interministériel de la participation citoyenne*, https://www.modernisation.gouv.fr/associer-les-citoyens/le-centre-interministeriel-de-la-participation-citoyenne.

3. Enhancing policy development from the centre through contemporary approaches such as innovation, behavioural insights and experimentation

Governments must adapt to the new and complex policy challenges the public sector faces. Using innovative approaches for policy development is no easy task. The survey shows that integrating such methods into policy development practices is perceived as a major or moderate challenge by almost half (43%) of CoGs surveyed. This is because these methods at times conflict with current forms of governance or decision-making. Such methods can include public innovation such as labs, behavioural insights and experimentation, discussed below.

Innovation labs

Innovation labs, also known as policy labs or policy innovation labs, are specialised units or institutions that aim to foster innovation and promote effective policy design and implementation. Innovation labs can act as testing grounds, where novel ideas and concepts are examined, tested and refined before being applied in practice, thus lowering the risk of policy failures. Many CoGs lead or house innovation labs, or support innovation labs by providing funding or access to data. Sharing information is an important first step towards co-ordination (Shostak et al., 2023[19]). Latvia serves as an example of how a CoG uses an innovation lab for policy outcomes (see Box 3.6).

Box 3.6. Latvia's Innovation Laboratory

The Latvian Innovation Laboratory (InLab) has become the main driver of innovation across the country's public sector. Led by the State Chancellery, InLab brings together public employees who co-create solutions to address long-standing horizontal issues. It promotes changes in the mindset of civil servants, putting a user-centred approach at the centre of its work.

InLab tests innovative methods for policymaking. In total, the laboratory has developed 47 prototypes or solution designs. Examples include the remuneration policy for medical personnel, the administrative simplification strategy, the future of work policy as well as the shadowing and entrepreneur programme.

InLab's experience revealed that there are some critical factors to be met for success. Among those, high-ranking officials' support is essential to fostering innovation in the public sector. In addition, a secured budget, constant improvement of the methodology and regional coverage are very important for continuous innovation activities. The State Chancellery is currently working on adding behavioural insights, systems thinking, foresight and design imagining approaches and expanding its scope in the regions of Latvia.

Source: OECD (2020[20]), *Public Sector Innovation Laboratory*, https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/public-sector-innovation-laboratory/ (accessed on 11 September 2023); LV Portals (2022[21]), *Spilgtākās inovācijas valsts pārvaldē: no inovāciju laboratorijas līdz e-valdības risinājumam*, https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/347540-spilgtakas-inovacijas-valsts-parvalde-no-inovaciju-laboratorijas-lidz-e-valdibas-risinajumam-2022 (accessed on 11 September 2023).

CoGs can also help to facilitate the adoption and replication of labs' policy practices or innovation across government by providing guidance and resources. Additionally, they may use communities of practices to promote learning of good policy innovation practices. One example is the United Kingdom's Policy Design Community (Box 3.7).

Box 3.7. The United Kingdom's Policy Design Community for innovative outcomes

The United Kingdom has established a multidisciplinary policy design community as part of its innovative public policy efforts. It provides a collaborative network for policy design thinking and innovation practitioners from both central and local governments. This aims to create more effective civil servants, more meaningful outcomes and better services for citizens.

The community organises meetings and practice sessions several times a year. Public officials interested in policy design are encouraged to join the official mailing list and Slack communication platform channel, thus facilitating day-to-day information flow. The community regularly shares its practices on its official government blog.

Currently, the community brings together officials from more than 60 diverse governmental organisations. It also engages stakeholders outside the government, such as university researchers. In addition, the United Kingdom's policy design community is expanding its activities by developing a policy design course for all policymakers, formalising policy design as a career path and establishing citizen co-design measures.

Source: UK Government (n.d.[22]), *About This Blog*, https://publicpolicydesign.blog.gov.uk/about-this-blog/ (accessed on 11 September 2023).

Behavioural insights

In many OECD member countries, behavioural insight (BI) units work with governments to apply behavioural insights to public policy. BIs draw from behavioural economics and psychology to understand how people make decisions and behave in specific contexts. These insights allow policymakers to design policies that account for behavioural biases and motivations, thus increasing the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy interventions. While some governments embed these units in line ministries, in many countries, such as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, BI units have been integrated into the CoG (OECD, 2018[23]). Box 3.8 provides an example on the use of BI in Canada for policy development.

Box 3.8. The Program of Applied Research on Climate Action (PARCA) in Canada: Informing decision-making through evidence from behavioural science

Canada recognises the need to achieve rapid and effective climate action and the importance of changing behaviours as a part of the solution. Thus, the CoG Impact and Innovation Unit (IIU), in collaboration with two ministries, launched PARCA, a behavioural insights-based approach to informing policy action on climate issues, situated in the Privy Council Office. PARCA generates behaviourally informed evidence to align government policy decisions with an accurate understanding of how Canadians think, feel and act in relation to climate change. It leverages the IIU's centralised role in the government of Canada to maximise the impact by:

- Generating data to understand how Canadians think, feel and act in response to climate change in order to identify the potential for promoting greater individual action.
- Using experimental testing and evidence in the design of policy, programmes, regulations and communications.
- Aligning priorities across government by connecting lead departments in climate-related areas to work on shared priorities, such as increasing uptake of climate-friendly home retrofits.
- Exploring the feasibility of other opportunities to leverage findings from applied behavioural science to guide policy developments.

It consists of three phrases:

1. Ongoing national data collection gathers evidence about how Canadians think, feel and act in relation to climate change and identifies key problems of interest.
2. Rapid in-depth studies isolate drivers and barriers to desired behaviour changes and test potential solutions to identified problems.
3. In-field experiments test research findings in the real world in collaboration with trusted partners and build evidence for initiatives that are likely to produce meaningful outcomes at scale.

Findings inform lead policy analysis, programme, regulatory development and public communications in lead departments and support overall central management of the climate change agenda.

Source: Government of Canada (2023[24]), *The Program of Applied Research on Climate Action in Canada*, https://impact.canada.ca/en/behavioural-science/parca (accessed on 31 October 2023).

Experimentation from the centre

CoGs can also promote a culture of experimentation in policy development. They can do this through frameworks, guidelines and resources, enabling policymakers to design and pilot policy interventions and test their effectiveness on a smaller scale. Experimentation allows policymakers to gather evidence on the

impact of policies, identify effective approaches and refine policies based on findings. Achieving this requires the capacity for policy prototyping and piloting, and appetite, support and capacity for innovation in the public sector (OECD, 2020[25]). Box 3.9 provides an example of the Slovak Republic's CoG enhancing experimentation on policy issues through its new Research and Innovation Authority.

Box 3.9. Experimentation through the Research and Innovation Authority in the Slovak Republic

The Slovak Republic is acknowledged as an "emerging innovator", with its innovation performance lagging behind most EU countries. Therefore, in recovering from the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Slovak Republic has taken active steps in building its research, experimentation and innovation capacities. In this context, the Research and Innovation Authority (RIA) was established at the central Office of the Government in October 2021.

The objective is to centralise research and innovation to address key challenges in a more co-ordinated manner. Its placement within the CoG enables advocacy from the highest level and the connection of field professionals with the country's senior leadership. The RIA trials and experiments policy issues and enhances the government's broader experimentation and innovation capacity. It also supports the Slovak CoG in decision-making and reforms broader innovation governance.

This is an example of how the CoG can enhance capacities such as experimentation and innovation.

Source: Government of the Slovak Republic (n.d.[26]), *VAIA*, https://vaia.gov.sk/sk/o-nas/vaia/ (accessed on 11 September 2023).

Additionally, broader approaches such as systems approaches are also being used by the government. Almost half of the surveyed countries (46%) report using systems approaches and methods to support co-ordination. These approaches must be embedded into existing systems and mechanisms to have a lasting impact. This is a key reason why many CoGs are driving such practices and integrating this continues to be a main challenge for many CoGs.

4. Enhancing policy quality and alignment through review mechanisms for policies and legislation

CoGs have always been gatekeepers of cabinet processes and decision-making (further discussed in Chapter 4). In most OECD countries, the CoG is responsible for reviewing and quality-controlling draft policy proposals, legislation or other policy documents submitted to the cabinet (Figure 3.4). They provide feedback on draft policies to line ministries and other agencies (OECD, 2023[8]). Their role can include:

1. Assessing against required processes, legal and regulatory compliance and analysis, and ensuring that adequate consultation has been undertaken.
2. Ensuring that policy proposals align with the overall government programme and priorities and reducing the risk of policy conflicts by making sure actors are considered at relevant policy stages.
3. Reviewing viability for implementation (less prevalent) and financial criteria aspects.

CoGs consistently try to align outcomes with broader government objectives, such as long-term sustainable development: 81% of CoGs ensure a co-ordinated and coherent approach by communicating these objectives across the administration, reviewing proposals to align with overall government priorities (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Revision of policy proposals, legislation and other policy documents
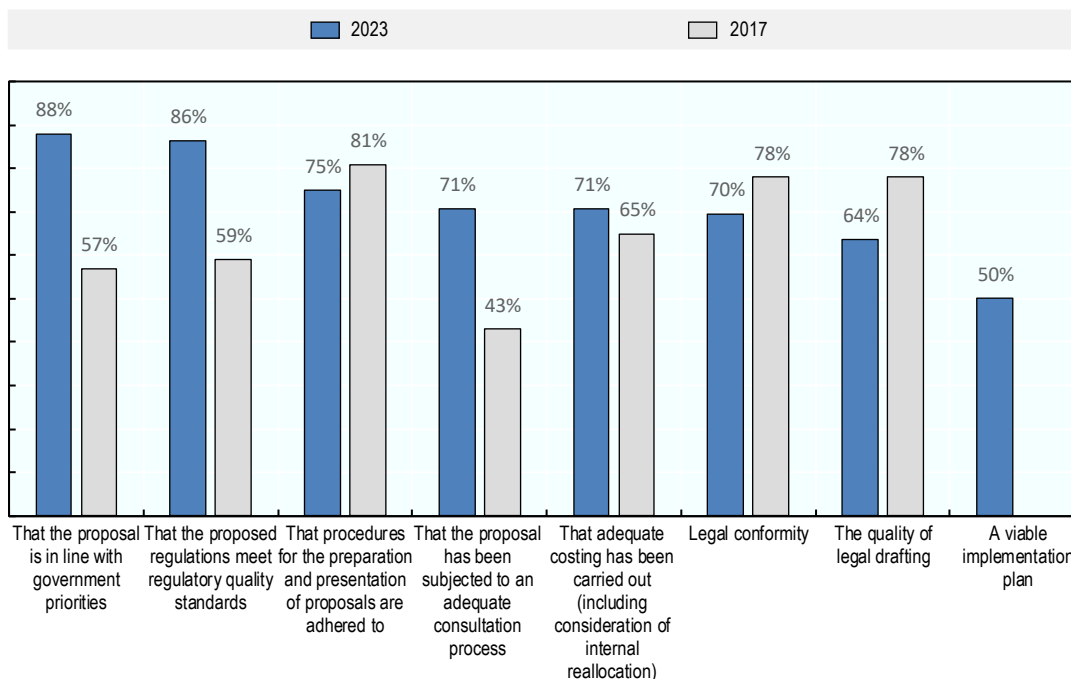
Note: n=26 (2023). Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "When reviewing draft policy proposals, legislation or other policy documents, which aspects does the CoG ensure?". In 2017, legal conformity and quality of legal drafting were a single response option. The 2017 survey did not ask about the existence of an implementation plan.

Source: OECD (2023[8]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris; OECD (2018[23]), *Centre Stage 2 -The Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government in OECD Countries*, https://web-archive.oecd.org/2021-05-18/588642-report-centre-stage-2.pdf (accessed on 19 May 2020).

5. Providing frameworks, standards and guidance and building public sector capacity from the centre

Frameworks and standards play a crucial role in policy co-ordination. They act as guidance to follow, ensuring that policies are aligned with the government vision and are of high quality. Sometimes, CoGs create the standards while, at other times, promote line ministry standards across the government. They can do this in various ways, including events, toolkits and websites (Brown, Kohli and Mignotte, 2021[27]).

Figure 3.5 outlines the various roles CoGs play in this regard. Seventeen of 26 CoGs provide line ministries with policy development frameworks or standards. In 88% of countries, setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity of the public administration in policy development is a priority for the CoG. In ten countries, the CoG is primarily responsible for setting standards, defining requirements and providing guidance to line ministries and agencies (OECD, 2023[8]). The survey also shows that CoGs provide support through guidelines and templates, review of draft policy proposals and ad hoc support to ministries, providing input into strategy documents, plans or instruments.

An area of support with notably less CoG involvement is capacity building. Training provision requires expertise and resources that the centre may not always have. Only 43% of CoGs focus on capacity building for innovation and less than a third of CoGs (30%) provide training on policy development.

Figure 3.5. Support provided by the CoG to line ministries and agencies in policy development
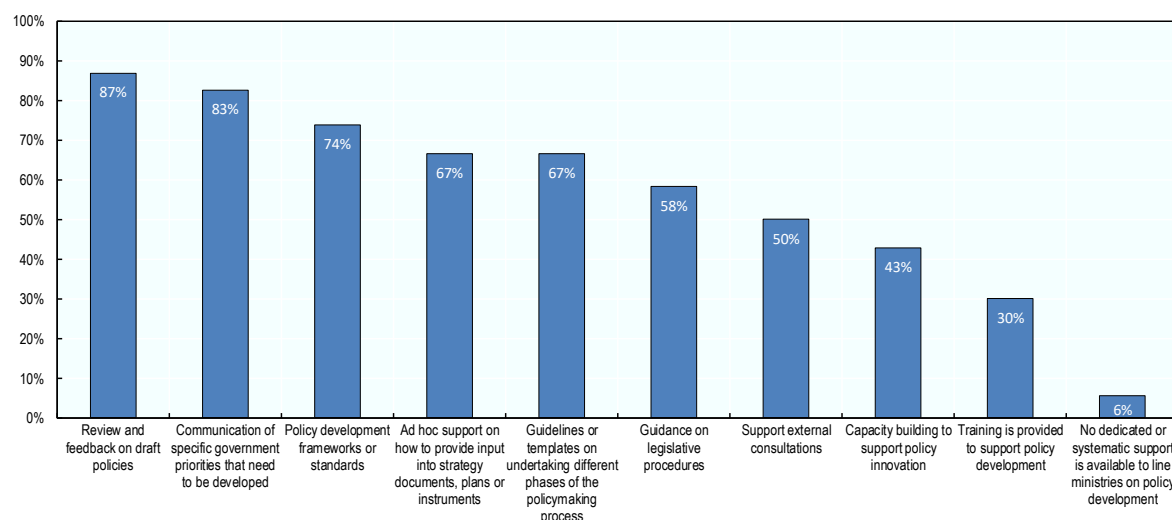
Note: n=26 (2023). Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What support does CoG provide to line ministries and other agencies in policy development?".
Source: OECD (2023[8]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Box 3.10 outlines examples from Australia and New Zealand on CoG policy units that set standards and provide guidance to the public administration on policy development.

Box 3.10. Setting standards and providing guidance for enhancing policy development

New Zealand

The New Zealand government recognises that great policy advice is the foundation of effective government decision-making. It underpins the performance of the economy and the well-being of all people. The CoG established an initiative called the Policy Project, aiming to build a high-performing policy system that supports and enables good decision-making.

The initiative develops and promotes common standards, equipping policy practitioners, teams and agencies with tools, information and advice to develop their skills and capabilities in policy development, making use of tools such as newsletters for communication.

Australia

Australia's prime minister and cabinet set standards and provide guidance and resources to the public administration on policy frameworks, proposal processes and policy impact analyses. The new policy impact analysis guidance helps policymakers reflect on how policies can affect people, businesses and community in order to better shape policy proposals, costs and benefits. The CoG has released a framework with standards on this and created forms, templates, guidance on processes, self-assessments and training videos.

Sources: New Zealand Government (2023[28]), *The Policy Project*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project (accessed on 31 October 2023); Australian Government (2023[29]), *Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis*, https://oia.pmc.gov.au/resources/guidance-impact-analysis/australian-government-guide-policy-impact-analysis (accessed on 31 October 2023).

6. Common challenges and enablers

Through the synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants in the OECD informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified.

Common challenges

- As the external environment is becoming more challenging to navigate, CoGs are finding it more difficult to operationalise long-term policy ambitions and consider trade-offs on policy options.

- Despite their value, there is a risk of over-proliferation of co-ordination mechanisms and bodies. This can cause duplication of work, dilution of purpose or administrative burden.

- Increasing co-ordination and strategic capacities for aligned policy development across government is a long-term challenge. CoGs need to support good relationships with line ministries and navigate, at times, the personal agendas of individual ministers or ministries.

- CoGs recognise the importance of balancing their role as stewards and the line ministry's role in driving policies. This can be challenging as lines are blurred between co-ordination and implementation.

- Frameworks, standards and guidance work may stretch the CoG's capacity. In some contexts, some non-CoG entities (e.g. line ministries or institutes of public administration) take this on. However, CoGs still need to agree, promote and assure such standards.

Common enablers

- Political leadership and a clear strategic vision with well-communicated priorities are essential elements for the success of the CoG in policy co-ordination and development.

- To avoid overlapping mandates and unclear responsibilities and empower the CoG with regard to other actors, governments must ensure clear roles and mandates for policy development.

- CoGs need sufficient resources and capacity to co-ordinate across government, enhance coherence and steward policy development. Officials working at the centre need technical knowledge for the review of policy proposals and draft items, and technical skills such as the use of data, communication and project management. Additionally, relationship building and political navigation skills are important.

- Policy challenges require collaboration across institutions and advice from external voices. Thus, CoGs should use fit-for-purpose mechanisms such as taskforces, working groups, advisory bodies and expert groups, with clear purposes, processes, timeframes and objectives. CoGs need to ensure that there is two-way trust, including with citizens, if this is to work.

- Given their ability to work across all ministries and agencies, CoGs should identify and facilitate the regular exchange of practices, tools and material to foster continuous improvement of policy development processes.

- Due to the constantly evolving policy development environment, CoGs should deploy an adaptive approach that is responsive to changing needs, emerging challenges and evolving circumstances.

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4 Driving sound decision-making practices from the centre

Driving sound decision-making practices has traditionally been a centre of government (CoG) responsibility through the facilitation of government and cabinet meetings. This chapter discusses the CoG's role in undertaking this function, concentrating on how it steers decision-making in times of complexity. It focuses on the role the CoG plays in the decision-making fora of cabinet or government meetings, through agenda management and preparation. Further, this chapter acknowledges that CoGs are increasingly guiding sound decision-making more broadly across government, in regulation, risk, data and fostering public sector integrity. The latter half of this chapter focuses on these functions, detailing practical examples of how the CoG manages these increased functions to drive sound decision-making practices across government.

Key messages

- Centres of government (CoGs) have always traditionally played a role in guiding government decision-making through facilitating cabinet and government meetings. Yet, balancing the focus of the CoG on major policy issues facing governments can be tough.

- More recently, CoGs are increasingly guiding good decision-making practices more broadly, including in regulation, risk and data.

- The complexity of policy challenges, changing national agendas and competing priorities complicates CoGs' role in coherently supporting good decision-making across the public service. They are required to do more mediating and negotiating between actors.

- While CoGs add value to government decision-making practices, the risk is that they are perceived as blockers or braking mechanisms. Building an environment that fosters productive and trusted relationships between the CoG and line ministries is essential.

- CoGs are crucial gatekeepers of the quality of the proposals put forward for debate during cabinet and government meetings and other decision-making fora. At times, balancing speed or agility with quality and integrity may be challenging.

- Embedding a public administration culture of evidence-informed decisions is important. CoGs can support sound decision-making by putting in place incentives, guidance materials and standards that foster transparency and adequate engagement with stakeholders.

1. Introduction

CoGs play a role in guiding good public administration practices that allow sound decision-making. CoGs most traditionally ensure that decisions made in cabinet or government meetings are evidence-informed, well-prepared and aligned with government priorities. They can also foster good practices in decision-making across the administration in varied areas, including regulation or risk management.

Right now, with complex and cross-cutting challenges facing governments, sound decision-making requires consideration of unclear trade-offs and a multitude of actors (DeSeve, 2016[1]). CoGs must ensure coherence of decision-making practices throughout the public administration, balancing transparency and integrity with experimentation and risk. CoGs are well placed to harness leadership support for the use of evidence in decision-making (OECD, 2015[2]).

This chapter will explore the CoG's role in driving sound decision-making within the following structure:

- Supporting decision-making at cabinet and government meetings.
- Stewarding good decision-making across other functions through regulation, risk management, data practices and fostering integrity in the public service.

2. Supporting decision-making at cabinet and government meetings

In most OECD member and accession countries, cabinet or government meetings are the highest-level forum for the discussion of policies, programmes and initiatives. As the supporting structure for the executive branch, CoGs are highly involved in these spaces (OECD, 2020[3]). They provide policy advice to help decision-makers debate policy options based on evidence and impacts (OECD, 2018[4]). According to the OECD survey (2023[5]), 73% of countries consider this a top priority. This section is an overview of

CoG practices that foster quality decision-making in cabinet and government meetings, including agenda setting, managing preparation and conclusion of meetings.

Figure 4.1. The CoG guides in multiple decision-making areas

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Setting the agenda

The CoG has an important role to play in deciding which items appear on the agenda of these decision-making meetings. It can drive sound decision-making by deciding what evidence and advice to present to decision-makers (OECD, 2018[4]). The CoG can directly manage the preparation of agenda items. In *2023, 73% of the surveyed CoGs indicated that one of their activities is to review draft policies proposals, legislation or other policy documents, ensuring that the proposed regulations meet standards; 65% of surveyed CoGs also review if* the proposal has been subjected to an adequate consultation process. The CoG can also directly manage the agenda, including proposals from line ministries. In 38% of countries surveyed, CoGs help develop policy options.

Clear rules and procedures govern the development and submission of proposals. These are typically led by the CoG. For example, in Latvia, the Unified Portal for the Development and Agreement of Draft Legal Acts, developed and administered by the CoG, centralises the agenda and protocol for cabinet sittings. Other examples include countries such as Estonia, where the CoG leverages digital platforms for the submission of proposals (Box 4.1), while in Canada, it can set requirements for the development of the proposal itself (Box 4.2).

Box 4.1. Leveraging digital tools to support decision-making at the highest level

Case study: Estonia's e-Cabinet

The information system for cabinet meetings in Estonia, known as e-Cabinet, is a tool that streamlines the decision-making process for cabinet meetings. This database and scheduler organises and updates relevant real-time information. Driven by the CoG, ministers and their teams are given a clear overview of every agenda item. Well before the start of the weekly cabinet session, ministers access the system to examine each item on the agenda and define their position on the topic. They can indicate if they have any objections or if they wish to speak on the subject. In this way, ministers' positions are known in advance. Proposals to which there are no objections are adopted without debate, saving time. Meeting minutes are also published on the website. Since adopting a paperless e-cabinet system, the average length of weekly cabinet meetings has fallen from 4 to 5 hours to between 30 and 90 minutes.

Source: OECD (2023[6]), *OECD Public Governance Reviews: Czech Republic: Towards a More Modern and Effective Public Administration*, https://doi.org/10.1787/41fd9e5c-en (accessed on 23 May 2023).

Box 4.2. Case study: Memoranda to Cabinet as quality control in the government of Canada

Memoranda to Cabinet (MCs) are a tool for proposing policies and supporting rigorous, evidence-based decision-making within the Cabinet of Canada. MCs are brought forward by ministers to aid in cabinet deliberations when considering the introduction of new laws or initiatives, changes to existing legislation or programmes, or responses to parliament. There are several steps required to bring the proposal to the cabinet.

1. MC drafters must consult the CoG, which ensures the proposal is in line with government priorities, is appropriately costed and has been subjected to adequate and systematic analysis.

2. The department bringing forward the proposal must hold at least one meeting with the Privy Council Office.

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3. Drafters organise consultations with other affected agencies and departments to address potential cross-cutting obstacles, collect additional information and address potential concerns.

4. The MC is discussed in the relevant cabinet policy committee, where decision-makers review the memoranda and prepare a recommendation for the cabinet.

Once a policy has been well discussed and a positive agreement has been reached, the MC is passed to the cabinet for ratification.

MCs follow a specific format. They describe the main issues at stake and list a set of actions, providing a clear rationale, a detailed approach and a consistency check of the proposal against key government objectives such as climate goals. They then set out how the policy would be addressed in parliament or through other measures.

The MCs' development process has several internal control mechanisms to ensure the quality of the proposals that reach the cabinet for discussion. MCs are overseen by responsible minister(s). The Privy Council Office informs the chair of each cabinet committee about the progress of MCs. The chief financial officer of the sponsoring minister's department reviews due diligence issues. Moreover, agencies in the CoG brief the prime minister, minister of finance and president of the Treasury Board on proposals.

Drafting MCs can take considerable time given the expected level of analysis and required consultations with the CoG and other agencies. A key to success is ensuring that planning and drafting take place well in advance so that the process is not rushed and that ministers can receive proposals well in advance of cabinet consideration so that they can internalise the information.

Note: The CoG in Canada is composed of the Privy Council Office, Finance Canada and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS). Source: Government of Canada (2020[7]), *Machinery of Government*, https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/mtb-ctm/2019/binder-cahier-1/1G-support-appuie-eng.htm (accessed on 9 June 2023); Information provided by the Privy Council Office.

Managing the preparation

CoGs support effectiveness at the decision-making stage by bringing together senior officials ahead of deliberations. They foster co-ordination across policies and portfolios through mechanisms such as commissions, inter-ministerial working groups and ad hoc exchanges. In several OECD member and accession countries, CoGs facilitate these discussions, review supporting materials and act as an arbitrator in case of disputes between government entities (OECD, 2015[2]).

In some countries, informal sessions may be more common or even institutionalised. Box 4.3 showcases the examples of Finland and New Zealand, where CoGs have introduced preliminary meetings among line ministers and other policymakers to improve cabinet decision-making processes.

Box 4.3. Support to cabinet meetings

Support to cabinet meetings

In New Zealand, cabinet meetings are preceded by standing cabinet committees. Cabinet committees provide the opportunity for more detailed review and discussion of proposals and issues before they are submitted to the cabinet for decision. Officials' committees provide support for most Cabinet committees and their chairs to progress the government's policy agenda. The officials' committees help to ensure policy cohesion, provide quality assurance during the drafting process, and ensure papers are progressed through the committee process in a timely manner.

> **Ministerial commissions in Finland**
>
> Finland has developed standing inter-ministerial committees to promote public policy coherence. They are involved in decision-making and the preparation of the government's plenary session.
>
> Other inter-ministerial working groups focus on the government's priorities during its term of office. They drive work on the priorities forward by co-ordinating between ministries for collaboration. These working groups meet at least several times a year and are disbanded when there is a change of government, when new working groups based on the new government's priorities are put in place. This approach helps streamline and prevent duplication of work.
>
> In both Finland and New Zealand, these fora provide opportunities for exchange and feedback ahead of the decision-making phase. This can increase efficiency during cabinet meetings and ensures that proposals that reach this stage align with government priorities and are supported by the cabinet.
>
> Source: New Zealand Government (2023[8]), *Cabinet Manual*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/cabinet-office/supporting-work-cabinet/cabinet-manual (accessed on 26 May 2023); Government of Finland (2021[9]), *Ministerial Committees and Working Groups*, https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/government/ministerial-committees (accessed on 7 June 2023).

Communicating the outcomes

While the discussions during cabinet or government meetings tend to be confidential, several countries prepare minutes or proceedings of the decisions made during the session. The agreements and commitments reached during the meeting are made public. This provides an element of accountability, as it sheds light on the implementation of priorities by the government.

3. Guiding sound decision-making across broader functions

More recently, CoGs have been called upon to guide broader decision-making practices across public administration. This includes practices in regulation, risk, data and fostering public sector integrity.

Guiding high-quality regulatory practices

Ensuring regulatory quality is an important objective in support of the government's decision-making function. In line with the OECD Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance, a "whole-of-government" approach to regulatory policy can support administrations in attaining public objectives (OECD, 2012[10]). CoGs can play a role in both the governance arrangements of rulemaking and regulatory management tools that administrations can use to ensure that regulations are effective and conducive to public objectives.

The CoG can support regulatory governance with gatekeeping functions, the provision of guidance, promoting the whole-of-government regulatory policy, using tools such as regulatory impact assessments and *ex post* evaluations, and evaluating regulatory policy. Positioning these functions close to the CoG can benefit the adoption of the policy throughout the administration (OECD, 2012[10]). Box 4.4 presents the example of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), the regulatory oversight body in the United States, which is located in the Office of Management and Budget.

Figure 4.2. Quality insurance of draft policy proposals and legislations at the CoG
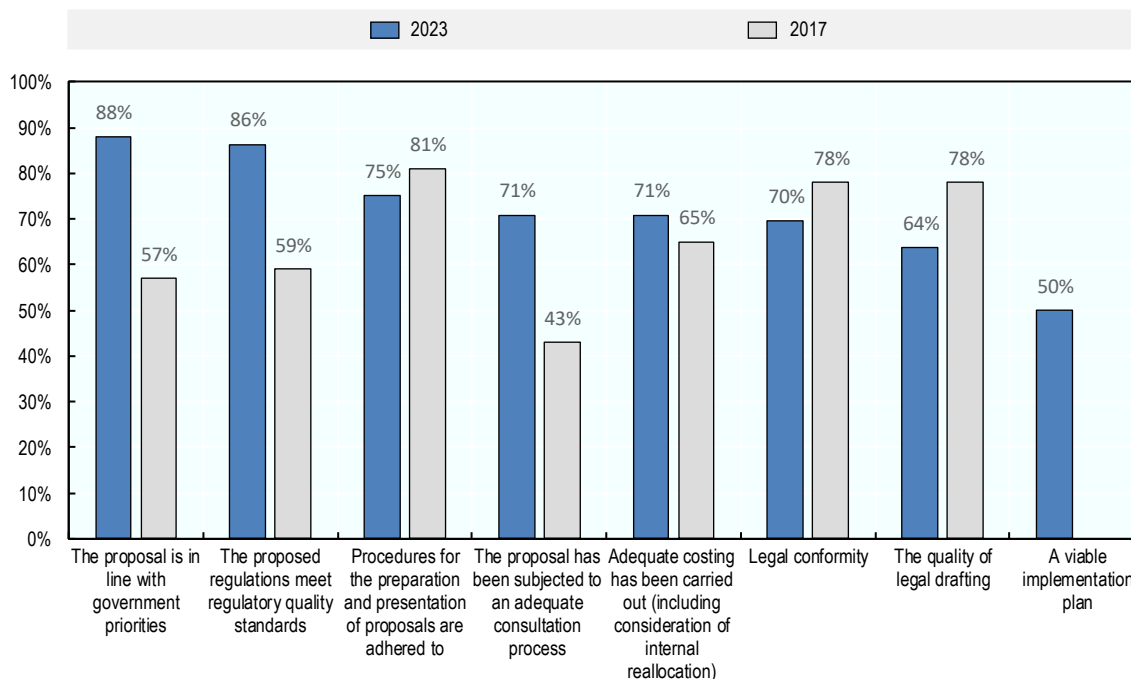
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "When reviewing draft policy proposals, legislation or other policy documents, which aspects does the CoG ensure?".
Source: OECD (2023[5]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Box 4.4. Regulatory oversight bodies close to the CoG

The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, United States

The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) is a statutory part of the Office of Management and Budget within the Executive Office of the President. OIRA is the United States government's central authority for regulatory oversight of executive branch regulations and regulatory policy. Because OIRA is positioned in the CoG, it can co-ordinate actions across the entire federal administration.

In addition to reviewing drafts of proposed and final regulations, OIRA scrutinises *ex post* evaluations of regulations and reviews. It approves government collections of information from the public and oversees the implementation of government-wide policies in the areas of information policy, privacy and statistical policy. OIRA also co-ordinates international regulatory co-operation.

Having a regulatory oversight body allows for a horizontal view of the policymaking environment and facilitates access to information from different parts of the government.

Source: The White House (2023[11]), *Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs*, https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/ (accessed on 6 April 2020); Renda, A., R. Castro and G. Hernández (2022[12]), "Defining and contextualising regulatory oversight and co-ordination", https://doi.org/10.1787/a4225b62-en.

CoGs can play a decisive role in promoting innovative approaches to regulatory policy and contributing to the necessary changes in institutional culture and mindsets across the administration (OECD, 2021[13]). Flexible and adaptable regulatory approaches led by the centre can support innovative decision-making

and manage risks. Box 4.5 presents the case of Canada's Centre for Regulatory Innovation, a CoG initiative to help regulation keep pace with new developments.

Box 4.5. Canada's Centre for Regulatory Innovation

Canada's Centre for Regulatory Innovation, established in 2018, is part of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and works across the government to support regulators to increase their toolbox regarding innovative approaches and practices, develop the capacities to carry out regulatory experimentation, and engage and exchange with other practitioners.

To that effect, the CoG provides regulators with resources, advice and expertise in the development of regulatory experiments and sandboxes, among others. The centre has also made available a set of capacity-building and training resources: The Regulators' Experimentation Toolkit and GCWiki page offer information on applying for regulatory innovation funding and describe the projects the centre has supported to date.

The CoG provides a bridge between regulators and businesses with the objective of encouraging innovation while limiting potential risks and protecting consumer trust. The CoG mandate derives from a high-level commitment from the Canadian administration to improve the regulatory environment for businesses, allowing regulators to adopt a future-looking perspective to rulemaking. Future actions to harness the power of innovation through better regulation include the development of capacities across regulators to make the most of agile regulatory practices.

Sources: OECD (2021[13]), *OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook 2021*, https://doi.org/10.1787/38b0fdb1-en; Government of Canada (2022[14]), *Centre for Regulatory Innovation*, https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/laws/developing-improving-federal-regulations/modernizing-regulations/who-we-are.html (accessed on 26 May 2023); Government of Canada (2022[15]), *Regulators' Capacity Fund: Lessons Learned Report*, https://wiki.gccollab.ca/images/1/12/RCF_Lessons_Learned_Report_2022_-_English_(Final).pdf (accessed on 26 May 2023).

CoGs can also promote regulatory quality through the development of guidelines and requirements for quality and future-proofed regulation. Box 4.6 highlights the case of Australia's Office of Impact Analysis, a body in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that provides capacity building to line ministries and agencies in the development of regulatory impact assessments.

Box 4.6. Building capacities for better regulation across the administration

Australia's Office of Impact Analysis

The introduction of better regulation requirements benefits from the development of guidelines and capacity-building activities that provide line ministries, regulatory agencies and other entities with the tools to successfully implement these obligations.

Australia's Office of Impact Analysis (OIA, formerly OBPR) offers capacity building on the impact analysis of regulatory proposals put forward by ministries or other entities. The office provides different kinds of training and resources free of charge to public officials. The contents, scope and purpose of the coaching activities are based on the audience and their needs. The OIA has five streams of capacity:

- General policymaker training or "RIA 101".
- Ministry-specific training.
- First-year cohort training.

> - Ad hoc "needs-based" training.
> - International and interstate training.
>
> The OIA's central location gives it an overarching view. It devotes an important part of its resources to engaging with regulators and bridging the knowledge gap in the use of RIA for policymaking. Certainly, embedding the use of regulatory management tools in the day-to-day activities of decision-makers goes beyond just the introduction of obligations and requires a proactive effort from the centre to facilitate their use. In the case of Australia, this has helped develop a high-performing regulatory system.
>
> Source: Australian Government (2023[16]), *Guide to Policy Impact Analysis*, https://oia.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/oia-impact-analysis-guide-march-2023_0.pdf (accessed on 25 May 2023).

Guiding risk management

The CoG has traditionally taken on a significant role in risk management by supporting decision-makers and co-ordinating government action. Out of the OECD CoGs surveyed in 2023, 12% identified risk management and risk anticipation as their top or significant priority for driving sound decision-making. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks recommends that members build preparedness through foresight analysis and risk assessment frameworks to better anticipate complex and wide-ranging impacts (OECD, 2014[17]).

Eight percent of the surveyed CoGs responded having a lead responsibility for integrating information on short- and long-term risks in policy development and, further, 27% share this responsibility with line departments. The CoG typically shares evidence from departments and scientific bodies with senior government officials (OECD, 2018[4]). Linking policy advice with the best available scientific advice – namely, high-quality, and timely advice – can add significant value during a crisis (OECD, 2018[18]). This supports better decision-making through the risk management cycle and can help design more effective policy interventions. Identifying potential impacts can be challenging, particularly during fast-paced or uncertain periods. This means that administrators may find it challenging to move from a "reactive" to a "proactive" approach as they might not have all of the relevant resources to make evidence-based decisions.

Box 4.7. Risk management from the centre

Ireland's National Risk Assessment

The Department of the Taoiseach (the prime minister of the Republic of Ireland) prepares and publishes an annual National Risk Assessment where it identifies and discusses the significant risks facing the country. First published in 2014, the National Risk Assessment provides a systematic approach to identifying and debating strategic risks facing Ireland over the short, medium and long terms. The National Risk Assessment underpins all of the specific risk management activities that different departments and agencies carry out. Its development is informed by stakeholder engagement activities that are aimed at collecting the views of citizens, organisations and public representatives on the draft list of risks identified by the Taoiseach.

The results of the National Risk Assessment can be a useful source of information to consider during the decision-making process and provide the basis for developing policies that will help build resilience. The CoG's engagement in the development and presentation of the National Risk Assessment signals the cross-cutting nature and importance of this document as a guide for informing public action.

Source: Government of Finland (2021[19]), *National Risk Assessment 2021/2022: Overview of Strategic Risks*, https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/795550-national-risk-assessment/#national-risk-assessment-20212022-overview-of-strategic-risks (accessed on 26 May 2023); OECD (2017[20]), *National Risk Assessments: A Cross Country Perspective*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264287532-en (accessed on 25 May 2023).

Guiding good data practices

CoG stewardship can improve the capacity for an evidence-informed approach to decision-making. Ensuring the use of accurate and reliable information can be a challenge in fast-paced or high-volume contexts. CoGs can support this by creating mechanisms, practices and guidance that help accelerate and standardise data management and use.

Box 4.8 highlights the CoG's role in leading and co-ordinating decisions on digital government in Portugal and the United Kingdom.

Box 4.8. Digital government leadership from the CoG

Case study: The Central Digital and Data Office and Government Digital Service, United Kingdom

The Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) and the Government Digital Service (GDS) of the United Kingdom lead the digital government agenda at the centre of government and are part of the Cabinet Office. The CDDO leads the government's Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Function and sets the strategic direction for the government on digital, data and technology. It also administers standards such as the Government Service Standard, the Technology Code of Practice and the Cabinet Office digital and technology spend controls. The GDS works across the whole government to assist departments in transforming its public services. It has built and maintained several cross-government-as-a-platform tools such as GOV.UK, GOV.UK Verify, GOV.UK Pay, GOV.UK Notify and the Digital Marketplace.

> **Case study: The Administrative Modernisation Agency, Portugal**
>
> Portugal's digital transformation agency, the Administrative Modernization Agency, was created in 2007 and sits within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. It exercises the powers of the Ministry of State Modernization and Public Administration in modernisation, administrative simplification and digital government and is under the supervision of the Secretary of State for Innovation and Administrative Modernization. The agency has a top role in the development, promotion and support of the public administration in several technological fields and is in continuous contact with focal points at institutions relevant to the implementation of digital government projects. It is responsible for the approval of information and communication technology (ICT) and digital projects over EUR 10 000 and chairs the Council for ICT in public administration.
>
> Source: OECD (2021[21]), *The E-Leaders Handbook on the Governance of Digital Government*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ac7f2531-en (accessed on 6 September 2023); UK Government (2023[22]), *Central Digital and Data Office*, https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/central-digital-and-data-office (accessed on 6 September 2023).

CoGs can leverage the technological developments of digital transformation to boost the availability and use of high-quality data in decision-making. This frequently involves centre-led new governance arrangements, policy and legislative change, infrastructure construction and capability development.

While line ministries most frequently lead on leveraging data and evidence for policy development, many CoGs have overseen the establishment of national data strategies to ensure the creation of systems that maximise and protect data's public value and facilitate the use of evidence by policymakers (OECD, 2017[23]). Box 4.9 highlights the examples of Australia and Germany's use of the CoG in national data strategies to enhance capacity.

Figure 4.3. Setting standards for good use of data tends to be a shared responsibility

Legend: ■ CoG leads ☐ Varies greatly ☐ Shared lead ☐ Line ministry leads

Activity	CoG leads	Varies greatly	Shared lead	Line ministry leads
Leveraging data and evidence for policy development	4%	19%	19%	46%
Engaging external stakeholders	4%	19%	38%	38%
Integrating information on short- and long-term risks	8%	27%	27%	31%
Integrating systems thinking approaches	8%	23%	27%	19%
Integrating strategic foresight approaches or knowledge	12%	19%	35%	12%
Development of policy options and proposals for decisions	15%		38%	46%
Setting standards for good use of data	15%	8%	27%	23%
Engaging with political actors during policy development	15%	31%	19%	31%
Ensuring legal conformity of policy proposals	23%	12%	38%	23%
Review and quality assurance of proposals	31%	8%	31%	23%
Co-ordinating implementation of government priorities	35%	12%	31%	15%
Ensuring that policy proposals from different ministries do not contradict each other	42%	4%	35%	12%
Ensuring alignment of proposals with strategic priorities	42%	8%	27%	19%
Stewarding or leading cross-cutting priorities	58%	12%	27%	4%

Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "For each of the below activities regarding co-ordinating and enhancing policy development, please indicate who has the primary responsibility".
Source: OECD (2023[5]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Box 4.9. Enhancing data capability in Australia and Germany

Case study: Australia's development of data capability

Australia's big data transition has been a multi-agency collaborative endeavour primarily co-ordinated by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, with the role more recently transitioned to the Department of Finance. Data sharing and collaboration were supplemented by the establishment of enabling policy, legislative arrangements and infrastructure.

The 2015 Public Sector Data Management Project provided the initial call to action and signalled the policy shift to increased data sharing and use. The project focused on building cross-agency and sector partnerships, building confidence through high-value projects and quick wins, and systematising data sharing and use through policy frameworks and legislative change.

This networked approach has enabled responsibility for whole-of-government functions to be shared. This both disperses the effort and ensures that components are led by those agencies with the necessary knowledge, skills and authority. Additionally, when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020, the five-year investment in data collaboration could be pivoted to address this highly data-

dependent crisis. The Australian government's data and analytics community knew and trusted each other's capacities and expertise. As responsibilities were dispersed throughout the network, so was the load during this critical time. While shared infrastructure, capability and trusted networks can be slow to build, they have broad applications and, once in place, are essential for an agile government.

Case study: Data labs, chief data officers or chief data scientists in federal ministries and the Federal Chancellery in Germany

All German federal ministries and the Federal Chancellery have established a data lab and created the position of a chief data officer or scientist. The mission of the labs, which work together horizontally, is to foster the use of data, establish a data culture, raise the level of data literacy and contribute to data-driven policy and decision-making.

Their work includes:

- Performing data analysis.
- Providing and elaborating infrastructure for the supply and exchange of data.
- Identifying and implementing relevant use cases for automation or use of data.
- Establishing a data governance in the ministries and government-wide.

Some labs were integrated into existing units, while others created new units or interdepartmental groups. Each is made up of a team from diverse backgrounds, ranging from data scientists and engineers to political scientists and physicists. The establishment of these labs is a key measure of Germany's first Data Strategy (2021), the German Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021) and Germany's Digital Strategy (2022).

Sources: Australian Government (2016[24]), *Public Sector Data Management*, https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2016-07/apo-nid236601.pdf (accessed on 9 June 2023); Information provided by the German Chancellery.

As governments mainstream the use of digital technologies and data across government, they must consider robust data governance frameworks that support data access and sharing across the public sector and when needed with external actors. This includes legal and administrative structures, institutional arrangements and mechanisms, policy instruments, co-ordination and advisory fora and technical aspects including shared data infrastructures and data standardisation and interoperability. It often requires clear and solid leadership, together with the involvement and accountability of relevant stakeholders of the ecosystem. A successful digital transformation requires close co-ordination between the digital government strategy design and execution, efficient and agile management, consistent and coherent planning, and investment in digitalisation projects and initiatives in the public sector (OECD, 2021[21]).

With the increased role of the CoG in cross-cutting complex issues that require evidence-informed decision-making, supporting the exchange of timely, high-quality data across the public administration is essential. The CoG can serve to co-ordinate the use of data across line ministries and other stakeholders, as it does in the example of Finland.

> **Box 4.10. Leveraging research data from the centre in support of decision-making in Finland**
>
> The TEA Working Group is a unit within the Finnish CoG whose main goal is to promote co-operation and information exchange between the ministries. Appointed and annually assessed by the Prime Minister's Office, it brings together representatives from all ministries, thus ensuring comprehensive horizontal oversight of ministerial research, foresight and assessment activities. To eliminate overlap, ensure continuity and strengthen evidence-informed decision-making, it guides the analysis, assessment and research process of governing institutions. It has also been a key actor in deciding the research topics to be included in the annual government research plan.
>
> The TEA Working Group's horizontal approach fosters a more comprehensive view of the needs and challenges that the Finnish society might face in the future. The findings from the different research activities have been directly linked to the government plan for analysis, assessment and research, which has provided a source of data for decision-making by ministries and the government.
>
> Sources: Government of Finland (n.d.[25]), *Government Working Group for the Coordination of Research, Foresight and Assessment activities*, https://tietokayttoon.fi/en/government-working-group-for-the-coordination-of-research-foresight-and-assessment-activities; Pellini, A. (n.d.[26]), "Making research evidence count: Insights from Finland's Policy Analysis Unit", https://odi.org/en/insights/making-research-evidence-count-insights-from-finlands-policy-analysis-unit/.

Fostering public sector integrity, openness and public participation

Public integrity is one of the determinants of trust in the government (OECD, 2022[27]). CoGs have an important responsibility when it comes to fostering public integrity. They are well placed to co-ordinate and/or contribute to the development and mainstreaming of integrity frameworks for decision-making. CoGs can also help set clear standards, proportionate sanctions and effective procedures to help prevent violations of public integrity and identify and manage actual, perceived and/or potential conflicts of interest (OECD, 2017[28]). CoGs can also encourage public integrity within the public administration by building knowledge, skills and commitment to public integrity amongst public officials. Providing sufficient information and training, including guidelines and consultation mechanisms, is key to fostering a culture of integrity in the administration (OECD, 2020[29]).

CoGs can improve access to information, promote open government and ensure effective oversight mechanisms across the administration (OECD, 2022[30]). CoGs, therefore, have an important role in promoting public participation in decision-making. For example, in Latvia, the CoG plays an important role in raising awareness about the importance of public participation to ensure meaningful and proactive citizen involvement in policy. The CoG systematically reviews draft legal acts for citizen inclusion, aligning with the 2024 *Guidelines for Ensuring Public Participation in Public Administration,* and will offer an e-course on this in 2024.

Box 4.11. Assigning responsibility for public integrity to a central government body

Countries may place core responsibilities for integrity with a central government body, whereas others will make this the responsibility of an independent or autonomous body. Regardless of structure, counties should ensure that the institutional actors have the appropriate level of authority.

United Kingdom

The Joint Anti-Corruption Unit is in the Cabinet Office and is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the UK Anti-Corruption Strategy and supporting the Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption Champion. The UK 2017-22 Anti-Corruption Strategy was developed through extensive cross-government discussion led by the Joint Anti-Corruption Unit.

Peru

The Secretariat of Public Integrity (*Secretaria de Integridad Pública*) is in the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and is responsible for governing integrity policies in Peru. Created in April 2018 by Supreme Decree 042-2018-PCM, it is the technical body in charge of conducting and supervising compliance with the National Policy of Integrity and Fight against Corruption at both the national and subnational levels, as well as of developing mechanisms and instruments to prevent and manage the risks of corruption. It is also responsible for proposing, co-ordinating, conducting, directing, supervising and evaluating policies, plans and strategies concerning integrity and public ethics. As governing entity for integrity, the Secretariat of Public Integrity provides advice, guidance and rules.

Australia

Promoting integrity is a key part of Australia's public sector reforms run by the CoG. It underpins the trust of the Australian public, who rely on the CoG to serve their interests and deliver the best outcomes for Australia. The Secretaries Board (comprised of all heads of agencies) is committed to promoting a pro-integrity culture where all staff feel confident to contribute ideas, provide frank and independent advice and report mistakes. In this spirit, the Secretaries Board set up the APS Integrity Taskforce. Australia has embedded integrity principles into the senior executive performance and leadership frameworks. Additionally, Australia is establishing an independent National Anti-Corruption Commission.

Sources: OECD (2021[31]), *Integrity in the Peruvian Regions: Implementing the Integrity System*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ceba1186-en; OECD (2020[29]), *OECD Public Integrity Handbook*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ac8ed8e8-en; Australian Government (2023[32]), "The Fraud Rule is changing", https://www.counterfraud.gov.au/news/general-news/fraud-rule-changing (accessed on 1 December 2023).

Decision-making with integrity is done through a skilled and professional workforce, including in their use of public service values and standards of integrity in day-to-day actions. Box 4.12 presents the case of the Australian Public Service Commission, an agency in Australia's CoG that plays a crucial role in stewarding the performance of the public service workforce and promoting integrity.

> **Box 4.12. Fostering the right skills for decision-making across the administration**
>
> **The Australian Public Service Commission**
>
> The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) is an agency under the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet responsible for strengthening the capabilities of the Australian Public Service workforce. Given the need for more agile working methods and the fast-paced context in which governments are operating, the APSC is working on future-proofing the Australian public service through the commission's strategic planning via four priorities: support quality public service workforce management, build leadership for the future, lift public service capability and foster trust and integrity.
>
> Within the APSC, the Integrity Agencies Group (IAG) works to ensure integrity is at the centre of public sector work. The IAG meets twice a year and leads co-ordination and promotion of integrity by identifying existing gaps, sharing information, engaging with major reform initiatives by providing guidance on modern integrity practices and promoting integrity frameworks such as complaint resolution and auditing. The APSC's location in the CoG places it in a position to disseminate good practices and foster the development of a high-quality workforce throughout the Australian administration.
>
> Sources: Australian Government (2023[33]), *Australian Public Service Commission*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/ (accessed on 6 June 2023); APSC (2019[34]), *The Australian Public Service Commission: Capability Review and Strategy for the Future*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/australian_public_service_commission_-_capability_review_and_future_strategy.pdf (accessed on 9 June 2023).

4. Common challenges and enablers

Through a synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants of the OECD informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified.

Common challenges

- The CoG's role in driving good decision-making in cabinet and government meetings may be more challenging in times of a coalition government and polarisation. This may require the CoG to adapt approaches by focusing more on central co-ordination, building relations and mediation.

- The CoG must also balance its role as gatekeeper and process manager of agenda setting and screening cabinet items, ensuring the necessary flexibility to promote agile decision-making. The CoG must maintain good relationships and a sound understanding of line ministry issues and contexts to be able to, if necessary, adapt timelines or agendas to respond to a rapidly evolving environment.

- Collecting data in simple formats under short timelines while ensuring reliability and quality can be challenging. At the current juncture, with increasingly complex and pressing horizontal issues, the CoG must develop clear and constant communication channels with knowledge producers and diverse stakeholders.

- CoGs may find it initially challenging to embed good practices on regulation or risk-based approaches in the daily work of decision-makers. In the CoG's close position to the highest political level, it can leverage political leadership from the highest level to generate support.

- CoG experiences note that a careful balance is required when dealing with the major policy facing government, such as trust, polarisation and democracy.

Key enablers

- The CoG can play an important role in embedding a culture of evidence-informed decision-making. Systematically ensuring that proposals are informed by evidence can be a key enabler for better public outcomes. CoGs need to have a good grasp of the overall ambitions of the government and the external operating environment to guide good decision-making practices.
- The CoG's role in promoting and co-ordinating the use of better practices regarding regulation, risk or public integrity can be strengthened by the availability of guidance and capacity-building materials to facilitate the adoption of these practices.
- Clearly defined procedures, roles, responsibilities and instruments are useful elements to build consensus on the requirements and preparations of cabinet meetings.
- Formal and informal spaces to exchange and discuss potential policies can build consensus in the cabinet and help ensure that proposals take into consideration their potential impacts.
- Identifying key information flows and sources can facilitate the use of evidence in decision-making. Strengthening the data governance ecosystem, including the role of the CoG as a knowledge broker, can increase the availability of timely and high-quality data.
- As CoGs play a greater role in guiding good decision-making practices, levers such as setting standards and guidelines, training, new structures or mandates and shifting culture are key.
- CoGs need to have the right skills to support the greater collaboration, negotiation and potential arbitration that current government contexts demand.

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5 Monitoring and enhancing performance

This chapter discusses the role that the centre of government (CoG) plays in monitoring, an essential part to understanding progress in government action and decision-making. First, the CoG plays a role in undertaking monitoring functions directly and guiding good monitoring practices across the public administration. The chapter discusses the monitoring processes undertaken by the CoG and the legal and institutional frameworks which enable this. It then focuses on CoG stewardship of good monitoring practices across government, using practical cases relating to national goals, satisfaction with government services and risk. Finally, it discusses embedding good monitoring practices as part of a performance-based culture providing standards and guidance, promoting the use of digital tools and presenting performance information to decision-makers.

Key messages

- Effective monitoring enables governments to understand the current state, progress and potential risks in decision-making support. Centres of government (CoGs) often undertake direct monitoring activities while also guiding good practices across the public administration.
- Clear roles and mandates around monitoring are important, given that this area can add tensions between the centre and line ministries. Additionally, data collection and sharing agreements, processes and mechanisms need to be considered.
- In many OECD countries, CoGs foster the use of performance information by encouraging the development of structured work routines, standardisation of tools and guidance.
- Introducing new ways of presenting the information to high-level decision-makers, enhancing capacities and fostering trust can help to consolidate a performance-based culture.
- Given the complexity of policy issues, CoGs also need to consider what and how to monitor in uncertain contexts. This also requires CoGs to foster learning and adaptation and consider how information is provided to people closest to the issues rather than just senior officials.
- Additional considerations include ensuring the right skills in the CoG, using political messaging to foster a performance and learning culture, and ensuring monitoring activities are designed as part of the overall policymaking and governance system.

1. Introduction

The increasing complexity of policymaking and sustained pressure to deliver policy results and impacts has resulted in CoGs taking a greater role in monitoring performance: 19 out of 26 CoGs responded that monitoring whole-of-government performance was their top or significant priority function (see Figure 5.1). Monitoring performance refers to the ongoing and systemic collection and analysis of data on indicators to provide policymakers and stakeholders with information on the progress of commitments. This differs from policy evaluations, which are structured and evidence-based assessments of the design, implementation and/or results of a planned, ongoing or completed public intervention (OECD, 2022[1]).

Governments can monitor policy implementation and key performance indicators attached to policies or priorities, cross-cutting policy challenges, the quality of their service delivery, citizen trust and public satisfaction as well as public sector performance and reform implementation. Monitoring performance can help meet accountability requirements, for example, by communicating to stakeholders the impact of the use of public funds.

Figure 5.1. Priority of monitoring whole-of-government performance for the CoG

Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "How much of a priority are the following functions in the CoG? [Monitoring whole-of-government performance]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

This chapter will explore the CoG's role as a guide of monitoring and enhancing performance through the following structure:

- Institutional setups and frameworks for monitoring performance.
- The centre's stewardship of monitoring and enhancing performance.
- Guiding good monitoring practices and a performance-based culture.

2. Institutional setups and frameworks for monitoring performance

CoG structures for monitoring performance

CoGs use different institutional setups and structures to monitor government performance. Central finance or planning ministries, the prime minister's office or ministries of public sector reform (depending on the scope and topic of what is being monitored) can be responsible for central monitoring.

Recently, some CoGs have established specific delivery units within their system. Delivery units usually sit in the prime minister's office and comprise small teams that report directly to the most senior decision-makers, such as the cabinet, the prime minister or the president. They usually focus on enabling the achievement of top government priorities by further aggregating sector-specific information.

These dedicated units can be found in both OECD and non-OECD countries, as is the case with the Results and Delivery Unit in Canada (Box 5.1), France's new delivery unit, the Government Delivery Unit under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in Peru and the United Kingdom Prime Minister's Delivery Unit.

Box 5.1. The Results and Delivery Unit in Canada

As of 2015, the Government of Canada introduced publicly available ministerial mandate letters, which outline the objectives that each minister will work to accomplish as well as the pressing challenges they will address in their respective role. The Results and Delivery Unit (RDU) at the Privy Council Office was created, in large part, to oversee and support the implementation of the government's key commitments, as well as advocate for and facilitate greater use of disaggregated data.

The RDU's work primarily centres on four key elements:

- Leveraging data to help convey meaningful narratives and support evidence-based decision-making.
- Systematically measuring progress via performance indicators toward desired outcomes that help demonstrate results for Canadians.
- Clearly defining programme and policy objectives.
- Supporting work in policy prioritisation and optimising implementation and resource allocation for results.

The methodology followed by the RDU aims to answer three underlying questions:

- What are you trying to achieve?
- How will goals be achieved?
- Are desired results being achieved and how will adjustments be made if not?

The RDU provides oversight and co-ordination to keep focus on top government priorities, monitor progress and recalibrate efforts as warranted.

Source: Government of Canada (2018[3]), *The Mandate Letter Tracker and the Results and Delivery Approach*, https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/results-delivery-unit.html (accessed on 16 June 2023).

Institutional or legal frameworks

CoGs can monitor performance and support good practices around monitoring activities, data and evidence and the use of monitoring information for decision-making. In some countries, this is embedded in legal documents or frameworks. This promotes clarity of roles and a coherent mandate, particularly given a COG's monitoring role can create demands on ministries.

Embedding monitoring in legal or institutional frameworks can enhance continuity following changes in the government, ensure clarity of roles and boost the uptake of monitoring practices by civil servants by integrating monitoring activities in the policy cycle. Strong frameworks can also ensure that a common understanding of the data which establishes progress is accepted by key stakeholders (Shostak et al., 2023[4]).The frameworks countries use to underpin monitoring can take various forms. Some countries emphasise monitoring of their government-wide strategies, while other countries focus on monitoring well-being goals or may use only guidelines or secondary legislation as a basis for that. At times, legal frameworks are supported by secondary documents, for example guidelines, to support standardisation and promotion of good practices (see section on fostering a performance culture for more information).

Given that the underpinning rationale for monitoring public policies differs among countries, so does the approach towards institutionalisation. The legal framework for performance information in the United States (Box 5.2) offers a good example of a whole-of-government approach towards the use of performance information established by introducing a strong legal and institutional framework within the federal government and the agencies that are resilient in response to changes in leadership.

> **Box 5.2. Frameworks to promote the use of performance information in the United States**
>
> The 2010 Government Performance Results and Modernization Act (GPRAMA) introduced a set of rules, procedures and routines for setting federal and agency objectives, monitoring implementation and achievements and performance reporting. The GPRAMA identifies the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as the custodian of this process and provides it with steering, co-ordination and quality control functions across all phases of the policy cycle. In doing so, the GPRAMA establishes a legal and institutional framework for performance information:
>
> - The OMB co-ordinates with agencies to develop the Federal Government Performance Plan, which sets performance goals and defines the level of performance to be achieved at the federal level. In this regard, the OMB also verifies compliance with the quality standards (related to both federal and agency performance plans) and ensures that all mandatory information is concurrently made publicly available and updated periodically.
>
> - The OMB works with the lead government official and officials from the agencies, organisations and programme activities that contribute to the accomplishment of each federal government priority goal to review the progress achieved during the most recent quarter, overall trend data and the likelihood of meeting the planned level of performance. It assesses whether agencies, organisations, programme activities, regulations, tax expenditures, policies and other activities are contributing as planned to each federal government priority goal. Moreover, it categorises the federal government's priority goals by risk of not achieving the planned level of performance. For the federal government, priority goals at the greatest risk of not meeting the planned level of performance identify prospects and strategies for performance improvement. The OMB reports on unmet goals to the head of each agency, parliamentary committees and the Government Accountability Office. In return, the head of each agency that has not met performance expectations has to prepare a Performance Improvement Plan addressing the OMB's recommendations.
>
> - The GPRAMA also contributes to transparency by providing clear rules related to the publication of agencies and the federal government's performance. In this regard, the head of each agency makes information about each agency's priority goal available to the OMB for publication on the website. Based on the quality criteria and content requirements provided by the GPRAMA, the OMB issues guidance to agencies on providing concise and timely performance information for publication. The OMB ensures that such information is provided in a way that presents a coherent picture of all federal programmes, the performance of the federal government as a whole, as well as individual agencies. The OMB ensures the effective operation of the single performance website and its quarterly update.
>
> - Finally, in relation to each federal performance goal, the GPRAMA organises quarterly data-driven meetings for the director of the OMB, with the support of the Performance Improvement Council, to discuss the achieved progress, overall trend data and the likelihood of meeting the planned level of performance.
>
> Moreover, the 2018 Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act strengthens the legal framework for using evidence in policymaking. The act allows the OMB to play a key role in improving data use in the federal agencies' decision-making. The act requires agency data to be accessible and agencies to develop statistical evidence for supporting policymaking.
>
> Sources: United States Congress (2010[5]), *GPRA Modernization Act of 2010*, https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ352/PLAW-111publ352.pdf (accessed on 6 September 2023); United States Congress (2018[6]), *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018*, https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ435/PLAW-115publ435.pdf (accessed on 6 September 2023).

3. The centre's stewardship of monitoring and enhancing performance

Stewarding good decision-making on government performance lies at the heart of the CoGs' role. Governments use the CoGs central positioning to ensure the highest political advocacy for monitoring key priorities or cross-cutting policies. They undertake different monitoring activities, including:

- Monitoring progress towards reaching national goals or policy implementation.
- Monitoring the satisfaction or experience of government services.
- Monitoring risks, internal government processes and reforms.

Monitoring progress towards reaching national goals or policy implementation

CoGs often play a role in monitoring overarching national goals or plans, or specific priority policies or sectoral initiatives: for example, France's central delivery unit monitors key societal and climate issues and the Australian Prime Minister's Office monitors top national strategies). CoGs have the advantage of being able to use their central positioning and political will to use performance information to support the highest level of decision-making. By establishing a robust monitoring system, CoGs influence decisions such as removing obstacles to implementation or modifying programme parameters or resource allocations (OECD, 2021[7]). For example, in Poland, the Government Project Monitoring Office (an internal body of the PMO), monitors important projects including selected public policies. It serves the Council for monitoring the portfolio of strategic projects (a subsidiary governmental body). Box 5.3 also outlines an example of how the Latvian CoG has established a monitoring system for the national development plan and specific priorities, and uses this to inform decision-making.

Box 5.3. Monitoring national development policies from the centre in Latvia

Latvia aimed to create a flexible and measurable monitoring framework to connect policy planning with the country's longer-term vision. The objective of the system is to monitor and maintain sector-specific priorities and budget alignment with national development priorities.

State policy planning framework manages, adjusts and monitors the different levels of policy planning documents, changes in political actors (governments) and their priorities. It includes managing long-term development plans, the government's medium- to short-term action plans and sector plans.

At defined periods, line ministries report to the CoG on the progress of the plans and explain the implementation of tasks that have not been sufficiently achieved. The existing system is flexible, as it provides continuity for national long-term development; meanwhile, if political actors change, it allows revision of adopted long-term development planning documents and offers new solutions.

Additionally, the Government Project Monitoring Office, an internal body in the Prime Minister's Office, also serves an important monitoring function. This office monitors selected public policies and serves as an important source of information for the Latvian Central Council on its portfolio of specific strategic projects.

Source: Information provided by representatives from the State Chancellery of Latvia.

In undertaking its monitoring activities, one-way CoGs attempt to standardise and systemise information gathering is through data routines, which are processes through which data are collected and disseminated according to a set rhythm. Routines are widely seen as a crucial success factor in promoting the use and value of performance information and in operations between the CoG and line ministries. They also add stability and predictability in an environment that is often defined by rapid change and a pressing need to

deliver. Concretely, they give decision-makers a good overview of the state of play, facilitating the identification of areas that need intervention. For example, in Spain and the United Kingdom (Box 5.4), there is a fixed routine for collecting information on the status of policy priorities at the central level.

Box 5.4. Data routines for monitoring priorities in Spain and the United Kingdom

Monthly and six-monthly state of affairs presented to the prime minister in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom introduced data reporting routines at the heart of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, which provides the rhythm for the unit's work. There are two reporting routines to the prime minister: monthly delivery notes and six-monthly delivery reports.

- The monthly delivery notes summarise the progress for each of the prime minister's priorities. They highlight the main issues encountered in a short and data-driven fashion and describe what is planned. Where necessary, some notes can be even more frequent.

- Six-monthly delivery reports are designed to be a comprehensive assessment of the state of play for all of the prime minister's priority areas in a given department. They are written by the head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, addressed to the prime minister and copied to the secretary of state and lead officials. The drafts are usually first discussed with the lead officials. Each priority's delivery report is just one page and is intended to:
  o Report progress against trajectories for the priority.
  o Outline what success looked like for the priority over the next six months.
  o Determine the best path forward and identify key actions that need to be taken.
  o Reveal areas of disagreement between the delivery unit and the lead department.

Management of public policy indicators, monthly report, Spain

After the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the CoG wanted to assess the impact of the government's social and economic measures to protect the Spanish economy and their citizens (Social Shield).

Therefore, starting in October 2021, the Department of Public Policies, within the CoG, designed a monthly data report containing indicators to measure the improvements or setbacks in three different areas: social welfare, the economic situation and environmental sustainability. Each of the three areas are composed by various indicators and four units in the Department of Public Policies follow up on these indicators.

The indicators were selected according to the main areas of government action. Additionally, they should be related to the daily life of citizens or companies and be easy to communicate. In the current version of the report, we are using 35 indicators, with a total extension of 80 pages.

This report is a dynamic and flexible tool to which new data can be added (i.e. after implementing a new policy, adopting new measures or if a new problem arises or disappears). Furthermore, it is connected to Microsoft's interactive data visualisation software product Power BI, which provides a wide range of options for presenting and filtering information.

Source: Institute for Governance (2015[8]), *Adapting the PMDU Model: The Creation of a Delivery Unit by Haringey Council, London*; Information provided by representatives from the Spanish Ministry of Presidency, Relationship with the Courts and Democratic Memory of Spain.

Data-driven review meetings can also be used by CoGs to involve stakeholders in monitoring. These are a strategic tool to monitor and improve the performance of policies and institutions and are characterised by their structured format that focuses on frequency and regularity. Whereas data are, of course, the main topic of discussion, the context and broader information that cannot be easily quantified are also important. Data-driven review meetings highlight the need to make sense of the data and for continuous learning. Box 5.5 outlines an example from the United States.

Box 5.5. Data-driven review meetings in the United States

The 2010 GPRAMA introduced the need for quarterly review meetings on each long-term federal government priority. These review meetings discuss data on the progress achieved during the most recent quarter, overall trend data, the likelihood of meeting goals and the planned level of performance against quarterly targets and milestones.

The federal government priority goals are categorised according to their risk of not achieving their planned level of performance. For those federal government priority goals that have the greatest risk of not meeting their planned level of performance, review meetings allow for the identification of prospects and strategies for performance improvement, including any required changes to agencies, organisations, programmes activities, regulations, tax expenditures, policies or other activities. Accuracy and reliability of the data used to measure progress towards achieving the priority goal are also discussed.

These meetings are organised by the director of the Office of Management and Budget with the support of the Performance Improvement Council. Meetings include officials from the agencies, organisations and programme activities that contribute to the accomplishment of each federal government priority goal.

Since then, agencies have started to organise regularly scheduled, structured and rigorously prepared data-driven meetings to review performance indicators with department or programme personnel. According to the US Government Accountability Office, to engage in data-driven reviews, it is necessary that programmes have identified their strategic priorities, that there is authentic leadership support to engage in the process and that programmes have the capacity to gather and synthesise data related to those priorities. On the latter, though, several agencies are able to produce data-rich analyses that identify trends and potential performance issues. Performance improvement officers reported that having accurate, timely and useful data available remains a major challenge.

Sources: United States Congress (2010[5]), *GPRA Modernization Act of 2010*, https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ352/PLAW-111publ352.pdf (accessed on 6 September 2023); United States Congress (2018[6]), *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018*, https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ435/PLAW-115publ435.pdf (accessed on 6 September 2023).

Several countries, such as Finland, Iceland, New Zealand and Wales (United Kingdom), have adopted well-being indicators. Given the cross-cutting nature of well-being approaches, these countries leverage the central positioning of the CoG for monitoring. Box 5.6 outlines Iceland's and New Zealand's monitoring from the centre of their overall well-being indicators as part of their national goals.

Box 5.6. Monitoring well-being from the centre

Advancing well-being in Iceland: A path to sustainable development and equity

In 2019, Iceland launched the national framework of indicators to measure well-being and sustainability, which supported the idea of a well-being economy as a key theme for guiding strategic decision-making at the ministerial level. The CoG developed 6 well-being priorities in collaboration with key partners and defined 39 indicators to monitor their implementation. Additionally, the CoG (including the Ministry of Finance) play a role in:

- Ensuring that the 50-year fiscal strategy has an updated section on well-being.
- Guaranteeing that ministries reflect their well-being-related policies in the strategy.
- Ensuring that policy objectives of all 35 portfolios are aligned with the national objectives

Moreover, the office of national statistics gathers and publishes data on the progress of the indicators. In general, the environment around well-being issues is built on a strong dataset. The priorities vary, are complex and require a horizontal approach across levels of government, including the private and non-profit sectors. Hence, there is a need for a long-term view, despite some of the issues the indicators are measuring requiring immediate attention.

Embracing a well-being policy approach in Iceland prioritises societal well-being, addresses cost of living challenges, fosters sustainable development and enhances collaboration for a thriving and equitable future.

The New Zealand Living Standards Framework as a performance routine that contributes to well-being

The Treasury has iteratively developed its Living Standards Framework over three versions, in 2011, 2018 and 2021. The framework reflects the Treasury's understanding of how a high-performing economy should be understood. A high-performing economy is one that combines resources productively by dynamically shifting resources and adopting the latest innovations, distributes the benefits of economic production equitably across people and over time, sustains the means of economic production for the use of future generations, and builds resilience to stresses and shocks. Treasury uses this framework to analyse strengths and weaknesses in the New Zealand economy, to inform its strategic advice to Government. It also uses this framework to ensure its policy advice considers any tensions or potential synergies between these economic objectives.

Associated with the LSF, the CoG also developed the LSF dashboard, which is a measurement tool that provides a range of indicators for well-being outcomes that the Treasury believes are most important to inform New Zealand well-being reporting and treasury policy advice on cross-government well-being priorities. The Treasury updates data in the LSF dashboard every six months (around April and October) to support ongoing well-being reporting.

Sources: Government of Iceland (2019[9]), *Indicators for Measuring Well-being*, https://www.government.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=fc981010-da09-11e9-944d-005056bc4d74 (accessed on 6 September 2023); OECD (n.d.[10]), *OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE)*, https://www.oecd.org/wise/ (accessed on 6 September 2023); New Zealand Government (2022[11]), *Our Living Standards Framework*, https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/our-living-standards-framework (accessed on 6 September 2023).

Some CoGs use non-traditional forms of monitoring and data sources for monitoring the progress and impact of policies, as is the case in Canada (Box 5.7).

Box 5.7. Using non-traditional data sources and monitoring approaches in Canada

The Impact and Innovation Unit (IIU) in the central Privy Council Office was established to address identifiable gaps between policy intent and effective policy implementation. The IIU applies methods such as outcome-based funding through Impact Canada Challenges, which aim to improve socio-economic and environmental outcomes for Canadians through challenges in priority areas, including public health, housing and infrastructure, clean technology and climate action, agriculture and food and space-based technologies.

Impact Canada Challenges deploy programme funding through an open innovation approach (stage-gated competitions) designed to crowd in solutions from a broad range of actors, including businesses, academics, individuals, not-for-profit and Indigenous organisations. By mobilising talent from non-traditional actors in a sector, including underrepresented groups, the IIU aims to expand the government's problem-solving skills. Challenges are outcome-based tools that provide financial and non-financial support to innovators if they can measurably improve on a given outcome. Impact Canada monitors challenges and this contributes to evidence-based decisions to advance key policy priorities. For Impact Canada Challenges, prioritising resources and a strategy for impact measurement that is both rigorous in methodology and able to adapt to measure outcomes is important.

A key factor that has contributed to the success of these approaches is strong collaborative partnerships with organisations contributing analytical and statistical expertise, including the national statistics agency Statistics Canada and academic institutions like the University of British Columbia. The IIU's approach to monitoring and measurement has generated robust evidence that suggests that Impact Canada Challenges successfully increased awareness of problem areas, mobilise new talent, can increase capacity and investments for their participants. These results conclude that employing Impact Canada Challenges in the right policy areas leads to better outcomes.

Source: Information provided by representatives from the government of Canada.

Monitoring the satisfaction or experience of government services

Another aspect that CoGs can monitor is the delivery of services by different ministries, agencies and departments. Some countries have established units or teams in the CoG with the objective of monitoring and steering the delivery of public services for citizens and other users (Baredes, 2022[12]). The CoG's position can send a message that public service delivery is of utmost importance and can promote consistent delivery standards across the administration. At times, monitoring government services focuses on efficiency or other performance measures. In CoGs, these more frequently focus on the satisfaction or experiences of citizens with government services. Box 5.8 presents the case of Norway, where the CoG monitors and has recently evolved its approach to monitoring citizen satisfaction, as well as an example of how Australia collects citizen experience data from the centre.

Monitoring risks, internal government processes and reforms

CoGs also play a key role in monitoring broader issues, such as risk and internal performance or reforms. In some jurisdictions (for example, in Australia and Ireland), CoGs monitor the implementation of internal reforms. The OECD survey (2023[2]) noted that 50% of CoGs monitor the administration reform progress. For more details on CoGs and public administration reforms, please refer to Chapter 6.

Additionally, the data gathered through monitoring routines can also contribute towards effective risk management. The review of critical risks from the CoG is becoming more widespread, including after the recent COVID-19 crisis. According to data from the survey, 58% of countries have faced an expansion in

their tasks on this topic. Monitoring potential risks is a crucial element to ensure that administrations are making decisions that are proportional to the potential impacts.

One example of this includes the United Kingdom's National Situation Centre, located in the central Cabinet Office. This situation centre was born out of the COVID-19 crisis, highlighting the importance of high-quality data in assessing risk and making better decisions (see Chapter 4). In Poland as well, the Government Project Monitoring Office in the PMO conducts, standardizes, and popularizes project management methods in government administration.

Overall, monitoring of information is key for decision-making leading to better government outcomes. CoGs traditionally support cabinet decision-making processes and the use of monitoring information is a key input for supporting the cabinet. This topic is further discussed in Chapter 4.

4. Guiding good monitoring practices and a performance-based culture

Embedding the use of monitoring and performance information in the administration requires the right overall culture. By promoting a monitoring culture that values data-informed decision-making, CoGs can support a public administration where monitoring activities are a valuable input into day-to-day activities and decision-making. CoGs can foster a good monitoring culture by providing standards and guidance, overseeing the quality of monitoring processes, and promoting digital tools and new ways of presenting information to decision-makers. Further, central public service commissions can help shape a learning culture, which is important when monitoring complex policies that require adaptation.

Countries have identified the support and engagement from political leaders as one of the critical success factors for the sustainability of monitoring activities. Given that the primary customers for performance information at the CoG are high-level decision-makers, it is important that they see value in the collection and use of data. Additionally, it is key that civil servants across the administration also perceive the benefits of adopting monitoring activities to enhance public sector performance.

Providing standards or guidance

CoGs provide frameworks, standards and guidance on overarching monitoring approaches, specifically for collecting and/or sharing data for monitoring purposes. Setting standards for data sharing with private sector entities, academic institutions and international organisations can expand the range of data sources available for monitoring efforts. The CoG can develop and promote these standards and guidelines for the entire public administration (OECD, 2022[15]), for example through the central Data Commissioner in Australia. Australia has also established an initiative to "embed evaluation into everyday practice", providing tools, guidance and training to support better decision-making (Australian Government, 2023[16]).

Guidelines can further help adoption and consistent practices that conform to standards. In many OECD countries, written guidelines, manuals or toolkits are used. For instance, in the United States, several guides and notes support the organisation of data-driven review meetings (Harry and Davies, 2011[17]). In the United Kingdom, the Green Book, issued by HM Treasury, provides guidance on how to appraise policies, programmes and projects from a cost-benefit perspective (UK Government, 2022[18]). It also provides guidance on the design and use of monitoring frameworks before, during and after implementation and how to assess the extent to which expected benefits materialised.

Promoting the use of digital tools

In recent years, governments have introduced the use of digital tools for monitoring purposes. Digitalisation allows data to be more easily collected, shared and analysed. It can also support monitoring by allowing for real-time data and instant analysis, publicity or dissemination of information and good opportunities for

data visualisation to better present the data. Most recently, the CoGs in France, Spain, the United Kingdom in general and Scotland in particular have introduced digital platforms for monitoring performance (Box 5.9).

Box 5.9. Utilising digital tools for monitoring and enhancing performance

Next Generation platforms for performance information in the United Kingdom

In 2019, the CoG in the United Kingdom started moving towards real-time performance tracking. Triggered by the preparation of Brexit and sped up by the COVID-19 pandemic, the new dashboard, called Government Performance App, was extended to the top 200 and top 35 government priorities.

The Government Performance App is managed by the Cabinet Office and the HM Treasury and fed by the different departments leading the government priority projects. Consistent with standard operational procedures, every four weeks at least, lead departments are requested to co-ordinate with "contributing" departments and agencies and regularly provide the CoG with information on progress against milestones and deliverables and on major concerns. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit has full access to information. Focusing on a limited number of key policies can get a structured situational overview of progress on the overall government portfolio and inform decision-making.

French barometers of public action results and public services

The French Minister of Transformation and Public Service launched the *Baromètre des résultats de l'action publique* or barometer of public action results. Responsible for co-ordinating the monitoring of all priority government reforms, the CoG (DIPT) was fully mobilised to design and deploy this barometer. The objective was to enable French citizens to measure and be aware of the progress of these public policies in their daily lives.

The barometer displays the status and the concrete results of 25 priority reforms carried out by the government. These cover eight essential dimensions of everyday life for citizens. With quantified data, the barometer presented the state of implementation in 2020 and the government's target for 2022 for each policy. The barometer is updated regularly and enriched with new policies so that French citizens can measure the progress of government action. France is also carrying out a regular barometer (survey) of citizens, called the Baromètre Delouvrier, on their satisfaction with key life events.

Public Performance reporting in Scotland, United Kingdom

In Scotland, the Performance, Delivery and Resilience Directorate (PDRD) under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office provides the central function of co-ordination and support for performance, delivery and resilience activity across government and ensures that the organisation monitors and responds well to a range of concurrent risks. Within its mandate, the PDRD monitors achievements against the government priorities "11 National Outcomes" and makes these data public through an online portal.

The portal is frequently updated and provides detailed information against the targets set for each national indicator. It is possible to download data underlying the National Performance Framework Indicators.

Accountability unit within the president's office in Spain

As has been the case in Spain in recent years, the formation of coalition governments requires greater monitoring and accountability efforts to guarantee the fulfilment of the government's promises through its programme. As such, at the beginning of the previous government, a unit (Accountability Unit) was created in the CoG to monitor the government's programme. A report on the progress and achievement of the government's commitments is made public every six months. An information technology (IT) tool

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was created for this, with a series of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based) indicators, which has been a key success factor as it has been fully adapted to monitoring the government action plan. The IT tool must be appropriate to the monitoring programme and, in addition, emphasis must be placed on the publicity and transparency of the information, making it possible for the tool to easily upload the information to the official website of the cabinet.

Sources: UK Government (2023[19]), *Project Delivery: Guidance - The Role of the Senior Responsible Owner*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1158010/2023-04-11-V2-AFIGT-The-role-of-the-senior-responsible-owner-2.pdf (accessed on 6 September 2023); Government of France (2022[20]), *Baromètre Delouvrier of Public Services*, https://www.modernisation.gouv.fr/publications/22eme-edition-du-barometre-delouvrier-lopinion-des-francais-legard-de-leurs-services (accessed on 30 June 2023); Scottish Government (2023[21]), *National Performance Framework*, https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/ (accessed on 6 September 2023); Information provided by the representatives of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Government of Spain.

One point of interest from the examples is how governments can leverage publishing performance data to build trust. Results from the 2021 survey on drivers of trust in public institutions indicate a need to better disseminate results to citizens (OECD, 2022[22]). In addition to the use of digital tools and platforms for the collection and presentation of data, the latest developments in artificial intelligence can help governments in data analysis, a key topic discussed during the expert groups.

Presenting performance information to decision-makers and key stakeholders

The way monitoring information is best presented depends on the different target audiences. High-level decision-makers tend to have little time at their disposal and require access to evidence they can easily digest. It is, therefore, crucial to bring the right information in front of the right people at the right time. CoGs should share simple, results-focused and visual information if helpful.

Examples of how performance information can be presented to decision-makers in an easily digestible way are the common operating picture and action sheets introduced in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to their usefulness, these have now been adopted for general use within the cabinet and the Council of Ministers (Box 5.10).

An important consideration is to ensure that monitoring information is also provided to people closest to the problems and issues, such as citizens and stakeholders. This is important as they are often crucial actors in effecting change in complex policy areas and thus need to also be a part of the process.

Box 5.10. Action sheets and common operating pictures in Australia

Triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which required more thorough and frequent situation assessment, the CoG in Australia developed two standard performance information tools that, based on metrics, support high-level decision-makers in dealing with the complexity of the public policies under their responsibility.

The "action sheets" are meant to remind decision-makers what has already been done in a specific policy area. Sometimes they are just a list highlighting the main events or actions taken so far but, in doing so, offer a base for future work. An additional benefit is that their preparation forces interdepartmental meetings to take stock of what ministries are doing and what is really happening.

The "common operating picture" supports strategic decision-making. It integrates performance metrics across various departments and presents them in a traffic-light format to tell decision-makers clearly whether actions taken are producing the expected results or need adjustment.

While line ministries create the products, the CoG plays a major role in ensuring sufficient quality, consolidating robust routines and boosting their use. The CoG also created one general overview by pooling the various pictures into one weekly briefing for the prime minister.

The introduction of these new tools by the CoG represented a turning point in monitoring. Traditionally, performance metrics were released on an annual basis through vast reports. Instead, this new approach makes for a much more frequent release of information.

Source: Interview with officials of the government of Australia, Priorities and Delivery Unit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

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5. Common challenges and enablers

Through the synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants of the OECD informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified.

Common challenges

- Centralised monitoring requires openness and input from line ministries. A common challenge in obtaining performance information is that civil servants are hesitant to give information. This can be due to them being fearful of monitoring.

- CoGs can experience challenges when accessing performance information, as other organisations can withhold or compete for information. Clear roles and mandates and transparency of data ownership and use are important considerations.

- Fostering an effective monitoring system is not easy if the CoG does not have the right mandates and expertise. The OECD survey (2023[2]) shows that 65% of countries identify monitoring and evaluation skills as missing in the CoG. Many CoGs noted that data literacy is a key gap when it comes to monitoring.

- CoGs can face a trade-off between the quality of the information and the need to present information to decision-makers in real time.

Key enablers

- Utilising the right kind of political support and messaging can send a strong signal about the value of monitoring for enhancing outcomes. In this regard, it is important for the CoG to consider how to foster a safe-to-fail and learning culture to encourage meaningful and fully committed participation from public officials.

- Ensuring that performance information is tailored for the audience is important to ensure that it is used to inform good decision-making. Leveraging digital tools can be useful in this regard.

- Context and interpretation are just as important as the data, particularly for complex issues. In this context, CoGs can use mechanisms such as data reviews and participatory approaches to make sense of the data and collectively identify actions with the relevant stakeholders.

- Harnessing performance information to increase transparency and accountability towards citizens is seen to harness support and interest from stakeholders outside the administration. CoGs may want to consider what data they share and how they engage stakeholders in decisions.

- CoGs should consider holistic approaches to embedding a culture of data-informed decision-making and strengthening monitoring practices and capacities across the ministries. This should include a range of approaches and a strong focus on learning and adaptation.

- CoGs need to consider how to bring stakeholders and citizens into the monitoring process.

- Monitoring activities are part of the broader policy lifecycle and governing mechanisms; thus, any monitoring approaches should be designed with this in mind.

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6 Guiding high-performing public administrations from the centre

As stewards of the public administration, centres of government (CoGs) are often responsible for setting the tone and culture in the public sector, including through steering public administration reform (PAR) efforts. This is becoming increasingly important as governments worldwide seek to modernise their methods to better reflect the changing environment and citizens' needs. PARs are long-term and challenging and, as such, require good co-ordination and top-level buy-in. This chapter discusses the role that the CoG must play in PARs, including effective mechanisms, such as resource allocation, political prioritisation, monitoring, stakeholder consultation and communication, for doing so. PARs are context-specific and effective ones must be fit for purpose. Given this, this chapter provides specific practical examples of co-ordination efforts from the CoG in driving PARs, focusing on new or binding mechanisms, central management and steering, initiation and oversight, utilising existing guiding and co-ordination mechanisms and a focus on monitoring or management tools.

Key messages

- Governments are increasingly recognising the need to move away from traditional modes of governing as these are not fit for the complexity of the future. They are also increasingly interested in how to achieve successful public administration reform and modernisation.

- Centres of government (CoGs) act as stewards of the public administration, setting the tone and guiding good practices. Many CoGs are responsible for steering public administration reform (PAR) efforts. PARs require sound co-ordination and top-level buy-in given they are long-term and challenging.

- The research suggests that CoGs play a co-ordination role; however, the specifics of this vary greatly across countries and depend largely on their planning approaches for managing reforms. Thus, approaches to implementing PARs need to be fit for context.

- CoGs usually do not have full control or influence when it comes to delivering or implementing PARs. It is therefore important to consider clear directions on PAR, roles and responsibilities for the CoG and other agencies.

- Additional considerations for CoGs in steering PARs include political support that extends beyond election cycles (given PARs often require long-term efforts), communication of PARs to citizens and ensuring PARs are incorporated into planning and resource allocations.

1. Introduction

Governments face increasing pressure to work in new ways due to changing expectations from citizens, the need to address horizontal and cross-cutting issues and in response to multiple crises (OECD, 2023[1]). The current context calls for public administration modernisation to ensure that governments have the capacity and instruments required for the future. Nearly all OECD member countries are currently engaged in PAR, ranging from whole-of-government reforms to more focused initiatives such as the digital transformation of the public service. CoGs are instrumental in stewarding, operationalising and co-ordinating government agendas and in shaping the values and practices of public administration. No matter the focus, CoGs need to ensure cohesive and sustainable PAR efforts that result in sustained change (OECD, 2023[2]).

CoGs have recently recognised that this topic has become more challenging. This is because steering long-term reforms is difficult in an era of crises, geopolitical shifts and increasing expectations from citizens. While governments recognise that traditional modes of governing are no longer fit for purpose, there is no one clear path forward for governments to choose. Thus, CoGs' role in supporting direction setting and decisions on PARs can be difficult.

This chapter will explore the CoG's role in PARs through the following structure:

- The role of the CoG in PARs.
- Co-ordinating whole-of-government reforms from the centre.
- Guiding public sector innovation reform from the centre.
- Common challenges and enablers.

2. The role of the CoG in PARs

In almost half of countries (46%), PARs are a top or significant priority for the CoG (see Figure 6.1). As a steward of vision, strategy and cross-cutting and complex priorities, the CoG's task in the management of reform is to drive collective and cohesive action to achieve reform outcomes.

Figure 6.1. The importance of steering PAR for the centre
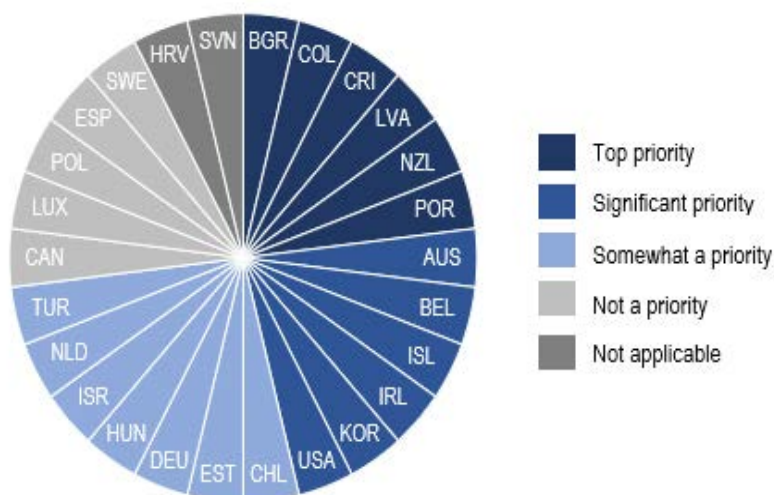
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "How much of a priority are the following functions in the CoG?".
Source: OECD (2023[3]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

The role of the CoG is reinforced in the OECD 2020 Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance, which highlights the capacity for whole-of-government co-ordination led from the centre as a key enabler of sound public governance (OECD, 2020[4]). A central authority (for example, the CoG) is also recognised as being critical to ensuring the coherent, integrated and multidimensional approach required for administration-wide change (OECD, 2023[5]).

The activities that CoGs carry out vary. Most CoGs support the implementation of reforms and provide advice or guidance to line ministries. Likewise, 58% of CoGs use their position to communicate across all government entities to promote reforms for public sector modernisation or innovation. CoGs, at times, have significant responsibilities in stewarding PARs, while in others, line ministries might have responsibilities related to designing and implementing reforms (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Activities undertaken by CoGs in relation to PARs
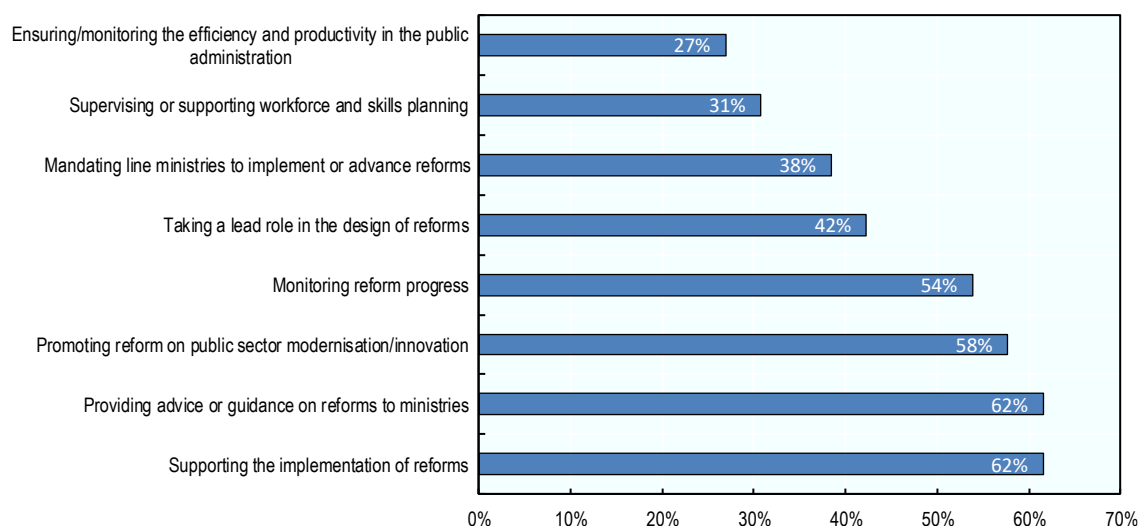
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What activities does the CoG do in PARs in your country?".
Source: OECD (2023[3]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Mechanisms for CoGs to effectively steward and guide PARs

For CoGs to effectively guide and support PARs, they need to consider appropriate institutional settings, co-ordination mechanisms and capacities. CoG feedback and the EU-OECD SIGMA initiative (OECD, 2023[5]) suggest that PARs are effectively implemented through the following five mechanisms, also detailed in Figure 6.3:

- PAR is acknowledged as a political priority and reflected in relevant political agendas and key planning documents. The objectives and measures of PAR also need to be linked and contribute to the overall government vision and priorities.
- Sufficient resources are allocated for the implementation of PARs, with support from the centre (this should include the required budget, information input and workforce).
- The planned reforms are effectively implemented and monitored by the CoG or by the public entity in charge of reporting lines and mechanisms to the CoG.
- All relevant stakeholders are regularly consulted and involved in PAR design, planning and monitoring (this includes government officials, relevant external stakeholders and citizens).
- PAR is effectively communicated and values of good public administration are promoted.

Figure 6.3. Five mechanisms for CoGs to effectively guide and support PARs
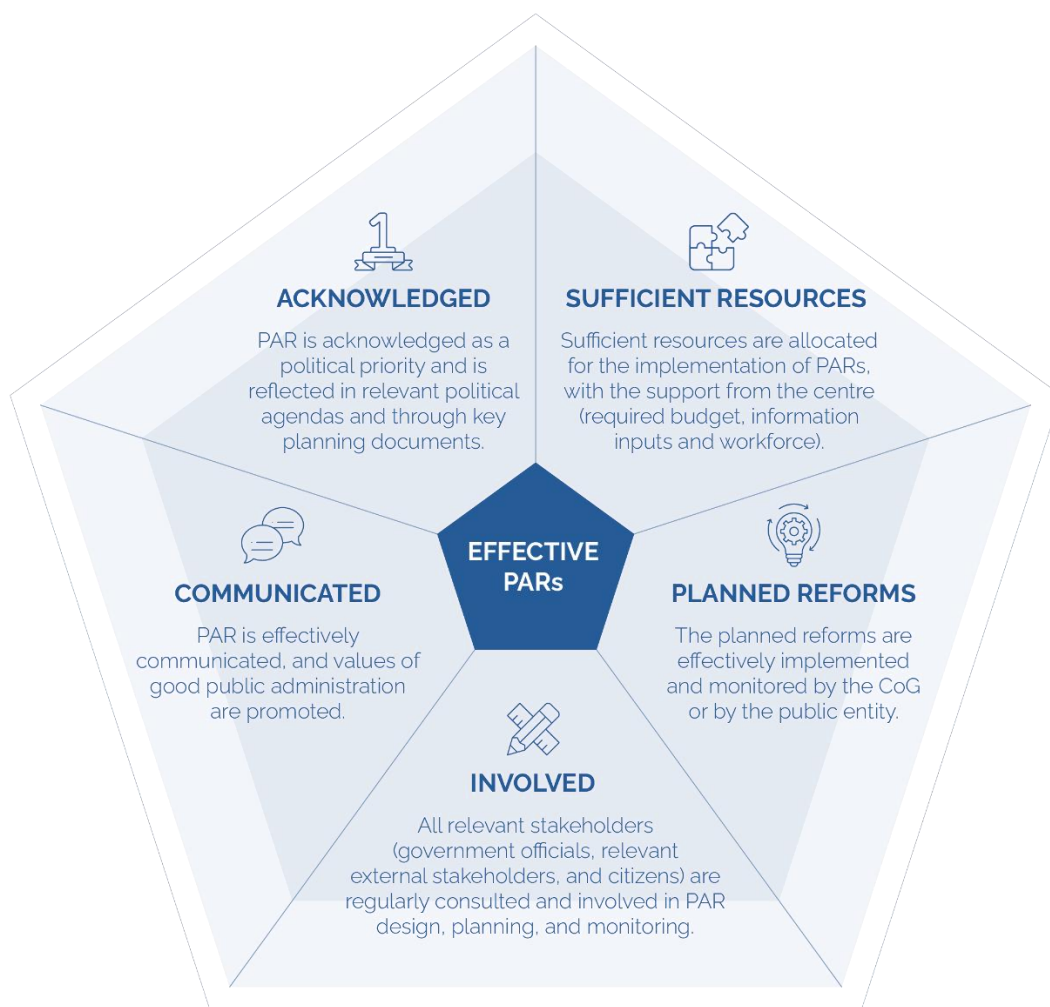
While governance arrangements on PARs vary across countries, the CoG can draw on these mechanisms to support directional setting, decision-making and co-ordination for PARs. These elements are discussed in the case studies below.

3. Co-ordinating whole-of-government reforms from the centre

Boxes 6.1-6.9 outline a range of practices from countries around the CoG in driving PAR. The following practices highlight CoGs' use of mechanisms in different ways, including:

- The overall role and organisation of the CoG in different contexts, from utilising new or binding mechanisms (New Zealand, United Kingdom) to central management and steering role (Australia, Czech Republic, Ireland, United Kingdom) to more of an initiation and oversight role working with, or supporting, other public entities in charge of implementation (Canada, Latvia).
- Utilising existing guiding and co-ordination mechanisms (Korea).

- A strong focus on monitoring and management tools (Czech Republic, France).

In addition, many other countries' CoGs lead PAR activities, including Slovenia, which starting to consider its own PAR and has established an expert group for sustainable public administration development.

Box 6.1. Declaration on Government Reform in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has acknowledged that the changing environment and landscape in recent years as well as the strong ambitions that the government has across a diverse range of domains, including housing and community, the environment, the health and education systems, unlocking the power of science and around jobs and employment, have required a renewal of government.

The Cabinet Office and Modernisation and Reform Unit has published *A Modern Civil Service* (UK Goverment, 2021[6]), providing a vision of a skilled, innovative and ambitious civil service equipped for the future, skilled, innovative and ambitious. A consultation effort was undertaken to work with civil servants to shape the civil service and create plans.

Considering this, Cabinet and Permanent Secretaries met and committed themselves to a collective vision for reform, agreeing to immediate action on three fronts:

- People: ensuring that the right people are working in the right places with the right incentives.
- Performance: modernising the operation of government, being clear-eyed about priorities and objectives in the evaluation of what is and is not working.
- Partnership: strengthening the bond between ministers and officials, always operating as one team from policy to delivery, and between the central government and external institutions.

Commitment to these areas was made through a declaration (UK Goverment, 2021[6]) available on the Government Office website, which includes specific priorities and commitments under each of the three areas and specific actions for the year 2021.

Formality and political advocacy are demonstrated through the process and 2021 declaration made by the Cabinet, signed by the prime minister and the head of cabinet: a strong mechanism for clear mandate and political leadership. The declaration also included a clear set of initiatives for each agency to follow, demonstrating good planning.

Source: UK Government (2021[6]), *A Modern Civil Service*,
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1173173/A_Modern_Civil_Service_slide.pdf
(accessed on 6 September 2023).

Box 6.2. A more adaptive, agile and collaborative public service in New Zealand

In recognition of the fact that the context and environment have changed over the last 30 years in New Zealand and to acknowledge lessons learnt through the COVID-19 crisis, the country recently implemented a major PAR known as the new Public Service Act 2020.

The act acknowledges the strong foundations of New Zealand and outlines five key areas to help join up public services and secure public trust and confidence in the government. The five areas include:

- Unified public service.
- Strengthening the Crown's relationships with Māori.
- Employment and workforce.
- Leadership.
- Organisational flexibility.

The act provides a modern legislative framework and impetus for reform that enables a more adaptive, agile and collaborative public service and includes stronger recognition of the role of the public service in supporting the partnership between Māori and the Crown, including a more practical description of what it means to engage with Māori and support the Māori-Crown relationship.

This reform approach established strong central management and stewardship for the systemic reforms, as enshrined in legislation and rules of the public administration. Each of the five areas includes a clear purpose and goal, a practical identification of what this means for all public servants as well as key systemwide reforms and priorities. Depending on the priorities, specific heads of agencies or senior officials are responsible for enacting the reforms, although it is unclear whether a centralised monitoring approach may be taken.

New Zealand also undertook consultation through surveys and other mechanisms in undertaking this reform, which showed strong support for the overall direction of the reforms.

Flexibility and innovative or contemporary approaches are core to this reform, with one of the five areas allowing provisions for flexible departmental models, joint ventures and joined up budgeting and policy development to specifically deal with complex and cross-cutting issues.

Source: Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission (2023[7]), "An overview of the changes", New Zealand Government, https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/guidance/public-service-act-2020-reforms/an-overview-of-the-changes/ (accessed on 6 September 2023).

Box 6.3. PAR in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has a well-established tradition and methods for designing whole-of-government public administration reform plans. The Czech PAR – Client-oriented Public Administration 2030 – follows the Strategic Framework for the Development of Public Administration 2014-20.

The PAR defines clear priorities for reforming and modernising the public administration The overarching vision of the PAR is to support a citizen-oriented public administration to increase the quality of life of its citizens (Ministry of the Interior, 2020[8]). Achieving the vision is conditional on the fulfilment of five objectives, focusing on public service quality, citizen engagement and efficiency.

The PAR is managed by the Ministry of the Interior and discussed in a specific working group of the Council for Public Administration. The working group is the forum for discussions on the PAR and for monitoring the strategy. It prepares and steers public administration reform, and is responsible for most of the PAR strategy as well as for co-ordination with other line ministries and other concerned bodies, for example through a joint steering committee or other forms of consultation or monitoring. This potential, particularly in decision-making, is only partly used and calls for more political steering and instruments.

While such a plan provides a clear and long-term strategy, it can be challenging to sustain decision-makers' interest in carrying out such a significant reform, potentially as – apart from streamlining the

administration – reforming the public administration is not considered a politically attractive topic. Further challenges can be met when PARs extend over multiple election cycles.

Source: OECD (2023[2]), *OECD Public Governance Reviews: Czech Republic: Towards a More Modern and Effective Public Administration*, https://doi.org/10.1787/41fd9e5c-en.

Box 6.4. Public administration reforms to address agility and resilience in Ireland, supporting the government now and in the future

Drafted in 2021, the ten-year Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy aims to develop a direction for the future of the civil service to respond to the changing environment, including climate and sustainability, geopolitical and demographic changes, housing and healthcare through greater agility and resilience.

Among other things, the 2030 strategy draws on consultation across the civil service, employee surveys and lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and organisational capability reviews.

The strategy articulates guiding principles, high-level outcomes and strategic priorities and themes. The "How will we deliver" sections establish lower-level outcomes, within three core themes:

1. Delivering evidence-informed policy and services.
2. Harnessing digital technology and innovation.
3. Building the civil service workforce, workplace and organisation of the future.

A set of guiding principles frame the reform approach.

Ireland's reform approach exhibits a strong centralised approach to civil service renewal, with the central agency – the Civil Service Renewal Programme Management Office – co-ordinating and driving a lot of the reform. The office works with project managers and secretary general sponsors to implement the plan. It also supports the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB), which is responsible for delivering the actions in the Civil Service Renewal Plan. The Programme Management Office also leads and manages communication and engagement activities. Project managers are assigned to each goal and detailed project plans, with associated outcomes and indicators, are developed to support the delivery of the action plan. Project team members have representation from all levels within the civil service.

The cycle of reform is managed through a ten-year programme of renewal, which provides the means to address complex, long-term issues while focusing on shorter-term outcomes through a cycle of three-year action plans. Reports are published on an annual basis. Managers report to the CSMB on the progression of their assigned projects.

Flexibility and innovation are supported through the annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards and the Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys. In addition, outcomes measurement is used to monitor the impacts of the plan on societal well-being. A key focus of the evaluation is lessons learnt that can be applied to future work and progress.

Sources: Government of Ireland (2021[9]), *Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy: 'Building on our Strengths'*, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/135476/ab29dc92-f33f-47eb-bae8-2dec60454a1f.pdf#page=null (accessed on 19 July 2023); Government of Ireland (2021[10]), *Civil Service Renewal 2024: Action Plan*, https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/211842/8d223347-9114-43dd-84c5-78f685c63f1b.pdf#page=null (accessed on 6 September 2023).

Box 6.5. Embedding public sector reforms to address trust, future capability, responsiveness and agility from the centre, Australia

The Australian Public Service (APS) has centralised administration but with many decentralised functions such as budget and workforce management and business planning. PAR approaches facilitate a whole-of-government approach through the leadership of a central unit as well as agency heads who are responsible for promoting co-operation with other agencies and management across structures under the Public Service Act 1999 (Australian Government, 1999[11]).

In 2018, the Australian Government commissioned an independent review of the APS to ensure it is better trusted, future-fit, responsive and agile in meeting the changing needs of the government and the community with professionalism and integrity for years to come.

The resulting reform agenda is built on four pillars, creating an APS that:

- Embodies integrity in all that it does.
- Puts people and business at the centre of policy and services.
- Is a model employer.
- Has the capability to do its job well.

The review was spearheaded within the Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet (PM&C) in Australia, with communications disseminated directly from the prime minister and heads of relevant agencies. Following the independent review and the development of the response and actions, a new APS Reform Office was created to monitor and co-ordinate the reform efforts from the centre, incorporating views of both the PM&C and the Australian Public Service Commission, with some duties distributed to other agencies. Mechanisms established to spearhead the reform include a strong central management approach with dedicated and centrally appointed staff and resources as well as responding to the challenge to strong central management created by the decentralisation of many functions. This was achieved by combining the legislation around central authority with the legislation of agency head responsibility for collaborative work approaches and achieving shared goals.

The approach focused on a shared vision, including creating an overarching reform narrative through consultation with the government, public administration and community in order to empower staff. A robust and agreed-upon plan for managing the PAR includes a well-defined set of initiatives that has been prioritised and sequenced, each with accountable leads, names and agreed-upon roles. Functions for such staff are stipulated, including communication plans, reporting frameworks and review processes.

Management conditions to support innovation are embedded via an articulated plan principle that implementation of the reform must be fit for purpose, supported by sector capability building to strengthen expertise and using two methods of outcomes-based assessment of whether objectives are being met.

In this case, Australia emphasised the importance of a clearly articulated and shared vision, well-defined initiatives and systems to support accountabilities as the primary enablers. Australia also utilises specific capability reviews of departments, led through the CoG, to help advance and embed the APS reform agenda and to specifically embed a culture of continuous improvement across the APS.

Source: Information provided by an official in the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Australian Government (1999[11]), *Public Service Act 1999*, https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2019C00057 (accessed on 6 September 2023).

Box 6.6. Public sector reform in Latvia

Political and economic change created the need for a Latvian public administration that could manage public resources in an effective and efficient manner, provide high-quality and accessible public services and serve the public interest in good faith, having the ability to respond swiftly and compete with the private sector for limited human resources in the labour market.

The Latvian government adopted the Public Administration Modernisation Plan 2027 in spring of 2023 and is a medium-term policy planning document that sets out the main lines for development and change in public administration. The plan aims to develop a more co-ordinated public administration that constantly evolves and adapts to changing social and economic conditions. It continues the path of change launched by the National Administration Reform Plan 2020.

More specifically, the Public Administration Modernisation Plan 2027 aims to implement smart, efficient and open management in all public administration processes, in line with the National Development Plan 2027, by focusing on human needs and proactive national action and implementing evidence-based solutions and cross-sectoral co-operation, using new methods and digital capabilities, providing understandable and accessible information, providing opportunities for people to participate in policymaking and achieving a balanced representation of public groups.

In the context of the public sector competing with the private sector for limited human resources in the labour market and reform leadership and co-ordination shared between the State Chancellery and the Ministry of Regional Development and Environmental Protection, Latvia addressed the need to drive change in an accountable way and provide space for innovation and participation by sharing management between the centrally located State Chancellery and ministries for this reform episode.

A management plan was established through the combination of communication plans, metrics for progress measurement, the monitoring of measurements and scope for changes to be made to the plan as it progressed. The last feature also establishes space for innovation, as does the stated focus on co-operation and flexibility over bureaucratic processes and normative approaches.

Source: Information provided by officials in the Latvian government.

Box 6.7. Public sector reforms on digital technologies and the use of data, changing and less hierarchical workplace designs and multi-generational work in Canada

In 2020, the Canadian government embarked on a reform agenda to respond to the changing environment including a greater focus on digital technologies and the use of data, changing and less hierarchical workplace designs and multi-generational work. After consultation with public servants across the country, a Beyond2020 agenda was implemented, which was articulated as focusing on mindsets and behaviours to achieve a more agile, inclusive and equipped public service. This strategy was published by the central Privy Council Office, yet Canada is also pursuing the implementation of such reforms throughout all public administration departments and agencies.

Beyond2020 aimed to implement a flexible reform framework to achieve agility, inclusiveness and a well-equipped service that was sensitive to unique organisational, individual and regional contexts and practicalities.

Pursuing a decentralised and highly customised approach to reform can be a challenge for countries with typically centralised management structures. The topic of reform is also challenging in that it is, for example, hard to measure reform to mindsets and behaviours of staff in view of building agility, inclusiveness and support for performance. In this round of reform, Canada employed network strategies to meet these objectives, replacing a strong centre-driven plan with a strategy to drive control of the reform through place-based champions.

Source: Government of Canada (2019[12]), *From Blueprint to Beyond2020*, https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/blueprint-2020/blog/blueprint-beyond-2020.html (accessed on 19 July 2023).

Box 6.8. Promoting PAR for proactive administration in Korea

Korea has a strong central administration, with the central government of South Korea (CoG) long devoting substantial efforts to reorganising central agencies, improving the efficiency and performance of the government under the framework of new public management, reforming regulations and implementing digital government utilising information and communication technology and artificial intelligence.

Korea has emphasised the importance of a behavioural approach in its PAR. The president emphasised in 2019 that public officials should undertake proactive administrative actions. Consequently, a joint taskforce was established with personnel from the relevant agencies, including from CoG institutions.

Korea also considered how to institutionalise this concept of proactive administration to ensure it was a sustainable reform, including reconsidering scrutiny measures and incentivising this approach through promotions, awards and other rewards.

CoG functions within the Ministry of Personnel Management, along with the Office for the Prime Minister and others, became leading agents for change, supporting the institutionalisation of this reform.

This type of reform demonstrates strong centralised leadership and co-ordination. It also emphasises the need to embed such reforms sustainably into the broader public administration system, including through legal levers and incentives.

The reform approach also includes engagement with citizens and other stakeholders, who can provide input into processes for awards.

This PAR includes consideration of the full reform cycle, not least requirements for central and line agencies to complete action plans, and is monitored through annual agency performance cycles, with full results reported to the cabinet meeting presided by the president.

Source: Kim, P. (2022[13]), "A behavioral approach to administrative reform: A case study of promoting proactive administration in South Korea", https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/PAP-08-2022-0093/full/pdf?title=a-behavioral-approach-to-administrative-reform-a-case-study-of-promoting-proactive-administration-in-south-korea (accessed on 6 September 2023).

> **Box 6.9. CoG institutional support and monitoring for PAR Services Public+ in France**
>
> The Services Publics + programme aims to mobilise reforms to continuously improve the user experience within public services. It is led by a CoG department of the Ministry of Public Transformation and co-ordinated by two strategic committees and an operational monitoring committee, demonstrating a level of overall co-ordination, formed for monitoring:
>
> - The *Direction interministérielle de la transformation publique* (DITP) is in charge of deploying the transformation programme. The DITP also monitors the implementation of the French government's priority reforms in liaison with local ministries and prefectures.
> - An Inter-ministerial Committee for Public Transformation, led by the Ministry of Public Transformation, has been set up to ensure the operational implementation, monitoring, inter-ministerial co-ordination and political steering of the Action Publique 2022 reform plan. It brings together members of the government two or three times a year and is chaired by the prime minister; the DITP provides the secretariat.
> - A high-level strategic committee brings together central administration directors and the Minister for Public Transformation.
> - An operational monitoring committee brings together directors of administration (at the local level) to discuss the monitoring of commitments and indicators.
>
> Each administrative network implements this PAR, making commitments by clarifying them and translating them into its own context. Participating public agencies are then required to self-assess their compliance with the nine Services Publics + commitments, identifying priority areas for improvement.
>
> The indicators measured and displayed are designed to meet the priority expectations of users (speed, reachability, personalisation, etc.) in their relations with public services, as well as with the Services Publics + commitments. Data are measured as close as possible to the user, at the local level, and are updated as regularly as possible (a minimum of year y-1). All main public services of the French state are represented (over 2.5 million employees), i.e. some 40 networks that are transparent about the quality of their service. The data published are those produced by each of the public services involved in the Services Publics + programme.
>
> Sources: Government of France (2019[14]), *Services Publics* +, https://www.modernisation.gouv.fr/ameliorer-lexperience-usagers/services-publics (accessed on 6 September 2023); Government of France (2022[15]), *Action Publique 2022 : pour une transformation du service public*, Inter-ministerial Directorate of Public Transformation.

Guiding public sector innovation reform from the centre

Recent challenges have shown that governments need to integrate more innovative approaches into policymaking and decision-making (OECD, 2023[1]). As of 2018, more than half (56%) of OECD member countries claimed a role in promoting modernisation or innovation (OECD, 2018[16]). A more innovative government is a core focus of many PARs CoGs are co-ordinating or leading. CoGs are using different mechanisms to do so. For example, in France, the Inter-ministerial Committee of Public Transformation in the Prime Minister's Office has set up and manages a fund to support the transformation of government activities. Spain's National Office of Foresight and Strategy works to foster strategic foresight and innovation. The innovation lab within the Romanian CoG supports innovation.

Many CoG are responsible for fostering a more innovative public administration. The OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation (OECD, 2023[17]) recognises governments need to act as stewards of innovation in the public sector and CoGs are these stewards. Boxes 6.10-6.13 describe additional

experiences from CoGs in Bulgaria, Costa Rica, France and Latvia guiding public sector innovation reforms.

Box 6.10. The Fund for Transformation of Public Action in France

Based on the logic of return on investment, this fund enables inter-ministerial initiatives to strengthen innovation in the French public sector. Priorities include the improvement of services to citizens and companies, and of public officials' working environment, as well as increase in the efficiency of public administration. Public organisations present their applications to the call for innovative projects to benefit from funding and stewardship, which are awarded dependent on the benefits in efficiency and productivity that are envisaged and the impacts on their users.

The programme has been piloted and managed by the Inter-Ministerial Committee of Public Transformation, which is part of the Ministry of Public Transformation and Civil Service, but whose range of action enables cross-sectoral co-ordination and supports the collaborative initiatives for public sector transformation.

With lessons learnt, France will continue to consider how to fund and integrate innovation into its support of innovative capacity through funding models.

Source: Information provided by representatives of the Government of France.

Box 6.11. PAR and the National Open Government Strategy, Costa Rica

In response to factors such as lower levels of trust in the government, rising unemployment and increasing demands from citizens for greater participation in and oversight of government decision-making, the Costa Rican government has pursued PARs through a National Open Government Strategy. The objectives include strengthening democracy, preventing and combating corruption, improving the quality and efficiency of public services, and achieving more inclusive societies.

The National Open Government Strategy uses an improved central management relationship between three key agencies, including the Ministries of the Presidency, Planning and Economic Policy, and Finance.

The centrally driven mandate is further strengthened by establishing the strategy as one of the pillars of the existing and broader National Development and Public Investment Plan 2023-2026, through a national policy on open government. They declared that open government was in the public interest by decree and established a National Open Government Commission. The commission is in the stage of public consultation on the six commitments of the Open State Action Plan: employment, economic recovery, security, open justice, open parliament, and integrity and anti-corruption.

The reform is managed through two-year action plans with an independent reporting mechanism. To establish some flexibility and space for innovation, open government contact points were utilised at the local level to design the second action plan to enhance inter-institutional co-operation.

Source: OECD (2016[18]), *Open Government in Costa Rica*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264265424-en.

Box 6.12. Driving innovation from the centre in Latvia

In response to the recognition of the need to raise the overall efficiency and effectiveness of public administration by promoting good governance and improving the level of staff competency in Latvia, the State Chancellery of Latvia launched an innovation lab and is continuing to enhance the role and impact of the lab with support from the European Commission and in partnership with the OECD.

The key priorities of the lab are to drive PARs, including the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy and, therefore, the introduction of a zero-bureaucracy approach. In this project, part of the overall goal was to utilise an innovation lab to also introduce and embed innovation into the public administration, to make it faster and more efficient to address topical or old problems, come up with the necessary solutions, and develop and test prototypes.

The lab is driven from the Chancellery, demonstrating top-down central commitment and management. It was also included in the government's action plan demonstrating clear political support.

Key enablers for this approach to PAR have included developing a clear vision and iterating on this vision depending on user needs, promoting learning from other countries' good practices, relying on dedicated and knowledgeable staff to lead the reforms and processes through the lab and building broader capability through the processes the lab undertakes.

Some challenges around this PAR included a gap between design and implementation, a lack of expertise and a lack of funding to drive sustainable change.

Source: Government of Latvia (2019[19]), *Creation of 3 Innovation Labs in Latvia*, https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/media/538/download (accessed on 6 September 2023).

Box 6.13. Stewarding communities of practice in Bulgaria's public administration

Building innovative networks of expertise

The CoG in Bulgaria has sought to create an innovative networking approach and communities of practice within the public administration. These networks have proven useful in supporting innovative capacity building and administrative reforms. This has included the administration of the latest procedural and legal amendments, conducting stakeholder consultations and garnering support for important initiatives based at the CoG. The CoG shares administrative responsibility for such networks with the Institute of Public Administration, the leading institution for most in-person events.

To enhance peer learning, promote the exchange of expertise and encourage day-to-day communication between the participants, some of these networks have employed the use of instant messaging software application Viber groups and communities. Larger networks have been observed to include several hundred participants via the Viber group, limited not only to representatives of the public administration but members of academia and think tanks as well. The use of Viber has also aided in deconstructing existing silos within the public administration. Additionally, all participants have direct access to their counterparts in neighbouring ministries and public agencies.

Source: Information provided by representatives from the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria.

4. Common challenges and enablers

Through a synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants of the OECD informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified.

Common challenges

- The composition of CoGs and their roles and mandates varies greatly (OECD, 2020[4]) including utilising more centralised management approaches or devolved approaches. The latter can be useful in diffusing reforms yet lose the strong political leadership and direction central management can offer. Conversely, a strong centralised system can also result in a reduction of grassroots innovation.

- CoGs do not have ultimate control or influence on the implementation and impact of PARs. In this context they need to consider how they steward sustainable reform without control. CoGs need to foster an enabling environment where all actors can drive systemic change.

- Alignment and/or integration of PAR objectives and priorities into a government's broader strategic planning documents is important. Yet this can result in challenges in prioritising policy reforms versus internal reforms for agencies with a common view of PAR goals.

- The financial sustainability of PARs is important. Ensuring that PARs are well planned and costed is a significant challenge and not all countries have processes to understand the financial cost or impact of reforms.

- The public administration needs to correspond to its needs and meet the principles of contemporary democracy and public administrations, including political neutrality (Žurga, 2016[20]). Thus, PARs still need to ensure that administrations are in line with these requirements.

Common enablers

- Strong overarching strategies for systemic and holistic PARs must be utilised. CoGs need to consider how to make use of good practices around strategic planning for driving PARs, aligning PAR priorities with broader government priorities and international commitments.

- CoGs and the structures and mechanisms supporting PAR must be fit for context. Approaches to reform must be realistic and cognisant of the context.

- CoGs' experiences demonstrate the importance of clarifying roles and mandates when working on issues over which they do not have a direct sphere of influence, including PARs.

- There is a general agreement that sustained political commitment and support at the top level are key success factors for the implementation of PARs from the centre.

- Management or co-ordination of the full PAR reform cycle should be taken into account, including monitoring of reforms and communication of results, even if not all roles are performed by the CoG.

- Countries also highlight the role of communicating and engaging with civil servants and citizens as an important part of gaining advocacy and building trust.

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7 Anticipating, preparing for and managing crises

This chapter presents the increasing role of the centre of government (CoG) in anticipating, preparing for and managing crises. This challenging role requires the CoG to assist the government in making rapid and well-informed decisions while balancing trade-offs. The chapter discusses specific practical examples of the CoG anticipating future disruptions through foresight and risk assessment and preparing for the future by learning from the past. It then presents the role the CoG must play in whole-of-government co-ordination during crises, supporting crisis response across new institutional arrangements and frameworks. Finally, it discusses the CoG's support in engaging with external stakeholders during crises, including scientific advice, involving broader external stakeholders such as citizens, non-governmental organisations and the private sector, and supporting public communications.

Key messages

- The increasing complexity and volatility of global contexts have raised expectations for centres of governments (CoGs) to anticipate, prepare for and manage crises. Some have set up a dedicated unit or team at the CoG to support crisis management since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CoGs recognise the growing challenge of their role. They must assist governments in making rapid and informed decisions while balancing trade-offs against a backdrop of uncertainty. Furthermore, governments often acquire new powers during crises and CoGs must ensure this is handled carefully.
- The use of foresight and scenarios to anticipate future developments is an increasingly important aspect of preparing for future crises and is slowly gaining popularity across CoGs.
- Engaging with citizens and external stakeholders is crucial during times of crisis. External partners, including the scientific community, often possess specialised expertise and knowledge that prove valuable in addressing complex and rapidly evolving crises.
- CoGs play a vital role in communications. Ensuring trustworthy and coherent messaging, particularly considering the rise of misinformation, is an important yet challenging task.
- Considerations include equipping CoGs with the necessary capacities to respond during crises while also building their agility and resilience to future disruptions. CoGs must carefully consider appropriate engagement and communications to maintain trust and integrity during crises.

1. Introduction

The management of crises and swift reaction to disruptions are core government competencies. During times of crisis, whether it be a natural disaster, terrorist attack, pandemic or an event we have not yet considered, citizens turn to the government for leadership. Trust in the government is crucial during these periods, as evidence suggests it facilitates swift compliance with policy measures necessary to minimise the impact on society (Brezzi et al., 2021[1]). For instance, pre-pandemic levels of trust influenced compliance with containment policies during the first wave of COVID-19. While governments did benefit from initial popular support, this was not long-lasting.

CoGs play a crucial role in crisis management by providing political leadership and a central point of co-ordination for decision-making during times of crisis (Figure 7.1). CoGs are increasingly involved in anticipating and managing crises, with 85% of CoGs reporting that risk management and anticipation are a priority for them (OECD, 2023[2]). To support this growing function, 42% of countries have set up a dedicated unit or team at the CoG to support crisis management. By providing political leadership and a central point of co-ordination, CoGs can contribute to the efficient management of crises and the implementation of necessary measures. Their involvement also helps maintain public trust.

Figure 7.1. CoGs play a crucial role as a central point of co-ordination during crises

SOUND ENGAGEMENT

LINE MINISTRIES

CITIZENS

CoGs
as a stabilizer during times of crises

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

COMMUNICATION

PRIVATE SECTOR + NGOS

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY
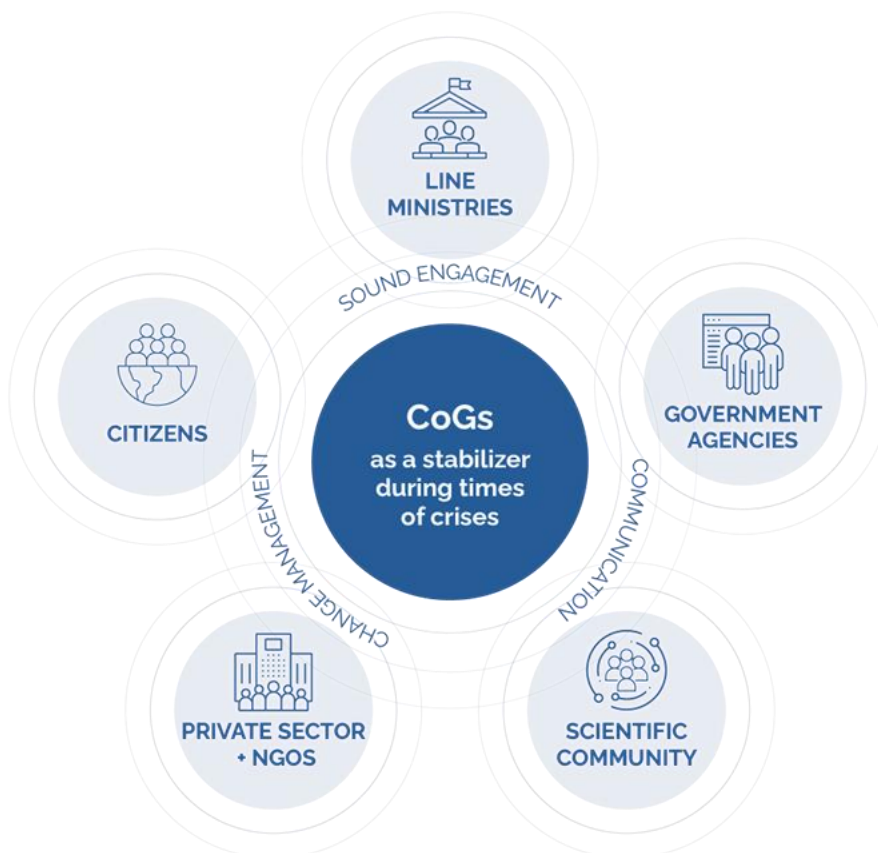
Source: Author's own elaboration.

The changing nature of the crises themselves complements their intensity. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic had two amplifying characteristics compared to natural disasters: a rapid global spread and multidimensionality not only in terms of prevention and management of health risks but through spill-over effects to many other crucial areas, including the economy, society and trust in government and democratic institutions. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has brought similar effects, as the security threat is compounded by impacts to the energy sector, for example. Over the last three years, CoGs have taken on further responsibilities to address the challenges posed by current crises. In 85% of the surveyed countries, CoG activities related to crisis management have increased mainly through the development of ad hoc taskforces or groups to deal with short-term issues (OECD, 2021[3]).

This chapter will explore the CoG's role and activities as a stabiliser during times of crises through the following structure:

- Anticipating and preparing for future crises.
- Whole-of-government co-ordination and crisis management.
- Engaging with external stakeholders during crises.

Figure 7.2. The role of the CoG in crisis anticipation, preparedness and management
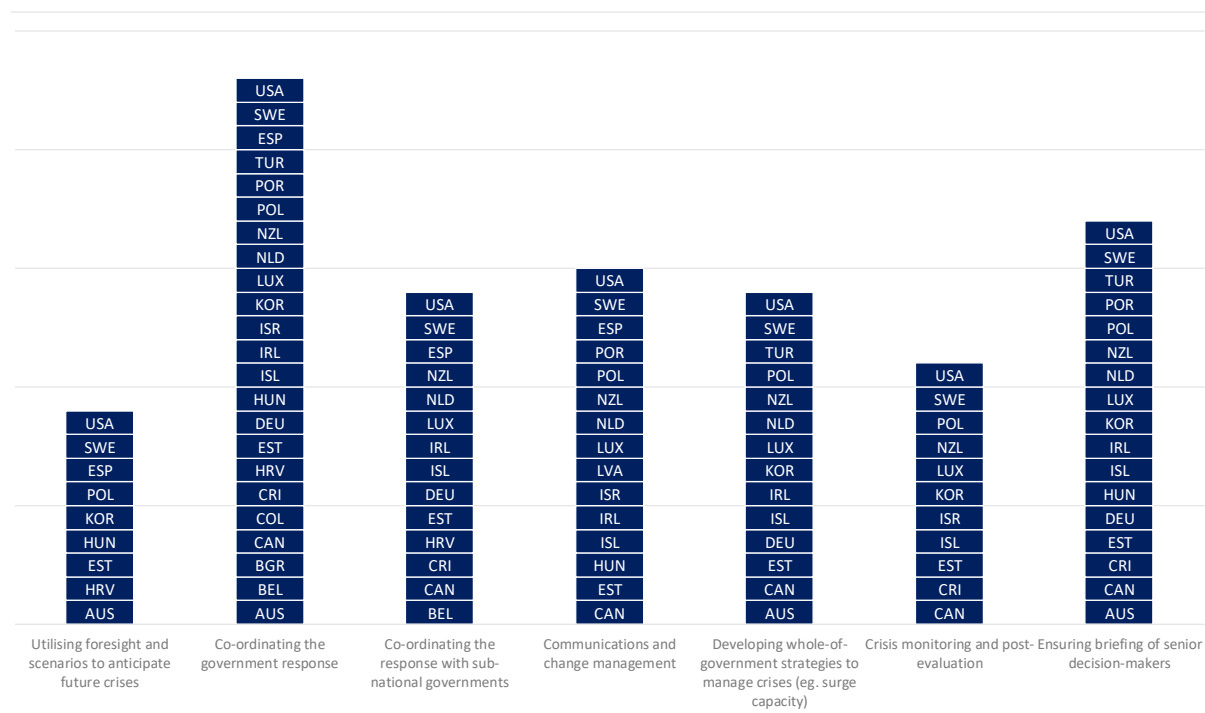
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What is the role of the CoG in preparing and managing crises?".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

2. Anticipating and preparing for future crises

Anticipating future disruptions

Countering multi-dimensional crises has increased the relevance of strategic foresight and national risk assessments. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks recommends that adherents to "develop risk anticipation capacity linked directly to decision-making through the development of capacity for horizon scanning, risk assessments" (OECD, 2014[4]).

Finland, Ireland, and Luxembourg all have examples of such capacities at the centre (including national risk assessments). Some CoGs (Figure 7.3) have dedicated foresight units to assess critical risks and anticipate future crises. Box 7.1 outlines Finland's national foresight system.

Figure 7.3. The CoG's use of foresight and scenarios to anticipate future crises
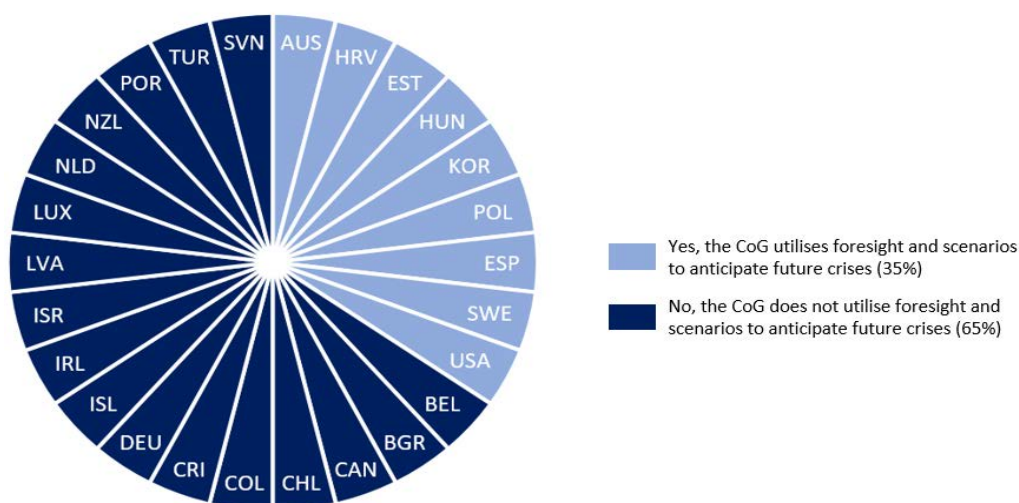
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What is the role of the CoG in preparing and managing crises? [Utilising foresight and scenarios to anticipate future crises]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Box 7.1. Finland: Using foresight from the centre for anticipating the future

Finland's national foresight system includes a *Government Report on the Future* co-ordinated by the Prime Minister's Office with inputs from key stakeholders. The report forms the basis for dialogue on the future in the government and parliament and aims to identify issues that will be important for decision-making and require special attention in the future. The report has a high-level steering group with five state secretaries.

The Committee for the Future was established in 1993 by the parliament of Finland. It is a key forum for raising awareness and discussing long-term challenges related to futures in Finland. The prime minister represents the executive in the Committee of the Future, which draws members from across all parliamentary parties and thus helps to diffuse the knowledge about future risks and disruptions. The committee prepares the parliament's response to the *Government Report on the Future* every four years. The Prime Minister's Office co-ordinates the Government Foresight Group which brings together strategic foresight experts. The group serves as an advisory body in the preparation of the *Government Report on the Future* and the ministries' futures reviews.

Source: OECD (2021[5]), *Policy Brief - Towards a Strategic Foresight System in Ireland*, https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Strategic-Foresight-in-Ireland.pdf; OECD (2022[6]), *Anticipatory Innovation Governance Model in Finland: Towards a New Way of Governing*, https://doi.org/10.1787/a31e7a9a-en (accessed on 5 September 2023).

Being prepared for future crises by learning from the past

To anticipate future crises and prepare accordingly, foresight approaches should be complemented by learning from the past. The 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions found that, on average, across countries, 49.4% of respondents expressed confidence that their government would be prepared to protect people's lives in the event of a new pandemic (OECD, 2022[7]). The COVID-19

pandemic showed that governments that drew on lessons learnt from past crises often demonstrated greater resilience (OECD, 2014[4]). The countries where most people believe that their government has learnt from the pandemic are also the countries where a higher number of people are likely to have trust in that government. Box 7.2 offers one example from Korea on how it integrated past learnings into the management of COVID-19.

Box 7.2. Learning from previous crises and rooting new practices in Korea

Korea's response to COVID-19 demonstrated the value of the institutional capacity to analyse lessons from previous crises and root new practices to be better prepared for the future. After the 2015 MERS coronavirus outbreak in Korea, the government enacted 48 reforms to boost public health emergency preparedness. These included guidelines for screening facilities, comprehensive testing and contact tracing, and supporting people in quarantine to make compliance easier (Kim et al., 2021[8]). These systems helped to quickly contain the spread of COVID-19 and allowed economic and social activities to resume earlier than in many other OECD countries.

Source: OECD (2021[3]), *Government at a Glance 2021*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en.

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3. Whole-of-government co-ordination and crisis management

CoGs play an important role by supporting decision-making and co-ordination across government agencies (OECD, 2020[9]) during times of crisis. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks recommends that adherents to "put in place governance mechanisms to co-ordinate on risk management and manage crises with government" (OECD, 2014[4]).

In the event of a crisis, CoGs most commonly focus on the management and co-ordination of government operations (OECD, 2018[10]). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, 85% of CoGs now highlight risk management as one of their priorities and 88% report that it is the CoG's role to co-ordinate the government's response to a crisis (OECD, 2023[2]). Almost half of OECD governments deployed new institutional arrangements to manage the pandemic, either in the form of a dedicated unit or an appointed co-ordinator (OECD, 2020[9]) and many CoGs assumed new responsibilities since COVID-19 (Figure 7.4). In Luxembourg, for instance, the composition of the crisis unit in charge of COVID-19 had to evolve slightly twice to adapt to the scale of the pandemic (OECD, 2022[11]). An example of Belgium's approach from the centre of government, and an example of an evolving framework for managing crises can be found in Australia (Box 7.3).

> ### Box 7.3. Crisis responses in Belgium and Australia
>
> **Belgium's crisis management approach to COVID-19**
>
> Following the declaration of the federal phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the federal government of Belgium became officially in charge of co-ordinating the crisis response. Between March 2020 and October 2020, crisis response was co-ordinated by the National Security Council, which was led by the Prime Minister and to which the Minister Presidents of the federated entities were invited. This phase saw the creation of ad hoc structures seeking to assist the executive in tackling this new virus. From October 2020 until March 2020, the crisis was mainly led by the Concertation Committee, a body in which the Prime Minister and the Minister Presidents hold equal decision-making power. This phase also saw the creation of a Corona Commissariat, which sought to clarify the overall governance structure and centralise the crisis response in a single delivery unit.
>
> Belgium has a National Risk Assessment process in place. Yet, opportunities exist for Belgium to raise awareness of the assessments across government and society, and to increase the use of the assessments in informing policy and decision-making.
>
> **Australia's cross-government framework on managing the crisis and recovery.**
>
> Since the COVID-19 pandemic and multiple natural disasters, Australia has recognised the need to evolve its approach to dealing with crises. The country has developed a simple and clear cross-government crisis management framework that is regularly updated based on future needs and lessons learnt from the previous crisis. It includes the ability to respond through shifts, for example, utilisation of surge reserves, enabling allocation of additional staff in case certain institutions require it during times of emergency.
>
> The overall framework prescribes criteria when crisis management duties move up to the prime minister (and the CoG). It also defines political and administrative responsibility in various types of crises, from cyberattacks to energy crises and natural disasters. Distinct definitions of crisis areas are further complemented with a clear definition of responsibility.
>
> Sources: Australian Government (2021[12]), *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF)*, https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/australian-government-crisis-management-framework-agcmf (accessed on 7 September 2023), (OECD, 2023[13]), *Evaluation of Belgium's COVID-19 Responses, https://doi.org/10.1787/990b14aa-en.*

Figure 7.4. Changes in CoGs during COVID-19 and recovery planning
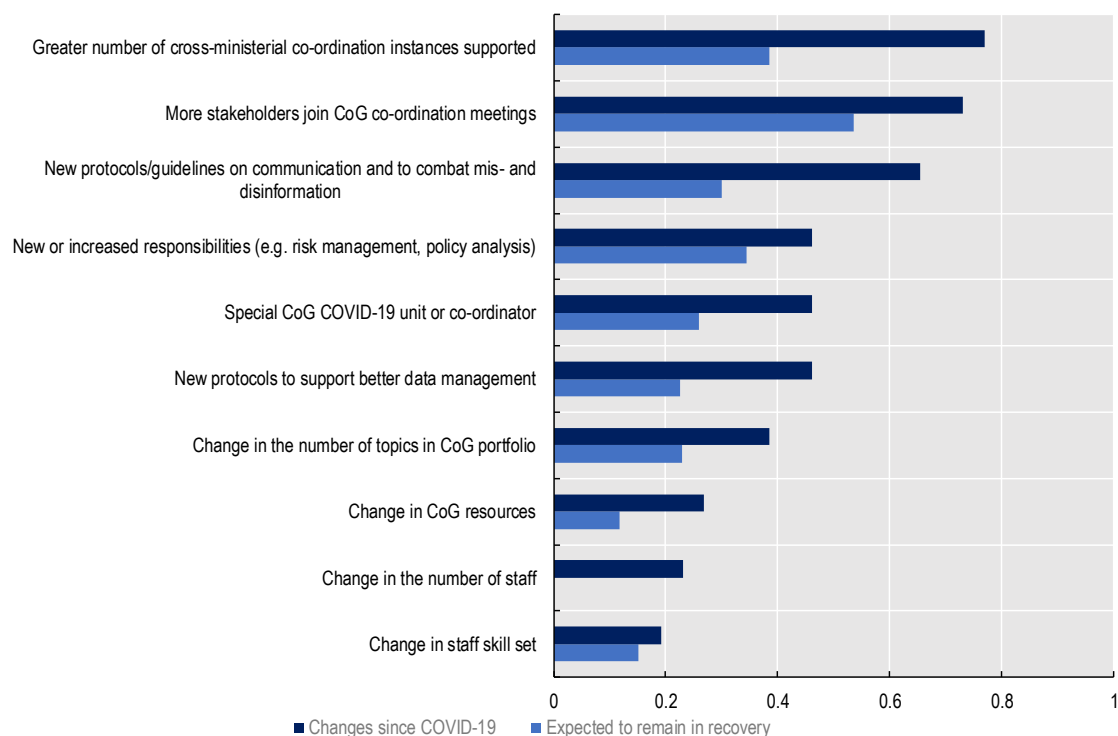
Note: Responses from 26 OECD countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and the Republic of Türkiye.
Sources: OECD (2021), Government at a Glance 2021, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en.

The CoG must be agile and responsive to take on its often-increased role adequately during crises. For instance, in Poland, the prime minister has been granted spending authority for special-purpose aid funds both during the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. Box 7.4 provides an example of how Romania's CoG was brought in to co-ordinate the large-scale response to the refugee crisis following Russia's war in Ukraine.

> **Box 7.4. Stewarding and guiding cross-cutting policies in a time of crisis, Romania**
>
> Romania was emerging from the COVID-19 crisis that had already pushed the country's social and economic limits when the war in Ukraine commenced. Over 3 million Ukrainians crossed the borders into Romania, resulting in immediate emergency response needs, as well as medium- to long-term priorities around inclusion and safety.
>
> The Chancellery responded rapidly to this cross-cutting issue through a whole-of-government effort, including collaborating with key stakeholders on a national plan. Romania established a clear decision-making and co-ordination structure to enable agencies with different responsibilities at all levels of government to plan, co-ordinate and interact effectively at the policy level and on the ground in response to the crisis. These included the establishment of a working group (Strategic Humanitarian Coordination Group) at the CoG. The CoG also helped to ensure coherence across the global stage.
>
> Source: Information from the Chancellery of Romania.

4. Engaging with external stakeholders during crises

Scientific advice during crises

CoGs provide direct support and advice to heads of government and the council of ministers or cabinet and facilitate cabinet decision-making. In a clear majority of countries (65%), the CoG is responsible for ensuring the briefing of senior decision-makers in times of crisis (OECD, 2023[2]). A key challenge for them is to ensure the incorporation of impartial, trusted evidence at speed. In this context, CoGs are increasingly acknowledging the importance of bringing in scientific, impartial advice during crises (OECD, 2021[3]). In many cases, CoGs started to rely more on expertise provided by scientific advisory committees, taskforces or expert groups, with some created on an ad hoc basis, while others pre-dating the pandemic. For example, in Poland, advanced data analysis techniques were used by experts from universities and research centres for forecasting purposes during the pandemic. Many of these committees report to the CoG, for example in Australia, where the scientific medical advice answered to the Ministry of Health and the Prime Minister's Office. Boxes 7.5 and 7.6 outline examples from Poland and the United Kingdom on the use of external or scientific bodies for decision-making at the CoG. Other countries such as Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland have also created scientific bodies to provide advice to government.

> **Box 7.5. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, United Kingdom**
>
> The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in the United Kingdom is a critical body of expert scientists and researchers convened during times of crises, particularly public health emergencies such as pandemics. Established to provide evidence-based advice to the government and ensure that timely and co-ordinated scientific advice is made available to decision-makers, SAGE plays a pivotal role in shaping the nation's response strategies. Who participates in SAGE meetings depends on the nature of the emergency and the issues under consideration and members are drawn from government, academia and the private sector. SAGE assesses data, conducts research and offers recommendations to inform government decisions, thereby helping to guide policies related to the ongoing crisis. SAGE's contributions in the face of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic highlight its essential role in providing rigorous scientific insights to support effective crisis management and safeguard public health.
>
> Source: OECD (2021[3]), *Government at a Glance 2021*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en.

> **Box 7.6. The Centre for Eastern Studies, Poland**
>
> The government-funded think tank, the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), established in 1990, provides the CoG with in-depth expertise and analysis. The OSW is a public institution funded by the government of Poland, and its wide-ranging policy portfolio includes research on several pressing international topics of importance to the Polish government, for example through timely policy advice on the international implications of challenges caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The OSW serves as a source of analysis, expert opinion and expertise in forecasting for Poland.
>
> The OSW demonstrates the value that flexible sources of expertise can offer to the CoG in times of crisis when already well integrated into CoG processes. An expert unit with strong links to the centre of government (i.e. direct subordination to the prime minister and funding by the Prime Minister's Office) can immediately become part of the decision-making and advisory processes for the management of crisis situations under the CoG's responsibility. This institutional setup avoids requiring the creation of new structures in the CoG, instead focusing on the agility and responsiveness of an existing unit to make rapid decisions based on deep analysis. The permanent source of knowledge that the OSW offers the CoG in Poland is a valuable tool, particularly during crises, eliminating the frequent trade-off between timely and high-quality expertise.
>
> Source: Information provided by representatives of the Government of Poland; OSW (n.d.[14]), *About Us*, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/o-nas (accessed on 1 December 2023).

Leveraging broader external stakeholders

Engaging with external stakeholders is also important during times of crisis. External partners, such as citizens, non-governmental organisations and the private sector, often possess specialised knowledge that is valuable in crises (OECD, 2018[15]). Collaboration with these stakeholders can also foster transparency and trust, building individuals' capacity to act in times of crisis (OECD, 2014[4]).

Most (77%) CoGs consulted stakeholders on the design of COVID-19 response strategies but only 35% actively involved stakeholders in their design (OECD, 2021[16]). This could be due to governments prioritising speed over transparency and oversight.

CoGs also need to consider how they engage with different levels of government. Depending on the governance structure, many crisis management functions are fulfilled by local authorities. Most CoGs (14 out of 26) are responsible for co-ordinating crisis responses with subnational governments. Box 7.7 outlines Latvia's engagement mechanism with these actors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Box 7.7. Involving various levels of government and external stakeholders in crisis management in Latvia

In Latvia, there was a recognition of the need to involve a wide range of stakeholders as well as all levels of government when dealing with crises. A new COVID-19 Crisis Recovery Strategic Group was established. Led by the prime minister, the group was composed of the Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Academy of Sciences, the Employers' Confederation, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the National Trade Union Confederation, among others. Importantly, it also included civil society through a representative nominated by the Memorandum Council. It also involved the parliament to ensure it supported the highest level of decision-making.

Source: OECD (2021[3]), *Government at a Glance 2021*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en.

Some CoGs also adopted more innovative approaches to engaging with citizens and stakeholders during times of crisis (for example, utilising digital platforms or innovation challenges). Box 7.8 outlines one example from Estonia, which utilised a hackathon approach to try to better deal with the pandemic.

Box 7.8. Triggering grassroot innovation with Hack the Crisis, Estonia

The challenges produced by the COVID-19 crisis constituted a shock to governments worldwide. Estonia has faced rapidly increasing infection rates, especially in certain hotspots. The government acknowledged that it did not have all of the answers and that new ideas and collaboration were essential to respond to the crisis as effectively as possible, and thus ran a Hack the Crisis event to gain ideas.

The central innovation institution Accelerate Estonia was charged with leading these efforts. Accelerate Estonia partnered with Estonian non-profit Garage48 to kick off the virtual hackathon just a few hours after it was approved. The government offered a cash prize of EUR 5 000 for each of the top 5 ideas to help the teams behind them further develop the concepts. Start-ups also contributed support packages, such as co-working spaces providing resources for the winners.

By the end of the hackathon 2 days later, 96 ideas had been proposed by over 1 000 participants. Many of the actions added positive outcomes and some are still used today.

The success of Hack the Crisis in Estonia and its significant following on Twitter through #HacktheCrisis sparked a global movement replicating the structure and approach around the world. More than 60 countries have held their version of Hack the Crisis, which was further evolved into a Global Hack initiative.

Source: OECD (2020[17]), *Embracing Innovation in Government: Global Trends 2020*, https://trends.oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/OECD-Innovative-Responses-to-Covid-19.pdf (accessed on 11 September 2023).

Public communication

Effective public communication by the CoG in times of crisis is key. CoGs play a crucial role in disseminating clear, consistent and transparent information to the public, building trust and mitigating panic. This is increasingly more critical in the fight against dis- and misinformation (OECD, 2020[18]; 2020[19]). Finally, it can help reach specific segments of the population and facilitate dialogue with citizens who may be marginalised.

Responses to the OECD's survey on strategic decision-making at the centre of government show that more than half of CoGs (58%) assume responsibilities related to communications and change management in times of crises (see Figure 7.5) (OECD, 2023[2]). During the COVID-19 pandemic, most CoGs adopted new protocols and guidelines to combat mis- and disinformation (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.5. The CoG's responsibility for communications and change management in times of crisis
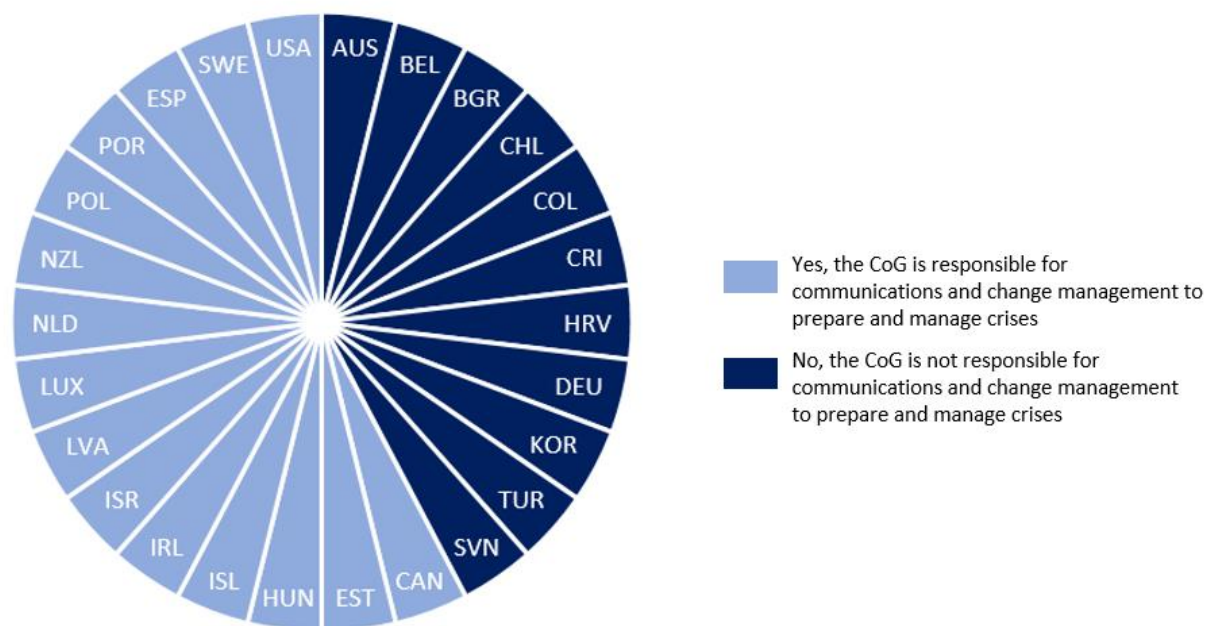
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What is the role of the CoG in preparing and managing crises? [Communications and change management]"
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

CoGs are working to make their messages and contents more compelling and adapted to specific or vulnerable segments of the population, including the use of social media (OECD, 2015[20]) (for example, countries like Australia, New Zealand and others utilised social media for public communication).

A good example is the United Kingdom's Government Communication Service, which also brought in citizens' insights during the pandemic. The service created a daily insights and evaluation dashboard for public communicators across the government. It summarises data collected through focus groups and surveys measuring public mood, trending topics and the state of public opinion on government measures. Similarly, the Finnish Prime Minister's Office, in collaboration with the National Emergency Supply Agency and the private sector, has been working with social media influencers to provide clear and reliable information.

Clear language and the customisation of communication material have also proven effective in sharing complex information with different segments of the population. Disseminating information in more than one language to reach specific groups has also been observed in CoGs, such as in Belgium, where key messages were translated into nine languages. Several other CoGs, such as those in France and the United Kingdom, have promoted specific video, audio and written material.

5. Common challenges and enablers

Through the synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants of the OECD informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified.

Common challenges

- One consideration for CoGs as they gain greater responsibilities during times of crisis is matching this with the right resources and capabilities. While many CoGs assumed new responsibilities during the COVID-19 crisis, in most cases, these increased responsibilities did not come with additional resources. Only 27% of CoGs experienced a change in the financial resources available to them, and only 23% had a change in staffing levels.

- CoGs are often given additional decision-making powers during crises, which can create sensitivities and make it harder for citizens and stakeholders to understand and engage with the crisis management structures. CoGs need to balance these powers with well-defined structures that give due consideration to the needs of all of society, while maintaining trust and integrity in government decision-making.

- A key challenge for CoGs is how to rapidly bring in trusted and impartial advice into decision-making while ensuring timely and accurate information is provided to the public. This challenge has been exacerbated by the effects of misinformation and disinformation.

Key enablers

- CoGs can mobilize their national risk assessment process and complement it with a range of strategic foresight approaches to feed into strategic planning and crisis preparation. These include conducting scenario planning, horizon scanning, trend analysis, and debates on alternative futures with both policymakers and stakeholders. It is important to ensure that key institutions responsible for democratic accountability, such as parliaments and federated entities, are involved in assessments, and that these processes inform policy and decision-making.

- CoGs could consider leveraging digital and data technology to engage with a broader audience and leverage knowledge from across the whole of society. It is important for CoGs to make use of trusted channels to communicate and engage citizens and stakeholders, both when preparing for crises, as well as when dealing with them.

- CoGs may need to consider increasing oversight and accountability mechanisms for crisis management, for example through greater use of Parliamentary oversight, specialized commissions of inquiry, or audits conducted by Supreme Audit Institutions.

- CoGs can utilize their coordination capacities to bring together different government bodies, scientific experts, and external partners in decision-making approaches. CoGs can utilize their central positioning to help ensure consistent, accurate, and trusted communication to the public and across all levels of government. In cases where CoGs lead such communications, they should pay attention to communication with vulnerable groups and minorities.

- It is important to learn from crises, and CoGs can strengthen their crisis preparedness by ensuring there is a structured process for continually improving their capabilities. They could further leverage monitoring and post-crisis evaluations to learn from both ongoing (especially relevant for protracted crises like the COVID-19 pandemic) and from past crises (including those that happen in their country and further afield).

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8 Communication from the centre

This chapter focuses on the role the centre of government (CoG) plays in public communication. The CoG can drive good public communication practices across the whole of the public administration. This chapter presents practical examples of the CoG driving good two-way communication between government and stakeholders, first, by leading by example from the centre and, second, by acting as an enabling force to elevate communication capacities across the entire public administration. It further details practical examples of the CoG enabling communication to reach diverse stakeholders through contemporary approaches such as behavioural insights. This chapter further details tackling mis- and disinformation and crisis response through steering and co-ordinating whole-of-government communication from the CoG. Finally, it turns its attention to good internal communication practices throughout institutional arrangements.

Key messages

- Centres of government (CoGs) play a key role in public communication. This includes undertaking communication activities to support more responsive and effective policymaking (including crisis communications), combatting mis- and disinformation, co-ordinating cross-government messages and guiding good communication practices across the government.

- Providing accurate and trustworthy information is seen as a critical factor in fostering trust in government institutions. Yet this is becoming harder for CoGs due to fast-evolving crises, a complex information ecosystem and challenges in reaching their diverse audiences. Leveraging public communication effectively requires dedicated reform and capability-building efforts to seize the latest innovations to cope with a very dynamic field and disseminate their use across government, which CoGs are well positioned to steer.

- Tackling mis- and disinformation is considered a top priority for CoGs. However, most CoGs do not yet seem to have a whole-of-government strategy in place on how to tackle it systemically. Many have established specialised units to tackle the immediate impacts of mis- and disinformation whilst trying to build longer-term resilience.

- CoGs play a larger role in communication during times of crisis. Ensuring that the government speaks with one voice can help reinforce key messages and prevent the spread of inconsistent information, which might hinder the general support for the collective action required.

- Considerations for CoGs include clearly establishing their steering role with regard to line ministries in public communication. This is relevant for broader communication, sector-specific communication and communication in crises. Additionally, CoGs could consider building the capacity of the administration to use new technologies and approaches.

1. Introduction

Democracies around the world are finding themselves at a critical juncture with ongoing pressure from crises, global challenges and increasing expectations from citizens. Governments' ability to rise to the test is being undermined by weak public trust in key democratic institutions, growing political polarisation and disengagement with traditional democratic processes. The OECD Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy Initiative emphasises the importance of the information ecosystem in governments, where public discourse, the media and political rhetoric are becoming fragmented.

Public communication refers to the government's function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good. This includes fostering an informed public, using communications to better policy design and building trust in public institutions more broadly. Public communication is a core government function but one that is still often not leveraged to its full potential, as noted in the *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward* (OECD, 2021[1]). However, the transformation of the information ecosystem and the demands from citizens for transparency, greater dialogue and more responsiveness are prompting significant rethinking and reform of this function (see, for instance, OECD (2023[2])). The CoG has a central role in steering this change and leading to a more purposeful and strategic use of public communication.

This chapter will discuss the CoGs role in public communication through the following structure:

- Key responsibilities at the centre for public communication.
- Stewarding effective two-way communication.
- Tackling mis- and disinformation and crisis response.
- Guiding good internal communication.

2. Key responsibilities at the centre for public communication

Effective and strategic communication requires a whole-of-government approach and the CoG is well positioned to guide good communication practices across the public administration. For example, it ensures that communication through line ministries is fit for purpose and aligned with a broader strategy. This can help citizens to see the administration as a single entity rather than a siloed structure. CoGs can also facilitate the adoption of good practices for communication across the administration.

CoGs carry out internal (across the public service) communication and external communication and engagement. In recent years, their roles, responsibilities and demands have increased (see Figure 8.1), yet this can manifest differently. For example, depending on the political system and the composition of the CoG, the communication function can either directly and institutionally form part of the presidency, chancellery or prime minister's office, have the status of a separate ministry or a mix of both. In the current global context, CoGs are being called upon for a more prominent role in public communication actions.

Figure 8.1. Change in the role of the CoG in public communications from 2019-23
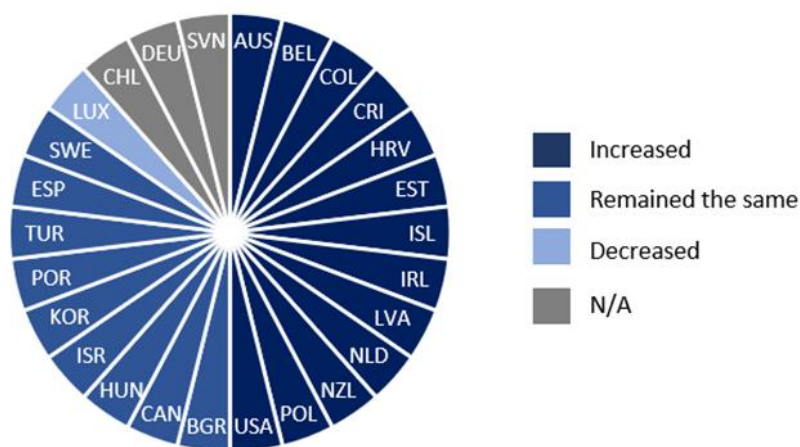
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "From 2019 to 2023, have the following factors about the structure and role of the CoG increased, decreased or remained the same? [Public communications]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

3. Stewarding effective two-way communication

The CoG is well positioned at the centre to lead by example, particularly in view of line ministries, advancing more purposeful communication that builds trust and supports policy design and delivery. An effective, sustained, two-way communication with the public and stakeholders is crucial to foster trust. Not only must governments be able to transmit information effectively but effective two-way communication also requires the ability to listen. One of the key sources of low trust, according to the 2021 OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, are perceptions that citizens are not listened to and that their feedback goes unheeded (OECD, 2022[3]). Many CoGs lead or are involved with external communications to some extent (Figure 8.2), also making them well-placed to serve as a driving force for elevated communication practices and building communication capabilities.

Figure 8.2. The CoG's role varies across communication activities
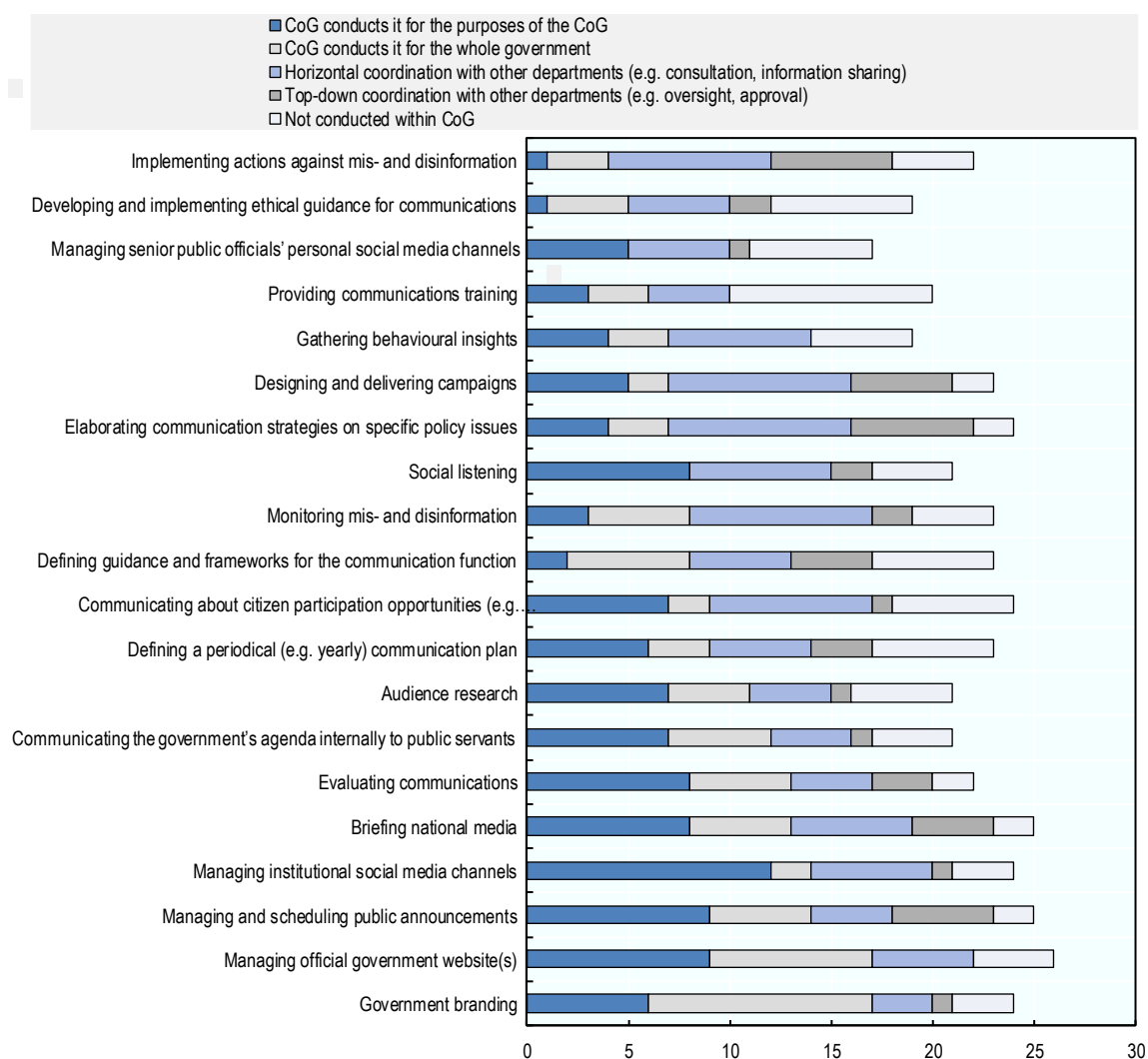
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "Please indicate the role of the CoG for the following communication activities".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Leading by example to drive more purposeful communication

While the CoG is never responsible for all external communication, it leads some communication efforts. This is particularly important for policies or programmes that involve several stakeholders in the administration or refer to cross-cutting topics. In Belgium, the Federal Public Service Chancellery led a communication campaign to renew Belgium's attractivity following the 2016 terrorist attacks (Box 8.1).

Furthermore, several CoGs expanded their role in managing government communication activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021[1]). For example, the Government Offices of Sweden crafted a multi-channel communication strategy to facilitate interactions with all stakeholders. The strategy utilised various communication media, including an institutional website, live broadcasts and social media, to engage in direct and indirect dialogue with the Swedish population (OECD, 2021[4]).

Box 8.1. Leading external communications from the centre in Belgium

"Belgium, uniquely phenomenal" communication campaign, 2017-21

Following the 2016 terrorist attacks in Belgium, a study carried out by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs showed that the general perceptions about the country were:

- Negative: the tone used to talk about Belgium was critical, mostly factual and correct, but often sharp and rather negative.
- Positive: there was an enormous outpouring of compassion and solidarity towards Belgium after the attacks and respect for the serenity with which the Belgian government (and people) reacted to the attacks.

Enhancing the image of a country faced with "Belgium bashing" and in a context of uncertainty and fear was a real challenge. The study helped the CoG understand better what needs to be communicated. Thanks to this study, the CoG decided to highlight Belgium's positive image and assets (openness, multilingualism, tolerance and collaboration). This first campaign highlighted Belgium's many attractions in a humorous and modest way. The campaign concept was based on "99 reasons why Belgium is 'otherwise phenomenal' (because 100 would be an exaggeration)". The target audiences/countries were strategically chosen based on the abovementioned analysis and included citizens, tourists and the press. This campaign lasted from 2017 to 2021 and helped drive tourism back to normal levels. Joining forces with regions, other federal institutions and a wide range of stakeholders was crucial for the success of the campaign.

Source: Information provided by representatives of the Federal Public Service Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Belgium.

The CoG can also lead by example on strong public communication methods through capacity-building approaches, with Chile's Digital Kit as an example (Box 8.2).

Box 8.2. Chile's Digital Kit: Illustrated guidelines for communication without gender stereotypes

The CoG in the Chilean government has developed a digital kit that consists of a series of periodically updated digital communication, design and development tools to facilitate the creation of digital and printed government material. As part of the tools provided, the government published an illustrated guide on public communication without gender stereotypes in 2016. The guide not only aims to create awareness about existing gender stereotypes by highlighting diversity but also illustrates the existing problems with the visualisation and depiction of women. This helps to reach all audience segments from the administration while working towards the objective of improving gender equality.

Note: The Digital Kit can be accessed at www.kitdigital.gob.cl.
Source: Government of Chile (2016[5]), *Guía ilustrada para una comunicación sin estereotipos de género*, https://kitdigital.gob.cl/archivos/160302_ManualPpctvaGeneroTRAZADO_baja.pdf (accessed on 22 August 2023).

Elevating communication capabilities across government

The CoG can also serve as a driving force to elevate communication capabilities across government. From its unique position in the centre, it can work to build better whole-of-government communication

methodologies and means. Box 8.3 describes a UK example of the CoG steering advanced communication methods throughout government.

Box 8.3. Steering communications from the centre: The UK Government Communication Service

In the United Kingdom, the Government Communication Service (GCS), created in 2013 within the CoG's Cabinet Office, supports whole-of-government communication and guidance for the rest of the civil service. Its goal is to provide an exceptional standard of professional practice to support the government, implementing the Prime Minister and Cabinet's priorities to build a stronger economy, a fairer society, a United Kingdom and a global Britain. The GCS multi-annual reform strategy has five goals:

1. Improve the ability of communicators to work together to address top challenges.
2. Grow capabilities to leverage technological transformation for the public good.
3. Improve efficiency and effectiveness of the GCS.
4. Build public trust.
5. Grow and develop the function's talent pool.

The GCS works under the public communication mandate represented by the Functional Standards document, which sets out the purpose for public communication and expectations for its consistent management in any given public institution. It uses a range of practices and frameworks to support its enhancement of public communications, including in the fight against mis- and disinformation.

Co-ordinating with the communication unit within the Prime Minister's Office, the GCS ensures that the UK government speaks with one voice. In doing so, it complements the development and update of the aforementioned common frameworks and guidance with support on capacity, collaboration and training. A strong steering function in the centre of government can be an asset to support better policy cohesion and alignment with the executive agenda (OECD, 2021[1]).

The GCS utilises a range of activities to support whole-of-government communication, including frequent meetings, weekly media moment grids, guidance on messaging, sharing of monitoring data, contributions to whole-of-government strategies and the use of protocols or the provision of direct guidance and support to departments or the Cabinet Office. The reform strategy seeks to strengthen the GCS' capacity for strategic planning with the goal of creating a common, annual framework for delivering communication campaigns across ministries. Departmental campaigns may be required to appoint a "senior responsible owner" who would receive direct support from the GCS.

Source: GCS (2020[6]), *What We Do*, United Kingdom Government Communication Service, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/ (accessed on 18 September 2023); GCS (2022[7]), *Performance with Purpose: Government Communication Service Strategy*, https://strategy.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/gcs-strategy-2022-25.pdf (accessed on 18 September 2023).

Audience insights and diverse reach

The CoG can help consolidate and drive better practices in helping consolidate and build capabilities to reach the right audiences and gain insights from these audiences. Transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation, as described in the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, are essential to building trust and achieving good policy outcomes (OECD, 2017[8]). Delivering accessible and inclusive approaches to two-way communication is essential to ensure diverse groups are included in this stakeholder participation (Cazenave and Bellantoni, 2022[9]).

Reaching all groups in society can prove difficult as no single approach is best when it comes to communication activities. Different groups tend to have dissimilar reactions or needs around communication and thus, inclusive and accessible communication is crucial (Alfonsi et al., 2022[10]; Cazenave and Bellantoni, 2022[9]). In fact, data from the OECD survey show that approximately 35% of countries reported that reaching all groups in society is among the top 3 most challenging communication-related responsibilities (OECD, 2023[2]).

Using communication across the policy lifecycle can help administrations gather insights for the deployment of policies and those who are users or impacted by policies (OECD, 2021[1]). This is important for the role of the CoG in improving responsiveness both when setting the agenda and designing policy. Communications can support government efforts in engaging stakeholders during policy development (see Chapter 3). Conversely, communication campaigns are commonly used to support the effective implementation of policy, where they can help increase awareness, compliance and acceptability. The application of behavioural approaches in public communication, prominent, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, is a growing practice at the policy implementation stage that supports better outcomes.

The CoG can support governments in ensuring they intentionally reach the right audiences, including those more difficult to reach. The OECD survey shows that reaching all groups in society (including young people, ethnic or linguistic minorities, offline groups, etc.) can prove difficult, even with the CoGs convening power (see Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3. Reaching all groups in society remains a challenge for some CoGs
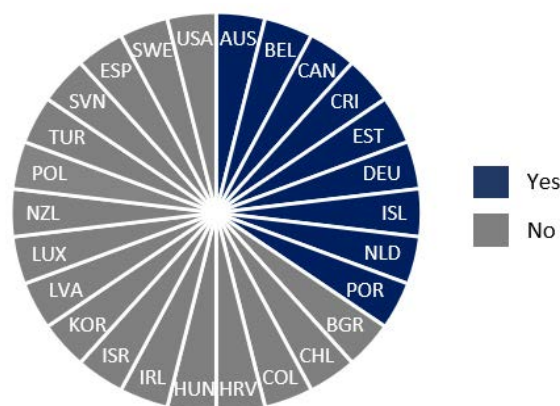
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What are the three most challenging communication-related responsibilities for the CoG? [Reaching all groups in society (including young people, ethnic or linguistic minorities, offline groups, etc.)]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Recently, some CoGs have been utilising newer and more sophisticated approaches to communication, including real-time data and behavioural insights. Primarily, this is to gain insights to help decision-making, better tailor policies and promote compliance and adoption of policies. For instance, the expansion in the use of social media and other digital platforms for communication has facilitated the use of social listening to understand the needs and experiences of stakeholders. On the other hand, many are using widespread surveys to gain insights from different audiences, for example in Australia.

Another technique that CoGs are using to hone their communication efforts is behavioural insights (BI). CoGs can target their communication by taking into consideration people's existing biases and social norms. There are several examples of BI units in CoGs, including in Canada, German and the United Kingdom, or hub-and-spoke models with a central unit with expertise that supports departmental activities,

such as in Australia. Box 8.4 describes how the United Kingdom's centre of government supports policymakers and communicators in using BI approaches, while Box 8.5 describes Canada's Impact and Innovation Unit which feeds BI into policymaking.

Box 8.4. IN CASE: A behavioural approach to anticipating unintended consequences in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's IN CASE framework is a tool designed to support policymakers and communicators in anticipating potential unintended behavioural consequences of a campaign or intervention. It was designed by the Cabinet Office's Behavioural Science Team and puts forward a set of prompting questions to help policymakers guide their discussions and identify which potential impacts could arise (i.e. intended behaviours, non-target audiences, compensatory behaviours, additional behaviours, signalling, emotional impact). The framework also includes elements to help mitigate undesirable consequences.

Source: GCS (2021[11]), *IN CASE: A Behavioural Approach to Anticipating Unintended Consequences,* https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/in-case-a-behavioural-approach-to-anticipating-unintended-consequences/ (accessed on 30 June 2023).

Box 8.5. Building and scaling behaviourally informed strategies for government to earn trust, counteract stressors and optimise policy implementation in Canada

The Impact and Innovation Unit (IIU) in the Privy Council Office was established to help bridge the gap between policy development and implementation. The IIU applies methods such as behavioural science to promote better outcomes for Canadians, which include public health, environmental protection and climate action, agriculture, immigration and innovation in the Canadian economy.

Across its distinct public health and climate behavioural research programmes, the IIU identified public trust in government and related public institutions as a critical and cross-cutting factor with strong links to key outcomes, such as COVID-19 vaccine uptake and support for climate action. This data-driven insight gave rise to a programme of applied behavioural science research dedicated to broadening and deepening our understanding of public trust in government. This programme, driven by the national-scale Trust, Information, and Digital Ecosystem Study (TIDES), is generating robust evidence to understand individual- and system-level factors shaping trust in institutions. Such factors include information consumption in challenging information environments, social cohesion and polarisation, democratic outlook, online harms and their links to trust in the government at various levels and in various policy areas. A key goal of TIDES is to guide potential evidence-based actions the government can take to both respond to external stressors on trust, such as mis/disinformation proliferating on line, and better earn trust by designing for trustworthiness in the government's own behaviours and processes.

The IIU has learned that decision-makers in multiple domains are finding public trust – and its behavioural antecedents and consequences – to be key to achieving policy objectives and are finding value in data-driven insights on this topic.

Source: Information provided by representatives from the government of Canada.

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4. Tackling mis- and disinformation and crisis response

One of the most pertinent topics for CoGs is the fight against mis- and disinformation. Mis- and disinformation can distort the public's perception of government competency and values, and as such can harm trust in government. Disinformation campaigns pose a wide range of threats, including public health conspiracy theories and foreign information manipulation and interference operations, as seen in Russia's efforts to undermine international support for Ukraine. These threats have reinforced the need for CoGs to play an active role in responding to disinformation, as well as to reinforce information integrity more broadly by fostering an enabling environment for accurate, reliable and plural information to thrive. The challenge from a governance standpoint is significant, as governments find themselves in a complex position. Policy measures are required to counteract disinformation and reinforce information integrity, and yet these actions should not result in undue control over publicly available content.

According to data from the OECD survey, tackling mis- and disinformation is a top or significant priority for 50% of the countries surveyed (OECD, 2023[2]). The CoG has an important role to play in combatting mis- and disinformation by building central expertise and capabilities to support line ministries and agencies from the centre.

Figure 8.4. Tackling mis- and disinformation is a priority for most CoGs
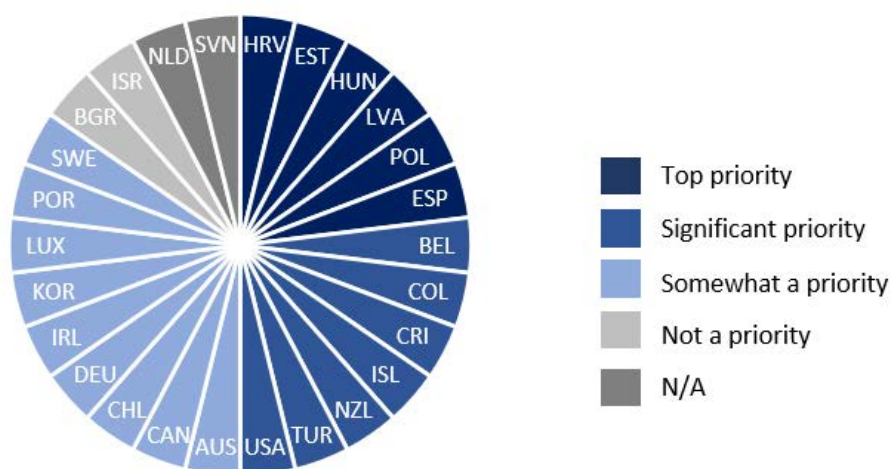
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "How much of a priority are the following functions in the CoG? [Tackling mis-disinformation]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Forty-six percent of countries surveyed by the OECD reported that their role in tackling mis- and disinformation has increased over the last three years (OECD, 2023[2]). Countries such as New Zealand (Box 8.6), the United Kingdom and the United States have centralised functions to co-ordinate and provide guidance on mis and disinformation. Many are utilising the practices outlined in the "Good practice principles for public communication responses to mis- and disinformation" (OECD, 2022[12]).

Box 8.6. New Zealand's approach to strengthening resilience to disinformation

The CoG is driving a whole-of-society approach after acknowledging New Zealanders' concerns about the effects of mis- and disinformation. Results from public engagement and the 2022 National Security Public Survey (as reported in the draft National Security Long Term Insights Briefing) showed misinformation (which here covers both mis- and disinformation) was high on the list of national security threats people felt would likely occur in both the short and long terms.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is co-ordinating a civil society-led group to look at long-term resilience approaches, supporting community programmes to society and commissioning specific research on the effects of disinformation.

Source: New Zealand Government (2023[13]), *Strengthening Resilience to Disinformation*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/national-security/strengthening-resilience-disinformation (accessed on 31 October 2023).

Nonetheless, the complexity of this evolving phenomenon means that most of the countries surveyed by the OECD (62%) report countering mis- and disinformation as one of the top 3 most challenging communication-related functions of the CoG (see Figure 8.5) (OECD, 2023[2]).

Figure 8.5. The most challenging communication responsibilities of the CoG
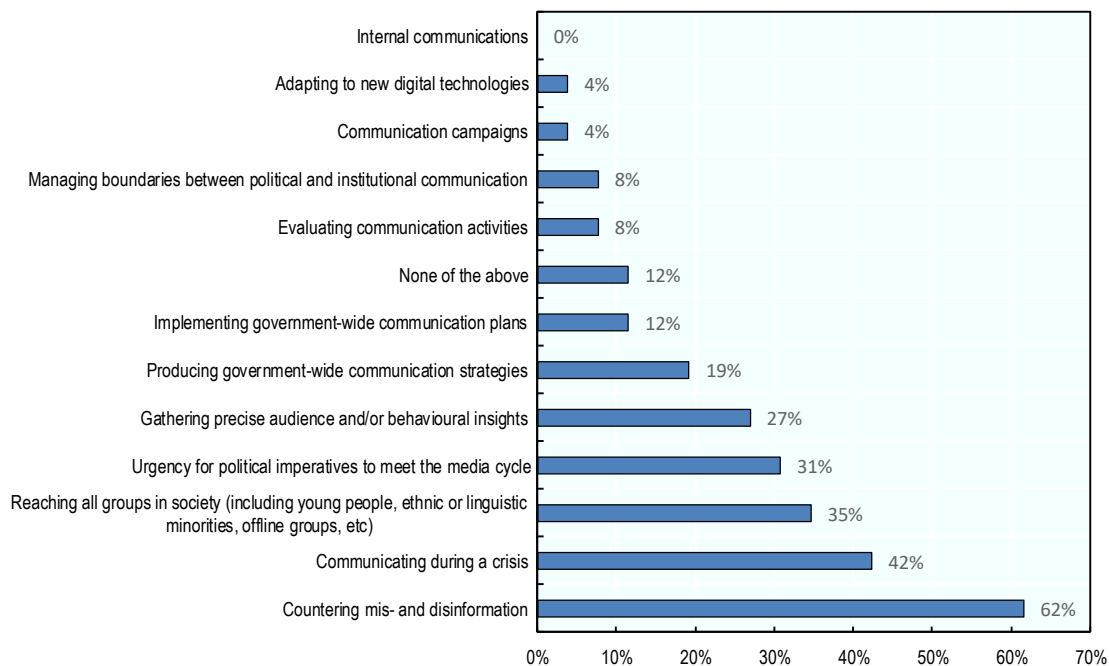
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "What are the three most challenging communication-related responsibilities for the CoG? [Communicating during a crisis]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

Counteracting this phenomenon also calls for monitoring actions so governments can identify and stop its spread. CoGs can track communication channels and narratives to understand the spread of false

information in real time. Based on such insights, they can aim to mitigate the reach and effects of such narratives by filling voids in reliable information with factual, clear and relevant information. According to the responses to the 2023 survey, 35% of CoGs collaborate with other departments in this task and 19% track mis- and disinformation for the whole of government (OECD, 2023[2]). Box 8.7 provides an example of Estonia's communication during the COVID-19 crisis and Box 8.8 details approaches in Japan, Latvia and the United Kingdom.

Box 8.7. Fostering coherent messages during the COVID-19 crisis in Estonia

In Estonia, the CoG co-ordinates public communication, including external and internal communication and fighting mis- and disinformation. During the COVID-19 crisis, the Government Communication Unit formed a special working group to discuss and disseminate the government's messages and receive feedback. Weekly meetings were complemented with written overviews on both communication plans and the media picture, and included social media monitoring to tackle mis- and disinformation. The format of the group went well beyond the line ministries, including the Police and Customs Board, European Commission representation in Estonia and independent constitutional institutions.

Moreover, the government also disseminated the information developed by the Scientific Advisory Body created at the beginning of the pandemic. This allowed the administration to communicate the importance of the situation to the public and helped increase trust in the actions carried out by the government.

Source: Information provided by representatives of the Ministry of Environment; Raudla, R. (2021[14]), "Estonian response to COVID-19 pandemic: Learning, cooperation, and the advantages of beign a small country", https://www.redalyc.org/journal/2410/241066211008/html/ (accessed on 30 June 2023).

Box 8.8. Tackling mis- and disinformation

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) was launched in 2018 within the Cabinet Office to monitor how the public was receiving government announcements. The proliferation of mis- and disinformation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic brought expanded responsibilities to the RRU, including direct rebuttals of harmful social media content in co-operation with the government's larger public health campaign.

Canada

In Canada, the Privy Council Office's COVID-19 Digital Communications Coordination Unit co-ordinated whole-of-government communication through mechanisms such as the Canada.ca crisis communications content design checklist, which encouraged public communicators to refer to big data to support the evolving information needs of citizens throughout the pandemic.

Japan

In Japan, the Government established its new structure, which is composed of Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, Cabinet Public Affairs Office, and National Security Secretariat, to counter

disinformation originated abroad in 2023. This structure collects, aggregates and analyses open-source information as well as conducts external communications in a prompt and accurate manner.

Latvia

In 2022, the State Chancellery of Latvia published "A Handbook against disinformation: to recognise and to counter." The manual presents practical recommendations for civil servants and civil society to identify and counter digital disinformation campaigns. In 2023, based on the handbook, the State Chancellery of Latvia launched long-term communication project Black on White (www.melnsuzbalta.lv) with an aim to increase societal resilience against mis- and disinformation. It includes weekly podcasts, analytical articles and know-how videos with practical recommendations, including how to identify deep-fakes, talk to a relative who trusts conspiracy theories or spot fraudulent ad campaigns on social media. Based on the whole-of-society approach, the platform also has a functionality for users to rapidly report suspected mis- and disinformation directly to the State Chancellery of Latvia.

Sources: Alfonsi, C. et al. (2022[10]), "Public communication trends after COVID-19: Innovative practices across the OECD and in four Southeast Asian countries", https://doi.org/10.1787/cb4de393-en; Banerjee, S. (2020[15]), "How we are fighting the spread of false coronavirus information online", https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/how-we-are-fighting-the-spread-of-false-coronavirus-information-online/; OECD (2020[16]), "Transparency, communication and trust: The role of public communication in responding to the wave of disinformation about the new coronavirus", https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/transparency-communication-and-trust-the-role-of-public-communication-in-responding-to-the-wave-of-disinformation-about-the-new-coronavirus-bef7ad6e/; Government of Canada (2022[17]), *Best Practices for Communicating in a Digital World*, https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/communications-community-office/articles/best-practices-communicating-digital-world.html; LSM News (2022[18]), "Latvia's State Chancery issues guidebook against disinformation", https://eng.lsm.lv/article/features/media-literacy/latvias-state-chancery-issues-guidebook-against-disinformation.a478655/; Narakazi, T. (2023[19]), "Japan setting up rapid-response unit to counter disinformation", https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14824434; State Chancellery of Latvia (n.d.[20]), *Black on White*, https://melnsuzbalta.lv/ (accessed on 4 December 2023); Bambals, R. et al. (2022[21]), *Rokasgrāmata pret dezinformāciju: atpazīt un pretoties*, https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/media/14255/download?attachment.

Moving forward, the OECD will continue to work with countries to identify a range of governance responses to counter disinformation and build information integrity. Notably, the OECD DIS/MIS Resource Hub,[1] launched at the 2022 Global Forum and Ministerial on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy, is a peer learning platform for sharing knowledge, data and analysis of government approaches to tackle mis- and disinformation. Drawing on good practices identified in the expert group, the resource hub is developing a framework to aggregate countries' ongoing efforts and provide a comprehensive picture of efforts to strengthen information integrity.

5. Guiding good internal communication

There is often a centralised function to lead internal communication across public sector organisations (OECD, 2021[1]). When adequate, internal communication can foster information dissemination, increase staff engagement and strengthen its support for the government's strategic priorities. Given the CoG's role in supporting the cabinet and in articulating the government's agenda, it can ensure consistent, clear and correct information across the government. In 2023, 19% of the countries reported that their CoG communicates the government's agenda to public servants for the whole of government. This role is essential to strengthen internal cohesion of the public sector and to engage and build support for government direction among public employees.

Given the different institutional arrangements that underpin the communication activities, some CoGs consider internal communication as part of their core activities. The 2023 survey shows a heterogeneous landscape across surveyed countries. Approximately 12% of CoGs reported internal communications as a top priority, while 46% considered it somewhat a priority (OECD, 2023[2]) (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6. Internal communications are a priority for most CoGs
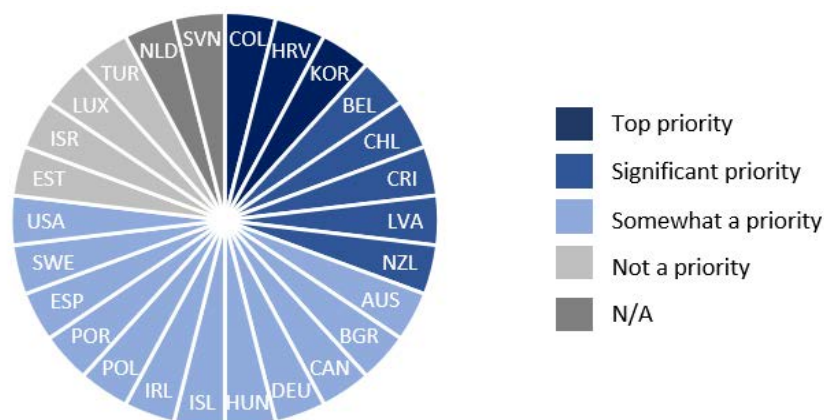
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "How much of a priority are the following functions in the CoG? [Internal public administration communications]".
Source: OECD (2023[2]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

6. Common challenges and enablers

Through a synthesis of information collected through country practices, desk research, interviews and the experiences shared by participants of the OECD informal Expert Group on Strategic Decision Making at the Centre of Government, the following key considerations can be identified.

Common challenges

- Countering mis- and disinformation is seen as a major challenge by a wide range of CoGs. Recent crises and evolving technologies, such as artificial intelligence, exacerbate this. Many CoGs are grappling with how to proactively respond to this phenomenon and stay ahead of malicious actors.

- Balancing the need for a quick government response with accurate, impartial and trusted information can be particularly difficult in highly politicised situations. The CoG is often called to safeguard the quality of the information. Yet, CoGs' proximity to the top elected officials can create a risk for politicisation. Public communication can only be effective if it is perceived as trustworthy by the public, rather than biased or polemical, which calls for checks and balances.

- Embedding communication activities in all policy cycle stages can prove difficult if staff do not understand or see its value or if accountability lines are not clearly defined. The CoG's role in driving a culture of good communication requires adequate leadership, support and resources.

- Reaching all groups in society can be challenging, particularly as patterns of news and information consumption grow more diverse and trust in media and official sources dwindles.

Key enablers

- Clear roles of line ministries on in relation to communication activities are important to avoid duplication of messaging or over-engagement with certain stakeholders.

- CoGs can play a key role in leveraging citizen and stakeholder insights for more inclusive and responsive policymaking and decision processes. A two-way dialogue between the administration and external stakeholders can be further fostered by integrating insights from consultations and broader participatory processes into final policy decisions.

- Whether it sits specifically in the CoG institution or not, a systemic approach to public communications can support consistent information to the public about the existence of participation opportunities and digital platforms for dialogue and exchange on key policy issues.

- Facilitating the availability of data in user-friendly formats, including, for example, promoting the use of clear, plain and understandable language, can help increase transparency, accountability and trust. The CoG's position in the administration can be leveraged to aggregate information and define standards for presenting it.

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Note

[1] For more information, see https://www.oecd.org/stories/dis-misinformation-hub/.

9 Building the centre of government (CoG) as a system

This chapter takes a systems-thinking approach to reviewing the centre of government (CoG) holistically. Evolving pressures and new requirements for the CoG need cohesive approaches which take into account the collection of elements – including people, processes, information and input – that can make up a high-functioning CoG. The chapter focuses on systems approaches, presenting country practices. It analyses the organisational design of the CoG, a systems approach to workforce development and the right mix of staff, and a holistic view on obtaining the right key materials and support, including digital tools and the right workflows. This chapter also highlights the need for balance between stability and agility at the CoG.

> ## Key messages
>
> - The evolution of and changing pressures on the centre of government (CoG) need a cohesive and holistic approach to building a high-performing CoG into the future.
> - Thinking of the CoG as a system – a collection of different elements, such as people, processes, information, inputs, etc. – ensures a holistic and adaptive perspective when developing it. CoGs can use a systems approach to their design and strengthen their various elements.
> - Several elements can be considered to enhance performance in a comprehensive way, including through processes such as organisation design, workforce and material input management, and support with tools such as mandates, governance arrangements, authorities, data and financial input.
> - Review of and constant adjustment to the system is to ensure support adaptive and sustainable systems.
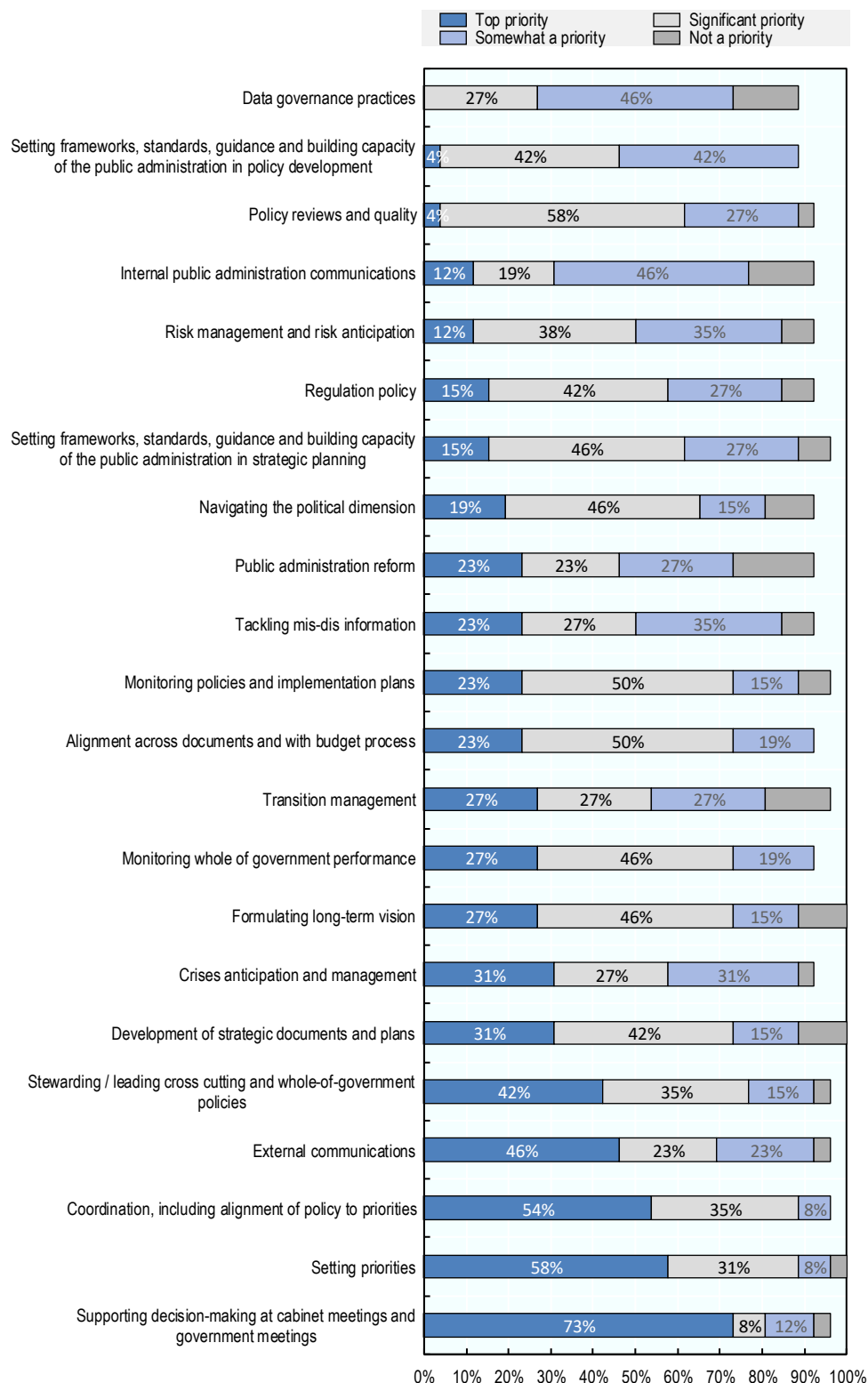
1. Introduction

The CoG has traditionally played an important role in facilitating cabinet decision-making. However, the CoG's role is increasingly expanding into other areas such as policy development, co-ordination, monitoring, strategic planning (OECD, 2015[1]) and reform (OECD, 2018[2]). These practices are being reshaped by internal and external transformations, including declining trust in governments, pressing fiscal contexts, crises and advancing technologies. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, CoGs have also become more involved in risk and crisis management, as well as tackling mis- and disinformation (OECD, 2020[3]) (see Figure 9.1).

This evolution of roles and responsibilities requires CoGs to consider how they need to develop to ensure they are fit for purpose now and in the future. Organisational development theory suggests that CoGs can be considered a complex system based on the various elements that must come together to enable them to perform. These elements include mandates, information inputs or flows, structure, workforce skills and culture and financial resources and data. Building effective CoGs requires consideration of these elements in a cohesive manner.

The compositions and functions of CoGs, including communications, national security and foreign policy, vary greatly across jurisdictions (see Figure 9.2).

Given the diversity of CoGs globally, identifying generic ways to build a strong CoG is challenging. However, doing so is increasingly relevant as the complexity of the role of the CoG increases in response to the global context.

Figure 9.1. CoGs' priority functions

Legend: Top priority | Significant priority | Somewhat a priority | Not a priority

Function	Top priority	Significant priority	Somewhat a priority	Not a priority
Data governance practices		27%	46%	
Setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity of the public administration in policy development	4%	42%	42%	
Policy reviews and quality	4%	58%	27%	
Internal public administration communications	12%	19%	46%	
Risk management and risk anticipation	12%	38%	35%	
Regulation policy	15%	42%	27%	
Setting frameworks, standards, guidance and building capacity of the public administration in strategic planning	15%	46%	27%	
Navigating the political dimension	19%	46%	15%	
Public administration reform	23%	23%	27%	
Tackling mis-dis information	23%	27%	35%	
Monitoring policies and implementation plans	23%	50%	15%	
Alignment across documents and with budget process	23%	50%	19%	
Transition management	27%	27%	27%	
Monitoring whole of government performance	27%	46%	19%	
Formulating long-term vision	27%	46%	15%	
Crises anticipation and management	31%	27%	31%	
Development of strategic documents and plans	31%	42%	15%	
Stewarding / leading cross cutting and whole-of-government policies	42%	35%	15%	
External communications	46%	23%	23%	
Coordination, including alignment of policy to priorities	54%	35%	8%	
Setting priorities	58%	31%	8%	
Supporting decision-making at cabinet meetings and government meetings	73%	8%	12%	

Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "How much of a priority are the following functions in the CoG?".
Source: OECD (2023[4]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", OECD, Paris.

Figure 9.2. The existence of dedicated units or teams in the CoG to support functions
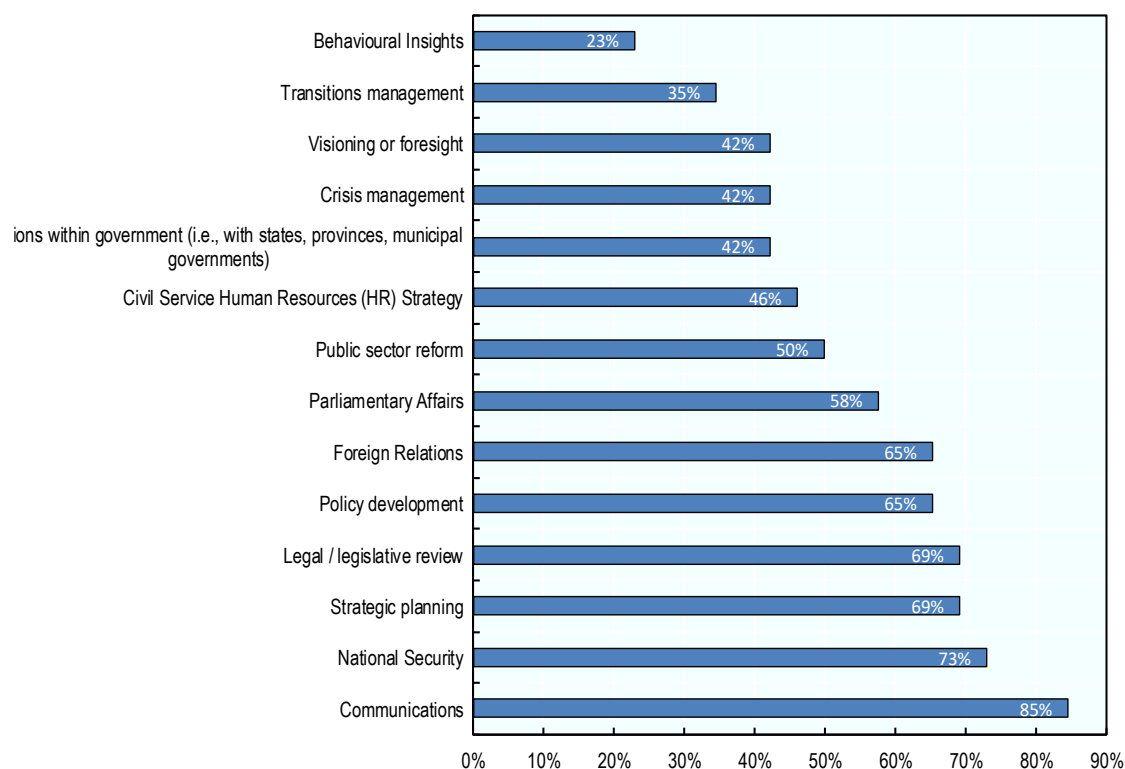
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "Is there a dedicated unit or team at the CoG to support the following functions?". The survey did not seek dedicated teams on cross functions such as digital or environment.
Source: OECD (2023[4]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", OECD, Paris.

This chapter will discuss key elements of building an effective CoG through the following structure:

- Enhancing the CoG as a system.
  - Organisational design mandates.
  - Workforce development.
  - Material input and support.

2. Enhancing the CoG as a system

A system can be defined as a set of elements and interconnections organised in a way to achieve an outcome or product which is more than just the sum of the system's independent elements (Meadows, 2008[5]; Dekker, 2017[6]). The CoG, just like any other organisation, can be considered a complex system based on the multiple elements that comprise it and its influence on its environment.

A first step in enhancing the CoG as a system is to ensure it has clarity in its purpose and mandates. This will ensure that there is a clear frame for developing specific elements. For example, it needs to adjust its performance or workforce incentives to increase collaboration. Following this, the CoG can consider its organisational design, mandates, workforce and other enablers.

Organisational design of the CoG

CoG mandates, structures, processes and consultative mechanisms are key to ensuring the CoG can work across boundaries (OECD, 2017[7]). To illustrate the diverse design of CoGs, Box 9.1 outlines in more detail the functions and powers of the CoG in the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland and Lithuania.

Box 9.1. Functions and powers of CoGs in the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland and Lithuania

Finland

In Finland, the CoG is composed of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Justice. The working areas and functions of the PMO include foresight activities and work on the future, analysis, assessment and research, communications and councils on economics and regulatory impact assessment. The PMO is also responsible for steering government ownership, Finland's European Union (EU) policy co-ordination and inter-administrative co-operation in specific areas like sustainable development. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for financial and governance policies. The ministry also serves as the secretariat to the Economic Policy and Finance Committees. The Ministry of Justice maintains and develops legal order and protections, reinforces democracy and safeguards citizens' fundamental rights. It is responsible for drafting key legislation and ensuring the judicial system's proper functioning.

Iceland

The CoG in Iceland is composed of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the Ministry of Finance and Economics (MoF) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The role of the MFA mainly regards the implementation of the European Economic Area agreement in partnership with the OPM. The OPM has a concrete role and functions in relation to co-ordination and project management across all ministries, in line with the 2011 Administrative Act. The function is mainly enforced through regular meetings of the permanent secretaries, ministerial committee meetings and ad hoc working groups and committees. Functions of the MoF concern the organisation and operations of the public sector in general, public sector reforms, public procurement, digitalisation, public ownership, innovation and public finance. Some of these functions are clearly stated in legislation supported by public agencies, while others are more ad hoc.

Lithuania

The CoG in Lithuania is composed of the Office of the Government. Its functions include scrutinising and drafting legislation, co-ordinating the implementation of the government programme and monitoring its results, co-ordinating Lithuania's EU interactions and policies, record keeping and government communication with the public.

Czech Republic

The CoG in the Czech Republic is composed of the Office of Government. It is the central state administration body and plays an essential role in decision-making through the preparation of government meetings, especially by preparing the agenda and submission materials. However, the office currently only assumes limited responsibilities for strategic planning and the co-ordination of policy development and other traditional CoG functions. This depends on political support from government. Some CoG functions in the Czech Republic have been performed by different bodies and line ministries.

Source: Informal Contact Group on Ukraine of the OECD Public Governance and Regulatory Policy Committees, Responses to Ukraine's Request for Comparative Experience (2023, unpublished).

Box 9.2 outlines Portugal's use of strong mandates for the CoG, combined with purposeful design, pushing for co-ordinated, forward-looking strategic planning.

### Box 9.2. Mandates for strategic planning, PlanAPP, Portugal

To address challenges relating to policy continuity and co-ordination, in 2021, Portugal established a Competence Centre for Planning, Policy and Foresight in Public Administration (*Centro de Competências de Planeamento, de Políticas e de Prospetiva*, PlanAPP). Located within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the CoG has a strong mandate regarding its role in the planning, design, adoption, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. PlanAPP designs, shapes and steers strategies and their planning processes, co-ordinates sectoral efforts and works with public administration to boost its anticipation and adaptation capabilities in a changing environment. Currently, work is underway in co-operation with the OECD to map CoG and non-CoG ministries involved in the strategic planning process and identify gaps and overlaps in responsibilities for the purpose of clarifying the responsibilities and role of line ministries and fostering internal networking.

Source: PlanAPP (2021[8]), *PlanAPP Presentation*, https://planapp.gov.pt/o-planapp/apresentacao/.


Workforce development

The composition of staff within the CoG is a crucial enabler for a successful operation. Yet, CoGs often have limited resources, which highlights the critical nature of the composition and expertise of the staff. CoGs need to help secure institutional memory, ensure continuity and develop long-term strategy (EC, 2017[9]). They must also have good political sense and the ability to react to events. This provides some basis for a CoG comprised of both permanent staff and contingency staff, experts or specialists. Political appointees may also be part of the mix and bring with them information about government objectives and a deep understanding of the political environment. CoGs have identified gaps in their workforce skills (Figure 9.3) and key challenges in recruiting the right staff.

Figure 9.3. The existence of moderate or major skills gaps in the CoG
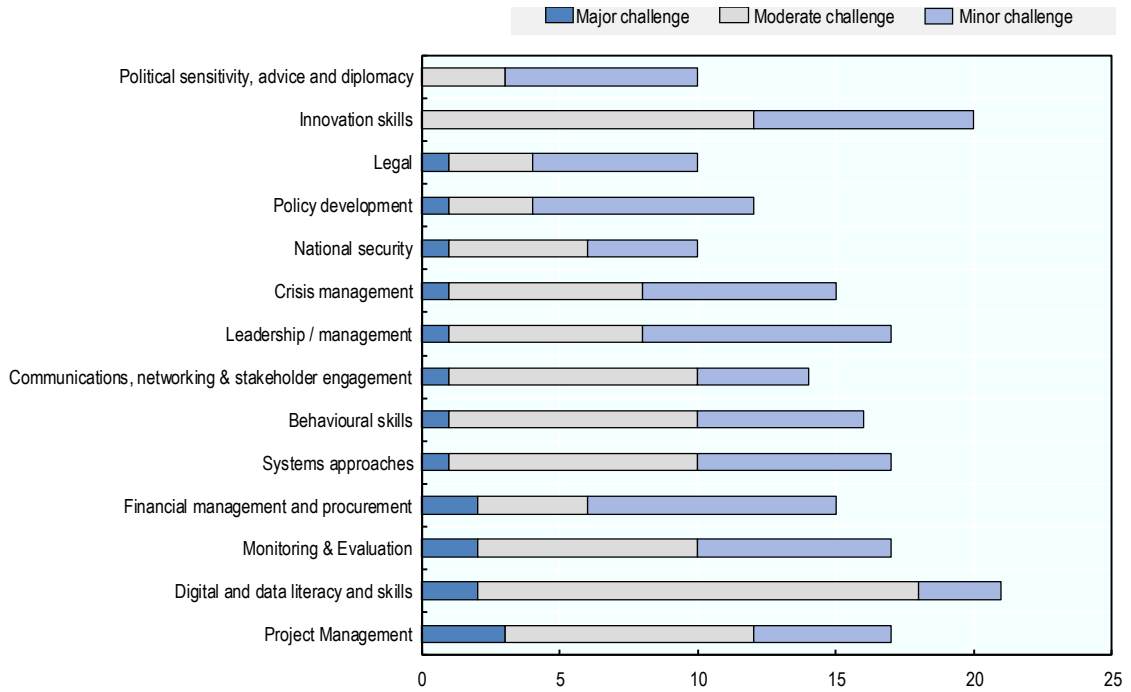
Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "To what extent are the following skills lacking or a gap to the CoG?".
Source: OECD (2023[4]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", OECD, Paris.

Figure 9.4. Challenge factors for ensuring the right skills in the CoG
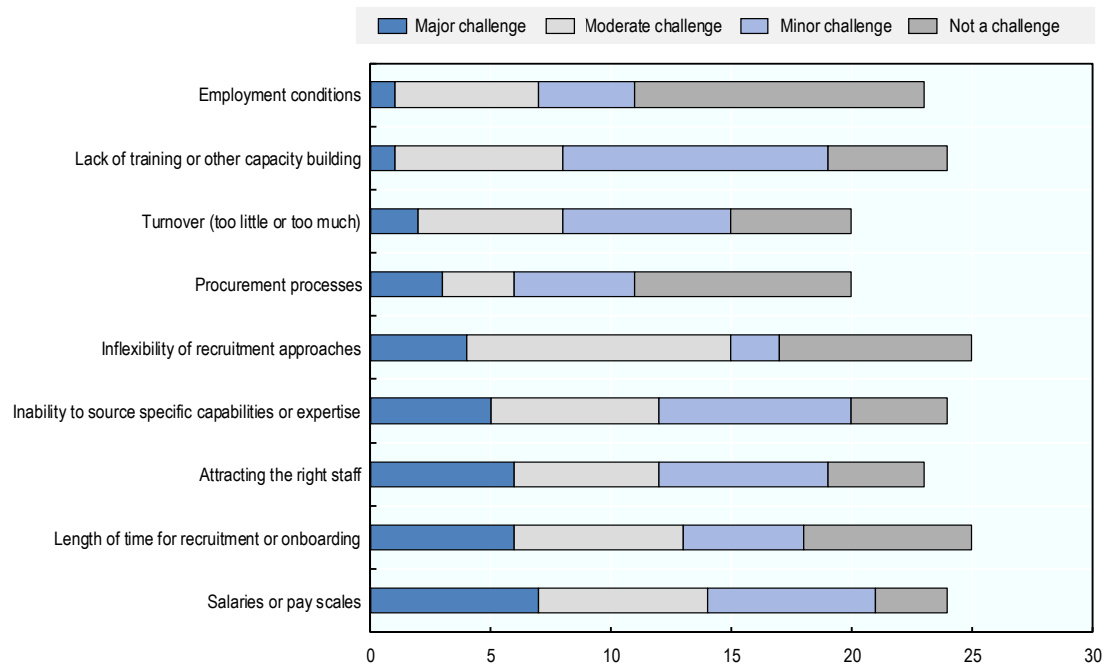
Note: n=26. Countries were asked: "To what extent are the following factors a challenge to ensuring that the required skills are available for the CoG?".
Source: OECD (2023[4]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", OECD, Paris.

The CoG must maintain strong partnerships with internal stakeholders to harness broader workforce resources and expertise when necessary, for example, when the CoG itself is small, as seen in Estonia (Box 9.3), which has very particular workforce requirements due to the size of its government and CoG. The Estonian CoG has the mandate to recruit staff and quickly draw on it and its information-related expertise in other areas.

Box 9.3. CoG as a system in small government, Estonia

Estonia's comparatively small CoG has a broad set of functions with articulated mandates and authority that addresses culture, relationships with ministries and capacity building. The small scale of the Estonian administration requires civil servants to work flexibly, adapting quickly without disrupting daily tasks. This requires civil servants with a broad strategic perspective and expertise, and who are skilled in collaborative and integrated work. The CoG can also recruit staff for specific projects. It also has the potential to streamline communication and minimise bureaucracy between ministers and government.

Information access is also fundamental for CoG operations. The CoG can directly request and acquire data from different departments, ministries and public agencies in Estonia. Obtaining high-quality data in a timely manner and rapidly producing analysis for informed decision-making can be challenging in complex and evolving contexts. To address this, the Estonian CoG is working to increase the automatisation of data sharing to accelerate data circulation and improve collaboration.

Source: Interview with a representative of the Estonian Government Office.

Designing the appropriate staff body for the CoG will require different mechanisms depending on the employer status of the CoG and the role of the CoG in recruitment. Expertise can be drawn into the CoG unit and the broader administration through a combination of targeted recruitment, flexible secondment and staff-sharing arrangements. Investing in public service leadership also achieves longer-term CoG goals (OECD, 2020[10]).

Building the skills of the existing CoG staff is equally essential. Professional development at the CoG through training and experiential learning can help build the diverse skills necessary for good governance, particularly in response to the unique needs of each CoG within its context (Box 9.4).

Box 9.4. Mobilising in-house and international training expertise at the CoG

Bulgaria

The CoG in Bulgaria has used internal and external training resources to build a high-performing workforce. Annually, CoG staff are encouraged to take part in two in-person training programmes at the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) as well as specific additional modules. Annual performance appraisal meetings often serve as a forum for employees and managers to discuss and address a unit's particular training needs. Many employees at the CoG also serve as instructors, delivering training at the IPA that targets a wide range of policies. This has helped to provide a practical perspective.

Bulgaria has also made use of EU-funded projects to enhance specific capabilities at the CoG by welcoming external expertise to deliver training on priority policy areas in co-operation with international organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank. The CoG currently participates in the Public Administration Cooperation Exchange (PACE) project within the EU Technical Support Instrument, which has allowed for study visits and peer exchanges between civil servants across EU member states.

Hungary

To support a high-performing CoG, there are various strategies and initiatives implemented, including specialised yearly training for the staff and different compulsory public administration examinations for entry-level and senior managerial-level positions at the University of Public Service, to offer the skills and knowledge necessary to handle the nuances of central government functions and today's challenges.

This training covers a number of policy areas and materials needed for the professional conduct of a civil servant and helps maintain the professionalism of the civil service.

Source: Information provided by representatives of the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria and the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office.

Material input and support

For the CoG to co-ordinate and drive towards the strategic objectives, material input and infrastructure support are required. Centralised, interoperable and accessible platforms for the management of data or digital information and workflows are essential. Establishing these requires investment in systems and data expertise, clear mandates for ownership and the development of guidelines.

This process requires consideration of resources, finances, training and roles, as can be seen in Latvia (Box 9.5).

Box 9.5. Standardisation and centralisation of support services to strengthen the CoG in Latvia

Latvia is working toward establishing a Joint Service Centre by 2026. A key goal is standardisation and centralisation of support functions to provide high-quality administrative data and information in real time. This will include systems such as human resource management, financial accounting, information and communication technology, procurement and property management, and will provide economic benefits, service quality and efficiency.

Employees of joint service centres are specialised professional staff who focus on improving the service they deliver. These centres allow the broader administration to focus on their primary business tasks. Once all departments are connected to the Joint Service Centre, its functions will be performed by the Treasury and the structure of the CoG will be revised to best fit the new environment.

Source: Republic of Latvia (2023[11]), On the Public Administration Modernisation Plan for 2023-2027, https://likumi.lv/ta/id/341706-par-valsts-parvaldes-modernizacijas-planu-2023-2027-gadam; Information provided by representatives of the State Chancellery of Latvia.

Some CoGs are also deploying digital tools and capacities to support their processes, for example the electronic systems in Estonia.

Box 9.6. Digital platforms for strategic planning in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has developed eKlep, a digital platform for submitting and reviewing documents in preparation for cabinet meetings. This inter-ministerial procedure includes the review of draft strategic plans and public policies, and allows comments from all government institutions.

The process is managed by the Office of the Government (CoG). In addition, strategic documents are added to an online registry, which includes all strategic and conceptual documents. It clearly displays documents, goals and measures, fulfilment responsibilities and success indicators. All line ministries and regions add their strategic documents to this registry.

Source: OECD (2023[12]), *OECD Public Governance Reviews: Czech Republic: Towards a More Modern and Effective Public Administration*, https://doi.org/10.1787/41fd9e5c-en.

3. Common challenges and enablers

Common challenges

- Drawing on the results of the 2017 and 2023 CoG surveys and country feedback, a range of recurring challenges around enhancing the CoG as a system have been identified:
  - o Finding the balance between agility and stability in the design of the CoG.
  - o Tensions in setting the right mandates, as this can hinder the CoG system in doing its job.
  - o Absence of routines in co-ordination and a siloed working culture.
  - o Recruiting and developing skills in specialist areas.
  - o Devolved responsibilities creating silos.
  - o Creating the conditions for innovation and agile responses.
  - o Establishing central data systems and participating in workforce planning.
  - o Appropriately recruiting and training CoG staff and specialist skills in certain areas.
  - o Building transparent and accountable relationships between political and administrative officers.
  - o Lack of permanency of the CoG and the consequent absence of institutional memory.

Key enablers

- CoGs are complex systems themselves and, thus, their design should take a systems-design approach to support a functional and adaptive perspective to building a high-performing CoG. CoGs must take a holistic approach in ensuring they have the right set of design elements. Sustainability is enabled through a balance of constant review and stability in some elements.
- CoGs could consider a dual-pronged approach, with the right mix of all or some permanent staff and established networks of experts available at short notice. Political appointees can offer information about government objectives and a deep understanding of the political environment.
- Communication skills, including negotiation, mediation and instruction, must also be a priority, requiring an appreciation and understanding of both the political and administrative culture (EC, 2017[9]). This is important as the CoG plays an essential role as a bridge between the political and administrative interfaces (see Chapter 1).
- CoGs must be able to react rapidly to new scenarios. Adaptive approaches to management that place knowledge of the system at the centre are critical, as they dictate the need for information flows, expertise and skills development within the system to achieve sustainable and long-lasting performance (Mele, Pels and Polese, 2010[13]).

Annex 9.A. Composition and functions of the CoG

Annex Table 9.A.1. Institutional composition and functions of the CoG, selected OECD countries

	Composition and functions of the CoG
Australia	• Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet • Department of Finance • Department of the Treasury • Australian Public Service Commission

Belgium	• Chancellery of the Prime Minister, in line with the Cabinet of the Prime Minister
	  o Co-ordinates federal, inter-federal and EU policy
	  o Performs administrative and logistical tasks related to the preparation and follow-up of meetings
	  o Organises, develops and co-ordinates communication of cross-departmental information with citizens, media and other political leaders

Bulgaria	• Council of Ministers
	  o Strategic planning
	  o Regulatory policy
	  o Policy co-ordination
	• Ministry of Finance
	  o Co-ordinates the assessment of financial impacts
	  o Grants approval for all strategic and legislative documents

Canada	• Privy Council Office
	  o Functions as the Department of the Prime Minister
	• Department of Finance
	  o Handles issues such as macro-economic and taxation policy
	• Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
	  o Establishes policies and standards for administrative, personnel and organisation practices across government

Chile	• Office of the President o Establishes policy priorities with support from government political committees • Legal Department of the President • Budget Department of Government • Communications Secretariat • Ministry of the Interior • Department of Interministerial Coordination
Colombia	• Cabinet that accompanies the President of the Republic o Monitors sectors of government, social development, economy, etc.

Costa Rica	• Ministry of the Presidency
	  o Leads co-ordination, prioritisation, legal compliance
	• Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy
	  o Leads planning, policy development, monitoring
	• Ministry of Finance
	  o Leads costing, budgeting, financing

Croatia	• Office of the Prime Minister
	  o Performs advisory, analytical, professional and administrative tasks for the needs of the prime minister
	  o Systematically monitors and analyses individual public policies to produce expert opinions and studies
	  o Creates strategic development plans and analyses
	  o Prepares proposals for individual projects from the government programme and co-ordinates their implementation
	  o Processes and prepares materials necessary for the participation of the prime minister in the work of the government cabinet

Estonia	• Government Office o Supports the government of the republic and the prime minister in planning and implementing policy and

	Composition and functions of the CoG
	ensuring good governance

Germany	• Federal Chancellery
	   ○ Prepares and supports the work of the chancellor
	   ○ Maintains contact with all ministries, obtains information about their work and mirrors their work through its internal organisation
	   ○ Co-ordinates the federal ministries and policies of the federal government

Hungary	• Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister
	   ○ Hosts core political staff and leadership of the government
	   ○ Ensures co-ordination between line ministries, central government agencies, state-owned companies and other public organisations
	 • Prime Minister's Office
	   ○ Co-ordinates activity of government commissioners, development of strategies, quality and organisation of public administration

Iceland	• Prime Minister's Office
	   ○ Leads co-ordination and project management across all ministries
	   ○ Ensures regular meetings of the permanent secretaries, through ministerial committee meetings and ad hoc working groups and committees
	 • Ministry of Finance and Economics

Ireland	• Department of the Taoiseach • Department of Finance • Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform
Israel	• Prime Minister's Office • Ministry of Finance • Ministry of Justice

Korea	• Office of the President
	   ○ Leads the government and takes responsibility for overall results from policies and administration
	 • Office for Government Policy Coordination
	   ○ Decides essential policies and co-ordinates policies of other ministries
	   ○ Monitors state affairs and mitigates conflicts before an outbreak

Latvia	• State Chancellery, contains the Prime Minister's Office
	   ○ Provides organisational support and advice to the cabinet of ministers and the prime minister, including by organising meetings of the cabinet and ensuring the preparation of cabinet documents and briefings
	   ○ Co-ordinates and oversees national and sectoral policy planning
	   ○ Implements public administration policy, as well as public and strategic communications
	   ○ The Prime Minister's Office co-ordinates the prime minister's interface with foreign and EU affairs, national security, relations with the parliament, and provides the prime minister with policy and other information
	 • Ministry of Finance
	   ○ Functions as an advisory to the Prime Minister's Office
	 • Ministry of Justice
	   ○ Provides consent on draft legal acts to be considered by the cabinet

Luxembourg	• Ministry of State
	   ○ Supports the prime minister, in their role as president of the government, as co-ordinator of the government's actions and guarantor of the cohesion of the government and the effective implementation of the government's actions
	 • General Secretariat of the Government
	   ○ Acts as the principal unit of the CoG within the Ministry of State
	   ○ Chairs the weekly meetings of all co-ordinators of all ministerial departments
	 • Other more functional units within the Ministry of State (e.g. legal service, diplomatic unit, etc.) are part of the CoG for all activities that fall under their realm
	 • Other agencies (e.g. Government Press Service, High Commission for National Protection, etc.) also support the prime minister in their role as co-ordinator of the government's action

Netherlands	• Office of the Prime Minister ○ Limited to co-ordination functions • Government Information Service
New Zealand	The CoG is responsible for supporting the prime minister and ensuring effective cabinet decision-making, running all government budget processes, fiscal and macro-economic policy, appointment of public service leadership, standards and guidance on integrity and conduct for the public service • Department of the Prime Minister of Cabinet

	Composition and functions of the CoG
	• The Treasury • Public Service Commission
Poland	• Chancellery of the Prime Minister • Government Legislation Centre
Portugal	• Presidency of the Council of Ministers Provides support to the Council of Ministers, the prime minister and the presidency, including ministers, cabinets and the supervised public institutions Promotes the inter-ministerial co-ordination, planning and foresight of the various government departments and provides support services such as legal and European affairs, logistics and information technology
Türkiye	• Directorate of Administrative Affairs of the Presidency o Supports decision-making at government meetings and ensures legal conformity of policy options and proposals for government decisions • Strategy and Budget Office o Responsible for setting vision, priorities and strategic planning, co-ordinating and enhancing coherent policy development and monitoring policies
Slovak Republic	• Office of the Government o Fulfils professional, organisational and technical tasks related to the activities of the government and the prime minister o Manages civil servant employment relations o Controls the implementation of tasks from the Programme Declaration of the Government and Government Resolutions, the handling of petitions and complaints o Leads co-ordination and management of the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan, corruption prevention, and research, development and innovation
Spain	• Cabinet of the Presidency of the Government o Provides the president of the government with the political and technical information necessary for the exercise of his or her functions o Represents the knowledge hub of the programmes, plans and activities of the different ministerial departments, to facilitate the co-ordination of the government's action o Represents the knowledge hub of the public policies and programmes adopted and developed by the governments of the regional entities
Sweden	• Prime Minister's Office, acts as agency head of Government Offices o Strategic planning o Policy development o Legal affairs o Communications o Crisis management o National security
United States	The CoG develops and co-ordinates policy across the executive branch • Executive Office of the President • White House Policy Councils • Office of Management and Budget

Note: n=26. Countries were asked: "How does your country define the CoG? Broadly, what roles, functions, units or agencies comprise your CoG?".
Source: OECD (2023[4]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", OECD, Paris.

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10 Overarching conclusions

This chapter presents a summary of the key enablers and challenges that have emerged from the synthesis of the country practices and experiences shared throughout the compendium. It then discusses the top six enabling conditions that are common across all centre of government (CoG) roles and functions. This includes: the need for clear mandates and delineation of roles between the CoG and other agencies; the need for CoGs to better utilise holistic and systemic approaches, coordination between CoG functions, including fostering trusted relationships between the CoG and other agencies; and the right workforce design as a fundamental requirement. This chapter also highlights the in-depth discussions held with CoGs in developing this compendium and opportunities to continue this dialogue into the future.

This compendium has offered a collection of country practices and lessons learnt from centres of government (CoGs).

There is immense value in sharing information across OECD member and partner countries and the range of experiences showcased in this analysis demonstrates the diverse forms of knowledge on offer from each contributed case.

Despite the diversity in the compositions of CoGs globally, CoGs play common roles and functions as explored through this compendium. The experiences from countries demonstrate that CoGs face many challenges in undertaking their roles. As such, they consider myriad factors to help them address such challenges, enabling them to perform their role effectively and support governments in achieving their ambitions. Six common enablers, in particular, merge from this compendium (Figure 10.1):

- **Clear roles, mandates and spheres of influence of CoGs are essential**. Setting out CoG roles and responsibilities can help differentiate it from line ministries, help it co-ordinate horizontally across government and make work more efficient by avoiding duplication. Clear mandates help the CoG bridge the political and administrative interface by honouring their differences. Guidelines, agreements and discussions can facilitate this.

- **Clear roles need to be complemented by trusted relationships** between CoGs and line ministries. CoGs must foster trust with line ministries, allowing them to see the value in the CoGs' roles and functions. It is also essential to open information sharing (including potential challenges) and for line ministries to adopt guidance or standards set by CoGs.

- **Holistic, intentional and systemic approaches are necessary**. CoGs need to intentionally design their approaches to guide good practices and reforms. CoGs must consider the whole system when undertaking their functions, including rules, people, processes, data and other support. Good strategic planning through holistic approaches can make complex and multifaceted projects a reality in public administration reform.

- **The CoG needs political leadership, clarity and support**. A clear vision from the government is crucial to the CoG's performance: CoGs need to translate the government's vision into priorities and actions across ministries. Further, clear mandates and political support are important for CoGs to help steward or co-ordinate effectively on behalf of the whole administration.

- **CoGs play a key role in co-ordination, yet CoG functions and institutions also need to be co-ordinated**. CoGs need to ensure that their various functions (e.g. prioritisation, policy action and monitoring) are also well co-ordinated and harmonised. This is important to ensure that priorities flow through the various functions smoothly and that different functions mutually reinforce each other.

- **CoGs need the right people, with the right skills, in the right places**. This is even more crucial as the role and functions of the CoG evolve. Skills such as good political sense, whole-of-system thinking, mediation and data analysis are becoming increasingly important. Further, the CoG needs the right material support (e.g. budgets or data access) to perform effectively. Collaborative approaches simplify this complex responsibility.

Figure 10.1. Key enablers for effective CoGs

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The OECD would like to thank countries for sharing their practices, experiences, and insights in the development of the Compendium, and hope that it will be useful for CoGs as they reflect upon and look for ways to improve their operations. Further consideration will be given on how to continue to make this work useful into the future.

Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity

COMPENDIUM OF PRACTICES

From steering decision-making in times of complexity to stewarding cross-cutting policies and guiding good practices across the public administration, centres of government (CoGs) play an important role in achieving government ambitions. CoGs have recently found themselves under pressure to help navigate increasingly complex policy challenges in an environment characterised by multiple crises, polarisation and declining trust in public institutions. This compendium gathers and shares practices and experiences of CoGs in undertaking their various roles and functions. It describes the mechanisms CoGs use in roles such as bridging the political-administrative interface, stewarding cross-cutting policies, guiding public administration reform, and engaging with citizens and other stakeholders. Finally, it discusses the lessons learnt and key enablers that emerge from the experiences. This compendium serves CoG leaders and government officials who seek to better understand the role of the centre in contributing to better outcomes for citizens and society.