

3rd Meeting of the OECD Expert Group on Public Communication

28 June 2021

Event summary

Overview

The 3rd meeting of the OECD Expert Group on Public Communication (EGPC) took place online on 28 June 2021 and gathered 90 participants from 25 countries. The meeting served as an opportunity to discuss the OECD Secretariat's ongoing work relating to public communication, including the flagship international report "*Public Communication: the Global Context and the Way Forward*" and the "*Good Practice Principles on Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation*". The meeting shared key findings and recommendations, and informed participants of the next steps before finalizing and declassifying the report. The OECD will share the draft report with countries that participated to the 2020 Understanding Public Communication Survey prior to review and approval by the OECD Working Party on Open Government (WPOG) and the Public Governance Committee (PGC). The meeting was also an opportunity for participants to shape the scope and framing of the Good Practice Principles, as well as to share recent work related to responding to the challenges of mis- and disinformation.

Introductory Remarks

Alex Aiken, Executive Director for Government Communication, United Kingdom stressed the importance of leveraging public communication to improve policy making and governance. Specific examples include efforts to "inoculate" the public from mis- and disinformation, as well as the role of communications to complement regulatory responses to the challenges governments face in rapidly changing media and information ecosystems. He also highlighted the importance of building on opportunities to learn from the international community, notably through the OECD. In the same spirit of learning, he proposed the creation of an International Academy that would support the professionalization of the function. He noted that the creation of international standards, via an OECD Recommendation, would further support efforts to build the capacity of public communicators.

Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary General of the Club of Venice, underlined the importance of collaborating internationally as well as the need to use public communication to bring together government, civil society and individuals, and to engage a variety of stakeholders to create a resilient information ecosystem. **Elsa Pilichowski, Director of the OECD's Public Governance Directorate**, expressed her support for Alex Aiken's suggestions to support capacity building efforts, move forward with an OECD Recommendation on Public Communication and use the OECD as a platform for continued engagement and collaboration between government and non-government partners. She also elaborated on the importance of effective communication in times of crisis and its role in supporting good governance, providing better policies and increasing compliance.

Presentation of the international report "Public Communication: the Global Context and the Way Forward"

The OECD presented the outline and key takeaways from the seven chapters of the "*Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*" report. The aim of the report is to better understand how OECD member and non-member countries have institutionalised and conducted the public communication function. Following the presentation, participants discussed the findings and shared examples and good practices.

Participants' comments helped further shape the report's scope and framing. Notably, participants **underlined the need to combat mis- and disinformation**. The importance of the role of institutional communication was specifically highlighted with regard to ongoing vaccination efforts, which rely on citizen trust and compliance with public health messaging. Members pointed to the need to overcome information voids, which can be filled by false or misleading information, potentially hindering the policy implementation. Participants also stressed the importance



of **using evidence, data gathering and behavioural insights** to enhance public communication, and stressed the **importance of evaluating outputs and outcomes of relevant initiatives** to build the capacity of this function over time.

Members renewed their commitment to **cooperating to tackle the challenges as well as opportunities in a rapidly changing media ecosystem**. This includes sharing best practices and experiences. Furthermore, EGPC members evoked the need to **engage with a wider range of stakeholders, including civil society and private actors**.

Presentation of the Good Practice Principles for combatting mis- and disinformation

The second session was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the Good Practice Principles for combatting mis- and disinformation. The 10 principles will help define factors that underpin communication and policy responses to information disorders and guide interventions to build information ecosystems that promote open government, increase trust and strengthen democracies. The creation of the principles will also serve as a platform to compile practices to help ensure the work's broad relevance.

Participants fully supported the development of the principles and noted that their creation represents an extremely useful undertaking. In particular, they noted the utility of helping to develop **a more organised and systematic approach to responding to the spread of mis- and disinformation**. Participants also underlined the need to **coordinate better across governments and with external stakeholders**. To that end, the principles would be useful in highlighting how governments can engage with all relevant partners. This consideration is particularly important building on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, which underlined the challenges of identifying accurate resources, providing consistent and coherent responses, and ensuring public communication structures can coordinate effectively in a rapidly changing context. Finally, the discussion brought up the need to **involve citizens proactively in the policy making process** in a transparent manner.

Finally, participants discussed and supported the creation of an OECD Recommendation on Public Communication. The Recommendation would build on the information collected in the international report and principles and provide an international standard of how the function can be structured, organised, and developed to ensure it improves policies and services, contributes to open government objectives and supports democratic governance. The Secretariat agreed to develop proposed text based on the evidence and results of the survey, as well as discussions with members, including via the EGPC, WPOG and PGC.