OECD Report on Public Communication

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Foreword

Seldom has the critical role of public communication been made so evident as in recent years. Revolutionary changes in the information ecosystem have pushed governments to reinvent how they produce, share and consume information and data to remain authoritative sources in the crowded and highly sophisticated world of today's mass media. This transformation has occurred in parallel to a series of international crises that undermined people's finances and health, with direct consequences on their trust in the ability of the state to protect them and ensure their well-being.

In such a complex context, the provision of accurate and timely information has proven to be critical for policy implementation and compliance, and a prerequisite for transparent, accountable, and responsive public administrations. When conducted strategically and in the public interest, communication is a pillar of democracy; yet, it continues to be under-valued and under-utilised as an instrument for achieving governance objectives.

Furthermore, while online communication and social media platforms are opening vast opportunities for governments and individuals alike to connect and engage, they have also enabled the proliferation of misleading and harmful content at unprecedented scale and speed. Ill-motivated actors, harnessing the same strategic communication tactics, have sought to manipulate information and mislead voters. In response, emerging government practices to debunk prominent rumours, pre-empt misinformation and fill information voids have demonstrated the central contribution of public communication to mitigating the spread and consequences of mis- and disinformation. These interventions are a key part of a holistic response to building societal resilience to the risks posed by harmful and misleading content.

The urgent and global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced countries to re-think, almost overnight, the governance arrangements that underpin their use of public communication. The crisis has required governments to provide up-to-date and targeted information to help citizens adapt their behaviour as needed. They have also had to work more efficiently and collaboratively both within the administration and with the private sector and civil society organisations to deliver compelling and informative messages, quell fears, and dispel mis- and disinformation. While the crisis has been an accelerator of government transformation leading to many innovative communication practices, it also underlined numerous gaps as well as the urgent need to reform this function and up-skill public communicators.

To support communicators and senior decision-makers in this endeavour, the OECD's first report on public communication makes the case for a more strategic use of communication as an instrument of government; an enabler of the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation; and as a tool for reinforcing democracy. The report provides an extensive mapping of related trends, gaps, good practices and lessons learned, by building on the Organisation's established work in the area of open and innovative government reforms, and in particular the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, and drawing on in-depth discussions with the members of its Working Party on Open Government and Experts Group on Public Communication.

Thanks to the data collected through the first OECD survey on public communication, targeting centres of government and ministries of health, the publication provides a baseline assessment and an evidence-based examination of relevant policies and practices across 46 countries and 63 institutions, in addition to the European Commission. The choice of these respondents allows the reader to gain both an overview of whole-of-government communication and a sectoral perspective from a key service-providing ministry. While the OECD launched the surveys prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the publication includes information that sheds light on practices developed in response to the pandemic, with some examples highlighted throughout the report.

As the COVID-19 crisis has proven that public-interest-driven communication can save lives, a focus on supporting the professionalisation of this function and establishing international standards based on the sharing of good practices will help stimulate a forward-looking and innovative reform agenda. Only through such an ambitious path can communication fully contribute to improved policies and services, greater citizen trust, and, ultimately, stronger democracies.

This document was sent to and benefited from comments by members of the OECD Working Party on Open Government, Health Committee, Network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government and Experts Group on Public Communication on 15 October 2021 and was approved by the OECD's Public Governance Committee via written procedure on 19 November 2021 and prepared for publication by the OECD Secretariat.

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The draft report was sent to and benefited from comments from Members of the OECD Public Governance Committee (PGC), Working Party on Open Government, Health Committee, Network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government and Experts Group on Public Communication . Colleagues from the OECD Directorates of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Public Affairs and Communication, Science, Technology and Innovation, as well as the Development Centre also provided comments.

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Executive summary

Redefining the role of public communication in an evolving information ecosystem

Public communicators are facing an increasingly complex information environment brought about by rapid technological changes, which have provided both novel opportunities and unprecedented challenges. These evolutions have connected individuals around the world, facilitated their ability to create and share information, and helped social movements broaden their reach. At the same time, online and social media platforms are undermining the role of traditional media and have facilitated the unparalleled speed and scale of the spread of mis- and disinformation in ways that undermine trust, public discussion and democratic engagement.

This report highlights pioneering government efforts to use public communication more effectively, as an instrument of policy making, service design and delivery, and democracy itself. For the purposes of this report, public communication, as distinct from political communication that is linked to elections or political parties, is understood as the government function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good. This publication therefore provides evidence and examples of how communication can be used to greater effect in improving policies and services, promoting a two-way dialogue with citizens, and strengthening transparency, integrity and accountability. It demonstrates how governance arrangements, institutional structures, and professionalisation can help the communications function go beyond the provision of information and fulfil its potential to help strengthen democracy and trust in government.

Governance of public communication

The report starts by exploring the diverse range of organisational structures for public communication across the surveyed countries and provides insights into how centres of government (CoGs) can better support the function across government. It is important to provide clear mandates and guidelines that set a strategic role for this function within government and that shield it from politicisation. While developing clear strategies can strengthen impact, improve co-ordination and help ensure communication supports policy goals, only just over half of respondents have done so. Furthermore, 76% of CoGs and 82% of Ministries of Health (MHs) noted that human and financial resources are a key challenge. Finally, less than half of communicators in CoGs interact frequently with policy teams. Such trends flag the need to further invest in and support the professionalisation of this function.

Evidence-based and data-driven public communication

Public communication needs to be informed by evidence, including audience and behavioural insights (BI), for it to resonate with intended stakeholders and have an impact. Such evidence helps ensure messages are tailored to all segments of society, notably underrepresented or disengaged groups. As many as 26%

of CoGs surveyed do not target any specific audience groups in their communication. Using BI across the communication cycle can also help ensure biases are identified and addressed, rendering communication more effective.

Evaluating public communication

While data suggest that countries widely recognise the importance of evaluating public communication, they also show the limited integration of evaluation within strategic planning processes, the lack of institutionalised methodologies and a focus on outputs over impact. For example, only 42% of CoG respondents analysed changes in service uptake, while even fewer evaluated changes in participation levels following a communication activity (16%). Conducting more systematic evaluations will be crucial in demonstrating the added-value of communications and justifying a greater investment in this function. Anchoring evaluations in an end-user perspective and including trusted voices outside of government can help improve their relevance and transparency.

Communicating in an evolving and fast-paced digital age

While almost all respondents have consolidated an online presence and have established dedicated digital communication units, there is untapped potential to promote more engagement through the use of technologies. A more consistent “digital by design” approach can help governments move the conversations where stakeholders are, and ensure digital communication is more citizen-centric. Accompanying the adoption of digital technologies and data with considerations on their ethical use as well as the pursuit of inclusion and engagement will be crucial.

Public communication responses to the challenges of mis- and disinformation

The report also looks at how governments can use communications to counter the spread of mis- and disinformation. Notably, only 38% of CoG respondents had developed guidance related to these topics, indicating that governments may be inadequately prepared for the magnitude of the challenge. Moreover, given that communication does not happen in a vacuum, developing a holistic approach, including legislative and regulatory responses, would help build resilience to harmful and misleading content. Such an approach would need to promote diverse, independent and quality media; support media and digital literacy; consider transparency requirements and issues related to the business models of social media platforms; and explore other efforts to strengthen the information ecosystem.

Communication applications for openness and improved public policies and services

Finally, the report provides illustrative examples related to the use of campaigns, media relations, internal and crisis communication and their contribution to policy implementation, service delivery, and open government principles.

The continuously changing information ecosystem in which governments communicate will require a shift in mindset as well as crucial reforms and investments to enable more strategic communication that can promote better policies and reinforce democracy. This report is a starting point and an international benchmark providing communicators and decision makers with the evidence and good practices to support this transition.

1 Redefining the role of public communication in an evolving information ecosystem

This chapter explores the opportunity for public communication to support better governance, improved policies and services, and greater trust. It illustrates how this function can help strengthen democracy in a context where digital transformation and novel and emerging challenges to information ecosystems are creating new imperatives for better dialogue with citizens. The chapter concludes by elaborating the analytical framework on which the Report is based, unpacking how governments can use strategic and two-way communication for more open and inclusive societies.

Introduction

The provision of accurate and timely information, alongside the opportunity for stakeholder participation and feedback, are essential elements of the democratic policy-making process. They are key factors that, at each stage of the policy cycle, can improve its quality, better tailor its outcomes and ensure greater impact. As the government function that provides information, as well as avenues for dialogue and debate between institutions and citizens, public communication plays a critical role in supporting more open and inclusive governance mechanisms.

Communication by governments has often been associated with political actors and processes and as the means to promote partisan agendas and manage reputations through one-way dissemination of information and narratives: in other words, propaganda. While this perception (and practice) persists, it is an outdated approach that undermines the potential for communication to contribute to policy making and good governance. Over recent decades, governments and researchers have increasingly recognised the role of communication as an instrument of policy making[1] (Canel and Luoma-aho, 2018[1]; Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins, 2007[2]; Lovari, Lucia D'Ambrosi and Bowen, 2020[3]; Macnamara, 2017[4]; Sanders and Canel, 2013[5]; WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[6]), one that can enable a two-way dialogue with citizens that generates genuine engagement and supports greater transparency and accountability (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[6]).

Building on and supporting this shift, this report seeks to analyse how the function is structured and governed in OECD countries and beyond, to understand how it is conducted, and how it may be more effective against the backdrop of an increasingly complex information ecosystem.[2] Going further, this report aims to consolidate the understanding of communication as a pillar of a more open government that safeguards democracy and places citizens at the heart of policies and services, based on the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation (Macnamara, 2017[4])[3] (OECD, 2017[7]).

For the purposes of this report, public communication is understood as the government function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good. It is distinct from political communication, which is linked to partisan debate, elections, or individual political figures and parties. While this distinction is often not clear-cut in practice, and while government communication is inevitably somewhat political in nature, this report explores how institutions can put in place rules, institutions, and processes that support a greater separation between these types of communication. Indeed, such differentiation has grown more important in the context of rising misinformation and distrust toward information perceived as manipulated or politically partisan. The provision of and accessibility to accurate sources of verified information are essential to enable democratic engagement, and are more necessary than ever.

At its core, communication is the discipline of packaging and delivering information strategically to achieve the greatest impact. As such, it relies on continuously evolving practices that, thanks especially to technological innovation, are becoming increasingly effective at delivering tailored messages to – and gathering feedback from – larger and more diversified audiences. Communication is not strictly the domain of government; rather, organisations and individuals in all sectors across the media and information ecosystem practice it and interact. Importantly, these actors have a prominent role in contributing to the evolution and innovation of the field, developing new practices that governments can learn from in turn. The specificity of government communication however is important to keep in mind, particularly as regards to the dedicated accountability and feedback loops that apply to it and that differ from the ones applied in the private sector.

Transformations linked to digital technologies, as well as to changes in the production and consumption of media, have created new imperatives for public communication and unleashed unprecedented opportunities for its application. In parallel, growing challenges of misinformation and disinformation[4] present severe implications for democracy and governance. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of public communication as a core component of good governance (OECD, 2020[8];

OECD, 2020[9]). As governments around the world adapt to this evolving environment, this report takes stock of the present context and proposes avenues for the way forward in terms of policy reform.

Despite the importance of public communication in an increasingly connected world, international comparative analysis on this subject remains scarce and research on its application and impact shows considerable gaps. A compilation of 15 country case studies by Sanders and Canel (2013[5]) provides one of the most comprehensive analyses of international approaches for structuring and conducting this function to date. Notably, the authors emphasise the scarcity of data and primary evidence as a challenge. Recent literature has been expanding the evidence base on how governments provide information to their citizens, how they receive and listen to feedback, and how their communication affects citizens' perceptions and attitudes (Kim and Krishna, 2018[10]; Macnamara, 2017[4]). Much of the literature concerning this function is also included in more practical types of publications, such as handbooks and guides (Luoma-aho and Canel, 2020[11]). Additional literature on the links between communication and governance has tended to focus on its role in development programmes in low-income settings,[5] while a larger volume of literature relates instead to the field of political communication and associated practices.[6]

Based on a first-of-its-kind survey of 39 Centres of Government[7] and 24 Ministries of Health from 46 OECD member and non-member countries plus the European Commission, this Report presents the most comprehensive international perspective on the status quo of public communication. Building on previous literature and on engagement with a global community of practitioners (the OECD's Experts Group on Public Communication formed in 2019, as well the OECD Working Party on Open Government), this Publication seeks to identify how this function can be reformed and conducted more strategically to better advance good governance, open government objectives and to support policy making as well as service design and delivery.

A key instrument for public policy and services

Public communication has a crucial role to play to support the design and delivery of policies and services. Indeed, it is a primary vehicle through which citizens learn about government action and comply with its indications. Accordingly, 84% of CoGs and 67% of health ministries surveyed by the OECD confirmed that raising awareness of policies is the leading objective of this function.[8] Beyond raising awareness, however, strategic communication is an essential tool for policy implementation, particularly for those that rest on compliance and behaviour change. Notably, campaigns are a widely used tool for this purpose and their impact is well documented (see Chapter 7).

Perhaps no single event has demonstrated the role of this function for supporting policy implementation more immediately than the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021[12]) .[9] Over the course of 2020 and 2021, the response to this crisis has depended in large part on the ability of governments to instruct all citizens to adopt certain behaviours and sustain a society-wide effort to navigate unprecedented challenges. During the early stages of the pandemic that saw entire nations moving into lockdowns, official notifications were essential to implementing emergency measures and to guiding and reassuring citizens at a highly uncertain time. As societies moved from crisis-response mode to adapting to life with the virus, massive campaigns informed by behavioural insights (or BI) encouraged people to follow instructions on social distancing and mask wearing to contain the spread of COVID-19. In 2021, communication efforts also sought to build confidence in vaccines to ensure widespread immunisation and quash the pandemic (OECD, 2021[13]; OECD, 2020[9]). Overall, effective communications have been instrumental to the implementation of key policies to manage the pandemic.

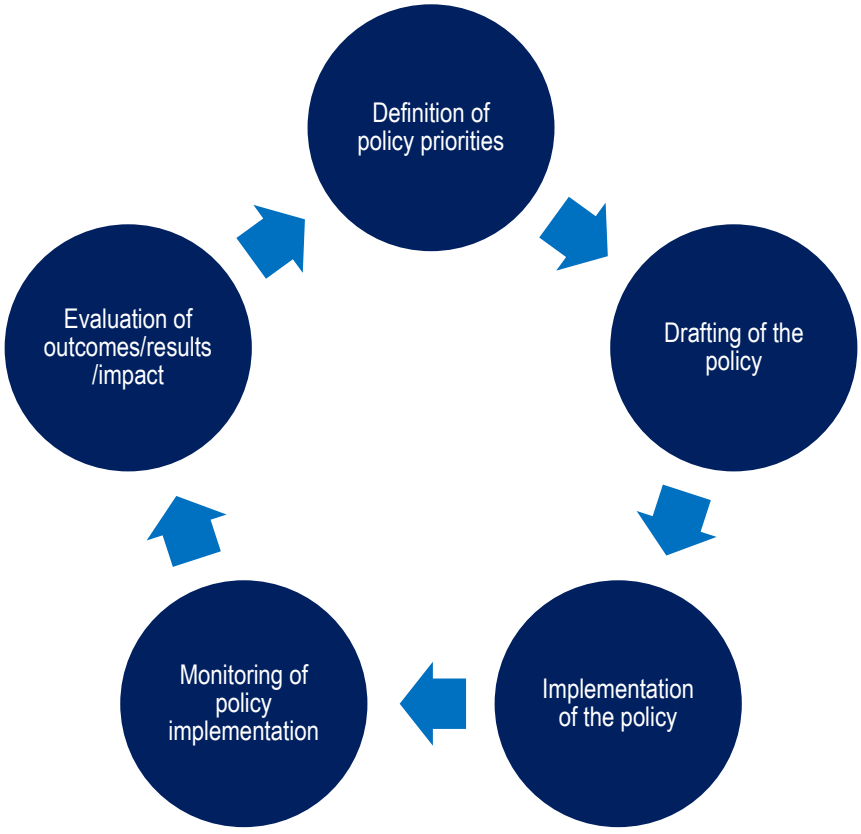
Whether at a time of crisis or under "business as usual", communications play a key role in public institutions' abilities to deliver the policies and services that contribute to society's well-being. However, as illustrated above, there is a significant opportunity to not only inform, but also engage wider audiences in shaping such policies and services. This is an important step to help restoring public trust amidst prevalent perceptions that regular citizens have little influence over policy making. According to the 2020 Edelman

Trust Barometer, 48% of respondents from 28 countries, including 15 OECD members feel that the political system is not working for them (Edelman, 2021[14]). According to the OECD's 21-country *Risks that Matter Survey* (OECD, 2018[15]), about 60% of respondents feel that the government did not incorporate the views of people like them when designing social policy.

To this end, it is important that communication is integrated at varying degrees at each stage of the policy cycle (see Figure 1.1), and not just upon the approval of the policy, with communicators involved in the policy-making process from the onset. Enabling a two-way flow of information and feedback can favour responsive and improved policy making (OECD, 2020[16]). The listening component of communications for example can also yield invaluable information to help design policies. However, research suggests that lingering views of communication as an auxiliary function, rather than a strategic one to policy, as well as perceptions that it carries risks, remain obstacles to expanding its role (Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins, 2007[2]; Sanders and Canel, 2013[5]; WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[6]).

The value of public communication for policies and services is not limited to engaging external stakeholders. The seeming disconnect between communication and policy is also reflected in the ways communicators collaborate internally with policy or service development teams (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[6]). OECD survey data for CoGs shows that less than half (49%) report working "very often" with such teams. Other recent surveys of practitioners reinforce the notion that there is room to better integrate the policy and communication functions. For example, a common challenge raised relates to communicators often lacking access to sufficiently high levels of decision making, or are included at the end of the policy cycle to disseminate or "sell" pre-designed outcomes (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[6]).

Figure 1.1. The five stages of the policy cycle



Source: OECD (2016[17]), *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268104-en..

Internal communication addressed to civil servants and employees across the public sector is another crucial asset to the implementation of policies and delivery of services. When conducted strategically, internal campaigns and regular information exchanges can contribute to driving desired changes in culture and fostering a more effective and cohesive public sector (see Chapter 7).

In addition to the contribution of communications for better policies and services as described above and as detailed in Chapter 7, it also plays a crucial role in nurturing more open societies, as described in the section below.

Communication as a pillar of a more open government

Across the world, OECD member and non-member countries have been increasingly implementing initiatives to build more open and inclusive societies. A decade of lessons from these efforts is explored in the 2016 OECD report *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward* and synthesised in the first international legal instrument on this area: the 2017 OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* (hereafter "the Recommendation") (OECD, 2017[7]). This Report builds on these two foundational documents.

Although the contribution of communication to the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation is often not fully recognised, the Recommendation includes several provisions that reflect its strategic importance (Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. Provisions relating to communication in the OECD Recommendation on Open Government

Provision 1: "take measures, in all branches and at all levels of the government, to develop and implement open government strategies and initiatives in collaboration with stakeholders and to foster commitment from politicians, members of parliaments, senior public managers and public officials, to ensure successful implementation and prevent or overcome obstacles related to resistance to change".

Provision 6: "Actively communicate on open government strategies and initiatives, as well as on their outputs, outcomes and impacts, in order to ensure that they are well-known within and outside government, to favour their uptake, as well as to stimulate stakeholder buy-in."

Provision 7: "Proactively make available clear, complete, timely, reliable and relevant public sector data and information that is free of cost, available in an open and non-proprietary machine-readable format, easy to find, understand, use and reuse, and disseminated through a multi-channel approach, to be prioritised in consultation with stakeholders".

Provision 8: "Grant all stakeholders equal and fair opportunities to be informed and consulted and actively engage them in all phases of the policy-cycle and service design and delivery. This should be done with adequate time and at minimal cost, while avoiding duplication to minimise consultation fatigue. Further, specific efforts should be dedicated to reaching out to the most relevant, vulnerable, underrepresented, or marginalised groups in society, while avoiding undue influence and policy capture".

Provision 10: "While recognising the roles, prerogatives, and overall independence of all concerned parties and according to their existing legal and institutional frameworks, explore the potential of moving from the concept of open government toward that of open state".

Source: OECD (2017[7]), Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, https://www.oecd.org/gov/Recommendation-Open-Government-Approved-Council-141217.pdf.

There are multiple ways that communication can support each of the open government principles. First, it can enhance active transparency ((understood as the obligation of public institutions to disseminate information without citizens having to request it). Public communication largely takes place on the platforms and channels that most stakeholders access daily for news or to connect with one another, like newspapers, television, and social media. By packaging government information for widespread consumption and delivering it to the public where they are most likely to see and engage with it, communicators can ensure such content reaches the widest possible audiences. In this way, communication complements and potentially expands the reach of policy or legal frameworks, such those related to Access to Information, that are designed to disclose information both proactively and reactively. In practice, they often rely on users purposely seeking out specific government data or documents. Communication can then connect with a wider audience in a way that can make these disclosures more relevant and visible. However, the function's support to transparency is ultimately contingent upon its ability to share information unhindered and without manipulation (Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins, 2007[2]). For this reason, policies or measures that require transparency in public communication and distance the latter to the extent possible from potential political interference are important to ensure it serves this objective.

Communicating both internally within the government and externally can also contribute to greater public sector integrity. This is defined as "the consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in the public sector" (OECD, 2020[18]). As a vehicle for raising awareness and promoting norms related to integrity and fight against corruption, public communication effectively support efforts to build a whole-of-society culture of integrity (OECD, 2017[19]). Indeed, initiatives to promote related values and behaviours include campaigns to encourage whistle-blowing within the public sector, as well as ones that focus on preventive actions, as documented in later chapters.

However, beyond communicating *for* integrity, communicating *with* integrity is essential to ensure this function is conducted in the service of citizens and in line with open government objectives. To this end, several governments have adopted ethical guidelines and other measures that regulate the work of communicators and their responsibilities to help ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of information (see Chapter 2).

Communication also plays a key role in promoting accountability. By communicating relevant information, media, citizens and stakeholder groups can scrutinise the actions of governments and voice their feedback (2017[20]). Governments also employ communication to respond to public scrutiny, justify their actions or explain how they aim to rectify their approaches to better meet citizens' expectations. This is especially important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which governments have imposed measures that limit certain personal freedoms and implemented decisions rapidly and in some instances opaquely. In this environment, clear and open communication is a key enabler of accountability as is elaborated further in Chapter 7.

Besides fostering greater accountability, communication can serve as a platform for understanding and addressing wider needs and concerns. Through organisational (Macnamara, 2016[21]) or social listening practices,[10] including by monitoring and analysing audience comments and attitudes online and offline in increasingly precise ways, governments can be well-positioned to respond appropriately to citizens' feedback. More continuous and committed efforts to listen to and understand public sentiment, and to look beyond the headlines of influential media, can thus contribute to greater accountability and responsiveness (Macnamara, 2017[4]).

Additionally, public communication is an asset for enabling and expanding opportunities for the participation of individuals and stakeholder groups in policy making and for broadening the reach of such initiatives. Alongside the rise of consultative, deliberative and other innovative participatory processes, communication serves an important role in publicising these opportunities to citizens and providing necessary information about the content of their engagement for them to input constructively in the

process. It can also relay the outcomes of processes to a wider public, strengthening the legitimacy of the initiative and closing the feedback loop (OECD, 2020[16]; OECD, 2019[22]).

Beyond these structured settings, public communication can provide an avenue for informal and continuous participation in democratic discourse. Digital channels, primarily social media, can facilitate direct interaction between institutions and large numbers of citizens. In doing so, they open up possibilities for engagement on an "always on" basis, rather than limiting it to designated initiatives instigated by the government to meet specific needs at a given time (Macnamara, 2017, p. 13[4]). If integrated within policy cycles, this type of two-way communication can further contribute to shaping policy outcomes.

Finally, and in addition to external communication, communicating internally is of equal importance to foster a more open government. Indeed, internal communication is a crucial tool to raise the awareness of public officials across the government on the importance of related reforms, understand potential concerns and to secure their buy-in of such efforts. Indeed, the OECD Recommendation (OECD, 2017[7]) urges adherents to "take measures, in all branches and at all levels of the government […] to foster commitment from politicians, members of parliaments, senior public managers and public officials, to ensure successful implementation and prevent or overcome obstacles related to resistance to change".

Although public communication can support open government principles in the ways discussed above, whether and how that potential is realised depends on the mandates countries set, the institutional mechanisms and practical constraints that empower or inhibit communicators. This potential is often unfulfilled, and findings in this report suggest there is broad scope to expand the function's role to better serve open government and good governance objectives. A conscious effort in this direction is necessary, as challenges presented by a complex information ecosystem and low institutional trust increase the urgency of strengthening how the public connects with their institutions. Furthermore, the risk of communications being used as a political tool is an important one to take into account, requiring the establishment of adequate safeguards and checks and balances.

Furthermore, successful public communication equally requires a thriving civic space. Civil society, special interest groups, academia and representatives of the private sector are some of the most important groups informing and shaping debates on policy matters and as such they must be free to meet, discuss and express their opinions. In addition, as an essential pillar of this space, a free, independent, and diverse media sector facilitates the unrestricted flow of information and the open exchange of opinions and ideas. These stakeholders are essential to the resilience and viability of the information ecosystem. As such, they are also among the key groups with which public communicators engage.

The implications of a rapidly changing information ecosystem on how governments communicate

Public communication does not happen in a vacuum: the context in which it occurs is core to understanding the challenges and opportunities it faces. Indeed, the analysis of its role for policy and governance mechanisms is made urgent by shifts in the information ecosystem that have transformed the function over the past decade and raised important implications for democracy. The technological revolution that has connected the world through social media has given rise to online social movements and simplified the creation and sharing of content and data. Such changes have also facilitated, however, the spread of mis- and disinformation, contributed to undermining the role of traditional information gatekeepers, and have fundamentally changed how governments communicate. Whereas until the early 2000s a so-called "one-to-many" model of communication prevailed, this has shifted today to a "many-to-many" model (Jensen and Helles, 2016[23]). Anyone can be both a producer and a consumer of information, and anybody with an internet connection has the potential to engage with and influence public debates.

Traditionally, governments had largely relied on traditional media to amplify official messages to reach citizens. With the advent of digital channels, this approach has gradually lost its primacy to direct institution-to-individual communication via online platforms that bypass traditional media (Canel and Luoma-aho, 2018[1]). This shift has also enabled a broader scope for governments to communicate about more diverse policy issues targeted to more specific audiences, as traditional media tend to concentrate on "newsworthy" subjects and political affairs, often under-reporting less mainstream issues (Lovari, Lucia D'Ambrosi and Bowen, 2020[3]). The unprecedented volumes of data that promise to make communication ever more precise, combined with the direct, unmediated access to vast and diverse publics, are some of the opportunities and challenges that have emerged.

At the same time, digital platforms have altered patterns in people's consumption of information and raised demands on their attention. The latter has become a resource that technology companies sell to advertisers. In turn, the design of online platforms and their algorithms, and the massive increase in the volume of information served to increase competition for what content people pay attention to, while making focus more superficial (Lewandowsky et al., 2020[24]). As governments compete with all other information sources for the public's attention, cognitive and psychological factors such as information overload can undermine the efficacy of even well-crafted content (Qiu et al., 2017[25]).

Online and social media have also heightened the pace at which information travels, accelerated the news cycle, and enabled a wider range of actors to drive discussions on policy issues. Taken together, digital technologies have produced a complex information ecosystem that has made it more challenging for official messages to "cut through the noise". Cumulatively, these changes require considerable adjustments to practices, public officials' skills, and even to how communication is organised, if governments are to make the most of the digital transformation and ensure it can promote better governance.

The deep changes brought on by the digitalisation of communication channels are not limited to governments. Traditional media markets have been upended by the rise of social media platforms over the past decade. Besides forcing changes in their way of operating, online platforms have also undermined the business model of news outlets, by shifting advertising spending to leading technology companies (Wieser, 2020[26]). Over the same period, research has documented a decline in local newspapers (Nielsen, 2015[27]). In parallel, low-quality and low-cost websites have proliferated that provide sensationalised content and clickbait headlines over thoughtful and investigative reporting. This trend bears worrisome consequences for the health of the information ecosystem and its role in sustaining democracy (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[28]).

Indeed, among the most disruptive consequences of the rise of online platforms and the relative decline of journalism is the growth in information disorders, such as rapidly spreading mis- and disinformation, as well as harmful content and hate speech (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017[29]). These phenomena predate the digital age, but the design of social media algorithms has amplified their spread (Lewandowsky et al., 2020[24]). Increasingly hostile and fragmented information landscapes pose a new hybrid threat to countries, as explored, for example, by the OECD High Level Risk Forum, and challenge their ability to develop and implement policy and facilitate democratic engagement.

The ability for governments to use the communication function to promote constructive democratic spaces is critically threatened by widespread mis- and disinformation. When falsehoods spread extensively and rapidly on issues of public policy, official messages are drowned out, creating significant challenges for public communicators to get key information out to all groups in society. Whether in the context of elections, health crises, migration or climate change, mis- and disinformation cast evidence and facts into doubt, sow distrust, and work against policy goals (OECD, 2020[30]).

Addressing information disorders amid a crisis of public trust

The challenge of misinformation both builds on and aggravates a deeper-seated crisis of institutional trust. Although COVID-19 and the responses to it caused measures of trust in government to fluctuate in 2020 and 2021 (Edelman, 2021[14]), before the pandemic they had stood low for years. In 2019, only 45% of citizens across the OECD said they trusted their government (OECD, 2019[31]).

Confidence in information is especially low, no matter the source. The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer measured record lows in four main categories of information providers, with social media being trusted by only 35% of respondents across 22 countries (Edelman, 2021[14]). In 2020, a 40-country study estimated that only 46% of the public have confidence in the news they choose to consume (Reuters Institute, 2020[32]). Worryingly, research has noted an increase in the phenomenon of news avoidance, whereby citizens often deliberately turn away from information, which can signal disengagement with policy issues (Skovsgaard and Andersen, 2019[33]; Fletcher et al., 2020[34]).

Rising political polarisation seems to feed into this trend, as trust in media sources can be linked to the extent to which they reflect an audience's political views (Reuters Institute, 2020[32]). Social media platforms may exacerbate the issue, as algorithms prioritise emotional content, potentially helping to amplify polarising content and speech (Smith, 2019[35]). Indeed, research from Europe and the United States suggests that internet and social media use affects levels of trust and further polarises pre-existing political beliefs (Klein and Robison, 2019[36]; Ceron, 2015[37]).

At such scale, these information disorders risk leading to the fracturing of societal beliefs, and loss of trust not only in government, but towards other groups in society that share different views. This context impedes constructive democratic debate and makes it difficult for citizens to come together and make collective decisions based on a set of commonly agreed facts.

Restoring a healthy information ecosystem requires a systemic and holistic approach, including considerations for regulatory, civic and media policy responses (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[28]). The public communication function has the potential and the responsibility to play a significant role in this endeavour by both reacting to and preventing the spread of problematic content, as is further elaborated in Chapter 6. To this end, the OECD has developed *Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation* (OECD, forthcoming[38]). These draw on a comprehensive set of practices and interventions aimed at strengthening the capacity of institutions and the resilience of the ecosystem in the face of this challenge (see Chapter 6).

Public communication's potential for rebuilding trust in government

Beyond the context of the present crisis in trust and misinformation, effective public communication can play a key role in helping to rebuild confidence in governments. Public communication that is transparent, respectful of the values of honesty, integrity and impartiality, and conceived as a means for two-way engagement with citizens can lead to greater trust (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[28]; OECD, 2020[30]).

Trust is the foundation on which the legitimacy of public institutions is built. It is a multifaceted concept but its influence on the outcomes of public policies is significant and tangible: it helps support social cohesion and the implementation of policy that requires behavioural responses from the public (OECD, 2020[39]). This makes building trust a priority for governments. While policy substance and tangible outcomes are ultimately critical in shaping trust, it "is often a subjective phenomenon, based as much on interpretation or perception as on facts" (OECD, 2017, p. 16[40]). Citizens often form perceptions based on the information they are exposed to, and these may be swayed in an environment where high-profile political affairs receive more airtime than the policies and day-to-day government work that keeps services running.

Effective public communication can thus help shape perceptions that the government is responsive, reliable, and acts according to values of integrity, openness, and fairness, the key drivers of trust identified by the OECD (2017[40]). Indeed, half of the CoGs in the OECD survey selected strengthening trust as a top objective of their communication. These same drivers of trust ought to guide the design and delivery of communication, furthermore, so that it is not used as a reputation management tool, but rather practiced in the service of citizens.

Towards a more effective public communication function

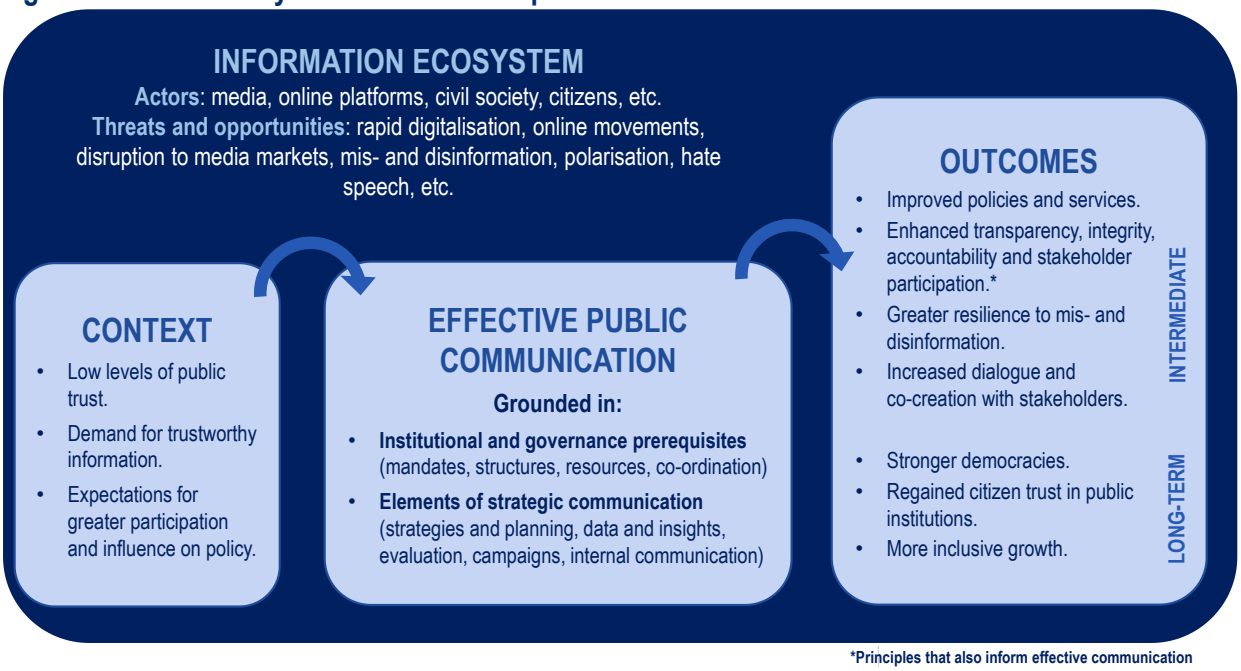
The above context reinforces the important role that public communication can play in delivering improved policies and services, contributing to open government objectives, better governance, and ultimately strengthening democracy. Building on the definition at the start of the chapter, therefore, public communication is considered "effective" when it is oriented towards advancing the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation, and is conducted in the service of more responsive and inclusive policies and services. An increasingly complex and challenging ecosystem, characterised by information disorders, further magnifies the imperative for governments to communicate effectively with stakeholders and citizens to strengthen democracy.

Moving beyond the conception of communication as the passive dissemination of official messages requires appropriate policies, institutions and practices that can optimise the function's potential to serve its strategic potential. The following chapters consider how it is structured, governed and conducted across OECD countries and beyond; identify the reforms and changes that can help governments fully leverage the function; and explore avenues for future analysis and research.

This work is guided by an analytical framework built around key policy catalysts that can bring about a set of medium- and long-term outcomes, grounded in the OECD Recommendation on Open Government. These catalysts can be summarised into two pillars (Figure 1.2) that consist of:

1. Institutional and governance prerequisites. These include official mandates, legal and administrative structures, as well as human and financial resources that support well-defined, integrated, and co-ordinated communication activities across the public sector.
2. Core elements of strategic communication. These are based on objective-driven strategies, grounded in evidence (drawing on data and audience and behavioural insights), and monitored and evaluated at all stages. Strategic communication is based on core competencies that cover media relations, campaigns and other specialisations. When applied well, these competencies can evolve the function from an information dissemination tool to a lever of more inclusive and responsive governance, and a platform for two-way communication.

Figure 1.2. OECD analytical framework for public communication



Note: This analytical framework presents the current setting and issues for policy to solve, the policy catalysts grouped into pillars of effective public communication and interacting with the open government principles, and the intermediate and long-term outcomes the catalysts aim to produce. This is set against the backdrop of a complex information ecosystem, which interacts with the policy catalysts posing both threats and opportunities to their efficacy.
Source: Author's work.

These pillars are essential to building effective communication across governments and public institutions at all levels. However, the continuously changing information ecosystem in which governments engage plays a major role in shaping their approach. This can affect the channels on which it occurs and the format it will have. Similarly, other actors in this ecosystem will complement, challenge and interact with messages. The ability for the function to contribute to a more open government therefore must take into account the broader ecosystem and the external factors that affect its efficacy and influence its priorities.

The following chapters will elaborate further on each of the pillars and elements of the above framework, informed by a 46-country, 63-institutions survey conducted, cleaned and validated by the OECD between February 2020 and January 2021. Further details of the survey and methodology are included in Annex A of this report. This comparative international analysis highlights that the understanding and execution of public communication remains highly varied across countries, even ones with similar levels of maturity. The analysis reinforces the need for international standards in this field and a more strategic outlook for this government function and points to areas for reform and for further investigation.

Going forward, governments can use the analysis in this report to understand how they can reform their communication functions to become more strategic and effective. Future research will need to explore more advanced approaches and applications that enable active listening and two-way dialogue beyond what is prevalent today. In partnership with its Experts Group on Public Communication, established in 2020, the OECD can look toward developing a maturity model for public communication as well as related standards and criteria for the professionalisation of this key government function. These could eventually serve as a compass to design reforms and interventions to fulfil the potential of this area of work for governance and policy.

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Notes

[1] This tension is an often noted factor in much of the literature on the subject: List relevant literature (WPP engagement report, McNamara LSE paper, Sanders and Canel, 2013; Fairbanks et al. (2007), "Transparency in Government Communication", *Journal of Public Affairs*, 7: 23-37; Lovari et al. (2020), "Reconnecting Voices. The (New) Strategic Role of Public Sector Communication After Covid-19", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, Vol. 13(2): 970-989; Canel, M.-J., & Luoma-aho, V. (2019). *Public Sector Communication: Closing Gaps Between Citizens and Public Organizations*, John Wiley & Sons. doi:10.1002/9781119135630

[2] This is understood as the combination of communication and media governance frameworks (i.e. institutional, legal, policy and regulatory) as well as principal actors (i.e. governments, traditional and social media companies, political figures and parties, organisations and citizens).

[3] The OECD defines open government as "a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth".

[4] Misinformation describes situations where false or misleading information is shared but no harm is intended; the sharer may not even be aware the information is false. Disinformation is when false manipulative and/or misleading information is knowingly shared with the intention of causing harm or influencing the information environment. Disinformation and information influence operations may be spread by foreign or domestic actors (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017[29]).

[5] See for example: *The contribution of government communication capacity to achieving good governance outcomes. (English).* Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP) Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/511591468331052544/The-contribution-of-government-communication-capacity-to-achieving-good-governance-outcomes

[6] See for example: Norris, P. (2001). Political communication. In N. Smelser & P. Baltes (Eds.), International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences (pp. 11631–11640). Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Elsevier.

[7] Centre of government (CoG) is defined as the support structure serving the highest level of the executive branch of government (presidents, prime ministers and their equivalents).

[8] Respondents were asked to select 5 priority objectives; "promote transparency" was tied with "raise awareness of health ministry policies" as the most-selected response. Austria did not provide a response to this question in the CoG survey.

[9] The OECD survey on which this report is based was administered in 2020 to cover the year 2019. Although the responses refer to the pre-COVID-19 era, several respondents have reflected the experience of the pandemic in some of their answers.

[10] Social listening (also referred to as social media measurement), is a practice for gathering insights on audiences' perceptions and engagement with content relating to an organisation or brand, or to a specific issue. It is more advanced than traditional audience research that maps demographic or geographical traits of audience groups at a lower frequency. Indeed, it can provide almost real-time understanding of different audience types' sentiment towards an issue and of trends in online conversations which can help produce more responsive content and refine approaches to communication. Social listening is most commonly conducted through the use of dedicated software that aggregate big data from content across multiple platforms. While many social media and online platforms no longer provide third parties with personally identifiable information on their users, it is the responsibility of communicators not to single out data that can be used to identify or locate a single person in the respect of privacy.

2 Towards a more effective use of public communication: Key governance pillars

This chapter discusses the prerequisites for effective governance of public communication. Based on the OECD surveys and related research, it focuses on institutional structures and mandates, strategies and planning, co-ordination, as well as human and financial resources that can support the institutionalisation and professionalisation of this key government function. It makes the case for how these pillars enable a more strategic use of public communication, which goes beyond mere information sharing but rather contributes to government priorities, strengthens trust and increases transparency and dialogue with citizens.

The governance of the public communication function

Building a more effective public communication function – one that acts as a key instrument for policy and furthers the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation – rests on a sound public governance approach and on the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the function. These factors constitute the first pillar in the OECD analytical framework presented in Chapter 1, and take different forms in governments around the world, both in terms of the way communication is structured at the institutional level and the purpose and scope it is given through policies and mandates.

The governance of public communication refers to a range of mechanisms and practices that collectively define the role of communication within the government and how it is conducted according to certain operational, professional, and ethical standards. Sanders and Canel (2013[1]) have proposed a useful framing of governments' approaches to governing their communication function along two main axes: tactical versus strategic, and (political) party-centred versus citizen-centred.

Building on this framework, a tactical approach to communications is one that is primarily oriented towards the pursuit of short- or medium-term goals that are loosely defined. Activities mainly aim to widen the reach of a piece of information at a given time without necessarily relying on evidence to guide and measure its dissemination. This is the case for example when the government wishes to circulate a new strategy it adopted, and proceeds with posting it on its websites and social media pages without a prior assessment of key target audiences, their preferred channels and the messages that would resonate most with them. Tactical communications are often ad hoc, dispersed, and with minimal to no internal co-ordination. Consequently, this approach offers at best an auxiliary function to an institution's operations.

Conversely, a strategic approach to communication revolves around the achievement of an institution's core objectives, be it policy implementation, public service uptake, transparency or engagement. It identifies a communication-based solution to a problem, and typically entails seeking a change in behaviour or perceptions from a well-defined public. As a more sophisticated way to conceive of and deliver communication, an initiative can be deemed strategic when it is insight-driven and set against concrete and measurable objectives. Moreover, it should aim to answer specific needs of the public, creating opportunities for a more responsive and interactive type of exchange. This can be seen when governments implement a communication campaign to encourage more women to apply to specific public-sector jobs for example, with targeted messaging that speaks to this particular group.

The strategic approach described above helps ensure that communication can be effective in achieving its stated purpose, while the distinction between party-centred versus citizen-centred communication relates to purpose attributed to this function. Although communication mandates are often codified in official documents, in practice these mandates tend to reflect the priorities that senior and often politically affiliated leadership attribute to it. Therefore, the choice of leveraging public communication as a service to citizens rests in good part with senior officials.

While this report makes the case for public communication's potential as a means for a more open government, in practice it is still less than commonplace for this function to be understood as such. As it emerged in discussions with members of the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication, this is the case especially at the higher levels of government for whom controlling messages and narratives on sensitive issues and managing the government's reputation often remains priority. A key challenge lies in the fact that transparent and interactive communication can often be perceived as a risk, causing resistance from the top (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[2]; Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins, 2007[3]).

Such resistance presents a significant missed opportunity for governments to cater to citizens' needs and expectations. Public scepticism about what is perceived as "spin" means that governments get diminishing returns in terms of public opinion and trust if they do not communicate openly and honestly. Instead, the risk of public disengagement and distrust will remain unaddressed. In this respect, re-defining the mandate

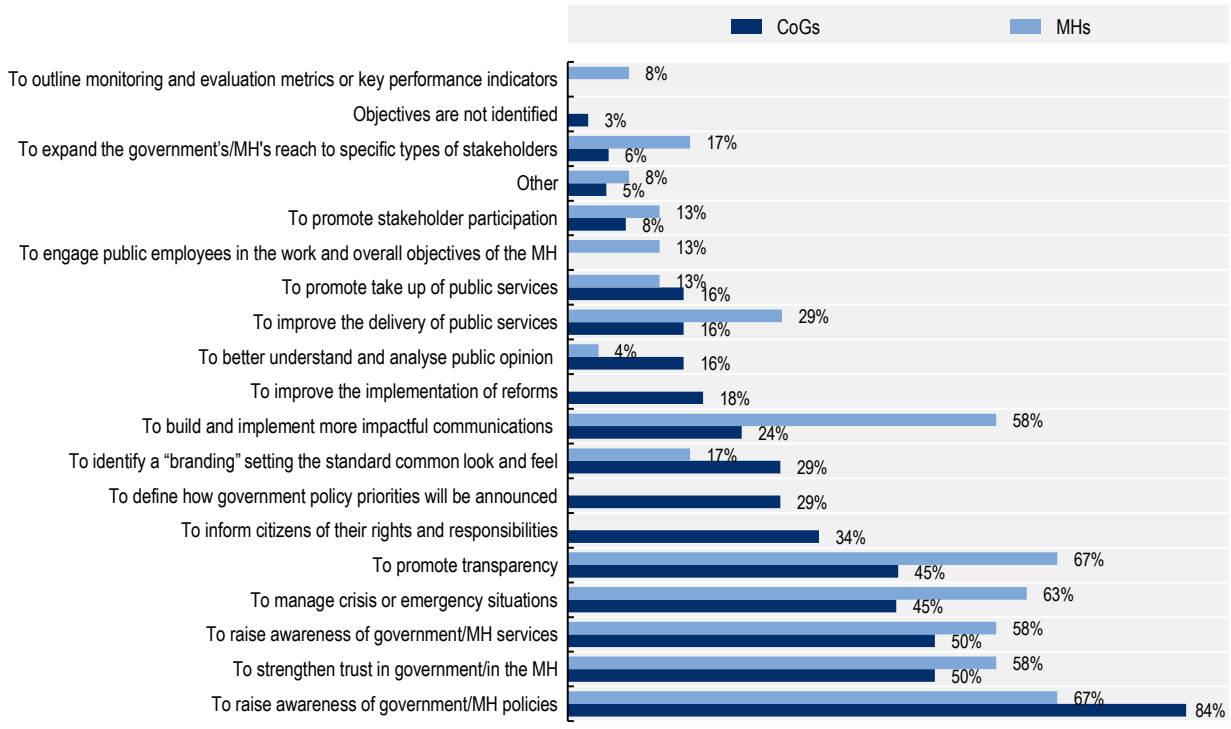
for public communication based on the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation is an essential way in which the potential of this function can be realised.

Mandates and objectives of public communication

Understanding the role of public communication within government requires an analysis of the objectives it aims to achieve. The international overview from the OECD survey data in this respect is somewhat mixed, although some trends can be noticed. The selection of top objectives for the public communication function pointed to a prevalence for informing over dialogue, or "speaking" over "listening" (Macnamara, 2017[4]). Among the priority objectives selected by institutions that participated in the OECD survey, proactive ones – such as supporting the implementation of policy or the delivery and take-up of public services – lag behind more passive uses of communication – such as raising public awareness of the same policies and services. Similarly, citizen-centric types of objectives (e.g. about understanding and analysing public opinion and promoting participation) were selected by fewer respondents than government-centric objectives that relate to defining how priorities will be announced or managing crises (Figure 2.1).

In practice, the objectives and mandate of the public communication function are often - if at all - outlined in a range of policy documents with varying levels of official status – from law or administrative policy, to handbooks and internal guidelines. Albeit varied, these serve to define the parameters for the function such as its purpose, duties and responsibilities, its core values, its line of reporting and place within government structures. They can also determine practical guidance and protocols, define what resources ought to be allocated to communication, or the relevant co-ordination and oversight mechanisms.

Figure 2.1. Primary objectives of public communication (top five responses)



Note: n CoG = 38 ; n MH = 24. Austria did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

The analysis of a sample of such policy documents[1] complements and substantiates the above data on the objectives and uses of public communication (see Box 2.1 for examples of different documents). A common trend identified is an emphasis on the centrality of information to democracy and on the right of citizens to be informed of their governments' actions, often drawing on constitutional provisions. This is found explicitly in the Netherlands' Government Communication Policy (n.d.[5]), for example, which states that "[t]he public has a right to government information. Actively sharing information is therefore one of the government's most important communication tasks […] People are also entitled to communicate with the government. For example, they can request information, take part in policy making, give their opinion or make a complaint. This means that they must be able to contact the government easily". Similar provisions regarding information as a prerequisite for democracy and participation are reflected in the Norwegian (Ministry of Government Administration, 2009[6]) and Brazilian (Ministry of Communication, 2021[7]) policies, among others.

Box 2.1. Examples of documents governing public communication in Canada, Estonia and Mexico

The Government of Canada's Policy on Communications and Federal Identity

The Government of Canada issued the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity, effective since 2016, providing context and rules for how the government should communicate with the public on policies, programs, services and initiatives. The document emphasises the importance of communications for public trust in the government. It explicitly encourages the use of innovative digital tools and online platforms, as well as tailored messaging, to reach specific and diverse audiences.

In addition, the policy emphasises the importance of whole-of-government co-ordination, citizen engagement and cost-effective communications.

The Policy is further complemented by a Directive on the Management of Communications. It defines the different roles and responsibilities of key government organisations. Specific responsibilities for heads of communications are defined in relation to managing and co-ordinating federal identity, social media, advertising, media relations and external partnerships. For example, the Privy Council Office is responsible for advising departments on government priorities, whereas Public Services and Procurement Canada is responsible for managing a central media monitoring service. The Directive also includes mandatory procedures for advertising and public opinion research. Additionally, the document provides processes to manage and create official social media accounts, what approval is required, etc.

Government Communication Handbook, Estonia

Estonia's Government Communication Handbook is a resource for guiding communication personnel within government bodies. The document sets the main purpose of public communication which includes clearly communicating government goals, decisions, actions and activities, and sharing timely and transparent information. Moreover, the handbook stresses the importance of political neutrality, professionalism, freedom of the press, and co-ordination for effective communications.

The document elaborates more practically on the key principles to include in communication plans and the composition of communication units. It also contains guidelines for enhancing citizen engagement, media relations and countering misinformation. Lastly, it includes detailed instructions for successful crisis and digital communication.

Finally, specific standards are set out in relation to press releases, conferences and briefings, as well as communication related to the state budget.

Social Communication Policy, Mexico

In Mexico, the Social Communication Policy of the Federal Government (2019) sets standards for all campaigns conducted by public institutions and funded with public resources to ensure their integrity and effectiveness. It outlines the requirements that campaigns must follow, as well as key elements to be avoided, such as misleading information, use of personal information from public servants or inciting violence. It sets the ceiling of funds to be spent via a single communication medium to 25% of the total of the campaign's budget. The policy also mandates that all information on spending on communication campaigns be uploaded to each entity's transparency portal in an open format.

Sources: https://www.gob.mx/sfp/documentos/guia-para-ejercer-el-derecho-de-acceso-a-la-informacion-publica; https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=30682.

In this regard, although it is often implicit, government communication policies validate the notion that this function serves countries' open government agenda. In the case of the Government of Canada, this is made into an explicit requirement for senior officials of "[e]nsuring that all their department's communications activities support the Government of Canada's principles of open government and its practices" (Government of Canada, 2016[8]). Both the OECD survey data (Figure 2.1) and the review of the communication policies in the sample confirmed the significant emphasis on government transparency. For instance, Sweden's CoG communication policy is among several to highlight the centrality of furthering transparency and explicitly note it as a core value, alongside factualness, comprehensibility, relevance and timeliness (Prime Minister's Office, 2012[9]). Other governments, including Norway's (2009[6]) and Brazil's (2021[7]), highlight in their policies the duty of engaging the media and providing journalists with access to government information. This emphasis can support the linkage with both greater transparency and government accountability.

Moreover, despite being selected as a primary objective by only about a tenth of survey respondents, promoting participation and engagement with citizens features regularly among the communication mandates reviewed. This discrepancy may suggest a gap between the mandate and its implementation in practice, that is between the official vision of the purposes public communication should serve and the capacity of public officials to actualise it. For instance, Norway's communication policy (2009[6]) emphasises "openness" as its guiding principle and contains provisions for outreach to specific stakeholder groups to be involved in the policy processes that concern them. This and related approaches are illustrated further in Chapter 7.

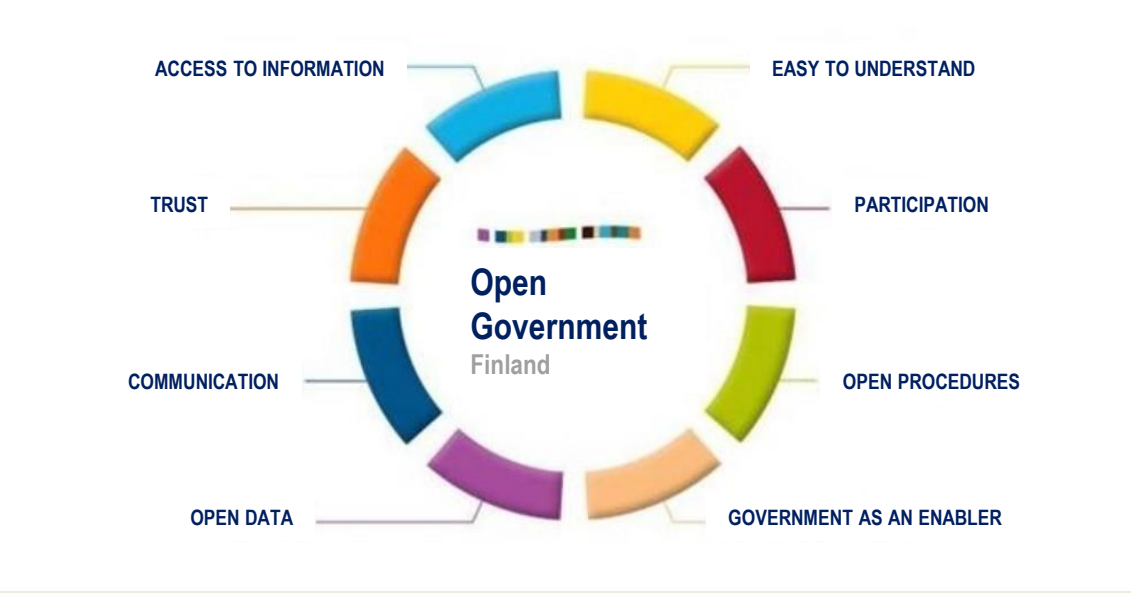
Conversely, public communication rarely features explicitly in countries' open government strategies or initiatives. Finland and Lithuania stand out in this respect as examples of countries that explicitly integrated public communication in their open government agenda, with dedicated provisions featuring in their Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plans (Box 2.2). Building on the evident synergies between these two areas of work will be instrumental both in executing the public communication mandates and furthering openness objectives.

Box 2.2. Communication as a pillar of open government agendas in Finland and Lithuania

Finland's 4th Open Government Partnership National Action Plan (2019-2023)

Finland's 4th OGP National Action Plan features public communication as one of its 8 core pillars to effectively implement the country's open government agenda. The Plan highlights the importance of strengthening internal communication to better co-ordinate and align key messages around open government reforms, as well as leveraging external communication to establish a two-way dialogue with the public. The Plan also underlines the need to ensure that government texts, services and reforms are clear and easily understandable by citizens.

Figure 2.2. National Action Plan (2019-2023), Finland



Source: The Open Government Partnership (2019[10]), Finland's 4th OGP National Action Plan (2019-2023), available online at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Finland_Action-Plan_2019-2023_EN.pdf.

The plan includes concrete commitments to strengthen co-ordination between levels of government, share good practices on effective communication and open digital feedback channels for the preparation of Finland's Open Government Strategy. In addition, the plan foresees the development of a dedicated communication plan for the country's open government unit, which will allow improving the way it interacts with citizens and better showcase the results of this agenda.

Action Plan for Lithuania's Participation in the International Initiative 'Open Government Partnership' (2021-2023)

The Government of Lithuania clearly and explicitly acknowledges the value of public communication to strengthen the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation. The *Action Plan for Lithuania's Participation in the International Initiative 'Open Government Partnership' (2021-2023)* highlights key priorities for the government and outlines operating principles in the implementation of the provisions of their programme.

The need for "open government communication" is highlighted as playing a central role in this endeavour. Specifically, the plan underlines the importance of unbiased, relevant, and clear information being disseminated in the civil sphere. This includes, for instance, procurement data which the plan states should be shared widely to increase transparency as well as accountability. Finally, this function is envisaged to open up dialogue between citizens and their representatives, taking into account their inputs during the deliberation of complex issues.

Source: The Open Government Partnership (2019[10]), Finland's 4th OGP National Action Plan (2019-2023), available online at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Finland_Action-Plan_2019-2023_EN.pdf and https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/lithuania-action-plan-2021-2023/.

Another prominent feature across policy documents is clarity and accessibility in communications. Across countries, communication is framed as having a duty of inclusion and service to citizens. Tailoring content and language to be clearer and more widely understood is a recurring feature of communication policy and guideline documents, including in Italy's Guidelines for Communication Programmes of Public Administrations (2018[11]) and Sweden's communication policy (2012[9]). In the United States, the clarity and accessibility of language used in government communication and documents is even codified by law (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. The United States Plain Writing Act of 2010

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 was issued to "enhance citizen access to government information and services by establishing that government documents issued to the public must be written clearly". Ultimately, the purpose of this Act is to improve accountability and effectiveness of government agencies by promoting clear and comprehensive public communication.

Government documents include any form necessary for complying with, obtaining or providing information on Federal Government requirements, benefits or services. The Act requires each head of agency to elect one or more senior officials to oversee its implementation, communicate and train employees on Act requirements and plain writing, and designate agency points-of-contact to receive and respond to public enquiries. Moreover, each agency is expected to create and maintain a plain writing section on its website, to inform agency compliance with this Act and provide a mechanism for public input. Within this section, institutions are required to publish both initial and annual compliance reports on the agency's plan and compliance with the requirements of the Act.

The Director of the Office of Management and Budget is responsible for developing and issuing guidelines on the implementation of the Plain Writing Act requirements. The Director may also designate a lead agency or use interagency groups to assist in developing this guidance.

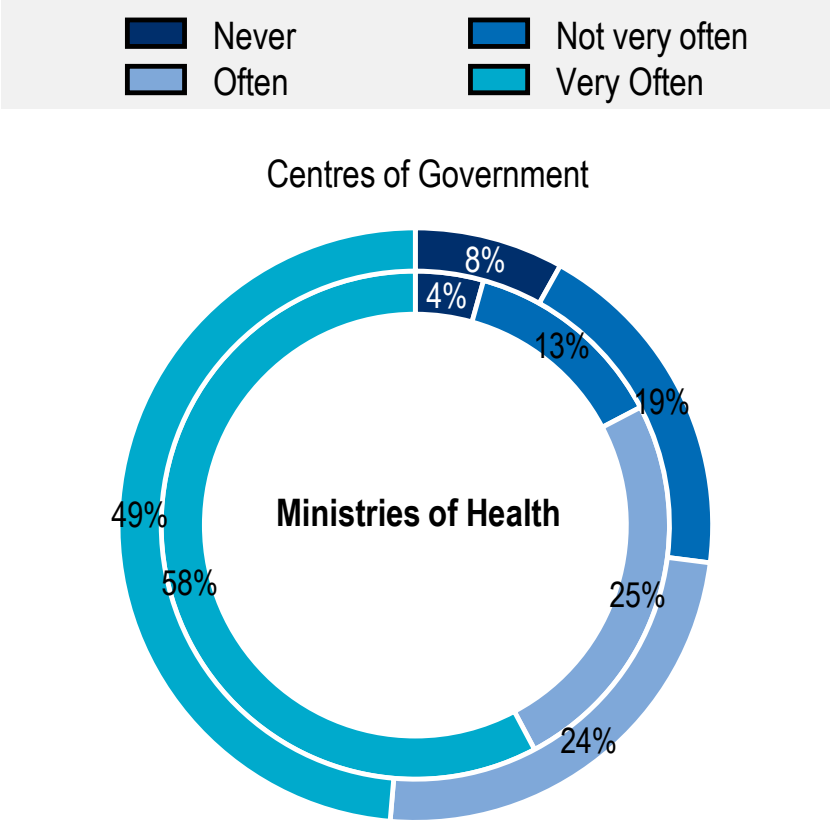
Source: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf.

To foster greater inclusion of all groups in society, the Government of Canada's Policy on Communications and Federal Identity makes explicit reference to communicating in its official languages (Government of Canada, 2016[8]), whereas Costa Rica's[2] government communication manual includes guidelines on communicating with vulnerable groups and on sensitive topics (including migration, gender-based violence, LGTBQ+ rights, and people with disabilities). As such, it appears that governments view the communication function as having a duty to democratise information by making it more accessible, relevant and intelligible to the widest publics.

The sample of communication policy and guideline documents reviewed also confirms the understanding of the communication function as an instrument for policy design and implementation. This is recognised explicitly in the relevant Brazilian, Canadian, Dutch, Italian and Norwegian documents among others, whereas specific applications of communication for policy are explored further in Chapter 7. Nonetheless, it is important to note that despite this, interactions between communicators and policy makers or programme teams are less frequent than desired. Only about half of CoGs and MHs claimed to work with public policy and service development teams with high regularity (Figure 2.3), which has been noted in literature as a challenge for fulfilling communication's potential (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[2]; Sanders and Canel, 2013[1]). Integration between Behavioural Insights and communication teams, for instance, has been one of the leading areas of cross-fertilisation that has supported policy objectives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chapter 3).

Finally, several governments have been working to update relevant policy frameworks to reflect the increasingly digital-first nature of public communication, as is the case with the Italian law governing communication (Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica, 2020[12]) and the Government of Canada's communication policy (2016[8]). The digitalisation of public communication does indeed call for the revision of policies to ensure they adequately reflect the opportunities but also challenges of communicating via digital channels, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 2.3. Frequency of interactions between communication and policy or programme development teams



Note: n CoG =37 (Austria and Germany were treated as non-applicable) ; n MH = 24.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Policies and practices for ethics and to support a greater separation of political and public communication

Central to the governance of the communication function are its implementation in an ethical and non-partisan manner. Similarly to all public officials, communicators are expected to abide by public sector integrity standards. However, non-partisanship is a more delicate matter insofar as government communication is inevitably somewhat political in nature. Sanders and Canel (2013[1]) rightly recognise that the most important distinction in this respect is whether the de facto purpose of communication is to safeguard the reputation and electoral prospects of incumbent political parties or whether it is primarily focused on informing and engaging citizens on matters that concern them, consistently with the mandates discussed above.

The risk of high degree of politicisation of public communication is a primary challenge to the effectiveness of the function as a tool of open government and for rebuilding and maintaining public trust. This is especially acute in an environment where information is increasingly weaponised not only by a variety of external actors but also by political parties and movements, and where mis- and disinformation remain a prominent issue.

To help mitigate such risks and progressively move towards a more impartial and open communication, governments have adopted several approaches that help better define the boundaries between political and public communication. In some of the countries surveyed, relevant provisions were included in policies and laws overseeing public communication. This is the case of the Netherlands, which Principles of Government Communication state that information shared by governmental sources "should always be focused on the content of policy, not on image building for individual members of government. With that in mind, ministers and state secretaries are never to be visible in central government publicity" (Ministry of General Affairs, n.d.[5]). While the implementation of such measures is challenging, they are nonetheless fundamental in limiting to the extent possible the likelihood of abuse of communication activities for political gains. Other common frameworks include laws and protocols forbidding civil servants from engaging in some types of politically partisan activities, including in the communication field. The Hatch Act of 1939 in the United States is one such legislation that applies to all employees of the executive branch, and to the communication function by extension, and requires them to conduct their role with political neutrality and refrain from taking part in partisan initiatives (U.S. Office of the Special Counsel, n.d.[13]). Often, these provisions are also included in ethics guidelines or codes of conduct for public officials, as illustrated below (see Box 2.4).

Box 2.4. Norwegian guidelines for impartiality of communications

Norway

In 2019, the Norwegian Government developed a set of guidelines concerning ethics and the relationship between political leadership and the civil service. They provide guidance for both politicians and civil servants on how to handle ethical dilemmas that may arise on a day-to-day basis, including in the context of communication.

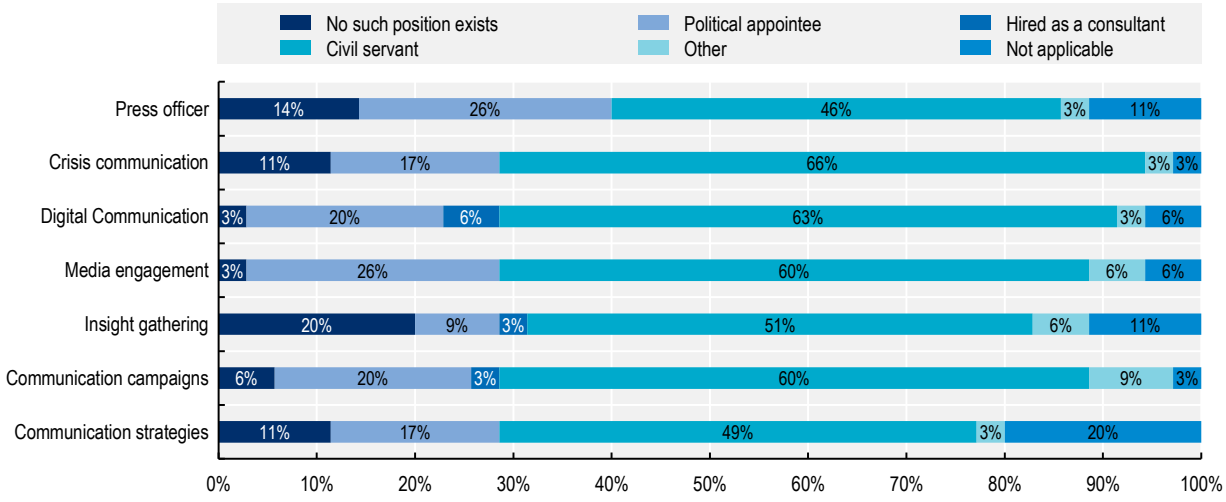
The document identifies several core obligations: legality, truthfulness, professionalism, development and co-operation, responsibility and management, openness about errors, and party-political neutrality. A set of case studies accompany the guidelines to illustrate these obligations practically, touching on topics including authority, freedom of expression, openness and transparency, professional integrity and political neutrality.

Source:
https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/8145632385cb477cba018d4a8dfaf6f8/about_the_relationship_between_political_leadership_and_the_civil_service.pdf; https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/c21df76243db416d859ad18e957d24ae/dilemmasamling_om-forholdet-mellom-politisk-ledelse-og-embetsverk.pdf.

Rules and practices on the appointment of senior communication roles and on the definition of responsibilities of politically appointed versus civil service personnel are similarly important to manage. In Italy, Law 150 of 2000 designates public communication roles and responsibilities to be covered exclusively by civil servants, whereas press office and spokesperson roles can be appointed externally. The latter in particular are intended as external professionals recruited by the political leadership of a ministry or agency and have distinct roles (Forum PA, 2020[14]) (for related examples see Box 2.5). Data from the OECD survey in this regard show the prevalence for appointments of senior communication positions from the civil service. This was the case for all seven types of senior roles in the Survey, with about half of CoGs reporting that civil servants filled each of these roles (see Figure 2.4).

Between 9% and 26% of CoGs employ political appointees for each of these positions. Media engagement and press office roles are notable exceptions, with slightly over a quarter of CoGs stating that these functions are led by politically appointed staff.

Figure 2.4. Overview of how CoG senior communication roles are appointed across selected competencies



Note: The 8 core roles include: Head of communication strategies, communication campaigns, insight gathering, media engagement, digital communication, crisis communication, press officer and "other" to allow respondents to include relevant options for their specific context.
n CoG = 35, Germany, Israel, Austria and Ireland did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Another notable aspect of these data is the proportion of politically appointed senior communication staff in a given organisation. In this respect, only a small minority – or about 15% of COGs – have over half of senior roles covered by political affiliates. This finding supports that, at least formally, a majority of governments take steps that contribute a certain measure of separation between political and public communication.

Box 2.5. Legal provisions for the appointment of high-level administrative positions in Belgium and France

In Belgium (at federal level) and France (at central government level), and similarly to other OECD countries, certain senior administrative positions may be politically appointed. To ensure transparency and integrity in the selection process and the appropriate execution of duties, these countries have introduced dedicated legal provisions.

In France, a central legal framework regulates recruitment for the highest positions at the discretion of the government, and provides that appointments to such positions "are essentially revocable, whether they concern civil servants or non-civil servants". A decree of the Council of State grants that high-level posts are to be appointed by the incumbent government but covered by these safeguards. The roles concerned include the Head of the Government Information Service (SIG).

Similarly, the highest administrative functions in Belgium are subject to specific regulations, including the appointment of the Director General for external communications. Among others, safeguards include specified requirements, competencies and knowledge to be able to participate in the selection process. The decree also elaborates on the recruitment and duties of the eventual appointees in serving the public interest and implementing their missions.

Source: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000006450553/; https://fedweb.belgium.be/sites/default/files/2001-10-29%20KB_AR_management_SPFFOD_SPPPOD.pdf.

In sum, setting clear standards, directives, guidance or procedures on managing to the extent possible the distinction between the political and institutional realms of communications is a useful and necessary practice to ensure this key function is conducted in the interest and service of the public. Such policies ought to acknowledge explicitly that unbiased information is essential to empower citizens to participate constructively in public life and hold their governments to account. The primary challenge will continue to be the implementation of relevant policies and respect for these boundaries in day-to-day practice. To this end, leadership from both political and civil service will remain essential. The move towards a greater professionalisation of the public communication function as described later in this chapter will also likely contribute to these efforts.

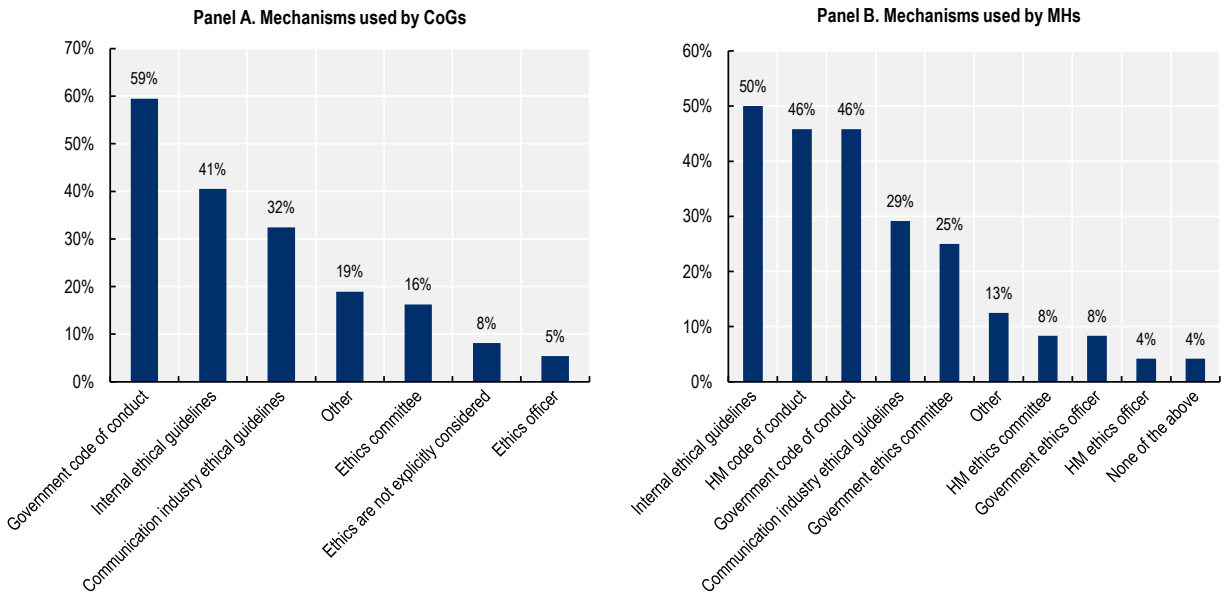
Ensuring ethics and integrity in public communication at all times

Together with mitigating risks of politicisation, upholding high ethical standards in the conduct of public communication is central to its effective governance and its role for transparency. Integrity considerations can affect the roles of communicators just as in any other public office, but they can especially concern risks related to the misrepresentation or withholding of information, or the disclosure of personal, classified or damaging data. Integrity risks also include conflicts of interests, particularly in the context of procurement and of revolving doors between public relations or political affairs consultancies and public offices. A wider range of risks and related prevention and mitigation mechanisms are elaborated in the *OECD Public Integrity Handbook* (OECD, 2020[15]).

Data from the OECD survey confirmed that nearly all respondents took steps to support the ethical conduct of public communicators, relying on a variety of mechanisms. Guiding documents include government-wide codes of conduct (in place in 59% of COGs and 50% of MHs), ethical guidelines specific to the unit or institution (in 41% of COGs and 55% of MHs), and specific to the communication profession (in 32% of COGs and MHs). A minority of respondents introduced more rigorous mechanisms for monitoring or enforcing these rules, in the form of ethics officers or committees (see Figure 2.5).

Specific measures are also in place with regards to use of official and personal social media channels, as well as advertising. With the rise of new technologies and their applications to public communication, guidance for the ethical use of data is emerging across a number of countries (see Chapter 5). The *OECD Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector* provide concrete advice to support public officials in the implementation of data ethics, including on how to manage data with integrity (OECD, 2020[16]).

Figure 2.5. Mechanisms used by CoGs and MHs to ensure ethics in communications campaigns



Note Panel A: n=37 countries
Note Panel B: n=22, (Japan did not provide data for this question; Sweden stated that the CoG does not run campaigns and as such, this question is treated as not applicable).
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Based on the analysis of a sample of documents submitted by respondents to the OECD survey, ethical conduct guidelines and standards commonly covered the following dimensions:

- Values, including integrity, honesty, impartiality, flexibility, excellence, etc.
- The necessity to implement communication functions serving the public interest and debate.
- Accessibility of information, openness and engagement.
- Completeness, reliability and accuracy of information used and shared.
- Warnings on risks of conflicts of interest.
- Oversight mechanisms for advertisement or funding (ads, campaigns, etc.) and transparency of procurement and spending.

However, practical guidance on handling sensitive information, maintaining transparent and honest communication, and granting equitable treatment and access to all media are important to ensure the function is conducted with integrity.

Delivering on public communication's mandate through the use of strategies

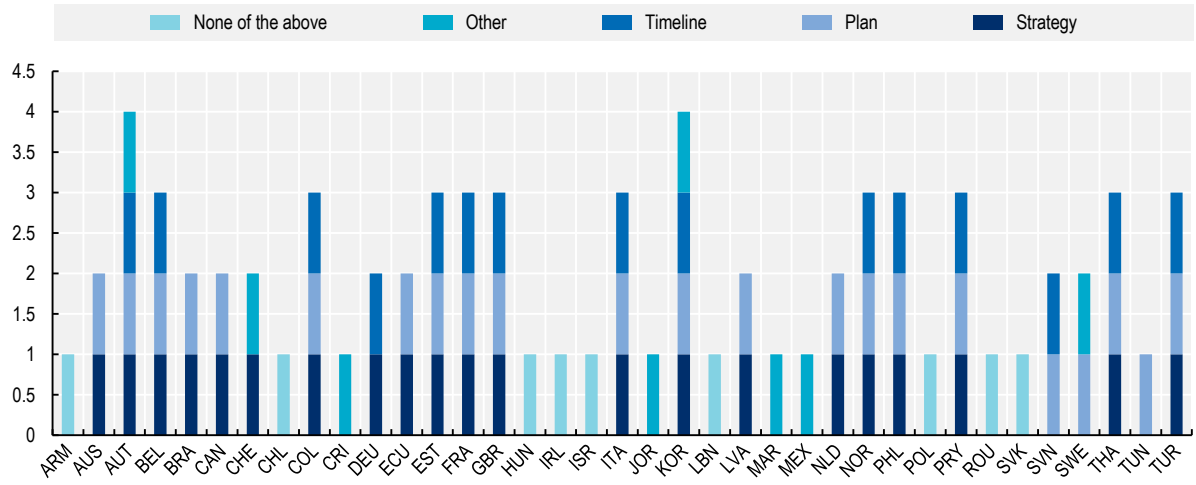
Whereas the above sections focused on the governance of public communication in terms of the policies, directives and standards that apply to the function, this section turns to another core aspect of its governance: the use of strategies. While policy documents set out the purpose and operational requirements of communication, dedicated strategies lay out its execution and substance: the policy objectives it will seek to achieve, the shape that communication will take (i.e. the key messages and the content to deliver them), and the evidence and metrics that will inform its design and performance, among other elements. In brief, strategies are core to ensuring communications fulfil their mandate in practice.

For the purpose of this report, and based on the OECD survey, a communication strategy is a written, time-bound document that identifies a communication solution to a problem, sets the approach to achieve its objectives, and defines the activities and tactics to be carried out. It is commonly complemented by a communication plan that details the content to be delivered and actions to be taken in sequence. It can be broad in scope, for example encompassing communications for the whole-of-government or entire ministries and sub-national administrations, across multiple policies and issues. Often, they can be specific to each policy area or programme, and the same institution may have several simultaneous strategies dedicated to distinct issues.

Periodically elaborating a strategy, however narrow or all-encompassing, is a pre-requisite for strategic communication. It is a key step towards achieving measurable impact and moving beyond the implementation of ad-hoc activities. Indeed, it allows for communication priorities to be agreed upon in consultation with policy makers and key stakeholders, and to ensure that they meet the official mandate of the function and align with the government's goals. Another pre-requisite is to ground it in evidence, as is discussed in Chapters 3 (on audience and behavioural insights) and 4 (on evaluation).

In this respect, the data from the OECD survey underlined that more countries could be making use of communication strategies to strengthen impact, improve co-ordination and reinforce coherence. As many as 43% of CoGs and 57% of MHs surveyed have not developed any strategy document in the previous three years. Communication timelines are also not commonly used, as only 41% of CoGs reported they developed them. Finally, as much as a quarter of CoGs have not developed neither a strategy, plan nor a timeline in the past three years (see Figure 2.6).[3]

Figure 2.6. Use of strategies, plans and timelines across COGs



Note: n CoG= 37. Lithuania and Czech Republic did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication.

A likely challenge to explain the low uptake of strategies is the relatively demanding process that goes into developing and executing them – from the research and insights-gathering phase to the elaboration, planning, validation, and eventual evaluation phases. This endeavour requires an important commitment of staff and time, as well as a long-term horizon, which can be difficult to manage in a fast-paced environment.

Indeed, over half of CoGs (53%) reported finding the development of government-wide strategies to be one of the most challenging communication competencies. They identified lack of co-ordination and constraints on human and financial resources as the main obstacles they face in this domain. The picture is very similar

for MHs, for 54% of whom developing strategies is the most challenging competency. Based on these findings, governments aiming to invest in more effective communication or transition towards a strategic approach will be well-served by supporting capacity-building and additional resources for this area.

Nevertheless, responses from those institutions who reported having developed strategies allow a number of observations. Several (including CoGs in Austria, Australia, Sweden and Slovenia) noted having multiple such documents for distinct areas and initiatives, tied to priorities in a given period. Conversely, the United Kingdom and Latvia are among a smaller group of CoGs that develop overarching strategies that direct whole-of-government communication (see Box 2.6). This all-encompassing type of document offers the advantage of codifying a unified vision and voice for the entire administration on priority areas and favours a more cohesive communication across line ministries. In practice, as discussed below, many respondents work to achieve such alignment through co-ordination led by the CoG, without necessarily formalising it in writing.

Box 2.6. The United Kingdom's whole-of-government communication priorities

The United Kingdom's Government Communication Plan for 2019-2020, developed by the Government Communication Service (GCS), identifies three overarching priorities and outlines approaches to address them:

1. Raising standards
   - Implementing an ambitious portfolio of new improvement programmes to drive transformation across departments and agencies;
   - Raising the profile of government marketing through a series of events, trainings and transformation of media buying;
   - Accelerating digital skills and culture transformation to drive innovation and help communication professionals commit time and resources to personal and team upskilling.
2. Strengthening democracy
   - Tackling misinformation and disinformation through fixed models providing long-term strategic responses to disinformation;
   - Partnering with government departments and a network of embassies to provide support to government and institutions internationally.
3. Delivering for communities
   - Launching cross-government campaigns, such as the Prepare for EU Exit campaign, to disseminate important information to citizens;
   - Implementing a series of campaigns to communicate measures being taken in relation to areas including education and skills, economy and industry, health and well-being, housing and social mobility.

Source: https://communication-plan.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/.

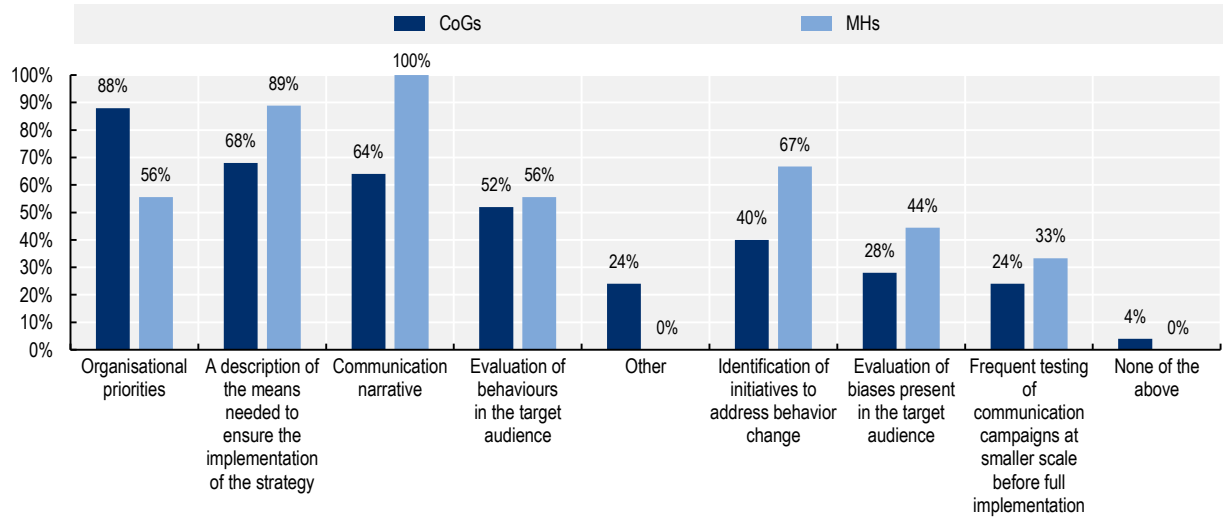
Other prevalent aspects of communication strategies are highlighted in Figure 2.7 and illustrated through selected examples in Box 2.7. Setting the overall communication narrative as a primary output of a strategy document was selected by all MHs and about two-thirds of CoGs. Alignment on organisational priorities and the elaboration of the means for the adequate implementation of the strategy are two other primary elements included by most respondents. In this respect, Ecuador's CoG communication strategy additionally specified mechanisms for review and evaluation, whereby a Communication Plan Review Committee ("Comité de Revisión de Planes de Comunicación") reviews, analyses and approves the strategies of individual ministries and evaluates their performance at the end of the year (see Box 2.7).

Likewise, several strategy documents submitted by CoGs refer to monitoring and evaluation, including the United Kingdom, Italy, Turkey, Colombia and Paraguay. Finally, the use of evidence on audience perceptions and behaviours is common to around half of respondents, and indeed several of those who selected "other" specified their strategies feature analyses about target audiences and stakeholders.

In sum, from the above analysis of strategies submitted and responses to the OECD survey, it emerges that, despite the definition of strategies provided, different institutions have different understandings of communication strategies. Indeed, at the initial stages of data collection and during validation meetings, the variety of documents and answers obtained from respondents indicated that several of them did not necessarily differentiate communication policies or simple plans from strategy documents for example. Moreover, this finding suggests that a good proportion of respondents are missing the opportunity to use this tool to take forward a whole-of-government approach to communication (see next section for further details).

This discrepancy could be linked to an organisational culture within the public administration that does not encourage the development of such documents, prioritising instead the more tactical approach to communication described above. It could also be due to the relative scarcity of standards and examples to inform a more unified understanding of the components that differentiate a communication strategy from plans. Overall, this lack of clarity is further evidence of the diverse nature of this government function around the world, and suggests that strategic communication remains a hybrid field with approaches differing even among mature countries.

Figure 2.7. Elements included in CoGs and MHs communication strategies (and plans, where applicable)



Note: n CoG = 25, includes Slovenia, Sweden and Tunisia that reported having a plan only. Germany and Jordan did not provide a response to this question. Respondents could select all applicable options. n MH = 9
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication"

Box 2.7. Examples of whole-of-government communication strategies and plans

The Netherlands' Public Communication Strategy (2020-2021)

The Communication Council's Programme of 2020 establishes government priorities, and poses a series of initiatives to address overarching communication challenges. These include enhancing communication with the public and encouraging inclusivity in their communication outputs. The programme also recognises internal objectives on whole-of-government co-ordination and increased capacity-building through training.

The programme is complemented by the Public Information and Communication Office (DPC) Activity Plan of 2021. The plan sets out one main strategic objective through its mission statement of "helping the government in improving communication with citizens and equipping professionals with the necessary market knowledge and training". It further outlines the government's substantive communication objectives and the actions to pursue them, along with details on financial resources, including structural and advertising costs, media purchasing and yearly budgets.

Italy's Government Communication Plan

The yearly Government Communication Plan is the main instrument through which the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and central state administrations set out to achieve communication objectives. The plan is a compilation of each administration's own communication programme, which identifies and sets priorities, target audiences, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and financial resources. To harmonise the programmes into an overall government-wide plan, clear guidelines and requirements are provided for each institution to define its key objectives, target groups, communication channels and content.

The plan also elaborates on the need to include a phase for monitoring and evaluating results of campaigns at multiple stages. It raises the necessity of estimating overall financial resources before carrying out any programme. Finally, the communication plan gives a clear structure for co-ordination and collaboration between different entities, to ensure communication activities are aligned for the whole-of-government.

The 2020-2022 communication strategy for Ecuador's Presidency

This document sets the general direction of communications for the Ecuadorian Presidency. It outlines the mission and vision of the institution, underlining its role as the leading arm of communications and emphasising the transparent, efficient and participatory nature of its work. Furthermore, the strategy identifies 3 key goals, notably to raise awareness of the international community of the work of the government, inform internal and external audiences of the activities and results of the public administration and promote cultural initiatives led by the Presidency. For each objective, a series of actions are defined with details on the target audience, main messages, Key Performance Indicators, allocated budget and responsible entity for its delivery. It concludes with information on the timeline of each activity.

Source: Estonia: https://www.valitsus.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/failid/government_communication_handbook_eng_13.09.2017.pdf; Netherlands, Italy and Ecuador: Submission as attachments to COG responses to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication.

The institutional organisation and structures for executing public communication

Whereas the policies, mandates, and strategies discussed above define the mission for communication, the institutional structures in place are the vehicle for implementing them in practice. Indeed, the way the public communication function is organised within government and the resources allocated to it are essential enabling factors. As noted in the previous section, some of these aspects about the structures dedicated to the communication function are determined in official documents. In practice, these are also evolving according to changing demands and increasing areas of specialisation in the field.

This section of the Chapter discusses how governments have institutionalised their public communication in terms of offices, funding, areas of responsibility, and co-ordination mechanisms. The following section instead looks in depth at the professionalisation of the function, given the centrality of human resources, specialised competencies and capacity building for both its institutionalisation and the quality of its outputs.

Across virtually all countries that took part in the OECD survey, communication was conducted by dedicated offices that are typically present in each ministry or agency and in the CoG. Indeed, the prevalent arrangement for these structures is to be decentralised and specialised on thematic issues relevant to each ministry, with varying degrees of co-ordination and oversight from the CoG. Noting this distinction, one reason for surveying both CoGs and MHs for this report was indeed to capture the similarities, differences, and interactions between them, to understand the role of this function in governments from both a central and sectoral perspective.

Across the CoGs surveyed, a majority (72%) claimed to share the primary responsibility for communications with other ministries. However, almost half also reported having primary responsibility for at least four out of seven competency areas,[4] even though others are shared. This reinforces the notion that in a considerable proportion of countries the CoG plays a very prominent role in the implementation of public communication. Conversely, countries where the CoG fully centralises communication responsibilities, or looks after its own communications only, are the exception.

Alternative arrangements are found in federal governments, such as Germany, Belgium, Australia and Switzerland, where communication responsibilities were often distributed between national and sub-national level. For instance, the Belgian Directorate General for External Communication of the Federal Public Service (FPS) Chancellery of the Prime Minister is responsible for drafting and disseminating the decisions of the Council of Ministers,[5] but many other competencies are decentralised.

Other countries, such as Brazil (Ministry of Communications, SECOM), Paraguay (Ministry of Technology and Information Communication) or Korea (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) have placed the main mandate for public communication with dedicated ministries or teams outside of the CoG. In a similar vein, some governments have also taken steps to consolidate their central offices into full-fledged agencies located in the CoG. The United Kingdom (UK) has established the Government Communications Service (GCS) as a whole-of-government body comprising all public service communicators. Likewise, France's *Service d'Information du Gouvernement* (SIG), Italy's Presidency of the Council of Ministers Department for Information and Publishing (PCM-DIE), and Slovenia's Government Communication Office, are examples of dedicated departments and agencies attached to the CoG tasked with conducting whole-of-government and inter-ministerial communication.

As is also discussed in the below section on human resources, the size, internal structuring, and level of specialisation of the bodies in charge of communications vary considerably across respondents. These factors all contribute to the capacity of these offices to perform the function to a high standard. Another important consideration is the centralisation or decentralisation of resources. Indeed, in some governments the CoG or dedicated ministry overseeing public communication often benefit from having bigger teams or more financing, particularly in relation to highly specialised or resource-intensive competency areas.

In some countries, such as the United Kingdom or Singapore, capacity is developed at the centre and put at the disposal of other ministries. This is more common, for example, in the areas of media and digital monitoring services, counter-disinformation, behavioural insights specialists, and training experts, which can be located at the centre but serve the whole administration. Such a system can offer advantages to harmonise the capacity of ministries with smaller teams and budgets. It can be especially helpful in less mature contexts where investments to develop the public communication function across all of government can be considerable and require a longer time horizon.

The next section looks in depth at another primary aspect of the institutional set up of public communication: its co-ordination across the public administration.

From cross-government co-ordination to a whole-of-government communication

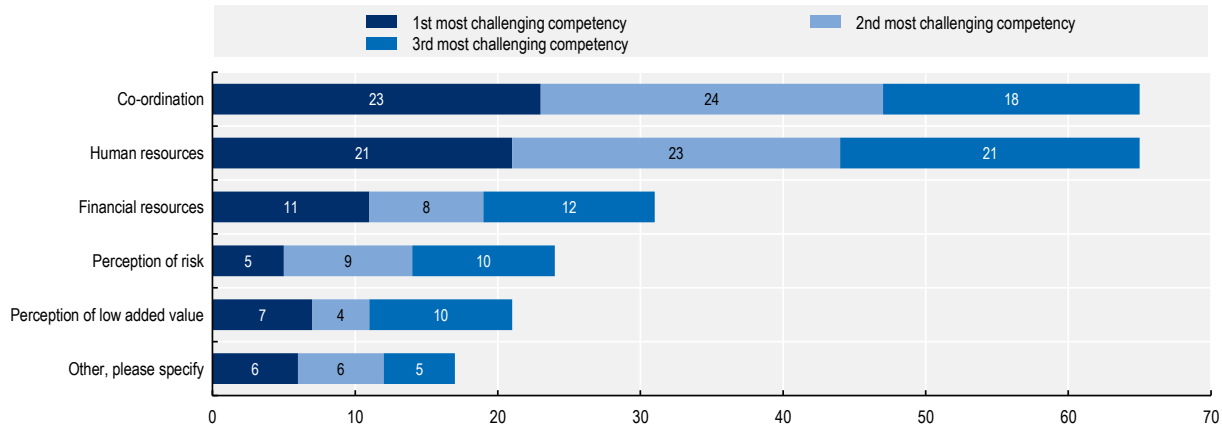
Given the often-dispersed structures tasked with conducting communication across government, mechanisms to co-ordinate and streamline activities are priority factors for ensuring the delivery of information efficiently and effectively. Notwithstanding the different degrees of centralisation of communication responsibilities, governments can build on such co-ordination efforts to achieve a fully whole-of-government communication and speak with one voice, as this section discusses.

As for many domains, policy co-ordination is a powerful enabler of greater coherence (OECD, 2020[17]). It has become acutely relevant for many OECD member and partner countries, partly due to the increase in cross-cutting, multi-dimensional policy challenges. This is demonstrated by the high proportion of countries reporting a rise in cross-ministerial policy initiatives since 2008, as documented in a recent OECD (2020[17]) study. As a result, some CoGs have expanded their central co-ordination role and capacity, including in the domain of internal and external communication (OECD, 2020[17]), particularly given the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2020[18]).

The co-ordination of public communication, whether horizontally across the administration, or vertically across levels of government, brings numerous advantages. It serves to avoid conflicting or duplicating messages, thereby allowing greater coherence in the information audiences perceive. Where relevant, it can facilitate cross-government support to a given ministry or team with regards to priority activities. Moreover, effective co-ordination has the potential to foster an environment conducive to the sharing of practices and lessons among practitioners. In turn, this contributes to greater efficiencies and improved outcomes for communication.

Co-ordination can also become burdensome if not structured appropriately. It is indeed the most commonly cited reason why many competencies are challenging according to OECD survey responses (Figure 2.8). For example, 73% of CoGs underline co-ordinating as a main reason why performing crisis communication is challenging, 40% for campaigns and 36% for evaluating communication. Indeed, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, communicators from multiple countries have noted great complexity with co-ordinating and aligning efforts in real-time to meet peak demand for information.[6] These trends, including in ubiquitous competencies such as implementing campaigns, highlight the inherent complexity of implementing joint, aligned and coherent actions across government. For this reason, identifying and adopting effective mechanisms that strike the right balance between being highly formalised and process-heavy at one extreme, and too informal and ad-hoc at the other, is an important priority.

Figure 2.8. CoGs' three most important reasons for selecting their three most challenging communication competencies



Note: n CoG = 38. Romania did not provide a response. This question is conditional to the selection of three challenges. Six countries did not select any challenging competency (either one or all three).
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

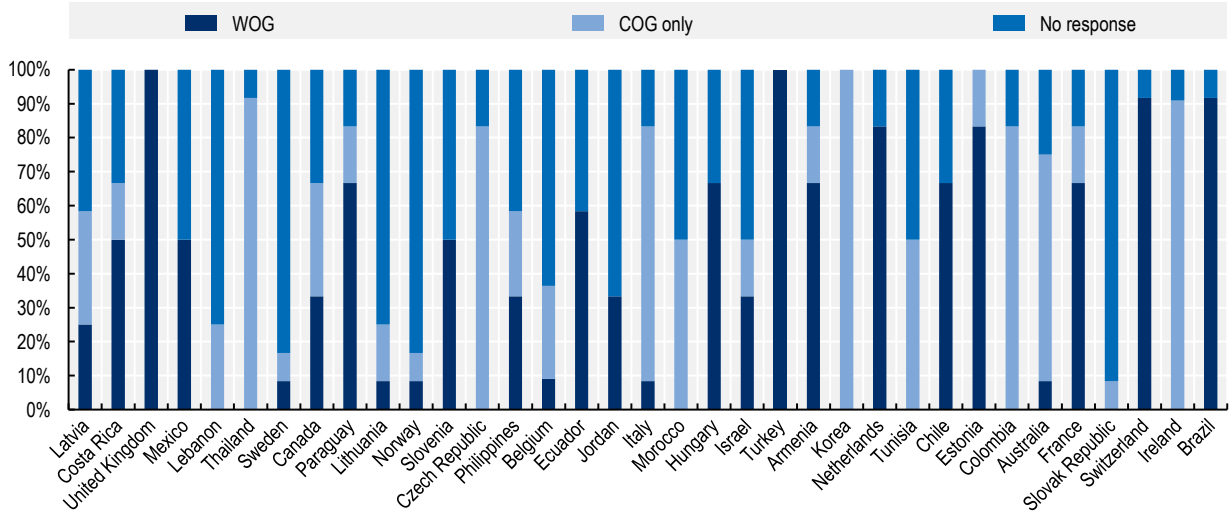
Along the trajectory towards a greater institutionalisation of this function, governments could envision moving beyond simple co-ordination to achieve a whole-of-government communication. This is intended as a unified approach that provides a cohesive and holistic direction for communication activities across the administration.

Indeed, siloed approaches to communication across ministries and agencies reflect internal administrative structures, and do not necessarily cater to the expectations of citizens and other stakeholders who instead tend to perceive governments as unitary. Building such a unified identity is already a trend visible in some governments' branding and online presence (OECD, 2020[19]). Countries like France and Italy, for example, have introduced clear and recognisable visual branding guidelines that apply across all of the executive to all content and materials. In France, this first step towards a national branding strategy was followed by the introduction of a "digital design system"[7] of the State in July 2021. Similarly, the United Kingdom was one of the first governments to bring all public sector websites under the same roof in its GOV.UK website. In Ireland, the establishment of a unified visual identity and gov.ie as a single online point of access by the Government Information Service promotes a coherent communication approach within the administration and facilitates citizens' access to official sources of information. By extension, the same principles behind these efforts to create a whole-of-government image can be applied to help administrations speak with one voice.

Ultimately, a whole-of-government approach to communication strengthens coherence of messaging, allows the administration to convey a clear narrative, and helps amplify official content amidst the crowded and fast-paced information ecosystem described in Chapters 1 and 6. By combining resources and minimising dissonance, it can contribute to overarching communication goals that depend on actions by all institutions, including furthering transparency and participation and rebuilding public trust.

In light of this discussion, evidence from the OECD survey indicated that co-ordination through different means is prevalent among respondents, and that several countries are taking steps towards whole-of-government approaches (Figure 2.9). The data suggested that there is no one-size-fits-all system in this area, and institutions surveyed have adopted a range of formal and informal mechanisms to co-ordinate their activities.

Figure 2.9. Share of CoGs communication responsibilities conducted for the whole-of-government

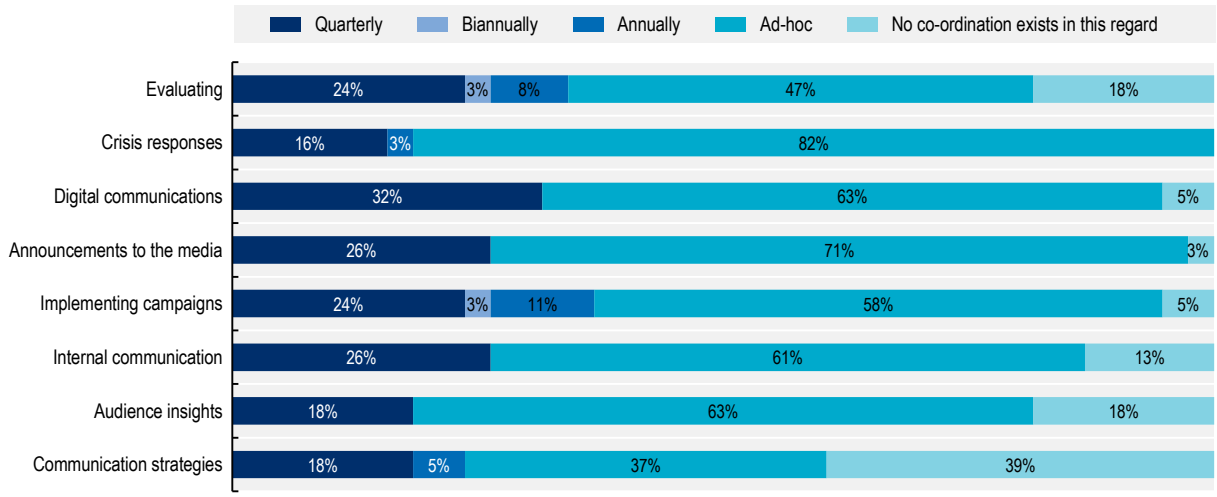


Note: n CoG = 35, 12 functions were included in the survey: communication strategies, communication campaigns, insight gathering, media engagement, digital communication, crisis communication, internal communication, evaluating communication activities, promoting stakeholder participation opportunities, countering disinformation, training and other. Austria, Germany, Poland and Romania did not provide an answer to this specific survey question.
Source: Survey OECD 2020 "Understanding Public Communication".

Based on the OECD survey data, some areas of public communication are more commonly co-ordinated than others, with the CoG typically playing a central role. These functions include crisis and digital communications, media relations, and implementing campaigns (Figure 2.10). For example, three quarter of CoGs co-ordinated with colleagues in other ministries on at least one campaign in 2019, and 97% reported having co-ordination mechanisms in place for crises.

Other strategic and time-intensive tasks such as monitoring and evaluation, collecting audience insights or the development of strategies are among the functions that are less often co-ordinated by CoGs (Figure 2.10) and where some efficiencies could be created through closer collaboration. Nonetheless, a number of practices indicate that some governments have benefited from introducing structures that support a co-ordinated, consistent and efficient approach to evaluating public communication (for the United Kingdom example see Chapter 4, Box 4.2, for Ecuador see Box 2.8 below). Such experiences highlight the value of capitalising on specialisation and lessons learned to increase overall standards in different competency areas.

Figure 2.10. Frequency of CoG's communication co-ordination with other government ministries, departments and agencies



Note: n CoG = 38. Austria did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

To implement these co-ordination functions, OECD member and partners countries rely on a range of instruments. Planning and scheduling tools and regular meetings are common in Colombia, Ireland, Latvia, Mexico, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. In some cases, these meetings take official status as happens with dedicated inter-ministerial committees in Estonia, Paraguay or Norway (Box 2.12). In this regard, in the Netherlands, the heads of all communication directorates across the government meet on a bi-weekly basis in the Communication Council.

Box 2.8. Co-ordinating strategies and evaluation of public communication in Ecuador

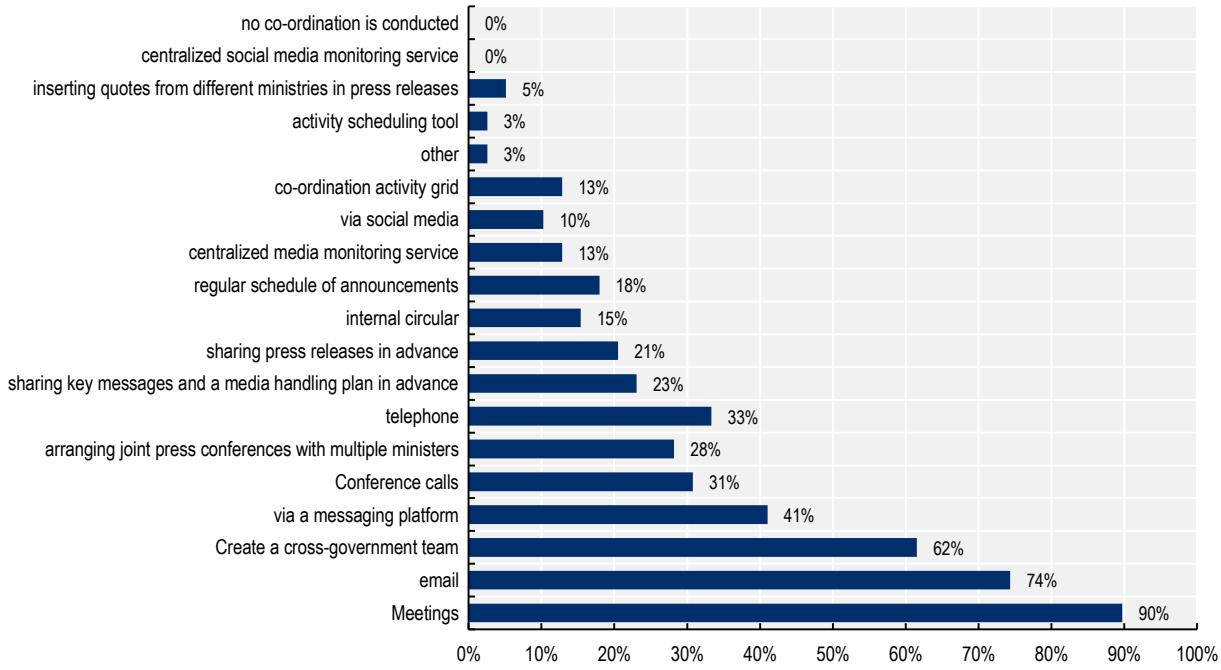
The General Secretariat of Communications in Ecuador, located under the Prime Minister's Office, is in charge of whole-of-government communication. It is responsible for the review and approval of all ministerial communication plans to ensure that activities are in line with the country's overarching strategy. To translate this document into action, the Secretariat created an internal Communication Plan Review Committee (or "Comité de Revisión de Planes de Comunicación") to review, analyse, approve and evaluate ministry-specific directives and actions. In this respect, the committee has reviewed a total of 110 documents, from which 65 Communication Plans were approved and 17 communication investments projects endorsed. Furthermore, the Committee oversees the annual evaluation of all ministerial strategies based on their specific indicators.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the government of Ecuador to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Co-ordination in the areas discussed above takes various forms. An effective way to structure activities is through the use of collective planning tools and shared materials, common to Colombia, Ireland, Latvia, Mexico, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. These tools can often be as simple as a table or "grid" with forward-looking information about activities and key moments, but if shared and updated frequently by all relevant stakeholders can offer a powerful and low-cost solution. However, these tools are less common among CoGs, who prioritise informal exchanges via emails, calls and messaging platforms (Figure 2.11).

Regular meetings, on a weekly or monthly basis, are instead the primary avenue for peers across departments and ministries to exchange and co-ordinate their work: 90% of CoGs noted them as a top method of co-ordination. These meetings have become more formal in a number of countries with the formation of dedicated inter-ministerial committees, as is the case in Estonia, Paraguay or Norway (Box 2.11). The Netherlands has similarly established a Communication Council that groups the heads of all communication directorates who meet at fortnightly intervals.

Figure 2.11. Most important ways in which the CoG co-ordinates across government (top five responses)



Note: n CoG = 39.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Box 2.9. Inter-ministerial committees or working groups for whole-of-government co-ordination

In **Estonia**, a Council on the co-ordination of governmental communication meets every week at Stenbock House. It discusses government communication issues and makes proposals on how to organise related activities. The meetings are chaired by the Director of Government Communication, and include the heads of the communication departments of all ministries. The public relations advisor to the Justice Chancellor and the head of the Communication Department within the Office of Government Oversight also participate. These meetings allow for an improved exchange of information between communication units of several ministries and agencies, by harmonising content and enhancing parallel organisation of communication activities.

In **Norway**, an inter-ministerial working group was formed in 2015 under the Prime Minister's Office. It comprises communication advisors from Norwegian ministries to co-ordinate and to create standards for how ministerial communication departments employ social media outlets in order to inform and engage with stakeholders.

In **Paraguay**, the Vice-Ministry for Communication, which is the governing body in charge of the formulation of communication policies and implementation of plans and projects within the executive branch, acts as the chair of the Coordination Instance for Communicators of the State and Capacity building (*Instancia de Coordinación de Comunicadores del Estado y Capacitaciones*). It brings together the practitioners of all ministries to co-ordinate actions, share good practices, and offer capacity-building opportunities.

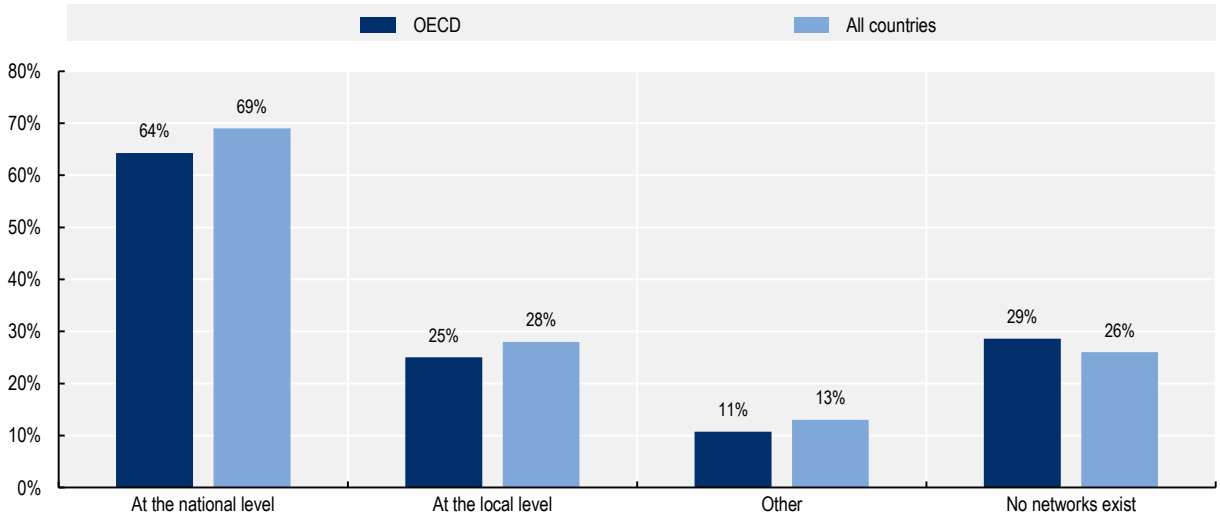
Source: https://tropico-project.eu/cases/administration-costs-for-bureaucracy/social-media-coordination-in-norwegian-ministries-the-case-of-digit/; adapted from responses of the government of Paraguay to the OECD 2020 Survey « Understanding Public Communication »; https://www.mitic.gov.py/noticias/mitic-y-pnud-llevan-adelante-ciclo-de-capacitaciones-para-comunicadores-del-estado; https://www.mitic.gov.py/noticias/comunicadores-del-estado-participan-de-capacitacion-en-comunicacion-estrategica.

While the aforementioned tools and mechanisms usually applied to central governments and seldom included subnational actors, co-ordinating vertically across levels of government is an important component for moving towards a more whole-of-government outlook for public communication. Peers networks have emerged as important platforms for exchange in countries including Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Philippines, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey and the United Kingdom (Box 2.10). In countries such as France or Australia, such networks have formed outside government under the leadership of private or civil society stakeholders. The French co-operative Cap'com is an example of this, and brings together national and local French communicators for sharing practices, research and training.

Networks of peers and professionals have an important role beyond co-ordination, as they also serve to foster co-operation, collective learning, and sharing of good practices. These are present in a majority (69%) of countries at the national level (Figure 2.12), but similar networks are also growing at the international level, particularly in Europe. For example, the Club of Venice is a longstanding grouping of senior communicators from European governments, having been established over three decades ago. Similarly, EuropCom brings together European communicators from national, regional and local administrations across the continent, to discuss emerging trends and challenges. The European Union's (EU) Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism Crisis Communication Network (CCN) brings together crisis specialists and practitioners from EU bodies and member governments.

In sum, none of the CoGs who took part in the OECD survey have reported not conducting any co-ordination. This is indicative of the importance of this activity for the overall effectiveness of public communication. Moreover, responses indicate that around half of CoGs are assuming multiple activities at the whole-of-government level a least in some areas. This could point to a trend towards greater integration and cohesion of public communication across the government that will have likely accelerated in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.12. Networks of public communicators



Note: n CoG = 39. "Other" includes community networks as well as networks at international level.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Box 2.10. Networks to support communication co-ordination across levels of government

Federal and subnational networks in Belgium

In Belgium, there exists two networks at the federal level that offer communication professionals the opportunity to learn, meet colleagues and share experiences: with its 660 members, the COMMnet network brings together federal communicators several times a year for activities organised on themes related to communication, whereas the COMMnetKern network, network of administrators who are responsible for communication within the federal administration, stimulates the federal communications policy and supports federal communication managers.

At the local level, WBCOM' is a network for francophone communication professionals aiming to support members through trainings, exchange of expertise and practices, thematic conferences, workshops and media coaching. The network is comprised of 200 regular members, and 800 professional contacts.

Co-ordinating through networks across levels of government in the Philippines

In the Philippines, each department at the national level has its own Public Information Division or Office, mainly tasked to handle public relations, answer media queries and in some cases, manage IT systems and infrastructures. The heads of these offices are part of a national network of government communicators led by the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO). At the local level, the same structure usually exists in local government units (LGUs), who also have their own Public

Information Division or Office and take part in o a network of local government communicators led by the Philippine Information Agency (PIA).

Moreover, the PCOO closely co-ordinates with its attached agencies. For example, the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) is the official public information arm of the Government of the Philippines which works closely alongside the PCOO. They have regional offices scattered all over the country to ensure a quicker and more efficient co-ordination with LGUs, the media, the youth sector, and other key actors, as they have a wide range of networks scattered across the Philippines.

Cap'com: a non-governmental network of public communicators in France

In France, Cap'Com is a non-governmental co-operative that connects professionals, elected officials, students and all those interested in communication at the level of local communities, administrations and public bodies. For more than 30 years, Cap'Com has brought together 25 000 communication professionals of local authorities, national and local administrations and non-governmental actors. It supports them through information sharing, networking training programmes, the organisation of thematic events and the annual Public Communication Forum. The network is led by the Cap'Com Steering Committee, which relays the concerns of the entire profession, reflects on developments in the profession and guides activities. It brings together around a hundred professionals and observers of public communication and meets 6 times a year.

Source: Author's own work, based on responses to the 2020 OECD Public Communication Survey; https://fedweb.belgium.be/fr/a_propos_de_l_organisation/communication/a_propos_de_la_communication_federale/reseaux; https://wbcom.be/nos-membres-et-partenaires/; https://www.cap-com.org/qui-sommes-nous

Ensuring adequate financial resources for public communication structures

The structures that underpin the public communication function ultimately depend on adequate funding. Translating the strategic vision of communication into action requires setting dedicated budgetary allocations against concrete objectives, linked to government priorities, evaluated against key performance indicators and made publicly available (OECD, 2019[20]). In this regard, formal and consistent resources not only help ensure the delivery and sustainability of efforts, but also attribute tangible value to this function and recognise it as a profession in itself.

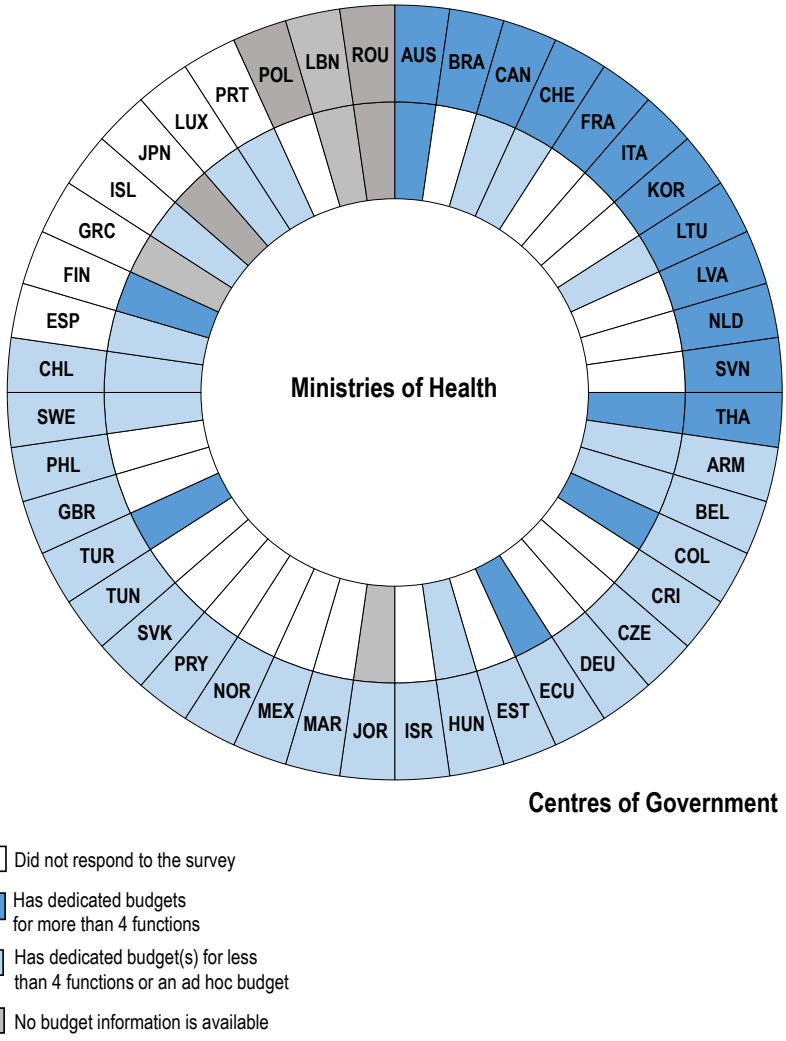
Despite its importance, evidence suggested that dedicated financing streams for public communication remain a challenge for many countries. According to OECD survey results, the lack of financial resources was selected by 45% of CoGs and 54% of MHs as one of the three main challenges to implementing core communication functions. In this regard, funding was the most cited challenge for communicating during a crisis (7 out of 17 CoGs and 1 out of 13 MHs), planning or implementing communication campaigns (6 out of 17 CoGs and 6 out of 13 MHs) and producing communication strategies (6 out of 17 CoGs and 6 out of 13 MHs) respectively.

Challenges in terms of financing for the profession have been exacerbated over the last decade resulting from mounting budget pressures following the 2008 financial crisis, the rapid pace of technological change, immigration influxes and other socio-economic factors (Macnamara, 2020[21]). While these pressures introduced a greater focus on transparency and accountability for public sector expenditure, communicators must balance tensions between budgetary constraints, upscaling delivery and ensuring value-for-money. Overall, these elements together illustrate the importance of a strategic management of public communication expenditure, from its planning to implementation and evaluation.

In practice, types of funding structures and available resources for the public communication profession vary significantly across countries. Overall, OECD survey results revealed that 92% of CoGs have a formal financing stream dedicated to this function – whether in the form of dedicated or ad hoc budgets for core

communication competencies (see Figure 2.13). However, only 32% of CoGs had dedicated budgets for more than four core communication competencies, while 60% had mixed funding structures. Competencies that are more commonly prioritised included campaigns (18 out of 37 CoGs), media monitoring (17 out of 37) and digital communication (11 out of 37) respectively. In terms of the amount of funds available, survey responses exhibited an ample disparity between the largest (USD 492 000) and smallest (USD 10 000) budgets available in 2019 across countries in the case of campaigns, for example. The prevalence of ad hoc funding structures or the lack of funding may help explain why countries face challenges in terms of insufficient resources, as the uncertain nature of funds inhibits the ability to invest in the profession and the capacity to conduct strategic planning and foresight.

Figure 2.13. Available budgets for core communication competencies in CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoG = 37 and MH = 23. The CoG in Austria as well as the CoG and MH in Ireland did not provide data for this question. The classification was done based on the responses and additional information provided to the question on whether available communication budgets are dedicated, ad hoc or unavailable for 9 core communication competencies. These competencies include: Communication strategies; Gathering insight for communications; Internal communications; Communication campaigns; Media relations; Media monitoring; Digital communications; Crisis communications; and Evaluating government communications activity.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

These trends were also predominant at the health sector level. As Figure 2.13 above illustrates, over a fourth of MHs (22%) lacked available budget information on public communication activities. Of those with available resources, 26% claimed to have a dedicated budget for 4 or more communication competencies and 52% to have mixed funding structures for less thematic areas. Similar to those at the CoG level, campaigns (9 out of 23 MHs), media monitoring (8 out of 23) and digital communication activities (7 out of 23) are the primary competencies prioritised in dedicated funding streams at the health sector level. Interestingly, in half of the LAC countries surveyed, MHs have a larger number of dedicated budgets for specialised competencies in comparison to their CoG counterpart.

While financing structures vary, OECD survey results also revealed countries faced difficulties in identifying the sources of public communication funds available. In fact, at least 8 CoGs and MHs were unable to provide budget-related information for various reasons. The most common reason selected by countries behind this was the cross-subsidised nature of communication activities, which are often covered by other budget lines in the institution. Countries also indicated that, in some cases, budget lines are not clearly specified for the profession. For example, the Government of Armenia noted that communication funds were part of the broader budget of the Prime Minister's Office with no dedicated line items assigned for this function.

OECD evidence also revealed good practices adopted by countries to publish budgetary information on communication activities proactively, and in some cases, their evaluations regarding value for money. This trend is consistent with the fact that budgetary transparency[8] is a well-established principle across public administrations in OECD countries (OECD, 2019[20]). For instance, the 2019 Social Communication Policy of the Mexican Government outlines budgetary restrictions on campaign expenditure to avoid the misuse of resources and unfair market concentration. The Policy also mandates beneficiary institutions to upload all relevant information on campaign spending in their respective transparency portal in an open format. In a similar fashion, several countries (Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Germany and Italy) stated that they publish available communication budget information in their institutional websites according to survey results. In the case of Ecuador, the Government also produces an annual accountability report with a section detailing the funds that were allocated to communication, how they were spent, and their results. Such “open budgets” are critical instruments to promote government accountability, performance budgeting and fiscal transparency (OECD, 2020[15]).

Ensuring a transparent reporting of public communication expenditures will be all the more important as countries embark on a recovery path from the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, disruptions from the crisis prompted public communicators to act quickly, develop partnerships with external stakeholders and re-deploy pre-existing resources. They however were urged to innovate and “do more with less” (OECD, 2020[22]), which has provided a number of good practices countries can build on going forward.

The professionalisation of the public communication function

Professionalising the public communication function is fundamental in an environment characterised by rapid technology development and increasingly multi-faceted challenges. Indeed, the skill sets commonly used within the public sector are said to “be no longer keeping up with the pace of change in the societies they aim to support and improve (OECD, 2017[23])”. This presents a two-fold challenge for the public communication profession. On the one hand, it calls on governments to identify the adequate set of resources, tools and skills needed to ensure that communication services are fit-for-purpose today and into the future. On the other hand, it implies addressing questions on the required investments for these capabilities in terms of attraction, recruitment and development of staff.

Strategic human resources management is an effective means to improve the efficiency, quality, and responsiveness of a range of government services, from which communication is no exception. This starts with the recruitment stage, and continues throughout training, and the development of talent through

performance management and appraisal (Visser and Van der Togt, 2016[24]). To this end, the *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability* calls for a values-driven culture and leadership, as well as investments in capabilities and responsive employment systems to ensure that the public service is fit-for-purpose (OECD, 2019[25]). It sets out a series of principles regarding:

- Recruiting, selecting and promoting candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes.
- Continuously identifying skills and competencies needed to transform political vision into services that deliver value to society.
- Developing the necessary skills and competencies by creating a learning culture and environment in the public service.
- Attracting and retaining employees with the skills and competencies required.
- Assessing, rewarding and recognising performance, talent and initiative.

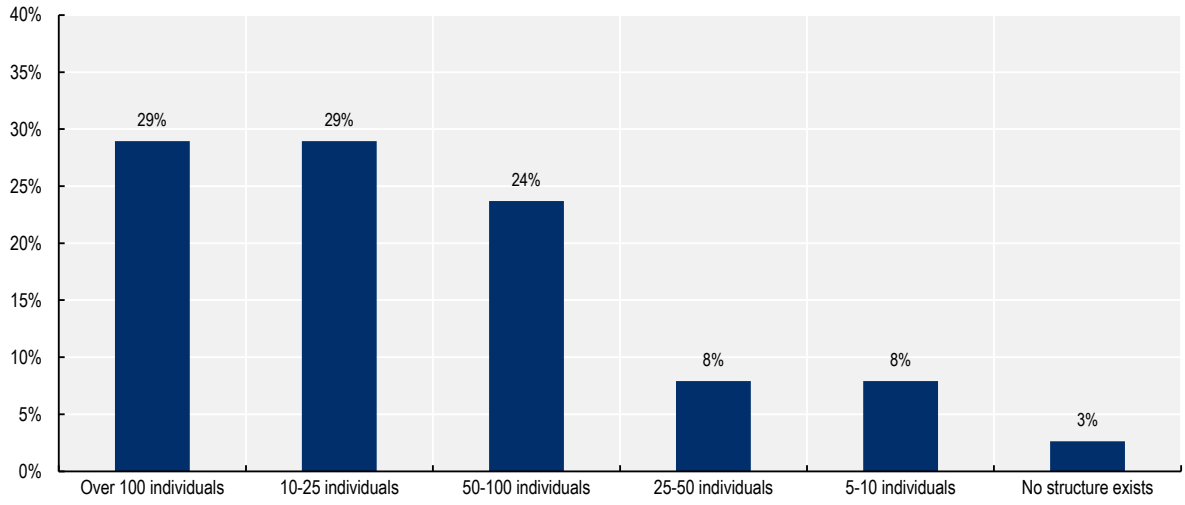
The following section will explore a series of avenues to push forward the professionalisation of the public communication function. It will first take stock of the composition of communication teams in CoGs and MHs to understand the challenges and opportunities in consolidating a well-staffed and specialised workforce. The section will then examine existing training and professional development opportunities to up-skill staff, retain talent and promote career progression. In doing so, the final section will reflect on the importance of modernising skills in today's fast-paced digital landscape to empower a workforce fit for the future.

Ensuring communication structures are fit-for-purpose

Public communication as an "under-skilled" and "under-staffed" area continues to be a shared issue in OECD member and partner countries across the world. According to OECD survey results, human resources was selected by more than three-fourths of CoGs (76%) and MHs (79%) respectively as a key factor inhibiting the effective implementation of core communication functions. Equipping relevant teams with the right resources and skills remains a challenge governments need to prepare for given the constantly evolving and fragmenting media and information ecosystem in which they operate. Indeed, countries are "required to fill positions that did not exist a decade ago", with a need for applicants with an increasingly diverse background including in data analysis, programming, storytelling, marketing, behaviour insights, as well as new skills such as the use of AI and predictive insights (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[2]).

As Figure 2.16 illustrates, there is a high disparity across OECD member and partner countries in terms of available human resources for public communication. In fact, survey results indicated that close to 53% of CoGs tended to employ from 50 to more than 100 individuals in contrast with close to 47% hiring less than 50 individuals, if at all. Countries on the lower side of the spectrum reported having insufficient communicators at hand, where staff must often deliver on multiple functions alongside their primary role. Differences in regards to the size of public communication teams reflected the diverse structures of institutions across the world, in particular in federal countries (i.e. Germany, Mexico, Brazil, etc.) where responsibilities tended to be decentralised across various ministries or levels of government.

Figure 2.14. Number of public communication structures with full time individuals at the CoG level



Note: N= 38 CoGs. Austria did not provide data for this particular survey question. Percentages were rounded up according to their decimals but are included herein for the purposes of clarity: Over 100 individuals - 28.95%; 10-25 individuals - 28.95%; 50-100 individuals - 23.68%; 25-50 individuals - 7.89%; 5-10 individuals - 7.89%; No structure exists - 2.63%.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In addition to their size, the degree of specialisation of public communication teams in countries was found to differ. As Table 2.1 Illustrates, several specialised functions lacked dedicated teams, whereas others were better staffed. Indeed, human resources were distributed rather unevenly across different functions, with the majority of CoGs having small teams between 1-5 members. Some of them were highly specialised, such as the case in Costa Rica, where responsibilities were divided among different teams or individuals according to survey results. The Government of the Philippines, on the other hand, divided teams across different offices and/or programmes within the CoG, with a team of cross-functional individuals, which assume one or several roles based on the project as well as expertise required. Results broadly suggest that team members will sometimes work across multiple functions, stretching skilled staff over several different areas. That being said, countries in small teams in particular may not have the capacities to assign responsibilities to single team members due to resource scarcity. Overall, the lack of available staff and specialised teams can help explain why human resources was selected by CoGs as one of the most challenging reasons for realising the profession's potential.

Table 2.1. Number of individuals working full-time in a particular structure in CoGs

Country	Communication strategies	Communication campaigns	Insight gathering	Media engagement	Digital Communication	Evaluating communication activities	Promoting stakeholder participation	Countering disinformation
Labels:	● 1-5	▲ 5-10	■ 10-25	◘ 25-50	♣ 50-100	♠ 100+		
Australia	▲	▲	●	●	▲	○	○	○
Belgium	●	●	○	○	▲	○	○	○
Canada	■	●	●	●	■	○	●	○
Chile	○	▲	▲	■	▲	■	▲	○
Colombia	▲	●	○	●	▲	▲	▲	▲
Costa Rica	●	●	●	▲	●	○	●	●
Czech Republic	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
Estonia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
France	■	■	●	●	●	■	▲	●
Italy	■	■	●	▲	▲	●	○	●
Latvia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Lithuania	○	○	○	▲	▲	○	▲	○
Mexico	■	■	○	▲	▲	○	○	○
Netherlands	●	▲	●	●	♣	▲	●	○
Norway	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲
Poland	○	■	○	■	■	●	♣	♣
Korea	■	●	◘	■	■	▲	●	●
Slovenia	○	▲	○	▲	●	▲	○	●
Sweden	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
Switzerland	▲	●	●	●	▲	●	●	●
Total OECD								
● 1-5	5	8	10	10	7	6	8	8
▲ 5-10	4	5	2	6	8	5	5	2
■ 10-25	5	4	0	3	3	2	0	0
◘ 25-50	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
♣ 50-100	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
♠ 100+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
○ No structure exists/ NA (0)	6	3	7	1	1	7	6	9
Armenia	○	▲	●	●	●	●	●	●
Brazil	■	◘	■	♣	♣	◘	■	♣
Ecuador	●	▲	○	●	▲	●	○	○
Jordan	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Lebanon	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○
Morocco	○	●	○	●	▲	●	●	●
Paraguay	▲	●	▲	●	●	●	●	○
Philippines	■	○	○	○	◘	■	◘	■
Romania	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●
Thailand	■	♣	♠	◘	♣	■	♠	■
Tunisia	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	●

Total non-OECD								
● 1-5	4	5	3	8	5	4	4	5
▲ 5-10	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0
■ 10-25	3	0	1	0	0	2	1	2
◘ 25-50	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
♣ 50-100	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1
♠ 100+	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
○ No structure exists	3	2	5	2	1	4	4	3

Note: Austria,Germany and Turkey did not provide data for this particular survey question. Brazil provided an aggregate number of SECOM and other relevant entities in the Ministry of Communication. Some respondents noted individuals in certain teams cover more than one of the above functions and may be double-counted. In certain countries, dedicated resources can still be available even when no dedicated structures exist for certain competencies (such as the case of the Government of Canada for example).
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Concerning the skillsets required for such positions, 15 CoGs and 20 MHs shared specific competency frameworks or job descriptions. Profiles varied widely depending on the technical specialisation of the job and the seniority level required. Differences in terms of the background and skill requirements ranged across the fields of journalism, social sciences, statistics, marketing, design, project management and public relations - illustrating the highly-technical and multi-faceted nature of jobs in the profession. As part of these responses, the use of communication competency frameworks was identified as a good practice to formalise skill requirements, hiring processes and professional development opportunities across institutions. Competency frameworks, like those in France, Lithuania and the United Kingdom detail specific expectations in terms of skills and background (i.e. educational and professional), provide a career progression path, and outline entry points for the profession (see Box 2.11).

Box 2.11. Communication Competency Frameworks in OECD and partner countries

France

The directory of public communication professions in France defines specific knowledge and skills required, including developing and steering the institution's overall communication strategy, and overseeing implementation, co-ordination and evaluation. In particular, communication managers are responsible for co-ordinating internal and external networks, communicating in crisis, designing and implementing global communication campaigns, managing the budget, and setting up a system for evaluating communication actions.

Lithuania

The competency framework for civil servants in Lithuania provides specific templates on how job descriptions, including positions in public communication teams should be designed. Indeed, each template provides descriptions of professional competencies for general, managerial, administrative and leadership activities. Key competencies include creating value for society, communication skills, reliability and accountability, analysis, strategic approach and performance management. Moreover, the job description template includes the scope, job level and title, detailed functions, required education and work experience, as well as language proficiency. This approach allows public institutions to define core communication competencies, align hiring practices, and promote professional development opportunities.

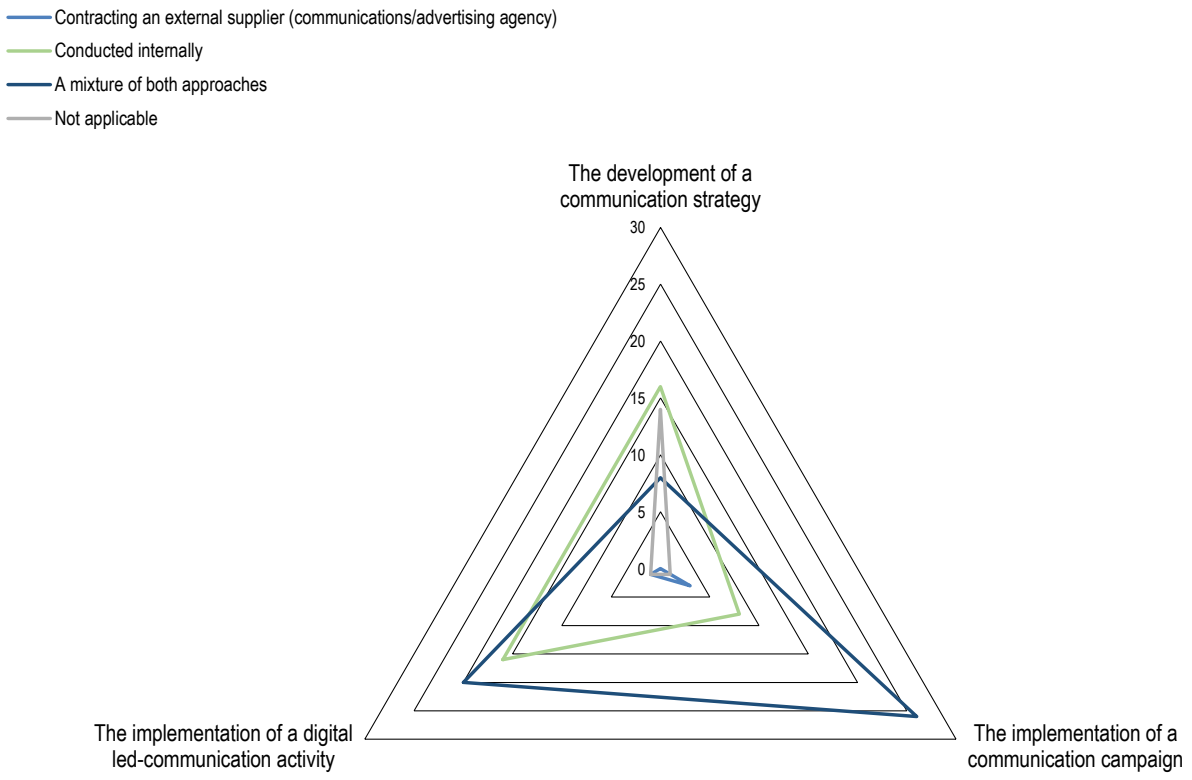
United Kingdom

The UK GCS Career Framework identifies job profiles at different levels, enabling civil servants to better understand what is expected of them. The framework defines roles across several communication disciplines, including external affairs, marketing, internal communication as well as media and strategic communication. Moreover, it specifies different routes for vertical and horizontal advancement in the profession, which include internal movement, direct mainstream recruitment, and accelerated development programmes. The framework further describes the key elements in assessing candidates: experience, strengths, ability, technical skills and behaviours. The competency framework also presents the wide range of opportunities to build skills and expand knowledge, including courses, trainings, networking and mentoring opportunities. Finally, career profiles in the form of cases studies are included to exemplify opportunities available across the GCS.

Source: https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/responsable-de-communication.

Another common practice found to fill skill gaps in the profession involves outsourcing to external contractors. According to OECD survey results, most CoGs (30 out of 38) and MHs (19 out of 24) used a mixed approach to carrying out essential functions by contracting external suppliers in addition to internal staff for the development of campaigns, digital-led activities and communication strategies primarily (see Figure 2.15). Only 4 CoGs and MHs respectively fully outsourced one or several of these tasks to the private sector. In some cases, countries relied upon recruiting former private communicators or consultants to ensure skilled resources for specific technical functions. For example, survey results indicated that the Netherlands and Korea look to external communication agencies or freelancers in order to fulfil temporary functions as well as develop the knowledge of public officials.

Figure 2.15. Number of CoGs carrying out key communication functions through internal or external means, or through a mixture of approaches



Note: Austria did not provide data for this particular survey question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Investing in professional development opportunities for public communicators

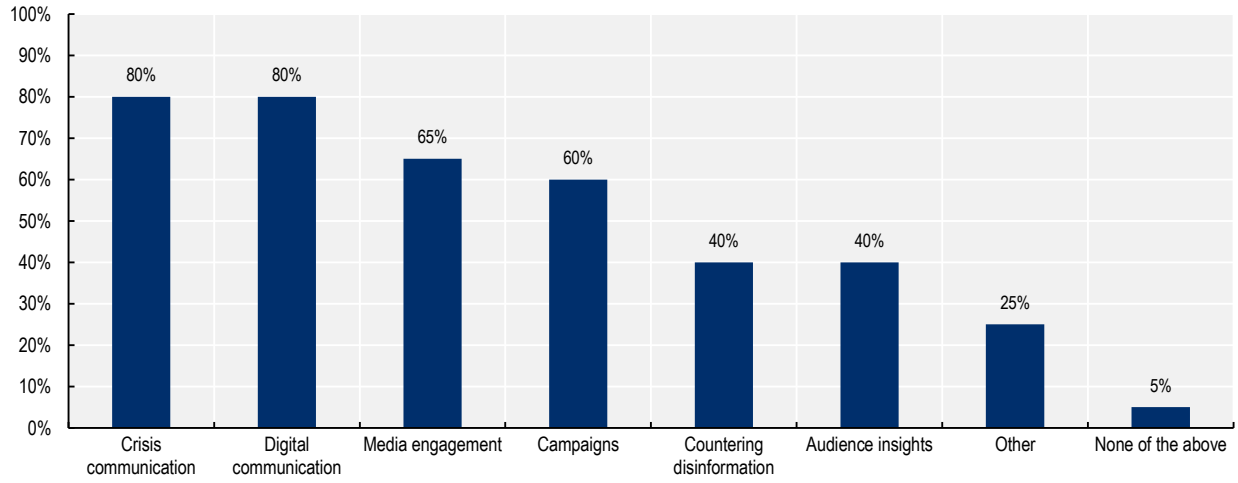
A key means of ensuring effective communication is recognising public communication as a profession in itself, one that requires investments, guidance and training. Indeed, the highly specialised nature of this function and the speed of change that communications operate in requires regular professional development opportunities through training, career progression and performance appraisals. In doing so, public sector institutions can promote a culture of continuous learning to ensure that skills are fit-for-purpose and can keep up with emerging trends in the field (OECD, 2017[23]).

OECD evidence suggested, however, that a lack of sufficient training remains a key challenge. In fact, only 20 out of 32 of CoGs (63%) reported having a specific structure or individual responsible for providing training. These findings are consistent with those from the WPP report, which suggested that only half of respondents believed they have the right tools and resources to do their job, with 43% reported working in the profession for more than 10 years and few having built up modern communication skills in that time (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[2]).

Where training is designed or delivered by CoGs, survey results suggested these cover a wide range of technical domains. As Figure 2.16 illustrates, out of 20 CoGs that provided training most opportunities are focused on digital communications (80%), crisis communication (80%) media engagement (65%) and campaigns (60%). Despite the recent infodemic, countering disinformation (40%) and audience insights (40%) were less prioritised by countries. This shows a need to improve these areas, especially in the wake of the infodemic linked to COVID-19 (see Chapter 6). Improving and expanding the range of skillsets

available for public communicators may empower them to face unprecedented challenges in a crowded media and information landscape (OECD, 2020[17]).

Figure 2.16. Competency areas that are covered in trainings developed and implemented by CoGs



Note: N= 20 CoGs who claimed to have a structure, team or individual in charge of training.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

While trainings may vary according to their degree of technical specialty, survey results indicated that countries tended to either complement existing in-house efforts with or fully resort to programmes delivered by external experts or other entities within government. In Italy, for example, the Training Policy Service within the Human Resource Department provided specialised training in areas such as digital transition, anti-corruption, smart working, as well as legal, administrative and accounting requisites. According to survey results, the private sector was also a primary partner in several countries (i.e. Belgium, France, Jordan, Morocco and Thailand) for the provision of capacity building on highly technical areas such as audience segmentation, data science, storytelling, social listening and impact evaluation (Box 2.12). As will be discussed in the next section, Public Administration Academies are becoming key partners for the delivery of relevant, ongoing and formal curricula to support communication-related professional development efforts. These trends are particularly relevant for the health sector, where only 9 out of 22 MHs indicated to have a dedicated structure, team or individual in charge of training. Indeed, findings point to most efforts being provided by private sector organisations or another entity within government.

Box 2.12. Partnerships with private sector firms for public communication training in Belgium and France

Belgium

In Belgium, the UBA Academy, a private sector initiative for both private companies and public institutions, offers several trainings, master classes, workshops and communication management classes on themes ranging from content marketing, agency management, B2B, paid media, strategy and branding, public affairs and regulation. The trainings are also offered on three different levels: advanced, beginner and expert. More than 300 training courses, tools, coaching and support for civil servants and federal organisations are also available through the Federal Public Service Strategy and Support (BOSA). The themes of the courses include leadership, administrative matters, communication, IT, organisational management, languages and well-being.

France

In France, the private sector is a primary partner for the provision of public communication training and capacity building. Indeed, public communication professionals benefit from workshops delivered by specialised firms. For example, trainings are provided by the CELSA-Sorbonne University (l'école des Hautes Études en Sciences de l'information et de la Communication), a communication and journalism school, in the areas of brand content and evaluation, whereas les Gobelins, a school of visual communication and arts, provides capacity building for Photoshop, InDesign, and multichannel communication. Finally, the National Audiovisual Institute (l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel), a repository of French radio and television audio-visual archives, provides training on audio-visual skills.

Source: Author's own work, based on France's responses to the CoG survey.

After attracting and developing a skilled public communication workforce, governments must also be ready to offer relevant professional development opportunities to retain talent and ensure a culture of ongoing learning (OECD, 2017[23]). This is especially relevant in the context of the public communication profession, where high turnover can be a threat in systems with a large share of politically appointed staff and in those suffering from frequent government reshuffles (OECD, 2021[26]). Staff turnover can also be a pressing issue for small teams where a single individual is charged with multiple functions or holds highly technical expertise that cannot be easily transmitted throughout the organisation. Similar to other countries in the LAC region, the Government of Brazil's public communication strategy (2019-20) identified in its SWOT analysis the issue of staff retainment as a priority weakness to address.

To mitigate these risks, countries can invest in a variety of professional development opportunities. Firstly, various countries (e.g. Canada, France and the United Kingdom) recognised high-impact campaigns and celebrated innovative practices through yearly award ceremonies. Giving visibility to impactful initiatives not only allows to disseminate best practices, reward and incentivise outstanding performance, but it can also help garner buy-in from senior officials to further invest in the profession. Secondly, continuous learning through performance evaluation and appraisal is a key element for motivating teams and identifying capacity gaps. In Thailand, for example, communication units are monitored and evaluated against progress on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), according to survey results. Third, the establishment of a dedicated competency framework defines clear opportunities for vertical and horizontal career progression as well as means for professional development in terms of training and skills. Together, these types of mechanisms can aid in nurturing talent and setting professional standards for a highly capable public communication workforce able to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Empowering a skilled public communication workforce for the future

As digital technologies accelerate the rate of change in the public communication profession, governments must develop the capacity to continuously adapt and innovate. It is no longer sufficient to establish a dedicated team, but rather, it is critical to modernise the skills and resources available to futureproof the profession (namely, anticipating and planning reactions to potential changes). Doing so allows the public service to better harness opportunities for innovation and respond to emerging challenges in an ever-changing digital landscape. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have particularly accentuated the relevance of empowering public communicators with the right tools and competencies in efforts to build resilience to external shocks and ensure the continuity of operations with social, economic and political activity migrating to the online sphere.

Achieving a fit-for-purpose public communication workforce is critical for unlocking the potential of digital technologies and data for the establishment of a two-way dialogue with the public. The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector offers a three-pillar approach for "guiding the public sector to acquire digital talent and equip public servants with digital skills" (OECD, 2021[27]). While there are no simple solutions, OECD evidence reveals an ample diversity of practices in OECD and partner countries to empower skilled public communication services in today's digital intensive environment.

A means for OECD and partner countries to build capabilities within digital communication teams is through the provision of technical training delivered by public sector academies or external providers. According to survey results, in Australia, Belgium, France and Morocco private sector firms have been commissioned to provide training on online brand content, social media monitoring, Photoshop, data science and other relevant expertise areas. In line with OECD Recommendations, the Ministry of State for Media Affairs within the Prime Minister's Office in Jordan is collaborating with expert civil society organisations in the field to design a comprehensive capacity-building programme for the national network of spokespeople, in which digital capabilities are a core component (OECD, forthcoming, 2021). The Government of Italy complemented training efforts on relevant regulation and social media courses by exposing public communicators to congresses, technical webinars and case studies highlighting good practice. Training programmes are also being delivered through public sector academies in Austria, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (Box 2.13). These programmes have been particularly relevant in promoting the reach, relevance and sustainability of professional development opportunities across all levels of government.

Box 2.13. Public sector academies in OECD countries with a public communication curricula

Austria

In Austria, tailored training is available at the Federal Academy of Public Administration and through on-demand contracted specialists. The Academy offers a wide variety of public communication seminars from how to formulate messages in the most concise and understandable manner to how to reach a target group sustainably. Amongst the different fields of interest, the Academy offers seminars focused on search engine optimisation, writing, tips and tricks for social media, copywriting, media training, the art of free speech, and crisis communications. Another topic covered is neurolinguistics programming, through an in-depth seminar explaining what natural language processing is and how to practice it efficiently.

United Kingdom

Through its vision to build professional standards across government, the *Government Communication Service Academy* in the United Kingdom aims to improve the performance of communicators and help build their careers through a robust offer of trainings and online resources.

The Professional Standards Team works with the heads of each communication discipline to design and deliver relevant development and training opportunities. Through its online and day courses, the academy provides workshops on themes such as campaign excellence; understanding disinformation; crisis communication; behavioural insights; and presenting with impact. It makes its offer readily available to communicators through an online site centralising all upcoming workshops. The academy also collaborates with external professional bodies, such as the Public Relations Consultants Association and the Market Research Society to expand its offer of webinars and learning resources.

In 2018, the GCS set up the Accelerate programme to offer industry-leading professional development, consultancy, and training across government and ensure that GCS is leading the way digitally. Notably, the programme drove innovation and allowed communication professionals to commit time, resources, and energy for personal and team upskilling. By 2019, the programme offered over 500 learning opportunities, published a podcast and developed relationships with partners, including Facebook.

Source: Author's own work, based on responses to the 2020 OECD Public Communication Survey.

Other practices are emerging to foster digital communication capabilities for internal knowledge exchange and team building through informal coaching programmes and peer-to-peer learning efforts. According to survey results, the German Press and Information Office, for example, established a partnership programme for on-the-job experience sharing through informal settings such as bingo events and brown bag lunches where workmates provide insights into current issues and onboard new members. It also developed new open space work areas for the digital editorial office (Redaktion Digital) for knowledge and ideas to flow easily between colleagues. In Thailand, the Government benefits from a peer-to-peer coaching system that foster cross fertilisation between communication teams to respond to future digital trends. In Canada, public communicators are also provided development opportunities, such as assignments, rotational acting, job shadowing, mentoring, and ongoing learning opportunities. These mechanisms can be particularly attractive in countries where a lack of financial resources, or the ad hoc and low supply of training, may inhibit competency building for a digitally enabled civil service.

Efforts in some countries also benefit from communities of practice dedicated to digital communication at both the technical and strategic level to build expertise and foster the exchange of good practices. Thematic networks of public communicators in Canada, Belgium and the United Kingdom meet on a regular basis to exchange good practices and lessons learned on technical issues such as data management, social media use and online storytelling (see Box 2.14). At the strategic level in Norway, the network of heads of communication organise weekly meetings to align overarching priorities and streamline a unified digital communication presence. OECD survey results also revealed that the Government of Paraguay similarly established a network of public communication directors and front-line employees to define priorities and co-ordinate around communication on social media and other channels.

Box 2.14. Digital communication communities of practice in OECD and partner countries

Canada

In Canada, the Communications Community Office (CCO), operating within the Privy Council Office, provides overarching advice, support and information on the function of communications, as well as information and career planning services to communicators across the federal government. The CCO is in charge of co-ordinating the Communications Communities of Practice (COPs), which are thematic networks driven by federal communicators with targeted specialties, including those on digital communication such as digital analytics, social media use, natural language processing and others. This community-led structure allows members to share best digital communication tools, relevant trends and information, discuss common challenges, and exchange new practices.

United Kingdom

The Digital Centre of Expertise (DCOE) is a cross-government forum managed by the central Government Communication Service (GCS) Digital Content team, an open to all central government Heads of Digital. The forum ensures continuous co-ordination and improvement of central government digital content and publishing activity, by hosting monthly sessions for government content and publishing leaders and industry experts to network and exchange best practices.

Source: https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/communications-community-office.html; for the United Kingdom practice: Author's own work based on responses to the 2020 OECD Public Communication Survey.

Key findings and way forward

- The governance of the communication function is core to determining whether it will be effective as an instrument for public policy and citizen trust. The policy documents that provide its mandate are a primary avenue for reform for governments seeking to improve how communication can better serve strategic objectives. Indeed, in many countries, the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation are already common across these documents and show the crucial contribution public communication can make to democracy.
- To achieve more effective communication, governments will also benefit from transitioning away from purely tactical approaches and pursuing more strategic ones. This entails increasing the use of communication strategies as blueprints that can concretely guide the execution of the function against its stated mandate. Presently, only a minority of CoGs and MHs make use of these tools.
- Adequate institutional structures are equally essential to the implementation of public communication. In this respect, virtually all respondents demonstrated having dedicated teams and offices in place, with a wide range of formats. This reinforces the finding that the function varies considerably between countries, and there is no single dominant model for how it is organised. Nevertheless, the core responsibility for communication is often located in the CoG, which plays a leading and co-ordinating role in about half of the governments surveyed.
- Co-ordinating public communication activities emerged as both a high priority and the biggest challenge for OECD survey respondents. A number of practices in this area highlight how relevant teams are investing in more cohesive and aligned communication through shared planning tools and dedicated networks and committees. Going forward, governments can seek to achieve greater efficiencies and speak more effectively with one voice by pursuing a truly whole-of-government communication.
- Communication cannot be effective without adequate financial and human resources. As an “under-skilled” and “under-staffed” area, this continues to be a pressing issue in OECD member and non-member countries. Indeed, the lack of human resources and skilled staff was selected by more than three-fourths of CoGs (76%) and MHs (79%) respectively as one of the top three challenges to carrying out core communication functions.
- Enabling a workforce that is equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century calls for public communication to be recognised as more than just a support function, but rather as a core component of policy making and as a profession in itself. Promoting efforts toward the professionalisation of this function will benefit from dedicated trainings, including on new digital trends, and from retaining talent through ongoing learning opportunities and setting good practice standards.
- Future research is needed across all the core themes discussed in this chapter due to their centrality to the communication function. Further unpacking the role of communication strategies emerges as an important priority. Limited evidence is available to this date about how these documents can or have served to drive communication efforts towards policy impact. Moreover, the diverging approaches across different countries to strategies’ design and execution highlight an opportunity to harmonise this area of practice through further enquiry.

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Notes

[1] Policy documents reviewed include: Brazil, Canada, Italy, Estonia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

[2] 'Manual de Comunicación: Narrativa de Gobierno del Bicentenario (2018-2022)', document submitted to the OECD as attachment to the response of Costa Rica's Presidency to the OECD survey.

[3] The OECD received 14 documents of which 10 met the criteria provided in the survey for communication strategies.

[4] From the survey question these are: communication strategies, communication campaigns, insight gathering, media engagement, digital communications, crisis communications, evaluating communication activities.

[5] The Belgian CoG noted in its responses to the survey it is notably tasked with the "organisation of events for the Prime Minister, organisation of campaigns at the request of the Council of Ministers or the Prime Minister, provision of information to citizens regarding the federal authorities' activities and co-ordination of federal initiatives and campaigns".

[6] Discussions during the first meeting of the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication on 30 September 2020, highlighted that the pandemic exposed and amplified these difficulties, but also created momentum for strengthening co-ordination (for further details see: https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/oecd-experts-group-on-public-communication.htm).

[7] See www.systeme-de-design.gouv.fr for more information.

[8] The OECD Toolkit on Budget Transparency defines budget transparency as being "fully open with people about how public money is raised and used" in a clear, reliable, timely and accessible manner (OECD, 2017[28]).

3 Evidence-based and data-driven public communication

Key data on audiences, their perceptions, behaviours, and on the performance of different content and messages can make communication more strategic. This chapter provides an overview of governments' gathering and use of insights about their publics and the application of behavioural science in this field. It also explores the potential of these practices to foster a better understanding between government and citizens and contribute to more data-driven and inclusive communication. The chapter concludes with forward-looking approaches to further mainstream the use of evidence in the design and delivery of public communication.

Data and evidence as prerequisites for effective public communication

Public communication is no different from any other policy area in that evidence and data are essential to its effectiveness against stated objectives. Indeed, communication can only be deemed strategic when it is grounded in analysis of the audience it aims to engage. This foundation allows activities and content to be designed based on a sound understanding of how specific societal groups perceive a given issue, consume information and trust government messages.

Evidence-driven communication applies data and insights at all stages of development and delivery – from the initial objective-setting and planning to the final stages of evaluation and learning. Such an approach seeks to build a strong understanding of the trends in public discourse around core policy issues; as well as audience perceptions, attitudes and habits; and the short-, medium- and long-term effects of communication activities (OECD, 2020[1]).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the information ecosystem is increasingly crowded with a large volume of content. Multiple stakeholders across media, the private sector and civil society are competing for the public's attention. More than ever, the current environment creates imperatives for making communication more targeted and compelling to specific publics. Doing so requires an understanding of behavioural, cognitive and psychological characteristics of specific groups of citizens, and knowledge of the communication channels they use.

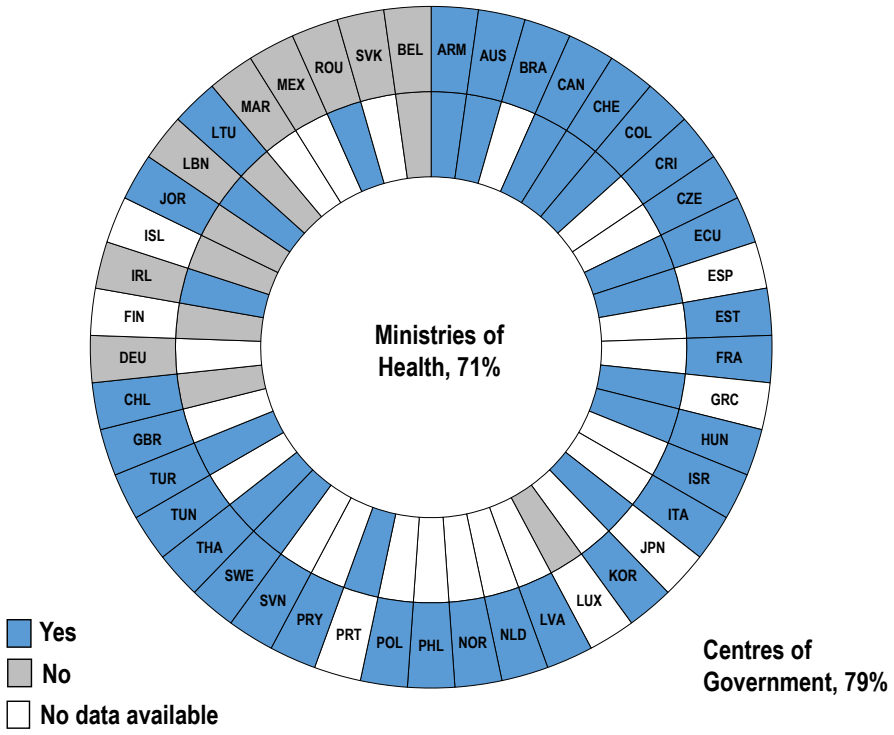
Without a solid evidence base, institutions are casting their messages to an unspecified public in a crowded communication space, with little knowledge of whether and how information is received. Similarly, they have no means of monitoring and measuring the impact of their activity and whether it is serving any pre-defined objectives. For this reason, evidence – in the form of audience insights research, social listening[1] or behavioural insights (BI) – is a prerequisite for a strategic approach to communication.

Thanks to the digital transformation of communication and the vast quantities of data generated by online activities, insights into audiences have not only become more diverse and precise but also cheaper, faster, and more easily accessible. Big data and software as a service (SaaS) platforms for online analytics have made acquiring and processing this information simpler, even for teams that lack specialised research or data science competencies. More qualitative and nuanced insights still require applied research methods such as surveys, polling, focus groups or behavioural experiments. Indeed, responses to the OECD survey on "Understanding Public Communication" (2020) suggest these are important tools in many institutions.

The role of data in particular in shaping public communication is visible among OECD survey responses, where 30 out of 38 centres of government (CoGs) and 17 out of 24 ministries of health (MHs) reported utilising different sources of data to inform the design of digital initiatives (Figure 3.1). OECD survey results suggest however that governments have yet to exploit its strategic value for the delivery of more responsive and effective communication. As Figure 3.2 illustrates, most CoGs and MHs primarily collect data directly from audiences, and only a small share of them use data on public service uptake for example.

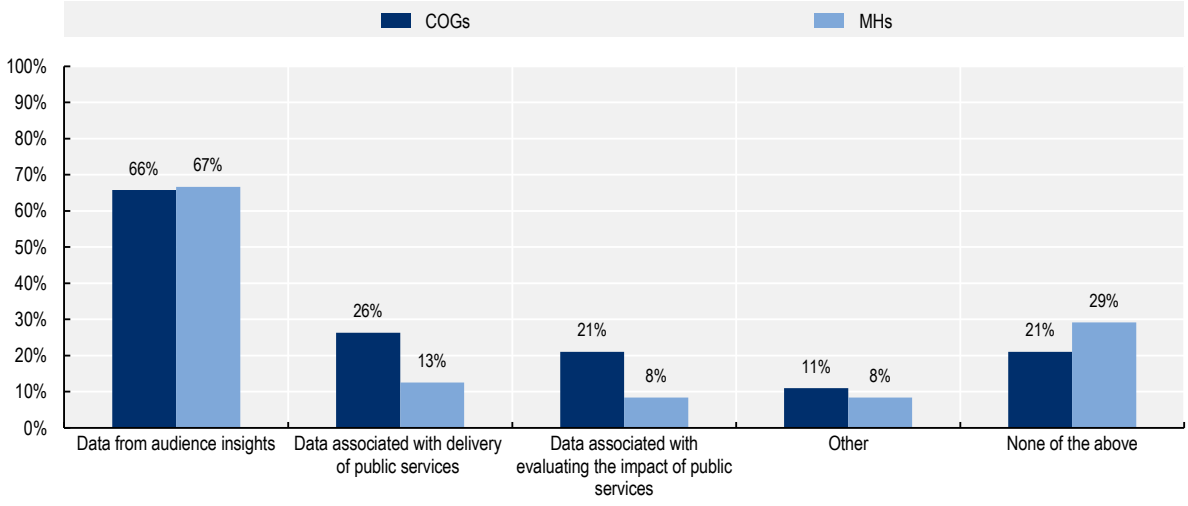
Mainstreaming the use of data in the design, delivery and evaluation of public communication is also at the core of using this function to enable social listening capabilities. Analysis of public discourse as well as attitudes and sentiment towards a given issue are essential not only to craft attuned messages and content, but also to improve policy and ensure it is in line with the needs of its intended beneficiaries.

Figure 3.1. Institutions that rely on audience insights or data about public services to inform digital communication efforts



Note: Answers to Survey question "Does the [CoG/MH] use any of the below categories of data to inform its digital communications?". "Yes" reflects answers for respondents who have selected at least one of "Data from audience insights", "Data associated with delivery of public services", "Data associated with evaluating the impact of public services" or "Other". Austria did not provide a response to this question in the CoG survey.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Figure 3.2. Types of data used to inform digital communication efforts in CoGs and MHs



Note: Austria did not provide a response to this question in the CoG survey.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

This chapter will explore the use of evidence, particularly with regards to audience and behavioural insights, in the design and delivery of public communication activities across CoGs and MHs in OECD countries and beyond. It will conclude with a series of reflections regarding the broader challenges to effectively leveraging this type of data, including ethical considerations and data privacy concerns that are crucial to keep in mind in this field. The subsequent chapter will complement the discussion of evidence-based communication with a focus on evaluation.

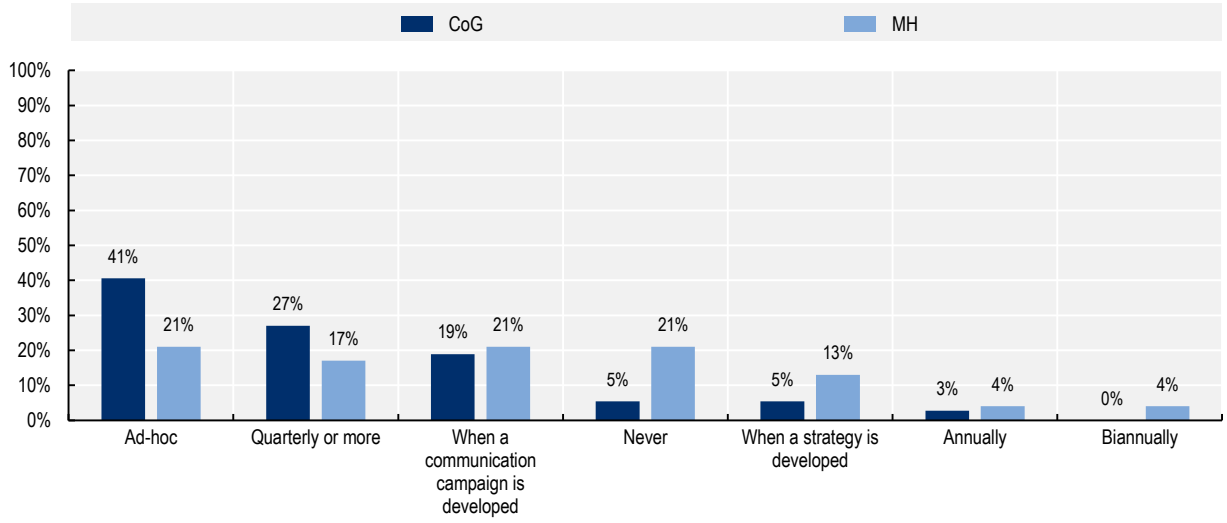
Research and insights to better understand and speak to citizens

Understanding the public is fundamental to communicating effectively and inclusively with all groups in society, including minorities and underrepresented groups. Gathering and using audience insights can help make public communication more relevant and impactful by tailoring the choice of different channels and messages to specific target audiences. Although research on audiences is a well-established practice in many countries, specific cases were markedly scarce across OECD survey responses. For this reason, this section draws more heavily on aggregated data, and less on practical illustrations, which is an area of focus for future data collection.

As defined in the OECD survey, audience insight refers to research activity that helps gain a deeper understanding of the public's motivations, impeding factors, fears or barriers, as well as their understanding of the subject to be communicated and their attitude towards it, as well as their media consumption habits. Efforts to understand stakeholders have become more prominent as digital platforms that generate vast data on users' demographic features and attitudes have increased in number. The same platforms also allow for a more precise targeting of diverse publics, making this knowledge highly useful.

Responses to the OECD survey suggest that there is still significant scope to adopt more sophisticated methods for insight gathering and make this a more regular feature of designing communications. Indeed, 41% of CoGs and 21% of MHs report using audience insights to inform communication planning only on an ad-hoc basis, while 21% of MHs do not do so at all (Figure 3.3). Slightly over a quarter of CoGs reported gathering audience insights at least every three months. These frequencies can be suitable for communications around issue areas or policies that are slower-moving. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the spread of false or misleading content around it have highlighted the importance of understanding rapid shifts in public perceptions and demands for information that call for real-time capacity to conduct accurate research and adjust approaches accordingly.

Figure 3.3. Frequency in which CoGs and MHs used audience insight to inform communication planning in the past 3 years



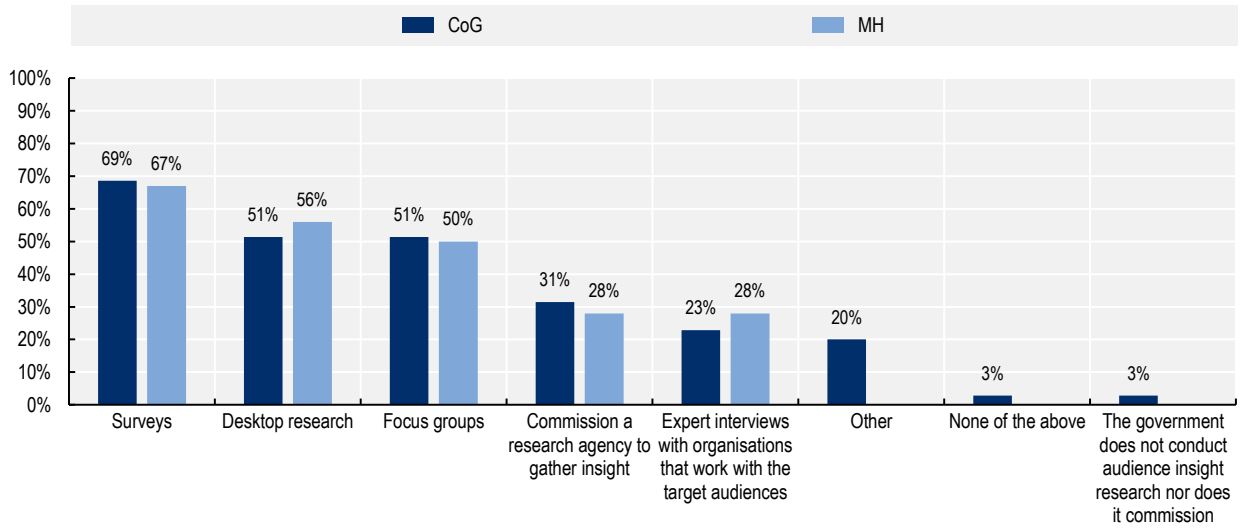
Notes: N= 37 CoGs and 24 MHs. Austria and Mexico COGs are non-applicable for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

The prevalence of less-than-frequent insight gathering can perhaps be attributed to the demanding nature of this area of communication in terms of time, resources and specialised skills required. Indeed, among the multiple different sources and methods of collecting this information, each has advantages, disadvantages, and contexts to which it is best suited. For instance, desktop research, such as media monitoring or social media analytics, is associated with low costs and rapid results, but tends to return top-line insights that may not be complete or accurate, or cut to the core of public opinion. Demographic data gathered by digital platforms for example is still largely self-reported data, so some biases can continue to affect the analysis in this field. More advanced data science skills can enable more sophisticated analysis but may be less common in communication teams.

By contrast, methods such as surveys, focus groups or interviews, which require extensive set-up, preparatory research and expertise, can return deep qualitative results but are highly resource-intensive. Despite this, data shows that between 70% and 50% of CoGs and MHs rely on surveys and focus groups for their analysis, with desktop research also being prevalent in over half of respondents (see Figure 3.4).

The availability of skilled professionals dedicated to this competency is an important enabler of a more frequent and advanced use of audience insights. Out of the 65% of CoGs reporting to have a dedicated person or team working on insight gathering, three-quarters have this staff embedded in the communication unit (although they sometimes cover multiple roles) and a small minority have separate teams with whom communicators co-ordinate. Similarly, 8% of MHs surveyed rely on external offices for their audience insights. Building these capacities and upskilling teams to benefit from new tools will be instrumental to strengthen the use of insights in communication.

Figure 3.4. Most important sources used by CoGs and MHs to gather audience insights



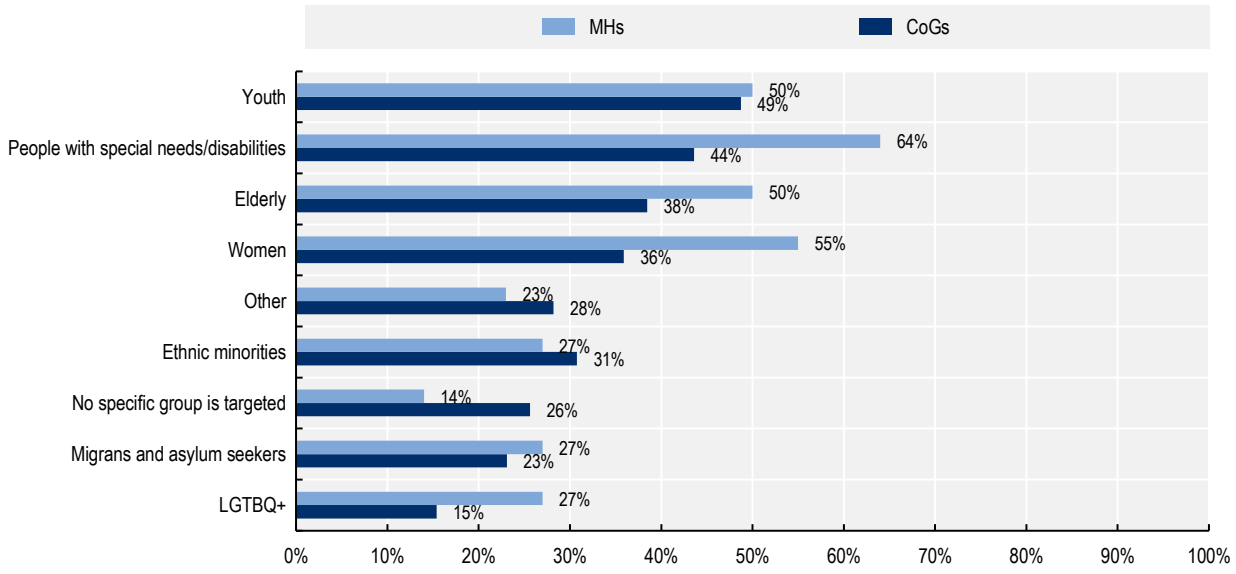
Notes: N= 35 CoGs and 18 MHs that used audience insights to inform their communication planning in the past 3 years. The MH of Chile is non-applicable for this question. Respondents were asked to select the top three sources used.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Leveraging insights for more targeted and inclusive communication

Understanding the public facilitates better segmentation of diverse audience groups, allowing a greater differentiation of what content is best suited to each group and the communication channels on which different segments are more likely to see and engage with. In this respect, audience insights create opportunities for government messages to be elaborated into formats that make them resonant and relevant for diverse audiences and also help this content reach the intended groups through informed use of platforms. For example, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) used responses to a Tweet where individuals stated they were preparing for a zombie apocalypse, alongside responses related to terrorism or natural disaster, to develop a campaign that resonated with the public. Building on these responses, the CDC disseminated information on how to react in the context of a zombie apocalypse (and other emergencies) as a way to spread important messages about pandemic preparedness. The campaign 'went viral' and increased traffic to the CDC's Emergency Preparedness webpage by 1.143% compared to the same date the year before (CDC, 2018[2]). Such a use of insights can in turn enable more impactful communication but also support efforts to include harder-to-reach or vulnerable groups, such as youth and minorities, and ensure they are not left out of information-sharing and engagement opportunities.

Data from the OECD survey highlights that MHs engage in segmented audience targeting more than their CoG counterparts. Youth and people with disabilities are prominent target groups across CoG and MH respondents (Figure 3.5). Furthermore, close to a quarter of CoGs and 14% of MHs reported that they do not target specific groups. Indeed, only 23% of CoGs and 22% of MHs reported that audience segmentation and tailoring of communications was among the top three objectives of their audience insight gathering. Overall, these responses could indicate that diversified approaches and inclusiveness of communication are areas for development to implement more strategic communications.

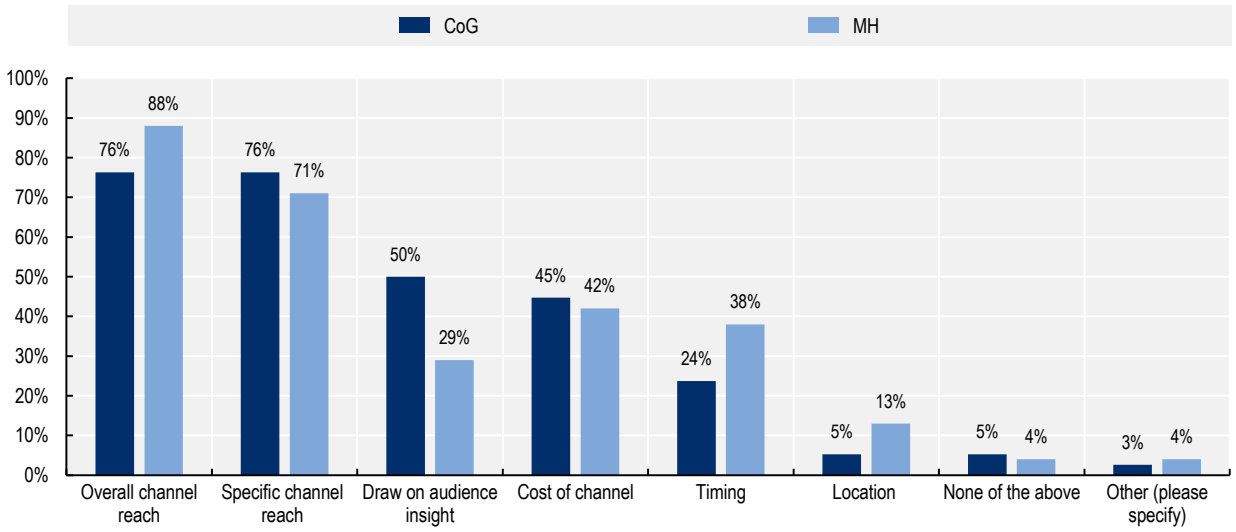
Figure 3.5. Specific groups targeted in the communication of CoGs and MHs



Notes: N= 39 CoGs and 22 MHs. Japan and Greece MHs did not provide data for this question. The elderly group was defined as individuals aged 65+ years and the youth group was defined as individuals aged 15 to 29 years.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Using the appropriate channels to reach all audiences is essential to the segmentation and targeting of communication. According to the OECD survey, the reach of a given channel, both in general and for specific target groups, is the primary criterion for its selection – above cost and timing (Figure 3.6). Insight-gathering is similarly instrumental in this respect, helping to understand which platforms each segment of the public consumes and how they engage with content. Survey responses show that using insight to select channels is somewhat established as a practice, with 50% of CoGs and 29% of MHs reporting that they do so.

Figure 3.6. Criteria used to determine communication channels by CoGs and MHs



Notes: N=38 CoGs and 24 MHs. Austria did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

From audience insights to social listening

Beyond its use in developing more tailored and effective communication, insight gathering can evolve into a mechanism for social listening – the practice of following online conversations and "listening" to citizens. An emerging theory on organisational listening, proposed most prominently by Jim Macnamara (2015[3]), elaborates the potential for communicators to listen to the public and understand the demand for information or engagement in order to respond to it. Organisational listening does not refer to snooping or tracking any individual or group's speech or actions, which is contrary to data privacy and the democratic principles that guide this report (for more on ensuring privacy see the sections below and Chapter 5). Instead, listening refers to the legitimate practice of extrapolating trends from aggregated open data that can shape the communication agenda based on citizens' needs, rather than the communication agenda driving the gathering of insights.

This is in contrast to the more common practice of communicating through "speaking" on a schedule determined by the government or institution's own priorities and timings. Indeed, Macnamara's research indicates that 80% to 90% of the communication by the organisations studied consists of "speaking", meaning it is focused on one-way communication of information and content (Macnamara, 2017[4]). It suggests that public communication may be underutilised to identify and address citizens' needs and that it is not sufficiently conceived as a two-way avenue for dialogue outside dedicated feedback initiatives.

As discussed in the *OECD Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation* (OECD, forthcoming[5]), tracking real-time trends from aggregated data on discussions and interest in given topics is a useful practice. It goes hand-in-hand with interventions to fill so-called "information voids", or gaps in reliable sources on a given subject, especially in relation to sensitive topics that are vulnerable to rumours and falsehoods (see Box 3.1). This approach is gaining ground in counter-disinformation efforts, and governments can leverage similar practices to make communication more responsive to citizens.

To this end, evolving the practices for gathering audience insights and building capacity to "listen" could help fully realise the potential of public communication to reinforce better governance and rebuild public trust. In turn, insights from listening activities could feed into policy making, and service design and delivery to ensure citizens' voices translate into government action.

Box 3.1. The use of social listening to identify information voids to inform vaccination efforts in the United States during COVID-19

Using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, including the use of social listening, the CDC publishes publicly available reports on citizens' perception of vaccination efforts in the United States at least once a month. The reports have been instrumental in identifying the extent to which false information has spread and impacted the vaccination efforts. Moreover, these reports have enabled the government to pinpoint interventions that respond to prevalent mis- and disinformation and fill information voids with accurate and clear messaging. For instance, the report published June 7th, 2021 found that vaccinated individuals had concerns about the effectiveness of the doses against the Delta variant. This insight enabled the CDC to recommend, among other measures, that messages target the effectiveness of the vaccines on the most common variants in the United States, and the need to continue partnering with trusted figures to amplify these messages.

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccinate-with-confidence.html ; https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/downloads/SoVC-report-9-508.pdf.

The use of behavioural insights for communication

BI is defined as the "lessons derived from behavioural and social sciences, including decision making, psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, organisational and group behaviour" (OECD, 2017[6]). It acknowledges that human behaviour is shaped by systematic biases that can hinder the ability of individuals to act in their best interest (OECD, 2019[7]). While drawing on BI can enable governments to improve communications to better prompt behavioural change, BI does not refer to changing individuals' behaviours against their own will. Rather, when citizens struggle to make choices in their own interests, such as quitting smoking for example, communications can leverage BI to craft messages that help individuals overcome their own biases while preserving their freedom. In this regard, its use can make public communication more efficient in improving the welfare of citizens.

Disseminating information and conveying clear messages to citizens is often only half of the goal of a public communication campaign. If the messages transmitted are intended to lead to a change in behaviour, it is important to integrate behavioural insights early on. To ensure concrete outcomes, communicators can build on evidence about what actually influences behaviours, instead of relying on beliefs of "perfect rationality", broad assumptions or declared intentions.

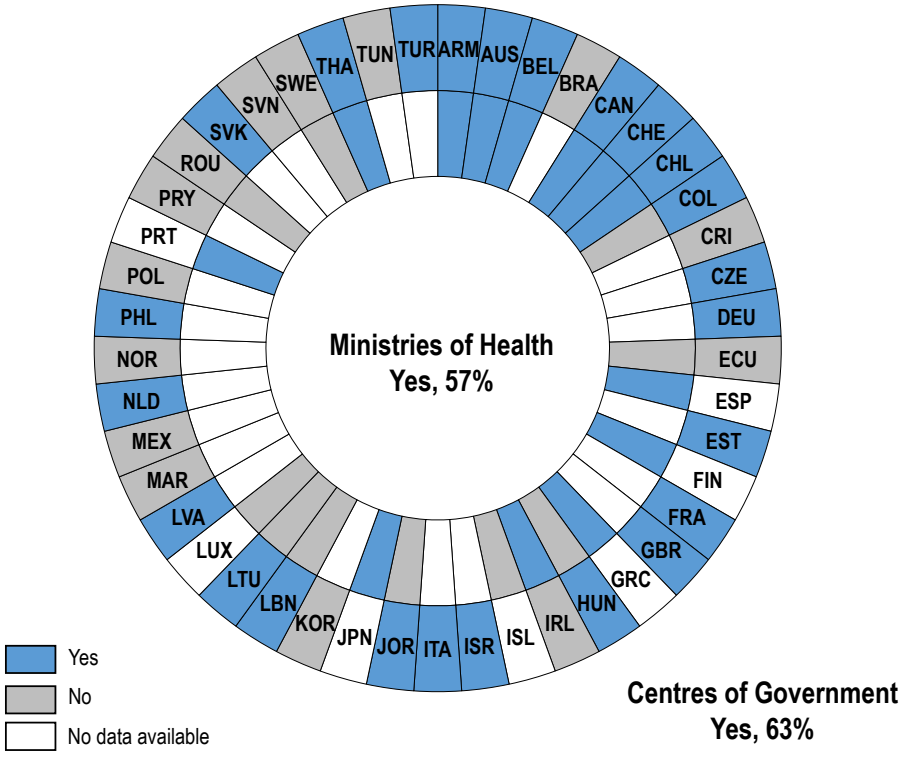
Sharing information on its own is not always enough to lead to behavioural change. Even when the target audience has a good understanding and adequate awareness of a specific policy issue, an "intention–action" gap can undermine the effectiveness of communication efforts. Indeed, research points to the relatively weak relationship between awareness, intention and action. For example, pro-environmental behaviours may not be adopted by those professing pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs (Dryzek, Norgaard and Schlosberg, 2011[8]; Eom, Kim and Sherman, 2018[9]). Survey results reveal that CoGs and MHs cite raising awareness and informing citizens about their rights and responsibilities more often than behaviour-specific objectives (such as engaging stakeholders or promoting the uptake and improving the delivery of public services).

This section will explore how public communication can use BI to better understand and encourage shifts in citizen's behaviours by incorporating insights from different segments of society in its various stages. It will first examine how CoGs and MHs are interacting with BI experts to design communication activities. It will then outline potential opportunities to leverage BI at each step of the communication planning process. Examples from OECD countries and beyond are used to illustrate good practices in this field and reflect on recent lessons from the COVID-19 crisis.

How are governments leveraging BI in the context of public communication?

Over the past decade, BI units have started to emerge within government institutions across the world. While many are already collaborating with communicators, OECD survey results point to an important number of countries that have yet to engage with BI experts to inform the design and delivery of communication efforts (see Figure 3.7). As a matter of fact, close to 63% (24 out of 38) of CoGs and 57% (13 out of 23) of MHs claimed to engage with behavioural experts within government or in academia and civil society. This is consistent with the fact that only 10 out of 24 CoGs and 6 out of 9 MHs report having a communication strategy or plan aiming at addressing behaviour change.

Figure 3.7. Share of CoGs and MHs that interact with BI experts



Note: N= 38 CoGs and 23 MHs. Austria (CoG) and Turkey (MH) did not provide data to this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Diverse institutional structures supporting BI in public communication

Despite their growing popularity, OECD survey results reveal that dedicated BI units are yet to be institutionalised within many CoGs and MHs (see Table 3.1). In fact, half of the CoGs whose public communicators engage with BI experts have no such expertise within government and engage solely with external actors (including civil society and academia). In addition, 6 out of 13 MHs that reported to engage with BI experts also stated that they have such expertise within government.

Several countries engage with both internal and external BI experts to enrich their communication planning. For example, the United Kingdom has both internal BI capabilities within Public Health England (PHE), the National Health Service (NHS) and other parts of government, including the communication team within the Cabinet Office (OECD, 2020[10]). In the case of France, the French Interministerial Directorate for Public Transformation (Direction interministérielle de la transformation publique or DITP) functions as an inter-ministerial body providing tools and recruiting external experts for specific ministry projects (OECD, 2020[10]).

Table 3.1. Types of interactions with BI experts in CoGs and MHs

	Has a BI expert(s) on staff	A BI expert(s) working in the communication team of other government entities	A BI expert(s) inside government (not in comms team)	Interacts with external BI experts	Other	Does not interact with BI experts
Australia	■	●	●■	●■		
Belgium			■	●■		
Canada			●■			
Chile	●■	●■		●		
Colombia				●		■
Costa Rica						●
Czech Republic				●		
Estonia	●			●		
Finland				■		
France		●				
Germany		●				
Greece	■			■		
Hungary				●		■
Iceland						■
Ireland	■	■	■	■		●
Israel					●	
Italy				●	●	
Japan					■	
Korea						●
Latvia				●		
Lithuania				●		■
Luxembourg						■
Mexico						●
Netherlands	●	●	●	●		
Norway						●
Poland						●
Portugal				■		
Slovak Republic				●		
Slovenia						●
Spain	■			■		
Sweden						●■
Switzerland				●■		
Turkey				●		
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●		
Total OECD CoG ●	**4**	**6**	**4**	**15**	**2**	**8**
Total OECD MH ■	**5**	**2**	**4**	**8**	**1**	**6**
Armenia	■			●		
Brazil						●
Ecuador						●■
Jordan				●		■
Lebanon	●					■
Morocco						●
Paraguay						●
Philippines				●		

	Has a BI expert(s) on staff	A BI expert(s) working in the communication team of other government entities	A BI expert(s) inside government (not in comms team)	Interacts with external BI experts	Other	Does not interact with BI experts
Romania						●■
Thailand	■	■		●■		
Tunisia						●
Total all CoG ●	**5**	**6**	**4**	**19**	**2**	**14**
Total all MH ■	**7**	**3**	**4**	**9**	**1**	**10**

Notes: Austria CoG and Turkey MH did not provide a response to this question. Black circles (CoGs) and black squares (MHs) represent those respondents that engage in certain type(s) of interaction(s) with BI experts.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Evidence from the OECD survey also indicates diverse institutional set-ups among OECD and partner countries (see Table 3.1) in terms of BI experts within or outside government. For example, public communicators in Hungary state that they regularly consult with experts in social sciences, while the government of Mexico follows a multi-stakeholder model, referring to experts in different policy domains prior to the deployment of whole-of-government campaigns. Structurally, 4 out of 24 CoGs (Australia, Canada, France and Germany) and 2 out of 13 MHs (Belgium and Canada) stated that they did not have a BI expert within their communication team in 2019 but interacted with BI experts located in other areas of government. In some cases, there is a centralised BI function that offers expertise across government. This is the case in Germany, where BI experts at the Federal Chancellery are available to support other parts of government on a range of projects, including communication.

Additionally, survey results reveal that BI is not necessarily applied evenly throughout government. Indeed, survey data indicates that MHs are more likely to have internal BI resources than CoGs. For example, in Armenia, Australia, Ireland and Thailand MHs indicated to have BI experts within the Ministry's staff while the CoGs did not. In addition, countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland have created specialised BI units or have units with expertise in BI within MHs. In fact, 7 of the 13 (54%) MHs that reported engaging with BI expertise have such a person in their team, whereas the same is only true for 5 out of 24 (21%) CoGs. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for such arrangements to be as flexible as possible. For example, Ireland created a specialised subgroup, temporarily combining internal expertise (from the Ministry's communication unit and research unit) with the expertise of external partners from other state organisations and academia to inform the deliberations of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET). The role was to provide insights and to carry out targeted behavioural research studies to provide insight for communication about the virus and public health behaviours (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2. Ireland's use of behavioural insights to support public communication

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) in Ireland leveraged BI as a means to support public communication activities. A Subgroup on Behavioural Change was set up in March 2020 including social and behavioural scientists as well as communicators.

The aim was to better understand and mitigate issues surrounding messaging fatigue, misunderstanding or non-compliance with public health guidance. This was done through active listening of citizens as well as by identifying public perceptions and norms that may affect the country's National Action Plan to fight the pandemic. The Subgroup supported communicators through the sharing of evidence and provided advice on tone, content as well as outputs of communication messages.

Members of the Subgroup also worked on specific projects and collaborated on COVID-19 response actions across the Ministry. The Ministry of Health published two brief cases studies on the application of behavioural insights to two such areas: hand washing and the COVID Tracker App for Ireland. First, a behaviourally informed hand washing poster was issued to all households. The poster was informed by international public health guidance but also insights from a literature review of behavioural science and hand hygiene. The poster focused on capability (how to) but also motivation, emphasising emotions of threat and disgust ("Kill the virus") and affiliation ("To protect you and others" and "Save lives"). Second, the design and launch of the COVID Tracker App for Ireland was informed by insights from a user experiences study, expert review, and pre-testing of content options. The wider evidence-informed communication strategy enabled the creation and dissemination of accurate, impactful information to citizens and empower the public to make informed choices as well as increased compliance.

Having met its terms of reference the Behavioural Change Subgroup was stood down following its last meeting on 24 July 2020. A COVID-19 Communications and Behavioural Advisory Group (CBAG) was formed to advise the Department of Health on these matters. The CBAG consisted of members of the former Subgroup on Behavioural Change but with wider representation from health sector. CBAG provided insights on the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department's broader communication strategies which plays a significant role in overcoming the challenges that existed around vaccine uptake. The CBAG regularly reviewed public opinion data on COVID-19 vaccination intentions. Members of the CBAG undertook a systematic view of evidence from 20+ surveys on COVID-19 vaccine uptake intentions and built on this to undertake predictive analysis using data collected from Ireland. The CBAG also provided insights for actions to support the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations such as the content of SMS messages after registering to get a vaccine and a vaccine leaflet for households. The latter was also informed by a meta-analysis of international randomised control trials testing the effect of individual correspondence on uptake of influenza vaccines. In addition, members of the CBAG produced a short paper identifying 15 key points to support uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. These research reports and insights from the members of CBAG helped to inform the work of the Department of Health and the HSE in public communications.

Furthermore, the Government Information Service (the unit responsible for co-ordinating communications centrally, located in the Department of the Taoiseach) commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake a behavioural study to inform policy and communication in respect of their response to the pandemic. From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular in advance of the development of vaccines, it was clear to the government that understanding human behaviour was a key way to protect citizens.

The Social Activity Measure (SAM) is a behavioural study that records the public response to the risk of COVID-19 infection and COVID-19 guidelines. Designed by the ESRI's Behavioural Research Unit (BRU), SAM is an anonymous, interactive, online study that surveys people about their recent activity. It examines where and how risks of COVID-19 transmission arise. SAM aims to inform policy regarding the opening of the economy and society, while keeping the virus under control. The research is funded by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Method

SAM is a "prompted recall" study that uses methods from behavioural science to help people to recall their activities. It asks about times when people left their homes via factual neutral questions. Questions cover locations, people visited and visitors to their home during the previous week. Follow-up questions gather greater detail about the previous two days: how many people participants met, for how long, ease of keeping a 2m distance, use of hand sanitiser and face masks, and so on. The study concludes with questions about the pandemic more generally.

SAM has produced many specific findings, which can be grouped into different sorts:

- trends in the locations people visit and how these change as restrictions change and the public mood shifts
- measures of riskier behaviour, including the proportion of people having close contacts, the number of individuals people meet up with from outside their household, the prevalence of social visits to other homes
- indicators of day-to-day risk mitigation, such as mask wearing and maintaining social distance
- breakdowns of these behaviours by location and social group, identifying where the largest risks are occurring and who is taking the most risk
- associations between perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, such as the strong relationship between perceiving restrictions as coherent, increased compliance and reduced risk taking
- non-associations, such as the weak impact on behaviour of the perceived threat of fines
- changes in expectations as the pandemic evolves and policy changes
- figures for vaccine uptake and reasons for hesitancy among a minority
- estimates of how vaccination is changing behaviour
- measures of compliance with public health guidance and the perceived compliance of others
- trends in travel across county boundaries, to Northern Ireland and overseas
- perceptions of different aspects of the policy response.

Source: https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/3008f6-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-nphet-covid-19-subgroup-be/; "National Public Health Emergency Team Behavioural Change Subgroup Draft Paper: Overview of the Work of the Subgroup to date" (2020). Department of Health, "National Public Health Emergency Team Behavioural Change Subgroup Draft Paper: Overview of the Work of the Subgroup to date" (2020). https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/3008f6-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-nphet-covid-19-subgroup-be/; Murphy, R. and R. Mooney (2020), A brief case study on using a behaviourally informed poster to improve hand washing in homes, Research Services and Policy Unit, Department of Health, https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/3c5bc8-health-research-and-statistics/; Murphy, R., S. Gibney and G. Mac Criosta (2020), Refining Tracker App content with user experience, expert review and an experimental study, Research Services and Policy Unit, Department of Health, https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/3c5bc8-health-research-and-statistics/; Murphy, R. (2020), Using Behavioural Science to Improve Hand Hygiene in Workplaces and Public Places, Research Services and Policy Unit, Department of Health, https://assets.gov.ie/73447/7989b01eb9844f1aaa636d0ba7c254f7.pdf; Gibney, S., L. Bruton and P. Doherty (2020), COVID Contact Tracing App: User Perspectives and Experience Research, Research Services and Policy Unit, Research and Development and Health Analytics Division, Department of Health, https://igees.gov.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/Research-Report-App-user-experience-and-perspectives-May-2020.pdf ; Murphy, R. (2020), Summary of Comments by the Sub-group on Behavioural Change on the content and design of the COVID-19 Contact Tracing App, Research Services and Policy Unit, Research and Development and Health Analytics Division, Department of Health, https://igees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Behavioural-Change-Subgroup-Report-April-2020.pdf; Julienne, Hannah and Lavin, Ciarán and Belton, Cameron and Barjaková, Martina and Timmons, Shane and Lunn, Pete (2020) Behavioural pre-testing of COVID Tracker, Ireland's contact-tracing app. ESRI Working Paper 687 December 2020; Muldoon, O., Bradshaw, D., Jay, S., Kinsella, E., Maher, P., Taaffe, C., Murphy, R. (2021). A research paper produced for the COVID-19 Communications and Behavioural Advisory Group, 2021 https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/3c5bc8-health-research-and-statistics/#behavioural-insights-and-patient-public-engagement; Murphy, R., Taaffe, C., Ahern, E. (2021). A meta-analysis of the impact of individual correspondence on flu vaccination rates: considerations for COVID-19 vaccination. Department of Health and Dublin City University. https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/3c5bc8-health-research-and-statistics/#behavioural-insights-and-patient-public-engagement; 15 Key Points to Support Uptake of COVID-19 Vaccines, Purcell, K., and Murphy, R. members of the COVID-19 Communications and Behavioural Advisory Group.

Organisational and institutional challenges for BI integration in public communication

Based on the above findings, communication practitioners must overcome several challenges to ensure BI is used optimally. First, it is crucial that communicators have access to BI expertise within or beyond government. However, OECD survey data revealed that a significant portion of CoGs do not interact with BI experts or do so only on an occasional basis. Integrating BI experts into communication teams – whether

through internal hiring processes or institutionalised partnerships with external parties – can lower barriers to collecting, using and evaluating BI and raise awareness around their benefits.

However, institutionalisation on its own is not enough to systematise the solicitation of BI expertise. Even where access to experts is provided, if the inclusion of those experts occurs on an ad-hoc or case-by-case basis, there is a risk of missing opportunities to enhance the impact of a campaign.

A key means to overcome this is to integrate an assessment of the potential use of BI in the design process for campaigns, including the identification of opportunities to include BI and an analysis of which fields of expertise would be most relevant.

BI practitioners within and outside government also require support from senior officials. Decision makers can advocate for an early-on integration of BI experts and call for ambitious experiments and the use of results for future communication campaigns.

The role of BI in public communication delivery

BI can be solicited at every stage of the communication process, from the objective setting and the preliminary collection of insights to the evaluation phase (see Table 3.2). Including these types of insights throughout the process allows governments to have a rigorous and coherent approach to promoting behaviour change through communication. Indeed, BI can help detect and better understand biases, propose levers of behavioural change, and evaluate the impact attained.

Table 3.2. Four-step model of BI implementation in communication campaigns

Stage	What can BI bring?	How?
Identify communication objectives	• Identify the target behaviours of a given campaign • Identify what success looks like from the behaviour change angle • Identify enablers and barriers to the target behaviour(s) • Identify whether the target behaviour is indeed likely to be influenced by communication material or other tools • Check whether the target audience is relevant, • Help set a realistic goal based on previous experiences and research.	• Identify target behaviours before engaging in strategic communication thinking • Identify a metric for success for behaviour change (e.g. 70% of the target audience is washing their hands) • Identify what determines behaviours through observation, interviews and surveys. • Model the factors influencing behaviours through the lense of BI models framing motivational and capability factors, for example such as the COM-B framework. • Conduct literature reviews on the topic, to know what research has identified as important factors for this behaviour in other settings. Look for evaluations of similar campaigns in order to acknowledge the effects that were obtained and their extent to know what can be expected.
Identify, design and inform a communication strategy or plan	• Offer several levers to trigger behavioural change through the general message and anticipate potential spillover effects. • Identify the most effective timing, channels, and formats for the communication activity. • Adapt material to different audience segments. • Reflect on the framing of the message, the visual and objective of the organisation.	• Use a model to map identified obstacles and potential levers and assess the chances for each to succeed. • Integrate possible feedback in the model to anticipate unintended consequences of the campaign. • Use audience insights and literature on specific groups to assess the channels and contexts most susceptible to influence. • Test messages and framing to assess their respective efficiency, through A/B testing or other experiments.
Reflect BI on the delivery of campaigns	• Monitor the timing of the intervention and that the real-time measures show no unintended effects. • Collect relevant data in prevision for evaluation	• Run regular surveys to assess the efficiency of the strategy, sentiments, perceptions and trust in the campaign. • Adjust the message or format of the campaign if necessary

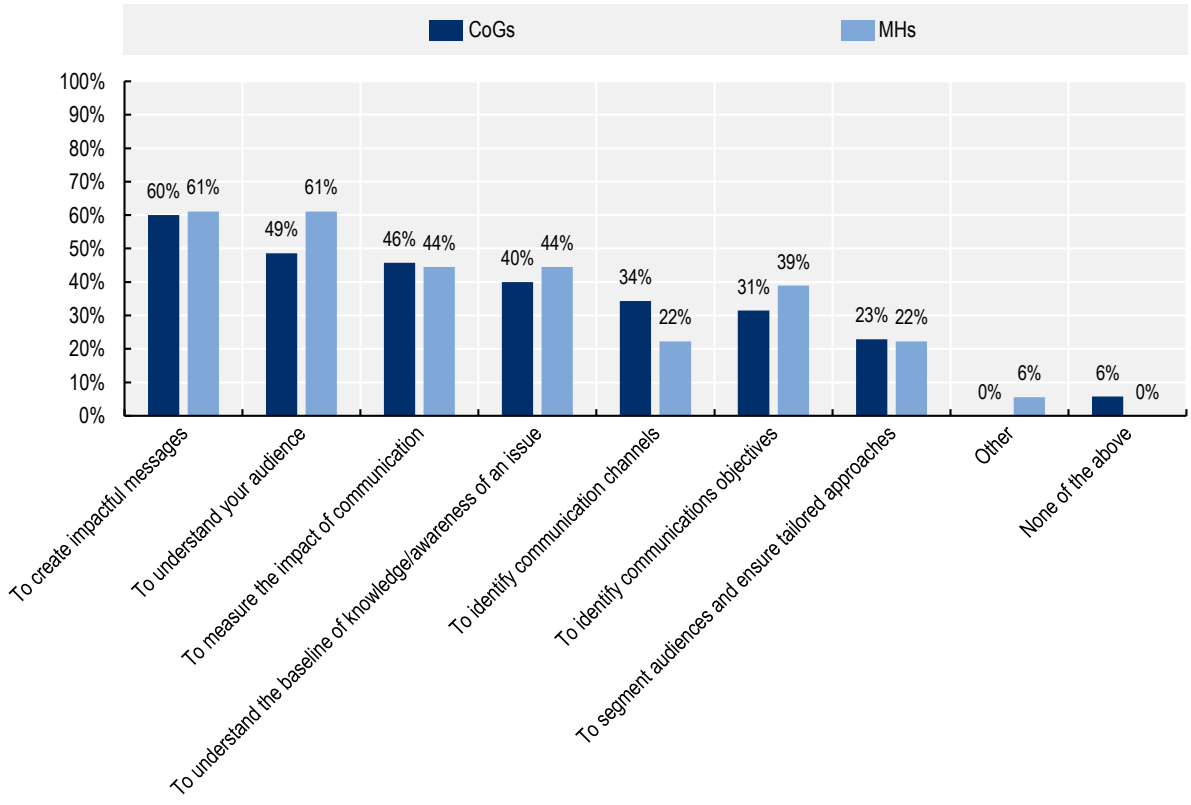
Evaluate effects on behaviour change	• Assess whether an actual behavioural change occurred and its effects on intended audiences. • Analyse possible reasons for failures or shortcomings and propose improvements • Synthetise, archive and publish the results to allow accumulation of experience and learning	• Run rigorous evaluations, using relevant measures of behaviours and counterfactuals whenever available. • Adapt the methodology of testing to the data available, the resources and the time scale.

Note: COM-B stands for Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behaviour. It is a model of behaviour and behaviour change that helps identify where adjustments need to be made to enable and encourage specific actions.
Source: Author's own work, based on UK GCS (2021).

Mobilising BI to segment and understand audiences

A key task for any communicator is to identify an audience and build an understanding of its existing beliefs, expectations and behaviours. Applying BI can aid in the segmentation of groups and in the definition of objectives to tailor communications to different needs. Its potential to build an understanding of the drivers, fears and media consumption patterns of different target groups was acknowledged by a significant share of CoGs and MHs as a priority objective for their use of BI (see Figure 3.8). This can help identify which audiences are most likely to change their behaviour and which messages and messengers will be most effective.

Figure 3.8. Objectives of CoGs and MHs for using audience insights



Note: N= 35 CoGs and 18 MHs that claimed to use AI to inform communication planning (question 9). Chile MH did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication.

Indeed, standard research methods such as surveys and focus groups can only go so far in achieving these aims as self-reported behaviours and motives do not always overlap with actual behaviours (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002[11]) (Kormos and Gifford, 2014[12]). They reflect attitudes rather than real actions, which can prevent the identification of the most adequate communication channels, and of the actual drivers of the target audience. BI research has a long history of narrowing the gap between declared and actual behaviours.

Evidence drawn from audience insights was indicated to influence campaign objectives for just under one-third of CoGs and MHs in OECD and partner countries (see Figure 3.5 above). BI can enhance the use of insights with research-based and tested models adapted to each type of audience, and can be a useful means to identify the extent to which behaviour is likely to be influenced by a communication campaign.

To capture actual behaviours, it is also important to reflect upon the ways in which the insights are collected. OECD survey results indicate that the primary methods for the collection of insights include the use of surveys (24 of 35 CoGs; 12 of 18 MHs), focus groups (18 of 35 CoGs; 9 of 18 MHs) and desktop research (18 of 35 CoGs; 10 of 18 MHs).[2] These are common methods utilised in evidence-based communication to collect "self-reported" behaviours and intentions. However, it is important to complement these insights with information about actual behaviours, beyond "self-reported" behaviours and intentions. Using BI to design and inform communication strategies and activities

Despite the growing adoption of BI, behaviourally-informed insights are rarely used at the planning stages of communications. According to OECD survey results, the evaluation of behaviours (13 out of 24 CoGs and 5 out of 9 MHs), biases (7 CoGs and 4 MHs) and identification of initiatives to address behaviour change (10 CoGs and 6 MHs) are prioritised in less than half of communication strategies and plans across surveyed countries. These results reveal that even though individuals' perceptions and actions are sometimes measured, BI is not systematically used in the planning processes, even though it can yield valuable results. In the case of the Government of Canada, for example, the administrationconducted monthly surveys that were behaviourally-informed to feed into the design of ongoing crisis communication efforts (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Behaviourally informed surveys informing communication in Canada during COVID-19

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, a team of behavioural scientists surveyed a panel of more than 2 000 Canadian citizens on a close to monthly basis to assess the evolution of their perception of risk, their trust in government and media, and their fatigue. The latter are all crucial factors influencing compliance with the recommended health practices communicated by the government. These insights also aimed to identify the least adhered-to health practices, the segments most at risk of infringing them and the spread of misinformation about the virus. The survey highlighted the value of personal storytelling and trusted messengers for promoting vaccine acceptance, which is now informing public communication strategies.

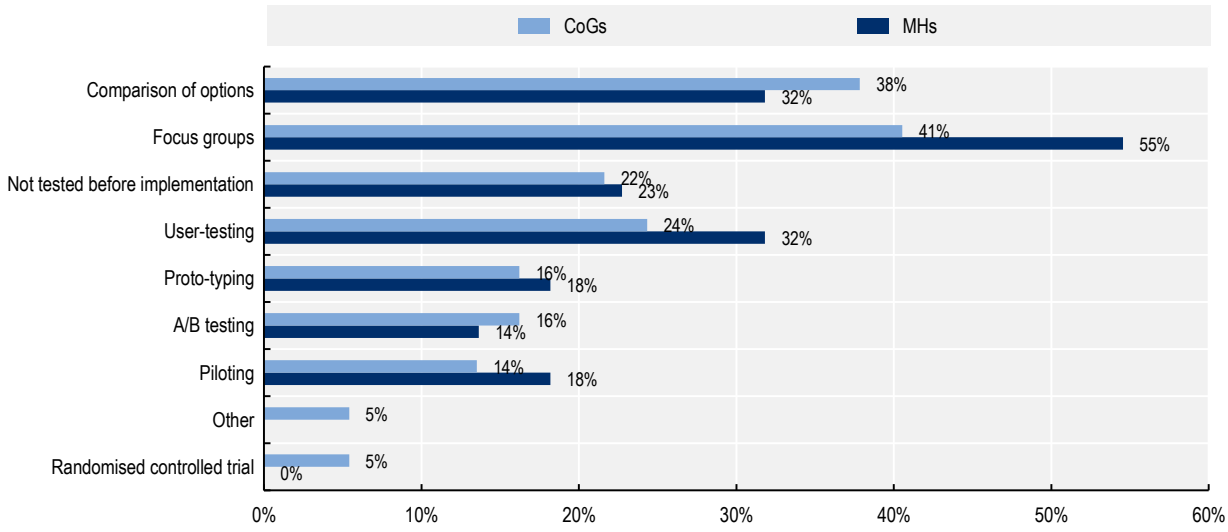
Source: https://impact.canada.ca/en/challenges/cosmo-canada/methods.

Furthermore, BI is well-positioned to provide *ex ante* advice on the most effective timings, channels and formats for communicating to different audiences. Whether it is because people are already thinking about the topic, because they are in a phase of behaviour change or simply because they have time to perform the behaviour, BI can greatly inform communication activities in this regard.

BI can also help public communicators fine-tune the details of ongoing campaigns, such as message framing and visual identity to maximise efficiency, readability and cognitive salience. In this regard, a good practice observed in the field is to test the framing of messages and visual content prior to the launch of a campaign to assess its efficiency, for example through A/B testing.[3]

Interestingly, testing campaigns through focus groups, comparison of options and user-testing is a common practice in 29 out of 37 CoGs and 17 out of 22 MHs and (see Figure 3.9). However, these methods focus on gathering declared intentions, which might not reflect actual behaviours. As such, bigger and more representative samples might be needed, complemented by both qualitative and quantitative sources of data.

Figure 3.9. Methods employed by CoGs and MHs to test campaigns before their implementation



Note: N= 37 CoGs and 22 MHs. Austria's CoGs and Japan's MH answered not applicable for this question. Sweden's CoG and MH stated they did not run such campaigns and were also treated as not applicable.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Reflecting on behavioural factors for the delivery of key communication campaigns

The field of BI has rapidly evolved over the last decade to advance the application of cutting-edge theory into practice. To this end, several frameworks have emerged to summarise complex behavioural science literature and map the main factors affecting human behaviour. Some frameworks are particularly relevant to analyse behavioural challenges in terms of barriers and enablers to behavioural change. For example, the COM-B model is widely used to analyse behaviours using three main factors that contribute to behavioural change: capability, opportunity and motivation (Michie, van Stralen and West, 2011[13]). Other frameworks summarise how to apply behavioural science in practice to improve communications. For example, the EAST framework developed by the UK Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), outlines four main ways to facilitate behavioural change: communications campaigns can encourage behavioural change by making the desired behaviour Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely (EAST) (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2014[14]).

OECD survey results reveal practical examples of how BI factors can be integrated from theory to practice in key government campaigns (see Box 3.4). In Australia, behavioural insights were employed to identify at-risk groups in a campaign aimed at reducing the number of road accidents by personalising messages to the identified groups. Furthermore, BI has been used by the Government of Canada for redesigning

communication material to increase the uptake of the online governmental service *MyBenefits* and resulting in its increased utilisation. Finally, the Netherlands used behavioural evidence to facilitate the work of check-out staff in groceries to lower the number of minors buying alcohol or cigarettes. By showcasing a weakness in the current system of ID checks, the government pushed citizens to systematically provide their IDs to checkout staff through communication materials which in turn, deterred youth from attempting to buy these products.

Box 3.4. Examples of BI-driven communication campaigns in OECD countries

Australia

The Western Australian Road Safety Commission partnered with external consultants in order to improve road safety. BI were used to support change in this area through a five-year communication campaign strategy aiming at reducing the occurrences of accidents linked to speeding, drunk driving, mobile phone distractions and seat belts.

The "Zero Heroes" campaign targeted a segment of the population for positive reinforcement communications. It reached high awareness level amongst the population (71%) and had behavioural impacts: 34% took some sort of action, as a result of the campaign; 21% checked their demerit points on the website of the Department of Transports. Campaigns such as "Time with Mum" and "Priorities" were developed in order to target higher risk and resistant segments of the population. The motivation and deterrents to behaviour change were identified in these groups and subsequently used to provide personalised campaigns as well as increase uptake of the desired behaviour. It reached relatively high levels of awareness in the specific target populations (39%) an audience that is renowned for not listening and not relating to Government messages.

Canada

In 2015, Ontario's Behavioural Insights Unit (BIU) became the first government unit dedicated to applying behavioural insights to enhance public services in Canada. The BIU conducts rigorous experimentation (e.g., through randomized controlled trials (RCTs)) to assess the impact of interventions such as enhanced communications on compliance, uptake, and efficiency of government programs and services. For example, the BIU designed letters to encourage eligible student uptake of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, emphasising the student's time-limited eligibility for a free vaccine or the cancer risk associated with HPV infection. This trial also made enhancements to the appointment booking system, enabling multiple email reminders with planning prompts to help overcome students' prospective memory failure and to reduce appointment no-shows. The RCT revealed that students who received the redesigned letters were twice as likely to get vaccinated than students in the control condition, with more than a thousand students getting the vaccine during the trial period alone. Another notable achievement of the BIU was increasing fine collections under the Ontario Provincial Offences Act, leading to an anticipated $9.3 million increase in collected fines each year. As part of the trial, the BIU adapted three versions of a fine notice to include new salient formatting with concrete steps, along with statements that highlighted the social norm that most recipients make on-time payments, or used a loss aversion framing that emphasized the penalties for inaction. The BIU continues to collaborate with ministries across the Ontario government to facilitate the improvement of public programs and a shift to online services.

The Netherlands

The NIX18 campaign by the Ministries of Health, Welfare & Sport and General Affairs in the Netherlands aimed at making not drinking and smoking under the age of 18 the norm. Behavioural insights found that employees in supermarkets struggled to conduct ID checks, while customers reported annoyance

at being considered too young. A communication campaign followed these findings in order to push customers to systematically provide their ID when buying cigarettes or alcohol. Materials, including posters and checkout dividers were provided to supermarkets. By urging vast swaths of the population to show their identification systematically, this also convinced youth that they would not be able to buy such products easily.

Source: https://www.kantarpublic.com/our-work/improving-road-safety-in-australia https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/medicare-compliance/how-we-ensure-compliance/behavioural-insights-and-interventions https://www.ontario.ca/page/behavioural-insights-ontario-update-report-2020#section-2 https://www.nix18.nl/ ; a wealth of behavioural insights : 2017 edition and Author's own work, based on Budge, M., Deahl, C., Dewhurst, M., Donajgrodzki, S., & Wood, F. (2009). Communications and behaviour change.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, BI practitioners have demonstrated the value of applying BI by adapting the content of communication campaigns to the perceptions of risk and awareness levels of citizens (see Box 3.5). In France, the behavioural analysis unit within the *Direction Interministérielle de la Transformation Publique* (DITP) evaluated key prevention campaigns and provided communicators with related advice. Furthermore, Finland, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, partnered with influencers and other trustworthy public figures to amplify governmental messaging during the crisis. Finally, emotional responses were leveraged in communication campaigns to increase civic duty and moral responsibility among the population. Positive emotions such as pride, joy or hope have been identified as more efficient to trigger voluntary action, as opposed to negative ones which may lead to inaction or self-protection (Brennan and Binney, 2010[15]). The integration of BI in campaigns allowed countries to fine-tune previous actions and collect relevant data that can be made use of in the evaluation stage.

Box 3.5. Examples of BI campaigns in the context of COVID-19

Canada

Emotions are a strong driver of behaviour. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada ran a campaign to promote physical distancing by appealing to individuals' values, moral responsibility as well as civic duty to protect the most vulnerable groups in society. This was coupled with actionable solutions, in this case: staying home. Campaigns which promote clear solutions to issues can empower individuals by providing them with a sense of control and deterring feelings of hopelessness.

Switzerland

Citizens tend to care about what others do and the sources from which information comes from can impact its trustworthiness. Governments around the world have taken advantage of this, asking influencers to participate in the efforts to contain the spread of the virus. In Switzerland, social media campaigns such as #soschützenwiruns ("let's protect ourselves") were leveraged. Trusted influencers shared images and information through these channels to convince citizens to stay home and protect vulnerable groups.

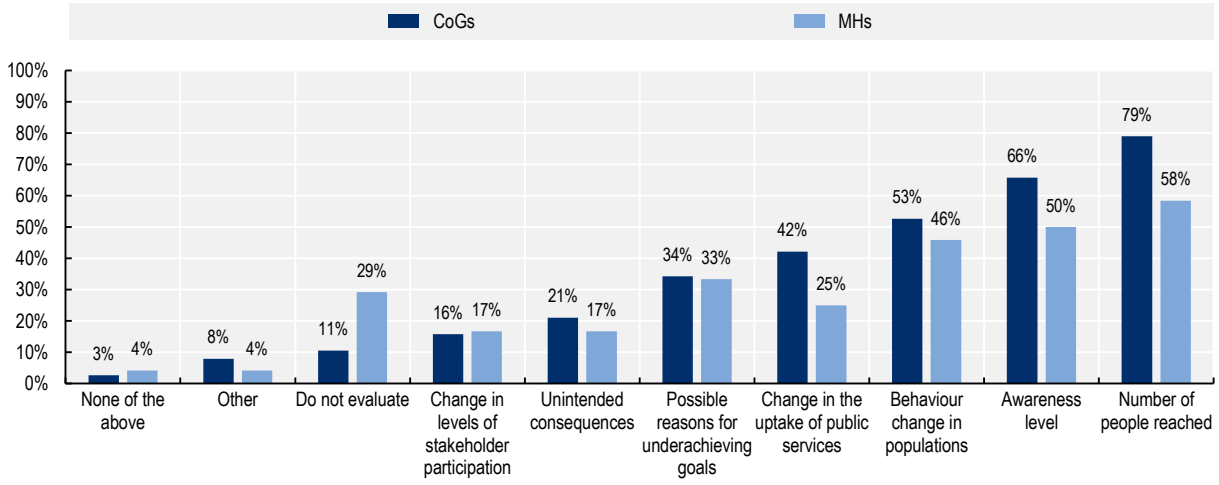
Source: Author's own work based on (Durantini et al., 2006[16]) and (Bavel et al., 2020[17]); additional sources include https://impact.canada.ca/en/challenges/covid-communications/campaigns https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/regulatory-policy-and-covid-19-behavioural-insights-for-fast-paced-decision-making-7a521805/

Communication campaigns aiming to promote vaccination confidence also benefitted from the use of behavioural insights. For instance, the Government of Canada deployed methodologies and techniques to monitor knowledge, perception, fears and behaviours of citizens related to COVID-19. These insights found that people are more likely to respond to personal narratives regarding vaccination experiences than to information campaigns (OECD, 2021[18]). In Ireland, the Department of Health's communication strategies were informed by the COVID-19 Communications and Behavioural Advisory Group (CBAG). CBAG played a strategic role by providing advice on communication tools that could be leveraged to increase the uptake of vaccinations such as the use of SMS messages after registering to get a vaccine confirming registration as well as reminding individuals of their appointments. Finally, in Colombia, a Randomized Control Trial was carried out to compare the intent of individuals to get vaccinated before and after exposure to a message which read "Healthcare workers will be the first to receive the vaccine. To help them fight COVID-19, when it's your turn, they need you to get the vaccine too." The research which was conducted in partnership with the British Embassy found that those exposed to the message were more likely to be vaccinated (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021[19]).

Evaluating the impact of public communication in changing behaviours

Evaluating observed behaviour change at the end of a campaign can be a key means to demonstrate success and may, in turn, serve to encourage the application of BI. As Figure 3.10 illustrates, the most commonly used evaluation metrics among CoGs and MHs include measures such as number of people reached and awareness levels.

Figure 3.10. Metrics used to evaluate communication activities by CoGs and MHs



Note: N= 38 CoGs and 24 MHs. Austria did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

The evaluation of behavioural change has been particularly prevalent in the health sector and is increasingly acknowledged since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to OECD survey results, 11 out of 24 MHs in OECD and partner countries evaluated behaviour change in populations to measure the success or failure of a given campaign. For instance, the Public Health England campaign "Change4Life: sugar smart" evaluated changes in household consumption patterns resulting from the introduction of the Sugar Smart app and advertising across 750 supermarkets. In the context of COVID19, the Irish Department of Health has run weekly national surveys, focus groups and behavioural studies to better understand changes in attitudes, perception and media consumption patterns.

While the practice of BI entails rigorous experimental methods, OECD survey results indicate that only 6 CoGs and 2 MHs use experimental methods to evaluate the results of campaigns. The most popular methods employed by 22 CoGs and 10 MHs are surveys, whose limitations for evaluating behaviour change have been discussed in the previous sections. The evaluation of BI requires highly technical expertise, including the ability to plan and run rigorous evaluations, use relevant measures of behaviours, apply counterfactuals, and adapt the test methodology according to available data, resources and timeframe. Evaluating changes in behaviour can therefore be considered a discipline, one in which the synthesis and publication of results allows for the accumulation of experiences to build the necessary capabilities for public communicators to draw on *post hoc* insights in the early steps of future campaigns.

Towards a systemic use and dissemination of evidence in public communication

This chapter illustrated the strategic value of evidence-driven communication. It explored the utility of audience insights for improving the targeting of communication campaigns as well as its potential to shift to a two-way model of communication. It also provided an analysis of the critical role of behavioural insights in informing the design, delivery and evaluation of citizen-centric communication.

However, public communication and the integration of evidence do not happen in a vacuum. In this regard, the opportunities and challenges for employing insights more efficiently and effectively in the broader data ecosystem in which public communicators must operate merit further reflection. While not exhaustive, the following section reflects on issues for future research in this field, including:

- ensuring sound data governance models to foster value creation within and beyond government
- leveraging emerging technologies to build social listening capabilities and facilitate the collection and analysis of insights
- addressing legal and privacy concerns through the ethical management and use of data.

First, the data-intensive character of the public communication profession raises important questions about data governance. Notably, growing volumes of information in an environment where institutional "legacy challenges"[4] remain unsolved is inhibiting the ability of public sector institutions to access, share and extract value from data (OECD, 2019[20]). Barriers include lack of incentives, standards, and interoperable systems for storing and processing data (OECD, 2019[21]). Efforts to tap into the strategic value of data for public communication could be accompanied by a reflection on the role of data quality principles, the sharing of protocols and the establishment of relevant training programmes. In this regard, the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data sets out general principles that could further guide related conversations (see Box 3.6).

Box 3.6. OECD Recommendation of the Council on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data

The OECD Recommendation provides a series of principles on how governments can maximise the benefits of enhancing data access and sharing arrangements while protecting individuals' and organisations' rights and accounting for other legitimate interests and objectives. The principles include:

- Establish and implement policy measures to enhance data access and sharing alongside broader activities such as engaging with and empowering relevant stakeholders to increase the trustworthiness of the data ecosystem. This could be done by promoting transparency, inclusivity and through the encouragement of data sharing across and between public and private sectors.
- Adopt a whole-of-government approach to data access and sharing to ensure that specific legal, societal and policy engagements are met. This could be done through the adoption of arrangements that achieve these aims, the implementation of flexible and scalable governance frameworks through fostering regulatory environments supporting access and sharing.
- Promote and enable a culture of responsibility for data governance by taking into account the rights and interests of different stakeholders, including those in the private and civil spheres.
- Provide incentive mechanisms as well as develop sustainable business models and markets for data access and sharing. The recommendations outline, for instance, the promotion of self- and co- regulation mechanisms to achieve these aims.
- Improve conditions for cross-border data access and sharing through reducing restrictions and promoting international co-operation. The Recommendations also state that conditions upon cross-border access and sharing should be non-discriminatory, transparent, necessary and proportionate to the level of risk.
- Ensure that data can be found as well as re-used across and within organisations by providing associated documentation in a timely, transparent manner. The Recommendations also promote the adoption of standards for data models and formats.
- Educate stakeholders to enable all parties to use data responsibly. Namely, the OECD recommends enhancing data-related skills and competencies needed, including by public servants, to harness the benefits of data access, sharing, and use.

Source: OECD (forthcoming[5]), *Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation*, OECD Publishing, Paris..

The role of public communicators in supporting the effective dissemination of government datasets to promote their use and re-use remains an area to be further explored. In fact, while there are established communication channels with the private sector, the OECD Survey on Open Government Data (OGD) found that only 18 out of 33 countries consider civil society and journalists as priority communities to engage with on OGD initiatives and/or policies (OECD, 2018[22]). Similarly, only 14 out of 33 countries were found to have concrete communication strategies to raise awareness on OGD, its benefits and existing datasets (OECD, 2018[22]). As discussed in Chapter 5, these findings highlight opportunities for public communication and digital government units to co-ordinate in promoting the effective dissemination of data across and beyond the public sector.

Second, the rise of emerging technologies offers multiple opportunities to ground public communication in evidence. The use of chat bots is a common example. In Brazil, the Secretariat of Social Communication (SECOM) is employing intelligent machine learning processes to conduct sentiment analysis, monitor the effects of messages, and identify information gaps that may require refocusing content (see Chapter 4 for

more details). In the United States, the Centre for Disease Control has similarly developed advanced social listening tools that triangulate diverse sources of data on public discourse and media in relations to COVID-19 and vaccination (see Box 3.1).

Third, public communicators increasingly face ethical dilemmas related to the use of insights in light of the growing reliance on personal information and artificially intelligent technologies. On the one hand, data privacy concerns emerge over how population data is gathered, used and reported. On the other, the programming of machine learning and natural language processors inherently reflect biases that may skew the collection and interpretation of data from different population groups, in particular among underrepresented segments of society. Some countries such as the United Kingdom have begun to disseminate general guidelines for data ethics to support the work of communicators (see Box 3.7). The OECD has also developed a set of principles, which could be of use for public communicators to reflect on the value and practical implications of data ethics (see Box 3.8).

Box 3.7. Data ethics framework in the United Kingdom

In recognising the important role of public communicators, the UK Government established a set of guidelines defining the scope of ethics in governmental communication, together with a dedicated Data Ethics Framework as well as a guide to using artificial intelligence.

The UK Government's Data Ethics Framework builds upon the overarching principles of transparency, accountability and fairness. This particular document guides the responsible use of data in government and the wider public sector by enabling civil servants to understand ethical issues as well as handle them in the context of their work. The framework is designed to be revisited frequently throughout the different stages of a project from data collection, to the sharing of information. It includes a self-assessment table for review at each stage of the process to empower communicators and other government employees to evaluate progress.

As Artificial Intelligence is increasingly used in communication, the Government set a framework guiding its use and creation within the public sector. The joint guidance developed by the Government Digital Service (GDS) and the Office for Artificial Intelligence (OAI) covers three broad issues, including: to assess whether AI can help meet user needs, the public sector can leverage AI and to use AI ethically, fairly as well as safely. It encourages civil servants to build upon the ethical values of

1. Respecting the dignity of individuals.
2. Connect with each other sincerely, openly and inclusively.
3. Care for the well-being of all.
4. Protect the priorities of social values, justice, and public interest.

Source : https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-ethics-framework

Box 3.8. OECD Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector

The OECD Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector outline the value and practical implications of data ethics in government. These principles call on governments to:

1. manage data with integrity
2. be aware of and observe relevant government-wide arrangements for trustworthy data access, sharing and use
3. incorporate data ethical considerations into governmental, organisational and public sector decision-making processes
4. monitor and retain control over data inputs, in particular those used to inform the development and training of AI systems, and adopt a risk-based approach to the automation of decisions
5. be specific about the purpose of data use, especially in the case of personal data
6. define boundaries for data access, sharing and use
7. be clear, inclusive and open
8. publish open data and source code
9. broaden individuals' and collectives' control over their data
10. be accountable and proactive in managing risks.

Source: OECD (2021[23]), *Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Key findings and way forward

- For public communication to be deemed strategic, it needs to be informed by evidence, for example in the form of audience insights research, social listening or behavioural insights (BI). While a majority of countries make use of evidence to inform the design and delivery of public communication, there remains scope to collect, employ and disseminate insights on audiences, behaviour change and uptake of services in more systematic and strategic ways – from the planning to the *ex post* evaluation phases.
- Audience insights provide communicators with a real-time understanding of public concerns and sentiments. Beyond simple demographic traits, understanding the habits, attitudes and information consumption patterns from different segments of society is key to making communication more inclusive, especially for underrepresented or disengaged groups.
- Survey data revealed room for governments to more systematically embed audience insights into the planning, design and delivery of communication activities, given that a majority of CoGs and MHs state that they conduct this type of research on an ad hoc basis. Similarly, greater audience segmentation and diversification of content across channels and target groups that is based on audience insights can contribute to more impactful, communication.
- Tapping into more sophisticated social listening capabilities by evolving the gathering of insights is the next frontier for promoting a two-way dialogue with citizens and making use of public feedback to improve policy making. Further research into the different types of insights and collection methods could help build a state of the art understanding and model for this field.
- Emerging technologies have opened new possibilities for public communicators to gather and analyse evidence to inform communication activities. For example, big data, cloud computing, smart algorithms and analytical softwares have unlocked a vast trove of insights and diminished the cost of acquiring and processing information about audiences. Further research into existing tools could help build an understanding of the benefits and potential limitations in building stronger social listening capabilities, in particular those which may raise ethical, privacy and security concerns.
- Behavioural insights provide key evidence on cognitive factors and biases that can enable communication to be more responsive and effective in reaching citizens amid competition for their attention in a crowded media ecosystem. Tapping into behavioural factors can help deploy communications that encourage desired actions in line with key policy goals.
- Efforts toward strengthening institutional capacities and ensuring expertise are available to collect and embed BI in a scientific way could aid countries in reaching more effective communications.
- Moving beyond a siloed collection and management of different types of behavioural data and audience insights could help ensure they are more widely used across public institutions and for relevant campaigns. Governments should reflect on data ethics and data governance arrangements to promote a whole-of government culture of evidence, avoid duplications and reduce costs.

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Notes

[1] The OECD survey on which this report is based was administered in 2020 to cover the year 2019. Although the responses refer to the pre-COVID-19 era, several respondents have reflected the experience of the pandemic in some of their answers.

[2] N= 35 CoGs and 19 MHs that claimed to use audience insights to inform its communication planning (question 9).

[3] A/B testing refers to randomised experiments to compare two versions of a single piece of communication (i.e. message, visual, slogan) to determine which one is more effective.

[4] Legacy challenges include: "outdated data infrastructures and data silos to skill gaps, regulatory barriers, the lack of leadership and accountability, and an organisational culture which is not prone to digital innovation and change" (OECD, 2019[20]).

4 Evaluating public communication

This chapter provides an overview of the role of evaluation in promoting evidence-driven communication. It explores diverse approaches used by Centres of Government and Ministries of Health, identifies challenges inhibiting their application and reflects on a series of avenues to professionalise practices in this field. In doing so, it explores the extent to which evaluation is institutionalised and identifies existing mechanisms adopted by governments for such purposes. It then discusses the importance of linking evaluation with organisational goals to reap its full learning, accountability and strategic foresight benefits. It lastly reflects on the potential for evaluation to demonstrate the impact public communication can have for the achievement of key policy outcomes.

Introduction

Evaluation is a core building block of evidence-driven communication. In addition to its role in informing design and delivery processes as outlined in Chapter 3, it helps build a comprehension of how intended audiences understand messages. Among its many benefits, evaluation can contribute to professionalising the field of public communication by providing evidence on its impact and lessons on what works and what does not. It can also aid governments in identifying trends that can inform the design of future communication strategies and initiatives.

Evaluating the impact of public communication is especially important in the context of governments' efforts to ensure accountability and transparency in an environment characterised by growing citizen expectations. The COVID-19 pandemic in particular has highlighted the need for improved evaluation mechanisms to help practitioners understand the impact of communication initiatives to inform future actions, reflect on lessons learned, and build country resilience for future crises.

The OECD defines the practice of evaluation as "the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results […] to determine the relevance and achievement of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability" (OECD, 2009[1]) (OECD, 2020[2]). It differs from the concept of monitoring, which is the systematic gathering of data to measure the progress of an ongoing initiative, in that it occurs at different stages, is issue-specific and customised (OECD, 2020[2]). Evaluation can provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process.

Despite progress to date, there is a need to build evidence on best practices for evaluating public communication. A wide gap remains between theory and practice due to the lack of standards and evidence of what works and what does not in this field. Indeed, policy makers and experts have not yet reached a consensus on "basic evaluation measures and standards", placing the field in a state of "stasis" (Macnamara, 2020[3]). These factors, together with the need to make public communication more data-driven, make building evidence on this field all the more important.

This chapter will explore different approaches used by governments to evaluate public communication. It will focus on an in-depth assessment of this particular area given the ample literature and country experience on monitoring and the need to address mounting challenges in regards to evaluation. As such, the first section will reflect on the growing importance of evaluation through an overview of practices in OECD and partner countries. In doing so, it will identify the main challenges inhibiting evaluation in this field. Acknowledging there is no silver bullet, the remaining sections will explore potential avenues to strengthen its institutionalisation, improve its focus from outputs to impact, and link metrics to organisational goals.

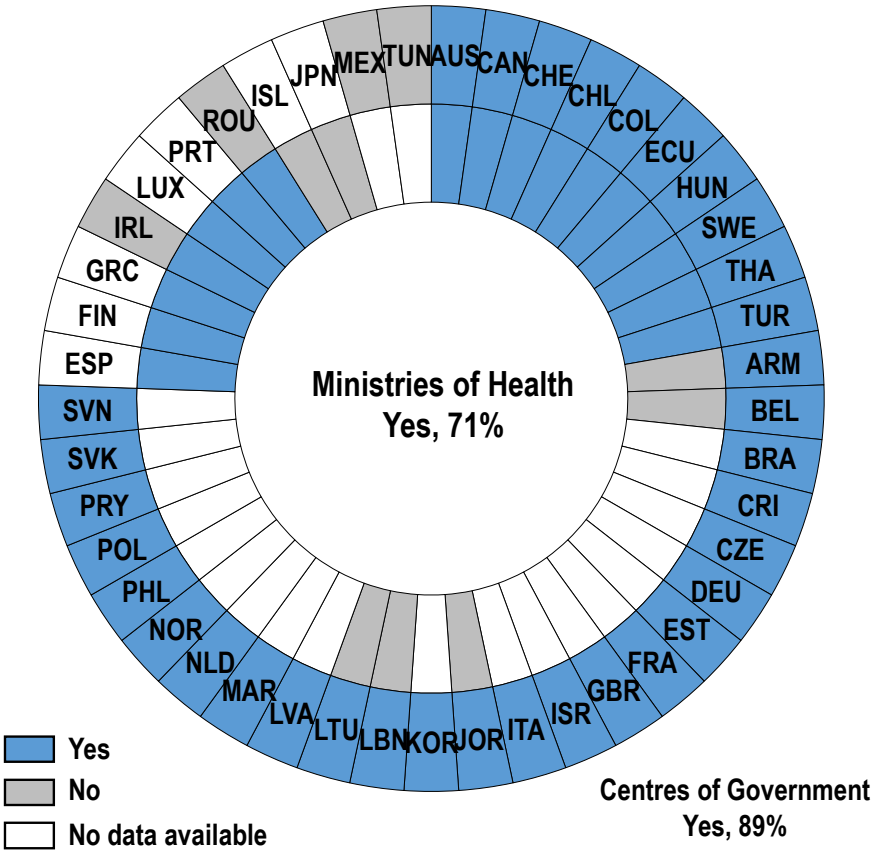
What does evaluation look like in the context of public communication?

Evaluation mechanisms and their systematic application are indispensable for governments to adopt a more strategic communication approach. Notably, they ensure that the function is efficient, achieves concrete impact, and contributes to policy objectives and government priorities. Evaluation can also provide legitimacy to the work of public communicators and better demonstrate its value to garner commitments from senior executives. Beyond the assessment of effectiveness being an end in itself, evaluation is a means of promoting a culture of openness by facilitating transparent government decision-making processes, encouraging the continuous monitoring of progress and promoting accountability for resources used (Macnamara, 2020[3]).

Indeed, evaluation is an essential tool for public communicators to assess the effectiveness of their initiatives, reduce risks of policy failure and promote learning. First, it can foster effectiveness by analysing whether initiatives reached the desired audiences and achieved their intended objectives. In doing so, it can provide timely insights on challenges or unintended consequences, enabling adjustments to given courses of action. Second, evaluation supports learning by building evidence of what works and what does not, helping to avoid failure as well as to inform the design of future strategic communications (OECD, 2020[2]). When applied consistently, this contributes to a better quality of decision making by providing insights on the links between policies, their communication and the impact of messages. Finally, evaluation can reinforce the open government principle of accountability by providing information about whether key communication efforts – and their allocated resources – are generating the expected results and delivering on "value for money" (Macnamara, 2020[3]).

In this regard, governments across OECD and partner countries generally recognised the importance of evaluating public communication. Figure 4.1 illustrates its widespread use at both the central level (34 out of 38 CoGs) and the sectoral level (17 out of 24 MHs). Its status as a core communication competency is also reflected by the fact that 27 of the CoGs that conducted evaluation have an established unit, team or individual for this task.

Figure 4.1. Share of CoGs and MHs that evaluate public communication activities, 2019



Note: Austria did not provide data for the CoG survey.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

While there is a rich diversity of evaluation practices across OECD and partner countries, several commonalities exist. By examining how evaluation frameworks define units of analysis (what is being measured), timeframes (*ex ante* or *ex post*), methods (how evaluation is carried out), and evaluating entity (internal, external or hybrid) patterns of best practices begin to emerge.

In terms of what is evaluated, communication can be assessed across several core competencies, or "levels of analysis" (Gregory, 2020[4]). As Table 4.1 illustrates, a large share of efforts in OECD and partner countries focused on the evaluation of campaigns (30 out of 33 CoGs) and their impact on the media (31 out of 33 CoGs). With the wide adoption of new technologies and their low entry costs, the assessment of digital and social media campaigns through impressions, likes and shares has also become a popular practice (32 out of 33 CoGs). This was the case of the "Belgium. Uniquely phenomenal" campaign, with an increase in international press coverage (75% in 2019 compared to 38% in 2018 and 19% in 2017), and an increase in the number of followers on Facebook specifically by 88%.[1] The least frequent evaluations in CoGs seem to concern the assessment of strategies (21 out of 33 CoGs) and internal communication (23 out of 33 CoGs), which suggests countries could focus more on systematically assessing organisational and strategic objectives beyond programmatic outcomes.

Table 4.1. Frequency with which public communication functions are evaluated by CoGs

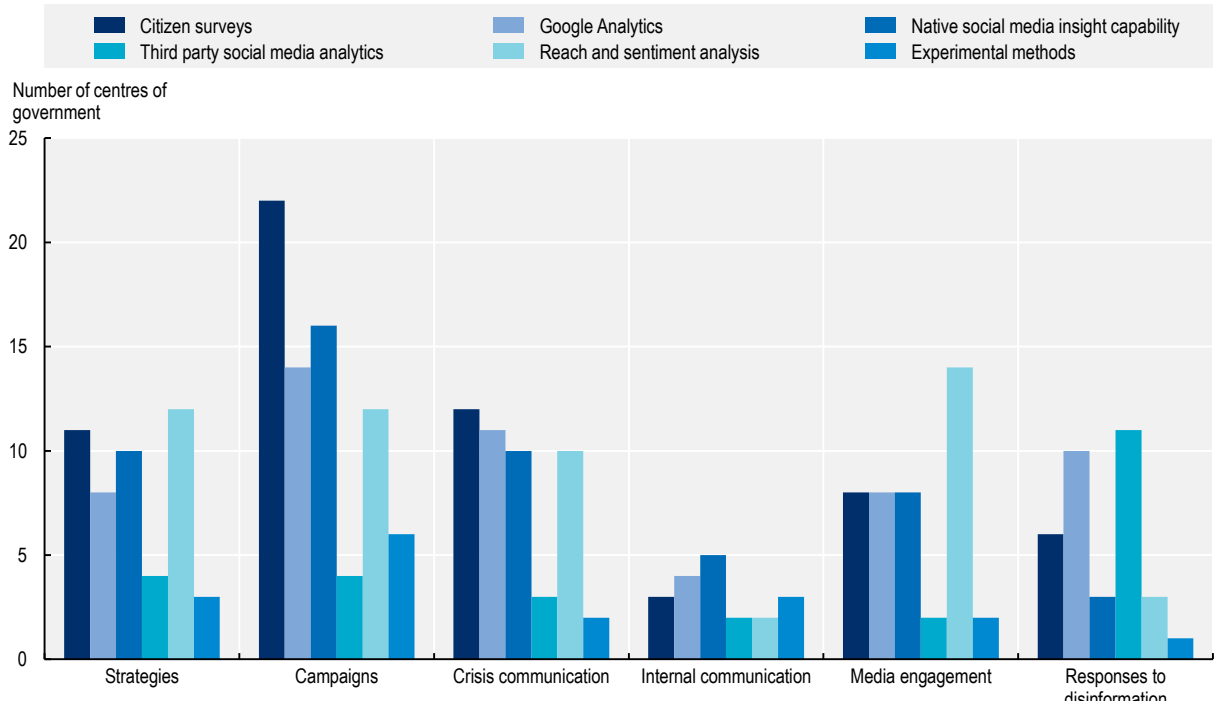
	Digital communication	Media engagement	Communication campaigns	Responses to disinformation	Communication strategies	Internal communication
Labels refer to: ● **Regularly** (Quarterly / annually / biannually) ▲ **Ad hoc** ■ **Never** ○ **NA**						
Australia	●	●	●	○	●	●
Belgium	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●
Canada	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲
Chile	▲	▲	▲	▲	○	▲
Colombia	●	●	●	●	●	●
Costa Rica	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	■
Czech Republic	●	■	▲	■	○	■
Estonia	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	●
France	●	●	●	▲	●	▲
Germany	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	■
Hungary	▲	▲	▲	▲	○	▲
Israel	▲	▲	▲	▲	○	▲
Italy	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲
Korea	●	●	●	●	●	●
Latvia	●	●	▲	■	●	■
Lithuania	●	●	●	●	○	●
Netherlands	●	▲	●	●	▲	▲
Norway	●	▲	■	▲	▲	▲
Poland	▲	▲	▲	▲	○	▲
Slovak Republic	■	■	▲	▲	○	■
Slovenia	●	▲	▲	▲	○	●
Sweden	●	●	■	▲	○	▲
Switzerland	●	●	●	▲	▲	●
Turkey	●	●	▲	▲	●	●
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●	●	●
● **Regularly** (Quarterly / annually / biannually)	14	10	10	6	8	10

▲ **Ad hoc**	10	13	13	16	8	10
Total OECD	**24**	**23**	**23**	**22**	**16**	**20**
■ **Never**	1	2	2	2	0	5
○ **NA**	0	0	0	1	9	0
Brazil	●	●	▲	▲	●	○
Ecuador	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Jordan	●	▲	▲	▲	○	■
Lebanon	▲	▲	■	▲	○	■
Morocco	▲	▲	▲	○	○	○
Paraguay	●	●	●	■	▲	■
Philippines	●	●	●	●	●	●
Thailand	▲	●	●	▲	●	●
● **Regularly**	18	14	13	7	11	12
▲ **Ad hoc**	14	17	17	21	10	11
Total All	**32**	**31**	**30**	**28**	**21**	**23**
■ **Never**	1	2	3	3	0	8
○ **NA**	0	0	0	2	12	2

Note: This table does not include countries that do not evaluate public communication, as per Figure 4.1. Austria and Armenia did not provide data for this question. Countries with non-applicable in the communication strategies column refer to those who do not have such guiding document in place as per responses to question 6. Slovenia and Sweden have communication plans or policies only, so were considered as non applicable for the purpose of this specific table.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Due in part to the wide range of competencies and activities public communicators evaluate, this field is also characterised by a variety of methods used in both OECD and partner countries, as indicated in Figure 4.2. The most common include surveys, web metrics (google analytics), tracking of news coverage and social media metrics (likes, reach, etc.). Governments rarely deployed methods such as randomised controlled trials or A/B testing, and when adopted, they were mainly applied in the context of campaigns. Given the diversity of methods, governments may find advantages in ensuring the selected mix of methods are fit for purpose against the intended degree of the rigour, availability of data and relevance of objectives for each evaluation (O'Neil, 2020[5]; Gregory, 2020[4]). Doing so will require an enabling environment for practitioners to ensure technical capabilities, guiding frameworks, adequate resources and high-level political support are in place.

Figure 4.2. Evaluation methods employed by CoGs for each communication competency



Source OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

The timeframe of evaluation is also a core criterion, notably whether these practices take place at the design or experimentation phase (*ex ante*), at the end of a communication initiative (*ex post*) or at both points. In practice, only four surveyed CoGs explicitly mentioned that they conducted evaluation at both the beginning and end of a given campaign. This is consistent with the fact that most public communication evaluations in CoGs were conducted on an ad hoc basis, and in most cases lacked an institutional framework for frequent application (see Table 4.1 above). Overall, findings concurred with general insights from the literature pointing to a general lack of *ex ante* evaluations within the field of public communication and the need to promote their use to set realistic baselines from which objectives can be more accurately assessed (O'Neil, 2020[5]); (Gregory, 2020[4]) (Macnamara, 2020[3]).

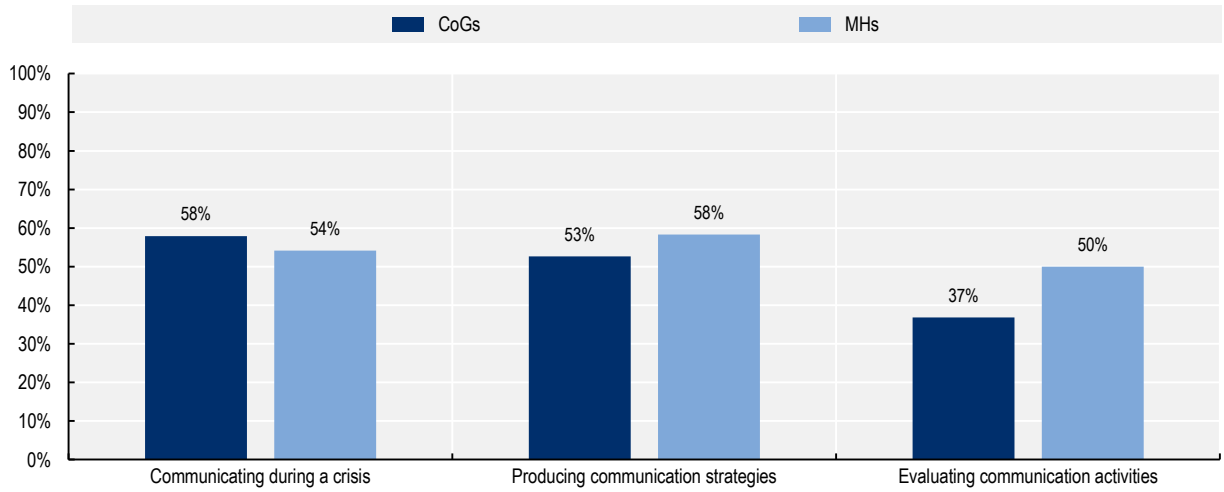
In terms of who evaluates, practices constitute the involvement of internal (the institution or another government entity on its behalf) or external actors (stakeholders outside of government). According to the survey, core communication functions within CoGs were primarily evaluated internally across both OECD and partner countries. Dedicated evaluation teams within CoGs were the primary responsible actors. Where these did not exist, a project lead or another entity within the institution conducted the evaluation. Engaging internal actors can be attractive as they may build on organisational knowledge, access data more easily than external actors and link results with organisational goals (OECD, 2020[2]); (O'Neil, 2020[5]).

In addition, some CoGs use hybrid approaches through the commissioning of evaluations to external actors. Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Netherlands and Paraguay are some examples of countries that in addition to their own staff may contract the private sector or external experts to conduct these exercises. The commissioning of external actors may help the results of evaluations be perceived as independent from political influence (OECD, 2020[2]); (O'Neil, 2020[5]). However, contracting external actors may present additional concerns in terms of costs and limited knowledge of internal organisational processes. Governments may benefit from engaging with external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, which will be discussed in further depth over the next sections of the chapter.

What are the main barriers inhibiting a frequent and systemic use of evaluation?

While a large majority of countries recognised evaluation as a core communication competency, 14 out of 38 CoGs and 12 out of 24 MHs considered it as one of the three most challenging competencies within their mandate (see Figure 4.3). According to OECD survey results, this was due to insufficiently skilled staff (10 CoGs and 8 MHs), co-ordination difficulties (5 CoGs and 5 MHs) and insufficient resources (5 CoGs and 4 MHs). Interestingly, five CoGs and three MHs mentioned both human and financial resources as key challenges.

Figure 4.3. Evaluation as one of the three most challenging competencies in CoGs and MHs



Note: N=38 CoGs. Romania CoG did not provide data for this question. Countries were asked to select the three most challenging competencies from the following options: communicating during a crisis, producing communication strategies, evaluating communication activities, implementing communication plans, planning or implementing communication campaigns, developing counter disinformation initiatives, planning or implementing digital communications and internal communications.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Beyond these institutional challenges, survey findings also revealed a series of factors constraining the application of evaluation in this field across OECD and partner countries. First, a majority of CoGs evaluated communications albeit infrequently and in a non-institutionalised manner, which impeded the consistent application and collection of quality data over time. Second, CoGs faced challenges in showing the contribution of the function to broader policy objectives given the prevalent measure of output (i.e. awareness levels, perception, reach) over impact. Third, evaluations were not generally linked to broader organisational goals, as most CoGs created indicators on an *ad hoc* basis (i.e. for each communication activity) and only a handful outlined these metrics *ex ante* within their communication strategy or plan. Together, these challenges were consistent with the broader institutional technical, legal/ethical and cultural factors inhibiting evaluation in many countries, as identified by research in this field (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Summary of challenges to evaluating public communication

Institutional	Lack of human resources / skilled staff Lack of an overarching communication strategy Lack of evaluation framework or guidelines Lack of dedicated financial resources
Technical	Difficulty of measuring impact and proving causality Conceptual confusion over monitoring and evaluation practices and their application. Use of invalid methods such as advertising value equivalents Difficulties in quantifying soft and contextual variables.
Legal/Ethical	Data privacy concerns over how population data is gathered, used and reported Management of biases that may inherently affect the interpretation of data from different population groups Ensuring the ethical application of behavioural change techniques
Cultural	Lack of incentives within the public sector to conduct evaluations Lack of political will to institutionalise evaluations

Source: Author's own work, adapted from (OECD, 2020[2]; Macnamara, 2020[3]).

Interestingly, the aforementioned challenges raised by survey respondents reinforce one another. Insufficient human resources (i.e. lack of skilled staff) exacerbate technical barriers to conducting robust evaluations, for example by inhibiting the use of advanced methods yielding higher quality or impact-related data. Moreover, the lack of an institutionalised framework or an overarching evaluation strategy may be one reason for the difficulty in linking the contribution of public communication to broader policy goals and assessing its impact. Moreover, difficulties in evaluating impact and showing causality may lower institutional incentives to invest in evaluation and hire additional staff. These findings align with those concerning the field of policy evaluation more broadly, where such interdependencies underline the need for a sound approach through setting a systemic model, promoting its use and ensuring the quality of results (OECD, 2020[2]).

Against this backdrop, the next section will explore opportunities for governments to address the core challenges of evaluating public communication, namely their lack of institutionalisation and synergies with strategic objectives, and general focus on outputs rather than impact. In doing so, it will first explore the extent to which evaluation practices are institutionalised, and identify existing de jure and de facto mechanisms adopted by countries in this regard. It will then discuss the importance of linking evaluation with organisational goals to reap their full learning and accountability benefits. It will lastly reflect on what evaluations examine in principle, arguing for the measurement of policy impact metrics to showcase the value of public communication.

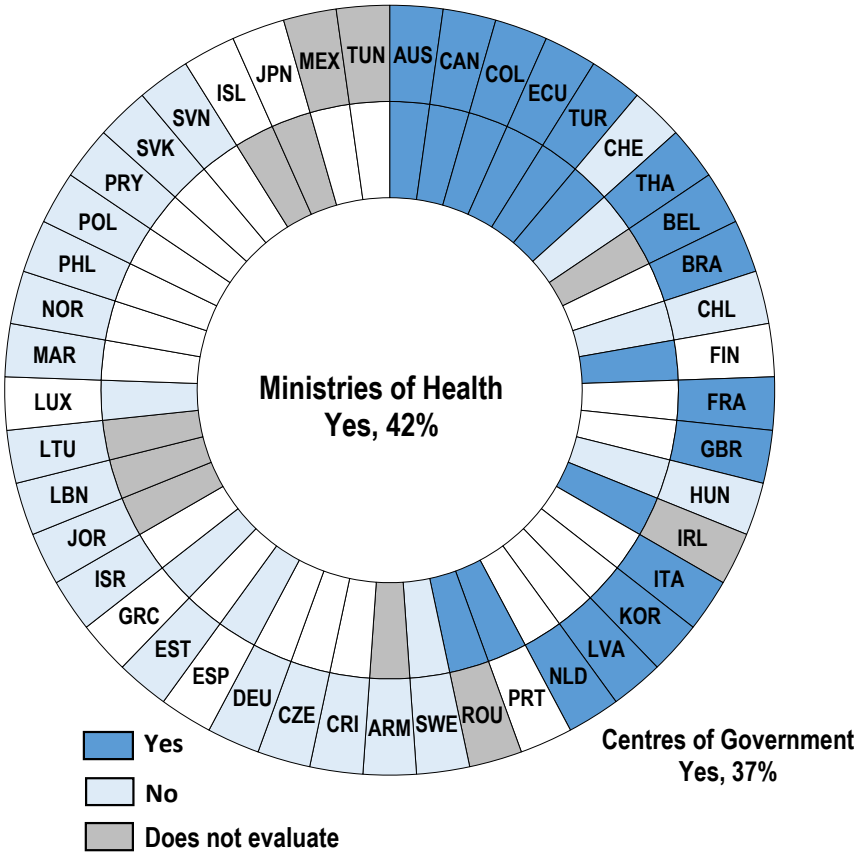
Promoting the consistent and formal application of evaluation

Institutionalisation is understood as the establishment of evaluation practices within government entities in a systematic way for their regular and consistent application (OECD, 2020[2]). It can take different forms, from the use of regulations, formal procedures or official mandates to policy instruments including practical frameworks, principles and guidelines.

Institutionalising evaluation is at the core of ensuring that public communication practices are fit for purpose. Establishing a systemic framework with a clear methodology, guidelines and templates for evaluation can contribute to aligning siloed efforts and promote the effective application of methodologies across the communications cycle. In doing so, it can help teams assess campaign and staff performance in a consistent manner to ensure the efficient allocation of human and financial resources. Formalising evaluation through a common approach can help simplify its implementation and encourage uptake. At the same time, an institutional approach can also support the role of evaluation in providing policy makers with high-quality evidence with comparable results across time, institutions, and disciplines (OECD, 2020[2]).

In practice, the low levels of institutionalisation in both OECD and partner countries is one of the main reasons why evaluation is underutilised in the field of public communication. In fact, survey results revealed that 53% of CoGs carried out evaluations in an *ad hoc* manner without an established methodology to ensure their consistent and regular application (see Figure 4.4).[2] Most countries conducting evaluations in this manner reported carrying out these practices infrequently, whenever there were available resources, appetite from the political leadership or specific programmatic needs. At the health sector level, evidence suggested that issues go beyond the ad hoc nature of practices in place, as 29% of MHs did not conduct evaluation in the first place.

Figure 4.4. Availability of institutional approaches to evaluate public communication in CoGs and MHs



Note: N= 38 CoGs and 24 MHs. Austria did not provide data to the CoG survey on this question. During the data validation process, all countries were assigned the category "institutionalised" or "ad hoc" based on their responses and were asked for a confirmation.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Given the technical and challenging nature of evaluating public communication, countries are recognising the importance of formalising processes and establishing shared methodologies. In fact, survey results revealed that practices in this regard were emerging in CoGs (37%) and MHs (42%) across OECD and partner countries. Among other things, these efforts took the form of legal and policy frameworks or expert communities of practice.

Indeed, several OECD countries have developed legal frameworks with concrete evaluation procedures for communication campaigns, for example, in government directives. The Government of Canada's Directive on the Management of Communications (2019) required the *ex post* evaluation of every campaign exceeding CAD 1 million (Canadian dollars) through a standardised reporting tool (see Box 4.1). Similarly, in the Netherlands, evaluations were mandatory for campaigns conducted on behalf of the central government with a media budget of EUR 150 000. An annual report was made public and shared with the Parliament with an overview of the total media expenses, the *ex ante* and *ex post* effects of each campaign and a comparative assessment of performance in relation to previous years. In the Australian state of South Australia, the Marketing Communication Guidelines (2020[6]) required the submission of *ex ante* evaluation criteria for the approval of all communication activities, regardless of their budget, as well as an *ex post* evaluation against these set objectives.

Box 4.1. The Government of Canada's Directive on the Management of Communications (2016)

The Government of Canada's Directive on the Management of Communications provides guidelines for managing and co-ordinating relevant activities, including procedures for public opinion research, digital communications and advertising. The Directive complements the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity, and its key objectives and expected results include whole-of-government co-ordination, citizen engagement and cost effectiveness.

Among other things, the Directive requires pre-testing and evaluating advertising campaigns that have a media buy exceeding CAD 1 million. Indeed, when considering such campaigns, public officials must first consult with their Communications Branch to ensure that research to support these activities has been identified on the approved annual public opinion research plan. Pre-testing and evaluation plans are developed in consultation with the Communications and Consultations Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) and co-ordinated with the Public Opinion Research Directorate of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC). Campaigns over CAD 1 million are evaluated using the Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool, provided by the PCO. Finally, campaign performance indicators and research results should also be discussed with the Communications Branch of the PCO.

Source: Last updated on 10/08/2019; available online at https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=30682.

Other practices to institutionalise the evaluation of public communication included the establishment of whole-of-government policy frameworks and guidelines recommending a "theory of change or programme theory logic" to evaluate inputs, outputs, outcomes, outtakes and impact (Macnamara and Likely, 2017[7]). In the United Kingdom, the Government Communication Service (GCS) Evaluation Framework 2.0 provided guidance for major paid-for behavioural campaigns by setting a shared methodology, common metrics and practical implementation templates (see Box 4.2). According to survey responses, the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism developed a dedicated strategy on communication policy evaluation (2020) with the aim of aligning the application of this function across sectors and ensuring quality control through established criteria. The Government of Belgium developed a set of guidelines for federal communicators outlining different methodologies and processes to conduct regular evaluations (Government of Belgium, 2014[8]). In addition, the Government of the state of New South Wales in Australia developed a dedicated framework, together with guidelines and an implementation matrix to support good practices (Government of New South Wales, 2017[9]).

Box 4.2. The UK Government Communication Service (GCS) Evaluation Framework 2.0

The UK's GCS Evaluation Framework 2.0 aims to provide guidance for major paid-for campaigns and the broader communication activities of departments across government. The Framework identifies three main types of funded campaign activities, including behaviour change, recruitment and awareness. The framework provides a set of specific and consistent recommended evaluation metrics for each. These metrics are framed around a "theory of change" logic that builds on four categories in the Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication's (AMEC) framework: inputs for evidence-based insights; outputs of communication and stakeholder engagement activities; outtakes of stakeholder experience; and behaviour change outcomes.

The Framework further elaborates on the objectives and scoring elements of the OASIS campaign planning guide. It provides professionals with a set of guidelines for effectively preparing, implementing and evaluating communication campaigns. These guidelines are based on fixed objectives that should contain three elements: a baseline, a numerical forecast of expected change, and an evidence-based explanation. It also recommends scoring to inform active communications, by focusing on outcomes and outtakes throughout the campaign.

Moreover, a five-step process is recommended to calculate return on investment, including setting objectives focused on quantifiable behavioural outcomes, establishing a baseline for metrics, identifying trends, isolating factors that could affect measurement outcomes, and accounting for any external factors that may alter the campaign.

Finally, the Framework highlights the importance of measuring and managing organisational reputation. To this end, it provides a simple guide focused on carefully choosing stakeholders aligned with the organisation's purpose, measuring reputation factors, such as organisational characteristics, relationships and third-party influence, and examining stakeholder behaviour and attitudes.

Note: OASIS stands for objectives, audience insights, strategy/idea, implementation and scoring/evaluation.
Source: UK GCS (2018[10]), Evaluation Framework 2.0.

Lastly, efforts in some countries benefit from formal and informal bodies building expertise and debating practices, frameworks and evaluation criteria. In the United Kingdom, the GCS established an evaluation council made of internal and external experts to review campaigns prior to their approval and following their implementation (see Box 4.3). In Canada, the Communications Community Office established a thematic network of public sector employees working in evaluation across different sectors.[3] The existence of public sector academies with dedicated curricula on the evaluation of public communication in countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom has also helped advance debate among policy makers and support champions to push for innovation in this field (see Chapter 2).

Box 4.3. The UK Government Communication Service Strategy and Evaluation Council

The UK's Government Communication Service (GCS) Strategy and Evaluation Council is an advisory body composed of strategic and evaluation communications experts from the public, private and third party sectors. The council was set up to support the GCS in developing and integrating best practice approaches to planning, delivering and evaluating relevant activities. Among its functions, the council helps shape cross-government communication initiatives, advises GCS members on how to best apply strategic planning and evaluation standards, and seeks to help improve the effectiveness and impact of GCS's activities and campaigns across government.

Moreover, council members provide guidance to individual government organisations with specific campaigns, audits of overall approaches, attribution modelling, calculating return on investment, or monitoring impact on specific audience segments. The council holds triannual meetings, hosted by government departments, agencies and public bodies, and aims to host an annual event focused on best public communication evaluation practices.

Source: Author's own work, based on https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-communication/evaluation/gcs-strategy-and-evaluation-council/

Against this backdrop, advancing the development of international standards in this field will be useful for public communicators to institutionalise evaluation practices. At present, the lack of consensus on appropriate methodologies, tools and principles of good practice for evaluating communication within government has inhibited the adoption of internationally recognised standards in this field (Macnamara, 2020[3]) (Macnamara, 2018[11]). The OECD is currently developing a set of international standards through the upcoming OECD Recommendation on Policy Evaluation, which will provide general insights that the public communication profession can build on and further adapt for its own purposes. Governments may also look to build on several other efforts from private and public initiatives to develop relevant guidance, including:

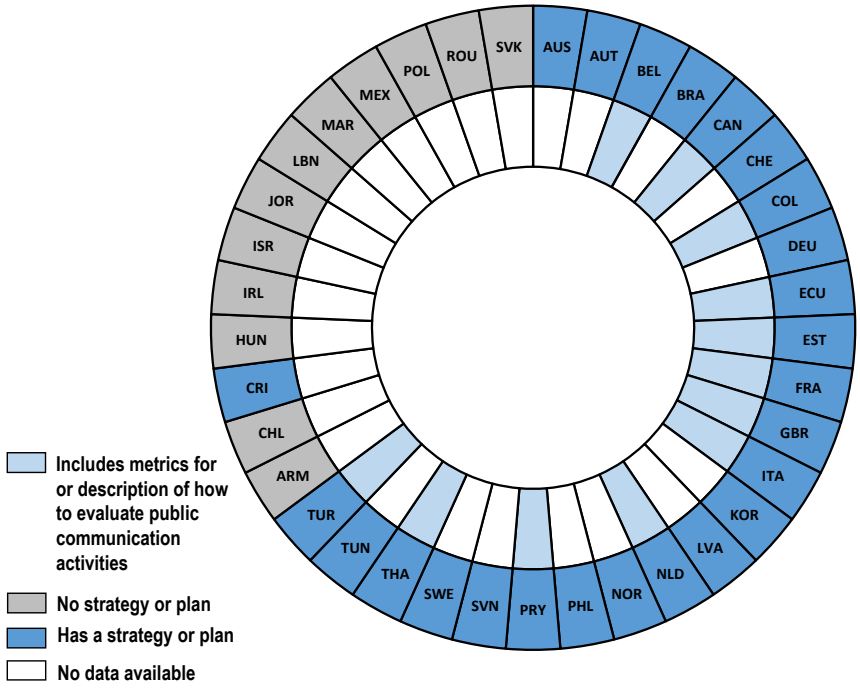
- ***The Barcelona Principles (2.0):*** The Barcelona Principles are a set of seven principles, providing a framework for effective public relations and communications measurement, adopted by public and private sector stakeholders from over 30 countries. The principles serve as a guide for practitioners to incorporate the changing media landscape and communication field into a reliable, consistent and transparent framework. The set principles include goal setting, measurement of communication outcomes, effect on organisational performance, quantitative and qualitative methods, and media monitoring (AMEC, 2015[12]). These principles include:
  a. "Goal setting and measurement are fundamental to communication and public relations".
  b. "Measuring communication outcomes is recommended versus only measuring outputs".
  c. "The effect on organisational performance can and should be measured where possible".
  d. "Measurement and evaluation require both qualitative and quantitative methods".
  e. "AVEs are not the value of communications".
  f. "Social media can and should be measured consistently with other media channels".
  g. "Measurement and evaluation should be transparent, consistent and valid".

- ***The Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) Integrated Evaluation Framework:*** AMEC's interactive Integrated Evaluation Framework aims to guide professionals through the process from aligning objectives to developing a plan, establishing targets and measuring outputs, outtakes, outcomes and impact of communications (Bagnall, n.d.[13]). This framework shows how to implement the Barcelona Principles by providing a tool that allows users to input data at each stage. In addition to providing definitions and examples, the tool also allows users to create reports based on the data submitted.
- ***European Commission's Toolkit for the evaluation of communication activities***: The European Commission Directorate-General for Communication developed a framework, guidelines and a code of conduct for European Union institutions to evaluate communication campaigns. The toolkit aims to guide the planning and implementation phase of communication activities deployed by Directorates in the European Commission. It also elaborates on different methods and types of evaluation metrics and indicators, and offers principles for effective planning (European Commission, 2017[14]).

Ensuring evaluation responds to strategic organisational objectives

Encouraging a systemic approach to demonstrate the value of public communication requires evaluation models that have a clear rationale tied to core institutional priorities. Reflecting on the direct contribution of this function to broader government objectives can help build an understanding of the "bigger picture" and nurture the strategic foresight that makes communication effective. While efforts to professionalise evaluation in this regard have been widespread, OECD survey data suggested that a small share of OECD and partner countries linked these assessments with strategic organisational goals. In fact, only 8 CoGs and 4 MHs that conducted evaluation outline metrics to assess activities from the outset of communication strategies or plans linked to government policy priorities (Figure 4.5). In addition, 4 CoGs included a description of how public communication activities should be evaluated, without specific indicators being outlined.

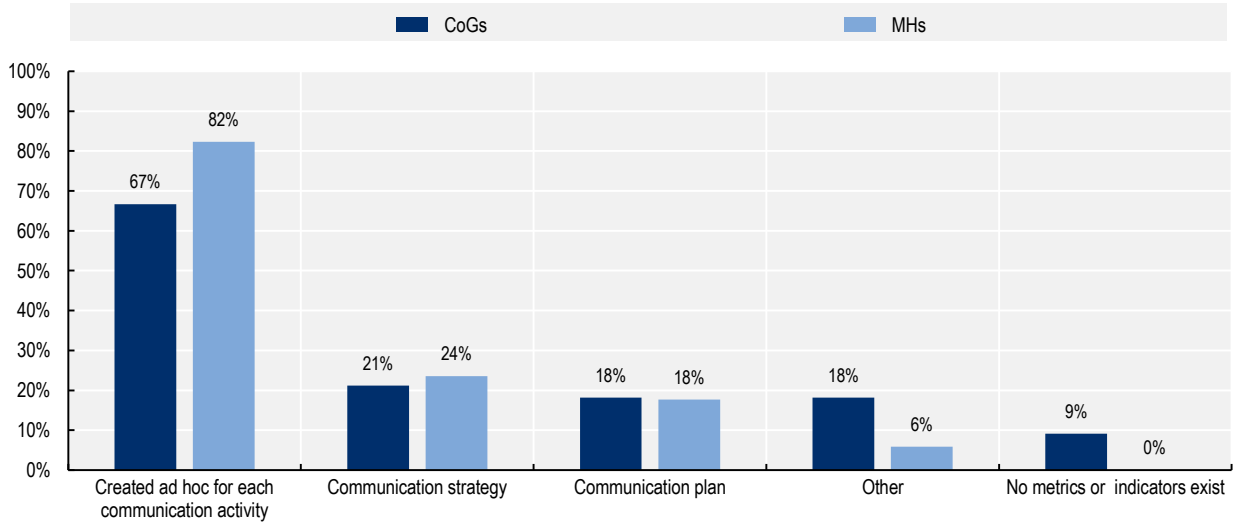
Figure 4.5. Availability of evaluation metrics in public communication strategies and plans in CoGs



Note: The outer ring outlines whether countries have a communication strategy or plan (in blue) or not (in grey), as per survey question 6. Lithuania and Czech Republic did not provide data for this specific question. The inner ring represents countries where communication strategies and plans include metrics for or a description of evaluation metrics for public communication activities therein. Austria and Jordan did not provide data for this specific question. Responses for the inner circle were sourced from question 48 from the survey asking where monitoring and evaluation metrics are outlined, as well as from a review of public communication strategies and plans submitted to the OECD as per question 6, 6a and 6b. Morocco noted that there is a Guidance document under development and Jordan that an internal document exists to provide guidance to team members. Costa Rica has thematic communication strategies.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In practice, OECD survey results indicated that 22 out of 33 CoGs and 14 out of 17 MHs created evaluation indicators on an *ad hoc* basis for each communication activity (see Figure 4.6). The informal and reactive nature of practices can be explained in part by the lack of institutionalisation discussed in the previous section, which in turn raises issues in setting baselines, monitoring progress, collecting comparable data and defining impactful targets. The lack of established metrics and their *ad hoc* creation in most countries also suggested difficulties in setting SMART objectives[4] from the outset. These challenges were exacerbated by the low application of *ex ante* evaluations, data from which can help provide a baseline for future exercises. Considering that 25 CoGs and 9 MHs claimed to have strategies and/or plans, these findings revealed potential gaps in ensuring congruence at all stages of the communication cycle, from strategic planning to feedback processes for the design of new initiatives.

Figure 4.6. Availability of evaluation indicators in CoGs and MHs



Note: N= 33 CoGs and 17 MHs that evaluate public communication as per Figure 4.1. Austria and Jordan did not provide a response to this question in the CoG survey.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

The development of evaluation metrics in synergy with a broader strategy or plan can provide a roadmap to show the value of this work in a consistent and credible manner. In the United Kingdom, for example, the 2019-20 Government Communication Plan sets clear professional standards for all departments through its comprehensive Evaluation Framework 2.0 and the GCS Modern Communications Operating Model (MCOM) (Aiken et al., 2019[15]). Within its strategic plan (2020-2024), the Government of Turkey sets out "objective cards" that include the rationale for each goal of all departments at the Directorate of Communications, KPIs with yearly targets based on a 2019 baseline, and related evaluation and reporting elements. Ecuador grounded communication evaluations in a broader results management framework (or "*Gestión por resultados*"), examining the outcomes of campaigns, the strategic management of this function and its contribution to government priorities. The country also outlined clear evaluation metrics for each of the government's objectives in its communication strategy.

Overall, OECD survey results suggested there is general agreement on the fact that demonstrating the value of public communication is not straightforward in practice and should be seen as an ongoing process. Five out of the eight CoGs that had established metrics linked with their communication strategy underlined the importance of remaining flexible and evaluating additional metrics depending on emerging needs as initiatives are rolled out. Monitoring processes informing evaluation also revealed the need to adapt courses of action and, at times, the strategic direction to achieve intended policy objectives. This is especially important as governments must engage with increasingly fragmented audiences through multiple channels and pursue various goals simultaneously amid a rapidly evolving media landscape (Ansgar and Volk, 2020[16]).

In this regard, OECD and partner countries are adopting tools to support the robust evaluation of organisational objectives linked to public communication activities. The Government of Canada developed the Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET) to assess post-campaign outcomes in a database shared across departments (see Box 4.4). Similarly, Colombia uses its Integrated Management System (SIGEPRE) platform to track indicators and provide an integrated dataset for policy makers on communication and its management (Presidency of the Government of Colombia, n.d.[17]). Beyond the direct inclusion of metrics in strategies, countries such as Australia, Korea and the United Kingdom have established Key Performance

Indicators (KPIs) and suggested data collection methods in cross-government guiding frameworks as detailed in the previous sections.

Box 4.4. The Government of Canada's Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET)

The Canadian government developed the Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET) in 2002, following a Cabinet Directive stressing the need for a standardised evaluation method across departments. The tool is a requirement of the Government of Canada's Policy on Communications and Federal Identityand is key in promoting consistent measurement and evaluation of public opinion.

The ACET was developed to ensure proper evaluation is conducted on large advertising campaigns; currently an ACET is conducted for campaigns exceeding CAD 1 million in media buy. Its main objectives include enhancing rigour and consistency in the evaluation of government advertising campaigns, creating a database of evaluations, establishing benchmarks and developing metrics against which campaigns can be evaluated. In September 2016, the tool was updated to include two new elements: a baseline survey conducted before the launch of ads in the media and a subsequent post-campaign survey with standardised questions. These new elements allow for comparison of insights over time.

Source: Author's own work, based on Edelman (2019[18]), Review of International Practices in Government Communication, available at https://www.ops.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/11/3.4.5-Resources-document-Review-of-International-Practices_Edelman-SENT-1308.pdf.

Showing the contribution of public communication to broader policy objectives

Concerning the elements that governments evaluate, survey results revealed that a majority of OECD and partner countries focused on the examination of outputs rather than outcomes and impact. As illustrated in Table 4.3, CoGs tended to evaluate first-order metrics focused on quantifying a communication initiative's reach (79%) and its effect on awareness levels (66%). This is consistent with the most popular evaluation methods employed in CoGs, which include *ex post* surveys, media monitoring, and review of social media impressions or other online analytics (see Figure 4.2 above).[5] Notably, data confirmed previous findings from the 2017 WPP Leader's Report, which reported that only 40% of respondents claimed to measure the impact of communication against set policy objectives (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[19]). While the evaluation of outputs can be helpful to measure the design and implementation aspects of a given initiative, on their own they do not provide sufficient insights on the broader effects of a communication activity.

Table 4.3. Types of public communication metrics evaluated by CoGs, 2019

Country	Number of people reached	Awareness level	Behaviour change in populations	Change in levels of stakeholder participation	Change in the uptake of public services	Unintended consequences	Possible reasons for underachieving goals	Other	Does not evaluate
Australia	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○
Belgium	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Canada	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○
Chile	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Colombia	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Costa Rica	○	●	●	○	○	●	○	○	○

Country	Number of people reached	Awareness level	Behaviour change in populations	Change in levels of stakeholder participation	Change in the uptake of public services	Unintended consequences	Possible reasons for underachieving goals	Other	Does not evaluate
Czech Republic	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Estonia	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○
France	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○
Germany	●	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○
Hungary	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	○
Ireland	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Israel	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○
Italy	●	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○
Latvia	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	○
Lithuania	●	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○
Mexico	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Netherlands	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	○
Norway	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Poland	●	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	○
Korea	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Slovak Republic	●	●	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
Slovenia	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sweden	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Switzerland	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	○
Turkey	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	○
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Total OECD									
● Yes	**22**	**20**	**15**	**5**	**12**	**5**	**10**	**3**	**2**
○ No	**5**	**7**	**12**	**22**	**15**	**22**	**17**	**24**	**25**
Armenia	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○
Brazil	●	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	○
Ecuador	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
Jordan	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○
Lebanon	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Morocco	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Paraguay	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	○
Philippines	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Romania	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Thailand	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tunisia	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Total All									
● Yes	**30**	**25**	**20**	**6**	**16**	**8**	**13**	**3**	**5**
○ No	**8**	**13**	**18**	**32**	**22**	**30**	**25**	**35**	**33**

Note: Austria did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

As outlined in Chapter 3, with the increase in the creation of behavioural units across governments, over half of surveyed CoGs (53%) and MHs (46%) claimed to evaluate the impact of communication through analysing behaviour change in populations (see Table 4.3 above). This can be a key means to examine

whether campaigns are achieving their intended objectives to "improve knowledge, change individual attitudes, or modify degrees of social support for a given policy (Wundersitz, 2019[20])". In Italy, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers implemented a campaign to promote the use of masks, social distancing and hand washing and evaluated its impact to understand success factors and areas for improvement (see Box 4.5).

Box 4.5. Evaluating the effect of the "Mask/Distance/Hands/#threesimplerules" campaign in changing the behaviours of Italian citizens

During the second wave of the pandemic, a key priority for the Italian Government was to ensure messages reached and resonated with groups of the population that were reluctant to follow health measures, such as wearing a mask, keeping social distancing and washing your hands. As such, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers implemented a multi-platform campaign focused on these three elements, with messages created for selected audiences, divided by different targets, such as youth and small and medium business owners, and by regions.

Thanks to a 3-week campaign on Facebook and Instagram, studies concluded to a 2.4 point increase in remembering the ad campaign and +1.5 in compliance with the three rules. The messages amplified with Ads reached 33% of intended audiences. Eight Ads were launched (Video, Stories, Carousel) with Ad credits offered by Facebook to spread awareness and have an impact. In total, the campaigns generated 16.8K post likes and the total engagement rate reached 25%. Evaluation of these BI informed campaigns enabled the government to measure the number of individuals reached and the effects of the messages to inform the development of future communication material.

Source: Author's own work based on OECD survey responses submitted by Italy.

In the Netherlands, the government developed the Communication Activation Strategy Instrument (CASI) to support the measurement and evaluation of policy outcomes in campaigns based on behaviour change objectives (see Box 4.6). While governments are increasingly adopting social listening techniques, OECD survey results reveal that existing practices tend to focus on general perceptions and impressions, which on their own are insufficient to substantiate links between behaviour change and policy outcomes, as argued in Chapter 3.

Box 4.6. The CASI instrument in the Netherlands

The Communication Activation Strategy Instrument (CASI) tool was developed to guide professionals through the development of campaigns by helping them measure, understand and achieve objectives, allowing for a clear communication strategy from the outset.

The instrument is based on a series of comprehensive questions, divided into four main steps:

1. **Translate the policy objective to the behavioural objective**

   Identify the key targets for behavioural change, objective measurements of the behaviour, where and when the behaviour in question is shown, and the desired behaviour change.

2. **Target group analysis**

   Analyse the target audience and its behavioural journey, including its social and physical environments and other behavioural determinants, in order to elaborate responses to achieve strategy goals.

3. **Strategy choice**

   Choose a strategy that best suits the target group, based on emotion, inclusion, social influence or motivation, and develop a summary of the strategy's behavioural goal and implementation methods.

4. **Performance**

   Identify action perspectives, communication opportunities, and resources and channels that can be used.

Source: Author's own work, based on Edelman (2019[18]), Review of International Practices in Government Communications, available at https://www.ops.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/11/3.4.5-Resources-document-Review-of-International-Practices_Edelman-SENT-1308.pdf

The emphasis on outputs and broad perceptions may help explain why OECD and partner countries are facing challenges in linking the contribution of the communication function to broader policy goals. In fact, only a small share of CoGs evaluated the impact of communication initiatives beyond awareness of a given policy, for instance through analysing changes in service uptake (42%) and stakeholder participation levels (16%). This is consistent with the fact that, even among the few countries that have established frameworks, most tend to omit the perspective of stakeholders to design and evaluate the effectiveness of communication activities (Macnamara, 2018[11]). Examining the effect of public communication on perception, satisfaction and engagement in public life, for example, can provide powerful insights to design policy interventions that are responsive to the needs of different population groups, in particular marginalised segments.

Assessing impact at the organisational level is also critical to ensuring the strategic direction of communication and its contribution to broader government priorities. In practice, OECD survey results revealed that a small share of CoGs evaluated potential reasons for underachieving goals (34%) and unintended consequences (21%) which may inhibit opportunities for institutional learning. The evaluation of these elements are indispensable in providing governments with a complete picture of how effectively a communication initiative is achieving policy goals, delivering on organisational objectives and justifying its costs (OECD, 2020[2]).

Beyond metrics, the over-reliance on outputs is also visible in the most important reasons for conducting evaluations cited by OECD and partner countries. According to OECD survey results, 55% of CoGs considered tracking performance through the development of quantitative data as the main reason for

conducting these exercises. A moderate share considered the examination of behavioural change (45%) and perceptions of general policies (42%), but impact on stakeholder participation (13%) and public service uptake (26%) were less prioritised. While these results suggest a recognition of the benefit of evaluation in ensuring the effectiveness of campaigns, this framing can reinforce the conception of communications as a "one-way" mechanism to share government information without considering its effect on stakeholders more broadly (Macnamara, 2020[3]).

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for how communicators can or should evaluate policy-oriented impact, several OECD countries are using specific outcome and impact metrics to ensure high-quality insights. In the United Kingdom, the guide for the GCS Framework 2.0 provided a series of metrics to evaluate behaviour change, awareness, recruitment and stakeholder engagement aspects of a given campaign, along with suggested measurement methods (GCS, 2018[10]). These included the proportion of the target audience that modified their behaviour, audience sentiments about campaign messages, attitudinal changes, expressions of interest, responses to calls to action, and return on investment across all campaign aspects. In Australia, the framework of New South Wales and its implementation matrix provided a roadmap for evaluating outcomes[6] as well as impact[7] through a set of proposed metrics, milestones and data collection methods (Government of New South Wales, n.d.[21]). The framework suggested examining the impact of initiatives with metrics such as complying behaviour, quality of life, cost savings and policy buy-in (see Box 4.7).

Box 4.7. Guidelines for implementing the evaluation framework of the government of New South Wales in Australia

The government of New South Wales developed a set of principles to guide public communication professionals in applying the NSW Evaluation Framework. These principles provide clear guidelines for setting objectives and ensuring effective strategic planning and evaluation.

The guidelines emphasise the importance of a whole-of-society approach, considering stakeholders throughout the communication process. The importance of creating a two-way dialogue with external actors and evaluating impact is underlined through the encouragement of listening, collaborating and relationship building. Evaluation of such activities and outcomes includes identifying the needs, concerns, experiences and responses of stakeholders and citizens in relation to the communication programme and its messages. Moreover, the economic, social, cultural and political context should be considered when setting objectives and conducting evaluation to consistently readjust and revise goals.

An evaluation implementation matrix complements the guidelines, providing further detail under each stage of the framework. These include brief descriptions or definitions, key steps, examples, metrics and milestones, and methods for generating evaluation data.

Source: Author's own work, based on Government of New South Wales (2017[9]), Guidelines for Implementing the NSW Government Evaluation Framework for Advertising and Communications, available at https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidelines%20for%20Implementing%20the%20NSW%20Government%20Evaluation%20Framework.pdf

Various OECD countries have also begun to evaluate the short-, medium- and long-term effects of campaigns and their specific contributions to broader policy aims (see Box 4.8). Sharing these types of results not only supports accountability, but also shows the value of public communication and helps make the case for future investments in this field. Other examples of the impact of campaigns that governments were able to demonstrate through rigorous evaluation can be found in chapters 3 and 7.

Box 4.8. The GREAT Britain Campaign

The GREAT Britain Campaign is an international marketing effort launched by the government in 2012 to promote key sectors, including tourism, education, and business. It provides an integrated and unified platform for the overall international promotion efforts of the Department for International Trade (DIT), Visit Britain, the British Council and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Using sector-specific methodologies approved by the National Audit Office, the campaign secured incremental economic returns of GBP 2.7 billion, with GBP 1.77 billion from international and domestic tourism, GBP 720 million from trade and foreign direct investment, and GBP 228 million from international education. In particular, the "Food is GREAT" campaign led by the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has helped boost British trade in food and drink exports from GBP 20.1 billion in 2016 to more than GBP 22 billion in 2017-18.

Evaluation was placed at the core of the campaign's activities from the outset, which has allowed the government to convey key results that helped the team secure funding through to 2020.

To effectively measure the campaign's activities, evaluation was carried out on three different levels. The first is at an organisational level, where monitoring and evaluation teams within each institution are in charge of tracking and analysing the return on investment (ROI) from marketing activities. Evaluation methods are further conducted at an aggregated level by the central GREAT team through ongoing ROI analysis, overall appraisal and an assessment of private sector support. Finally, scrutiny is conducted by the campaign's Senior Responsible Officer, with review and sign-off from the GREAT Programme Board and, review by HM Treasury and the NAO."

Source: Bird, C. (2017[22]), Why evaluation is GREAT, civil service quarterly, United Kingdom, available at https://quarterly.blog.gov.uk/2017/08/16/why-evaluation-is-great/

Evaluations should also seek to assess the impact of public communication on the ability of citizens to contribute to public life. Anchoring evaluations in an end-user perspective is important given how this function can enable stakeholder participation by ensuring optimal flows of information, effective state-citizen interfaces, and two-way dialogue mechanisms. Moreover, the inclusion of trusted voices from non-government stakeholders in the process of evaluation can help improve their design, relevance, transparency and independence (OECD, 2020[2]). In fact, OECD survey results suggested that only 9 out of 34 CoGs engaged with civil society and academic institutions for evaluating campaigns. Examples illustrating the integration of these actors took different forms, from the commissioning of evaluations to universities such as in Thailand, to the formal inclusion of civil society in the Government Communication Service Strategy and Evaluation Council in the United Kingdom. Additional research could help build a better understanding of how to include the perspective of external actors across evaluations to measure changes in stakeholder engagement in the policy-making process and beyond. The Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's 2020 Strategy on Policy Communication Evaluation provides an example of initial efforts to measure stakeholder participation and citizen satisfaction-related impact (see Box 4.9).

Box 4.9. The 2020 Strategy on Policy Communication Evaluation in Korea

The 2020 Strategy on Policy Communication Evaluation developed by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism sets out guidelines for the general direction of evaluation as well as specific criteria and methods for its application. It aims to strengthen tangible outcomes and the impact of evaluation. To achieve this, it seeks to enhance evaluation methods related to policy communication, citizen participation and citizen satisfaction. Moreover, the strategy underlines that evaluation should be simplified and reflect on the effectiveness of the COVID-19 response.

The strategy further underlines different methods for evaluation, including qualitative and quantitative evaluations of communication performance; conducting evaluations on a quarterly, semi-annual and regular basis; and reflecting overall results in a final evaluation at the end of the year. Evaluation criteria include three main categories: outputs, outcomes and citizen realisation. For the latter, metrics are based on the rate of satisfaction with communications and responsiveness, evaluated through perception surveys or polls, online data collection (i.e. social media monitoring), and direct observation. These criteria account for 25% of total evaluation metrics.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Evaluating impact alone, however, will not contribute to developing a strategic communication if its results are not utilised in the end. According to OECD surveys, using evaluation results to inform communications is not a common practice, as only a quarter of CoGs in OECD and partner countries make use of data associated with evaluating the impact of public services, for example. Given their high costs, having an end-user perspective during its design and subsequently selecting an appropriate methodology are important elements to ensure these exercises are fit for purpose, in particular to yield high-quality data that feeds into the strategic design of communications. The OECD also underlines the importance of building capabilities, developing standards (i.e. for data collection or wider evaluative processes), setting advisory panels, involving external stakeholders and facilitating access to results as some ways to ensure the quality and utility of policy evaluations more broadly (OECD, 2020[2]).

Key findings and way forward

- While the importance of evaluating public communication is widely recognised, OECD member and partner countries have scope to expand its application. Evidence points to the lack of institutionalisation, the limited integration of evaluation within strategic planning processes and the predominant focus on outputs over impact as the main inhibiting factors. The lack of adequate human and financial resources compound these challenges.
- Institutionalising evaluations in the field of public communication can ensure they are more consistently used, help instil methodological rigour, and facilitate the comparability of data across institutions, activities and time. CoGs are critical in embedding a systemic approach through the dedicated use of *de jure* or *de facto* mechanisms. Existing practices include the use of government directives, regulations, models, guidelines and communities of practice, among others.
- Evaluation cannot contribute to strategic communication if it is not linked to the policy priorities of the given institution. Integrating evaluation from the onset of the planning process of a given communication strategy or initiative is also essential to promote a culture of accountability and enable an evidence-driven communication.
- Going beyond the evaluation of communication outputs and measuring changes in behaviour, stakeholder participation levels and or uptake of services for example can help show the contribution of communication activities to broader policy goals. Examining the reasons for underperformance and unintended consequences may also provide valuable insights for public sector organisations to learn from. Evaluating the impact of communication activities can also provide evidence in support of future investments in the profession and position it as a key lever of government activity.
- Anchoring evaluations in an end-user perspective and including trusted voices outside of government in such endeavours can help improve their design, relevance, transparency and independence. Given the low level of involvement of civil society and academia in this practice, further research could help identify opportunities to integrate the perspective of these actors in relevant processes, in particular in its initial stages.
- Difficulties in evaluating public communication are also due to the lack of internationally recognised standards and principles of good practice adapted for governments in this field. To that end, building on existing international efforts, including the forthcoming OECD Recommendation on Policy Evaluation, and sharing successful country-level examples will be a valuable way forward.
- Further research could be conducted with the aim of mapping evaluation processes at the country level to understand the impact of existing evaluation models and in turn, inform the development of principles of good practice specific to the profession. Codifying successful practices could also help illustrate how governments can better evaluate the impact of public communication on broader policy objectives and stakeholder engagement. Such research could also support governments in moving beyond establishing robust monitoring and evaluation processes toward adopting a culture of ongoing learning within public institutions.

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Notes

[1] Belgium's answer to the OECD CoG Survey.

[2] According to the survey data, 52.6% of CoGs conduct evaluations in an ad hoc manner, 36.8% on an institutional basis and 10.5% do not conduct evaluations at all.

[3] Information retrieved from the 2019-2020 Communications Community Office Annual Report available online at https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/communications-community-office/reports/annual-2019-2020.html.

[4] SMART objectives refer to those that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and with a specific time frame.

[5] As of 2020 Ireland does significant evaluation on communication effectiveness, particularly with respect to Covid-19 Public Health advice, evaluating number of people reached, awareness levels, behaviour change in populations, unintended consequences and possible reasons for underachieving goals.

[6] Outcomes refer to short term and long term, asking what the target audience/s take out of communication and initial responses and what sustainable effects the communication has on target audiences.

[7] Impact refers to the reflection on the full effects and results are caused, in full or in part, by the communication activity.

5 Communicating in an evolving and fast-paced digital age

This chapter explores emerging practices and salient issues that governments should consider when communicating in a fast-paced digital environment. It will begin by taking stock of how Centres of Government and Ministries of Health are communicating in today's digital landscape to build an understanding of how this function is perceived and valued and to identify trends and existing challenges. In advocating for digital by design approach, it will explore the opportunities for governments to amplify the reach, interactivity and inclusiveness of online communication efforts.

Introduction

The digital revolution is transforming the relationship between governments and citizens. Notably, it is enabling more participatory, innovative and agile ways for them to communicate (OECD, 2020[1]). Social media platforms and mobile technologies have changed not only the way in which information is consumed, but also how individuals engage and interact with one another, with more direct links between producers and consumers of information, as well as a blurring of the lines between these two groups (Murphy, 2019[2]). The extent to which public communicators are able to capitalise on these opportunities while addressing the potential negative effects of today's fast-paced and evolving digital era (i.e. digital divides, data privacy concerns, online mis-information and echo chambers for example) can help efforts in reaching more open and inclusive societies.

This is especially true in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which underlined how critical digital communication can be to save lives. Throughout the crisis, the Internet served as a lifeline for citizens to sustain daily activity, engage in collective efforts to curb the spread of the virus and consult timely, relevant and accurate information. As economic, political and social activity expanded rapidly online, new possibilities opened for governments to reach wider audiences in more rapid, efficient and cost-effective ways. However, while the world embraced this shift at an accelerated pace, the pandemic also exacerbated the consequences of pre-existing digital divides and inequalities, as well as the spread of mis- and disinformation.

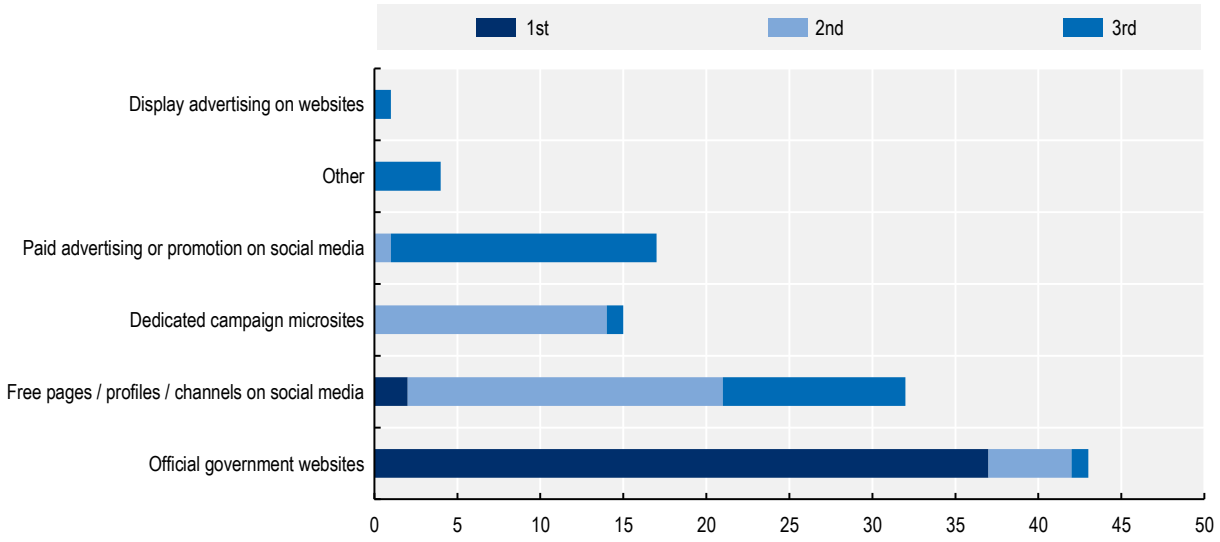
Against this backdrop, the chapter will explore avenues for governments to communicate effectively in a continuously evolving and fast-paced digital environment. It will begin by taking stock of how CoGs and MHs are communicating in today's online landscape to identify trends and establish how this function is perceived and valued. It will advocate for a shift in the focus of public communication from information sharing to engagement through a "digital by design"[1] approach promoting integrated online and offline omnichannel[2] delivery models. In doing so, the chapter will assess emerging practices and salient issues governments can consider when operating in a digitally intensive environment.

How are Governments communicating in a digital age?

Unlike traditional channels, digital technologies are offering multiple opportunities for governments to foster optimal flows of information, as well as to engage meaningfully with stakeholders in new online spaces. Beyond social media, the use of websites, emails, videos, online advertising, mobile applications and crowdsourcing platforms provide multiple interfaces where public communicators can respond to various audience needs. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, voice assistants and augmented reality are also demonstrating potential to disrupt traditional one-way communication models. Indeed, technologies are offering new avenues for public institutions to reach vulnerable groups, open new spaces for dialogue, automate information-sharing processes and digest large volumes of data instantaneously.

With the growing adoption of digital technologies, CoGs in both OECD and partner countries have consolidated an online communication presence through a variety of channels (see Figure 5.1). OECD survey results revealed that institutional websites and social media platforms are the most popular means to engage with the public. In terms of websites, respondents noted the importance of institutional pages, as well as "one stop shop" sites centralising relevant information in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A moderate share of CoGs also indicated paid advertising on social media (44%) and dedicated campaign micro sites (38%) among their top three most used channels. In fact, online advertising through social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter) has become the primary means through which a large share of CoGs (63%) deliver government campaigns. Overall, preferences regarding specific digital interfaces were consistent across CoGs and MHs, despite differences in organisational arrangements.

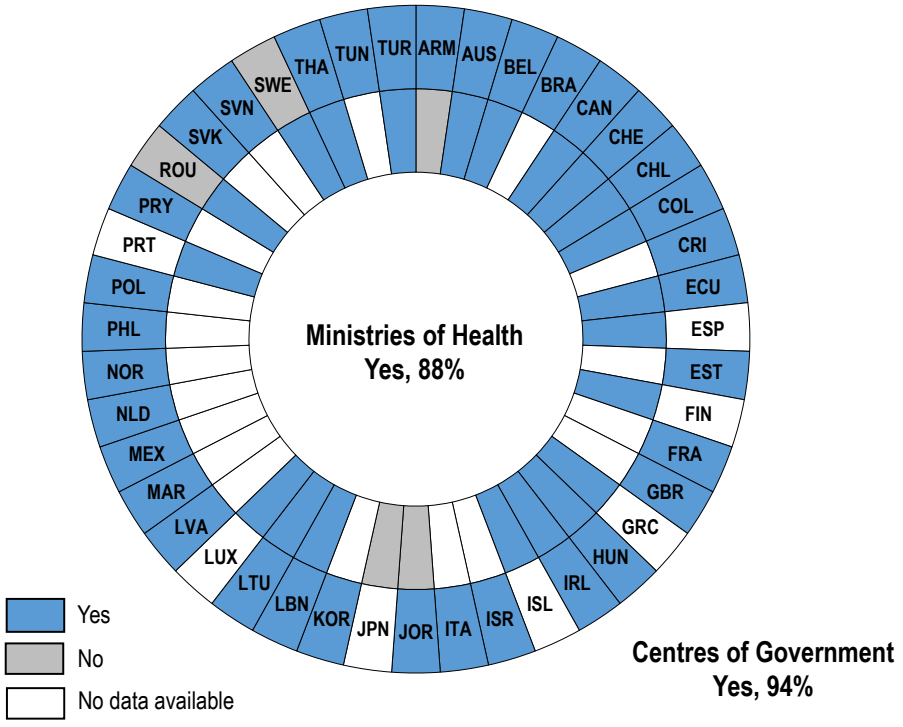
Figure 5.1. Top three digital communication channels used by CoGs to make citizens aware of government policies and announcements



Note: The number of countries in the "official government website" option is greater than 39 given that BEL, PHL and SVK selected the option in two or three different ranks to reference different online interfaces.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Governments across OECD and partner countries at both the central and health sector level perceived digital communication as a priority area of their work (see Figure 5.2). In fact, survey results indicated that 34 out of 36 CoGs had a dedicated unit, team or individual in charge of managing digital communications. Organisational arrangements within CoGs primarily took the form of a digital communication department. In some cases, survey results also revealed that different units or departments shared these responsibilities, such as in Sweden and Italy. These arrangements were consistent at the health sector level, where 21 out of 24 MHs had a dedicated team or unit in this regard.

Figure 5.2. Digital communication structures, teams or individuals in CoGs and MHs



Note: Austria, Czech Republic and Germany did not provide information for this question in the CoG survey. In Sweden, there is no specific unit established for digital communication but this work is embedded in the tasks of all sections within the communication division.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

As digital technologies are increasingly embedded in the work of public communicators and government administrations more broadly, their integration raises questions about the degree to which a distinction should be drawn between "digital" and "non-digital" communication. The next section will therefore take stock of CoGs' and MHs' use of tools such as mobile applications, social media open government data portals and other emerging technologies. In doing so, it will argue for a shift in the way communication is conceived, from a one-way mechanism for pushing information toward serving as an instrument to engage with a wider variety of stakeholders. It will also advocate for the adoption of a "digital by design" approach in today's online age to foster omnichannel online and offline modalities that promote more accessible and inclusive communication.

Mobile technologies

Mobile technologies have contributed to shaping a new online environment for users to access and exchange high volumes of information instantaneously. On the one hand, the growing adoption of online platforms on mobile devices has changed media markets and profoundly affected traditional news providers in print, radio and television. Indeed, mobile technologies have emerged as essential means of distributing timely news and information to a wide range of audiences (Newman et al., 2019[3]). Messaging apps like WhatsApp and WeChat, for example, have become primary networks for citizens to connect with each other and share news, particularly in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa (Newman et al., 2019[3]).

At the same time, mobile technologies are offering new opportunities for governments to reach wider audiences. The adoption of such technologies, referred to by the OECD as "m-government" and including both government use of social media and their creation of dedicated mobile applications, can help

strengthen public performance, promote a more connected society and solidify open governance (OECD/ITU, 2011[4]). As Table 5.1 illustrates, mobile tools have the potential to supplement existing e-government applications and processes, expand reach to marginalised citizens, and innovate by encouraging stakeholder participation in the design and delivery of news and services (Siddhartha et al., 2013[5]).

Table 5.1. M-government

Supplement	Mobile technologies provide additional features and channels for public administration services, processes and communication. Given their wide adoption, they represent an attractive and low-cost means to generate public value for a wider population group.
Expand	Mobile features are presenting new opportunities to re-design or adapt conventional public services and communication to the needs of traditionally underserved groups in public life. In particular, mobile features can help address communication and service delivery gaps by widening access to marginalised groups such as rural communities, individuals with disabilities and low-income households.
Innovate	In the process of re-designing and adapting traditional services to new mobile interfaces, these technologies offer opportunities for governments to re-imagine their delivery and governance models. Mobile technologies can provide new ways for citizens to engage with government, ensure more transparent information sharing and promote accountability.

Source: Author's own work, based on the three types of m-government framework of (Siddhartha et al., 2013[5]).

In the context of communication, m-government can enable public institutions to rapidly disseminate and amplify the reach of news and information. Its immediacy can be particularly useful in a crisis, where mobile technologies can quickly alert citizens on emergency measures, for example. Lower price-point, ready-for-use and smart mobile devices can also reduce existing "demand side" barriers, empowering citizens to connect with governments and access a wide variety of information and services across numerous policy domains (i.e. health, education, tax, employment and transportation) (OECD/ITU, 2011[4]). These tools also have a key role to play within the public sector, notably by facilitating internal communication, information sharing and whole-of-government co-ordination processes.

For example, governments are making use of SMS and smart messaging applications to inform the public, promote behavioural change, and improve the delivery and uptake of services. Indeed, in its Self-Assessment campaign intending to boost tax intake, the UK Government targeted customers most susceptible to missing the deadline and sent a series of SMS reminders, leading to a substantial decrease in late returns (UK GCS, 2019[6]). In the context of COVID-19, the Government of Uruguay leveraged the use of messaging applications, including WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, to enable a multi-channel communication strategy and two-way dialogue to reach, inform and engage all segments of the population rapidly and efficiently.

The potential for mobile technologies to provide online interfaces for the government and its citizens to engage through digital applications is also clear. Notably, Health Canada launched a COVID-19 app to aid citizens to track potential symptoms, access the latest updates through trusted resources, and receive timely notifications, news and alerts. As part of these efforts, it also launched a complementary app called COVID Alert to identify and notify citizens of possible exposures to the virus. These programmes were among those featured on the "Mobile Centre", a catalogue of government and third-party applications using public sector data (Government of Canada, 2020[7]). The Korean government also developed a COVID-oriented app called CoronaNOW to empower the populace during such a difficult crisis context (see Box 5.1). Similarly, the government of Switzerland created the SmokeFree Buddy App within the framework of its 2018 tobacco prevention campaign (Government of Switzerland, n.d.[8]). The app, developed by experts in smoking cessation, provides an innovative and interactive way to guide people who want to quit and directs them to trusted sources of information and government support programmes or services available to them.

Box 5.1. The CoronaNOW application in Korea

Mobile applications can help governments communicate more effectively with their citizens on emergency measures. The CoronaNow mobile application (https://www.coronanow.kr) updates citizens instantly on COVID-19 statistics based on data from the Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC). In under three minutes, the team of developers manually inputs the data and visualises the information in graphs to provide citizens with up-to-date, clear and relevant statistics on the spread of the virus. The team also works collaboratively with stakeholders outside of government, for example, with international student volunteers from Daegu University to create COVID-19 news articles, videos, and summary results from the data analysis lab.

The application was developed due to the increase of misinformation on social media about COVID-19, generating anxiety among the public. As such, CoronaNow's main goal is to aggregate content disseminated across different platforms to provide accurate and unbiased official sources of information concerning the pandemic. CoronaNow informs citizens of case counts – confirmed cases, testing and deaths – while also providing practical information on nearby screening locations, online shops selling affordable face masks, news updates and information on domestic actions taken to contain the virus. The application also provides global data released by foreign websites such as the John Hopkins University and Tencent, China.

Another feature called "Channel Talk" enables users to provide feedback, ask questions and thus, allows for a two-way engagement between the government and its citizens. The CoronaNOW application and website showcase how governments can empower citizens through the dissemination of information in accessible ways, while amplifying the reach of their policy goals during a time of crisis. Through using these innovative applications, citizens were able to take part in the government action plans as important stakeholders and were able to shape the response to the crises.

Source: Author's own work, based on the contributions from the Korea Development Institute.

Nonetheless, data privacy concerns have become more prevalent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with the adoption of mobile applications with tracking features. These applications, which collect geospatial and other forms of citizen-related data, are helping governments monitor and contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, communicate warnings to communities at risk and test the effects of messages on crisis measures (i.e. social distancing, confinement or vaccination) (OECD, 2020[9]). However, the OECD found that new digital solutions for monitoring and tracking purposes "have varying implications for privacy and data protection, with issues emerging over the collection and sharing of this information" (OECD, 2020[9]). As Chapter 3 illustrates, data governance arrangements on the collection, management and storage of this information should be reflected to ensure fully accountable and transparent privacy-preserving solutions. In this regard, the European Commission established in 2016 a robust data protection framework recognising privacy behind its management as a fundamental right (see Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Data protection framework in the European Union

In 2016, the European Commission established a robust framework on data protection through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Law Enforcement Directive and other rules concerning the protection of personal data.

The GDPR was set out to protect individuals with regard to the processing and free movement of personal data, underlined as an essential step to strengthen fundamental rights within the digital age. The regulation also aims to facilitate business, by cancelling out unnecessary administrative burdens and solidifying rules for public bodies and companies in the digital single market. Similarly, the Data Protection Law Enforcement Directive was implemented to protect citizens' personal data when used by criminal law enforcement authorities for law enforcement purposes, and to facilitate cross-border exchange and co-operation in the fight against terrorism and crime.

To ensure that these rules are well respected and applied, the GDPR established an independent body, the European Data Protection Board (EDPB), composed of representatives of the national data protection authorities of EU and EEA countries. To this end, the EDPB tasks include providing general guidance, and advising on issues related to personal data protection, new proposed legislations and binding decisions in disputes between national supervisory authorities. The European Commission also appointed an independent Data Protection Officer, in charge of monitoring proper internal application of these data protection rules.

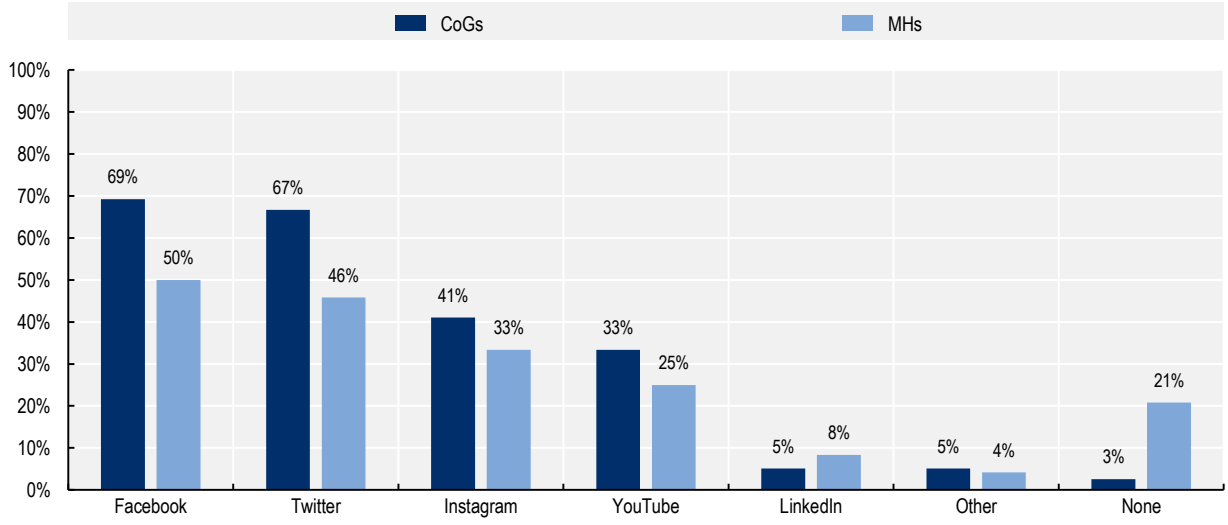
Source: Based on European Commission (2016), https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu_en.

Social media

Social media platforms have revolutionised the way societies connect, interact and share information. By opening new digital fora, these platforms have empowered individuals, communities and social movements to thrive online. They have also ushered in a dramatic expansion of the volume and use of data, facilitated interactions between organisations and provided new opportunities for the public and private sectors to innovate. Governments, businesses and citizens alike have also become more reliant on these platforms since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular as social and economic activity has been displaced to the online sphere.

With civic activity flourishing online, the high opportunity costs of not establishing a social media presence have prompted governments across the world to prioritise a variety of these platforms for communication purposes. As Figure 5.3 illustrates, a large share of CoGs and MHs in OECD and partner countries made use of free pages on Facebook (69% and 50% respectively), Twitter (67% and 46%), Instagram (41% and 33%) and YouTube (33% and 25%). Given their high usage rates, social media platforms offer opportunities to personalise communications and engage more meaningfully with citizens through their immediate and interactive features (Murphy, 2019[2]) (Graham, 2014[10]). In particular, survey results revealed that these platforms were highly attractive for CoGs and MHs due to their low entry and utilisation costs, as most respondents considered financial resources one of the top three limiting factors for the delivery of communications more broadly.

Figure 5.3. Most frequently used social media platforms by CoGs and MHs



Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Although its various functions and benefits have opened new and unprecedented possibilities, these platforms are also introducing novel challenges for governments, businesses and society at large. Indeed, the rapidly evolving digital frontier has raised concerns over privacy, security, data management, social inclusion, and the unchecked spread of mis- and disinformation – all of which can have serious repercussions for democracy. These factors have been particularly pressing as governments must keep up with the rapid evolution of social media trends and in using digital spaces for ubiquitous engagement (Lee and Kwak, 2012[11]). Indeed, public communicators must also grapple with these tensions while promoting a two-way dialogue in these spaces to foster more open and inclusive democracies.

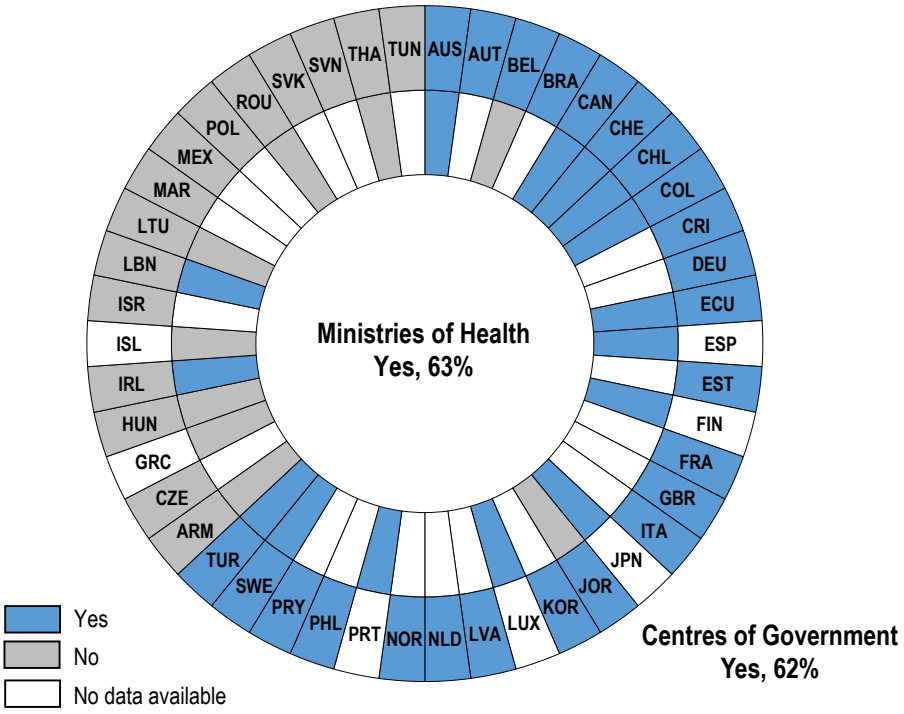
Against this backdrop, the following section will reflect on how CoGs and MHs are taking advantage of these platforms through an in-depth assessment of guidelines for government social media use. In doing so, it will build on the OECD's framework in this field to identify the key challenges ahead for governments to promote a purpose-oriented use of these platforms in the digital sphere.

Promoting purpose-oriented communication by governments through social media

Social media use in government is no longer a question of choice. Among their many benefits, these platforms are proving vital in amplifying the democratising effects of public information, as well as engaging citizens who may not use or have access to traditional channels or legacy digital platforms. To reap their full potential, however, governments ought to identify strategic objectives for their use, understand the risks of communicating through these platforms, and establish in turn effective internal policies.

In this regard, establishing a sound governance framework through *de jure* or *de facto* mechanisms is a core element for a purpose-oriented use of social media in the public sector. The importance of providing clear guidance for public institutions to communicate on these platforms is widely acknowledged in practice, as more than 62% of CoGs (24 out of 39) and 63% of MHs (15 out of 24) in OECD and partner countries have adopted the use of dedicated guidelines, manuals or policies (see Figure 5.4). Broadly, a purpose-oriented approach calls for continuously adapting the use of social media according to emerging trends, external shocks, and the needs of internal and external stakeholders (Mickoleit, 2014[12]).

Figure 5.4. Availability of social media guidelines in CoGs and MHs



Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Table 5.2. The OECD's checklist for purpose-oriented use of social media in government

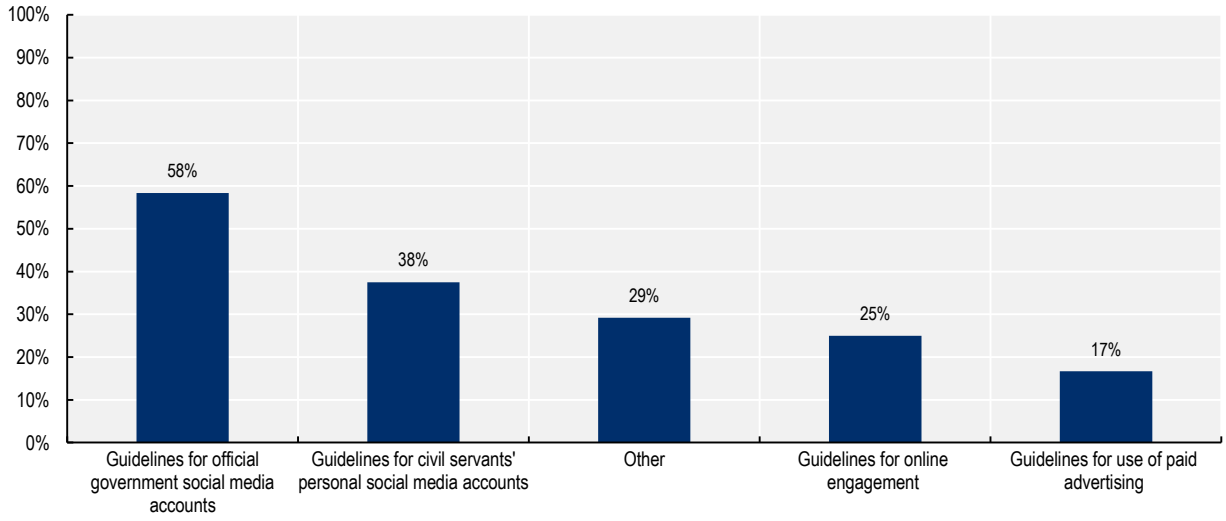
Issue	Questions to be raised and answered
Objectives and expectations	What is the core mission of my institution? What are the most important information and services provided by my institution? How important is public communication for achieving my institution's core objectives? How can social media support my institution's core mission? What are examples from similar domestic or international institutions? Can social media enable outside actors to support selected activities of my institution?
Management and guidelines	Is there a central oversight body for social media use across government or is the preferred operating mode one of dispersed innovation? How can different organisational units in my institution leverage social media, e.g. the public relations department, the IT department, the policy making department, the service delivery department? Is there a need for social media guidelines for civil servants, including for personal use? Is there a need for social media guidelines for official institutional accounts, e.g. a given ministry? Who, if anyone, sets guidelines for social media use by politicians or appointed high-ranking civil servants representing an institution?
Legal compliance	What are the specific legal and regulatory provisions that may have an impact on social media use? Are social media covered by or excluded from official record-keeping? What disclaimers should be added to the institution's social media presence? What information is my institution allowed to re-use when it comes to privacy protection or compliance with intellectual property laws? How can we ensure that the institution's social media use meets requirements for accessibility of information and services?
Skills and resources	What human resources are available or can be mobilised to achieve sustainable impacts? Are social media skills addressed by wider (digital) skills strategies? How are social media expenses accounted for? Can they be extracted from overall communications expenses to calculate specific costs?

Issue	Questions to be raised and answered
Collaboration and community building	Do government communities exist where I can exchange social media experiences? What co-ordination or collaboration mechanisms would help my institution?
Managing risks	What are the reputational risks for my institution and how much damage would be associated with them? Does my institution need to worry about unintentional disclosure of information? What share of civil servants uses social media in their personal capacity? Are social media risks addressed by overarching strategies for managing risks in my institution or government?
Monitoring and measuring social media impacts	How advanced are my social media indicators? What do they measure: presence, popularity, perception or purpose? Does my institution use indicators that evaluate the contribution to core objectives? What would be an ideal set of metrics for my institution's use of social media? What information sources can I use to move from the current metrics to an ideal set of purpose-oriented indicators?

Source: Mickoleit (2014[12]), Social Media Use by Government: A policy primer to discuss trends, identify policy opportunities and guide decision makers.

As Figure 5.5 illustrates, a significant share of countries have established dedicated guidelines for the governance of social media in the public sector, but for different purposes and various target groups. A majority (14 out of 24 CoGs) had guidelines in place for official institutional accounts (e.g. a Facebook account of a specific ministry or department). Fewer had guidelines that determine what individual civil servants were expected to do and not do when using social media in their personal capacity (9 out of 24) and directives for engaging on these platforms (6 out of 24). Only a small number had guidelines in place for managing paid advertisement (4 out of 24). Countries that selected "other" (7 out of 24) made use of resources such as manuals (Costa Rica and Ecuador), dedicated strategies (Norway) or policies (the Philippines), internal operating procedures or "netiquette" guidelines (Jordan and Germany) and constitutional or legal provisions (Turkey).

Figure 5.5. Types of social media guidelines shared by CoGs



Note: N= percentages are calculated over 24 CoGs who claimed to have social media guidelines.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In this regard, survey results also indicated that specific sector-level guidelines existed in 10 out of 15 of MHs in OECD member and partner countries. In fact, 6 out of 15 MHs reported having internal guidelines within the ministry together with whole-of-government directives in this regard. Conversely, 4 out of 15 MHs claimed to use sector-specific guidelines developed by the institution on their own. While these

findings suggest that guidelines are primarily general in nature, MHs tended to use sector specific directives to complement whole-of-government guidelines or make up for their absence.

While guidelines are country-specific, a review of these documents provided by CoGs revealed a series of shared traits.[3] First, 9 out of 16 of these resources referenced specific regulatory provisions on data privacy, intellectual property or public sector reforms (Australia, Colombia, Italy, Norway, Paraguay, the Philippines, Sweden and the United Kingdom), codes of conduct (Australia and the United Kingdom), or an overarching communication policy (Canada and Norway). Linking guidance to broader regulatory frameworks does not only empower communicators to fulfil their mandate but can also help set a strategic vision for social media to support broader government objectives. Second, guidelines in 9 out of 16 countries outlined the potential risks of social media use. These ranged from data privacy concerns to those regarding security, ownership of content, viral spread, mis- and disinformation, reputation risks, and detractors or "social media hooligans" as the government of Latvia refers to them. Third, a moderate share of documents (7 out of 16) articulated the main institutional objectives of social media use. For example, social media guidelines in Paraguay outlined the objectives for each platform, linked to the goals defined in the overarching whole-of-government communication strategy.

Nonetheless, findings also suggested that a risk-averse approach predominated in the use of social media. Further research into the extent of this approach and the reasons behind it would be required in the future. A relatively low number of guidelines shared by CoGs outlined the benefits and incentives for using these platforms (5 out of 16) compared to those that noted potential risks. In line with these findings, only a small number of guidelines outlining benefits explicitly included the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability or stakeholder participation. Added to this is the complex constellation of policies and regulatory frameworks that may exacerbate risk averseness by limiting operations and requiring civil servants to balance conflicting stakeholder interests (Mehta, 2021[13]). This is particularly challenging given the bureaucratic nature of verification and approval processes across different institutional layers, which may introduce delays and reduce the relevance of online content (Murphy, 2019[2]). These factors together can lead to a culture within the public sector that moves slowly and carefully when it comes to designing, approving and releasing content through social media platforms.

While many guidelines contained objectives to promote an aligned approach, most lacked a clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities for various actors, as illustrated above. Lack of clarity can increase the cost of designing and delivering social media communications, cause bottlenecks, and generate delays given the various institutions and internal actors (e.g. community manager, communication unit and policy teams) involved. Setting clear attributions is also critical in light of the proliferation of different types of government accounts on these platforms – political, institutional, individual – which may blur boundaries between the political and public character of communication therein, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Murphy, 2019[2]). This is particularly relevant as OECD survey results revealed that only 9 out of 39 CoGs and 6 out of 24 MHs have specific guidelines for the personal use of social media (see Figure 5.5 above).

In addition to its strategic framing, providing implementation support in the form of tactics, tools and resources can support the articulation of guidelines into concrete action. OECD survey findings revealed that only a small share (3 out of 16 of guidelines shared by CoGs) included concrete tools, templates or other relevant practical resources for such a purpose. Adequate human and financial resources to provide both the means and incentives to standardise practices should also complement implementation mechanisms. However, most guidelines did not reference these elements (only in 4 out of 16). While these issues were addressed in other documents (i.e. such as public communication strategies), the complex patchwork of directives revealed a need to better cross-reference this information, in particular given the various actors engaged through these directives. For instance, to equip communicators with the right tools and skills, the Government of Chile created a one-stop shop with general guidelines and resources to use these platforms consistently (see Box 5.3).

Box 5.3. The Government of Chile's Digital Kit

The Government of Chile's Digital Kit is a one-stop-shop with manuals, tools and templates to facilitate the communication work of public officials through social media. Public officials can consult up to date resources such as manuals on managing institutional websites, applying graphic norms for government visual material, ensuring an inclusive communication free of gender stereotypes and social media use in general. It also provides templates for institutional websites, typographies and a library of visual material to align the communication of all public institutions under one visual identity and voice.

The portal also houses the government-wide social media guidance document ("*Decálogo de Comunicación en Redes Sociales para Cuentas Gubernamentales*"). The guideline provides a series of recommendations for different types of government accounts on generating effective content, managing interactions with users and the role of community managers. The document also includes concrete information on: the overall communication objectives of the National Administration; Engaging with the public Designing effective visual and audio content for different audiences; Managing crisis communication through social media; Developing a digital content strategy; Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and Addressing privacy and security concerns.

Source: Author's own work, based on https://kitdigital.gob.cl/.

To improve the effectiveness of social media use by public institutions, guidelines must be updated continuously to reflect changing trends. This will be all the more important, as 9 out of 15 guidelines shared by CoGs[4] were published or updated prior to 2018, with the oldest document dating back to 2011. Indeed, increasingly fragmenting audiences and emerging technologies require governments to keep up with the fast pace of trends through the adoption of new working methods and tools. Continuously adapting the overall strategic vision for using these platforms in line with broader public communication strategies can also enable leaner and more flexible ways to design, validate and release content.

In addition to guidelines, countries are adopting complementary measures to promote a purpose-oriented use of social media through communities of practice which help build expertise and exchange lessons learned. As discussed in Chapter 2, OECD survey results indicated that networks of public communicators are emerging both at the technical and strategic levels in this particular area. In the Canadian Government, for example, thematic communities meet regularly to exchange techniques and approaches, such as co-ordinated campaigns and strategies, social media tactics, engagement, and evaluation. At the strategic level, the Government of Norway organises weekly meetings with heads of communication to align priorities and streamline a unified digital presence.

Open government data portals

In our data-intensive societies, open government data (OGD) is playing an important role as an engagement-driven communication mechanism with the public. OGD is understood as "digital data that is made available with the technical and legal characteristics necessary for it to be freely used, reused and redistributed by anyone, anytime and anywhere" (IODC, 2015[14]). It includes data held by national, regional, subnational and international government bodies in the wider public sector, both in the form of raw data sets and data aggregated through dashboards, portals or trackers.

The role of OGD in promoting transparency and stimulating engagement and opportunities for dialogue with the public cannot be understated. First, OGD portals can serve as tools to proactively communicate up to date, clear and reliable information and improve access to other relevant public sources. Second, this mechanism can promote two-way communication that increases opportunities for stakeholders to

interact with governments while also allowing the latter to maximise the value of data sets (Shaw, 2015[15]). In fact, OGD portals can enable stakeholders to participate in collaborative processes to define and solve pressing policy issues by making government information easy to integrate and opening spaces to crowdsource public contributions. Third, OGD can support the debate of policy options by simplifying detailed technical information through accessible visualisation formats (OECD, 2019[16]). Lastly, OGD can also enable the internal articulation and sharing of relevant information to promote a strategic whole-of-government communication approach. In sum, OGD can play an important role in strengthening a citizen-centred and participatory form of democracy through increased engagement and dialogue, in line with the principles of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (OECD, 2018[17]) (OECD, 2016[18]).

The OECD OURdata 2019 survey reveals that various governments are enabling OGD portals as tools to promote data-driven communication and opportunities for citizen feedback. In Chile, for example, the Ministry General Secretariat of the Presidency launched a call for artists to develop original digital content with OGD (OECD, 2020[19]). In Korea, the National Information Society Agency used an open API to support government efforts to proactively disclose information on COVID-19 mask distribution (see Box 5.4). In countries such as Australia, Canada, Estonia, Korea, the Netherlands and Sweden, governments are hosting hackathons to encourage stakeholders from different backgrounds and expertise to work with OGD in response to particular challenges (OECD, 2020[19]).

Box 5.4. The use of an open API by the National Information Society Agency in Korea

OGD can serve as a two-way communication instrument to encourage engagement and dialogue between different stakeholders to find policy solutions to common challenges. In Korea, open data was leveraged in order to proactively disclose the availability of face masks during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, the National Information Society Agency in Korea (NIA) converted raw data from the Health Insurance Review and Assessment Service (HIRA) into an open API and shared this information with private companies.

The published data enabled developers in the private sector, civic-hackers, start-ups, and other communities to release over 150 applications and web services where citizens and sellers could check for mask availability in real-time. This gave citizens access to inventories of face masks and their availability at nearby selling points in real-time. The Open API also promoted transparency, by enabling citizens to become watchdogs and ensure that masks were being purchased and effectively distributed by the government in real time. Through these applications, citizens could thus hold their government accountable during the pandemic. These services and applications showed a high usage rate by recording 670 million API calls on face masks in three weeks and decreased the number of complaints about the distribution of masks significantly.

Source: Author's own work, based on the contributions from the Korea Development Institute.

The role of OGD as a two-way communication mechanism has also gained traction in the advent of the COVID-19 crisis. Notably, an analysis by the OECD and GovLab of 76 initiatives revealed that communicating the status of the pandemic was the most prominent use of OGD during the initial stage of the crisis from March - July 2020 (OECD/The GovLab, 2021[20]). MHs and national statistics offices provided daily updates on the number of cases, deaths, recoveries and demographic distribution of infections primarily through dedicated COVID-19 dashboards and data trackers. The report also underlines that "almost three-fourths of all OGD projects addressed health communications and informative charts rather than pressing economic or social needs, with a predominant emphasis on providing situational awareness rather than assessing or predicting impact" (OECD/The GovLab, 2021[20]). A good example is

the COVID-19 dashboard in France led by the Ministry of Health, Etalab and the SIG to promote a more transparent and proactive sharing of information at the national, regional and departmental levels (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5. The French COVID-19 open data portal

OGD can improve transparency, one of the key pillars of an open government agenda. Similarly to many other countries, in France, a dashboard led by the Ministry of Health and Etalab was developed to provide COVID-19 related information at the national, regional, and departmental level, in collaboration with the SIG for its conception and visibility on the Government's COVID-19 hub. The dashboard provides statistics on the spread of the virus, including the number of hospitalisations and recoveries as well as figures on the "solidarity funds" for small businesses impacted by the pandemic.

More recently, the dashboard has detailed statistics on the French vaccination campaign. Users can easily check the number of individuals having had their first injection in each region as well as the statistics regarding fully vaccinated individuals. The dashboard also provides the number of vaccines available for medical centres and information on the establishments getting priority access.

To centralise the information available with government action plans, the COVID19 dashboard links to up to date information by the French government on its latest briefings including those relating to the national curfew put in place, the groups that can get vaccinated as well as frequently asked questions.

Source: Author's own work, based on https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus/carte-et-donnees (accessed on 31 May 2021).

Despite the emerging use of OGD as a transparency and engagement-driven communication mechanism, the OECD OURdata 2019 index found that its potential remains generally underexploited. The results from this report reveal that numerous OGD portals are predominantly used as top-down information-sharing tools, taking the form of "static websites or data catalogues" (OECD, 2020[19]). In regards to survey responses provided by CoGs and MHs, OGD was not mentioned as a common means of fostering innovation, collaboration and knowledge sharing, nor as a resource to inform communications more broadly. This underutilisation is compounded by the lack of evidence and good practice principles for how governments can use OGD to foster collaboration around problem identification, improve the proactive sharing and access to information, and collect feedback in the context of public communication. Future efforts could focus on developing such principles to provide insights into the potential link between OGD and the work of public communicators at both the CoG and sector level.

Emerging technologies

Public communication is a field in constant evolution. Technological developments and their impact on media and information ecosystems are creating new opportunities for governments to connect with citizens in new places, at new times and in new ways. The disruption of these emerging technologies, however, is taking place faster than the pace at which governments can effectively or consistently integrate them. Ensuring governments have the necessary capabilities to readily embrace novel technologies is therefore critical to develop innovative communication approaches in today's crowded media and information ecosystem.

Emerging technologies are essential in driving innovation in the public communication profession and keeping up with 21st century challenges. These technologies are defined as those of "recent adoption, or currently under development, that offer disruption to the current operating models of government and allow for innovative solutions for policy and service delivery, and to the socio-economic context overall" (Ubaldi et al., 2019[21]). OECD survey results and research suggested that novel technologies such as artificial

intelligence, augmented reality, natural language generation and processing, virtual assistants, and others (see Table 5.3 for more examples) had a wide variety of applications in the field of public communication.

Table 5.3. Examples of emerging technologies

Transparently immersive experiences	Augmented reality Connected home Brain-computer interface Artificial body parts, exoskeletons Nanotechnology 3D and 4D printing Graphene and new materials: materials with new features Virtual reality
Digital platforms	5G Edge computing Distributed ledger technology Smart contracts Global cryptocurrencies, local crypto currencies, programmable money, crypto KYC regulation Internet of Things (IoT) platforms Software-defined security Li-Fi
Artificial intelligence solutions	Virtual assistants (chat bots or voice bots) Speech recognition Natural language generation Natural language processing Biometrics Computer vision Machine learning Deep learning Swarm intelligence Robotics Recommender systems Expert systems Affective computing Intelligent decision support systems Digital twin

Source: Ubaldi et al. (2019[21]), "State of the art in the use of emerging technologies in the public sector", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 31, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/932780bc-en.

First, artificial intelligence technologies are showing great potential as interfaces for citizens to consult official, clear and up-to-date information. For example, the Government of Latvia developed a virtual assistant in the public administration called UNA to reply to frequently asked questions regarding the enterprise register (Ubaldi et al., 2019[21]). The use of chat bots has also been particularly prominent during the COVID-19 crisis, where countries such as Croatia, Estonia, Korea, Mexico, Panama and the United Kingdom have set up virtual assistants to provide information on a 24/7 basis and provide more responsive communications (see Box 5.6). In the case of Estonia, the Suve chatbot was co-designed with citizens through the Hack the Crises hackathon in March 2020, illustrating the opportunity to engage citizens and provide more inclusive communication (OECD, 2021[22]). In countries such as Croatia, Mexico and the United Kingdom, virtual assistants were programmed into instant messaging platforms (e.g. WhatsApp) to take advantage of the high usage of mobile technologies.

Box 5.6. The use of chatbots in Korea

Leveraging artificial intelligence technologies to disseminate information to citizens more effectively is crucial in a time of crisis. After the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in January 2020, enquiries to the Government's civil complaint response centre (1 339 call centres) rose significantly, resulting in delayed answers to citizens. In response to this issue, Kakao Talk, the most popular messaging app in Korea, helped introduce chatbots to facilitate prompt communication with citizens. This enabled citizens to get official information in a timely and efficient way by asking a virtual assistant question about the pandemic. These chatbots provided answers to frequently asked questions, such as data on outbreak trends and the latest updates of screening clinics. Finally, Kakao Talk also allowed citizens to receive a notification when vaccines were available even when no reservation was made, and to obtain vaccination certification through a simple procedure.

Source: Author's own work based on the contributions provided by the Korean Development Institute.

Second, emerging technologies are automating the treatment and analysis of high volumes of data through natural language processing, machine learning and smart algorithms. In Brazil, for example, the *Secretaria Especial de Comunicação Social* (SECOM) employs intelligent machine learning processes (i.e. Brandwatch) to conduct sentiment analysis on social media, monitor the effects of messages, and identify information gaps accompanied by a dedicated manual for its application (see Box 5.7). The Government of Poland created a data integration platform using a Geographic Information Systems software for crisis management units during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate data sharing across the whole of government, support coherence across decision-making process at the central and local level as well as to ensure the continuity of essential services (OECD, 2021[22]). Based on the experience of private marketing firms, Health Canada is also making use of these technologies to determine the effectiveness of crisis communication in changing the behaviours of patients, healthcare providers and other relevant consumers (Ubaldi et al., 2019[21]).

Box 5.7. SECOM's Manual on monitoring the institution's Social Media activity through Artificially Intelligent technologies in Brazil

SECOM's Manual on Social Media Monitoring outlines the monitoring process on online platforms carried on behalf of the Federal Government. Through the "BrandWatch" tool, SECOM utilises intelligent machine learning processes to conduct sentiment analysis, monitor the effects of messages, and identify new opportunities for producing and disseminating content. The guidelines also underline the objective of measuring the performance of social media against the communication strategy of SECOM. The data is complemented with insights from the Parliamentarians Dashboard (or *Dashboard de Parlamentares*), which centralises information on key policy discussions through the display of sentiment analysis, mentions and published reports.

Source: Author's own work, based on OECD Public Communication Survey for CoGs.

Third, voice assistants and speech recognition technologies are helping governments blend communication activities across different channels. For example, speech recognition technologies are improving service and user experience in call centres (Ubaldi et al., 2019[21]). In the United Kingdom, citizens can use voice assistants (e.g. Amazon Echo and Google Home) to get answers to questions about how to renew a passport thanks to the interconnectedness of GOV.UK content (Ubaldi et al., 2019[21]).

Voice-user interfaces are also enabling platforms for disadvantaged segments of the population with specific accessibility requirements to consult official government information. For instance, content on GOV.UK is designed to be screen-reader friendly and newly developed "Alexa skills" can provide information in real time (see Box 5.8).

Box 5.8. The Start4Life "Breastfeeding Friend" by Public Health England

The Public Health England (PHE) launched the Start4Life Alexa Skills in the spring of 2019 to provide mothers with instant and easily accessible information about breastfeeding. The tailored voice-recognition application was created after PHE found that mothers do not breastfeed their babies the recommended amount of time. Namely, PHE found that some mothers are embarrassed to ask for advice in person and may continue breastfeeding if provided with better information as well as support.

The hands-free technology enables women to get access to information surrounding breastfeeding, answers specific questions and provides a menu to find NHS-approved advice on a range of topics. The application was tailored for mothers and is hands-free, which enables mothers to ask questions while breastfeeding, or to seek information that they otherwise may feel embarrassed to do so in person.

Source: UK GCS (2018[23]), *5 Trends in Leading-Edge Communication, Government Communication Service*, London, https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/5-Trends-in-Leading-Edge-Communications.pdf.

Despite their transformative potential, the use of emerging technologies in government merits further reflection. While these tools present opportunities to future-proof public communication and allow governments to better respond to new trends and external shocks, they also bring new challenges with respect to their legal, ethical and structural implications. Further research into practices, their effectiveness and overall impact in addressing specific communication challenges is needed to codify the state of the art in this field. Such analysis would also aid in the identification of the key barriers to overcome in adopting these technologies and enabling the structural readiness for public communication teams to do so.

Toward a "digital by design" approach to communicating in a fast-paced digital age

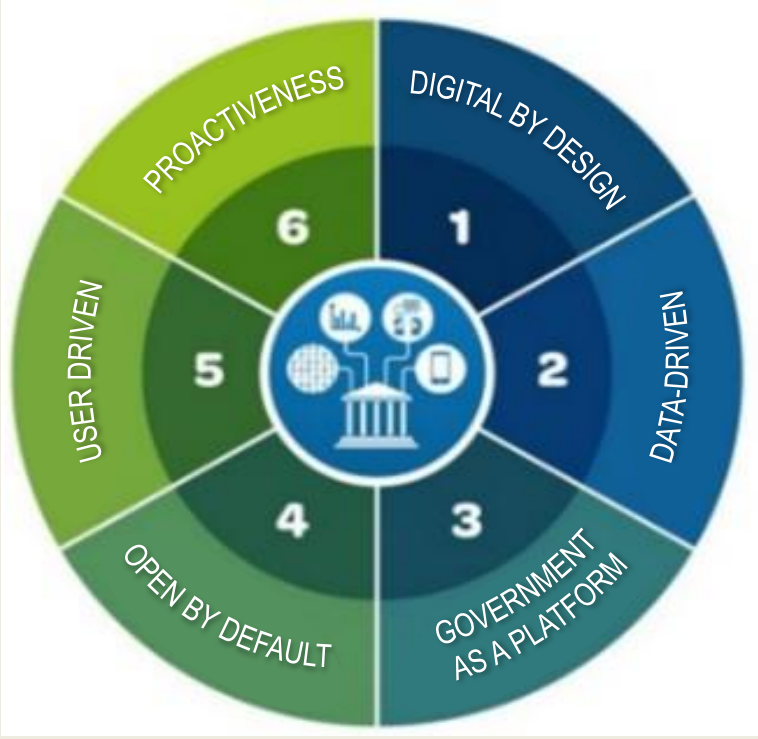
The previous sections provided an overview of the use of various means for CoGs and MHs to communicate in increasingly digitally intensive societies. Each explored existing practices and trends in utilising social media, OGD, mobile and other emerging technologies. Despite the ample adoption of these tools, however, OECD evidence reveals that governments can do more to exploit the strategic value of digital communication as an instrument for openness, transparency and participation. As such, an integrated approach in conceiving communications through omnichannel modalities could help shift the focus from information sharing toward engagement.

Indeed, the ample constellation of purpose-specific tools underlines the need to take a "*digital by design*" approach, maximising reach and enhancing the inclusiveness of public communication policy. This concept refers to the ability of government to embed relevant technologies from the outset of a policy or campaign to enable a multi-channel approach to the delivery of a particular function or service (see Box 5.9). A digital-by-design approach thus implies an integrated strategy of online and offline channels that allows governments to invest in digital resources while simultaneously addressing communication inequalities that may emerge as a result of digital divides. As such, it does not seek to "narrow the service delivery channel to a digital one, but rather allows users to access non-digital channels, which still offer the same quality of service" (OECD, 2020[1]).

Box 5.9. Applying the OECD's principle of "digital by design"

The digital-by-design principle refers to a government that has tapped the full potential of digital technologies and data from the onset of the design of policies and services, in addition to non-digital access. The OECD defines this principle as one of the six determinants for the effective design and implementation of strategic approaches to improving digital maturity (see image below).

Figure 5.6. The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework



Source: OECD (2020[1]), "The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 02, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en.

In doing so, a digital-by-design approach can aid public sector institutions in "mobilising new digital technologies to rethink, re-engineer and simplify internal processes and procedures", "promoting a digital culture", and "developing the skills of their public servants". This implies that governments can deliver high-quality communications centred on different citizen needs and media consumption habits, regardless of the channel used. It also underlines the necessity of providing online and offline modalities and promoting accessible and inclusive communication.

Source: OECD (2020[1]), "The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 02, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en.

Such an approach, however, requires the constant reassessment of integrated omnichannel communication modalities as innovations emerge (OECD, 2020[1]). Therefore, it becomes all the more important for governments to keep up with the fast pace of innovations in the digital sphere. In doing so, a holistic approach that integrates all interfaces for communication can aid in future-proofing the profession, in particular for governments to engage with citizens more effectively, adapt rapidly to changing trends and co-ordinate messages to speak with one voice.

Placing stakeholders at the heart of digital communication efforts

Beyond sharing information, digital communication can be a key building block in promoting the participation of stakeholders in public life. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government defines stakeholder participation as "all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery" (OECD, 2017[24]). Through the provisions therein, it argues that all stakeholders should have "equal and fair opportunities to be informed, consulted and actively engaged", while dedicating specific efforts to reach "the most vulnerable, underrepresented or marginalised groups" to promote a culture of open government. The OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies also encourages the participation of public, private and civil society stakeholders for improved policy making as well as public service design and delivery in the digital age (OECD, 2014[25]).

Public communication can enable the effective functioning of the three levels of stakeholder participation – from informing to consulting and engaging with all relevant actors. The initial stage refers to the government's capacity to share up-to-date, relevant and clear information, which can empower citizens to exercise their voice in policy making, monitor government action and debate public decision-making processes to foster trust. Access to information (ATI) laws are a pre-requisite legal framework in this context that set the rules for both proactive and reactive disclosure of information. However, the capacity to share information on its own is insufficient, and opening regular, interactive and meaningful dialogues with the public is crucial. Consulting and engaging stakeholders through two-way dialogue mechanisms is therefore critical to promote a wider diversity of voices beyond those traditionally in possession of access and influence, to avoid policy capture and to increase the relevance of policy outcomes (OECD, 2017[24]). As such, an effective communication seeks to promote two-way dialogue mechanisms at all stages of the policy making cycle, by, among other means:

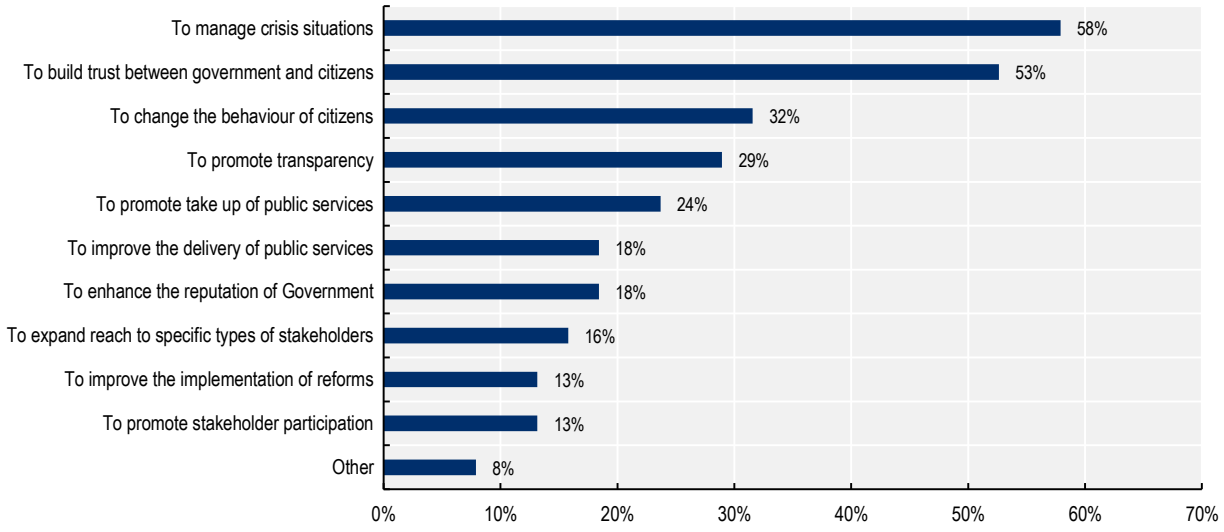
- Informing the public about the existence of participation opportunities and digital platforms for dialogue and exchange on key policy issues.
- Mobilising stakeholders to partake in consultations and innovative citizen participation initiatives.
- Equipping stakeholders with the right information to meaningfully contribute to public decision-making processes.
- Establishing dedicated opportunities for civil society, private sector and the media to express their voice.
- Communicating how insights from consultations and broader participatory processes (i.e. citizen assemblies) were integrated into final policy decisions.

The following section will explore the opportunities and challenges that CoGs and MHs are facing to shift the traditional focus of digital public communication efforts from information sharing to engagement. It will also reflect on emerging practices in CoGs and MHs to amplify the reach and inclusiveness of online communication efforts, in particular through collaborations with trusted voices, promoting accessibility for vulnerable groups and addressing broader communication inequalities.

Shifting the focus of digital communication from information sharing to engagement

Figure 5.7 provides an overview of the primary objectives of the most recent digital-led communication activities run by CoGs in OECD and partner countries. The most popular objectives focused on managing crisis situations (58%), building trust (53%) and changing behaviours in line with policies and regulations (32%). The prioritisation of these goals not only reflects the important role that digital technologies have played since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also a general positive perception of their value in enacting change and transforming the relationship between government and citizens.

Figure 5.7. Priority objectives of digital-led communication activities in CoGs



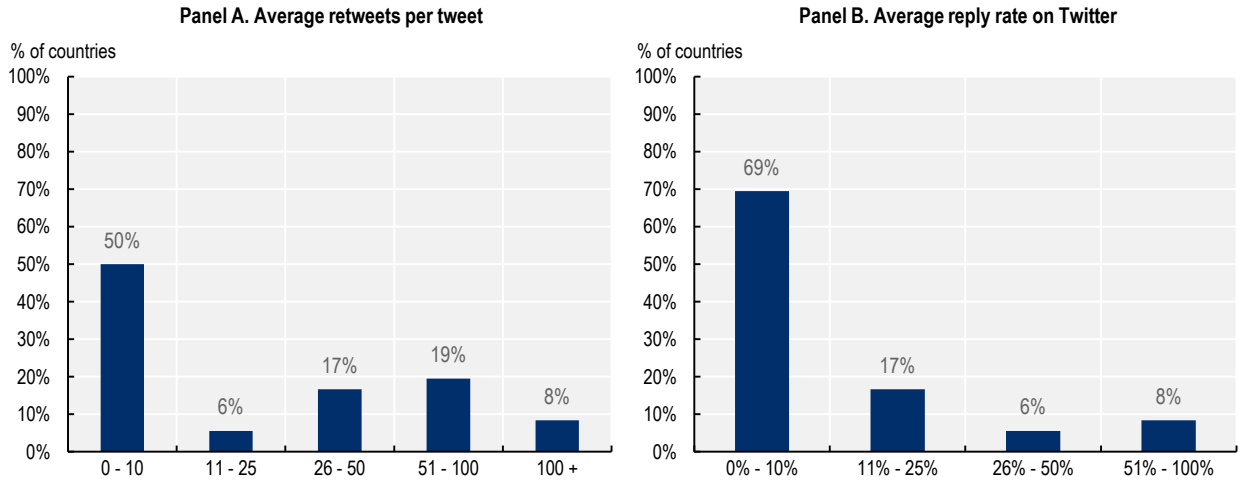
Note: n = 38 CoGs. Austria did not provide a response to this question. Countries were asked to select the top 3 objectives of their recent digital communication activities.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In regard to promoting stakeholder participation, however, findings revealed that public communicators in OECD member and partner countries still predominantly use digital tools to unilaterally share information, and could make a greater effort to using such tools more interactively to promote two-way communication. As Figure 5.7 above illustrates, a small share of CoGs considered promoting stakeholder participation (13%) and engaging citizens through these tools to improve the implementation of reforms (13%) as priority objectives for digital-led communication. Promoting transparency is also not widely considered as a top priority when conceiving these efforts (29%), even though it is a precursor of stakeholder participation in public life. Together, these insights suggest that governments have not yet grasped the full potential of the interactive and networking benefits of digital tools (Murphy, 2019[2]) (Mergel, 2012[26]).

Overall, these findings are consistent with the use of social media platforms in practice, where a preliminary analysis of CoGs' Twitter activity for example (using online public sources) revealed generally low levels of interactivity (see Figure 5.8). Indeed, half of the 36 countries analysed had an average of less than ten retweets per tweet. Moreover, average reply rates on Twitter were generally low, with an average rate of only 13% of analysed accounts responding to citizens' comments. Except for a few outliers, these findings revealed that governments often struggled to compete with other news providers or online personalities for citizens' attention, therefore potentially missing opportunities to have engaged in a dialogue with citizens who are on these platforms. There are however some good practices that are emerging across the world, with countries such as in Colombia, Luxembourg and New Zealand for example, who are using social media platforms to establish direct communication and engagement with citizens through

videoconferences or Facebook Lives. These include hosting sessions where the Head of State or Ministers answer informal questions and engage in interactive discussions (see Box 5.10).

Figure 5.8. Average rate of engagement through Twitter



Note: N=36 CoGs. Data for Tunisia, Slovak Republic and Romania was not available. The calculations were sourced directly from the Twitonomy tool analysing the twitter handles of of each CoG entity. The numbers are meant to give a general overview of levels of engagement,
Source: Author's calculations based on twitonomy, 2021.

Box 5.10. Interactive communication with Heads of State and Ministers on social media in OECD countries

Colombia

The Government of Colombia established different initiatives to provide more direct, relevant and interactive communication with the public. As one of its measures, the President of Colombia hosts a daily television programme where scientific experts, online influencers and relevant government officials deliver COVID-19 measures and relevant information. For example, some of the topics that more than 80 programmes have covered include vaccine security, auto care measures, deconfinement steps, elderly care measures and relevant updates on virus progression (i.e. infections, deaths, recoveries). The head of state also conducts informal Facebook lives to answer direct citizen queries, listen to key concerns and provide relevant updates. The aim of these proactive measures, together with the production of over 2 500 visual and 500 video materials, is to reduce anxiety, combat misinformation and depoliticise communication through official information and scientific evidence.

New Zealand

The Government of New Zealand adopted a specific approach to communicating about the COVID-19 crisis by framing messages around solidarity and unity. The Prime Minister's messaging urged people to unite, calling the country "our team of five million". In addition to daily press briefings, the Prime Minister engaged in informal and informative Facebook Live streams to answer citizens' queries on self-isolation and other health-related measures. This approach was complemented by a high reliance on and visibility of scientific expertise, as the Director General of Health was present and contributed to every high-level briefing. Such "empathic communication" has shown its effectiveness in ensuring citizens' adoption of health policies.

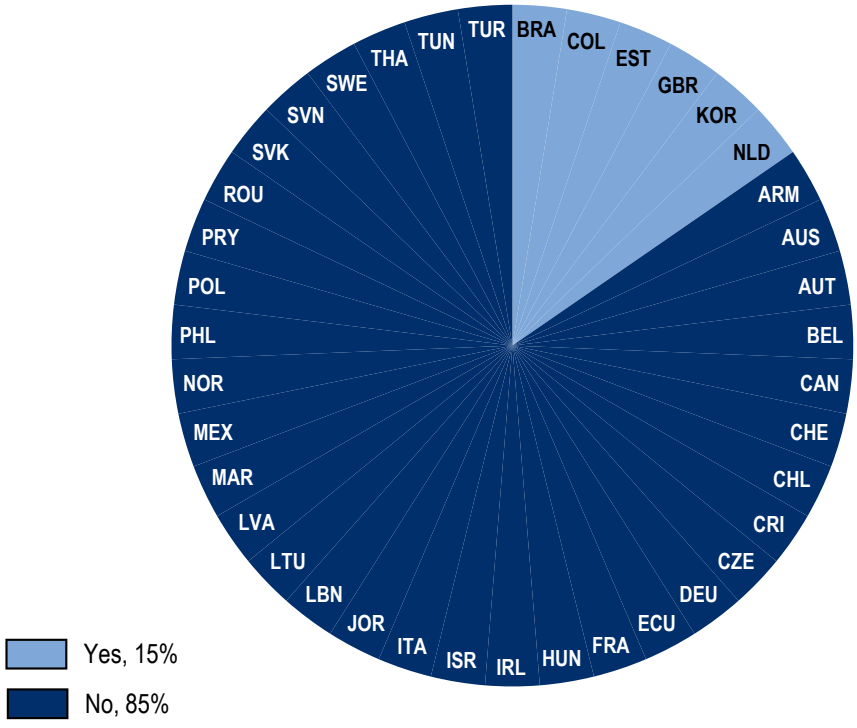
Luxembourg

To diversify its communication offer practices, the Government of Luxembourg organised a series of open videoconferences for citizens to ask questions in real time directly to specific Ministers. This has allowed the Government to open more interactive spaces for dialogue in the online sphere, in support of its strategic priorities to promote transparency through proactive and participatory digital channels.

Source: Author's own work based on OECD (2020[27]); OECD (2021[22]); and an interview with Mr. Hugo Alejandro Arevalo Dillón, specialist in the Health Ministry of Colombia.

Generally, low levels of engagement through social media may also be explained in part by the lack of dedicated guidance and skill development for public communicators. In fact, OECD survey results revealed that while social medial guidelines were widely adopted by CoGs, only 15% develop specific directives focused on engagement (e.g. to hold online consultations, request feedback, etc.) (see Figure 5.9). The lack of guidance and tools in this regard not only promotes a risk-averse approach to interacting with the public but also is a missed opportunity for institutionalising and shaping the strategic direction of communications through these channels. Providing a framework to engage through these platforms – together with the necessary tools and skills – can help clarify and promote their strategic use, which can, in turn, promote an interactive and constructive dialogue through these channels.

Figure 5.9. Guidelines available for engaging through social media in CoGs



Note: n = 39 CoGs.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Where engagement guidelines exist, they tended to share certain elements in support of more interactive and participatory use of social media. First, activities promoting social listening capabilities were emphasised to identify topics of interest, understand public mood and general perceptions on key issues,

pinpoint information gaps, and map communities and influencing voices. Second, content moderation of institutional accounts was a shared element in these guidelines, notably to set response timeframes, standardise responses in some cases, and manage online trolls and hate discourse. Third, given how social media has increasingly served as a conduit for citizens to share their discontent or report issues in their communities, guidelines included suggestions for complaint management. In Colombia, for example, the Government established a social media engagement protocol (or *Protocolo de interacción en redes sociales*) with specific guidance on how to interact with different types of stakeholders, including citizens, the media and other public institutions (see Box 5.11). In Brazil, the social media manual (or *Manual de orientación para participar en redes sociales*) emphasised the importance of enhancing citizen participation, provides examples of online content moderation and outlines five principles to follow when interacting with the public and managing complaints.

Box 5.11. The Government of Colombia's online engagement protocol for social media use

In 2019, the Government of Colombia published Circulaire No. 1 (of 22 March 2019) to provide guidance and a co-ordinated framework for the use of social media by public institutions in line with the provision within Law 1341 of 2009 regulating the use of ICTs. As part of the recommendations therein, it underlines participation as one of eight principles for effectively managing interactions through these platforms. It states that participation with stakeholders should be professional, providing timely response to comments, respecting different viewpoints and providing constructive comments that animate engagement. It moreover calls for entities to communicate their participation and activities through conferences, forums or sectoral meetings to communicate and stream them in real time through social media.

To translate this vision into action, the Government of Colombia published a dedicated social media engagement protocol (or *Protocolo de interacción en redes sociales)* in the Urna Digital portal to serve as guidance for community managers, public communicators and public officials. Acknowledging the importance of fostering a sound online information ecosystem, the protocol provides recommendations on how to engage with citizens, private sector actors, journalists and official government spokespeople respectively. For example, it suggests to monitor media developments for answering journalist information requests rapidly through these platforms and to tag government leaders on relevant sector policies to promote a co-ordinated communication. The guideline also maps a taxonomy of types of participation from external stakeholders on social media (i.e. providing comments, congratulating, providing constructive feedback, asking questions, and hostile participation) with examples and suggested types of responses for each.

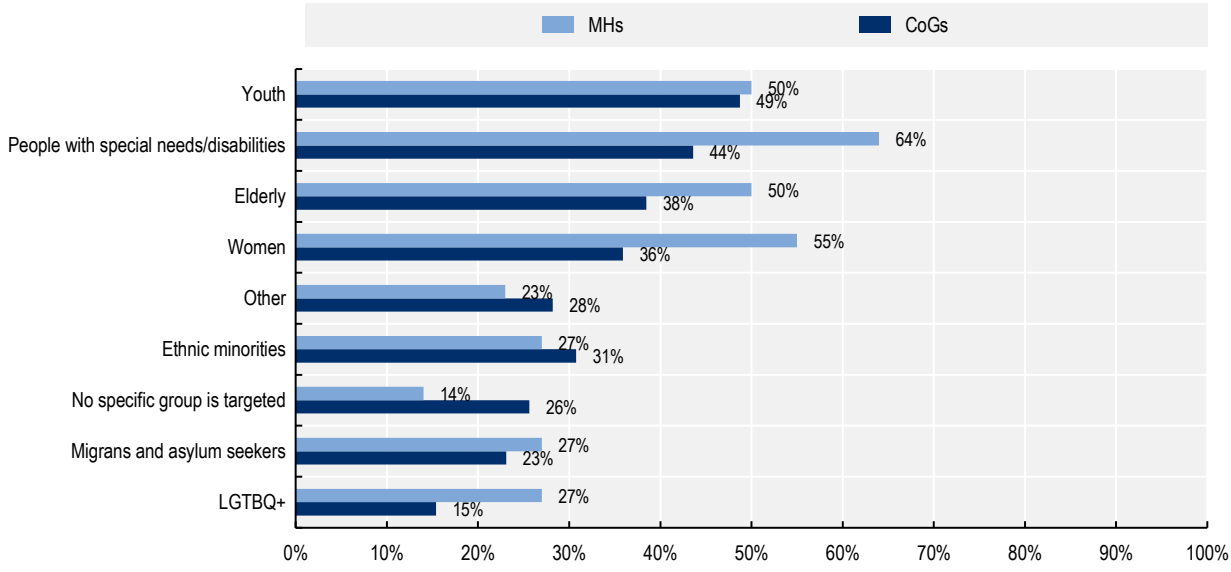
Source: Author's own work, based on https://dapre.presidencia.gov.co/normativa/normativa/CIRCULAR%20N%C2%B0%2001%20DEL%2022%20DE%20MARZO%20DE%202019.pdf; http://www.gobiernoenredes.gov.co/protocolo-interaccion-redes-sociales/.

Promoting an inclusive and holistic approach to communicating in a fast-paced digital era

A key benefit of digital communication is the potential to reach a larger sample of stakeholders to provide new means to engage with and give a voice to disadvantaged groups in policy making. As such, digital communication can be essential in promoting a holistic approach to engage stakeholders within and beyond government to address delivery gaps, build networks and promote collective action. From the supply side, digital tools can help redefine how communication is conceived, delivered and amplified by allowing more direct collaboration with civil society, the private sector and influencers across the policy cycle. From the demand side, the increased use of these tools can encourage governments to reflect on the framing and available interfaces to promote accessibility and inclusiveness.

In practice, findings revealed both the opportunity and need to expand the remit of digital communication efforts to ensure all segments of society can engage with their government on issues that matter most to them. According to OECD survey results, a moderated share of CoGs and MHs targeted key groups such as youth (49% and 50% respectively), individuals with disabilities (44% and 64%), the elderly (38% and 50%) and women (36% and 55%) as part of their communication work (see Figure 5.10). A comparatively low percentage engaged with groups such as ethnic minorities (31% and 27% respectively), migrants (23% and 27%) and LGBTQ+ individuals (15% and 27%). Furthermore, survey results suggested there is room to magnify the use of online tools to engage underrepresented groups, as only 16% of CoGs considered "expanding reach to specific types of stakeholders" as one of the top three priority objectives of digital communication. Identifying this as a strategic goal, France adopted an accessibility charter in March 2021 as a common framework of communication norms and practices across government. To support its implementation and mainstreaming of the rules and actions across administrations, a network of contact persons in each ministry was also created.

Figure 5.10. Specific groups targeted in the communication work of CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoG = 39; n MH = 22. The MHs of Greece and Japan did not respond to this question. The elderly group was defined as individuals aged 65+ years and the youth group was defined as individuals aged 15 to 29 years.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

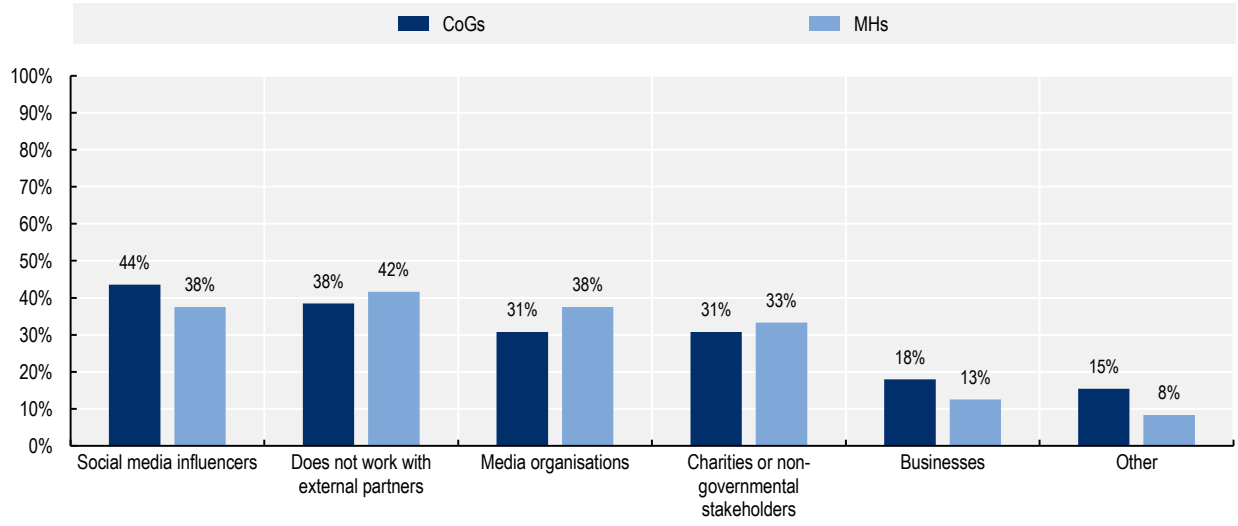
The following section will reflect on a series of avenues for CoGs and MHs to further embed a whole-of-society approach that takes advantage of the opportunities provided by digital tools to increase participation, including:

- Partnering with trusted voices in the online sphere outside of government to expand the reach of official digital communication, and in turn, inform their design based on community needs;
- Ensuring accessible digital content to different population groups, from the design of interfaces to the deployment of key communication messages; and
- Addressing communication inequalities in light of the fast-paced evolution of the online information ecosystem, the fragmentation of audiences and the effects of the digital divide.

Partnering with non-governmental stakeholders to reach all segments of society

The networking effects of digital technologies are bringing about novel spaces for public institutions to collaborate with non-governmental stakeholders through a whole-of-society communication approach. In practice, survey results suggested there is room to maximise the reach and relevance of communications, as 15 out of 39 CoGs and 10 out of 24 MHs across OECD member and partner countries did not collaborate with non-governmental stakeholders (see Figure 5.11). For example, as compared to the percentage of CoGs (62%) that collaborated with external actors, less than half engaged specifically with the media (12 out of 24), civil society (12 out of 24) or the private sector (7 out of 24). The involvement of trusted voices such as those of community leaders, civil society activists and businesses can be a key means to amplify messages, improve their immediacy, provide a sense of familiarity and simplify technical policy issues.

Figure 5.11. Types of actors with whom CoGs and MHs partner to expand the reach of digital communication activities



Note: n CoG = 39; n MH: 24 MHs.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Moreover, Figure 5.11 illustrates that a moderate share of CoGs (44%) and MHs (38%) were exploring partnerships with social media influencers as a means to engage hard-to-reach population groups, including youth. Practices collected revealed that this type of collaboration is particularly attractive to mobilise calls to action, disseminate official information and diversify media sources for different societal groups. Building on factors such as relatedness, empathy and credibility can help counteract growing citizen apathy as a result of exposure to misinformation, hate speech, data exploitation and bots (Stuart-Lacey, 2018[28]). With regards to communicating with youth particularly, a recent OECD Report underlined the important use by youth specifically of non-institutionalised channels for political participation, including online activism (OECD, 2020[29]). In 2018, 23% of people aged 15 to 29 surveyed across 22 OECD countries in the European Social Survey reported they had posted or shared messages about politics in the previous 12 months, compared to 15% of respondents aged 30+ (ESS, n.d.[30]).

Engaging trusted voices is particularly relevant as crowded media ecosystems risk diluting key official information. For example, the "thanks challenge" in Korea and the "#soschützenwiruns campaign" in Switzerland leveraged the popularity of social media and YouTube influencers to slow the spread of COVID-19 and raise morale (see Box 5.12). In order to minimise reputational risks that may come with these types of collaborations, the CoG of Finland conducted influencer mapping and audience

segmentation exercises ensuring these partnerships are aligned with a common set of values for the public good (OECD, 2020[27]).

Box 5.12. Influencer partnerships for communication in OECD countries

Finland's influencer strategy in curbing the spread of COVID-19

The Prime Minister's Office of Finland, in collaboration with the National Emergency Supply Agency and the private sector (PING Helsinki and Mediapool) partnered with social media influencers to provide clear and reliable information for younger audiences, which can be harder to reach through traditional channels. Following thorough influencer mapping, over 1 800 Finnish influencers helped the government share reliable information on health measures to empower and engage citizens in the fight against COVID-19. A follow-up survey conducted by PING Helsinki revealed some of the outcomes of this initiative: "94% of followers felt they got enough information and instructions about coronavirus via influencers with over half saying influencer communication affected their behaviour" and "97% of respondents consider the COVID-19 information shared by influencers reliable".

The "Thanks Challenge" in Korea

During the pandemic, the Government of Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare launched the "Thanks Challenge" on Instagram, with the aim of increasing the reach of awareness-raising efforts around COVID-19 measures. The initiative invited citizens to share a picture of themselves at home to promote social distancing and "stay at home" measures. Celebrities and influencers also took part in the campaign and helped the government disseminate official information about the disease and its symptoms.

Instagram campaign: https://www.instagram.com/thanks_challenge/?hl=ko

The #soschützenwiruns campaign in Switzerland

Led by the head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, the Government of Switzerland launched the #soschützenwiruns (or "this is how we protect ourselves") campaign, where influencers shared images and videos to educate audiences that staying home helps protect vulnerable groups and reduces the strain on the healthcare system.

Source: Author's own work, based on the responses from Korea and Switzerland to the OECD (2020[31]), OECD Center of Government Survey: Understanding Public Communication; and OECD (2020[27]), "Building resilience to the Covid-19 pandemic: the role of centres of government", *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/883d2961-en.

A relatively common trend among a number of online influencer campaigns at both the CoG and MH level is their intent to reach younger segments of the population. This finding is consistent with OECD survey data indicating that close to half of CoGs and MHs seek to target youth through their communication work more broadly. Such efforts to "youth-proof" communication reveal the interest and difficulty for governments in mobilising this particular group and engaging them in public life. For instance, the Government of Finland launched an influencer campaign targeting youth to promote the adoption of COVID-19 emergency health measures (see Box 5.12 above). Similarly, according to survey results, Health Canada seeks to encourage healthy lifestyle choices among young people through partnerships with social media influencers, for example in campaigns against opioid consumption.

In addition to helping to fulfil immediate aims, engaging youth through public communication in the digital era more effectively can help build stronger democracies. Informing and engaging youth can help strengthen civic participation, encourage innovation, shape a fruitful online debate and foster economic growth through the creation of new market opportunities (OECD, 2019[32]). In line with the provisions of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, tailored efforts to communicate with youth are essential to foster a culture of open government and empower these actors to actively contribute to

the policy making cycle (OECD, 2017[24]). Acknowledging this importance, the Government of Ireland engaged with youth organisations to tailor communication efforts to their needs and activate these actors as direct content developers for official campaigns (See Box 5.13). The OECD Guide "Engaging Young People in Open Government" also provides a series of potential avenues to promote a meaningful communication with youth (see Box 5.14).

Box 5.13. Engaging with youth in Ireland to design more relevant communication efforts

Ireland's Government Information Service, in collaboration with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health, engaged with representatives from a range of youth organisations to better understand young people's experience of the pandemic, to ensure policy makers and communicators had an awareness of their concerns and to examine ways to communicate more effectively with young people. The group met weekly, shared research they had undertaken and was directly involved in informing campaign briefs and giving feedback on the campaigns as they developed. An example was the Government's #antiviral campaign – a social media campaign using channels such as tik tok, Instagram and snapchat, with content developed by young people for young people.

Source: Contribution from the Government Information Service in the Irish Department of the Taoiseach.

Box 5.14. The OECD "Engaging Young People in Open Government: A Communication Guide"

The OECD "Engaging young people in open government" guide provides ideas and approaches on how to communicate effectively with youth to promote their participation, drawing on recent research and case studies from across OECD member and partner countries. It provides concrete avenues for communicators to learn more about youth audiences, reach them effectively and ultimately promote their participation in the design and delivery of policies and services.

The Guide underlined the importance of engaging with youth as important stakeholders and equals, rather than "citizens in training". To reach young citizens effectively, it emphasises that digital technologies should be used strategically in tandem with traditional forms of engagement, such as youth councils. The Guide also encourages governments to conduct activities online and provide spaces for young people to partake in the definition, monitoring and implementation of open government reforms to improve the credibility of the messages and encourage collective action within that particular demographic.

Source: Author's own work based on OECD (2019[32]), Communicating Open Government: A how-to guide, OECD, Paris, .

Ensuring that public communication opens a two-way dialogue and builds trust will rely on the capacity of governments to engage a wider variety of actors, beyond influencers, to promote a whole-of-society approach. Given the current information deluge, governments in various countries (e.g. Ecuador, Italy, the United Kingdom to mention a few) have started collaborate with private sector actors as Google and Facebook to make official content easier to find in the context of the present infodemic. According to survey results, the Government of the Netherlands partnered with a maternity magazine to provide key information online to young parents on nursing and early child development. In Costa Rica, the Government collaborated with LGBTQ+ organisations to promote same-sex marriage policies through online and traditional campaigns. The Government of Romania partnered with the civil society organisation Code for Romania to co-develop its national COVID-19 public information platform and ensure its accessibility to all population groups (OECD, 2021[22]). To equip local communities, civil society and business actors with the

right tools, the Ministry of Health in Australia developed a communication kit for these actors to amplify government campaign messages online.

Some countries are even placing citizens at the forefront of communication initiatives to relay real life experiences to help different audiences relate. For example, the Government of Korea collaborated with citizens to act as reporters during the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games to generate informative articles for the main website according to survey results. The Australian Ministry of Health engaged in a similar storytelling exercise, allowing citizens to relay information as part of the government's immunisation campaign in 2019.

Ensuring the accessibility of online communications

An essential element to support the participation of stakeholders is the use of digital interfaces, content and messages that are accessible to all segments of society. Accessibility in this context refers to the use of simple, clear and user-friendly communication that seeks to eliminate barriers for groups who may, for whatever reason (disability, language or literacy barriers, resource constraints, etc.), face challenges in accessing information. Ensuring that information is clear, available and easy to find is a precondition for promoting transparency, which is at the core of empowering stakeholders to take part in participation initiatives and hold their governments to account (OECD, 2016[18]).

In practice, OECD survey results indicated room to improve the accessibility of digital communication for disadvantaged segments of the population in both OECD and partner countries. As Figure 5.10 above illustrates, only 17 out of 39 CoGs and 14 out of 22 MHs targeted individuals with special needs and disabilities as part of their communication work. While MHs were more likely to reach disadvantaged groups, given the nature of the sector, barriers persisted in more than half of surveyed countries for a large margin of these individuals to consult key public information. This is particularly pressing considering that over 15% of the global population experience some form of disability (World Bank, 2021[33]).

To bridge this divide, experiences from countries reveal a series of practices that can be further built on to promote the general accessibility of digital communication in various contexts. Several countries such as Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have established government accessibility guidelines for adapting web and mobile communication to the needs of disadvantaged groups.[5] These mechanisms include, for example, guiding principles, toolkits and templates such as those from the Government of Canada (see Box 5.15). Publishing information online in more than one language has also been observed in countries such as Belgium, where key COVID-19 messages were translated into 32 languages (OECD, 2020[27]). As discussed in the previous section, emerging technologies are also being utilised in countries like the United Kingdom to ensure accessible digital interfaces to different vulnerable groups who may need special audio, visual and language cues. In addition to facilitating general accessibility, practices are underlining the potential of strategies such as plain language, gamification and immersive storytelling to promote more-inclusive communication.

Box 5.15. Promoting accessible communication for all in the Government of Canada

Communicating effectively and inclusively with a wide variety of citizens enables governments to promote better democratic engagement. Acknowledging its relevance, the Government of Canada has a robust framework to promote the accessibility of its content. It outlines the principles of accessible design, including the use of clear language, on a dedicated site complemented by the Government of Canada's Accesibility legislation and the work of Accesibility Standards Canada (https://accessible.canada.ca/). In fact, communication is underlined as one of the seven priority areas of the Accesive Canada Act. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines define requirements to ensure all Government web content is accessible, in line with international standards for web accessibility. Together, these mechanisms provide officials with a framework to provide citizens with accessible information by removing barriers and respecting differences.

Principles of accessible design

The Government of Canada provides best practices for communicators to share clear, concise, and easy to use information for citizens. This involves developing communications that are designed with accessibility in mind from the start and provide a variety of formats so that all citizens can access the information. As well as following the POUR principle (perceivable, operable, understandable and robust) in order to create content, communicators produce content that is accessible in a variety of formats and in both official languages. Tools such as the Digital Accessibility Tool Kit help create accessible products in formats such as PowerPoint, Word, Excel and PDF. This enables citizens in a multilingual country to access information, as well as avoids citizens with disabilities being left out of the democratic process.

Web content accessibility guidelines

When developing communications, it is important to be aware of their specific audience and tailor content to them, while being mindful of audiences that may not be able to access a certain format. As such, the objective of the guideline is to make Web content more accessible to people with disabilities, taking into account visual, auditory, speech, learning, cognitive language and learning disabilities. In order to make Web content more accessible, the guidelines outlines principles for creating Web content. Similarly, guidance developed for social media advises communicators to provide alternative formats to their content. Podcasts, for instance, should be uploaded with a transcript in both French and English, the two official languages, and videos should include closed or open captions. These good practices enable the public to access the same information in predictable ways.

Source: Author's own work based on https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/topics/government-communications/making-communications-accessible.html.

First, the concept of plain language can support public institutions in simplifying technical policy messages and disseminating information on government activity more clearly. The use of plain language implies clarifying the wording, structure and design of communications for audiences to easily find, understand and use information (International Plain Language Federation, n.d.[34]). This type of communication centres the principle of accessibility by designing content for the average reader through simple vocabulary, short sentences, headings, key words and visual aids of digital content.

Efforts to operationalise plain language in public communication are taking various forms. In regards to simplifying content on websites, administrative documents and regulation, countries like Belgium, Mexico, Peru and the United Kingdom have created manuals with guiding principles in this regard.[6] Countries are also including dedicated plain language commitments in Open Government Partnership (OGP) national action plans, as in the cases of Luxembourg (2019-2021) and Finland (2019-2023). In addition to simplifying messages, the Government of Korea produces a series of comic books with key government

information portrayed with visual aids to facilitate information sharing with younger audiences, including children (see Box 5.16). In the United States, a centre for plain language (Plain Language.Gov) was established to oversee the implementation of the plain writing act, provide training and share good practices across the public sector.

Box 5.16. The use of Webtoons by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Korea

"Cartoon Empathy" is a magazine published on the 1st day of each month by the communication office of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Major policies are introduced in the monthly magazine in easily digestible formats, with simple language as its readership is composed of relatively young people. Furthermore, COVID-19 related materials reproducing verified web content from the 'Publicity Materials' in the 'COVID-19 Official Homepage' were also turned into cartoons. They are available as offline magazines, but also online web toons.

Source: Author's own work based on the contributions from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Korea.

Second, gamification can also play a role in promoting a more accessible communication by building media and digital literacy capabilities, raising awareness of key policies and empowering difficult-to-reach actors to participate in public life. Gamification in the field of public communication is a method utilised to reach niche audiences, enhance internal and external information sharing and promote spaces to co-create policy solutions through game mechanics and experience design (Oberprieler, 2020[35]). For example, the Decide Madrid and Decidim Barcelona platforms aimed to engage people in policy making using points and rewards to incentivise citizens to share ideas and contribute to policy proposal projects. The Government of Brazil launched the "Cities in Play" online game in 2017 to enhance civic engagement in high-school students by immersing them in the role of a mayor and sharing basic information on the services available in their constituency (Dal Fabbro, 2017[36]).

Third, the power of immersive digital storytelling is emerging as a trend to amplify messages and enhance reader engagement in a crowded online sphere through compelling content. Through sense making,[7] this approach entails identifying priority themes and narratives that are brought to life by framing information into a coherent story through interactive maps, charts and scrolling experience (Sundin, Andersson and Watt, 2018[37]). Complex policy narratives have been translated to visually rich campaigns in Scotland (the turning the tide campaign), the UK House of Commons (the four ways to regulate bailiffs campaign) and at the EU Council level (taking the lead on climate change campaign) (Shorthand, N.D). In some cases, governments are also placing citizens at the centre of these efforts and empowering them to tell their own stories, such as in the Open Data user stories campaign in Canada (see Box 5.17). Highlighting citizens' experiences through stories shared in accessible and interactive digital formats not only promotes knowledge retention and mobilises collective action, but also makes messages more relatable.

Box 5.17. Open Data user stories in Canada

Open Data user stories can be found on the Government of Canada's open government portal. The web page advertises the use of open data by citizens, companies, journalists as well as other stakeholders. Projects vary widely, including a data journalist that used open data in order to show winter warming trends and its impact on Canadians through the map of snowfalls. These immersive stories enable citizens to understand how open data can be applied in a variety of different settings, promote the use and re-use of public data and promote the visibility of ongoing initiatives on the open government portal.

Open data user stories enable the Government of Canada to both underline the importance of open data as well as make communication more relatable, thereby transforming numbers and values into more tangible insight. Citizens and journalists are able to explain how they used open data in order to advance their projects, highlighting the usefulness of open data. In addition to stories on the possible applications of open data, the Government of Canada links to the open data portal for the public to easily use and re use.

Source: Author's own work based on https://open.canada.ca/en/stories.

Addressing communication inequalities in an era of growing digital divide

Among the many inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital divide has emerged as a factor threatening the inclusiveness and effectiveness of communication efforts in many OECD and partner countries. While the digital transformation is well underway, its scope and speed has varied greatly across countries, sectors and segments of society. Just over half of households globally (55%) have access to the Internet, with stark differences among high-(87%), middle-(47%) and low-income (19%) economies (ITU/UNESCO, 2019[38]) and (ITU, 2019[39]). Digital divides constrain access to government information in online spaces and can reinforce existing socio-economic divisions by income, age, geographical areas and gender. Against this backdrop, addressing communication inequalities on all fronts will be critical in promoting a whole-of-society approach and empowering stakeholders to participate in public life.

A first element promoting a more inclusive communication calls for reflection on the potential socio-economic barriers that may inhibit access and usability. Notably, low-income households face challenges in terms of access and connectivity gaps (OECD, 2020[40]), particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is unavailable or services are costly. Socio-economic disparities may furthermore have an effect on available levels of media and digital literacy capabilities as well as general skills to effectively utilise digital tools (OECD, 2020[40]). In 2018, for example, only 40% of adults in OECD countries with no formal education interacted with government authorities online, in comparison with 80% of those with tertiary education (OECD, 2019[41]).

A second element to ensure communication activities are citizen-centric is their alignment with the needs, perceptions and habits of different age groups. This implies managing tensions between the need to keep up with the pace of new trends adopted by digital natives, while enabling content for less proficient groups. In fact, patterns of digital activity exhibit important variances between generations, for example only 58% of individuals aged 55-74 used the Internet frequently in 2019, whereas nearly 95% of 16-24 year olds were daily Internet users (OECD, 2019[41]). While CoGs and MHs were aware of the challenges and opportunities related to reaching young individuals, a comparatively small share tailored communications for the elderly (38% and 50% respectively). In efforts to adapt to new trends, the Government of Korea is utilising TikTok for the diffusion of short messages for younger audiences, such as those in the recent "CPR" and "Thank you, teachers" campaigns. In regards to engaging with the elderly, the Government of

France developed a dedicated COVID-19 guidance webpage for this group as part of its National Information Portal with health recommendations, answers to frequently asked questions and access to other official information sources (Government of France, 2020[42]). In May 2021, the French governmental COVID-19 hub evolved to ensure specific categories, including the most vulnerable groups, younger or disabled audiences as well as the elderly, experience a dedicated navigation on the website and access tailored messages to each of them.

A third element to address is the gender gap exacerbating communication inequalities. Although advances are being made in many countries, "over 250 million fewer women than men are present online (OECD, 2019[41])". A 2018 Pew Research Centre study also revealed disparities in the usage of social media between women and men, where 80% of men were found to use Facebook in contrast with 60% of women. In line with these dynamics, survey findings indicated that only 36% of CoGs and 50% of MHs specifically targeted women as part of their communication work. These findings suggest that greater efforts are needed to adapt channels for this group to generate spaces for continued dialogue on gender equality policies and guard against perpetuating gender stereotypes. For example, the Government of Chile established a dedicated guide for designing inclusive communications by framing several principles to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes (see Box 5.18).

Box 5.18. The Government of Chile's Illustrated Guide to promote a communication free of gender stereotypes

The Government of Chile developed a guide with recommendations on how to promote the diversity and inclusion of women in key visual, written and audio material for campaigns. This resource was developed to counteract the effects of TV, print and online mass communication by public and private entities perpetuating gender stereotypes through the depiction of women in an unequal standing in certain roles. As such, its calls on public communicators to carefully analyse the content and messaging of campaigns and assume an active role in promoting a cultural change towards inclusion by avoiding the reproduction of inequality settings for women.

Some of the key recommendations illustrated with examples and visuals include:

- Replace images promoting stereotypes based on industry beauty standards with a diverse depiction of women from different origins, roles and standings.
- Represent women and men in diverse social roles in the private and public sphere.
- Display children in equal conditions and avoiding physical stereotypes.
- Present co-responsibility at home as something natural in Chilean households.
- Show the diversity of roles, jobs and professions that women partake in.
- Situate men and women in equal conditions in visual terms.
- Ensure the numerical balancing of women and men. Present in visual material the reality in which half of the population is female and partaking in a profession.

Source: Author's own work, based on https://kitdigital.gob.cl/.

Acknowledging these gaps, countries are utilising hybrid delivery models with both digital and non-digital channels to foster a more inclusive approach to public communication. Recent examples have surged following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency to spread messages widely through online means and on site call centres. For instance, several countries (e.g. Croatia, Ecuador, Latvia, Netherlands, Paraguay, Slovenia and Sweden) have developed one-stop shops for apps and websites complemented with call centre support (See Box 5.19). The Belgian Government adopted a multi-channel strategy to

disseminate life-saving information, with dedicated experts responding to questions submitted, in social media posts and through a call centre on a daily basis. In addition to addressing delivery gaps, these efforts were effective in helping the public feel more comfortable in dealing with high-risk and uncertain topics through an empathic and human-centric approach. Efforts in this regard are all the more important to engage with "hard to reach groups", for example in rural communities, as shown from the recent experience in promoting COVID-19 vaccination. While a multi-channel strategy is a key step forward, governments must also pursue broader efforts to address the underlying structural challenges behind communication inequalities and to design coherent strategies under a digital-by-design approach.

Box 5.19. The use of a multi-channel digital communication strategy during COVID-19 in Sweden

The Government Office of Sweden developed a comprehensive set of communication tools for public entities to reach out effectively to all relevant stakeholders. This multi-channel strategy for COVID-19 related communications involved:

1. E-mail and phone: Through the use of traditional means, ministries can answer questions about the Government's policies by phone, email and letters in real time.

2. Institutional website. Information, news and FAQ regarding the Government's work in response to COVID-19 are regularly published on the website. Contact information for ministers, state secretaries and press secretaries are also available therein.

3. Live broadcast of press conferences: Digital press conferences and press briefings are held with the prime minister and ministers on a weekly basis. It is an opportunity to communicate new decisions and actions, often together with the responsible authorities. A question time with the media is broadcasted live to the general public and is available on the official website, YouTube and Instagram.

4. Social media: Information and news are published on Instagram (the account of the Swedish Government) and comments are utilised to engage in a direct dialogue with the population on relevant matters.

Source: OECD (2021[22]), Survey on Building a Resilient Response: The Role of the Centre of Government in the Management of the COVID-19 Crisis and Future Recovery Efforts.

Key findings and way forward

- Digital technologies have become essential tools for the public communication profession in OECD member and partner countries. A large share of CoGs and MHs have consolidated an online presence, for example, through institutional websites, social media platforms, dedicated campaign micro-sites and online advertising.
- The digital function is generally institutionalised across CoGs and MHs. While related arrangements vary, particularly depending on the country's level of centralisation, most governments have an established digital communication unit. Given the critical link between the work of public communicators and digital government units, further research is needed to explore the extent to which both agendas are co-ordinated and synergised across countries.
- Good practices are emerging in the use of social media, open government data, mobile and novel technologies to expand the reach and relevance of public communication. Further research into relevant practices, their effectiveness and overall impact in addressing specific communication challenges could help further codify the state of the art in this field. Such analysis would also aid in the identification of the key barriers to overcome in adopting these technologies and opportunities for countries to innovate.
- Although surveyed officials value the utility of digital communication, a focus remains on its traditional use for information sharing rather than engagement. Social media platforms for example could be used in more strategic ways to encourage stakeholder participation. While a large share of CoGs and MHs have guidelines for the use of these platforms, communicators in most countries lack dedicated guidance on how to use them to achieve strategic objectives. Furthermore, a greater use of the interactive features of online tools could help promote more interactive communication.
- A number of CoGs and MHs have taken steps to expand the reach of digital communication activities for youth, women, the elderly and individuals with disabilities. Nevertheless, findings reveal the need to further exploit the opportunities offered by technologies to engage with marginalised segments of society, such as ethnic minorities, migrants and LGBTQ+ groups.
- The chapter provides examples of three ways in which CoGs and MHs could develop more inclusive and holistic digital communication efforts. First, encouraging collaborations with influencers, civil society and businesses to promote a whole-of-society public communication approach can help expand the reach of campaigns and mobilise local communities. Second, governments can work towards ensuring that digital interfaces, content and messages are accessible to all segments of society. Third, tailoring the delivery of messages according to the needs of different groups can help address the effects of the digital divide in terms of income, age or gender.
- Further research is required to shed light on how countries are using digital communication in a way that does not leave behind disadvantaged groups (whether due to income, age, gender, disabilities or as a result of the digital divide).
- Providing "citizen-centered" communication in a rapidly evolving digital age will be critical as countries recover from the COVID-19 crisis to build back more open, resilient and inclusive democracies. The effects of the pandemic are foreseen to exacerbate security, data privacy and misinformation challenges (Anderson, Rainie and Vogels, 2021[43]). As such, governments stand at an inflection point to adopt a "digital by design" approach that promotes participation and inclusion.

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Notes

[1] As part of its Digital Government Policy Framework (2020[1]), the OECD defines the principle of Digital by Design as "the establishment of clear organisational leadership, paired with effective co-ordination and enforcement mechanisms where "digital" is considered not only as a technical topic, but as a mandatory transformative element to be embedded throughout policy processes".

[2] Omnichannel is defined as a delivery model composed of different channels for dissemination, including those of a digital and non-digital nature.

[3] The qualitative analysis is composed of a review of the social media guideline documents provided by the following countries: AUS, BEL, BRA, CAN, CHE, CHL, COL, FRA, GBR, ITA, LVA, NLD, NOR, PHL, PRY and SWE. Guidelines from the Government of Norway and Brazil were consulted online.

[4] Guidelines for France did not have a specified date of publication nor last update.

[5] United Kingdom (https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/accessible-communications/), Australia (https://www.vic.gov.au/accessibility-guidelines-government-communications), New Zealand (https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/index.html), Netherlands (https://www.government.nl/accessibility)

[6] Mexico (https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/7260/Manual_Lenguaje_Claro.pdf), Belgium (https://webguide.belgium.be/sites/default/files/paragraphs/Strat%C3%A9gie_communication_digitale_f%C3%A9d%C3%A9rale_FR_0.pdf), Perú (http://www.pj.gob.pe/wps/wcm/connect/7b17ec0047a0dbf6ba8abfd87f5ca43e/MANUAL+JUDICIAL+DE+LENGUAJE+CLARO+Y+ACCESIBLE.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

[7] As defined by Karl Weick, sense making refers to how we structure the unknown to be able to take action or make a decision.

6 Public communication responses to the challenges of mis- and disinformation

This chapter provides a brief overview of the rapidly evolving phenomenon of mis- and disinformation and analyses how governments' public communication function can contribute to responding to it. Informed by OECD survey data, the chapter first reviews countries' efforts to institutionalise their response to these challenges, notably through the creation of official guidance and strategic documents, training and evaluation, and the role of intra- and inter-governmental co-operation. It then explores specific communication practices and opportunities to engage with private sector and civil society stakeholders to support a holistic response to the mis- and disinformation challenge.

Introduction

As discussed earlier in this report, governments, as well as the private sector, civil society and individuals, are contending with both the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly interconnected world. Significant changes to media and information ecosystems,[1] and in particular the ability for the instantaneous and global spread of mis- and disinformation via social media platforms, are challenging the shared understanding of issues and evidence needed for effective government communication and citizens' participation in policy making. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and intensified these challenges, notably in the context of anti-vaccination campaigns.

As a vehicle for transparent, factual, and accurate information, as well as a facilitator of two-way interaction between institutions and citizens, public communication plays an especially important role in this context.[2] By facilitating citizens' access to official information as developed or transmitted by public institutions, public communication can help governments serve as authoritative resources and help citizens differentiate facts from opinions, which is essential for healthy democracies. The wider context in which the public's trust in government has generally been decreasing is also important to consider, and identifying ways countries can use the function to respond to these challenges moving forward will continue to be an important element of analysis.

As disinformation tactics have become more sophisticated, so too has the theoretical understanding of what was once referred to simply as 'fake news'. Researchers and organisations have broadly accepted the typology where misinformation describes situations where false or misleading information is shared but no harm is intended—indeed, the sharer may not even be aware the information is false. By contrast, disinformation concerns falsehoods or misleading content knowingly shared with the intention of causing harm (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017[1]).

Understanding how public communication can respond to mis- and disinformation requires analysing three interlinked areas. The first one looks at the institutional, legal and policy frameworks that can be put in place to ensure that the public communication function is organised efficiently and co-ordinated effectively. This section of the chapter will also discuss the public officials' capacities necessary for these frameworks to be properly designed and implemented and will be based largely on the findings of the OECD Public Communication Survey. Secondly, a selection of communication practices will be presented that have proved successful in preventing and combating mis- and disinformation. Finally, the chapter will review a range of government efforts to support an ecosystem where accurate information and data can be created and disseminated in a timely and effective manner. The OECD *Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation* (OECD, forthcoming[2]) provides additional insight.

Several respondents to the OECD Public Communication Survey have noted that proactive, timely, and transparent communication is a primary means of preventing the spread of mis- and disinformation, all while accomplishing other policy objectives (OECD, 2020[3]). Focusing on prevention is especially important, as avoiding a falsehood spreading in the first place is more efficient than correcting it once it has taken root. Such efforts require anticipating potential misunderstandings or disinformation attacks, which means listening to and engaging with the audience to identify their concerns and to fill potential gaps. Furthermore, studies have shown that if people are warned about efforts to sow doubt, they are more resistant to being swayed by misleading content (Blastland et al., 2020[4]). A wide range of communication practices are well anchored in this space and should be applied. Among others, these include tailoring content to various groups in line with their risks of and vulnerability to exposure, including factors related to news avoidance and low trust in government; monitoring trends and understanding audience needs; filling information and data gaps proactively; tracking problematic content in real time; and ensuring communications, including about uncertainty, remain honest, open and trustworthy.

These practices, however, and the institutional elements to be discussed below, are inextricable from efforts to foster an enabling information ecosystem. This is the space where public communication is received by citizens and stakeholders, as well as where misinformation spreads. Its features, and the actors within it, can help determine how prominent and widespread problematic content can become, as well as how authoritative sources and facts will be received by the public. The strength of a country's civic space; regulatory considerations regarding transparency and oversight of social media platforms; the ability of citizens to recognise and dismiss false and misleading information; and the diversity, independence and quality of the media all contribute to an enabling environment where communication-based responses can be more impactful. As these factors are outside the direct purview of public communicators, Centres of Government (CoGs) and other agencies, public agencies and ministries should therefore also consider policies to support a resilient media and information ecosystem, such as through building transparent and constructive relationships with internet and social media platforms; supporting media and digital literacy efforts; promoting public participation and fact-based journalism; and conducting research on challenges and opportunities.

By largely focusing on the institutionalisation of public communication responses to mis- and disinformation, furthermore, this chapter will help governments ground their efforts in this area and utilise the function to facilitate rapid, strategic and proactive responses. The OECD Public Communication Survey data, which focuses on the policies and strategies, co-ordination efforts, and prioritisation of the relevant responses to mis- and disinformation, will serve as the basis of the chapter's analysis. It will first examine the current environment, how it has changed in recent years and how its continual evolution poses a challenge to those aiming to counter mis- and disinformation. The chapter will then turn to in-depth analysis of data from the OECD's survey, with particular attention to guiding documents, structures and co-ordination. Finally, the report will consider where the field should look to improve responses to the relevant challenges and opportunities going forward.

An overview of the rapidly evolving mis- and disinformation landscape

Rapidly evolving technologies, including the rise of social media and the ubiquity of mobile communications and messaging, have dramatically altered the media and information ecosystem, disrupting traditional models of communication and circumventing previously established methods of verifying and sharing news and data. On the one hand, this shift has empowered people and enabled more effective collaboration within and between governments and stakeholders. On the other hand, it has multiplied opportunities for problematic content to spread. To date, however, governments have met these changes largely through ad hoc and isolated approaches.

While the existence of falsehoods is not new, its ability for global amplification via online platforms poses a new threat to democracies. The media ecosystem once adhered to a one-to-many or mass communication model, where governments and other institutions largely shared information with the public through gatekeepers at select news outlets. Today, it increasingly operates on a many-to-many or networked communication model (see Table 6.1). In this context, actors in the media ecosystem are both producers and consumers of news, and by interacting on social media platforms and private messaging networks, they can share information published on an increasing number of news aggregation and opinion dissemination websites that may not adhere to journalistic standards (Plasilova et al., 2020[5]; Jensen and Helles, 2016[6]). The increasing digitalisation of one-to-one engagement via text messages and other means has increased the potential for disinformation to spread through interpersonal communication, as well.

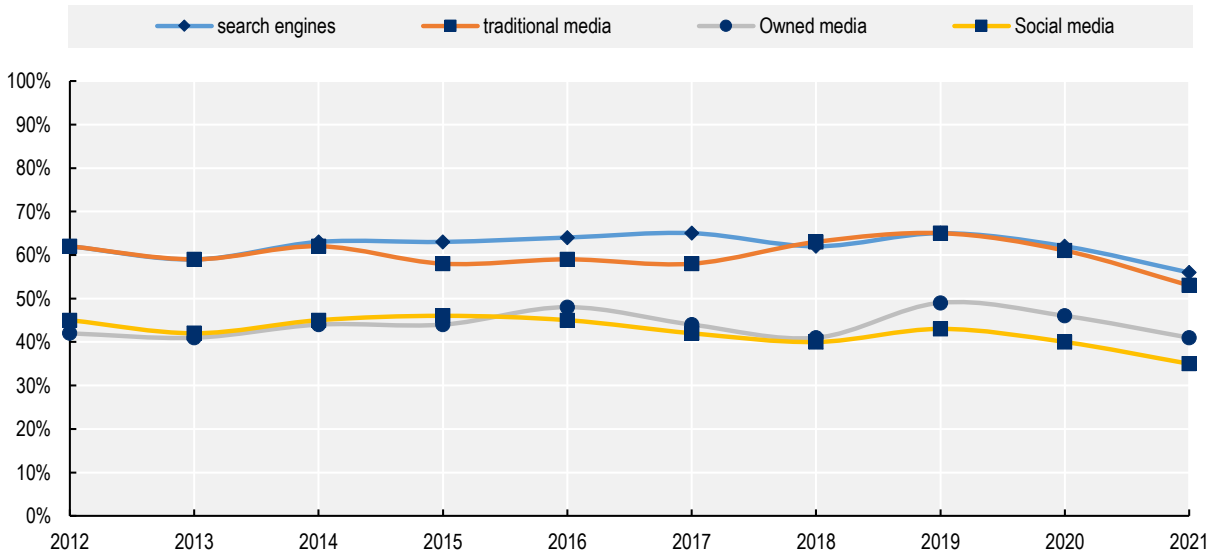
Table 6.1. Typologies of communication

Typology	Examples
One-to-one, interpersonal communication	email, text message, voice, instant message
One-to-many, mass communication	book, newspaper, audio and video recording, web 1.0/webpage, download, broadcast radio and television
Many-to-many, networked communication	web 2.0/wiki, blog, social network site, online chatroom

Source: author's own work, adapted from (Jensen and Helles, 2016[6]).

Shifts in the media ecosystem have not only affected where and how individuals access information, but also how they feel about it. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2021[7]), only 35% of respondents claim to trust what they see on social media. Confidence in traditional media remains higher, at 53%, but that number is at a 10-year low and declined by eight percentage points between 2020 and 2021 (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. Trust in all information sources at record lows



Note: Percent trust in each source for general news and information.
Source: Edelman (2021[7]), Edelman Trust Barometer 2021, https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2021-03/2021%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer.pdf.

These findings point to a shortfall in society's trust in all news sources. According to the same report, 57% of those surveyed believe that government leaders are 'purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations'; 59% of respondents believed the same of journalists and reporters. In addition, 59% agreed that 'most news organisations are more concerned with supporting an ideology or political position than with informing the public' (Edelman, 2021[7]). This declining trust in media is accompanied by deep concern about combatting mis- and disinformation. The survey found that 60% of respondents indicated that 'finding ways to combat fake news' has become more important over the previous year, while only 10% think it has become less important.

Beyond posing a challenge to public communicators' efforts to convey accurate information, declining trust in both the government and the media has consequences for the public's willingness to participate in democratic life. Research has shown, for example, that declining trust in formerly respected sources of

information and the resulting disagreement about basic facts can cause or aggravate the erosion of public conversation, contributing to political paralysis, increasing disengagement among societal groups, and policy uncertainty (Kavanagh and Rich, 2018[8]). Declining trust is a complicated and worrying trend, and the challenges posed to governments' ability to work toward policy solutions to COVID-19, climate change, and other complex issues are especially concerning.

Through providing timely and accurate information, public communication can play an important role in helping governments respond to these novels and evolving challenges. More broadly, as a strategic lever for supporting the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation, it facilitates the relationship between governments and the public. While governments cannot single-handedly combat these challenges, institutionalising robust responses can help create a healthy information and communication environment.

Data from the OECD survey of Centres of Governments and Ministries of Health provided a snapshot of the progress toward institutionalising responses to mis- and disinformation and pointed to areas for further research and development. Identifying what works regarding countries' efforts to institutionalise their responses will be a key focus of collaboration within and across countries moving forward.

The institutionalisation of public communication responses to mis- and disinformation

Many governments have been grappling with the threat of mis- and disinformation and designing strategies to counter it for some time. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the immediacy of the real-world dangers posed by the spread of false and misleading content and the necessity of swift responses to it. Mis- and disinformation about the pandemic has harmed individuals, for example when the spread of such messages has reduced propensity to follow public health advice or reduced vaccine confidence (Roozenbeek et al., 2020[9]). Real world impacts have also appeared in attacks on critical infrastructure, where cell phone towers were damaged following spurious reports that there was a link between 5G and COVID-19 (Satariano and Alba, 2020[10]). The increasing evidence of the link between online and offline threats posed by the spread of misinformation has further clarified governments' need to respond to these challenges. In examining the strategies in place, therefore, this chapter aims to work toward a better understanding of effective practices as well as to identify areas for additional research.

Established good practices in risk communication have shown to be very useful when dealing with and overcoming mis-disinformation (OECD, 2016[11]). Nevertheless, not all pre-existing crisis communication structures have been equally successful in dealing with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, measures destined to build trust and increase transparency have been more effective, and continue to be essential for the success of the recovery efforts seeking to foster compliance with changes to health protection measures (OECD, 2020[12]).

Providing official guidance on responding to mis- and disinformation

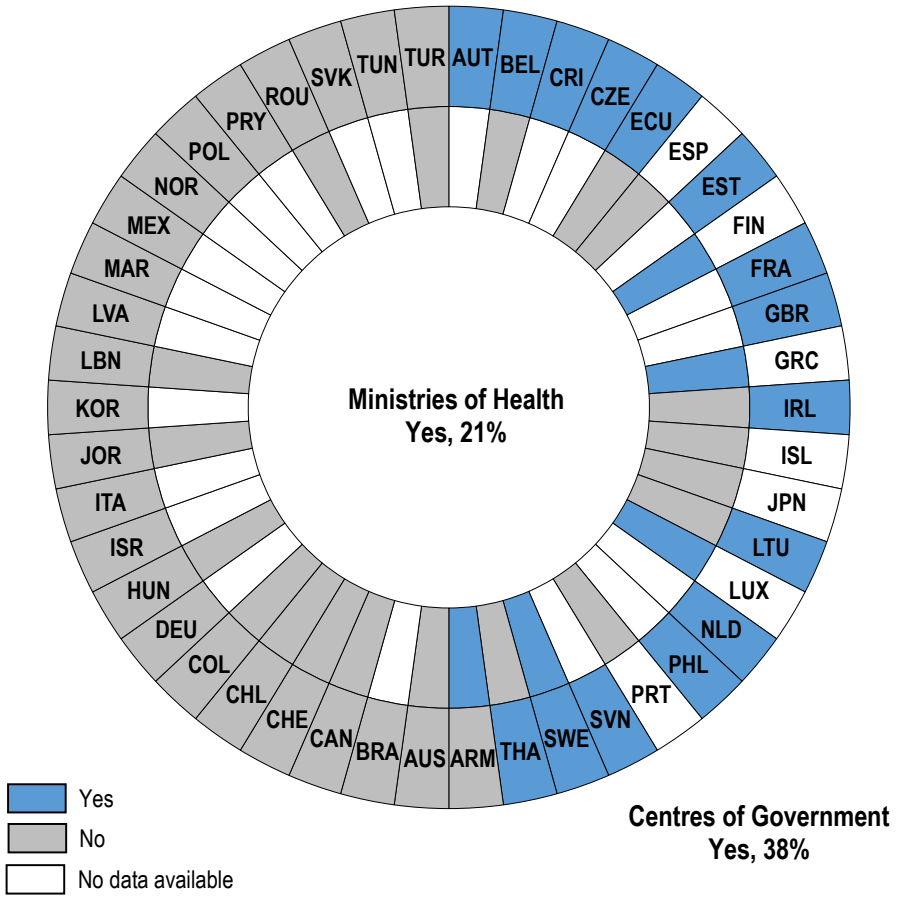
Accurately defining mis- and disinformation is essential to fully understanding the challenges it poses and the potential responses (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[13]). While many governments may have a working understanding of mis- and disinformation, and may have even taken steps to combat its spread, the codification of these definitions and practices remains unfinished.

Of countries surveyed by the OECD, just over half (54%) of centres of government had developed or adopted a definition of at least one of the terms "disinformation", "misinformation", or "malinformation".[3] For example, the Republic of Korea utilised the definitions set out by the Korea Press Foundation, which is a public institution with the mission of supporting the country's media and information ecosystem.[4] Three of the countries that had not defined these specific terms had developed definitions of related terms, such

as “information attack” (Estonia), “rumour” (Jordan), and “*informations erronées*” (“incorrect information”, Morocco). Respondents noted that identifying and classifying common frameworks and language helps communicators frame challenges and opportunities accurately, collaborate more effectively and identify a common path forward.

Respondents also noted that codified strategies that are well implemented internally can be particularly useful in situations where rapid and sometimes decentralised responses to the spread of mis- and disinformation may be required. In this way, policy frameworks and implementation guidelines may complement the use of official definitions in helping to clarify the challenges and systematise responses. Such guidelines empower autonomous action while ensuring initiatives are aligned with institution-wide messages. Nevertheless, in 2019, only 38% of CoG and 21% of MH respondents had a strategy in place to govern the response to mis- and disinformation (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Availability of guiding documents for governments’ responses to disinformation



Note: N= 39 CoGs and 24 MHs. Ecuador’s guidelines are in the process of being developed. Nine CoGs claimed to have a government-wide strategy, plan, toolkit or guidance document in this regard, including BEL, CRI, CZE, EST, FRA, GBR, IRL, LTU and NLD. Two CoGs, namely GBR and SVN, claimed to have a ministry-specific strategy, plan, toolkit or guidance document.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding public communication”.

Of countries that have developed strategies, there are some commonalities in the objectives pursued. Among the 15 countries that reported having a defined strategy at the CoG level to counter disinformation, the top three goals included “increasing societal resistance to disinformation,” “helping civil servants understand the threat posed by disinformation,” and “helping civil servants respond to disinformation.”[5]

The high ranking of both internal (i.e. supporting civil servants) and external (i.e. increasing societal resistance) objectives for counter-disinformation strategies indicates that governments conceptualise these guidelines as tools for helping to respond to big-picture societal issues, as well as for supporting day-to-day initiatives and services.

Less emphasised in survey responses was the potential for strategies to carve out resources for evaluation and investigation that could bolster the understanding of and resilience to mis- and disinformation. Only 2 countries reported that "helping civil servants monitor the impact of government responses to disinformation" was a top-three priority, and none selected "to help identify areas for future research". Moving forward, there may be scope to support further investigation into the root causes and sources of the information disorder with a view to helping countries develop a more anticipatory and forward-looking approach.

The relatively low proportion of governments that have developed strategies or documents to guide interventions on countering disinformation does not necessarily mean that they have not engaged with the issue. On the contrary, evidence abounds of actions and initiatives implemented on a more ad hoc basis, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2020[3]). Such findings suggest that public institutions may have been inadequately prepared to face the wave of health misinformation that accompanied COVID-19. The absence of strategic guidance may have contributed to the hesitancy in many OECD and partner countries to communicate clearly about the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic and decisively about relevant emergency measures to contain the virus. This left room for misleading rumours about how the virus is spread and the effectiveness of measures to curtail its contagion, which had offline consequences on opposition to social distancing guidelines, vaccine resistance and even property damage, as noted above (Seitz, 2020[14]) (Satariano and Alba, 2020[10]).

Efforts to harmonise and strengthen the public communication response can improve the speed, coherence and transparency of public messages, as well as provide guidance and a framework for public officials to track and respond to mis- and disinformation. By explicitly outlining the purpose, methods and principles of efforts to tackle relevant challenges, governments can help ensure that public communication initiatives maximise impact and are pursued in a manner aligned with broader government goals. While creating a strategy is an important first step toward countering mis- and disinformation, internal communication about the strategy and training individuals on how to apply it are essential to its effective implementation. Ultimately, much of the value of guidance documents is in their ability to consolidate and rationalise otherwise scattered initiatives.

Institutional support for responding to mis- and disinformation – structures, training and evaluation

Along with the development of definitions and strategies, governments have also established organisational structures to help counter mis- and disinformation. Of those surveyed, 64% indicated there were specific structures, teams, or individuals responsible for the communications element of countering disinformation. The analysis shows that many of these teams are structured around monitoring online conversations and disseminating accurate information using online platforms. Continuing to analyse the relevance of the priority focus areas of these teams, their value and effectiveness will be central to ongoing work in this space.

In the United Kingdom, for example, the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) is a team of analyst-editors, data scientists, media and digital experts located at the CoG that monitors online conversations to identify emerging issues, alert government departments to emerging stories and assess the effectiveness of communications. The RRU takes a tailored approach, working closely with departments across the government to ensure users see search results and social media content with accurate information (Aiken, 2018[15]). The Unit's role as a co-ordinator of departments and agencies also includes providing daily,

weekly and commissioned online news reports and tailored social media insight products to press officers and media specialists across government (see Box 6.1).

One of the key benefits of establishing a structure is the opportunity it provides for a consistent and strategic focus on building capacity and sharing lessons. Only eight survey respondents, however, had teams tasked with developing and implementing training on countering disinformation. Across surveyed governments, it is one of the competencies that has the least dedicated training.

Public communicators are well placed to track and combat the spread of misleading and false content. Identifying and sharing best practices and training materials could contribute to the professionalisation of communication as a discipline, as well as reinforce efforts to respond to mis- and disinformation in a transparent way that promotes democratic engagement.

Box 6.1. The United Kingdom's institutionalised response to mis- and disinformation

The UK government has developed a number of structures and guidelines to respond to mis- and disinformation, including the Rapid Response Unit (RRU), RESIST framework, and a training course on Understanding Disinformation.

Rapid Response Unit – As part of its public communication response, the UK Government established the RRU to concentrate monitoring and response efforts across the administration. The RRU is located at the centre of government and responsible for co-ordinating with and supporting all departments in tracking and devising responses to misinformation in their issue areas.

RESIST Counter-disinformation toolkit – The UK Government Communication Service (GCS) developed the RESIST toolkit to help public sector communications professionals, policy officers, senior managers, and special advisers develop responses to disinformation. RESIST stands for:

- **R**ecognise disinformation
- **E**arly warning
- **S**ituational insight
- **I**mpact analysis
- **S**trategic communication
- **T**rack outcomes

The toolkit arms departments with best practices to monitor, assess, and counter disinformation. The full toolkit is available publicly online at https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/resist-counter-disinformation-toolkit/.

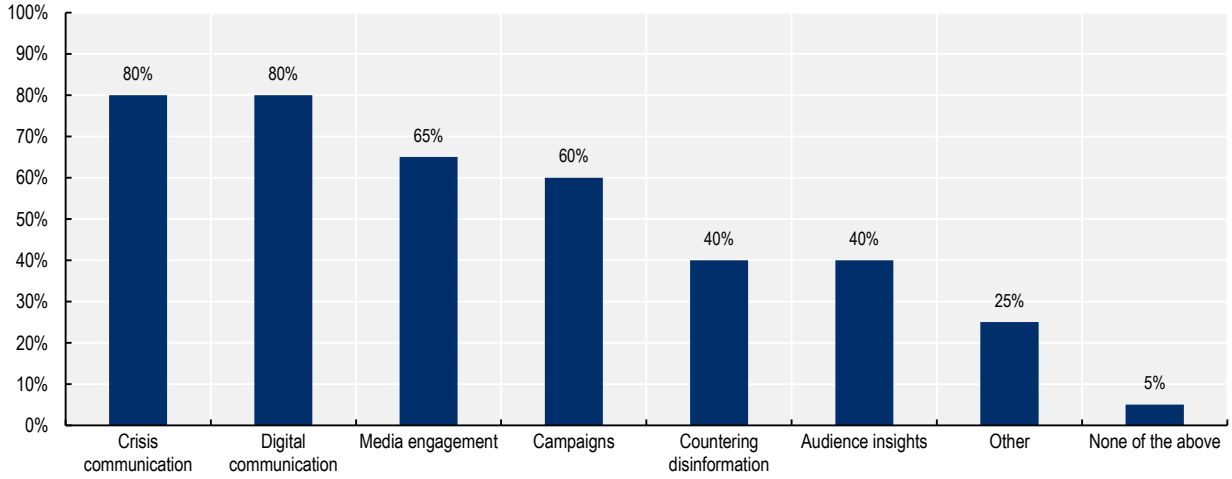
Understanding disinformation – Government Communication Service International (GCSI) delivers a training programme on how to "recognise and respond to disinformation as a government communicator". The course is available to all GCS employees. The six modules of the course are released weekly, with participants able to complete lessons on their own time.

Source: Author's own work, based on: https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/courses/understanding-disinformation-in-partnership-with-gcsi/.

Tackling these challenges requires a diverse mix of skills and competencies, and building them into relevant departments can be part of a wider effort to strengthen the function. As Figure 6.3 illustrates, the top two competencies for which respondents have a structure, individual or team in charge of training – communicating during a crisis and supporting digital communication – play a key role in supporting a robust response to mis- and disinformation. On the other hand, only 40% of respondents noted the same for "countering disinformation," suggesting an opportunity to expand professionalisation efforts in this area.

The modules developed by UK GCSI to help employees recognise and respond to disinformation serve as a useful model.

Figure 6.3. Competency areas where training is developed and implemented by CoGs



Note: N= 20 CoGs that claimed to have a structure/individual/team in charge of training.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In addition to training, evaluation is a key tool for public communicators as they work to counter mis- and disinformation. Evaluation helps ensure that communicators successfully dispel falsehoods, helps identify challenges in countering disinformation, and provides lessons in overcoming them.[6] Understanding the impact of government responses is a priority for many OECD and partner economies, with 28 of responding CoGs reporting that they conducted evaluation of counter-disinformation activities. Nevertheless, there is scope to expand and solidify these efforts. For example, only seven surveyed countries reported evaluating responses to disinformation on a regular (rather than ad hoc) basis, while only 5 of 24 MHs surveyed indicated doing so on a regular basis. Through the regular evaluation of these activities, as conducted, for example, by the Netherlands' National Cyber Security Centre, governments can systematically build evidence of what works and what does not in their national context.

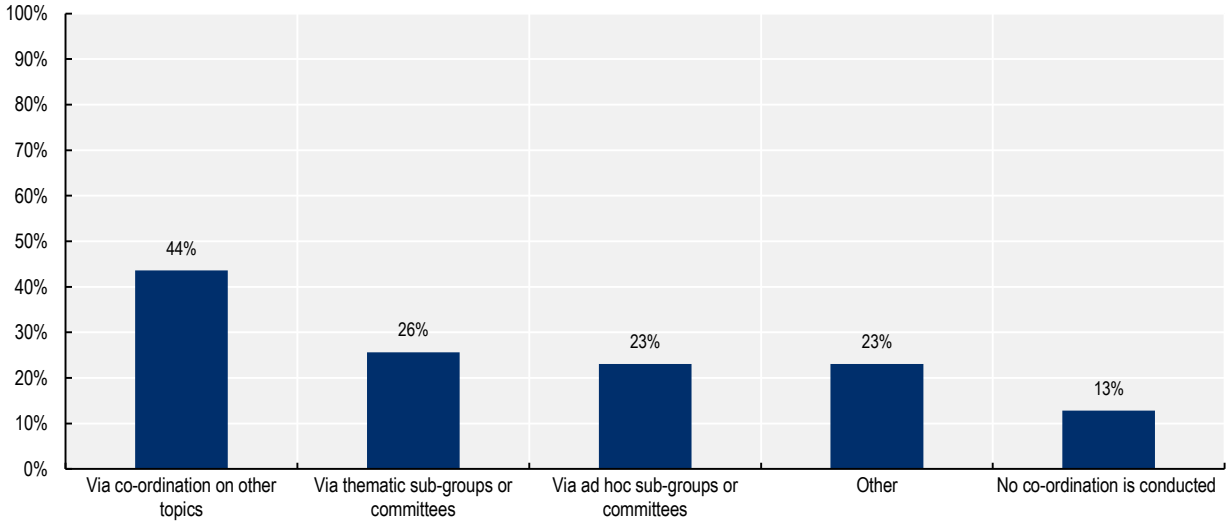
Notably, evaluating responses to disinformation has not been as widely implemented as evaluation of other topics as detailed in Chapter 4. Twenty-three CoGs reported having dedicated teams to evaluate media engagement, 21 for crisis communications and campaigns, and 17 for strategies and internal communication. In addition, only two countries selected 'to help civil servants monitor the impact of government responses to disinformation' as a priority in their programmes to counter disinformation, indicating it is a line of work that may benefit from more focus. While the data provided initial insight into the evaluation of government communication, more work needs to be done to understand how it is conducted and how insights gathered are integrated into responses to disinformation.

Intra- and inter-governmental co-ordination

The threats posed by mis- and disinformation are complex, with local, national and international implications. Effective co-ordination mechanisms are therefore required to help governments combat false information on many fronts at once. Co-ordination can take place across ministries within a country; internationally across countries; and between governments and domestic stakeholders such as civil society groups, social media companies and individuals.

First, intra-government co-ordination is widespread across surveyed countries, with 34 out of 39 of CoGs indicating co-ordination with other ministries, agencies, or departments on the issue of mis- and disinformation. Seventeen CoGs co-ordinated such activities via other issues, such as broader communication topics or security. Ten established thematic sub-groups or committees, and nine did so through ad hoc sub-groups (see Figure 6.4). Other methods included emails and WhatsApp groups to bring together officials from across the government.

Figure 6.4. Mechanisms used by CoGs to co-ordinate disinformation activities with other entities



Note: N= 39 CoGs. Countries under "no co-ordination is conducted" include those that do not co-ordinate with other entities and those who do not conduct activities on disinformation.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated efforts to increase intra-governmental co-ordination in this context. Mis- and disinformation about health issues in particular have long plagued the medical community (Trethewey, 2020[16]). The outbreak and escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fast-spreading myths about the causes of the virus, erroneous cures, and vaccine conspiracies, have brought new urgency to efforts to work across government to counter such narratives. In Italy, for example, a taskforce was set up in April 2020 to facilitate collaboration on responses to COVID-19-related disinformation between CoG, the Civil Protection Department, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Italian Communications Regulator (AGCOM). Additional instruments, such as weekly newsletters, can help raise awareness of issues and threats and serve as a basis for additional co-ordination mechanisms. In France, the SIG sends a weekly newsletter to promote cross-government understanding of recent trends related to mis- and disinformation and contribute to co-ordinated response across the government.

Moving forward, countries may look to identify successes and lessons from the creation of structures initially established to counter misinformation about COVID-19. While 87% of CoGs surveyed indicated they co-ordinate across government on disinformation responses, just over half that did so (44%; 17 respondents) indicated at least some of their co-ordination occurs through work on other topics, rather than specifically on disinformation. Survey responses did not indicate whether developing new dedicated co-ordination mechanisms on disinformation may be advantageous compared to integrating it in existing practices. However, governments that have set up more advanced counter-disinformation interventions appear to have centralised capacity, with an eye to directly supporting all parts of government, as in the case of the RRU example above. This approach focuses on effective co-ordination as a key to the success of its initiatives and an important aspect to investigate further. Such centralised capacity can also be useful

in producing resources that can be easily adapted and used by agencies and ministries at the national level, as well as by sub-national governments and community groups.

While national-level public communicators play a key role in limiting the harm caused by the spread of mis- and disinformation, the challenge is also a global one that requires international co-operation, particularly in the face of co-ordinated efforts to spread mis- and disinformation by state and non-state actors. Notably, in 2018, a high-level group of experts tasked by the European Union with assessing the state of disinformation and proposing solutions concluded that the "problems can be handled most effectively, and in manner that is fully compliant with freedom of expression, free press and pluralism, only if all major stakeholders collaborate" (European Commission, 2018[17]). To fulfil its brief to develop a platform for sharing good practices between countries, the EU created the Rapid Alert System, which established an EU-wide network of strategic communication professionals to flag, share, and respond to disinformation (European Commission, 2018[18]). See Box 6.2 for additional examples of intra-governmental and international co-ordination.

Box 6.2. Co-ordination in practice

Intra-governmental co-ordination

The Government of Canada's Safeguarding Elections plan

In January 2019, the Canadian Ministers of Democratic Institutions, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and National Defence annouonced the Plan to safeguard that year's General Election. The first pillar of the plan, Enhancing Citizen Preparedness, presented a robust public communication plan, which included a clear and impartial process for informing the public of an incident that threatens Canada's ability to have a free and fair election (the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol), a programme to build citizen resilience against online disinformation (the Digital Citizen Initiative), increased resources for an existing cyber security awareness campaign (Get Cyber Safe), and a public report on cyber threats to Canada's democratic process from the country's cyber security agency. The Critical Election Incident Public Protocol was administered by a panel of senior public servants from across government, which included the Clerk of the Privy Council, the National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General, the Deputy Minister of Public Safety, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Following the 2019 election, elements of the Plan underwent internal and/or independent assessments, which confirmed the Plan's utility and relevance. In order to safeguard future Canadian elections, key measures were improved and renewed for 2021 and beyond.

International co-ordination

EU Action Plan against Disinformation

In preparing for European elections, the European Commission called for the development of a co-ordinated response to disinformation in June and October 2018. The Action Plan Against Disinformation was adopted in December 2018 with the aim of building capabilities and strengthening co-operation between EU Member States and EU institutions. The Action Plan sets out a whole-of-society approach to countering disinformation that is grounded in European values, including freedom of speech. The four pillars of the plan are:

- improving detection, analysis and exposure of disinformation
- strengthening co-operation and joint responses to disinformation
- mobilising private sector to tackle disinformation

- raising awareness and improving societal resilience.

With the Action Plan in place, the European Union was better able to quickly mobilise an effort to counter disinformation about COVID-19.

Source: Author's own work, based on: https://www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/news/2019/01/safeguarding-elections.html; https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/action-plan-disinformation-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018_en

The field of mis- and disinformation is evolving rapidly, and governments are still in the process of understanding the phenomenon. Public communicators have quickly scaled up efforts to combat the spread of false and misleading content, particularly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and taking stock of progress to date provides helpful insight into the state of the field and next steps. Further institutionalising responses to mis- and disinformation through adopting specific definitions, designing communication strategies, and leveraging new and existing resources for targeted training, evaluation and co-ordination will help streamline and systematise best practices.

Path forward: Identifying targeted public communication practices and engaging in a whole-of-society response

Ultimately, responding effectively to the challenges and opportunities that the communication landscape presents will require a holistic approach. In addition to the measures governments can take to strengthen the institutionalisation of their responses – via guidelines and definitions, structures, capacity building, evaluation and co-ordination of responses – they should also continue to focus on both their specific communication practices, as well as the means to work with outside partners, including social media platforms, to improve the environment in which communications occur. The relationship between the three elements – enabling institutions, practices, and enabling ecosystems – is underlined in the OECD *Good Practice Principles on public communication responses to help counter mis- and disinformation* (see Box 6.3).

Box 6.3. OECD Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation

The draft OECD Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation have been developed as part of the larger effort to ensure communicators can tackle emerging challenges and build confidence in the information environment. The ten principles are:

1. Transparency

Governments strive to communicate in an honest, clear and open manner, with institutions comprehensively disclosing information, decisions, processes and data within the limitations of relevant legislation and regulation. Transparency, including about assumptions and uncertainty, can reduce the scope for rumours and falsehoods to take root, as well as enable public scrutiny of official information and open government data.

2. Inclusiveness

Interventions are designed and diversified to reach all groups in society. Official information strives to be relevant and easily understood, with messages tailored for diverse publics. Channels and messages are appropriate for intended audiences, and communication initiatives are conducted with respect for cultural and linguistic differences and with attention paid to reaching disengaged, vulnerable, underrepresented or marginalised groups.

3. Responsiveness

Governments develop interventions and communications around the needs and concerns of citizens. Adequate resources and efforts are dedicated to understanding and listening to their questions and expectations to develop informed and tailored messages. Responsive approaches facilitate two-way dialogue, including with vulnerable, underrepresented and marginalised groups, and enable an avenue for public participation in policy decisions.

4. Whole-of-society

Government efforts to counteract information disorders are integrated within a whole-of-society approach, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the media, private sector, civil society, academia and individuals. Governments broadly promote the public's resilience to mis- and disinformation, as well as an environment conducive to accessing, sharing and facilitating constructive public engagement around information and data. Where relevant, public institutions co-ordinate and engage with non-governmental partners with the aim of building trust across society and all parts of the country.

5. Public interest-driven

Public communication should strive to be independent from politicisation in implementing interventions to counteract mis- and disinformation. Public communication is conducted as separate and distinct from partisan and electoral communication, with the introduction of measures to ensure clear authorship, impartiality, accountability, and objectivity.

6. Institutionalisation

Governments consolidate interventions into coherent approaches guided by official communication and data policies, standards and guidelines. Public communication offices benefit from adequate human and financial resources, a well-co-ordinated cross-government approach at national and sub-national levels, and dedicated, trained and professional staff.

7. Evidence-based

Government interventions are designed and informed by trustworthy and reliable data, testing, behavioural insights, and build on the monitoring and evaluation of relevant activities. Research, analysis and learnings are continuously gathered and feed into improved approaches and practices. Governments focus on recognising emerging narratives, behaviours, and characteristics to understand the context in which they are communicating and responding.

8. Timeliness

Public institutions develop mechanisms to act in a timely manner by identifying and responding to emerging narratives, recognising the speed at which false information can travel. Communicators work to build preparedness and rapid responses by establishing co-ordination and approval mechanisms to intervene quickly with accurate, relevant and compelling content.

9. Prevention

Government interventions are designed to pre-empt rumours, falsehoods and conspiracies to stop potentially harmful information from gaining traction and to build resilience to mis- and disinformation. A focus on prevention requires governments to monitor and track problematic content and its sources; recognise information gaps; understand and anticipate common disinformation tactics, vulnerabilities and risks; and identify appropriate responses, such as "pre-bunking".

10. Future-proof

Public institutions invest in innovative research and use strategic foresight to anticipate the evolution of technology and information ecosystems and prepare for likely threats. Counter-misinformation interventions are designed to be open, adaptable and matched with efforts to build civil servants' capacity to respond to evolving challenges.

The principles are intended to:

- Compile evidence on public communication and related government interventions aimed at tackling mis- and disinformation and addressing underlying issues and sources of mistrust in information.
- Stimulate a multi-disciplinary discussion on what has worked in addressing low public confidence toward information from official and mainstream sources.
- Help guide government interventions to build information ecosystems that promote openness, transparency and inclusion, ultimately increasing trust in public institutions and strengthening democracies.
- Provide practical guidance for international efforts to promote confidence in COVID-19 vaccines as an essential step to overcoming the pandemic.

Source: OECD (forthcoming[2]), *Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

The institutionalisation elements discussed throughout this chapter can support the development of specific practices by contributing to the professionalisation of communications as a discipline and can support policies that allow the broader information ecosystem to flourish. The following sections will in turn discuss some of the specific communication practices that underpin responses to disinformation and explore how governments can engage in a whole-of-society effort to tackle relevant challenges and promote democratic discussion, as well as indicate areas for further research.

Communication practices to provide accurate and timely information and reach all segments of society

The daily practices of public communicators are essential to counteracting mis- and disinformation. Transparent and regular communication can proactively prevent falsehoods from spreading and increase trust in the government as a source of accurate, reliable and timely information. Openness, relevance and responsiveness are critical, and, as discussed below, are also particularly useful for countering false narratives.

One of the most straightforward practices to countering mis- and disinformation is through fact checking and debunking false stories. In debunking a piece of false information, research has shown that it is crucial to first state the correct information, then explain clearly what is false and why, and finally re-emphasise the correction (Chan et al., 2017[19]). Effectiveness also requires that disinformation be caught early, which also highlights the importance of having media, and social media, monitoring procedures in place. Additionally, given limited time and resources, it is impossible for any public communicator to counter every piece of misinformation. Indeed, on occasion debunking can even be counterproductive if it draws attention to a rumour. Establishing and regularly reviewing thresholds for responding to a particular falsehood – for instance, a given level of engagement or spread – can simplify decision-making processes and make debunking more effective (Lewandowsky at al., 2020[20]).

Even once a falsehood has been debunked, however, the false information may remain relevant for those who have seen it. Getting ahead of disinformation – or, in effect, inoculating individuals through "pre-

bunking" – may therefore prove to be a more effective strategy. For example, individuals are less likely to be swayed by disinformation if they have been exposed to a weak version of the falsehood (Roozenbeek and van der Linden, 2021[21]). The "Go Viral!" and "Bad News" games developed at the University of Cambridge are examples of efforts to conduct pre-bunking (see Box 6.4 for examples of government efforts to support debunking and pre-bunking).

Box 6.4. Examples of debunking and pre-bunking

Debunking false and misleading claims is one approach used by public communicators to help promote fact-based public conversation and information environments. Doing so effectively requires speed, accuracy and a careful consideration of context. Debunking should be applied strategically and guided by the prevention of harm, and considering where in the "life-cycle" of media manipulation the misinformation falls will be important to target responses appropriately. To that end, establishing and updating guidance for debunking can facilitate decision making.

Journalists, fact-checking organisations, social media companies and individuals alike can play active roles in debunking misleading and incorrect content. While governments cannot – and should not – serve as "arbiters of truth," there are a number of examples where governments have established efforts to respond to potentially damaging and misleading content.

For its part, pre-bunking focuses on forewarning people and providing potential counterarguments regarding manipulative misinformation. The following examples of how governments have conducted or supported related efforts help illustrate a path forward:

US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)

In the run up to the 2020 national election, the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) published a Rumor Control site that responds to common election-related mis- and disinformation. This website provides an example of a government-led effort to counteract misleading information around a specific topic, in this case elections. It addresses common misunderstandings and rumours related to election security by describing processes, security measures, and legal requirements designed to protect against or detect security issues related to election infrastructure and processes. It also provides definitions, resources and links to additional information.

EUvsDisinfo

Established in 2015 in response to external "ongoing disinformation campaigns", EUvsDisinfo is the flagship programme of the European External Action Service's (EEAS) East StratCom Task Force. The project is staffed by full-time staff with backgrounds in communications, journalism and social sciences and relevant language skills who are seconded by EU Member States or recruited by EU institutions. They identify, compile, expose and debunk disinformation and collect the cases they detect in an open-source, searchable database.

"Go Viral!" and "Bad News" pre-bunking games

The Go Viral! game was developed by the University of Cambridge in partnership the UK Cabinet Office. It builds on research that found that by exposing people to the techniques used to spread misinformation online, they can better identify and disregard false and misleading content. Through the game, players are exposed to the thinking behind false news stories and memes to help them detect such content in the real world. The *Go Viral!* game is based on a pre-COVID version of the game, *Bad News*, which has been played more than a million times since its launch in 2018. Research found that playing the game once reduced a player's perception that misinformation was reliable by an average of 21%.

Source: Author's own work, based on: Donovan, Joan (2020) *"The Life Cycle of Media Manipulation,"* The Verification Handbook 3, 2020. https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-3/investigating-disinformation-and-media-manipulation/the-lifecycle-of-media-manipulation; Donovan, Joan; Friedberg, Brian; Lim, Gabrielle; Leaver, Nicole; Nilsen, Jennifer; and Dreyfuss, Emily, (2021), *Mitigating Medical Misinformation: A Whole-of-Society Approach to Countering Spam, Scams, and Hoaxes*, https://mediamanipulation.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Mitigating-Medical-Misinformation-March-29-2021_0.pdf; https://euvsdisinfo.eu/; Roozenbeek J. and van der Linden, S. (2021), "Don't Just Debunk, Prebunk: Inoculate Yourself Against Digital Misinformation", Character & Context Blog, Society for Personality and Social Psychology (https://www.spsp.org/news-center/blog/roozenbeek-van-der-linden-resisting-digital-misinformation; Roozenbeek, J. and S. van der Linden (2019), "Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation", Palgrave Communications, Vol. 5/1, http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0279-9; https://www.cisa.gov/rumorcontrol.

Clear and open communication, particularly in the face of uncertainty, is also important to combatting disinformation, and recent research indicates that such honesty can boost confidence in messages (van der Bles et al., 2020[22]). In fact, as noted in the United Kingdom's Uncertainty Toolkit for Analysts in Government (Home Office, n.d.[23]), failing to accurately convey the degree of uncertainty in predicted outcomes can undermine trust in the long run when real-world events contradict government messages. The Toolkit contains good practices for communicating uncertainty, including understanding the audience, using plain language and using data to illustrate the message rather than often-misunderstood descriptors such as "low risk" or "very likely".

Diversifying the messengers and platforms promoting verified information is another important component to the success of efforts to correct falsehoods. Government platforms on their own are limited in their reach, particularly to segments of the public who have lower trust in institutions – a critical audience for counter-disinformation narratives. Leveraging the voices and platforms of individuals and groups who enjoy high levels of trust across society can help amplify government messages and increase their perceived reliability among difficult-to-reach populations.

An initiative implemented by Finland at the beginning of the pandemic illustrates how external voices can be key to quickly mobilising effective messages. The government drew on the National Emergency Supply Agency – an established network of authorities, business and industry to be activated in response to security concerns – to reach the public with accurate information about the pandemic through encouraging influencers to amplify messages. In collaboration with private sector partners, the government distributed a weekly email to influential voices in Finnish society with facts about coronavirus and ready-made content for social media channels. The campaign was well received, and a survey of people who followed participating social media accounts found that 97% found information about the virus shared by influencers to be reliable, and nearly half said they changed their behaviour during the pandemic because of messages (PING Helsinki, 2020[24]).

As seen in the case of Finland, using social media influencers to amplify government messages can be an effective tool, provided it is conducted in a transparent and public-interest-driven manner. In Belgium, scientists rather than politicians delivered the government's daily COVID-19 briefing, and they are accompanied by a rapid response team pulled from relevant civil service departments. This has allowed the daily briefings to effectively counter misinformation, depoliticise and reinforce the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus and emphasise the importance of paying attention to knock-on impacts of the virus, such as the toll on mental health (Brunsden and Khan, 2020[25]).

Beyond the government's role as an information provider, facilitating two-way communication can help ensure the public's concerns, beliefs and behaviours are more widely understood and appreciated. Two-way communication helps increase participation and engagement with a wider variety of stakeholders, and helps governments share messages more effectively. For example, as described in greater detail in Chapter 7, at the beginning of the pandemic, Slovenia enlisted the assistance of doctors and medical students to help clarify information about COVID-19 and more clearly understand the public's questions and concerns. The hotline that was established answered more than 135 000 calls concerning the rules

on crossing the border, movement and gatherings, testing, and other health concerns. The initiative also helped the government track citizens' knowledge of and concerns about the pandemic. Initial questions about the symptoms and prevention of COVID-19 gave way to clarification questions about government measures in response to the virus as the pandemic progressed.

Additionally, public communicators should consider the role of shifting digital contexts on how individuals receive and react to messages. How people consume information and engage with digital tools are constantly evolving. To that end, behavioural insights (or BI) are particularly important to understanding the mechanics of how people interact with content and how misinformation can spread, as well as the potential effectiveness of different approaches. Cognitive and psychological factors such as information overload, confirmation bias and a tendency to believe repeated messages can undermine factual messages and challenge public communicators' ability to disseminate accurate information[7]. Indeed, the same cognitive and behavioural factors are and can be exploited by ill-motivated actors behind sophisticated disinformation campaigns that play on people's vulnerabilities and fears. Accounting for human psychology can help communicators develop more effective responses to mis- and disinformation and predict how their audiences will receive them.

Behavioural insights can help governments combat misinformation by recognising who is most vulnerable and why; designing behaviourally informed solutions; and evaluating solutions empirically. Psychological mechanisms such as illusory truth effect[8] and locus of control[9] are among the mechanisms that motivate people to believe and share mis- and disinformation. Behavioural insights can help uncover these and allow public communicators to combat the root cause of information disorder. Through designing behavioural prompts, such as 'nudges' to think about accuracy before sharing a link, public communicators and BI experts can work together to prevent disinformation-spreading behaviour rather than try to contradict false messages once they have already taken hold. Through rigorous tests such as randomised control trials, BI experts can also help provide empirical foundations for communication efforts. As also identified by the OECD, however, government have faced difficulties integrating BI approaches into their regulatory policy-making processes, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Challenges have included clarifying roles and expectations, financial and human resources, and communicating outputs and outcomes (OECD, 2020[26]), echoing the challenges faced by public communicators.

While this is not an exhaustive list of communication practices that can help counter the challenges faced, it provides an initial insight into how countries are putting into practice their efforts to respond to misleading and false content. Continuing to collect, analyse and share how these practices are being put into effective use and how they might be shared and applied more widely will be the focus of ongoing work in this field.

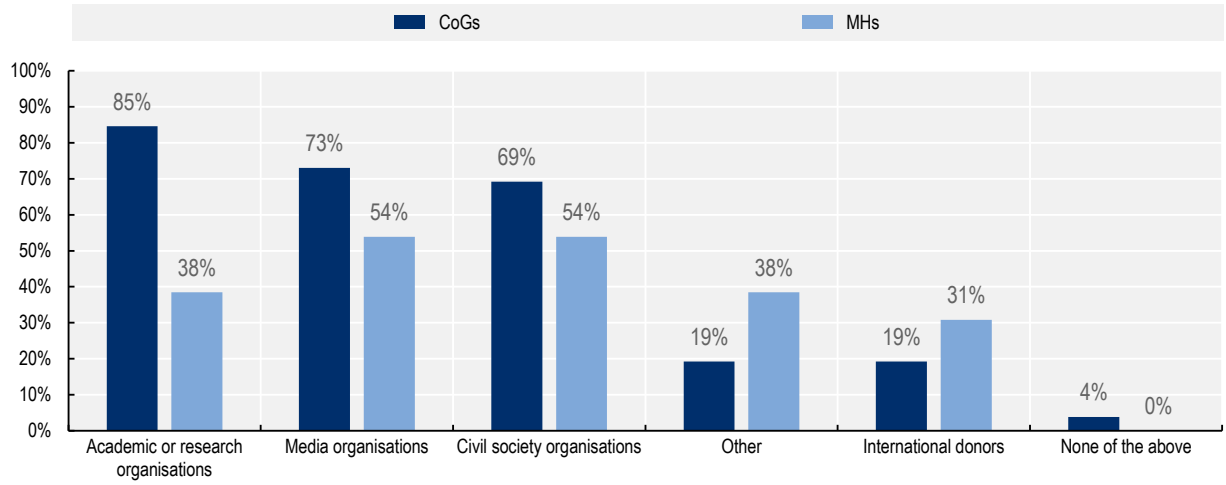
A whole-of-society approach to supporting public communication and the information ecosystem

Beyond implementing good communications practices and institutionalising responses to mis- and disinformation, the threats posed are at least in part a symptom of larger societal issues. In this regard, governments should attempt to engage in a whole-of-society effort that includes working with and benefiting from civil society, the private sector and individuals to support the timely and effective sharing of information and data and to promote democratic discussion.

Indeed, as noted by the European Commission, "the best responses are likely to be those driven by multi-stakeholder collaborations" (European Commission, 2018[18]). To facilitate a holistic approach, governments can engage with stakeholders from across civil society, the private sector and the public. To that end, of countries surveyed, 72% already consulted with actors outside of government on topics related to disinformation. Academic and research organisations were the most commonly involved, with 85% of CoGs (22 out of 26) that engaged with non-governmental organisations listing them as partners. Ministries of Health were less likely to co-ordinate with external stakeholders, with only 54% indicating they did so. Among those that did co-ordinate, media and civil society organisations (7 out of 13 respectively) were the

most consulted (see Figure 6.5). Organisational structures permitting, there may therefore be an opportunity for MHs to increase their engagement with external stakeholders, or benefit from engagement conducted by the CoG, to bolster their expertise in responding to disinformation.

Figure 6.5. Stakeholders consulted by CoGs and MHs on the issue of countering disinformation



Note: N CoGs= 26; Australia, Germany and the Netherlands did not provide data for this question. A total of 10 CoGs indicated in question 53 that the government has never consulted with external actors. N MHs= 13; A total of 11 MHs indicated they never consulted with external actors.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

It should be noted, however, that the majority (65%) of CoGs that co-ordinated with non-governmental actors to counter disinformation did so on an ad-hoc basis. As such, there may be scope to continue to formalise and regularise engagement with non-government actors. For instance, as identified in the OECD data collection process, the 2018 Report of the Belgian Expert Group on False Information and Disinformation contains a recommendation to create a permanent consultation forum between the government and universities, media, NGOs, and social media and search platforms. As designed, the forum would have three primary functions: to foster dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and co-ordination; to centralise relevant information and activities in Belgium; and to facilitate co-operative projects between different actors. Through the centralisation of research, the provision of tools for citizens and journalists, support for quality journalism (including financial support), and bolstering media literacy efforts, the platform would take a four-pronged approach to stemming the tide of disinformation. Beyond its concrete aims, the creation of the platform would intentionally send the signal that the responsibility for keeping societal debate balanced and factual lies with all actors. Similarly, the EU report "Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach" (European Commission, 2018[17]), lays out the EU's approach to responding to disinformation, including the creation of the 2018 Code of Practice on Disinformation, support for quality journalism to foster a pluralistic media environment, and acknowledgement of the role for educational initiatives and awareness campaigns to improve media literacy.

One avenue for collaboration is in empowering citizens to detect and discard false information via media literacy initiatives. Such efforts can help stem its spread as well as create incentives within media markets to refrain from promoting misleading or incorrect information. For instance, the 'Media for Citizens-Citizens for the Media: Strengthening the Capacity of NGOs for the Development of Media and Information Literacy in the Western Balkans' initiative brought together seven media literacy organisations in the Western Balkans in an EU-funded project to improve media literacy. The project aims to understand and improve the state of media literacy in the region through mapping the current state of policies and practices; hosting summits where practitioners, experts, and activists can create coalitions; and ultimately funding online

campaigns, programmes to bring journalists into high school classrooms, and 40 civil society-led information literacy initiatives (CIMUSEE, 2018[27]; Greene et al., 2021[28]).

A diverse media ecosystem that supports strong, independent, fact-based outlets is an additional critical element to underpinning the flow of accurate information. However, these media models are the ones most threatened in the digital age. According to the 2020 Reuters Digital News Report, the COVID-19 pandemic has particularly exacerbated the impact of digital disruption on local media, even as it has underlined the importance of these outlets in keeping citizens informed about the prevalence of the virus in their area, highlighting local measures to stop the spread, as well as holding local politicians to account (Newman et al., 2020[29]). Identifying efforts to support a thriving, diverse media landscape can help forestall the spread of false information and improve the space for public engagement and dialogue.

Furthermore, involving citizens in the process of designing interventions through civic dialogues and deliberative processes can help to hone messages for audiences susceptible to disinformation as well as improve citizens' trust in government. The French government initiated such a process to counteract COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among citizens. Faced with a low rate of intended vaccine uptake, where only 57% of citizens initially said they intended to get vaccinated, the French government assembled a randomly selected, demographically representative 35-member citizens' vaccine panel to consult on the strategy for rolling out the vaccine (Casassus, 2021[30]). The panel was tasked with considering proposals related to questions, fears and ethical considerations related to the COVID-19 vaccine, in particular around communication with the general public, dialogue with health professionals and access to vaccination in some geographical regions and segments of the population. After three days of consideration, the panel recommended, among others, that "positive communication" be adapted for specific audiences (Desmoulières, 2021[31]).

Finally, the threat posed by the spread of mis- and disinformation will continue to evolve, and responses to it will need to evolve as well. To that end, supporting academic and scientific research and maintaining open channels between experts and practitioners, both in government and in the private sector, will be crucial to robust, holistic approaches going forward. Innovations like the pre-bunking games *Bad News* and *Go Viral!*, which first emerged out of a collaboration between the UK government, Cambridge University and a media agency in the private sector (the technology think tank Debunk EU facilitated the game's introduction in the Baltic States), would not have been possible without the perspectives and expertise of each party. Moving forward, governments can continue to identify not just the most effective public communication responses, but the interplay of those efforts with a broader set of initiatives to support the media and information ecosystem more widely.

Such responses are broader than public communication responses. At the same time, however, there is a range of potential regulatory or legislative responses that are the purview of independent bodies or Parliaments, such as those concerning the diversity and independence of the media; the strength of a country's civic space; content moderation, transparency requirements and business models of social media platforms; etc. While these issues also play an important role, the scope of the practices discussed here focus more narrowly on those that directly involve constructive engagement focused on strengthening the information space.

Key Findings and way forward

- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new urgency to the challenges posed by the spread of mis- and disinformation. Notably, only 38% of CoG and 21% of MH respondents had a strategy in place to govern the response to mis- and disinformation at the outset of the crisis. This relative lack of institutional focus does not necessarily mean that governments have ignored the issue, but it does indicate they may have been inadequately prepared to face the wave of health misinformation that accompanied COVID-19. Ad hoc and crisis responses, especially during the pandemic, were activated quickly, suggesting that systematising responses can help governments anticipate future and evolving challenges and thereby be more effective. Moving forward, additional research will help illustrate specific benefits to the creation and application of strategies, how they can be applied most effectively, and lessons for countries that are seeking to develop a more consistent institutional focus to responding to this challenge. Strengthening communicators' understanding of how to counter mis- and disinformation and establishing consistent practices can also help facilitate collaboration, identify a common path forward and stay ahead of emerging trends. Identifying successes and lessons from responses initially established to counter misinformation about COVID-19 will also be a useful approach.
- OECD data suggests that there is scope to strengthen the evaluation of governments' responses to disinformation. Through the regular evaluation of counter-disinformation activities, governments can build evidence of what works and what does not. Measuring the public's understanding and receptiveness to messages can indicate the success of campaigns, further clarify messages, and inform the design of training materials and activities. Increasing the focus on identifying what works and providing training to public communicators on responses to misinformation are important avenues for future activities.
- The complex and widespread challenges posed by mis- and disinformation also highlight the importance of co-ordination across and between governments, as well as with external stakeholders. Overall, co-ordination was widespread across surveyed countries, with 86% reporting co-ordination between CoG and ministries, agencies, or departments, and 72% of countries surveyed engaged with actors outside of government on topics related to disinformation. Nevertheless, given that the majority of countries that co-ordinated externally did so on an ad-hoc basis, there may be scope to continue to formalise and regularise such engagement. The presence of domestic and international actors intent on sowing harm or confusion highlights the essential role of co-ordination between all relevant actors to tackle the spread of mis- and disinformation. With external stakeholders, such engagement could take the form of public communication practices that enable honest, timely and relevant messages that utilise two-way dialogue and a broad range of trusted channels and spokespersons. External engagement can also facilitate the exchange of good practices, as well as help strengthen the context in which information is shared through support for media literacy, quality fact-based journalism, deliberative democracy initiatives, etc.
- Governments should also view the public communication function as part of a wider response to the challenges represented by mis- and disinformation. Developing a forward-looking approach, informed by innovative and inclusive communication practices, will complement institutionalisation efforts. Additionally, efforts to strengthen the media and information ecosystem through media literacy, regulatory responses, efforts to strengthen independent, local and fact-based journalism, and additional research on what works regarding specific interventions, among others, will help ensure public communication can play an effective role in governments' holistic responses to these challenges.
- Moving forward, governments can continue to explore how efforts to build resilient information environments can be seen within the wider context of rebuilding and maintaining trust and reinforcing democracy. More fully understanding of the causes and sources of the challenges presented by the spread of mis- and disinformation will in turn help develop forward-looking approaches to

communication responses to ongoing and complex issues, such as the COVID-19 recovery, climate change, etc. Continuing to collect, analyse and share good practices will serve an important role in providing useful and practical guidance.

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Notes

[1] This is understood as the combination of communication and media governance frameworks (i.e. institutional, legal, policy and regulatory) as well as principal actors (i.e. governments, traditional and social media companies and citizen journalists).

[2] For more discussion on role of public communication in responding to the challenges posed by the spread of mis- and disinformation, as well as a broader range of potential governance responses, see Matasick, C., C. Alfonsi and A. Bellantoni (2020[13]), "Governance responses to disinformation: How open government principles can inform policy options", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/d6237c85-en; and OECD (2020[12]), "Transparency, communication and trust: The role of public communication in responding to the wave of disinformation about the new Coronavirus", *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19),* OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/bef7ad6e-en.

[3] Malinformation, as defined by Wardle and Derakshan (2017[1]), describes 'when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.' The focus in this report is primarily on mis- and disinformation.

[4] The Korea Press Foundation was founded by the Korean government in 2010 as a public institution to support media. The body combines three previously existing institutions: Korea Press Foundation, Newspaper Commission for the Press, and Korean Newspaper Circulation Service. Their mission is to manage challenges facing journalism and media industries in Korea and to help Korean media industries adapt to new media and information technologies (https://www.kpf.or.kr/eng/user/engmain.do).

[5] The author identified the most important objectives in question 51 based on CoGs that claimed to have a strategy or guiding document to combat misinformation in question 50.

[6] The role evaluation plays in communication is covered in chapter 4 of this report. This chapter examines how evaluation can support responses to mis- and disinformation.

[7] Related literature and evidence is summarised in Shane (2020[32]), "The psychology of misinformation: Why we're vulnerable", First Draft, 30 June 2020 https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/the-psychology-of-misinformation-why-were-vulnerable/.

[8] The illusory truth effect is the tendency for people to believe information they have seen before, even if it is not true.

[9] Locus of control refers to an individual's belief about the extent of control they have over what happens to them, versus outside actors or events determining outcomes.

7 Communication applications for openness and improved public policies and services

This chapter analyses the contribution of public communication to improved policies and services as well as to the fundamental open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation. It focuses on campaigns, crisis and internal communication, as well as media relations. It makes the case for communications as a lever of government and a key contributor to good governance and democracy. It provides examples of how it can be used to advance countries' strategic objectives with a focus on the responses used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

The previous chapters of this Report analyse the governance arrangements and institutional requirements that can enable a more strategic public communication. They also examine the role of audience and behavioural insights, as well as evaluations, to fulfil this potential, before focusing on the particular context communicators are operating in and how they can respond to the threats of mis- and disinformation. This last chapter provides examples of how to maximise the ability of communications to improve policies and services, strengthen governance, and ultimately reinforce democracy.

As discussed throughout the Report, the potential remains for the public communication function to be used more effectively as a tool for policy making and better governance. For example, in their response to the OECD survey, only 16% of CoGs prioritised "better understanding and analysing public opinion", and only 8% prioritised "promoting stakeholder participation" as the objectives of their communication initiatives (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.1). Indeed, policy makers "frequently undervalue the role of communication in policy delivery" (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016[1]), and although communication can be used throughout the policy cycle, it mainly takes the form of campaigns for policy announcements and awareness-raising purposes (Macnamara, 2017[2]).

This chapter therefore provides examples of how to go beyond this classic use of communications. It explores how governments apply selected communication competencies that were covered in the OECD survey to support policies and services. This includes:

- targeting campaigns to support the implementation of policies and the take-up of services
- strengthening a constructive relationship with the media
- seizing the potential of internal communication for a more effective public sector
- communicating efficiently and inclusively during crises.

Each of these sections also includes an analysis and examples of the use of communication to promote the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation.

The use of campaigns to support the implementation of policies and services

Public communication campaigns are one of the most common means to support the implementation of policies and the delivery of services (Macnamara, 2017[2]). They help raise awareness of specific government reforms and support policy makers in pursuing targeted goals over defined timeframes. Beyond sharing information, they can also serve to help change public behaviour—as highlighted through their use during the COVID-19 pandemic—and enhance engagement in policy-making processes (Macnamara, 2017[2]).

The responses to the OECD survey highlighted common trends, opportunities and challenges with regards to implementing campaigns as an instrument of policy making. Notably, these activities emerged as one of the most established competencies across all countries and one that is often closely linked with policy goals. The following sections also highlight how campaigns have been used to amplify citizen participation, such as in the context of deliberative processes, and to foster a culture of integrity throughout society.

A widely used yet challenging practice

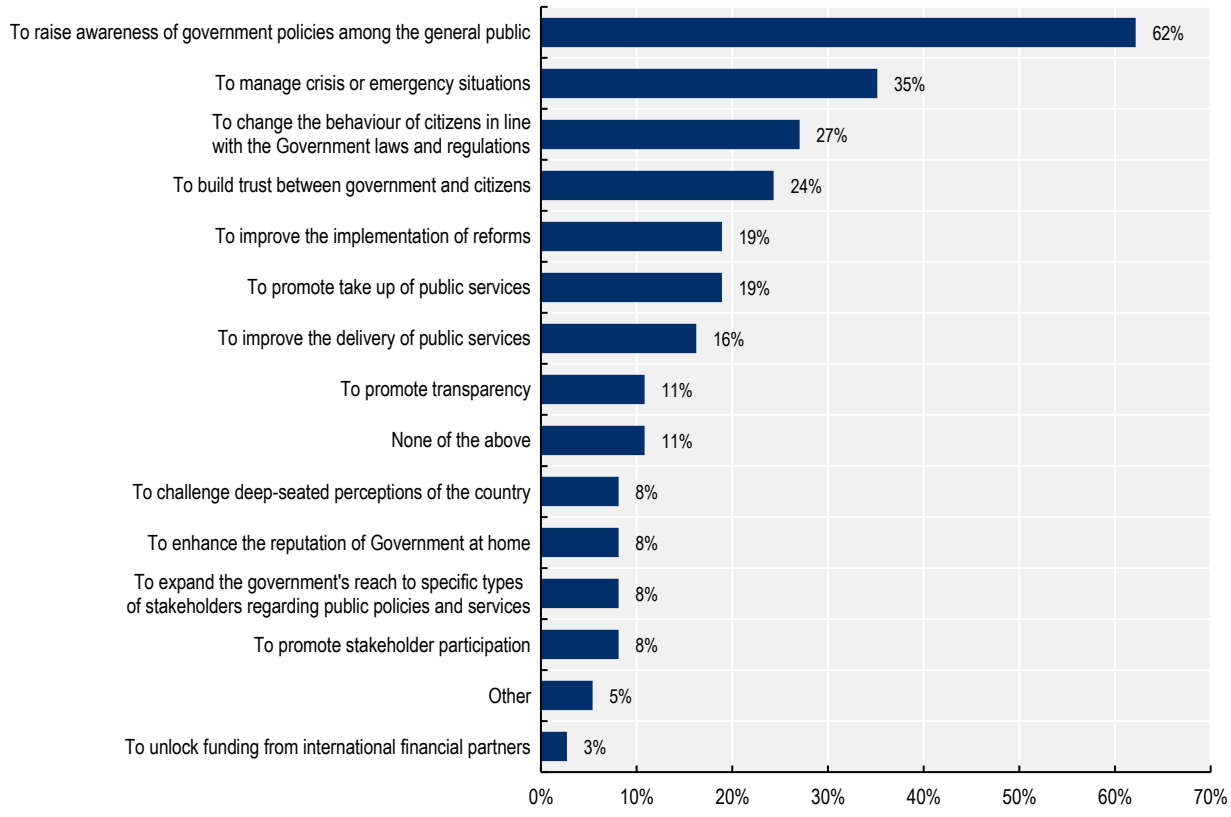
Campaigns are the most commonly used tool to communicate about governmental policies. Surveyed countries have also used them to support greater use of services and increased policy compliance, change citizens' behaviour, and to a lesser extent, promote wider socio-economic policy goals.

Indeed, the majority of CoGs surveyed (35 out of 37; 95%)[1] and MHs (22 out of 24; 92%) run campaigns. This is consistent with the number of CoGs with specific resources for campaigns, with 35 out of 37 CoGs (95%) mentioning they have dedicated capacities and 18 of these 35 having specialised structures for this purpose comprising 1 to 10 staff. Three CoGs declared having a structure that deals with campaigns but no dedicated staff and 5 did not provide a number, while 9 comprised between 11 and over 100 individuals. The 35 CoGs that said they used campaigns ran close to 700 campaigns in 2019, with 7 CoGs not conducting any during that specific year. While the number of campaigns implemented by countries varied greatly, the highest volumes were seen in countries where the CoG had a clear mandate for implementing and/or co-ordinating campaigns, and dedicated structures that were staffed and resourced (see Chapter 2).

While this is a nearly ubiquitous competency across countries surveyed, the planning and implementation of communication campaigns was selected as one of the three most challenging competencies by 26% of CoGs[2] and 33% of MHs.[3] For these institutions, the main reasons cited include co-ordination as well as human and financial resources.

The widespread use of campaigns is also reflected in the diverse reasons for their use. Examples shared through the OECD survey illustrate that campaigns are used to raise awareness of government policies (62%) and change the behaviour of citizens in line with government laws and regulations (27%) (Figure 7.1). Promoting transparency and stakeholder participation are not as highly prioritised.

Figure 7.1. The most important objectives of recent campaigns run by CoGs



Note: n CoG = 37. Austria and Sweden responded this question did not apply in their context; n MH = 24. Survey respondents were asked to select up to three options.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understand Public Communication".

Well-designed and implemented campaigns prove to be cost-effective and can prove the value of communications to senior leadership and to society as a whole. Some of the experiences shared through the OECD surveys, including examples developed below, have resulted in measurable increases in compliance with governments' measures, uptake of public services and, even in economic growth.

Using audience insights and behavioural sciences to tailor campaigns has proven key in this effort (see Chapter 3). For example, in 2018, a British government campaign to promote the timely filing of tax returns led to an all-time record of 94% compliance with the deadline (Box 7.1).

Box 7.1. The 2018 tax return campaign in the United Kingdom

In 2018, the UK government redesigned its annual tax return campaign in an effort to boost tax intake and improve its record-breaking 2017 result of 93% compliance with the deadline. To do so, it drew on existing insights from previous campaigns and ongoing behavioural insights trials to identify trends and potential gaps for improvement.

Instead of leveraging positive insights to influence behaviour, the government took the innovative approach of using ducks to personify the negative feeling of guilt that citizens could feel when filing their tax return. To create engagement, endearing messages such as "don't let the thought of your tax return peck away at you" were spread across multiple low-cost channels, including the press and social media. The campaign was also advertised on the radio, roadside posters, and digital displays. The behavioural insights team also targeted customers likely to miss the deadline based on previous evidence and sent them a series of reminders via SMS, mail and email, resulting in a significant decrease in late returns.

This initiative led to a record 94% of customers filing by the deadline in 2018, boosting tax intake in the United Kingdom by GBP 1.5 billion. The campaign also contributed to an increase in media coverage, leading to 98% positive press coverage.

Source: GCS, Campaign Highlights 2018/19.

Communication campaigns in the health sector, including during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have also shown their potential and limits to support behavioural change, compliance with related policies and guidance, and uptake of government services. For example, monitoring the impact of immunisation campaigns in Australia has allowed the government to measure trends in attitudes towards vaccination and the adoption and implementation of related actions (Box 7.2). In the COVID-19 context, evaluations of campaigns led by the Irish Ministry of Health for example showed that they helped foster adherence to government measures to ensure the safety and health of individuals. Many governments have however had to implement complementary measures to communication campaigns (such as regulations), as the pandemic has underlined the limitations and downsides of some campaigns in ensuring large segments of the population comply with the needed measures. From a service uptake perspective, communication initiatives by health departments in Ireland and Switzerland to raise awareness of existing programmes to help people quit tobacco use have led to a substantial increase in the use of such services (Box 7.3).

Box 7.2. Australia's childhood immunisation campaign and the measure of citizens' attitudes and behaviours

In 2017, the Australian government launched its Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign "Get the Facts about Immunisation", to boost confidence in vaccination and the National Immunisation Program. The campaign targeted parents of children aged 0 to 5, health professionals and pregnant women with the aim of increasing their intention of participating in childhood vaccination by providing them with evidence-based information and data to guide their decision.

Get the facts on childhood immunisation – help protect your community

Phase 3 of the campaign was initiated in 2019, drawing on online benchmark and tracking surveys conducted among key audiences. The goal was to extensively evaluate the campaign's effect based on three main principles: reach, response and impact.

Building on the above, the government identified trends in attitudes towards vaccination and gaps for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the campaign. The scope for more targeted messaging included a focus on the benefits of vaccinations, tailored information to pregnant women, and geo-targeting recipients.

Source: Australian Department of Health, Get the Facts Campaign Evaluation Report, September 2019.

Box 7.3. Using campaigns to improve the uptake of support programmes to quit smoking in Ireland and Switzerland

Ireland's 'QUIT' campaign and Switzerland's "Smoke Free" one were launched to help citizens quit smoking and reduce overall tobacco consumption in their respective societies. They rely either on online programmes or applications to raise awareness, stimulate a dialogue and guide citizens towards a smoke-free life.

The Swiss government launched the "Smoke Free Buddy" app, developed based on science by specialists in smoking addiction, to provide interactive support and services for people who want to quit smoking. The Health Service Executive in Ireland developed a Quit Plan that individuals can sign up for, providing phone, email and text support, a personalised website to track progress, and one-to-one support to stop smoking from trained advisors.

These campaigns helped boost the delivery and uptake of tobacco cessation services. In Ireland, there were almost 291 000 visits to quit.ie in 2020 and 7 755 quit plans were activated. 45.5% of those who entered into the intensive cessation support programme in 2020 had quit at 4 weeks. Moreover, the campaign proved to be effective and prompted 600 000 quit attempts since 2011. In Ireland, *Tobacco Free Ireland*, the national tobacco control policy, outlines an ambitious target of having less than 5% of the population smoking by 2025. Similarly, following a comprehensive evaluation, the first wave of the Swiss Smoke Free campaign was shown to have amplified consultations on the health department's smoke-free line by two to three times. Moreover, a third of the smokers surveyed who had decided to quit smoking managed to do so during the course of the campaign, resulting in an overall reduction in smoking prevalence of 1.17% within the target group aged 20 to 78.

Source: https://www2.hse.ie/quit-smoking/; https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/strategie-und-politik/kampagnen/tabakpraeventionskampagne.html#312_1574771951763__content_bag_de_home_strategie-und-politik_kampagnen_tabakpraeventionskampagne_jcr_content_par_tabs; and https://www2.hse.ie/quit-smoking/ https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/information-for-media-and-journalists/; Health Service Executive (HSE), Tobacco Free Ireland Programme End of Year Report 2020, https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/hse-tfi-2018-2021-plan/tfip-end-of-year-report-2020.pdf.

When designed and implemented in a strategic way, campaigns have the potential to contribute to broader socio-economic goals. In doing so, their application additionally ensures their use is cost-effective and their value-add is recognised across the whole of government and society (Box 7.4).

Box 7.4. Using public communication campaigns for growth: "Belgium. Uniquely phenomenal"

In 2017, in an effort to promote the image of Belgium, the federal government launched a multi-year campaign entitled "Belgium. Uniquely phenomenal", with 99 good reasons to visit and invest in Belgium, marketed in a humorous and modest way to reflect the country's appeal.

The campaign was launched with extensive visually striking posters displayed all over Belgium. A viral and international campaign complemented these efforts with a website, targeted video content on social media, and an extensive public relations, influence and partnership programme targeting foreign journalists and influencers.

Over time, the consistent use of the visual identity and messages has created a familiar brand, achieving the intended impact on targeted audiences and markets. The campaign has contributed to supporting Belgium authorities, private actors and companies to export and expand into new markets abroad. It has also supported tourism, universities and more by encouraging people to visit and discover the opportunities the country has to offer. It led to more than 333 influencer posts and more than 420 articles in the Belgian and international press. Uniquely Phenomenal has thus united efforts of actors from the public and private sectors to generate activity, jobs, growth and attract new opportunities for a variety of actors in the society.

Source: https://www.uniquelyphenomenal.be/; https://kanselarij.belgium.be/en/major-project/belgium-uniquely-phenomenal; https://uniquely-phenomenal-belgium-partner-room.prezly.com/partners-room-107775

An opportunity to promote citizen participation

While campaigns are most often used to share information, governments can also develop them to increase opportunities for citizen participation in public life. Indeed, only 8% of CoGs indicated in their response to the OECD survey that their campaigns aim to promote stakeholder participation (Figure 7.1). As mentioned in the joint OECD-Open Government Partnership (OGP) Guide on communicating Open Government (OECD, 2019[3]), such tools can highlight existing opportunities for individuals to contribute to laws for example, or widen the government's interactions with the public (Box 7.5) and target specific groups, including traditionally underrepresented ones. They can also help engage the public with the development of OGP action plans (Box 7.6). Furthermore, campaigns can raise awareness on the processes and objectives of participation opportunities, their envisioned outcomes and how inputs provided will be taken into account (OECD, 2018[4]), which can further support citizens' involvement in similar exercises in the future.

Box 7.5. National Consultations and communication in OECD countries

Mexico's General Consultation of the National Strategy for the 2030 Agenda

The Mexican government launched a public consultation in 2018 with the aim of engaging with and gathering feedback from citizens to develop the National Strategy for the 2030 Agenda. Citizens were asked to comment on a draft proposal prepared by the Federal Government with concrete objectives, actions, institutional responsibilities and indicators to achieve results for the SDGs.

To this end, the Government launched an online awareness-raising campaign to share information on the SDG agenda, the country's progress to date, and available opportunities to participate in this exercise. The public consultation allowed citizens to express their views and opinions via several channels, including forums, social media (i.e. linked in, facebook, twitter), dialogue tables and a dedicated electronic portal. Participants ranging from the private sector, civil society and academic institutions took part in the process.

Turkey's "I have an Idea for my Country" national consultation

This project, initiated by the Directorate of Communications of the Republic of Turkey, enables citizens to share and assess creative ideas that they believe will benefit the country. The project involved 16 ministries, eight directorates and four offices operating under the Presidency. A team formed within the Directorate conducted a preliminary assessment of the ideas received.

They were then submitted to relevant institutions for their assessment. Between February 7, 2019, when the project was announced, and December 31, 2019, a total of 45.106 ideas were submitted online. 31.514 of these ideas have been approved and forwarded to relevant institutions.

Source: https://latinno.net/en/case/13262/; Contributions from the Directorate of Communications within the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey.

Box 7.6. Stakeholder participation in the Government of Canada's 5th National Action Plan on Open Government

As a member of the OGP, the Government of Canada provided citizens with the opportunity to actively participate in the development of the Government of Canada's 5th National Action Plan on Open Government. On their "Let's Talk Open Government" website, anyone could provide feedback and comments on the Plan's commitments. Several discussions took place on the platform including some related to climate change, corporate and financial transparency as well as combatting disinformation. A summary of the topic at hand was provided, with questions for citizens to reflect upon to stimulate online debate. Furthermore, the website provided information on the timeline for the Plan's publication, a Frequently Asked Question section, and the possibility to provide feedback privately.

In addition to discussions that took place on the online platform, the Government of Canada also held a series of live consultation sessions through a digital platform over a five-week period in November and December 2020.

Source: https://letstalkopengov.ca/.

Using campaigns to inform citizens about the opportunities and outcomes of deliberative processes can also yield significant results (OECD, 2020[5]). Campaigns have indeed helped amplify public learning going beyond the participants of the process, as in the case of the Irish Citizens' Assembly (see Box 7.9).

A tool to foster a culture of integrity

The use of campaigns to promote integrity is a key example of an application of public communication in support of good governance (OECD, 2017[6]). Integrity is defined as the "consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in public-sector behaviour and decision-making" (OECD, 2017[6]). This means that governments and public officials understand, adopt and behave according to adequate standards at all times, put the public interest ahead of personal and private interests, and carry out public duties in a way that allows for and can endure public scrutiny while not raising suspicions, concerns or breaches (OECD, 2020[7]).

In this context, campaigns can help foster shared values and expectations and increase individual buy-in and action for and with integrity. They help underline corruption risks in specific sectors, raise awareness of segments of the population and increase their understanding of public integrity issues within and beyond public institutions (Box 7.14). For example, campaigns help build citizens' and public officials' knowledge of where and how to find and use oversight and audit reports and when, where and how to blow the whistle if they are confronted with wrongdoings.

The use of public communication in promoting a culture of integrity is illustrated by the example from Latvia (Box 7.7) and by a multi-faceted campaign developed by the Council for the Prevention of Corruption in Portugal. Among other activities, the "Images against Corruption'' (*Imagens contra a Corrupção*) campaign included a series of contests for schools where students discussed issues related to fraud, corruption and bribery and produced sculptures, drawings, plays and songs showing lessons learned, with awards for the best ones (OECD, 2020[7]).

Box 7.7. Whole-of-society communication efforts to foster integrity in Latvia

In 2019, the Latvian government carried out a campaign to promote a new whistleblower law called "See.Hear.Talk.". It included two large media events and eight discussions with different target audiences (entrepreneurs, young adults, civil servants, etc.).

In an effort to support whole-of-society engagement, the campaign was also covered on television, radio, press, social media and outdoor advertisements. Moreover, a microsite was developed to explain the impact of the new law as well as the online whistleblower forms available to the public.

The campaign received more than 180 pieces of coverage on local and national news outlets. A specific strategy was also used to communicate with young adults in an approachable way through YouTube notably.

Source: www.trauksmescelejs.lv.

Governmental awareness campaigns can also be designed and implemented jointly with third parties. Such campaigns can take various forms and use diverse channels, such as radio, television, print and social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), or a combination, depending on the objectives and target audiences, as illustrated by the examples of blogs and YouTube campaign for integrity in Greece (Box 7.8).

Box 7.8. Integrity campaigns targeting youth in Greece

As part of an OECD project with Greece to increase integrity and reduce corruption in the country, the government developed the "be the change you want to see" campaign on YouTube in 2018. The campaign called on YouTubers, who are among the most influential figures among young people, to share their personal experiences of corruption.

The aim was to create authentic content that young people could easily relate to and that allowed them to engage with content creators, seen as ordinary people with common concerns and interests. Rather than focusing on the scale and scope of corruption, the goal was to engage young people in a conversation and emphasise that youth have the power and responsibility to change culture for the better.

The reaction to the vlogs was positive and the campaign sparked great interest in this topic among young Greeks, reaching 78% of 13- to 34-year-olds. The videos received 888 240 visits and more than 62 000 reactions.

Source: https://www.oecd.org/corruption/ethics/youth-anti-corruption-campaign.htm.

Strengthening a constructive relationship with the media

Impactful public communications require a robust and well-functioning media and information ecosystem to ensure they contribute fully to transparent and effective policies, service delivery and democratic engagement. While online and social media platforms have enabled one-to-one communication and facilitated easier access to broad segments of society, regular media engagement helps ensure that relevant and trustworthy information is widely shared and disseminated. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) data highlights the correlation between a government's robust media engagement frameworks and practices and a pluralistic, sound media environment as well as the importance of these conditions in ensuring wide audiences are reached and well-informed. Countries with enabling legal environments and constructive relationships between the media and government rank higher on the organisation's world press freedom index.[4]

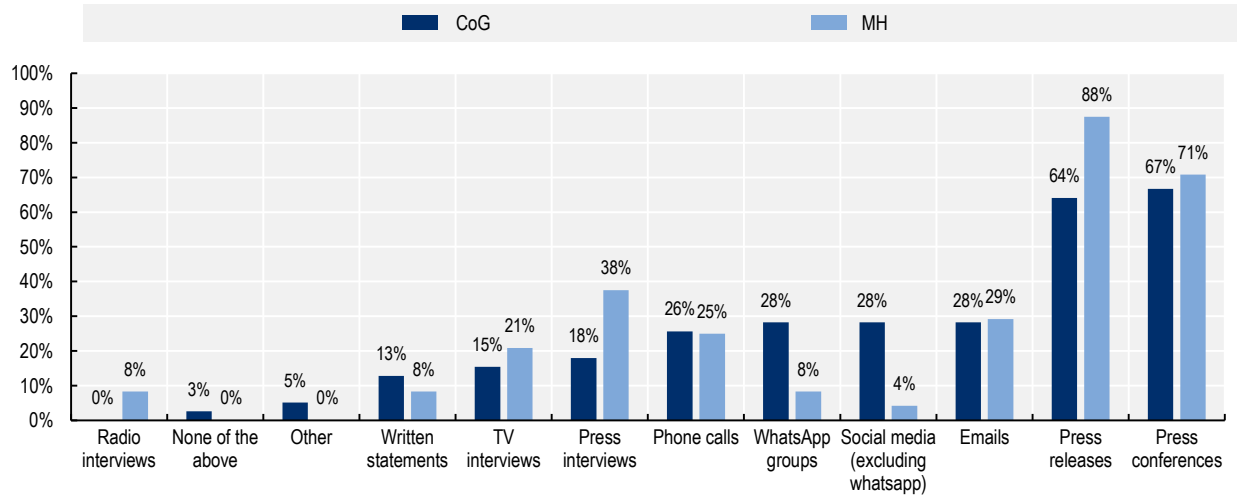
This section explores how public communicators can engage strategically with the media to promote transparency and participation.[5] All OECD member and partner countries surveyed engage with the media through their centre of government (CoG), through ministries or both. This takes a wide range of forms, including press releases, conferences, social media interactions, as well as television and radio interviews. The objectives pursued tend to vary, and data collected through the OECD survey indicated there is still scope to optimise the utility of these relationships, in particular as they relate to promoting active transparency, which is understood as the obligation of public institutions to disseminate information without citizens having to request it, and increasing participation. Additionally, and through increased access to and publication of information by media, stakeholders are more exposed to evidence about priorities, policies and decisions that can help them scrutinise and hold governments to account.

Press releases and press conferences were among the three most used channels to communicate with journalists for respectively 64% and 67% of CoGs, and 88% and 71% of MHs (Figure 7.2), the vast majority of which are done on a weekly or daily basis. For example, 59% of CoGs and 63% of MHs issued daily press releases in 2019. Similarly, regular press conferences were organised, creating opportunities for direct questions and discussions between public officials and journalists. In 2019, 59% of CoGs and 29% of MHs offered them on a weekly basis, and 28% of CoGs and 25% of MHs on an ad hoc one.

In data collected across OECD member and partner countries, press conferences were described as open to all journalists by 70% of the 37 CoGs responding to this question and 83% of MHs. Respondents stated that journalists' questions were allowed, with 97% of the 37 CoGs and 92% out of the 24 MHs selecting that there were no restrictions (e.g. pre-selected topics to be covered, submission of questions prior to the press conference) or prior approval of questions required.

Furthermore, social media interactions and WhatsApp groups were used by public communicators to engage with journalists in 28% of CoGs, while only one MH selected social media and 2 opted for WhatsApp groups (Figure 7.2). The potential to open discussions through these forums on an individual level can be capitalised on further to strengthen two-way communication processes, as detailed in Chapter 5.

Figure 7.2. The most commonly used channels by CoGs and MHs to communicate with journalists

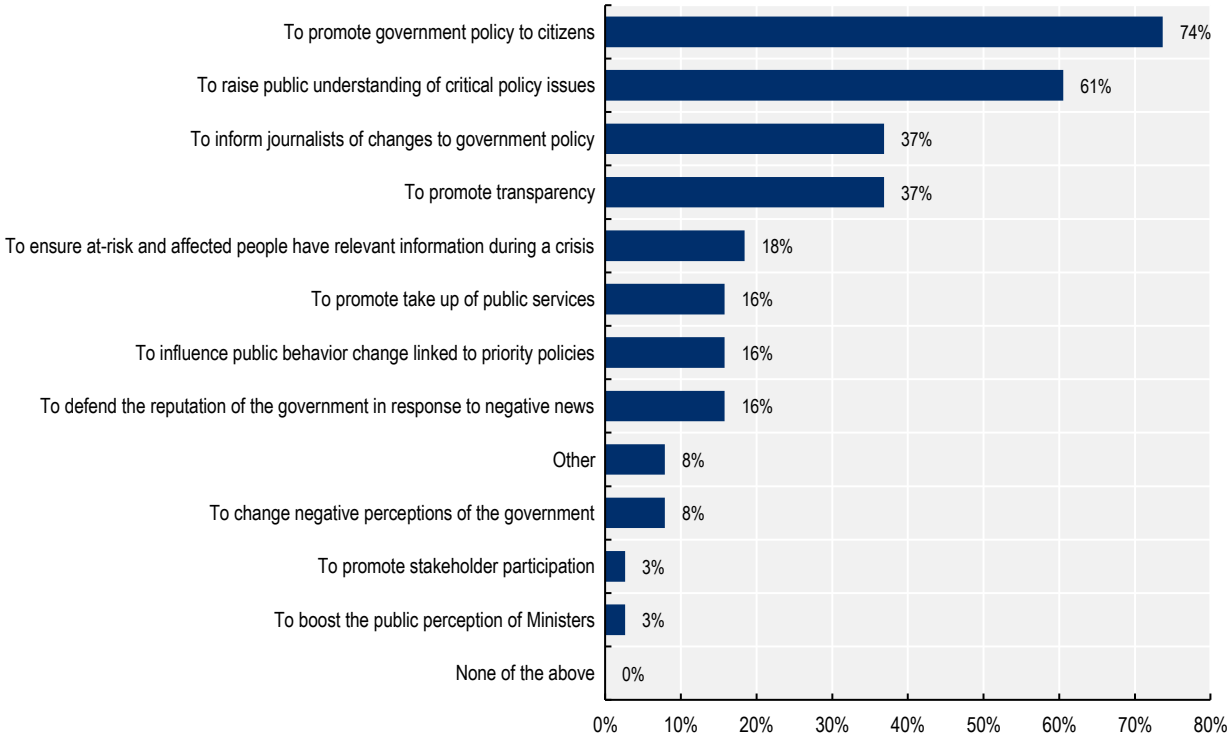


Note: n CoG = 39 ; n MH = 24. Survey respondents were asked to select up to three options.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

In both CoGs and MHs, promoting transparency was selected as the third main priority for media engagement in surveyed countries. Notably, 37% of CoGs and 58% of MHs selected it as one of their three primary objectives pursued through media relations. In CoGs, this follows the objectives of promoting government policies (74%) and raising public understanding of critical policy issues (61%) and is tied with informing journalists of changes to government policy (37%) (Figure 7.3). Promoting stakeholder participation was selected by one CoG as a priority, and none of the MHs indicated it was an area of focus.

By helping to make information more widely available, accessible and relevant through media relations, public communicators serve an important role in upholding transparency in public life. They do so by delivering timely, accurate and appropriate messages directly to target audiences and removing the requirement for citizens to search public databases or portals for information.

Figure 7.3. Most important objectives for the CoG's engagement with the media



Note: n CoG = 38. Respondents were asked to select up to three options. Austria did not provide data for this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Governments could consider making use of their media relations to further other key principles beyond transparency, such as stakeholder participation for example. Indeed, by using appropriate media channels and targeted messages, communicators can help ensure they go beyond the function's focus on information provision. Practices shared by surveyed countries have highlighted that some media-handling plans can specifically support stakeholder engagement opportunities. Media relations play a crucial role in promoting public learning with regards to the results of deliberative processes and other innovative forms of citizen participation for example (OECD, 2020[5]), as per the case of the Irish Citizens' Assembly (Box 7.9).

Box 7.9. Communicating about the Irish Citizens' Assembly and involving the media in promoting deliberative processes

An example of how public communication expands public learning beyond the participants of the process is the Irish Citizens' Assembly of 2016-2018. The latter was composed of 99 randomly selected citizens, who were tasked with providing recommendations for the constitutional amendment regarding the right to abortion. This complex topic had been the subject of political debate for years. Participants had an opportunity to learn from experts, listen to stakeholders, and deliberate. In the Assembly's recommendation to the special cross-party parliamentary committee that was set up to consider its conclusions, they advised changing the eighth amendment of the constitution, which at the time banned abortions, and suggested that the government hold a referendum on the matter, which is required in Ireland for constitutional changes (OECD, 2020[5]).

The initiative was communicated to the public throughout the whole process. Specific outreach activities included streaming discussions online and interviews with participants in the press, radio and television. Radio interviews allowed participants to discuss their experiences and the public to hear from citizens like them, which helped to build support for the citizen-driven nature of the process.

Public communicators and organisers of the process engaged with journalists to echo and amplify participants' discussions. Media coverage was especially helpful in presenting the nuances of this national debate.

Source: (OECD, 2020[5]; Suiter, 2018[8]; Matasick, 2020[9]).

Seizing the potential of internal communication to create a more effective public sector

A key finding from the OECD survey, echoed by the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication, emphasised the potential for internal communication to be used more strategically. Understood as the communication within and across public sector organisations, it enables senior officials to inform and engage employees in a way that motivates staff to maximise their performance and enable them to deliver on strategic outcomes.[6] According to the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability (2019[10]), such communication is central to the design and implementation of public services as it ensures optimal flows of data and information and supports the exchange of good practices while also contributing to breaking siloes between different parts of the administration. It can also foster transparent decision making and strengthen its legitimacy while also opening channels for feedback and engagement.

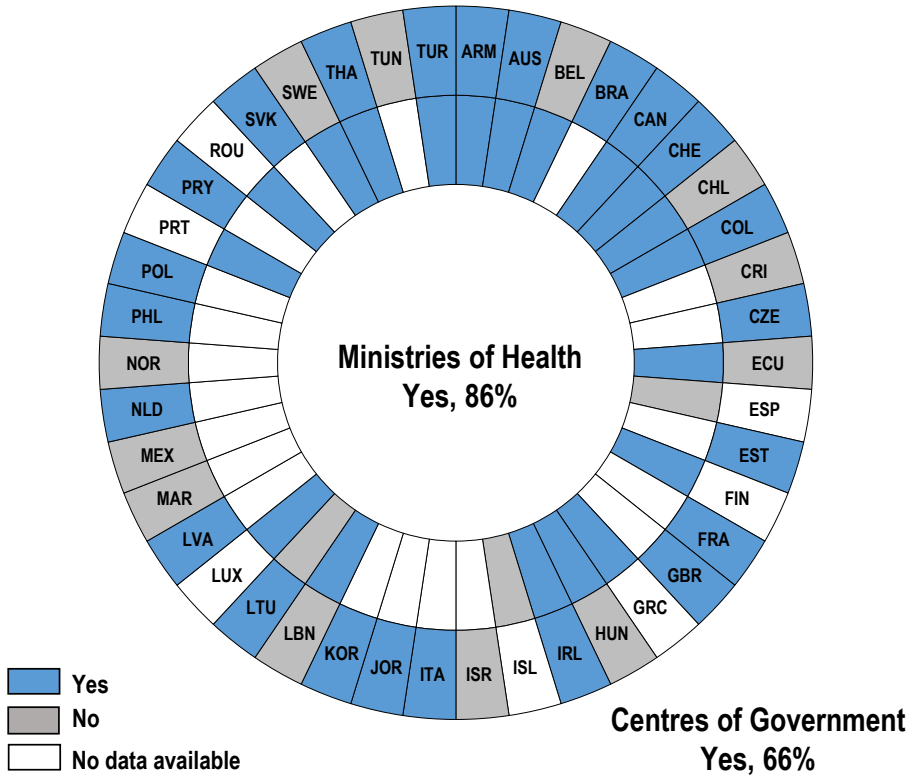
The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted another central role for internal communications: that of engaging with public officials who were required to work remotely at short notice. Similarly to most countries, over 50% of the Irish public sector workforce, for example, was working from home in 2020 (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2020[11]). Communicators therefore had a critical role to play in ensuring the continuation of operations, while also sharing information within the public service in more flexible, rapid and reliable ways.

This section explores the contribution of internal communication to a more effective public sector. It analyses the existing structures, protocols and mechanisms used to communicate key information across government, drawing on good practices from OECD member countries and beyond.

The state of play of internal communication in CoGs and MHs

To share information effectively across departments, establish an organisational identity and ensure communication supports strategic objectives, governments need a dedicated unit that continuously informs and engages with staff. This was acknowledged in most countries surveyed, where 23 out of 35 CoGs (66%) and 19 out of 22 MHs (86%) have dedicated structures, teams or individuals in charge of managing internal communication within and beyond the institution (Figure 7.4). In a few countries, such as Latvia, these responsibilities were included within the human resource department. In other cases, as in some federal countries, whole-of-government internal communication did not lie within the CoG but was rather mainstreamed across different ministries. Irrespective of its location, establishing a structure in this regard is particularly important given that communication programmes at times require the co-ordination of different actors and policy agendas.

Figure 7.4. Availability of a unit/team/individual for internal communication in CoGs and MHs

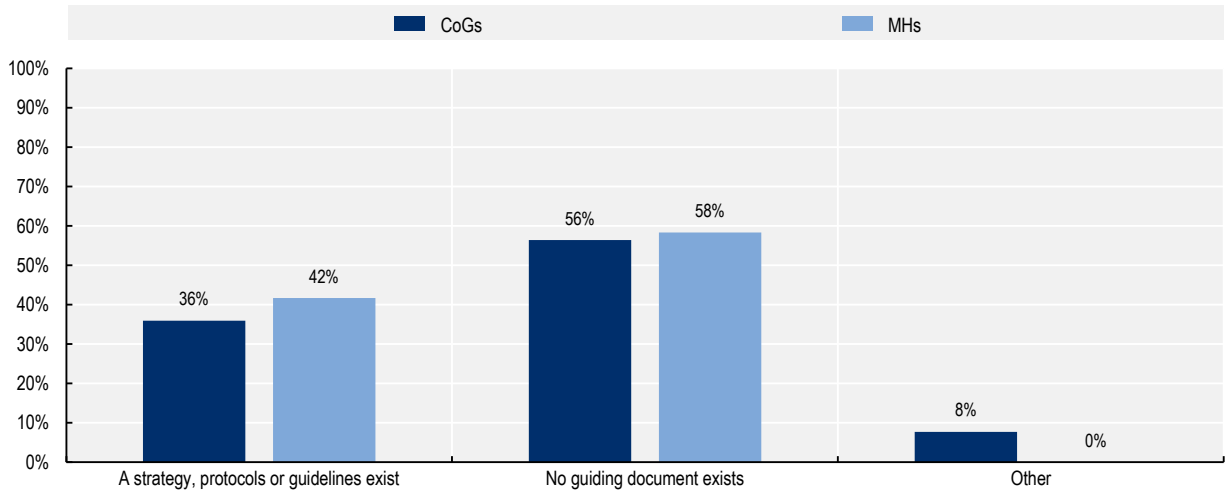


Note: n CoGs = 35 ; n MHs = 22. In the dedicated line to the internal communication competency, Austria,Germany, Romania and Slovenia did not provide data in their response to this question in the CoG survey. In Belgium, it wasnoted that internal communication falls under the mandate of the SPF Support and Strategy (BOSA), which was not the respondent to the survey; Japan and Jordan did not provide a response to this question in the MH survey.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Internal communication, however, can also benefit from its integration within a given institution and across government. This implies the establishment of partnerships across the organisation, including via policy teams, committees or networks as well as support services such as human resources, external relations and information systems departments, to contribute to competency-development programmes, performance management and employee engagement. In particular, political leaders play a key role in setting a joint vision aligning activities under precise goals and values, setting clear expectations and providing opportunities for civil servants to contribute and raise concerns (Sasse, 2016[12]).

While efforts to institutionalise internal communication in CoGs and MHs are widespread, data suggested that the use of overarching frameworks to support its strategic application was not a common practice in most surveyed countries. In fact, only 36% of CoGs and 42% of MHs had in place a dedicated strategy, protocol or set of guidelines to engage employees, boost morale and facilitate information sharing across the organisation (Figure 7.5). Low levels of institutionalisation across OECD member and partner countries suggest that there is room to leverage the strategic value of internal communication beyond its role to facilitate information-sharing across the public sector.

Figure 7.5. Use of strategies, protocols or guidelines for internal communication by CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoG = 39; n MH = 24.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

According to data collected through the OECD survey, the nature of guiding documents in OECD member and partner countries varied in their level of formality and the objectives included therein. In some countries, frameworks (e.g. in Australia and the United Kingdom) or guidelines and manuals (e.g. in Belgium, Colombia, Estonia, Italy,[7] Sweden and Switzerland) were used to set the overall vision of this competency, establish roles and responsibilities, as well as the scope of activities (Box 7.10). They may also outline specific procedures to be followed and, in a few cases, good practices or case studies. Acknowledging its value as a lever for promoting transparency and efficiency, the government of Colombia, for example, translated these principles into action through the yearly development of an internal communication plan. In other countries, more informal approaches were adopted through the development of simple guiding principles or documents for the use of specific tools or services (e.g. in Canada and Norway) or on the main policies and processes in place (e.g. in Ecuador and Poland).

Box 7.10. A snapshot of internal communication strategies, protocols and guidelines in OECD countries

The Internal Communication Guide for Federal Communicators in Belgium

The aim of this guide, or "COMM Collection" is to detail the vision and mission of internal communication within the federal administration. It provides federal communicators with recommendations and good practices on how to foster internal communication within their organisation. It is based on the following five principles:

1. Implementing internal communication within the first stages of the decision-making process.
2. Facilitating interactions through the use of mixed media, online and informal communication.
3. Supporting the organisational vision through adequate resources and guidelines.
4. Partnering and engaging with different support services (i.e. ICT and human resource services).
5. Communicating internally before doing so externally.

The United Kingdom's Government Communication Service (GCS) Internal Communication Operating Model 2.0

To ensure effective and efficient internal communications across departments, the United Kingdom's GCS developed a model building on five core pillars as depicted in the picture below.

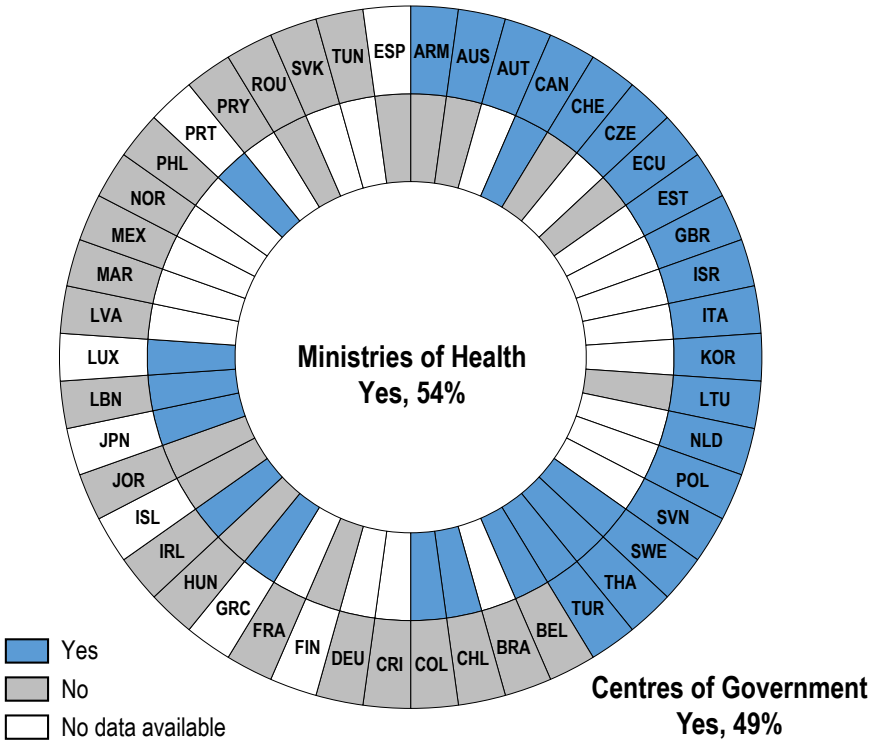
Source: https://ic-space.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/strategy-and-internal-communications/creating-a-consistent-standard-for-internal-communications/; https://fedweb.belgium.be/sites/default/files/downloads/COMM%20Coll%203%20Vision%20interne%20FR.pdf; https://fedweb.belgium.be/fr/publications/cc03_vision_mission_communication_interne.

Where strategies, protocols or guidelines did not exist, evidence suggested that internal communication was carried out on an ad hoc basis. At times, such approaches may not allow internal communication to fulfil its objectives. An irregular or inconsistent approach may also have the adverse effect of disengaging staff through seemingly unorganised, top-down and unresponsive communication. These factors may pose challenges for leaders to build trust and mobilise stakeholders (Vuori, Aher and Kylänen, 2020[13]; Yang and Maxwell, 2011[14]).

To address these effects, internal audience insights can be significant means to designing the appropriate mix of communication tools, messages and channels that will effectively inform, consult and engage the public service. Through collecting internal audience insights, governments can build an understanding of the concerns, habits, awareness levels and motivations of public sector employees to ensure that internal communication allows for public institutions to work towards common goals and speak with one voice. Leveraging insights from internal audiences can also promote user-centric communication in which stakeholders can have a personalised experience to access information and submit queries.

In practice, the lack of insight gathering within the public sector in both OECD member and partner countries is correlated to the fact internal communication is underutilised in achieving broader strategic policy objectives. Indeed, compared to the percentage of countries gathering insights on external audiences, only 49% of CoGs and 54% of MHs commissioned these insights for internal publics (Figure 7.6). The limited internal audience segmentation in surveyed countries was consistent with the fact that only 3 out of 39 CoGs and 7 out of 24 MHs considered changing behaviours of government employees as an important objective of communication. Nevertheless, understanding the needs of internal audiences and reflecting such preferences in key messages, tools and engagement opportunities is ever more important namely in light of generational shifts in the public sector workforce (Neill, 2015[15]).

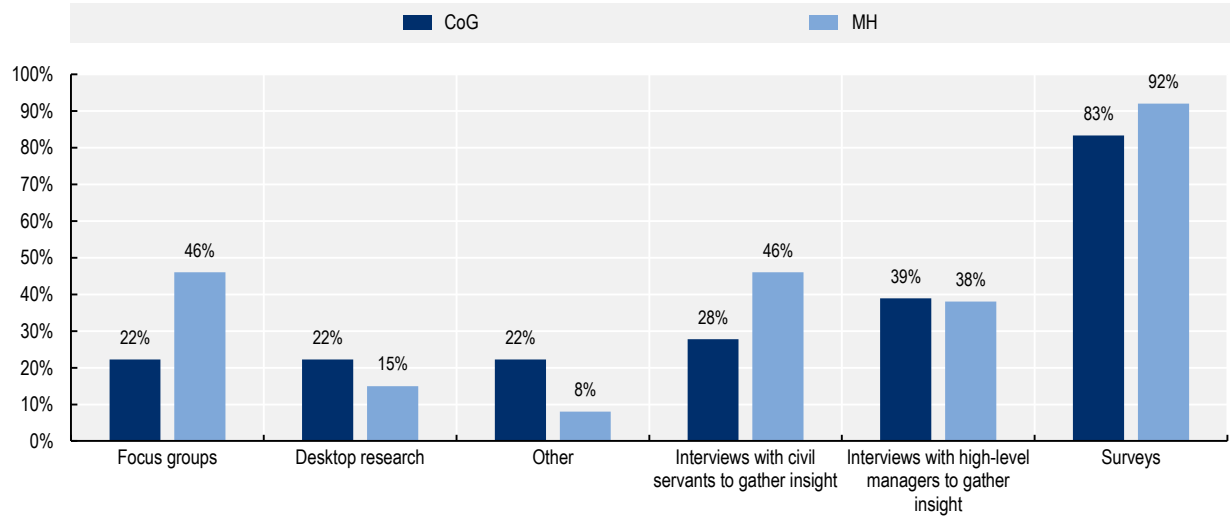
Figure 7.6. Internal audience insight collection in CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoG = 39; n MH = 24. The inner circle refers to the responses of ministries of health, whereas the outer ring refers to the responses of centres of government.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

As Figure 7.7 illustrates, countries employ different methods to better understand internal publics. Evidence suggests that surveys are the most popular method, followed by interviews with high-level managers or civil servants. Data collected also highlights that surveys typically measured general employee satisfaction (e.g. in Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Norway and Slovenia) or perceptions and insights after each internal event or campaign (e.g. Ecuador and Korea) (Box 7.11). For example, the Czech Republic mentioned in its response to the OECD survey that this process was conducted in co-ordination with union representatives to ensure legitimacy and hold internal communicators accountable for improvements. Italy conducted usability testing of institutional sites across public sector organisations. Other countries, such as Ecuador and Thailand, leveraged induction sessions to better understand the expectations and needs of new employees for their communication work. These practices together illustrate the potential of analysing internal audience insights to optimise communications with public employees, promote cross-department information sharing, create buy-in and a sense of involvement, and thus support service delivery.

Figure 7.7. Methods for gathering internal audience insights in CoGs and MHs



Note: Calculations were based on a total of 18 CoGs and 13 MHs that responded to the previous question in their respective survey that they collect internal audience insights. Austria did not provide a response to this question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Box 7.11. Examples of internal audience insight gathering

Canada

To inform its internal communications, the Government of Canada conducted the Public Service Employee Survey in 2019, administered by a market and social research firm on behalf of the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer of the Treasury Board of Canada. The survey's objective was to measure the opinions of federal government employees on internal policies regarding general well-being, compensation and opportunities for engagement to support the continuous improvement of "people management practices". The survey results were used to identify challenges and good practices, benchmark and track progress over time as well as inform the development and refinement of action plans. Overall, 182 306 employees from 86 departments agencies took the survey, amounting to a 62% response rate.

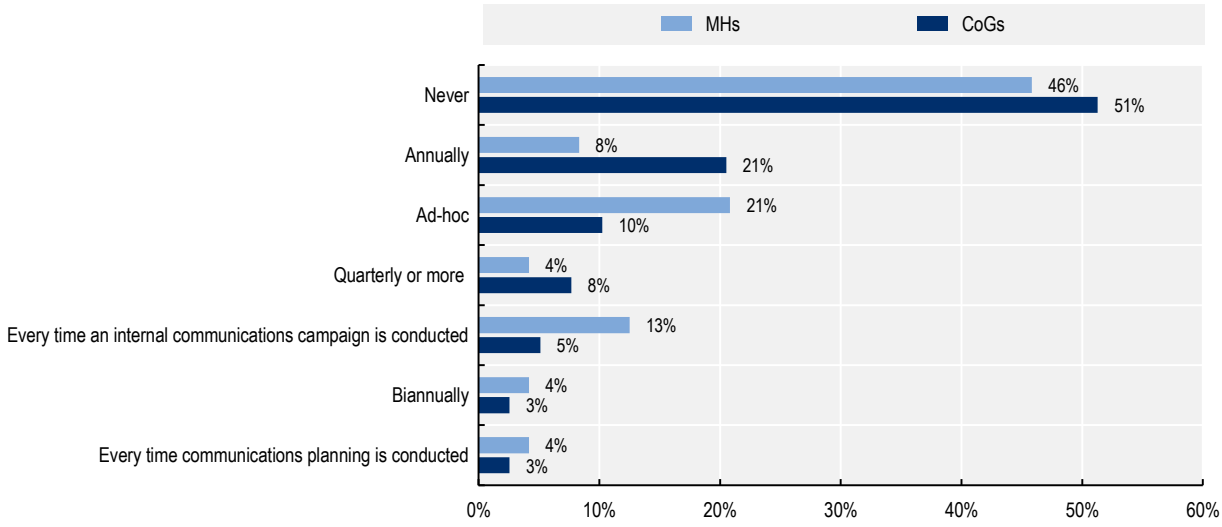
Ecuador

As part of its communication planning in 2019, the government of Ecuador conducted a series of studies to increase its understanding of internal audiences in view of informing the design and delivery of its communication campaigns. A satisfaction survey was carried out across all relevant ministries to gauge the rate of acceptance of internal communication activities. This allowed the identification of good practices as well as information gaps across institutions. A survey analysing the labour environment was also conducted to measure the rate of employee satisfaction. These insights informed the development of the country's new internal communication plan and identified areas for future improvement.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the governments of Canada and Ecuador to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication"; https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/public-service-employee-survey/2019-public-service-employee-survey-pses/about-2019-public-service-employee-survey.html.

While measuring the quality of audience insights was outside the scope of this report, the frequency with which they are commissioned points to a variety of approaches (Figure 7.8). Most CoGs and MHs who commissioned internal audience research did so on a one-off annual (8 out of 19 and 2 out of 13 respectively) or ad hoc basis (4 out of 19 and 5 out of 13), in stark contrast with those that did so regularly; for example, every time a campaign was conducted (2 out of 19 and 3 out of 13) or for the planning of communication (1 out of 19 and 1 out of 13).

Figure 7.8. Frequency of internal audience insights collection in CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoGs = 39; n MHs = 24.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Ensuring internal communication practices effectively engage staff

To ensure the effectiveness of and support for a given institution's vision, public officials must perceive it to be valid, efficient and implementable. Communicating effectively with the individuals tasked with implementing such a vision is crucial to enhancing buy-in and involvement (OECD, 2019[10]) (OECD, 2016[16]). The planning stage of the internal outreach strategy is therefore critical to ensuring that all relevant actors are reached and heard, as well as that the means employed align with objectives set by the leadership.

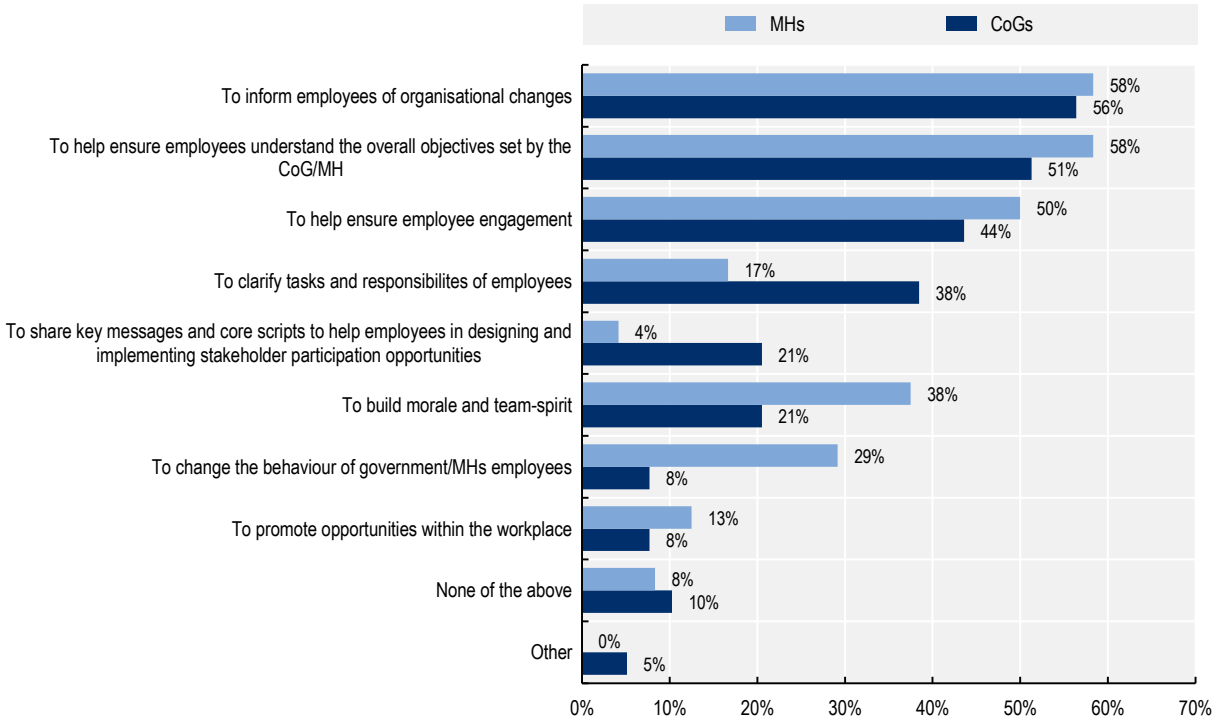
Survey results suggest that internal communication within CoGs and MHs can more effectively:

- provide channels and methods for employee engagement throughout the service delivery and communication cycles
- disseminate cross-government campaigns and other large-scale information-sharing endeavours, which are in part constrained by financial resources; and
- build employee morale, promote opportunities within the institution and change behaviours, all of which are key elements of promoting the engagement of internal stakeholders and creating occasions for more strategic internal communication practices.

Figure 7.9 provides an overview of the most important objectives for conducting internal communications in OECD member and partner countries surveyed. At the centre of government level, a majority considered informing employees of organisational changes (56%), ensuring employees understand objectives set by the CoG (51%) and supporting employee engagement (44%) as the top three priorities. These trends were also largely consistent with data collected in MHs. CoGs prioritised objectives regarding sharing key

messages and core scripts, building morale and team spirit (21%) and changing behaviours (8%) to a significantly lesser extent. For their part, MHs noted that sharing key messages and core scripts to help employees in designing and implementing stakeholder participation opportunities as the least important objective.

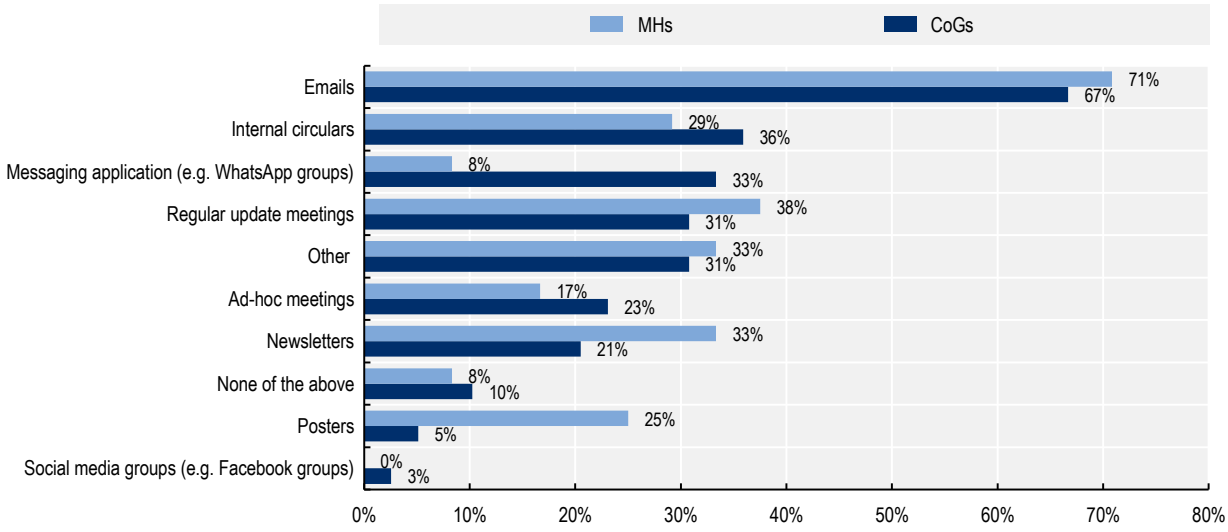
Figure 7.9. Most important objectives of CoGs and MHs for conducting internal communications



Note: n CoG = 39 ; n MH = 24. Respondents were asked to select up to three options.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

While responses collected suggest governments recognise the importance of promoting employee engagement (in 44% of CoGs for example), the most popular internal communication channels employed by respondents favours a less dynamic and unidirectional information-sharing approach. In fact, 67% of CoGs and 71% of MHs used institutional emails as their primary means of reaching employees. Other mechanisms such as internal circulars (36% of CoGs and 29% of MHs) and intranets or internal websites (31% of CoGs and 33% of MHs mentioned them under "other") were also utilised for such a purpose to a more moderate extent (Figure 7.10). Interactive channels that have the potential to foster better listening and participation, such as regular update meetings (31% of CoGs and 38% of MHs), messaging platforms (33% of CoGs and 8% of MHs) and social media groups (3% of CoGs and 0 MHs) were less favoured.

Figure 7.10. Main channels used by CoGs and MHs to conduct internal communications



Note: n CoG=39 ; n MHs=24. Respondents were asked to select up to three options.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

While the ability to "push" information is necessary, it is not sufficient to effectively engage employees. Combining new and traditional communication formats to open spaces for dialogue can help public sector institutions empower employees, mobilise action for the attainment of strategic goals and facilitate relationship building among staff. Establishing meaningful communication in this regard also allows for greater buy-in of internal policies, helps resolve conflicts, and facilitates the acceptance of internal changes (OECD, 2016[16]). In addition to traditional means, the government of Turkey, for example, uses a more hands-on approach to deploy internal communications around its vision, through the direct involvement of staff in developing the government communication strategy (Box 7.12).

Box 7.12. Promoting the participation of public officials in designing the strategic planning process of the Directorate of Communications (DoC) in Turkey

In 2019, the DoC established the "Committee for Strategic Planning", comprising senior DoC officials. As part of the strategic planning process, the committee held weekly meetings to evaluate the studies conducted by thematic sub-committees of the Strategy Development Department. These studies compiled a series of needs, comments and inputs on strategic priorities gathered through surveys from external and internal stakeholders. To complement this approach, the government launched a training programme to increase awareness about activities under the strategy at all levels of the DoC and beyond, and to solicit feedback on implemented actions and policies, exchange information, and encourage two-way communication. In addition, satisfaction surveys and group interviews were conducted with staff to ascertain their views, attitudes and perceptions and determine their satisfaction levels. The 2019 government communication strategy was drafted and finalised, drawing on the feedback, recommendations, and ideas gathered through this initiative.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the government of Turkey to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Survey results also revealed opportunities to amplify the scope and reach of internal communication practices beyond a given institution. The share of CoGs that conducted internal communication campaigns was low across both OECD member and partner countries, with less than half deploying these types of initiatives to disseminate key messages. In terms of their frequency, most CoGs that conducted internal communication campaigns did so on an ad hoc basis (9 out of 18), followed by quarterly (7 out of 18) and annual (2 out of 18) initiatives. The more infrequent and limited use of this type of campaigns can likely be explained by the challenges posed by financial resources available, with only 5 CoGs declaring a dedicated budget for this activity.

The need to deliver internal communication under constrained resources may also help drive the adoption of digital tools to communicate with internal publics in more rapid, informal and cost-effective ways. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, for example, there was an interesting trend toward the use of groups within instant messaging platforms (e.g. WhatsApp) to promote informal relationship building and swift information sharing. Other countries made use of online memo boards (e.g. Slovenia) and weekly bulletins with information on main policies and reforms (e.g. Ecuador).

In addition, several countries such as the Czech Republic, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have created and/or invested in intranets as collaborative online ecosystems for knowledge sharing, project management and engagement with stakeholders across departments. Survey results also identified new methods complementing traditional one-way information sharing channels (e.g. websites, emails and newsletters), such as the use of podcasts by the government of Norway (Box 7.13).

Box 7.13. Podcasts as a tool for internal communication in the Norwegian Public Administration

Within the context of National Security Month, the government of Norway launched a series of podcasts in October 2019, produced by the Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation and the National Security Authority. It aimed to inform and engage ministry employees in security-relevant policies and activities. The podcasts were launched via both extranet and intranets, and are available and open for all users to stream on several apps, including Sound Cloud, Spotify and Player FM.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the government of Norway to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

While digital tools offer new opportunities to connect and facilitate information-sharing, efforts to build employee morale, recognise good practice and promote peer learning are also necessary to foster a positive climate in the civil service. Integrity campaigns within the civil service, for example, have aimed to raise awareness, build capacity and ensure ownership of shared values, standards and mechanisms (OECD, 2020[7]). They ultimately are instrumental in building long-term commitment, helping promote a consistent dissemination of norms (i.e. in legal and regulatory frameworks, codes of conduct or ethics), fostering a culture of openness and changing behaviours through meaningful exchanges with internal audiences.

In practice, these efforts can take the form of internal communication campaigns, posters, brochures or digital tools. Countries such as Mexico and New Zealand as well as the sub-national government in the Canadian province of Alberta have used internal communication to make such values identifiable, visible and known across government institutions (Box 7.14). Other communication tools such as copies of codes or guidelines, ideas boxes, notes on employees' boards, computer screen savers or notifications (e.g. on a tip of the week, civil service value of the month, etc.) can help raise awareness and ownership of integrity standards (OECD, 2020[7]).

Box 7.14. Posters to foster integrity within administrations: Examples from Canada, Mexico and New Zealand

In Canada, the government of Alberta's Public Interest Commission designed posters to be distributed to public entities to foster ethical behaviour. Messages encouraged public officials to "Make a change by making a call. Be a hero for Alberta's public interest". In Mexico and New Zealand, posters were used to describe standard values and constitutional principles of the civil service and make them visible and memorable for public officials.

Sources: CBC News (2015[17]), "Whistleblower law needs better promotion, ombudsman says", https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/whistleblower-law-needs-better-promotion-ombudsman-says-1.3144625 (accessed on 13 May 2021); Secretaría de la Función Pública, Mexico (2018[18]), *Principios Constitucionales*, Unidad de ética, Integridad Pública y Prevención de Conflictos de Intereses; NZALS (2017[19]), *Code of Conduct Policy*, New Zealand Artificial Limb Service, https://www.nzals.co.nz/assets/Policy-Forms/Code-of-Conduct-Policy.pdf.

Communicating efficiently and inclusively during crises

Communicating during a crisis is a central function of public communication that immediately supports policy implementation. It ensures the timely, transparent and effective dissemination of information on the situation to stakeholders, as well as measures adopted to address it, supporting crisis policy application and emergency service delivery. It helps provide the necessary messages to ensure individuals are able to protect themselves and to comply with preventive, protective or rescue measures.

Governments undertake crisis communications when an unexpected event occurs that could negatively affect the government's reputation or endanger citizens. A crisis is understood as a threat to operations or reputations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly.[8] This can take many forms, including natural disasters, catastrophes, attacks, pandemics, etc.

Crisis communication consists of "communicating messages on the status of a crisis, its impacts, the actions and measures that have been mobilised" (Baubion, 2013[20]). Its importance has been further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has proven instrumental in disseminating and supporting the implementation of health measures and recovery policies. In this regard, CoGs have played a crucial role notably in ensuring coherence of government messages both internally and vis-à-vis the public and civil society, reaching specific segments of the population and facilitating dialogue with citizens to develop policies and services adapted to their needs and expectations (OECD, 2020[21]).

This section explores how countries structure and apply crisis communication, based on their answers to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication". While it includes examples linked to COVID-19, it does not assess government communication during this pandemic specifically. Despite the challenges posed by this competency to 58% of CoGs[9] and 54% of MHs, many redeployed resources or allocated extra staff, notably to support media monitoring and handling media relations, performing digital communications, and co-ordinating and evaluating efforts in this field. Beyond its information provision role, this section also analyses how this key competency can further be used as a lever for accountability and stakeholder participation to contribute to upholding democratic principles, including in unexpected circumstances.

Design, structures and staffing of crisis communications

To support emergency and recovery measures, survey results as they are detailed below point to an emphasis on the need for a clear, rapid and reliable communication response, and a majority of countries having defined crisis communication structures with protocols and criteria to manage crises, designating spokespersons. Furthermore, it is common for countries to redeploy resources and/or allocate extra capacity to specific crisis communication arrangements, including media and social media activities as well as co-ordination and evaluation.

During a crisis, the careful design of a clear, rapid and reliable communication response is instrumental in reducing uncertainty throughout society, which tends to dramatically increase in times of crises (Sanders, 2020[22]), and in generating trust. Messages designed with reliability, integrity and responsiveness, which are main drivers of trust (OECD/KDI, 2018[23]), are thus key during such events. Some countries have recognised this in their crisis-response communication protocols. For example, the United Kingdom emergency planning protocol stresses that "a strong crisis communication strategy can keep stakeholders informed, build and maintain public trust in the government and ensure accurate information is being reported by the media" (UK GCS, 2020[24]).

Survey respondents and workshop participants also noted that individuals' reactions and attitudes, especially in the COVID-19 context, stressed high expectations in terms of governments' clear, reliable and trustworthy messages.[10] Contributors stressed that actions rely on using relevant information and sharing them with the public in an honest and simple manner to provide a clear understanding of the situation. Evidence-based communication efforts to describe steps taken, actors involved, expectations and targeted results help reduce doubts (for some practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, see Box 7.15). Under these conditions, public crisis communication can fully play its role in ensuring individuals trust the measures adopted and implement safe behaviours (OECD, 2020[25]).

Box 7.15. Good practices to ensure reliable communication in the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, during the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak, governments had to ensure public communication was a responsive and reliable tool to promote the implementation of and compliance with public decisions and protective measures.

Most governments held daily briefings to keep citizens informed and updated. Some of them, including the Republic of Korea, held these twice a day. The federal government of Belgium also offered regular press conferences where medical staff and scientific experts intervened alongside government officials and, in Portugal, scientific experts delivered public briefings on the pandemic. These various arrangements were not only opportunities to present figures and facts about the evolution of the pandemic, but also a way to address questions, reinforce official narratives and debunk mis- and disinformation.

To support trustworthy communication in uncertain times, some countries also stressed ethics. The Government of Canada's Emergency Management Framework explicitly details the importance of ethical communication responses. Considering the impact of crises and their management on lives, the environment, property and the economy, decisions "must be weighed carefully within the context of emergency management ethics and values. Whole-of-society partnerships based on effective collaboration, co-ordination and communication are key".

Source: (Public Safety Canada, 2017[26]; OECD, 2020[25]).

In terms of enacting overall crisis responses, 63% of CoGs[11] surveyed indicated that they had defined protocols or standards to react in case a crisis occurs. National context-specific institutional arrangements present a wide array of approaches and their presence helps establish strong crisis policies and practices

(OECD, 2016[27]). A vast majority have criteria, protocols or frameworks for crisis management and some countries had also codified specific communication guidelines or frameworks. They often defined shared responsibilities at national and subnational levels of government to implement overall crisis responses (OECD, 2016[27]), and also allocated communication roles. Moreover, almost all CoGs and all MHs had assigned roles for communication to an identified individual or organisation and a large majority had created co-ordination mechanisms, not only for overall crisis management but also for communication purposes.

As a first enabling step for a clear, rapid and reliable communication during crises, some countries have established and codified communication manuals or procedures to support the timely and transparent delivery of messages. They include crisis communication frameworks (e.g. the United Kingdom emergency planning framework), specific communication sections in crisis response decision trees (e.g. in Costa Rica, see Box 7.16), plans (e.g. in Thailand), acts (e.g. in Switzerland) and policies (e.g. in Canada).

Respondents to the survey stressed that such codified procedures have been used to implement dedicated protective or recovery measures for recent incidents, disasters, or migration crises, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Some survey responses and exchanges held in the framework of validation workshops further suggest that lessons learned and practices implemented in the context of the coronavirus outbreak will be used to help further strengthen and adapt the crisis communication processes.[12] Indeed, these recent crises have highlighted the increasing complexity of crisis response procedures, as well as the need for the development of clearer objectives and strategies to communicate government measures to the population. While this chapter does not aim to evaluate government communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, further research on this topic could be conducted.

Box 7.16. Costa Rica crisis communication decision tree

The crisis communication decision tree in Costa Rica represents a systematic approach to disseminating messages to the population by elaborating structures and protocols to be adapted based on the nature of the crisis. Its purpose is to create a unified process and regroup management and communication resources so that the Ministry of Communication has a quick and effective response to relevant negative events or major media crises that alter the functioning and image of the government.

The tree is constructed as follows:

1. **Initial Response**

The initial response depends on the type of crisis. Crises are divided into two types:

- Disaster or emergency, political, financial and environmental crises: The initial response is to activate the Crisis Committee.
- Legal, personal and sexual crises: The initial response is to conduct an office meeting between the Minister and Director of Communication. Following the meeting, the Crisis Committee is activated.

2. **Elaborating a plan**

The second step is to elaborate a crisis communication plan, by defining messaging, formats, communication products and a designated team.

3. **Actions**

The third and final component involves specific communication actions:

- informing the co-ordinators
- designing the team that will take the lead in managing the crisis and distributing tasks
- creating a team communication channel (e.g. WhatsApp group)

- executing previously set products and formats
- monitoring crisis communication actions.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the government of Costa Rica to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication; Crisis Communication Plan, Ministry of Communication, October 2019.

Where countries do not have written protocols and criteria in place, survey results pointed to other approaches. For example, some centres of government or ministries of health that did not have codified criteria, protocols or manuals reacted and adapted their functioning and activities to respond to situations, events and emergencies as they came up. Such flexible arrangements were used to manage crises and related communication in countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Mexico.

Another element explaining the diversity of country approaches is the level at which the crisis response is enacted. In federal countries, crisis response and related public communication activities may be entrusted to subnational governments or be a shared responsibility between the federal and local authorities, in line with the national constitutional and legal orders. Survey responses highlighted that in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada and Germany for example, crisis management and communication was a shared competency between the central and subnational governments, with a federal lead and phased-out approach between the centre of government and the federated entities, depending on the scale and reach of the crisis, as in Belgium, and often relying on a federal framework with responsibilities assigned to subnational entities, as it is the case in Australia for example (Box 7.17).

In addition, at a supra-national level, the European Union (EU) established the Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism (IPCR) Crisis Communication Network (CCN). The IPCR "supports rapid and co-ordinated decision-making at EU political level for major and complex crises" and its CCN brings together crisis managers or communication experts from member states and EU bodies to help share lessons learned from practices.

Box 7.17. Codifying communication during crises in federal countries: The experience in Australia

The Australian government has established clear frameworks at the national and subnational government levels to codify its communication during crises or emergencies.

At the national level, specific co-ordination arrangements for crises are established and outlined in the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF). Indeed, the AGCMF is designed to be applicable in crises of all kinds, covering management phases of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Moreover, the framework elaborates written plans, policies and procedures, including detailed arrangements for co-ordinating communication and disseminating timely, important information to the public.

In a similar way, frameworks also exist at subnational levels. For example, the government of New South Wales has elaborated a State Emergency Management Plan, describing its approach to crisis management, planning and policy framework, co-ordination arrangements, and roles and responsibilities of agencies. In addition, the plan defines specific objectives and principles related to functional areas, recovery processes, and community and stakeholder engagement. The framework is further supported by a series of sub plans and functional area supporting plans, which include guidance for communicating with the public in a timely and effective manner.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the Australian government to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication"; https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Documents/publications/20181207-NSW-state-emergency-management-plan.pdf.

A second enabler of a swift and trustworthy communication response during crises lies in clarifying roles for disseminating governments' messages. The vast majority (90%) of CoGs and all MHs mentioned they designated a spokesperson to act as the main intermediary with the public. In this regard, 69% of CoGs assigned the responsibility to communicate governments' measures to the highest political levels (President or Prime Minister, Minister or Secretary of State). Such arrangements support the leadership, coherent voice and communication of the government (OECD, 2016[27]), as a clear and high-level spokesperson role reduces the number of sources and the likelihood of different or even diverging messages that can result from various actors speaking on behalf of a government. In addition, 8% of CoGs mentioned that they had an administrative ministerial spokesperson (e.g. secretary general, head of services, director) and 13% assigned this role to other organisations or actors such as experts. As illustrated by Table 7.1, responses to the survey revealed common roles applied by spokespersons across all countries.

Table 7.1. Spokespersons' responsibilities

Actors	Main assigned crisis communication responsibilities
President or Prime Minister	Announcing high-level orientations and decisions Detailing decrees and measures to be adopted Communicating up-to-date and accurate information
Minister or Secretary of State of Health	Communicating on the diagnosis Detailing governments' preventive and response measures Communicating up-to-date and accurate information
Ministerial Spokesperson	Communicating on the diagnosis Informing the public on implementation of measures Communicating up-to-date and accurate information
Other	Combination of both political announcements and technical responsibilities Flexible arrangements depending on circumstances and nature of the crisis, etc.

Source: adapted from 39 CoGs responses to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

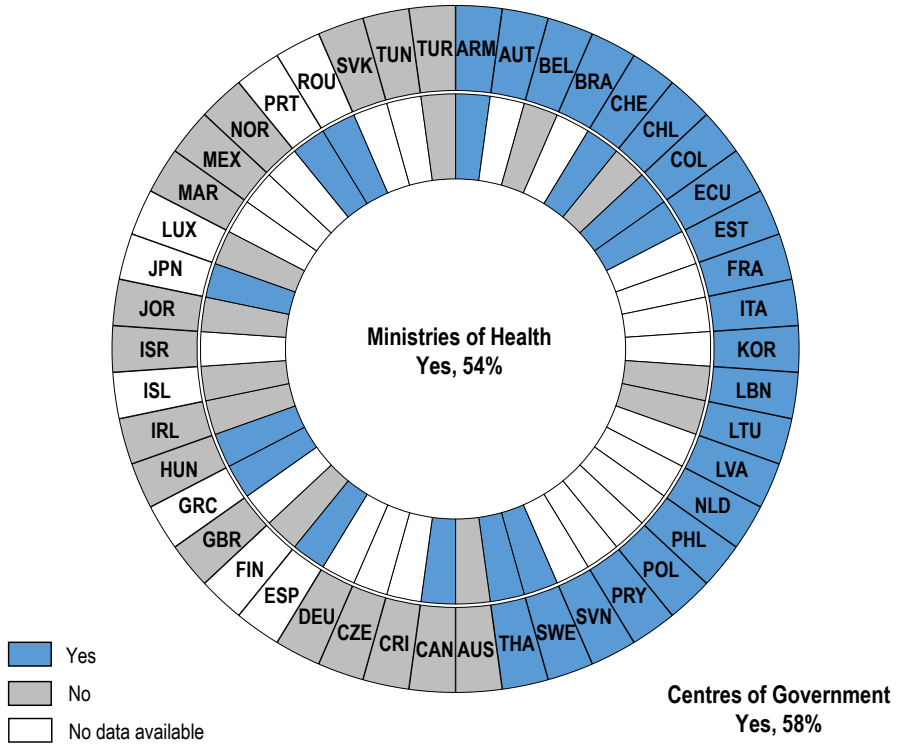
In unprecedented circumstances, these government spokespersons and communicators may face dilemmas in finding an appropriate level of transparency, notably in uncertain situations, when errors have occurred or where there are knowledge gaps. At the same time, they face the need to instil credibility and confidence (Page, 2020[28]). In this delicate balance, consistency and transparency about strategic and operational objectives are central to ensuring support for emergency measures, policies and delivery of services (Page, 2020[28]). They are also key for implementation and trust, as citizens' judgment on actions implemented relate to "competence, fairness, honesty, caring, accountability, and transparency of leaders or risk managers" and can thus be driven by the "characteristics and performance of official spokespersons" (Moreno, Fuentes-Lara and Navarro, 2020[29]).

In the face of crises, practices described by survey respondents demonstrated that many countries utilised a combination of actors to serve as spokespersons. Despite a large tendency to assign this function to the highest political levels, 51% of CoGs also sought interventions from other actors such as administrative officials and/or experts and scientists. More precisely, survey data indicated that 18% of CoGs partnered with experts to drive more credible and evidence-based communications. This was the case in 2020 in the regular joint press conferences held in response to the coronavirus outbreak in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, for example.

Irrespective of the selected approach and assigned roles, effective communication activities and messages deployed in the framework of governments' crisis responses are dependent on resources and instruments to implement them in a coherent and consistent manner. This is key to ensuring governments reach their audiences and share messages about the actions and measures to be implemented (OECD, 2020[25]) while being one of the most complex competencies that public communicators face.

Survey results indicated that communicating during a crisis is particularly challenging for governments, with 58% of CoGs surveyed (22 out of 38 countries) selecting it as the most challenging communication competency (Figure 7.11). Among the CoGs selecting "communicating during a crisis" as a challenge, 77% cite human resources and 73% co-ordination as reasons for the challenge—notably, 64% mentioned both issues as main reasons. Responses to the survey and the experiences shared in follow-up research highlight the complexity of implementing effective and efficient crisis communication. Independent of the institutional and governance variables covered in Chapter 2, this competency presents unique challenges even when resources, robust procedures and appropriate and flexible staffing arrangements are in place.

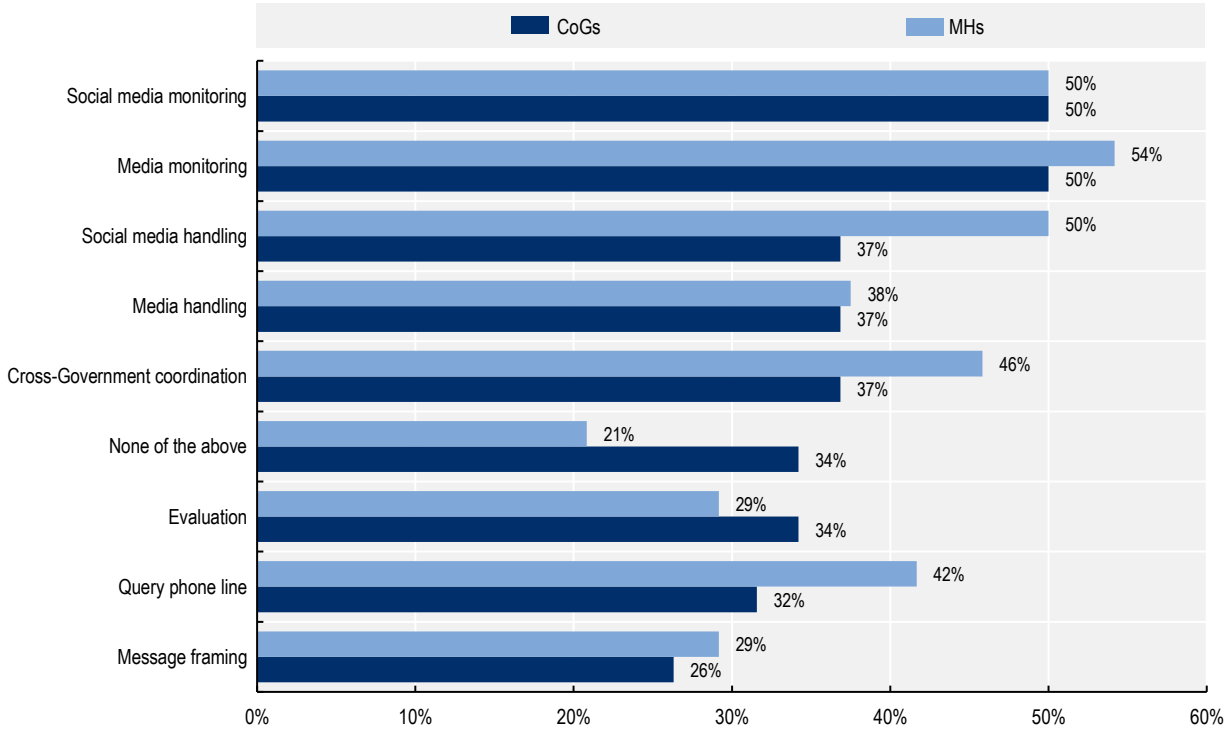
Figure 7.11. Communicating during a crisis is a top challenge for over half of CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoG = 38 ; n MH = 24. Romania did not provide a response to this question in the CoG survey.
Source: OECD 2020 survey "Understanding Public Communication".

The majority of countries (66% of CoGs) provided surge capacity to support information dissemination and communication activities in times of crisis in response to the challenges raised by this competency, the diverse and evolving nature of crises, and increased concerns, questions and requests from citizens, stakeholders and the media. This highlights the ability of CoGs to adapt their function and staffing to communicate more swiftly and effectively in case of emergency. These extra or surge capacity staff are mostly used to conduct social media and media monitoring (50% for each), with around one-third of respondents focused on social media and media handling[13], cross-government communication co-ordination and evaluation (Figure 7.12).

Figure 7.12. Allocated roles of extra or surge capacity to support communication functions in times of crisis within CoGs and MHs



Note: n CoG = 38. Lebanon did not provide an answer ; n MH = 24.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

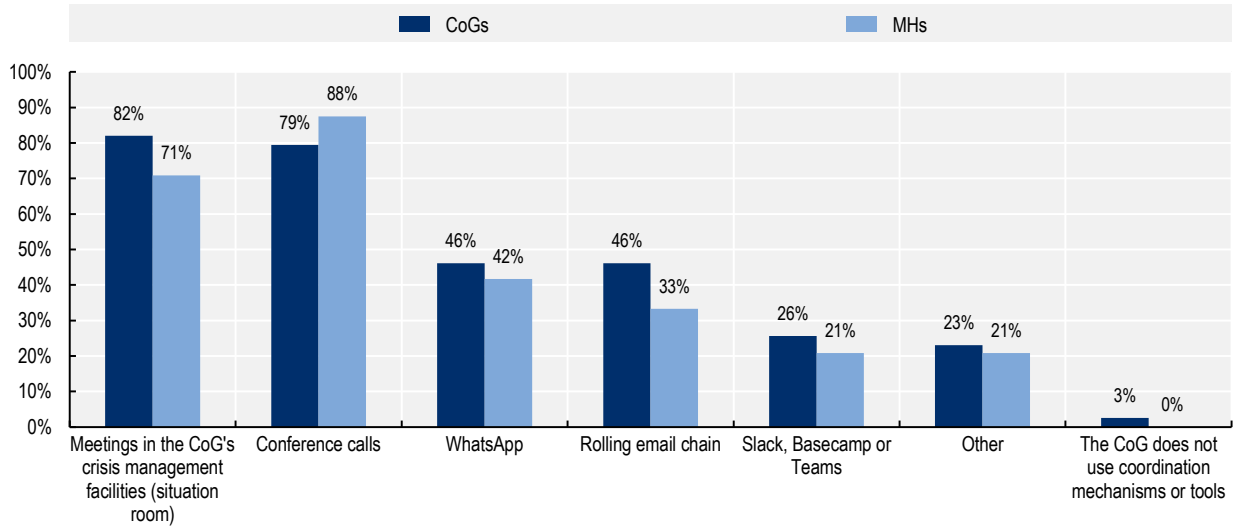
The focus of surge capacity staff on social media monitoring is consistent with the survey finding that communicating during a crisis was the number one objective selected for the use of digital communications (58%),[14] again pointing to the function of digital tools. Furthermore, one-third of CoGs and MHs assigned their additional staff to conduct communication co-ordination and evaluation efforts. These two components can contribute to ensuring the consistency and relevance of messaging, as well as gathering inputs, ideas and data on the impact of past or ongoing campaigns and activities. As such, these roles support evidence-driven and transparent messages, consistently disseminated by all government communicators (Box 7.19).

However, although a majority of CoGs allocated surge capacity staff to crisis communication, respondents still pointed to a need for additional human resources to overcome the complexity of the situations they faced and improve responses. Evidence shared points to difficult or unclear procedures to follow for co-ordinating communication activities, disseminating governments' measures, and/or responding to citizens' and stakeholders' questions, concerns and other requests during crises.

With regards to co-ordination mechanisms for crisis communication, 97% of CoGs and all MHs had methods in place. An overwhelming majority of them (82% and 71% respectively) used meetings in the CoG's crisis management facilities, followed by conference calls (79% and 88%). These two options traditionally allow governments to gather a large number of stakeholders involved in managing the crises in one physical or virtual location to communicate with them about the situation. Nonetheless, other tools that provide means to create similar virtual gathering conditions, such as messaging and video platforms, were less prioritised. Digital messaging platforms such as WhatsApp have been used as rapid information sharing tools by close to half of CoGs (46%) and 42% of MHs (Figure 7.13). A similar proportion use rolling

email chains for the same purposes. To keep track of these online and offline emergency discussions or information diffusions, 84% of respondents reported having minutes or co-ordination reports.[15]

Figure 7.13. Cross-government co-ordination mechanisms or tools used by CoGs for communication in times of crisis



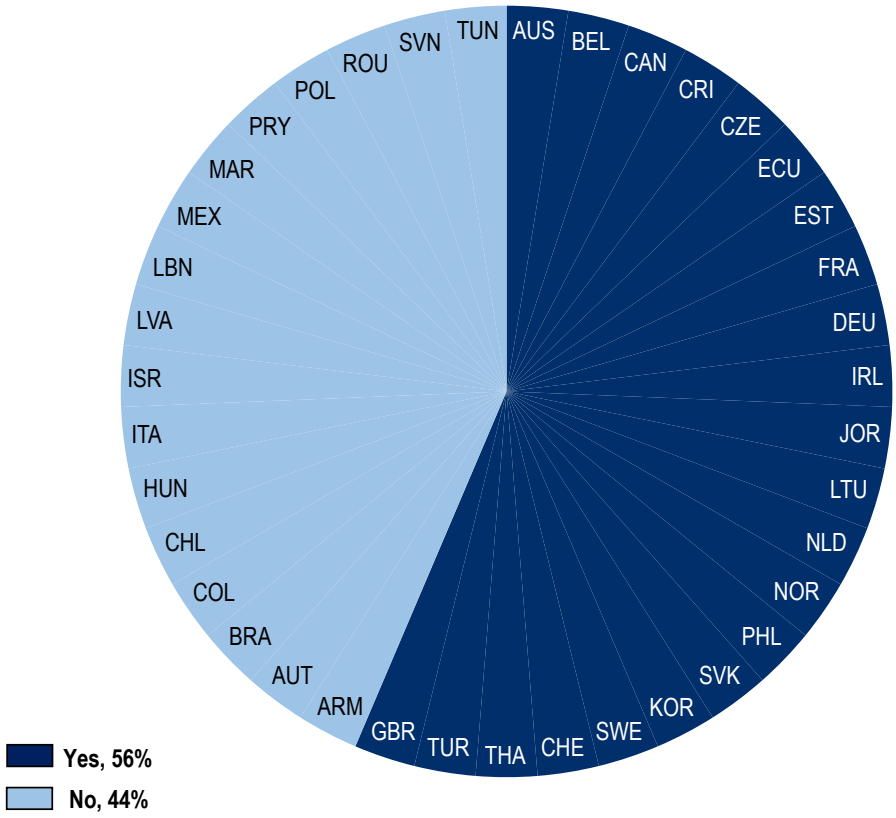
Note: n CoG = 39; Other includes options such as informal meetings, emails, activity log, WebEx and other messaging platforms such as Viber. n MH = 24; Other includes options such as informal videos, audios, WebEx, Zoom and Skype.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Despite a widespread use of co-ordination tools, 73% of CoGs and 61% of MHs selecting crisis communication as a challenge mentioned co-ordination and the wide range of actors (public institutions, experts, scientists, etc.) involved in preparing messages and analysing their impact as a reason why this competency is complex. Exchanges with officials have also highlighted that protocols and arrangements may sometimes be challenging for a variety of reasons, including due to bureaucratic or hierarchical arrangements, the fact that processes are difficult to implement or adapt to specific situations, that staff lack of knowledge or experience using them, or that communicators lack resources.[16]

Beyond setting structures, defining roles, assigning extra resources and ensuring co-ordination of government messages during emergencies, recovery and evaluation phases were embedded in crisis communication processes in 56% of CoGs surveyed, as shown in Figure 7.14. As such, they ensure the whole crisis policy cycle is covered, including informing cross-government decision makers and stakeholders, monitoring citizens' choices and behaviours after the emergency response, and planning of recovery and rehabilitation or support efforts (OECD, 2016[27]).

OECD survey responses highlighted that evaluating crisis communications was conducted on an ad hoc basis by 21 out of 33 CoGs[17], quarterly or more by 5 CoGs and annually by 4 CoGs. As such, taking into account past evaluations and lessons learned from crisis communication practices, they also help to assess the impact of crisis and risk communication efforts and to incorporate lessons into future communication strategies, criteria, protocols, plans and approaches (OECD, 2016[27]).

Figure 7.14. Countries where crisis communication processes include an evaluation and recovery phase or not



Note: n CoG = 39. The percentage of OECD countries where crisis communication processes included an evaluation and recovery phase amounted to 64%.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Ensuring crisis communication is used as a lever of accountability

Building on the abovementioned components, the ability of governments to communicate transparent and reliable information to their populations is a prerequisite to ensure public officials and institutions are held accountable for their crisis response and recovery management processes. While the OECD survey does not allow to assess how crisis communication contributes to governments' accountability, emerging practices during the COVID-19 pandemic provide insights into addressing this complex issue.

Furthermore, public communicators can support public accountability in such unexpected situations by promoting transparency and access to information, providing access or disseminating specific data of interest to key stakeholders and tailored for them (e.g. contracting documents, health situation figures, vaccination data, etc.), including reusing or encouraging the reuse by third parties of open government data, as this was done in national and subnational governments' communication activities around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Scotland (Box 7.18).

Box 7.18. Promoting accountability through communication about health open government data: the case of Scotland

In Scotland, where the National Health Services (NHS) data portal, the "Daily COVID-19 Cases in Scotland" delivers information structured in two pillars.

The first provides data on number of new daily confirmed cases, negative cases, deaths, and testing by NHS Labs. The second covers new hospital admissions and new intensive care unit admissions for COVID-19 in Scotland, including cumulative totals and population rates at Scotland, NHS Board and Council Area levels. In addition, seven-day positive cases and population rates are also presented by Neighbourhood Area. NHS social media posts and other communication activities have been deployed to use the data and inform the population as well as to promote access and consultation of the datasets.

In addition, a "Public Health Scotland COVID-19 dashboard" is updated on a daily basis with the latest data available and data visualisations on COVID-19 in Scotland. They include positive cases reported to Public Health Scotland by NHS Scotland and the United Kingdom Government Regional Testing laboratories, number of tests carried out, figures on deaths of people with a positive test, number of admissions to hospital and intensive care units and COVID-19 vaccination rates.

Source: https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/our-areas-of-work/covid-19/covid-19-data-and-intelligence/covid-19-daily-cases-in-scotland-dashboard/overview-of-the-daily-covid-19-data-dashboard/.

Similarly, OECD member and partner countries' crisis communication responses have highlighted the crucial role played by such actions to explain to individuals and stakeholders their government's decisions, including when these were linked to limiting certain freedoms and rights. Indeed, to contain the spread of the virus, governments have had to restrict freedoms such as the freedom of movement or right to peaceful assembly during the COVID-19 pandemic. A vast majority of countries passed emergency legislation to address challenges posed by the crisis, at times restricting freedoms in efforts to curb the spread of the virus, including increasing government surveillance powers and tracking systems.[18] Additional recent reports have confirmed limitations to freedoms in an unprecedented number of countries to respond to the pandemic, with close to 13% of the world population living in 2020 in countries with an "open" or "narrowed" civic space rating[19] – a decline from close to 18% in 2019 (CIVICUS, 2020[30]).

As individuals' perceptions of governments' actions on such sensitive issues matter to ensure decisions adopted remain legitimate and complied with by the populations, crisis communication is a crucial component to clarify why such measures were adopted, whether they are temporary, and the scope of the restriction(s), as this was the case in Denmark (Box 7.19). However, the relations between public communication governance, structures, and applications during crises and governments' accountability were not covered in the OECD survey and trends could not be assessed and substantiated based on collected data. Refining these linkages will require additional research to further substantiate their contribution to uphold good governance, and notably accountability and transparency during crises in a more systematic way.

Box 7.19. Communicating about temporary limitations to civic freedoms: the example of Denmark

During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have faced challenges in striking the right balance between, on the one hand, enacting crisis measures, and on the other hand, protecting and promoting civic space. According to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) 146 countries enacted 385 emergency measures from January to September 2020 that at times restricted basic civic freedoms. Among these, 57 countries introduced measures that affect freedom of expression, 147 curtail freedom of assembly and 60 propel privacy issues.

Nevertheless, some countries, such as Denmark communicated clearly on measures required to address the pandemic to counteract these effects. For example, following discussions in Parliament in March 2020, the Government exempted gathering restrictions on "opinion-shaping assemblies" such as protests and political meetings as part of COVID-19 measures. Through the communication of these amendments, the Government re-assured citizens of the protection of this right while encouraging social distancing and respect for safety measures.

Source: Page and Ognenovska (2021[31]), "Can civil society survive COVID-19?", published online on the OECD DAC online blog, available at https://oecd-development-matters.org/2021/01/13/can-civil-society-survive-covid-19/; https://www.ft.dk/ripdf/samling/20191/lovforslag/l158/20191_l158_som_vedtaget.pdf; ICNL/ECNL (n.d.[32]), "COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker: Keep Civic Space Healthy", International Center for Not-for-Profit Law/European Center for Not-for-Profit Law, https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/ (accessed on 13 May 2021).

Ensuring crisis communication is used as a lever of stakeholder participation

Encouraging collaborative approaches to communicating during crises helps co-create more targeted messages that reach their audiences more effectively and create buy-in and trust, which are essential for the implementation of emergency measures. Traditional crisis communication has often been implemented in a one-way, top-down manner, delivering messages from government to citizens (OECD, 2016[27]). However, communicating during a crisis is not only a tool to share information to citizens to ensure their safety, but also represents an opportunity to engage in conversations with a variety of stakeholders and learn from concerns and experiences raised by individuals to shape recovery processes and future policies. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the issue of participation even more relevant, including at the highest political and administrative levels in governments. Policymakers have discussed the repercussions of the virus on wide range of stakeholders. The use of national dialogues in Finland and Germany for example allowed individuals to give feedback, voice concerns and ask questions directly to high-ranking public officials, providing in turn the executive a better understanding of stakeholders' expectations and situations (Box 7.20).

Box 7.20. Engaging with and listening to citizens' concerns during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the governments of Finland and Germany directly engaged with citizens regarding the crisis. These dialogues allowed individuals to voice concerns and provided policymakers the chance to better understand the effects of the virus on stakeholders' lives, make financial and aid services known to citizens, as well as respond to feedback. The conversations were widely disseminated and summaries made available on government websites, ensuring all citizens could learn about these events.

The Finnish National Dialogues

In March 2020, in response to COVID-19, the Ministry of Finance, the civil society organisation Dialogue Academy and the Timeout Foundation joined forces to launch the Finnish National Dialogues. Their aim was to engage with and listen to citizens on how they were handling the crisis and to understand their needs. The initiative also aimed to include a range of actors in organising these dialogues. Over 80 organisations and actors had come together, including civil society organisations, municipalities, government offices, foundations and individuals.

Between April and June 2020, 162 dialogues took place, with over 1 100 participants actively contributing to these discussions. Ultimately, the goal of these discussions was to increase the mutual understanding of the different participants. Particular attention was given to ensuring inclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups, whose voices might not be as prominent as other demographics. Through this partnership, the government was able to reach a wide range of groups, including prisoners, sex workers, relatives of mental health patients, teachers, social workers, children, the elderly and pensioners. The dialogues were all documented and used to build a comprehensive overview, which was published on the Ministry of Finance's website.

'Die Bundeskanzlerin im Gespräch': the chancellor in conversation in Germany

The Citizens' Dialogues organised by the German Federal Chancellery offered opportunities for informed conversations between public officials and citizens on the impact of the virus. Individuals could put forward questions directly to the chancellor. These conversations brought together professional communities such as individuals engaged in volunteering, the cultural sector, helpline staff, and students in seven events as of the beginning of September 2021. Additionally, people living in regional communities and specific demographic groups, such as families with children, were also given the opportunity to participate.

These dialogues aimed at keeping the chancellor "as close to citizens as possible". These opportunities for direct interaction allowed the chancellor to respond to concerns as well as make services and financial aid known to citizens. For example, responding to discussions involving individuals from the cultural sector, the chancellor provided reassurance that pandemic assistance would continue into the autumn as well as *vis à vis* the vaccination efforts. In addition to being broadcasted on official websites, these conversations were also broadcasted on Facebook and summaries were made widely available.

Source: https://avoinhallinto.fi/assets/files/2020/11/Policy_Brief_1_2020.pdf; https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/citizens-dialogue-voluntary-work-1916384; https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/preserving-the-future-of-culture-1898578; https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/citizens-dialogue-volunteering-1918870; https://www.facebook.com/Bundesregierung/videos/die-bundeskanzlerin-im-gespr%C3%A4ch-ehrenamt-in-der-pandemie/223218509283310/.

In light of the potential for crisis communications to feed into broader communication and governance objectives, some countries have recently started to co-develop crisis communication activities—notably in

the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Such initiatives contribute to not only a more integrated approach to crisis communication (OECD, 2016[27]) but also dialogue between actors involved, such as public authorities, international organisations, civil society organisations, the media, scientists, businesses, and stakeholders at the local and national levels. This was the rationale, for example, in Slovenia, where a call centre developed to provide information about the pandemic was also used as a platform for a two-way conversation between the government and the population, as described in Box 7.21.

Box 7.21. Using a COVID-19 call centre as a two-way crisis communication system in Slovenia

In Slovenia, the call centre operated by the Government provides the public with reliable and up-to-date information on the coronavirus at a toll-free telephone number. Calls are answered by medical students of the University of Ljubljana.

The Centre not only provides information about the virus and measures to stop its spread, it has also been used as a means for people to express their fears and worries while talking to someone knowledgeable, trustworthy and understanding. As such, it has acted as a two-way information delivery system, allowing the government to inform citizens about health and safety and citizens to convey their concerns to the government.

Given the proportion of Slovenians who live in rural areas and/or do not have access to digital tools, the call centre also made it possible to establish a dialogue with difficult-to-reach segments of the population.

Source: Interview with Kristina Plavšak Krajnc, Senior Advisor, Office for EU and International Cooperation, Ministry of Culture, Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2020.

Digital communication facilitates the shift from information sharing to meaningful engagement, and public communicators selected crisis management as the top objective pursued through digital-led activities. Recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have also required that governments find new and innovative ways to reach all parts of the population (see Chapter 5).

Governments can use this potential not only directly with social media followers or website visitors but also through engaging with intermediaries as two-way relays of information and feedback. By working with influencers, community leaders, and many more, public communicators can help co-construct messages and channel information from government to citizens as well as the other way around, online and offline, as seen in the Government of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Box 7.22). Such initiatives have helped ensure all groups in society were effectively reached and engaged through means and languages that they use, including publics that are less easily reached by governments, more vulnerable or isolated. They also resulted in lessons learned for government communication processes on how to co-create messages and better engage all parts of society.

Box 7.22. Relying on influencers or community leaders as intermediaries for dialogue between the government and citizens in Canada

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada developed new ways of engaging with influencers, opinion leaders and community representatives to better understand the concerns and expectations of specific demographic groups and minorities and co-create targeted and tailored messages. Confronted with challenging times, these new approaches responded to evidence and feedback pointing to the need to adapt communications for groups that are difficult to reach or have less trust in government messages but needed to be rapidly and efficiently addressed during the crisis.

Beyond translating resources and developing ads about the government's COVID-19 response different languages distributed through a variety of channels, the government strengthened relationships with leaders of minority groups or communities. For example, they co-developed national and regional communication campaigns with indigenous leaders and equipped them with the necessary skills and information to respond to concerns and expectations and give feedback to the government. Evidence from these COVID-19 initiatives includes that co-creation approaches result in culturally appropriate products and support messages that are more likely to reach and be trusted by all groups, increasing the impact of crisis communications. Building on this experience, the Canadian government plans to further use and institutionalise such development and co-creation processes in future public communication strategies and activities.

Source: Adapted from information shared by the government of Canada.

Key findings and the way forward

The specific applications of public communication discussed above illustrate the practical ways in which this function can be implemented to meet a range of policy goals. As demonstrated, their use also offers opportunities to support transparency, integrity, accountability and citizen participation in public life, and ultimately contribute to strengthening democratic processes.

- Campaigns are one of the most ubiquitous and effective instruments of communication to raise awareness of – and compliance with – government policies, as well as to promote the uptake of services. Emerging practices highlight the opportunity to expand the use of campaigns to foster a more open government, for instance by encouraging greater stakeholder participation and supporting the implementation of policy objectives such as strengthening a culture of integrity within society and the public sector. Further research into the risks of poorly run campaigns and criteria for impactful and innovative campaigns could further highlight means to make a more strategic use of this communication competency.
- Media relations, as the oldest and most established area of communications, is widely used to provide information and promote government priorities. However, its potential for improving transparency is under-exploited. Engagement with the media is mostly conducted through formalised means such as press releases and conferences. Further research would be needed to document the potential of digital tools to complement these avenues and open spaces for dialogue between public communicators and journalists can further be leveraged. Furthermore, while acknowledging a delicate balance is to be safeguarded between engagement with the media and potential attempts at shaping or pressuring the media environment, encouraging more constructive relationships with the media can greatly support democratic dynamics, by amplifying stakeholder voices that public communicators can in turn use to inform their work. This can be done by maintaining regular conversations with a variety of media outlets on issues beyond high-profile news stories, for instance by partnering with them to amplify opportunities for citizen participation. Going forward, research into guidelines, charters, or principles developed by countries to inform their relations with the media could shed light on how to create meaningful engagement and enable the media to play a watchdog role and support democratic processes.
- Internal communication appears to be an under-prioritised competency that suffers from constrained resources, limited guidance and co-ordination challenges. Nonetheless, it plays a central role in creating a more effective public sector by creating alignment with, and buy-in for, governmental priorities. While internal audience insights and the analysis of specific internal communication campaigns were outside of the scope of the OECD surveys, future research on these topics could help build a better understanding of their impact.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of crisis communication, while underlining numerous limitations. While the OECD surveys cover the year preceding the pandemic (2019), and while this report does not aim to assess government's communication efforts during the crisis, the survey findings shed some light onto this crucial government function. Having defined and clear structures, responsibilities and protocols that can be easily adaptable are essential to ensure preparedness and to speak with a coherent voice during such unexpected circumstances. Evidence points to the possibility of reforming this competency to render it more evidence-driven, co-ordinated and collaborative. This is particularly urgent if crises require steering a whole-of-society response, as in the case of the recent pandemic. Future-proofing crisis communication and increasing preparedness will require learning from thorough evaluation of crisis communication and its impact. External scrutiny by stakeholders would benefit such exercises and ensure greater accountability in crisis response and management. Considering the monitoring and evaluation of crisis communication was not extensively covered by the OECD surveys, going forward, further research on this area could yield valuable insights. Studying in more depth how, where and when

public communication innovated, succeeded and failed during the COVID-19 crisis could also be needed to deepen these analyses. Moreover, refining the understanding of co-ordination mechanisms would require additional discussions and follow up with countries, which the scope of these OECD surveys did not allow for.

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Notes

[1] Austria and Romania did not provide data for this question.

[2] Romania did not provide data for this question

[3] Japan did not provide data for this question.

[4] https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries.

[5] For more details on engagement with social media specifically, please see chapter 5 of this Report.

[6] Definition provided in the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

[7] Refers to "Linee guida per l'elaborazione dei programme di comunicazione delle pubbliche amministrazioni" issued by the Undersecretary to the information and publishing in November 2018.

[8] Definition provided in the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

[9] Romania did not provide a response to this question.

[10] Following the completion of the survey and its data cleaning phase, the OECD collected these insights from public officials and communicators in the framework of data validation workshops held between September and November 2020.

[11] Lebanon did not provide a response to this question. Among MHs, a similar proportion of respondents (16 out of 23 MHs, 65%) relies on criteria, standard procedures or protocols to respond to crisis. Among them, a majority pointed to national central frameworks or guidelines. The other 7 ministries pointed to responses depending on the situation. The Lithuanian MH did not provide an answer.

[12] Following the completion of the survey and its data cleaning phase, the OECD collected these insights from public officials and communicators in the framework of data validation workshops held between September and November 2020.

[13] Monitoring is understood as watching and checking a situation carefully for a period of time. Handling is understood as dealing with, having responsibility for, or being in charge of responding to media and social media requests and questions (adapted from Cambridge Dictionary).

[14] Austria did not provide a response to this question.

[15] Slovenia responded not having cross-government co-ordination mechanisms for crisis communication.

[16] Following the completion of the survey and its data cleaning phase, the OECD collected these insights from public officials and communicators in the framework of data validation workshops held between September and November 2020.

[17] This calculation only takes into account the 33 countries who evaluate communication activities.

[18] Data shared by Mr. Mark Malloch-Brown in an OECD Observatory of Civic Space Webinar on “The Impact of National and Global Security Measures on Civic Space”, 15 July 2021.

[19] The Civicus Monitor uses 5 categories : “open”, “narrowed”, “closed”, “repressed” and “obstructed” to assess and cluster how civic freedoms apply in 196 countries.

Annex A. Methodology

The OECD Report "Public Communication: the Global Context and the Way Forward" is based on data collected through the OECD 2020 Understanding Public Communication Surveys administered to Centres of Government (CoGs)[1] and Ministries of Health (MHs) in 46 OECD member and non-member countries as well as the European Commission. It builds on the mandate of the OECD's Public Governance Committee and draws on the OECD's analytical framework on public communication as well as discussions of the OECD Working Party on Open Government (WPOG) and Experts Group on Public Communication (EGPC).

Survey responses

This Report is based on 64 survey responses (from both CoGs and MHs) from 46 countries (including 35 OECD members) and the European Commission. More specifically, 39 countries replied to the CoG survey and 24 to the MH survey.

Throughout the report, data is presented using the following ISO country codes.

Table A A.1. ISO Codes of the countries referred to in this report

1	Armenia	ARM	24	Korea	KOR
2	Australia	AUS	25	Latvia	LVA
3	Austria	AUT	26	Lebanon	LBN
4	Belgium	BEL	27	Lithuania	LTU
5	Brazil	BRA	28	Luxembourg	LUX
6	Canada	CAN	29	Mexico	MEX
7	Chile	CHL	30	Morocco	MAR
8	Colombia	COL	31	Netherlands	NLD
9	Costa Rica	CRI	32	Norway	NOR
10	Czech Republic	CZE	33	Paraguay	PRY
11	Ecuador	ECU	34	Philippines	PHL
12	Estonia	EST	35	Poland	POL
13	Finland	FIN	36	Portugal	PRT
14	France	FRA	37	Romania	ROU
15	Germany	DEU	38	Slovak Republic	SVK
16	Greece	GRC	39	Slovenia	SVN
17	Hungary	HUN	40	Spain	ESP
18	Iceland	ISL	41	Sweden	SWE
19	Ireland	IRL	42	Switzerland	CHE
20	Israel	ISR	43	Thailand	THA
21	Italy	ITA	44	Tunisia	TUN
22	Japan	JPN	45	Turkey	TUR
23	Jordan	JOR	46	United Kingdom	GBR

Relevant considerations

The aim of the OECD surveys was to understand how public communication is used across OECD member and non-member countries. More specifically, it focused on the contribution of communication for improved governance, policy-making and service design and delivery, as well as increased public trust and country resilience to mis- and disinformation.

The surveys benefited from the input of different teams within the OECD Public Governance Directorate, including the digital government, behavioural insights, risks, governance indicators and policy evaluation teams.

Based on the surveys, the report conducts an exploratory analysis across a variety of themes, while acknowledging that complex competencies such as evaluation or crisis communication cannot be grasped in their entirety through a limited number of questions. Given these limitations, the report focuses on selecting communication competencies based on priority needs of surveyed countries, while also identifying future areas of research that merit further reflection.

The survey shared with CoGs asked respondents to provide information and data on their whole-of-government practices. The survey sent to MHs aimed to complement this holistic perspective with a sectoral one from a key service-providing ministry and a crucial actor in times of health crises.

Given that the COVID-19 crisis unfolded in parallel to the data collection process, and while the survey requested countries to answer regarding the practices and status quo in 2019, some survey responses may reflect the priorities of countries in 2020. Whenever applicable, the OECD noted these instances and nuanced the implications to the survey findings in the Report. Based on the request of EGPC members, the OECD incorporated examples related to COVID-19 responses throughout the report based on cases shared during the data collection process, meetings held, as well as desk research.

Furthermore, certain countries did not respond to all questions, depending on their particular context. In the case of Austria for example, the CoG was unable to answer several questions given the multiple changes in the administration in the recent years. The CoG in Germany also noted that certain questions (such as those linked to the structuring, hiring and staffing of public communication teams for example) would not accurately portray their practices given the federal nature of the state, but provided additional information to contextualise their answers. In countries where the CoG did not conduct activities for the whole-of-government, such as Israel for example, responses to certain questions were also nuanced. It is also worth noting that the mandate for whole-of-government communication is located outside the CoG in certain countries (such as Brazil, Costa Rica, Korea or Paraguay). Their activities however remain comparable to those of the CoG, and this has been clarified namely in Chapter 2. Finally, and wherever a country did not provide data to a specific question, the OECD noted this under the respective figure and adjusted the calculation baseline.

Structure of the surveys

For the purpose of the surveys, public communication is understood as any communication activity or initiative led by public institutions for the public good. It is different from political communication, which is linked to the political debate, elections, or individual political figures and parties.

They focused on the following 10 thematic areas:

1. strategy and planning
2. audience and channels
3. campaigns
4. media engagement

5. digital communication
6. internal communication
7. crisis communication
8. evaluation
9. disinformation and media ecosystems
10. cross-cutting questions.

The questionnaires included yes or no options as well as multiple-choice questions. They offered space for countries to provide further explanations on their specific case, share supporting documentation and make any additional remarks. Wherever possible, the report complements aggregate data with boxes containing examples of good practices to reflect different country experiences. While it is not possible to include all insights and practices in the report, all input was thoroughly assessed to help contextualise the findings and interpret the data.

The OECD Secretariat submitted a draft version of the CoG and MH surveys to the WPOG for their review. Following the integration of comments, the Secretariat piloted the surveys with countries from different regions (Costa Rica, Latvia, Morocco and the United Kingdom).

Data cleaning and validation process

The final surveys were sent to the delegates of the WPOG on February 2020 who were asked to share them with the relevant officials at the respective CoG and MH. The OECD extended the initial deadline to respond given public communicators' massive workload when the COVID-19 crisis erupted.

The OECD administered the surveys online via the Checkbox tool, accepting only one response per institution (i.e CoG, MH per country). Respondents were asked to liaise with relevant actors across the Government as needed. The Secretariat conducted a review of all submissions to ensure the overall consistency, comprehensiveness and comparability of data, as well as to identify where additional evidence or documents were needed. During this process, the OECD followed up with each country for additional information, clarifications and examples with particular attention to federal countries to better contextualise existing practices. Respondents were asked for a final validation of their responses in January and February 2021 following the changes requested by some countries to their submissions. As a result of this process, some answers were modified to ensure consistency across respondents.

The Secretariat subsequently validated the key survey findings with responding countries during a series of in-person and online events (including the first meeting of the EGPC on 30 September 2020, as well as regional events for Latin America and the Caribbean as well as MENA on 17 November 2020). The data validation period went from June 2020 to February 2021. Members of the EGPC and WPOG endorsed the key findings of the Report during the third meeting of both groups on 28 and 29 June 2021 respectively.

Note

[1] Centre of government is defined as the support structure serving the highest level of the executive branch of government (presidents, prime ministers and their equivalents).

OECD Report on Public Communication

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT AND THE WAY FORWARD

The first *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward* examines the public communication structures, mandates and practices of centres of governments and ministries of health from 46 countries, based on the 2020 Understanding Public Communication surveys. It analyses how this important government function contributes to better policies and services, greater citizen trust, and, ultimately, stronger democracies in an increasingly complex information environment. It looks at the role public communication can play in responding to the challenges posed by the spread of mis- and disinformation and in building more resilient media and information ecosystems. It also makes the case for a more strategic use of communication by governments, both to pursue policy objectives and promote more open governments, by providing an extensive mapping of trends, gaps and lessons learned. Finally, it highlights pioneering efforts to move towards the professionalisation of the government communication function and identifies areas for further research to support this transition.

Government Communication Service

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