



Launch of the OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE)

25 November 2020

COVID-19 is reshaping our world and affecting each and everyone's well-being across all dimensions, from health and financial security to social relations and trust in others and in institutions. The crisis is also drawing attention to the many socio-economic divides fracturing our societies, and deepening these divides by hitting the most vulnerable hardest. There has never been a more important time to create the **OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE)** to continue putting people's well-being at the top of the agenda and ensuring that better lives for all, both now and in the future, remain at the heart of COVID-19 response and recovery strategies. WISE aims to work hand-in-hand with governments, businesses, foundations and civil society to support them in achieving their mandates. On the occasion of the launch of the OECD WISE Centre, a virtual high-level roundtable was organised, and brought together the OECD Secretary-General, Ministers and representatives of civil society who have all integrated well-being as a central part of their mandate and activities. They discussed how to ensure that recovery and reconstruction strategies put people's well-being and inclusion at the centre. Below are some highlights of the insights they provided.



From top left to bottom right: Angel Gurría, Aino-Kaisa Pekonen, Grant Robertson, Mona Fortier, Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, Princess Laurentien, Olivia Grégoire, Saila Ruuth and Martin Abregu.

Angel Gurría OECD Secretary-General



As the Secretary-General highlighted, the creation of the OECD WISE Centre is a milestone moment, coming at a time when the COVID-19 crisis has deepened social divides and increased hardship for the most vulnerable. In order to

"Build Back Better" and ensure an inclusive, green, and resilient recovery, WISE will advance key projects like the high-frequency evidence scan of the impacts of COVID-19 on people's well-being and the analysis of the pandemic's impact on people's perceptions of inequalities. This work aims to help governments to build more resilient societies by making acceptability a key part of recovery strategies and investing in the areas with greatest social returns.

WISE will also extend pioneering OECD analysis on inequalities and child well-being, contribute to better connect public policies and business action by working with innovative platforms such as B4IG and the Inclusive Growth Financing Forum, and carry forward OECD work on Measuring Distance to SDGs.

"The creation of WISE comes at a historic moment. Its work and analysis will be paramount in helping us tackle the many challenges we face and deliver policies that are economically sound, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable."



Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen OECD Deputy Secretary-General



Mr. Vestergaard emphasised that extraordinary times like the COVID-19 health, economic, and social crisis call for extraordinary responses. Well-being and inclusion were a key part of the OECD's response to the Great Financial Crisis

through the Better Life and Inclusive Growth Initiatives. The creation of the WISE Centre will help further measure what matters to people, while pointing to how policies and economic

“We're no longer talking about growth only, we're talking about a recovery that has to be strong, green, inclusive and resilient, [...] a recovery that builds on people's well-being and social inclusion as pillars for a sustainable economic growth.”

growth can improve people's lives. WISE will build on the progress made and lessons learnt over the past decade, bring together the measurement and policy aspects of the agenda, and strengthen the OECD's activities on well-being, sustainability, inequality and inclusive growth. By sharing innovative experiences and good practices, WISE will unlock the potential of multidimensional agendas and help chart a course for recovery with people's well-being and social inclusion as central pillars of sustainable economic growth.

Aino-Kaisa Pekonen Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Finland



According to Minister Pekonen the new WISE Centre offers a possibility to strengthen the links and synergies between the economy and well-being, while helping governments to build back better from the pandemic. The Minister

stressed that the development of indicators for well-being and sustainable and inclusive growth will be an important process, and one where the WISE Centre will work closely together with the OECD committees. The ongoing pandemic has made it even clearer that investments in health and well-being, education and social security are essential for sustainable social, economic and environmental development. Finland works to both protect the vulnerable and the functioning of the economy and society, and to find new opportunities to support both the economy and people's well-being. Covid-19 has brought to light the need for digital solutions which build on trust and inclusivity, and ensure data protection, data privacy as well as ethical considerations. Finally, the Minister pointed to the need for strong and comprehensive social safety nets during this time.

“Social safety nets are the foundation for the economy and people's well-being. Strong social safety nets enable people to pursue their goals, start businesses and carry on with their plans.”



Mona Fortier
Minister of Middle-Class Prosperity
and Associate Minister of Finance,
Canada



Minister Fortier explained that Canada’s economic response to COVID-19 has protected jobs, provided emergency support for families, and has helped keep businesses afloat all while keeping Canadians healthy and safe. Canada

provided financial support to workers who lost their jobs, increased financial support to families with children, boosted financial support to students, seniors, and persons with disabilities, and helped small businesses through loans, rent and wage subsidies. As the pandemic has deepened social divides and affected people’s mental health, Canada created a national platform for accessing mental health services, while providing significant support to community organisations such as Food Banks, shelters, and organisations doing work to prevent gender-based violence. Minister Fortier also explained that Canada is working to build back better while improving Canadians’ quality of life, investing where it is most needed and on what matters the most to people. The Minister spoke about her mandate to develop and implement a Quality of Life Framework for Canada, in order to better incorporate quality of life measurements and considerations into government policy and budget decision-making processes. The Minister also mentioned some of Canada’s specific commitments including creating a million jobs, investing in training for workers, and reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

“ *Better incorporating quality of life and well-being measurement into the decision-making process [...] will ensure that Canada’s economic recovery improves well-being today and for generations of Canadians in the future.* ”

Grant Robertson
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister
of Finance, New Zealand



Minister Robertson welcomed the creation of WISE and his hope is that the Centre will thrive. WISE can support OECD countries’ work to implement well-being policies by providing a robust statistical and analytical foundation. For

instance, the New Zealand Treasury’s Living Standards Framework is drawn from the work of the OECD. New Zealand’s 2019 budget was an end-to-end well-being approach: not just about measuring success with a wider set of indicators, but also using well-being to develop policies.

“ *Our Living Standards Framework is [...] how we look after our people, the environment, our money and our communities. If we can get the balance of those four things right, then I believe we’ll truly be delivering a well-being approach.* ”

For example, budget priorities were determined by looking at the well-being impacts of policies, and in consultation with Government Science Advisors. Government ministries were then invited to coordinate and work together across those priorities. Inter-generational impacts were also at the core of budget decisions. The well-being approach adopted in the 2019 budget created a different focus, resulting in substantial new resources for mental health, for example, and strong cross-government coordination on the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, with 10 different government agencies developing a single joint approach. When it came to devising the response to COVID-19, New Zealand applied a well-being approach, arguing that the best economic response is a strong public health response, and the best way to protect livelihoods is to protect lives. New Zealand has also made legislative changes to ensure that well-being objectives are embedded within the Public Finance Act, with the Finance Minister required to discuss well-being objectives and performance at each budget.



Olivia Grégoire
Minister of State for the Social,
Inclusive and Responsible
Economy, France



According to Minister Grégoire the current economic crisis calls for the contribution of private actors to collective development and well-being. Even if the French government has significantly invested in a greener and fairer economy, the cooperation of businesses is needed to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth. This is why France allows companies to incorporate in their statutes a *raison d'être*, by adopting the legal status of "mission company" which notably requires them to officially integrate their stakeholders into governance. The Minister also stressed the importance of transparency on performance and on the social and environmental impact, and the need to promote and share good practices on measurement issues. France has also just created social bonds to help reconcile economic performance and impact, and promote public-private partnerships on inclusive growth.

“*The alliance between economic performance and environmental and social performance is the basis for a more inclusive and responsible economy.*”

These social bonds encourage private and public investors to finance ecological or social projects, and if these projects achieve their objectives, investors are reimbursed by the state, sometimes with interest. The alliance between economic performance and ecological and social performance is the basis for creating an economy that put solidarity and responsibility at the forefront.

Martin Abregu
Vice President for International
Programs, Ford Foundation



Mr. Abregu explained that in order to encourage institutions to become agents of change that promote equal opportunity, we need to identify the appropriate indicators of success for each of them, indicators that are focused on the most marginalised to ensure that they always benefit from new policies. The Ford Foundation works to ensure that those who have been historically marginalised, such as indigenous people, black women and girls, informal workers, etc., are part of the decision-making and COVID-19 recovery processes, as we know that unequal societies are less able to cope with the crisis. Mr. Abregu argued that this should first be done by building and strengthening the institutional voice of the most vulnerable and of those who are directly impacted by COVID-19 through organisations that can influence decisions made by governments. Secondly, by creating platforms where such organisations can interact with different stakeholders and with each other, and finally by ensuring that there is an open civic space that allows these organisations to engage in public conversations.

“*We hope to be working with you [...] to identify those indicators that are not only about solving problems, but are really about equalising and catching up with those most marginalised.*”



Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands



Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands observed that the COVID-19 crisis has made the already existing issues on child well-being all the more visible. She highlighted two elements as fundamental when developing well-being policies. Firstly, true dialogue between all perspectives concerned so as to develop a shared understanding of the problem as well as the “big hairy and audacious goal that needs to be achieved”. She invited policy-makers and governments to dare to let go of their conviction that they have all the answers, and start unravelling the problems with the people concerned. This opens up the way for a multi-sectoral approach and thus avoids governments and other players to operate in silos. Secondly, the unprecedented situation that COVID-19 brings about, highlights new vulnerabilities. For instance, the sense of loneliness among young people, or demands of resilience of people losing their jobs unexpectedly and never thought of themselves as “vulnerable”. The Princess concluded that solutions can only be developed and found through a shared thinking process of governments, business and social players based on the principles of true dialogue.

“ Before COVID-19, well-being was perceived as a ‘nice to have’. There is now a clear realisation that it is a ‘need to have’.”

Saila Ruuth State Secretary to the Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Finland



State Secretary Ruuth explained that Finland’s recently adopted resolution for reducing inequalities in well-being, health and safety by 2030 is a continuum of long-term efforts and work for promoting well-being and health in Finland. To achieve this objective, government agencies cannot work in silos.

“ The success is total when we have created a virtuous circle of policies where well-being and sustainable growth reinforce each other and profit both people and society as a whole.”

Effective results can only be achieved if different branches of government have common objectives and work together with civil society, social partners, businesses and research institutes. In addition, State Secretary Ruuth explained that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting emergency conditions have further highlighted the need to take determined long term measures to reduce inequality, and that the goal-oriented nature of Finland’s long-term resolution has proven to be a valuable guide, also during the crisis.



The launch of WISE generated significant interest with close to 700 people joining from governments, the statistical community, international organisations, academia, civil society and the private sector. See more details and watch the full event here: www.oecd.org/wise/OECD-WISE-launch-event.htm

The OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity is pursuing its mission through 6 pillars:

- **Measuring what matters** by generating new time-critical insights on what matters to people and investigate what drives people's well-being with the aim of informing policy decisions and business actions.
- **Getting people and governments on the same page** by collecting new data and information on individual perceptions of inequality to gain insights into the gaps between perception, reality, and people's preferences.
- **Giving everyone a stake** in growth by studying the root causes of inequalities and assessing the role of policies to prevent increased poverty and social exclusion, to address high inequalities and promote equal opportunities, making governments more efficient and responsive and enhance social cohesion.
- **Making a fair transition to a green economy** by mapping inclusive and green policy packages, outlining the main challenges and identifying possible solutions for countries to make a fair green transition.
- **Changing the odds from the outset** by investigating how children, and those of future generations, can be better supported and provided with opportunities to improve their life chances, and by engaging OECD countries in shaping a common vision for child well-being policies.
- **Bringing people together** by developing a thriving community and partnerships to promote inclusiveness, solidarity and sustainability and foster international debate with key actors across sectors through events like the OECD World Forums on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy.



For more information on the work of WISE, visit:
www.oecd.org/wise



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