OECD Public Governance Reviews

Building Centre of Government Capabilities to Steer and Deliver Complex Priorities

Synthesis Report

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OECD Public Governance Reviews

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SYNTHESIS REPORT

BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

LAUNCH VERSION

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Foreword

Governments today operate in an environment of heightened complexity, where policy challenges are increasingly interconnected, resources are constrained, and citizens' expectations of public services continue to rise. Delivering government priorities requires not only clear political direction, but also strong institutional capabilities to co-ordinate action across government. In this context, the role of the centre of government has become more critical than ever.

This report, *Building Centre of Government Capabilities to Steer and Deliver Complex Priorities*, examines how CoGs can better support heads of government and cabinets in setting priorities, aligning institutions, and ensuring that policy ambitions are translated into tangible results. Drawing on evidence from six countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal) it provides insights into how governments are adapting their structures, processes, and capabilities to respond to increasingly complex demands.

The report highlights three areas that are central to effective delivery. First, it explores how governments organise themselves and the role of the centre of government in steering machinery-of-government changes, to better align administrative structures with political priorities. Second, it examines how CoGs support prioritisation and planning, helping to translate broad political programmes into a manageable and coherent set of commitments. Third, it focuses on the capabilities required for cross-government co-ordination and policy development, including analytical capacity, data systems, and collaborative networks across ministries.

Across these areas, a consistent message emerges effective CoGs act not only as co-ordinators, but as strategic advisors. They help bridge the divide between political leadership and the public administration, broker consensus across competing interests, and sustain attention on long-term outcomes, including through ensuring preparedness and resilience. At the same time, the report underscores the risks of overextension, fragmented mandates, and insufficient analytical capacity at the centre, highlighting the importance of clear role definition and disciplined choices about where and how the centre should engage.

The findings presented here contribute to the OECD's *Government Unstuck* agenda, which seeks to support governments in overcoming persistent barriers to delivery and rebuilding trust in public institutions. They point to practical steps that can strengthen the centre's ability to steer effectively, including embedding priorities in core government routines, investing in data and analytical capabilities, and fostering stronger collaboration across institutional boundaries.

This report was prepared as part of a project funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument, in close co-operation with the European Commission. It reflects the commitment of participating countries to learning from each other's experiences and to strengthening their governance systems in the face of shared challenges. By bringing together comparative evidence and practical lessons, this report aims to inform ongoing reform efforts across the OECD and contribute to more effective, responsive, and resilient public institutions.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AAP – Annual Action Plan

APS – Australian Public Service

CESOP-Local – Municipal Sustainability Index (Portugal)

CfOT – Centre for Organisational Transformation

CGN – Cross-Government Network

CGPP – Consolidated Government Policy Plan

COFOG – Classification of the Functions of Government

CoG – Centre of Government

CoM – Council of Ministers

CoMA – Council of Ministers Administration (Bulgaria)

CPWPO – Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office (Ireland)

CSR2030 – Civil Service Renewal 2030 (Ireland)

DSD – Department of Sustainable Development (Romania)

DSG – Deputy Secretary General

EU – European Union

GCDS – Government Chief Data Steward

GO – Government Office (Estonia)

GSCo – General Secretariat for Coordination (Greece)

GSG – General Secretariat of the Government (Romania)

GWPT – Government Work Programming Team

HM Treasury – His Majesty's Treasury (United Kingdom)

ICSD – Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development

IGEES – Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service

KOSTRA – Municipal Reporting System (Norway)

KPI / KPIs – Key Performance Indicator(s)

LLPW – List of Legislative or Programme Works

MAZI – Monitoring and Coordination Information System (Greece)

MoF – Ministry of Finance

MoG – Machinery of Government

MRAA – Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture

MTBF – Medium-Term Budgetary Framework

NAO – National Audit Office (United Kingdom)

NDP 2030 – National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030

NRRP – National Recovery and Resilience Plan

NSI / INE – National Statistical Institute

ODP – Outcome Delivery Plan

OIA – Office of Impact Analysis (Australia)

OPS MAZI II – Updated MAZI monitoring platform

PLANAPP – Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Public Policies (Portugal)

REPLAN – Public Administration Planning and Foresight Services Network (Portugal)

RRF – Recovery and Resilience Facility/Fund

SG – Secretary General

SGGOV / SGGOV – General Secretariat of the Government (Portugal)

SOG – Senior Officials Group (Ireland)

TBS – Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

TSI – Technical Support Instrument

VAU – Government Analytical Unit (Czech Republic)

Executive summary

Governments deliver complex, cross-cutting priorities in a fast-changing environment, with constrained resources, rising citizen expectations and limited public trust in government. OECD findings show that low trust is driven, in part, by citizens' perception that governments are unable to address long term and complex policy challenges. There is a sense that governments are "stuck" and that a significant transformation is now required. This report contributes to the OECD's *Government Unstuck* agenda, which identifies opportunities for governments to improve their ability to deliver reforms that make a difference in citizens' lives. It examines how centres of government, the bodies that support heads of government and cabinets, can strengthen their capacity to steer, co-ordinate and sustain delivery across increasingly fragmented and fast-moving policy environments.

This report was prepared under the auspices of the project *Enhancing Centre of Government Capacities to Steer Complex Priorities*, funded by the European Union. The project supported participating countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal) in developing stronger institutional capacities at the centre of government to deliver government priorities. This synthesis report draws on the OECD's analysis of the six countries and the findings from peer-to-peer exchanges during workshops held in each of the six countries.

The report focuses on three areas central to delivery: re-organising the machinery of government, prioritising and planning for delivery, and building the capabilities needed for cross-government policy co-ordination, development and follow-through. Across these areas, particular attention is paid to the role of the centre in bridging the interface between the political level and the public service in ensuring implementation of policy priorities.

Re-organising government to deliver

Across countries, institutional restructuring remains a common response to cross-cutting priorities, including the creation of new ministries, the transfer of functions and the expansion of central units. The OECD's findings from countries such as Estonia suggest that such reforms can help align institutional structures with political priorities when supported by clear objectives and co-ordinated implementation. Where preparation is limited and legislative and administrative processes are unable to adapt in time, restructuring has been associated with operational disruption, unclear mandates and reduced legitimacy within the administration. The findings underline that the contribution of the centre of government lies in advising on options, brokering agreement across agencies, assessing costs and risks when feasible given political and fiscal objectives to restructure, and guiding implementation. They also highlight the value of considering lower-intensity alternatives such as co-ordination mechanisms or taskforces before initiating more costly structural change.

Prioritising and planning for delivery

The centres of government in participating countries face persistent challenges in translating political initiatives into manageable and coherent priorities. In several cases, large numbers of initiatives have contributed to fragmented planning with limited hierarchy among strategies (national or regional; policy-focused; or short and long-term) and weak links to budget processes. Examples from Bulgaria and Poland show that consolidating political priorities into smaller, clearly-owned sets can improve focus and accountability. However, the report also shows how prioritisation alone is insufficient. Success in delivering government priorities depends on embedding emerging priorities in planning frameworks, cabinet processes, budget decisions, and monitoring systems. Across the six countries, the connection between strategy and budget remains limited, with strategic priorities often not systematically linked to resource allocation or tracked through implementation.

Building capabilities for cross-government co-ordination and policy development

Centres of government have taken on expanded roles in recent years, including strengthening capacities for crisis responses, co-ordination public sector reform, and overseeing high-profile priorities. While this can strengthen the government's ability to steer from the centre, it can also create risks of over-extension within the centre of government, fragmented structures and limited capacity to manage competing demands. It is therefore all the more important to build capabilities for policy co-ordination and policy development to address these challenges.

Effective implementation of cross-cutting priorities depends on the centre's ability to convene, broker and support joint policy work. Across the six countries, centres of government act primarily as facilitators, relying on inter-ministerial groups, senior officials' forums and shared analytical processes to align policy across ministries. A recurring finding is that analytical capability, including data analytics and policy evaluation, remains uneven and is frequently identified as a priority for investment. Findings also point to networks of planning officials and central analytical units playing a complementary role, but their effectiveness depends on integration with routine government processes (such as preparation of cabinet meetings) as well as clear demand from decision markers which needs to be better anticipated.

Most of the six countries have developed central digital platforms or monitoring systems to track the implementation of priorities. The report finds that these systems vary in influence. Where monitoring is integrated into cabinet processes, budget discussions and regular ministerial engagement, the output from the monitoring systems supports decision making and helps identify implementation risks. Where platforms operate as repositories without regular reporting or clear accountability, the impact is limited. Examples from Greece and Poland in the report illustrate efforts to link monitoring with decision-making routines.

Findings from the chapters on each of the six countries show that involving the centre of government in stewarding cross-government priorities is often driven by political incentives or lack of clarity around the role of a lead ministry, but that decisions on duration, scope and exit are less systematically defined. The report highlights the importance of clarifying the conditions under which the centre assumes responsibility, the resources required, and the arrangements for eventual transition back to line ministries.

Each of the six country chapters focuses on a specific challenge and the role of the centre in addressing that challenge: in Estonia the role of the centre in guiding changes to the machinery of government to better align policy priorities with ways of delivering them; in Portugal the role of the centre in ensuring an effective political-technical interface in managing and delivering priorities; in Poland the role of the centre in steering the design and management of the significant number of priorities; in Bulgaria the role of the centre in ensuring long-term policy goals are taken into account; in Greece the role of the centre in facilitating better monitoring and assessment of key reforms; and in Ireland ensuring the centre is not overburdened by co-ordination responsibilities whilst being effective in delivering on cross-government priorities.

Across different institutional contexts, the chapters identify a set of factors that shape whether cross-cutting priorities translate into delivery. The chapters end with options for exploration in each country context. An annex to this report, available under the "Support materials" tab on the report's main page (hereafter, the "online Annex"), contains toolboxes developed during peer-to-peer exchanges between the six countries, peers from other OECD countries, and the OECD Secretariat's analysis of the contributions. The online Annex provides examples of how the centre can help to steer the re-organisation of government, prioritise and embed initiatives within governmental routines, and develop analytical and co-ordination capabilities at the centre. The material suggests that effective centres of government combine strategic clarity with disciplined choices about their own role, supported by routines that connect political direction with administrative execution.

1 Introduction: Steering government through complexity: The evolving role of the centre of government

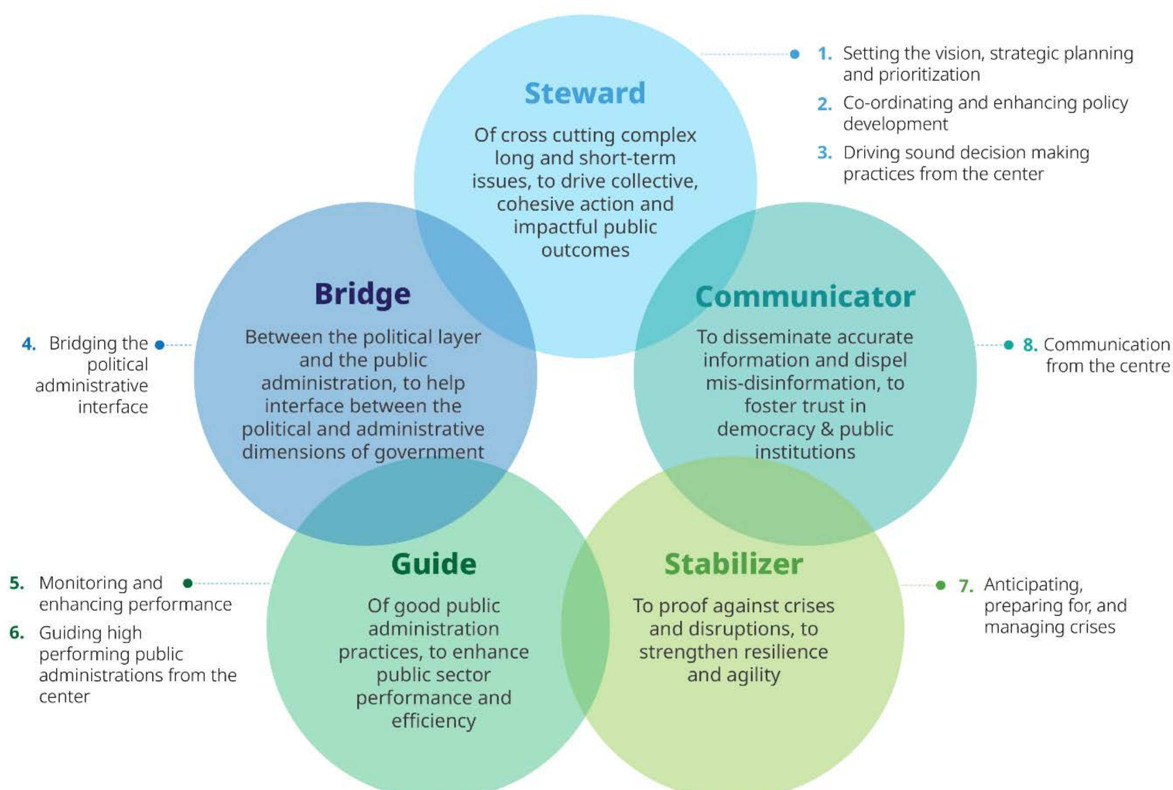
The introduction sets out how increasingly complex, cross-cutting policy challenges combined with constrained resources, rising public expectations and limited trust in government are placing significant new demands on centres of government (CoGs) to steer and co-ordinate key government priorities. It examines how CoGs are evolving from largely administrative support bodies into strategic advisors responsible for aligning political priorities with implementation, managing interdependencies across ministries, and sustaining delivery over time. Drawing on evidence from six countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, B, Poland and Portugal), this chapter highlights three dimensions shaping effective delivery: efforts to re-organise government to achieve its main goals; prioritising a manageable set of commitments within planning, budget and monitoring routines; and ensuring the CoG remains agile and effective by strengthening its co-ordination and analytical capabilities. Across these areas, a central theme is the importance of the political – administrative interface, as effective delivery depends on the CoG's ability to act as a bridge between political direction and administrative execution, avoid overextension, and establish routines, tools and institutional arrangements that translate strategic intent into sustained results.

1.1. Introduction

The landscape in which governments must operate has become significantly more challenging. Public administrations are under greater strain than ever, driven by geopolitical tensions, restricted budgets, rapid technological change, including the growing but uneven adoption of tools such as artificial intelligence, and the cascading effects of environmental crises and conflicts. While the issues requiring government intervention are growing more interconnected and time-sensitive, the structures and processes of government have not always kept up with the speed, co-ordination, need to balance inter-dependencies, and clear strategic direction needed to address them effectively. The OECD's 2026 Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions found public confidence is weakest where policy challenges are most cross-cutting and inter-generational. For example, only 34% of respondents believe government can adequately balance the interests of current and future generations (OECD, 2026[1]). In addition to scepticism amongst citizens that governments can address complex policy challenges, governments themselves face mounting external and internal barriers to delivery: slow growth, demographic shifts, and a layered accumulation of administrative complexity and governance processes within their own machineries.

Centres of Government (CoG) are well placed to support government in tackling these challenges. The CoG is formally defined as the body, or group of bodies, that advises and supports the highest level of the executive branch of government and council of ministers, leveraging its unique central positioning to be at the heart of steering holistic, co-ordinated and coherent decision making across institutions and policy instruments (OECD, 2024[2]). Although the composition of CoGs in OECD countries varies, ranging from a single institution to several units linked to the head of the executive, the OECD has identified five common functions that describe the CoG's essential roles in delivering on government priorities (Infographic 1.1).

Infographic 1.1. Centre of Government Functions



Source: OECD (2024[3]), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en.

The operating environment for CoGs has also become faster and more politically fragmented, changing the nature of the work. Pandemics, energy and geopolitical crises, and rapid technological change have compressed the time available for policy deliberation, consultation and decision making. At the same time, more fragmented party systems responding to increased divisions within societies, coalition and minority governments, and electoral volatility have increased the demands placed on CoGs to manage intra-governmental relations. The issue is not only that CoGs are being asked to act faster or handle more priorities, but that those priorities require simultaneous action across several ministries, alignment between political commitments and resources, and sustained attention. This shifts the CoG from a role focusing on primarily supporting cabinet meetings towards a more active and strategic stewardship function: clarifying priorities, brokering trade-offs between competing sectoral priorities, detecting blockages and keeping collective attention on outcomes that no single ministry can deliver alone.

In response, many CoGs have expanded their institutional architecture. Across the countries examined in this report, centres have added specialised capacity in strategic communications, strategic foresight, crisis and risk management, monitoring and data infrastructure, policy analysis, digital policy and delivery support; several have also created thematic units or dedicated teams for priorities that cut across ministerial portfolios. This is in addition to the core work the CoG has traditionally undertaken with, for example, co-ordinating the preparation of regulations and the use of impact assessments and/or ex post reviews. In many cases, these increased responsibilities have been a rational response to genuine capability gaps. But they have also risked overburdening the CoG, potentially setting out blurred mandates and unclear thresholds for when the centre should engage and when it should hand responsibility back. When mandates accumulate without a coherent rationale, the CoG can unintentionally add to fragmentation rather than reduce it. One of the questions this report addresses is, therefore, which common features across different structures, mandates, capabilities and tools enable CoGs to deliver effectively on cross-cutting priorities and avoid unintentionally creating obstacles to delivering on their key functions.

This report draws on findings from a project conducted by the OECD Secretariat with the support of the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument and examines how CoGs in six participating countries are adapting their roles, practices, and tools to meet these demands. This report includes the analysis of those six countries in separate chapters for Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal. They reflect the findings stemming from research conducted in the six countries as well as the results of peer-to-peer exchanges on the different challenges identified for each country.

The report builds on the OECD's broader work on the functions of the centre of government outlined above. It also contributes to the OECD's Government Unstuck agenda, which identifies opportunities for governments to improve their ability to deliver reforms that make a difference in citizens' lives (OECD, forthcoming[4]). Each of the chapters focuses on those functions most directly connected to steering and delivering complex priorities: bridging political leadership and the public administration; stewarding strategic, cross-cutting and long-term priorities; guiding public administration reform and institutional modernisation; and ensuring that the centre itself functions as a coherent system (OECD, 2024[2]).

The report focuses in particular on three core areas where the CoG can effectively exercise its main functions and ensure that cross-cutting priorities can move from political commitment to sustained delivery: (1) Re-organising government and its machinery to deliver, (2) prioritising policies and planning for delivery, and (3) building capabilities for cross-government policy co-ordination and policy development.

The first area relates to **re-organising government to deliver**. Cross-cutting priorities might lead to a mismatch between political ambition to deliver on core policy priorities and administrative structures that reflect a siloed approach to governing. Governments may respond by creating new ministries, merging portfolios, establishing central delivery units, creating co-ordination structures, or redesigning functions within the centre itself. These choices can help align machinery with priorities, but they also might carry costs: disrupted institutional memory, unclear mandates, duplicated functions, or instability in central planning and co-ordination bodies. The report therefore examines how machinery-of-government changes and the internal architecture of the CoG can either strengthen or weaken the centre's ability to act.

The second area focuses on **prioritising policies and planning for delivery**. CoGs are increasingly expected to support the political cadre in translating broad political programmes into a limited number of commitments that can be sequenced, financed, monitored and sustained. The challenge is not only to define priorities, but to avoid overloading the political and administrative agendas, to connect priorities to budget choices, and to ensure that data is used as a strategic asset for diagnosing delivery bottlenecks and enabling solutions to implementation barriers. The report examines how CoGs use cabinet-level agenda management, strategic planning frameworks, priority-monitoring systems and digital infrastructure to maintain focus on commitments long enough to enable effective delivery.

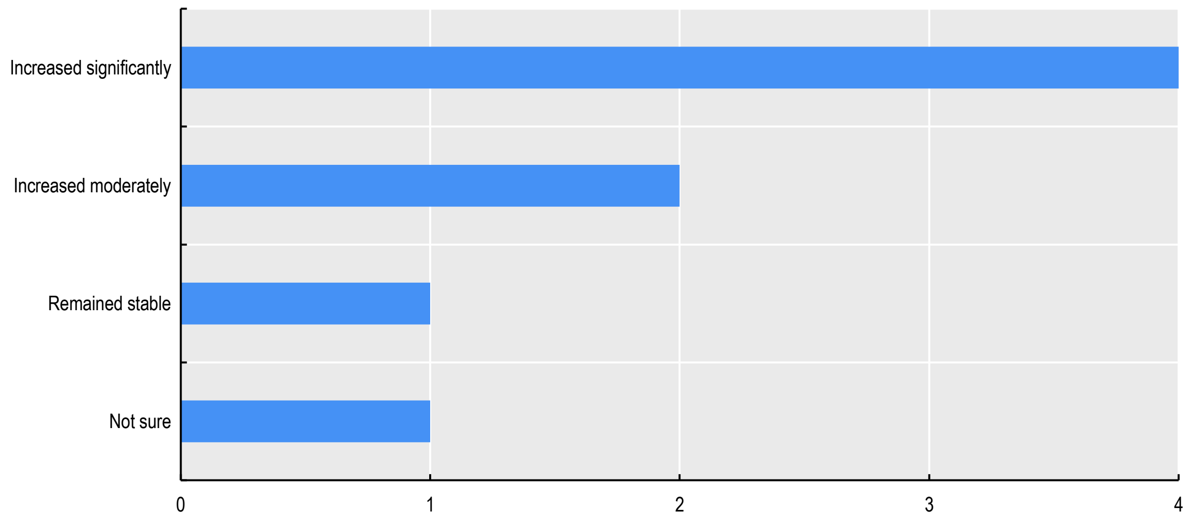
The third area focuses on **capabilities for cross-government policy co-ordination and development**. The centre cannot deliver cross-cutting priorities by substituting itself for line ministries. Its effectiveness depends on whether it can convene ministries, clarify shared objectives, support data-informed policy design, and create routines through which implementation problems are surfaced and addressed. The report examines the formal and informal networks, skills, digital platforms and data-governance arrangements through which CoGs seek to strengthen collective policy development and co-ordination and follow-through across government to deliver on those most intractable "wicked" policy problems (OECD, 2017[5]).

The remainder of this chapter examines these dimensions in turn, drawing on the findings from the OECD countries that contributed to the project mentioned above. It draws on data collected through surveys undertaken with the six country representatives and peers in each of the in-country workshops. Whilst this data is not comprehensive across OECD countries, it provides a snapshot of practices in the countries which participated in the project. The analysis is also informed by the 2023 survey on the Centre of Government with a broader set of OECD Member countries.

1.2. Re-organising government to deliver

CoGs today often operate in organisational environments designed for a traditional set of sector-based demands. As the volume and complexity of cross-cutting priorities has grown, governments have responded by reshaping the institutional architecture through which they implement policy priorities: creating new ministries, transferring functions between departments, establishing or dissolving central planning bodies, and redrawing portfolios inside the CoG itself (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Changes to the number of cross-cutting priorities handled by the centre 2020-2025



Note: n=8, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (2026[6]), "Agile and Dynamic Stewardship of Cross-Cutting Policies at the CoG", unpublished

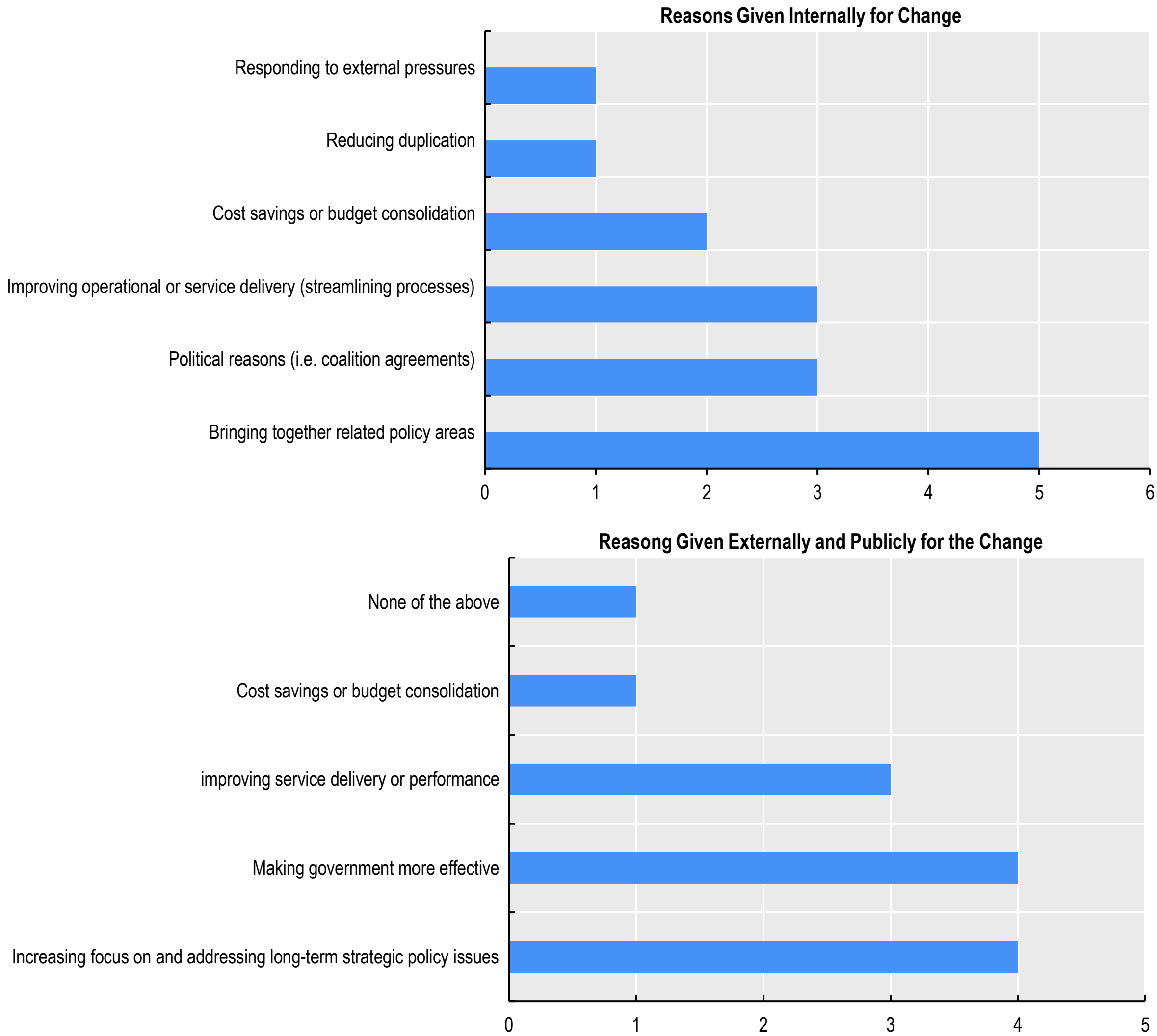
While changes are presented as instruments to improve agility and delivery, the lessons from the findings in the six countries in this report show that they can also produce the opposite. Restructuring can be costly, slow to mature, and at times undertaken without the analysis, frameworks, or change-management routines that would make it work.

1.2.1. Designing machinery-of-government change to deliver policy outcomes

Machinery-of-government (MoG) changes can help governments align administrative structures with political priorities. They require careful preparation given that they affect reporting lines, corporate systems, budgets, institutional memory and working cultures. Their value depends on whether the institutional change solves a defined delivery problem (such as meeting fiscal objectives with a leaner government) at a proportionate level of disruption. This places the CoG in an important advisory position both before and after decisions to restructure have been taken, since the centre can help test the objective of the reform, assess transition costs, identify operational risks and compare restructuring with alternative institutional options.

The decision to re-organise government is most often a political one (Figure 1.2). The CoG's role and functions as previously described are less about 'deciding to re-organise' and more about providing the data to help inform those decisions and once the decision is taken to help steer and guide the public administration into effectively implementing it. The CoG's role ex-ante requires it to provide the political cadre with all of the options and costs of changing the machinery of government and its possible alternatives in order to achieve the overall policy objective.

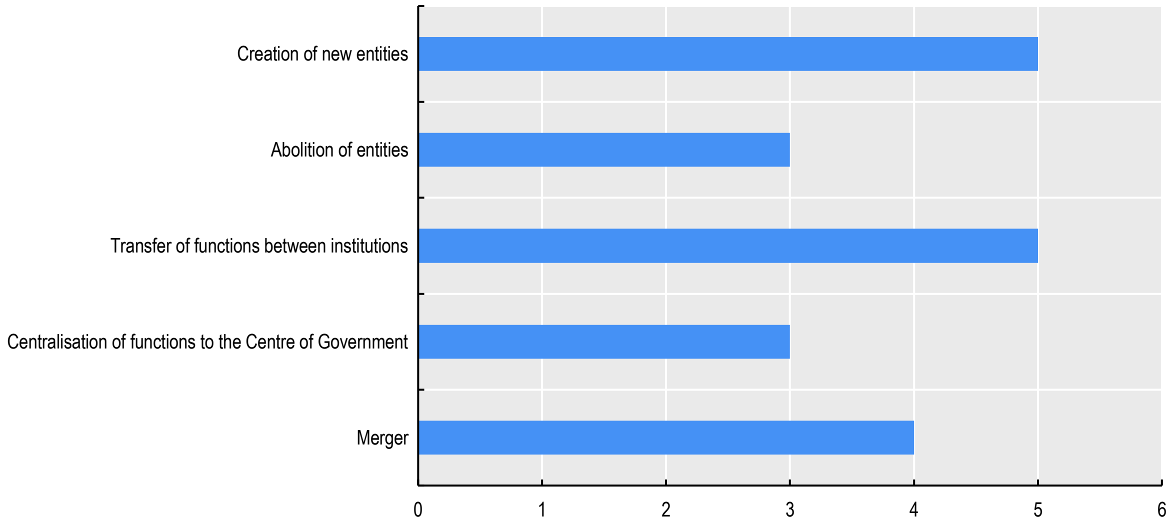
Figure 1.2. Rationales for machinery of government change (internal and external)



Note: n=6, Estonia, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom.
Source: OECD (n.d.), "Machinery of Government changes", unpublished

The CoG has a significant role to play in breaking down silos through organisational reform. When a priority lacks a clear institutional home, cuts across several ministries or carries high political salience, changes in the machinery can appear to offer clarity and send a political signal. Not surprisingly, as Figure 1.3 shows among the six countries, creating new entities, along with the transfer of functions, is the most common type of MoG change that surveyed officials have experienced. Yet the same objective may sometimes be achieved through existing cabinet committees, taskforces, ministers without portfolio, joint delivery arrangements or strengthened co-ordination routines. Taking into consideration the transaction costs that these changes might entail is a necessary part of effective machinery of government reform.

Figure 1.3. Creating new entities is a common type of MoG change



Note: n=6, Estonia, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom.
Source: OECD (n.d.[7]), "Machinery of Government changes", unpublished.

Estonia illustrates the difference that prior analysis by the centre can make when governments reorganise ministerial responsibilities. In 2023, following parliamentary elections, the government reorganised parts of the ministerial structure to align administrative responsibilities with new political priorities, most visibly through the creation of a Climate Ministry. The changes affected around 700 of Estonia's approximately 2500 civil servants and created operational costs across human resources, IT, financial management, document management and internal working routines, since Estonian ministries operate as separate employers with different administrative systems. The Government Office prepared several rounds of analysis on options and impacts before the Council of Ministers took its final decision. In contrast, in 2024, following a cabinet change, a second round of transfers included the relocation of the Digital Policy Department from the Ministry of Economic Affairs to the Ministry of Justice and some smaller units being moved for the second time in two years. The Government Office was not asked to prepare comparable analysis, objectives were less clearly communicated, and as outlined in Chapter 2 lower understanding within the civil service and weaker perceived legitimacy of the process.

The insight from this example is that the CoG's contribution lies less in defending or opposing a decision to restructure than in ensuring that the decision is informed, sequenced and operationally feasible. A practical tool that emerged during the implementation of the project was the development of a hierarchy of institutional responses that tests the lowest level of intervention capable of achieving the objective. The OECD distinguishes between co-operation, co-ordination, collaboration and integration, with transaction costs and disruption rising as the arrangement becomes more intensive (Gerson, 2023[8]). This typology provides the centre with a way of asking whether a priority requires full integration through restructuring, or whether co-ordination or collaboration would be sufficient. It also helps identify lighter options, including multiple ministers within one ministry, ministers without portfolio, government committees, thematic cabinet meetings, inter-ministerial taskforces, joint delivery teams or portfolio reshuffles that do not move administrative units.

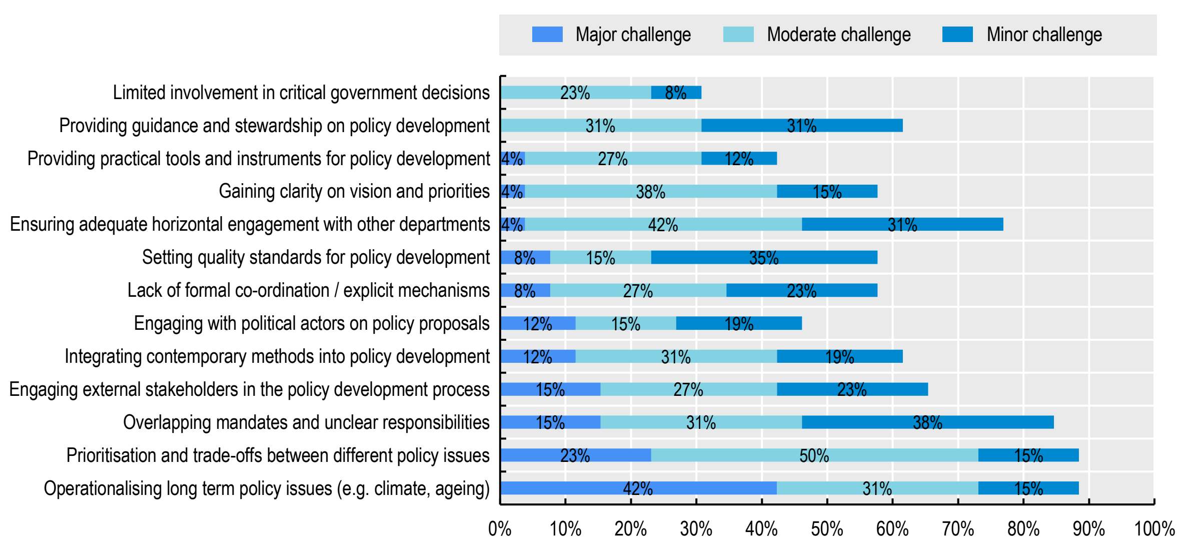
Machinery-of-government changes benefit from a structured advisory role for the CoG. Examples include the United Kingdom's Cabinet Office guidance which organises MoG changes around three phases: preparation, hitting the ground running, and a 100-day plan. Australia's Public Service Change Framework provides enterprise-wide tools supported by advisory services from a dedicated Centre of Excellence. In New South Wales, government agencies are expected to implement MoG changes consistent with the

NSW MoG Changes Guide. The Guide provides NSW government agencies with guidance on implementing MoG changes and to support a more efficient transfer of employees and functions between agencies (Government of New South Wales, 2024[9]). These examples and the Estonia chapter below suggest that the CoG can help provide a set of practical steps that would otherwise be improvised through bilateral negotiations between affected institutions.

1.2.2. Managing the accumulation of mandates inside the CoG

CoGs are often being asked to take on new responsibilities in guiding and steering the delivery of government priorities, public administration reform, crisis response and stakeholder engagement, alongside their traditional role in supporting political and administrative decision making. These increased responsibilities can strengthen the centre's ability to act on cross-cutting priorities, but they can also stretch its capacity, create layered portfolios or fragmented internal structures, and exacerbate co-ordination challenges. The Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government (Figure 1.4) highlighted these challenges with the most often cited being overlapping mandates and unclear responsibilities; prioritisation and trade-offs; and operationalising long-term issues.

Figure 1.4. Challenges in co-ordinating policy development

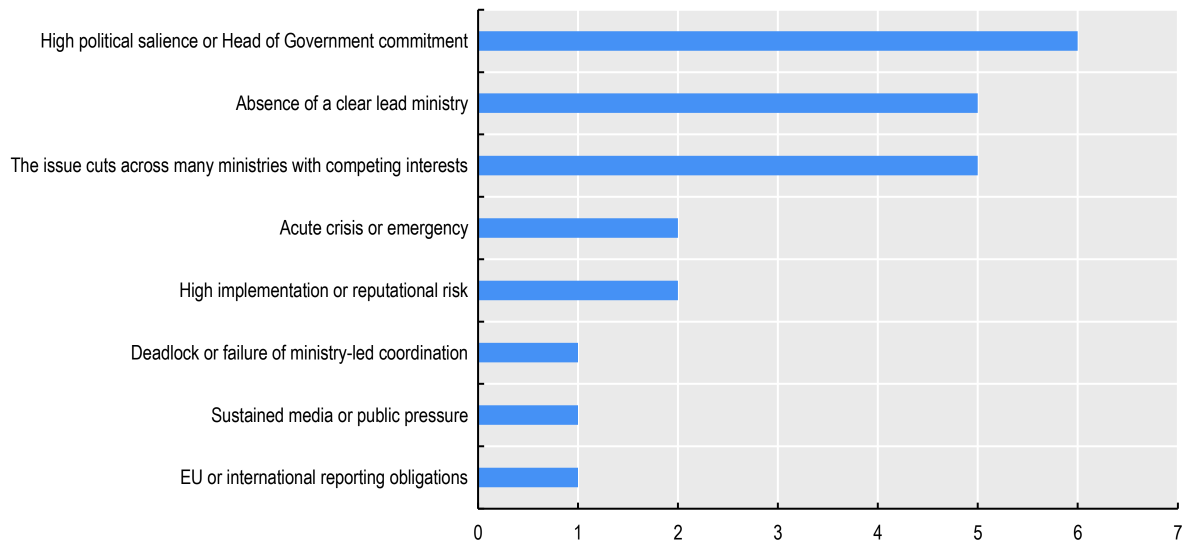


Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished

Decisions to bring an issue into the centre are inherently political. A head of government, prime minister or senior minister may decide that the centre must lead because the issue is politically salient, publicly sensitive, institutionally blocked or too important to leave to ordinary co-ordination channels. The CoG's role is not to make the decision to centralise policy priorities (that remains a political imperative). The CoG instead is expected to determine working modalities to fit the specific issue to be addressed: for example, whether the problem requires central ownership or only central convening structure, whether a credible lead ministry exists, what capacity the centre would need to effectively steer the issue, what will happen to existing priorities, and what conditions would allow responsibility to move elsewhere later.

The findings for the countries that participated in the research for this report, suggest that centres often face stronger pressure to take on issues than to define the limits of their involvement. CoG engagement is commonly triggered by political salience, the absence of a clear lead ministry or by issues cutting across several ministries with competing interests (Figure 1.5). These are valid reasons for central involvement. They do not, however, define the form or duration of that involvement. The findings from the survey of the six countries in this report point to the management risks that follow, including resource constraints at the centre, difficulty declining requests from ministers or heads of government, political pressure to act and the absence of clear exit or handover options.

Figure 1.5. Factors that contribute to the centre taking on cross-cutting issues in-house



Note: n=8, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (2026[6]), "Agile and Dynamic Stewardship of Cross-Cutting Policies at the CoG", unpublished.

Ireland illustrates how mandate accumulation can emerge in a capable CoG. Over the past decade, the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister's Department) has taken on responsibilities linked to Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, housing, child poverty and well-being, support for Ukraine and others. These responsibilities reflected political salience, cross-sectoral scope and the need for central convening. The accumulated portfolio nevertheless creates a management problem for the centre itself. The analysis in Chapter 7 highlights that central stewardship needs a strategic discussion about the capabilities needed at the CoG, its approach to deliver on these priorities and plans for a legacy strategy including clear roles and responsibilities as part of a handover process.

In Ireland, the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office, established within the Department of the Taoiseach in 2023, provides an example of a mandate to co-ordinate from the centre. Child poverty had been addressed across several policy areas, such as social protection, children, education and housing, but without a single department positioned to lead a whole-of-government response. Moreover, the issue was a personal priority of the Taoiseach (the Prime Minister). The Office was set up to co-ordinate rather than implement the policy. It does not manage budget or programmes. In turn, it convenes departments, frames a shared narrative, brings a child-poverty lens into the budget process through cross-government budget reports, and leads a Cross-Government Network of senior officials that fills a gap in a system where co-ordination relies heavily on informal contact. Its profile was reinforced in September 2025 by a government target to reduce consistent child poverty to no more than three per cent of children by 2030. The Office was not designed as a permanent unit, and the open question is the point at which its functions transfer to line departments once they can sustain the agenda without central support.

The country chapters below highlight questions that the CoG could ask itself before it takes on a new mandate. The CoG can reflect on whether central involvement will simplify decision making, address a known political or administrative deadlock, align with strategic goals, impact on existing priorities, require new resources or improve accountability for results. Before taking on a cross-cutting priority, the CoG can also clarify the policy objective, the political objective, the expected duration of its involvement, the resources required, the impact on existing priorities, the benefits for lines of accountability and the conditions for devolving responsibilities back to line ministries. It can also test whether a lower-intensity role would be sufficient, such as convening ministries, supporting a cabinet committee, establishing a senior officials' group, strengthening monitoring or providing temporary analytical support. This might give political leaders a clearer view of the trade-offs involved in placing another issue at the centre.

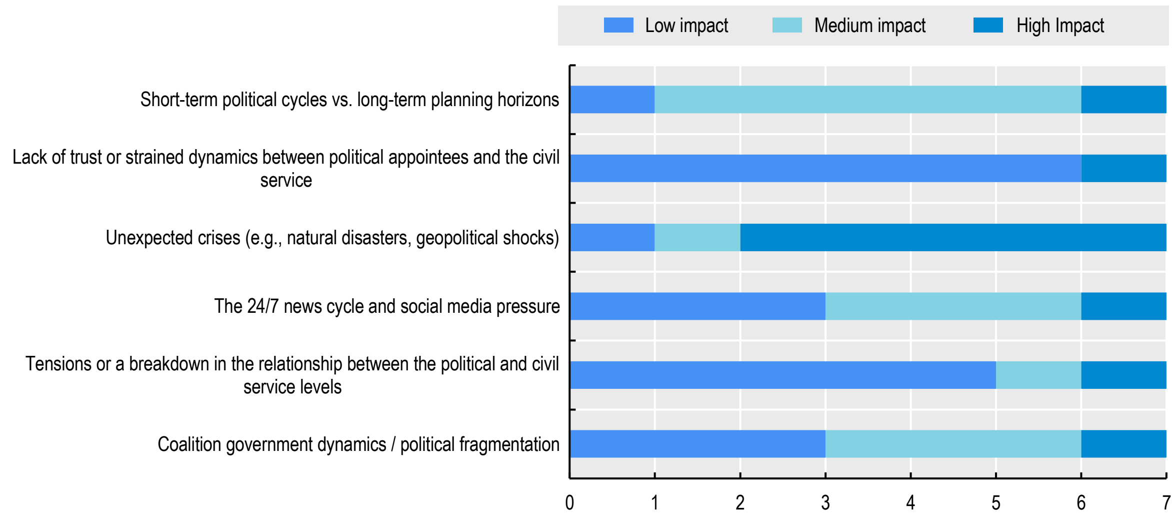
Global Affairs Canada offers an example of how countries can keep ownership for delivery of cross-cutting issues within line ministries. It operates under the shared leadership of three ministers covering foreign affairs, trade and international development. The centre steers and ensures implementation through departmental plans, prepared by ministries in response to the Prime Minister's mandate letters. Another example is the creation of Canada's Major Projects Office, a federal agency created in 2025 and designed to co-ordinate across federal departments and work with provinces, territories, Indigenous Peoples, and private-sector participants to fast-track the development of major infrastructure projects. By providing a single point of contact and leadership on major infrastructure projects referred to the office, the aim is to shorten the regulatory timelines and increase co-ordination and support from the government to complete projects faster (Government of Canada, 2026[11]).

Ideally, exit or legacy design should be treated as part of the original engagement decision. Countries participating in this report identified sufficient capacity and resources in the lead line ministry, a stable co-ordination structure and political endorsement at cabinet level as important factors for a successful exit strategy. Handover, therefore, needs to be discussed when the centre first takes on the issue, even if the final transition remains contingent on political priorities. Estonia provides one example of a more deliberate transition path. Co-ordination responsibilities were first located in the Government Office, supported by central convening arrangements, before the creation of the Climate Ministry provided a more permanent institutional home for the priority. This does not imply that every cross-cutting issue should become a ministry, but it shows that the centre can incubate a priority, build political and administrative alignment, and then transfer responsibility when the receiving institution has the mandate and capacity to sustain implementation.

1.2.3. Acting as a bridge between the political and administrative levels of government

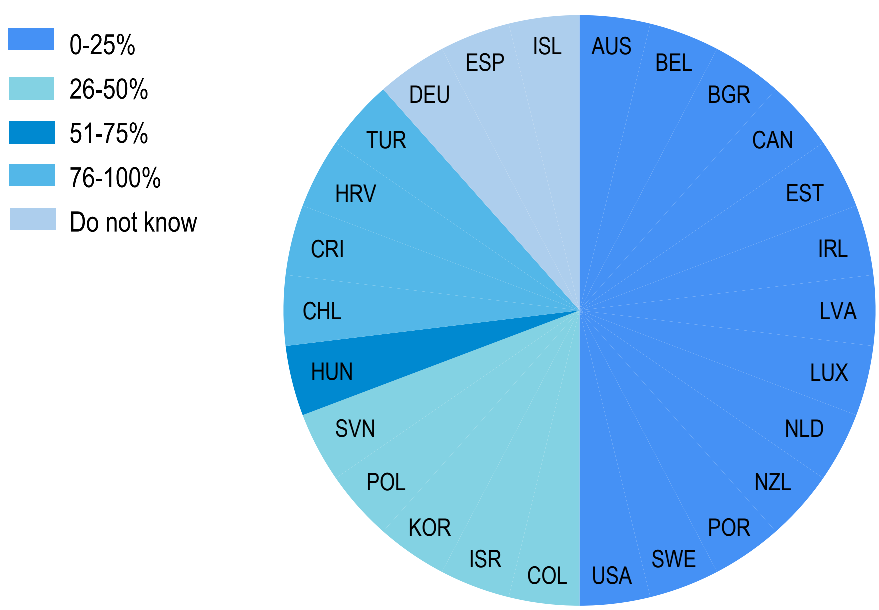
Beyond decisions about ministerial structure and the scope of the centre's mandate, governments face a third reform and design choice: how to ensure that the CoG builds an effective bridge between the political leadership and the civil service in helping to deliver on key priorities. Political decisions are mostly taken under compressed timelines and shifting electoral mandates; the administrative work of analysis, co-ordination and implementation operates under longer horizons of statutory remit, norms and accumulated institutional knowledge. The CoG sits at the crossroads of the two systems, and the institutional choices about how they connect, which routines link them, at what stage technical input enters political decision making, how political and senior officials interact: these all determine whether the relationship works as a bridge or as a source of friction (OECD, 2024[2]). Countries participating in the research for this report highlight that there are a number of factors impacting on the CoG's ability to deliver on political priorities. This is particularly the case during transitions between administrations (Figure 1.6 and Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.6. Factors impacting on the ability of the CoG to deliver on political priorities



Note: n=7, Portugal, Bulgaria, Poland, Ireland, Greece, New Zealand, Estonia.
Source: OECD (2025[12]), "The Centre of Government's role as a bridge: current practices and tools", unpublished.

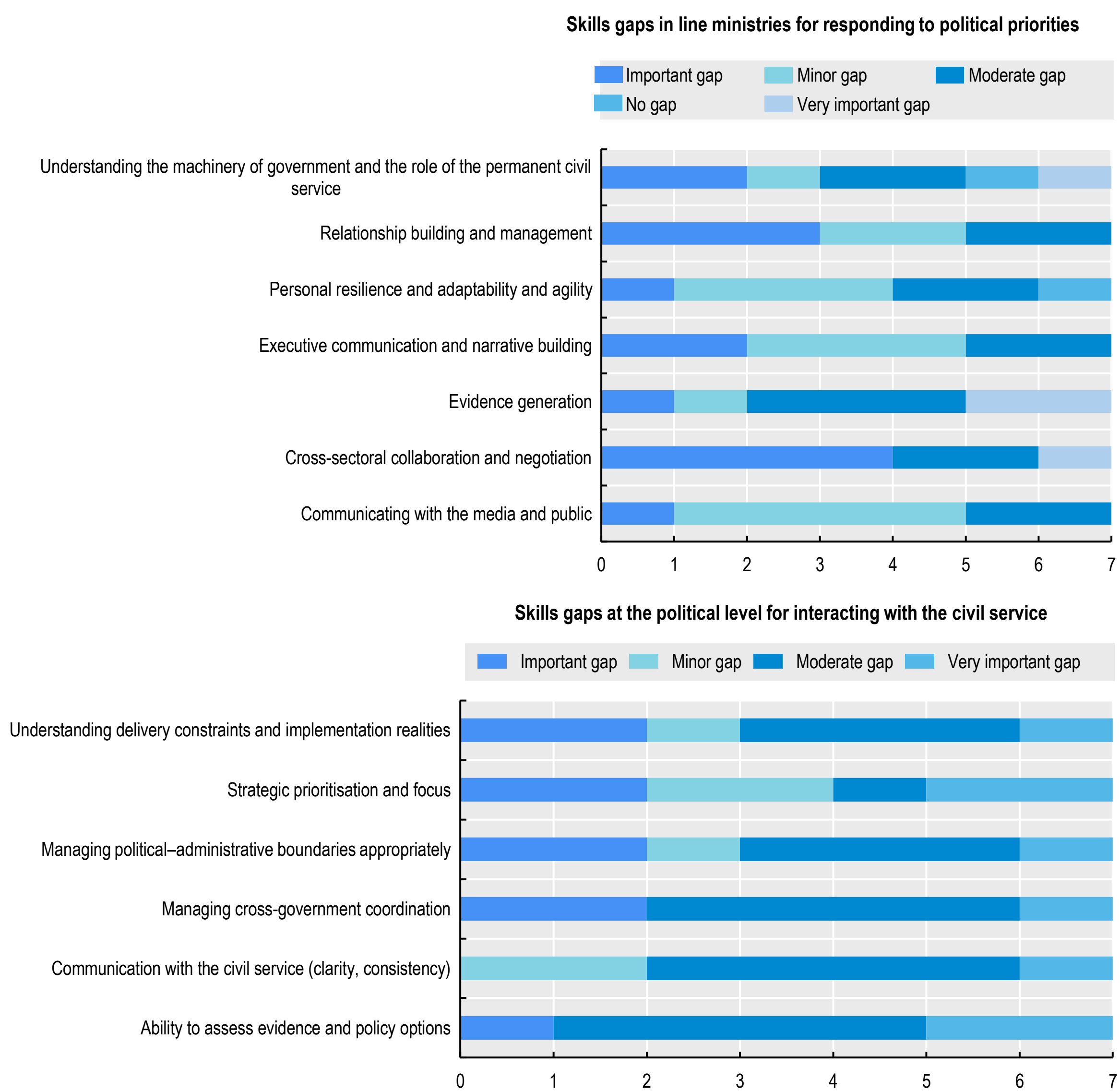
Figure 1.7. Change in CoG senior management within six-months following a transition



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government, unpublished.

As Figure 1.8 shows based on a survey undertaken with participating countries, the skills required to navigate this interface are unevenly developed on both sides. In line ministries, the most frequently identified important or very important gaps are the skills required to work across institutional silos: cross-sectoral collaboration and negotiation, strategic planning, data generation and an understanding of the machinery of government. At the political level, the gaps reported by the largest number of respondents in the survey as important or very important are an understanding of government processes and strategic prioritisation and focus, with managing cross-government co-ordination, understanding delivery constraints, managing political-administrative boundaries appropriately and the ability to assess findings and policy options. The gaps differ on each side, but together they suggest that the political-administrative interface is weakened when political and civil service actors do not have a sufficiently shared understanding of political priorities, government processes, and delivery constraints.

Figure 1.8. Skills gaps at the political-administrative interface



Note: n=7, Portugal, Bulgaria, Poland, Ireland, Greece, New Zealand, Estonia.
Source: OECD (2025[12]), "The Centre of Government's role as a bridge: Current practices and tools", unpublished

Formal frameworks governing the relationship exist in most of the six countries in this report with 57% stating that there is a formal legislative or regulatory framework and 14% a formal handbook or official guidance. This is also true in a number of OECD countries. For example, Denmark's White Paper 1443/2004 sets out the relationship between civil servants and politically appointed advisers, limits each minister to a single special adviser focused on media and press relations, and preserves the civil service as the primary source of policy expertise. Reforms in 2024 to Australia's Public Service Act 1999 introduced a new APS Value of stewardship developed through extensive consultation with Australian Public Service employees and other stakeholders and provides that ministers must not direct agency heads on individual employment matters (Australian Government, 2024[13]). In Finland, a 2004 reform created political State Secretaries attached to individual ministers to support political steering, while civil servant State Secretaries retain responsibility for administrative effectiveness and inter-ministerial co-ordination, an arrangement designed for ministries where several ministers from different parties share one administrative structure (Government of Finland, 2004[14]). Even with formal frameworks in place however, these may not systematically shape the relationship in practice. For those with existing frameworks, 60% of the countries surveyed for this report mentioned that their formal framework is only partially used (OECD, 2025[12]).

The timing of technical input to support cabinet preparation is also perceived to be a common challenge. Among the same respondents, four out of seven note that the administrative or technical level is brought into major priority-setting at the mid-stage, after the political direction has been set but before final decisions are taken. Portugal's Public Administration Planning and Foresight Services Network (REPLAN), which connects planning units across ministries to political decision-making processes, is designed to help shift this interface upstream by linking technical planning capacity more closely to earlier stages of policy preparation. Options that are developed in Chapter 3 for Portugal focus on better connecting the outputs of such networks for cabinet preparatory meetings, building a policy calendar around a limited number of cross-cutting priorities, and creating more regular cabinet-technical interactions through the networks themselves. Ireland and Finland's structured political-technical committees, referenced during peer-to-peer exchanges, illustrate the same logic in a more institutionalised form.

The chapters below also illustrate how an effective relationship between the political and administrative levels depends on a shared understanding of their respective roles. 70% of the countries surveyed for this report noted that induction for incoming Ministers and political advisers consists of optional briefings without a standardised curriculum; only one country reports an institutionalised programme covering rules, roles and processes (OECD, 2025[12]). Potential tools to strengthen this interface combine skills development with more deliberate organisational routines. They include clearer induction for incoming political leadership; targeted training in co-ordination, communication, negotiation, data use and delivery for senior government staff; regular forums that bring political and senior administrative levels together often enough to build working relationships; and explicit protocols for engagement between political advisers and career officials. Moreover, as digital technologies and AI increasingly shape how information is generated and used across government, CoGs can strengthen their bridging and co-ordination role by leveraging these tools to connect political and civil service perspectives, support more timely and coherent information flows, and enable better decision-making informed by analysis and data at the interface between both levels (OECD, 2025[15]).

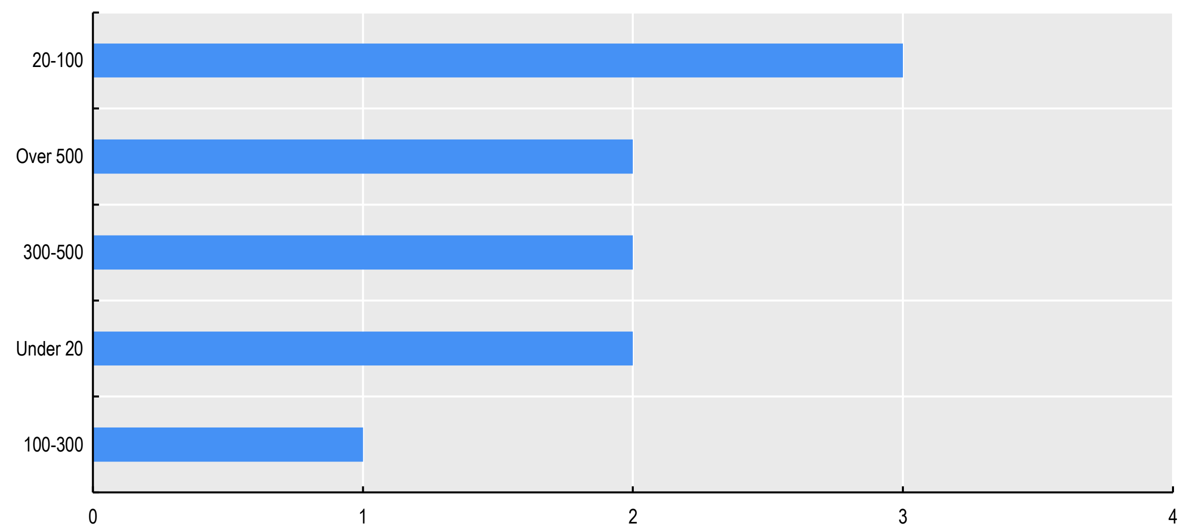
1.3. Prioritisation and planning to deliver

Translating a coalition agreement, an electoral programme or an international commitment into a body of initiatives that governments can effectively deliver is among the more demanding tasks that a government, and in particular a centre of government, is asked to perform. Political programmes and plans tend to accumulate, and the planning systems that surround them tend to expand faster than government's capacity to budget and implement them (OECD, 2015[16]). Two questions sit at the centre of the work covered in this section. The first is how the CoG helps narrow a large agenda into a manageable set of priorities that line ministries and budgetary bodies can recognise, monitor, and act on. The second is how the chosen priorities are then embedded in the routines through which government takes decisions, allocates resources and reviews implementation.

1.3.1. Translating political programmes into a manageable set of priorities

The number of commitments that participating CoGs are asked to steer varies sharply across countries. The six countries in this report noted that the number of priorities ranged from fewer than 20 priorities to more than 500, with most falling in the 20-100 range (Figure 1.9). The variation matters because the centre's task is qualitatively different at each end of the distribution. A government working with a tightly drawn list of commitments can rely on cabinet preparation and existing line-ministry planning to maintain focus, whereas a government working from several hundred initiatives requires the CoG to triage actively between commitments that need political steering, those that need only periodic monitoring and those that can be addressed within routine ministerial planning cycles.

Figure 1.9. Number of priorities in the current government's manifesto or key strategic document



Note: n=10, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom.
Source: OECD (n.d.[17]), "Strategic Prioritisation at the Centre of Government Survey" unpublished.

Many governments face the challenge of having too many priorities, strategies and initiatives, without a clear hierarchy among them. In the countries reviewed for this report, 70% mentioned that there was only a partial or unenforced alignment between strategic documents (OECD, 2026[18]). Bulgaria provides one illustration of the proliferation of strategies, documenting an ecosystem of more than 200 strategic documents, mostly sectoral, without a clear hierarchy among them and with limited links to the budget. Although the new Methodology for Strategic Planning, adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2025, provides a clear hierarchy among national strategic documents, establishing hierarchical links between existing documents remains challenging. Poland, although structured differently, highlights similar pressure at the CoG. OECD analysis shows that in January 2025 the number of government initiatives was estimated at around 800, while the List of Legislative or Programme Works contained upwards of 700 projects and was being constantly updated. These examples illustrate how the centre of government can become quickly overwhelmed by both the sheer number of commitments from the electoral programmes of different parties as well as legislative commitments born out of line ministry initiatives.

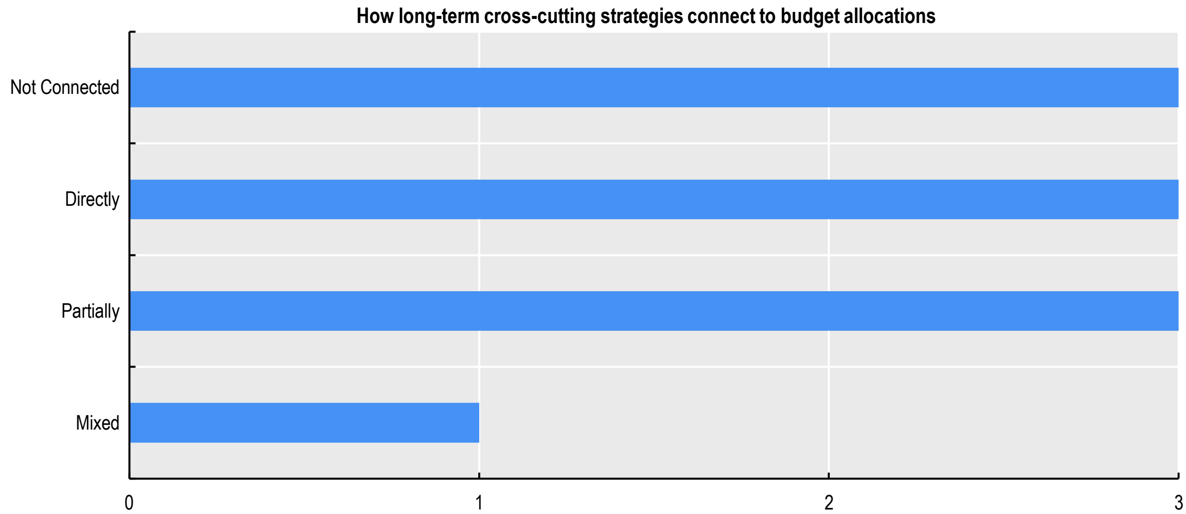
Poland's 2025 reforms illustrate one avenue from a broad agenda to a workable priority set. Following a wider government reshuffle and reorganisation in July 2025 and under the auspices of the new Minister for Supervision of the Implementation of Government Policy in the Chancellery, each minister was asked to identify three priority tasks for the second half of the government's term, organised under four priority areas covering security, economic competitiveness, public administration and digital government. The list of policy priorities of members of the Council of Ministers was published on the Chancellery's website, and 58 government priorities were adopted by the government in September 2025. The Polish case illustrates the benefit of having a deliberate compression of a much larger field of initiatives into a published, ministerially owned list backed by central oversight arrangements.

Other CoGs rely on different instruments to perform a similar streamlining function. Estonia's Government Action Plan operationalises the coalition agreement; the Slovak Republic maintains an internal platform for monitoring its government Manifesto and a list of active strategic documents; and Canada uses publicly available mandate letters from the Prime Minister to line ministries specifying either what each minister was expected to deliver (under Prime Minister Trudeau) or setting out the Prime Ministerial priorities and requesting that line ministries set out how to deliver on them (under Prime Minister Carney). These instruments are not equivalent, and they reflect different constitutional traditions. They share a common function, however, which is to translate a political agenda into a smaller set of commitments, communicated in some instances to the public, with identifiable owners, time horizons and reporting expectations attached.

1.3.2. Embedding priorities in planning, budget and monitoring routines

Selected priorities only influence delivery once they enter the routines through which government takes decisions, allocates resources and reviews implementation. An analysis of monitoring long-term and cross cutting commitments across the countries reviewed for this report shows that the connection between strategy and budget remains uneven (Figure 1.10). Three countries described long-term cross-cutting strategies as not connected to budget allocation, with strategic plans and budget processes operating in parallel. Three others reported that long-term objectives are referenced in budget documents but that allocations follow ministry-by-ministry logic, with no systematic way to track total spending against a strategic priority across government. Three reported a direct link, in which the CoG or the Ministry of Finance can identify spending against each long-term cross-cutting objective and adjust allocations against progress. Ireland reported a structural distinction between current and capital spending, with the National Development Plan providing a longer horizon for capital priorities. The point is not that one configuration is preferable than another, but that a strategy – budget link cannot be assumed to follow automatically once a strategic plan or framework has been created.

Figure 1.10. Connections between strategies and budgets, and actions when a priority is off track



Note: n= 10, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Poland, Finland, Romania, Ireland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, New Zealand.
Source: OECD (2026[18]), "Survey: Stewardship and Monitoring of Long-Term and Cross-Cutting Commitments at the CoG", unpublished

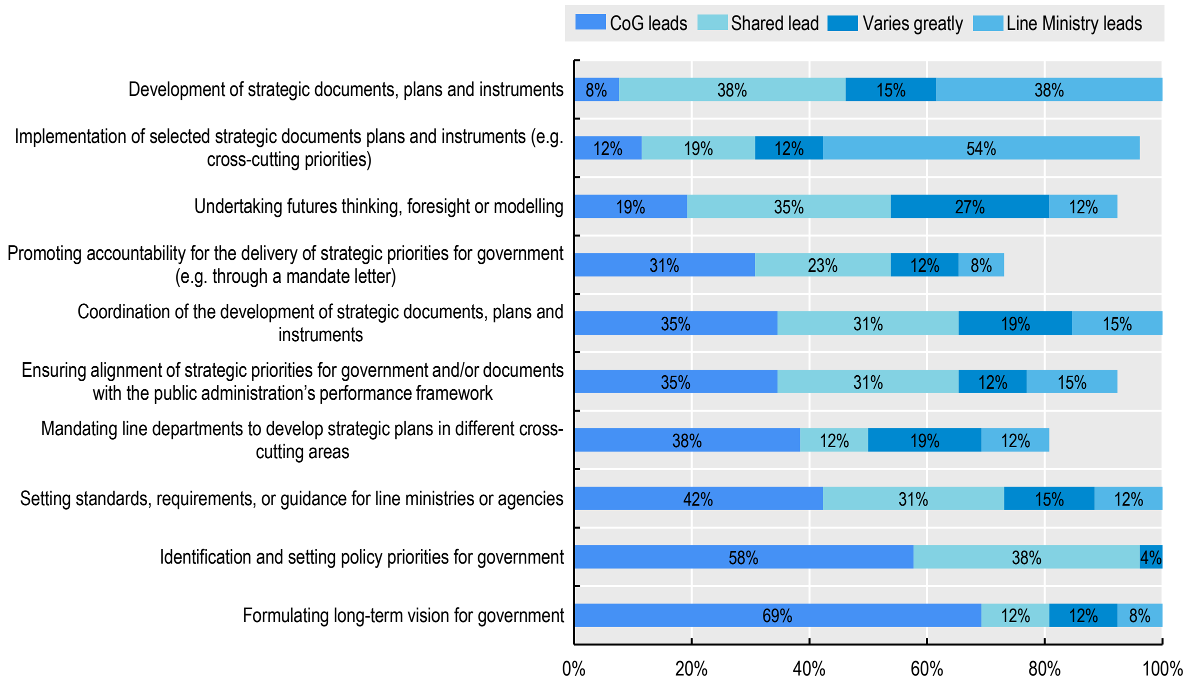
Across the country analyses the same institutional pattern emerges, even where specific instruments differ. Embedding priorities in delivery routines requires planning bodies that sit close enough to cabinet preparation and the budget calendar to be consulted before trade-offs are settled and recognising that political ownership is key to keeping the architecture in place. Portugal offers an example in Chapter 3 of this report on how planning architectures can be designed to bridge strategy and budget. REPLAN brings together planning units across all ministerial portfolios and encompasses 26 services across the 17 ministerial areas. The multi-sectoral nature of this Network contributes to national planning exercises, including the preparation of the Grandes Opções - Portugal's high-level multiannual planning document- and the Medium-Term National Budgetary-Structural Plan. This covers most of what is needed to align long-term priorities with budget choices: a central planning body, a network embedded in line ministries, a longer-term planning instrument and a medium-term budgetary framework.

Another interesting example takes place in the Netherlands, where spending reviews anchor priorities into the government's work. The coalition agreement clearly defines expenditure ceilings and commits the incoming government to spending reviews over its four-year term. The Cabinet selects the policy areas for review and sets the terms of reference in the Budget Memorandum, a non-political working group co-ordinated by the Ministry of Finance conducts the analysis, and the findings and the Cabinet's decisions on them are released publicly (OECD, 2023[19])

1.3.3. Tackling long-term priorities in the current complex environment

Formulating long-term priorities is both one of the CoG's main activities when it comes to setting the vision, priorities and strategic planning but is also perceived as one of its greatest challenges (Figure 1.11 and Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.11. CoG responsibilities for setting vision, priorities and strategic planning



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished.,

The fragility of planning routines without sustained political backing is a recurring lesson from the country chapters when it comes to implementing long-term priorities, and Bulgaria illustrates this as it faced a significant challenge with numerous changes of government over a five-year period. Several reforms launched between 2022 and 2023 – the Strategic Planning Directorate within the Council of Ministers Administration (CoMA), the Development Council established in 2023, and the draft Strategic Planning Law – were intended to address strategic proliferation, build a hierarchy of strategies and link them more systematically to the budget. However, frequent changes at the political level resulted in these reforms being postponed or only partially implemented.

At the same time, there are ways in which CoGs can support long-term priorities whilst recognising the changing nature of the political landscape. In Bulgaria, they have set out a digital platform (Monitorstat Information System) which is intended to integrate strategic documents, indicators and budget data in a single platform. Other examples include embedding long-term priorities in routines as is the case in Finland with policies having an explicit intergenerational focus. In another example, long-term insights briefings are used to embed futures thinking in policy in New Zealand. Foresight can also serve a similar function. Ireland's National Risk Assessment, for example, prepared by the Department of the Taoiseach in 2014, applies horizon scanning and trend analysis to emerging risks (OECD, 2018[20]).

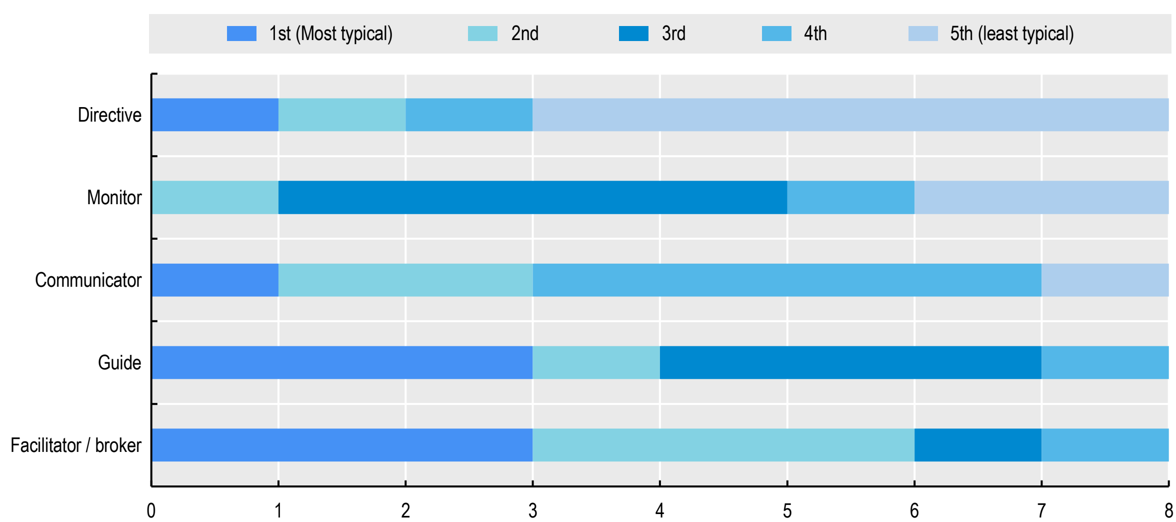
1.4. Capabilities for cross-government policy co-ordination and development

Building capabilities at the centre of government including both technical and soft skills was a recurrent theme across the different peer-to-peer exchanges and research undertaken for this report. The CoG's contribution to delivering policy priorities depends heavily on the analytical infrastructure it can draw on for cross-government policy work, the networks through which strategy and planning officials co-ordinate across portfolios, and the practices through which findings and analysis on past reforms reach the next round of decisions in time to shape them.

1.4.1. Building capabilities to support cross-cutting policy development

Findings from the country chapters in this report show that CoGs appear to have a clear role in steering the development of cross-cutting policy priorities. According to OECD research undertaken for this report with participating countries, the main contribution of the CoG is to make collective policy work possible when responsibilities sit across several ministries and when different political priorities need to be reconciled (OECD, 2026[6]). In approaching these tasks, the participating countries perceived themselves primarily as facilitators or brokers, ahead of more top-down roles such as directive change agents. This suggests that the centre's policy role is to create the conditions for joint work: convening actors, structuring dialogue, bringing data into the process and helping ministries align around problems that no single institution can address alone.

Figure 1.12. Centre of government's typical roles on cross-cutting priorities



Note: n=8, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (2026[6]), "Agile and Dynamic Stewardship of Cross-Cutting Policies at the CoG", unpublished.

The instruments reported by the six countries in this report confirm the importance of these capabilities. CoGs rely heavily on standing inter-ministerial working groups, cabinet committees, senior officials' groups, dashboards and joint assessments (OECD, 2026[6]). In addition, the CoG plays an important role in overseeing the quality of regulations. As stated in the OECD's 2021 Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance, "A standing body charged with regulatory oversight should be established close to the centre of government, to ensure that regulation serves whole of government policy" (OECD, 2012[21]) This includes making sure that regulations are coherent with overall government goals, of high legal quality and accompanied by sound economic analysis (Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. Regulatory simplification led by centre of government institutions

The OECD Simplifying for Success Initiative, launched in April 2025, supports renewed government efforts to deliver simple, smart and streamlined regulations to help unlock prosperity. As part of this Initiative the OECD collected more than 50 case studies of regulatory simplification efforts, including initiatives led by CoG institutions. The example below illustrates how the centre of government can drive regulatory simplification for example by acting as a channel for business-driven proposals (as in Estonia).

Estonia: Council of Economic Growth and Efficiency

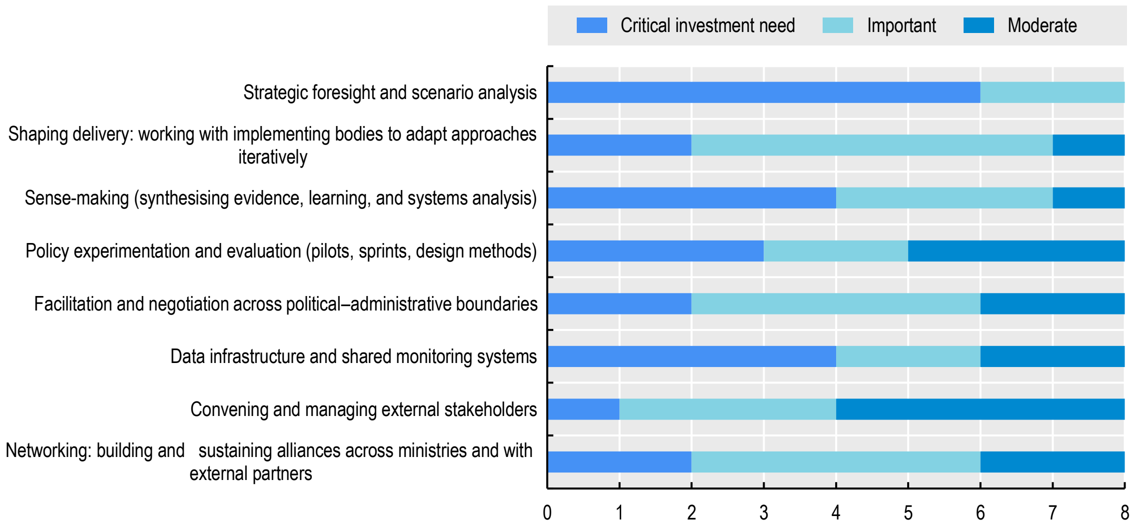
Established in March 2025 under the Government Office, the Council of Economic Growth and Efficiency brings together entrepreneurs and business leaders to identify excessive regulatory burdens, particularly in planning procedures, reporting obligations and state oversight and feed them into government decision-making. The Government Office manages intake, routes proposals to relevant ministries for feasibility assessment and forwards Council-approved measures to the Government for final approval. A public dashboard, updated daily, tracks each proposal's submitter, responsible minister, and status. Within months, over 500 proposals were submitted, with 122 approved by Government, 15 rejected and 15 already implemented. Managing this volume, particularly identifying duplicate submissions, has proven resource-intensive for the Government Office. Still, the model shows how a CoG body can build a structured, transparent channel for business-driven simplification.

Source: OECD (2025[22]), *Simplifying for Success: Insights from OECD Surveys*, OECD, Paris, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-sub-issues/administrative-simplification/s4s-key-insights/OECD%20S4S%20Symposium%20Brief_Simplifying%20for%20success_Insights%20from%20OECD%20surveys.pdf.

Other tools as reported include the development of innovative hubs or labs. Latvia's Innovation Lab on Procurement as a Horizontal Stress Test for Public Administration Performance is one example where a prototype was used by the centre to address horizontal issues in public administration. These tools improve co-ordination and give the centre visibility over cross-cutting priorities, but the assessment also points to a more specific capability gap: the ability not only to co-ordinate activity, but also to understand the nature and implications of cross-government policy challenges, and to build capabilities across ministries so that cross-cutting work does not depend only on the centre's direct steering (OECD, 2024[3]).

This particular challenge helps explain why analytical capability and tools are perceived as the leading areas for investment at the centre. Strategic foresight, horizon scanning, scenario analysis and data generation are the most frequently identified critical needs. The CoG can play a key role in setting cross-government data governance standards and priorities; facilitating data sharing and interoperability across ministries; and ensuring that data is effectively embedded into decision-making routines at the political and administrative levels (OECD, 2019[23]) . As a result, there is a clear recognition of the need for stronger data infrastructure and shared monitoring systems in the six countries as a core enabler of government transformation rather than a purely technical or operational issue (Figure 1.13).

Figure 1.13. Capabilities CoGs identify as critical investment needs for stewarding cross-cutting priorities



Note: n=8, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (2026[6]), "Agile and Dynamic Stewardship of Cross-Cutting Policies at the CoG", unpublished.

One example of cross-government analytical capacity is the use of policy advisory bodies which can be organised either at arm's length or within the CoG. Ireland's National Economic and Social Council, established in 1973, and chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, advises the Taoiseach on strategic policy for sustainable economic, social and environmental development, bringing together representatives from business, trade unions, agriculture, community and environmental sectors alongside government officials and independent experts. Its work programme is set annually with input from the Department of the Taoiseach. In another example, Czechia's Government Analytical Unit (VAU), established in 2023 within the Office of the Government, provides central analytical capacity to support policymaking informed by data and analysis across ministries (OECD/European Commission, 2025[24]).

Spain also illustrates the focus on policy advisory bodies within the CoG. The Cabinet of the Presidency of the government includes a Department of Public Policies, under the General Secretariat for National Policy, which supports the design and evaluation of executive policies and promotes co-ordination across ministries to ensure coherence in government action. A separate Department of Strategic Foresight and Scientific Advice, reporting to the Deputy Director of the Cabinet, houses the National Office of Foresight and Strategy, which analyses long-term challenges and supports the design of innovative policies and long-term strategies, and the National Office of Scientific Advice, which works to embed data and findings in policy design and to build links between government and the research community.

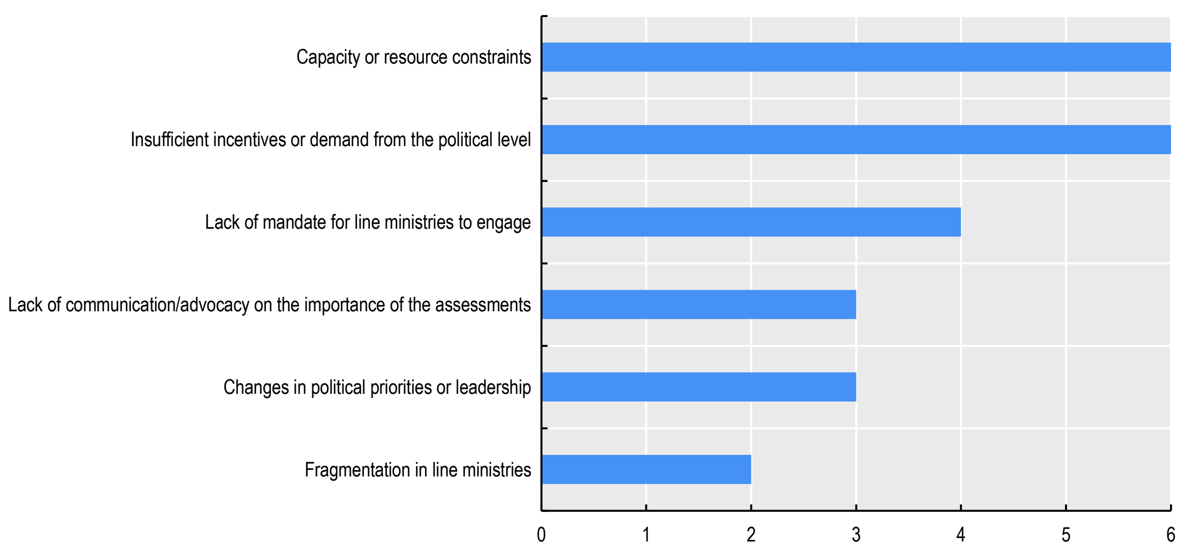
Networks of planning or strategy officials based in line ministries provide a complementary route to cross-government analytical capacity. For the six countries in this report, almost half have a formal strategic planning network and 14% mention that the network functions on an informal or ad hoc basis (OECD, 2025[12]). The main role cited by the six countries is to align ministerial plans with whole of government priorities. Portugal's REPLAN provides an example as does the case from Bulgaria which created an informal network of experts on strategic planning in 2023 to support capacity-building and early-stage consultation. Formalising such networks can help to strengthen the effective focus on long-term priorities if they are accompanied, in the case of Bulgaria, by a clear technical advisory mandate, an annual work plan and a structured calendar of activities.

Senior officials' groups have become a recurrent instrument for organising the technical work that prepares cabinet-level decisions on cross-cutting priorities. Ireland's Senior Officials Groups, attached to each cabinet committee and chaired by a senior official from the Department of the Taoiseach, prepare cabinet committee agendas, align departmental positions, broker interdepartmental compromises and escalate unresolved issues to political attention, with a documented role in co-ordinating cross-cutting priorities including child poverty and housing. Finland's political-technical working groups, prepared by formal secretariats and including permanent senior officials from key central ministries, perform a comparable function. Standing inter-ministerial working groups, senior officials' groups chaired by the CoG and political-level cabinet committees prepared by the CoG are the most frequently reported networking routines among the six countries and 2 peers providing data for this report. In both the Irish and Finnish examples, central preparation by a named central ministry gives these groups a defined working rhythm and an institutional locus for the analytical work that supports cabinet-level decisions.

1.4.2. Building capabilities to track progress in delivering on key reforms

The use of monitoring tools to track progress ex post remains uneven across participating CoGs. Amongst the 6 countries in this report 40% note that they are currently monitoring over 100 priorities within the centre. The main obstacles reported by the 6 countries in this report are both political and capacity related. Insufficient incentives or demand from the political level and capacity or resource constraints are the two most frequently cited challenges to sustaining assessment work at the centre of government (Figure 1.14). This suggests that the challenge is not only technical. Assessment needs depend also on political demand, timely commissioning and clear channels for ensuring findings are considered during the decision-making process on current and future reforms.

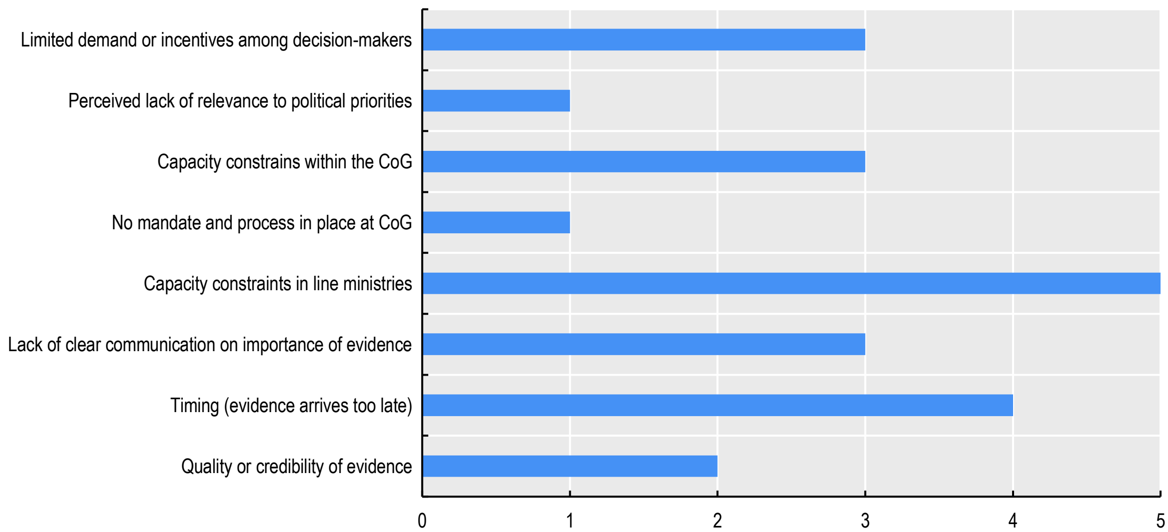
Figure 1.14. The biggest challenges to sustaining monitoring at the centre of government



Note: n=8, Australia, Poland, Bulgaria, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Estonia, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (n.d.[25]), "Strengthening Impact Assessments of Reforms and Investments at the Centre of Government", unpublished.

OECD findings and research with the participating countries in this report show that capacity and timing are perceived as fundamental limits on the use of ex-post data in decisions (Figure 1.15). Capacity constraints in line ministries are the most frequently cited limit, ahead of information arriving too late and capacity constraints within the CoG itself. Portugal describes assessment as embedded inconsistently or on an ad hoc basis, with timing and capacity limiting use; Greece reports no formal mechanisms in place for receiving impact findings relevant to decision makers, with capacity constraints in line ministries cited as the principal challenge.

Figure 1.15. What most often limits the use of analysis and data on policy impact in decision-making



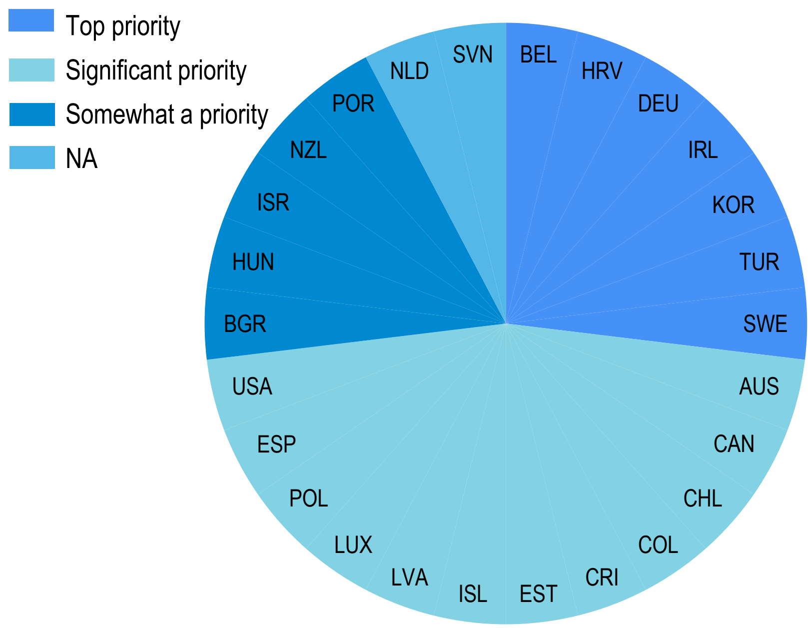
Note: n=8, Australia, Poland, Bulgaria, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Estonia, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (n.d.[25]), "Strengthening Impact Assessments of Reforms and Investments at the Centre of Government", unpublished.

Country examples in this report highlight more formalised arrangements for ex post assessment, although these vary in scope and maturity. Ireland's Department of the Taoiseach, for example, reports more than 50 reforms and more than 50 investments subject to ex post impact assessment in 2024-25. Findings reach decision makers through formal cabinet reporting, integration into budget and performance review processes, informal briefings and public reporting. Australia's Office of Impact Analysis, located within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, provides another example. The Australian Government provides a structured central standard for assessing policy proposals through its Guide to Policy Impact Analysis is binding on policy proposals expected to change rights, powers or obligations and to have a significant community impact. It sets out seven structured questions covering problem definition, policy objectives, options analysis, consultation and evaluation, with mandatory documentation subject to assessment and public release (Australian Government, 2026[26]). Like other governance processes, the examples of Ireland and Australia suggest that assessment becomes useful to the CoG when it is embedded in the routines of government decision making.

1.4.3. Using digital infrastructure to build capabilities at the centre of government: dashboards, data systems and the use of AI

The increasing complexity of policymaking and sustained pressure to deliver policy results and impacts has led to CoGs taking a greater role in monitoring performance. In 2023, 19 out of 26 CoGs noted that monitoring whole of government performance was their top or significant priority function (Figure 1.16).

Figure 1.16. Priority for the CoG in monitoring whole-of-government performance



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished.,

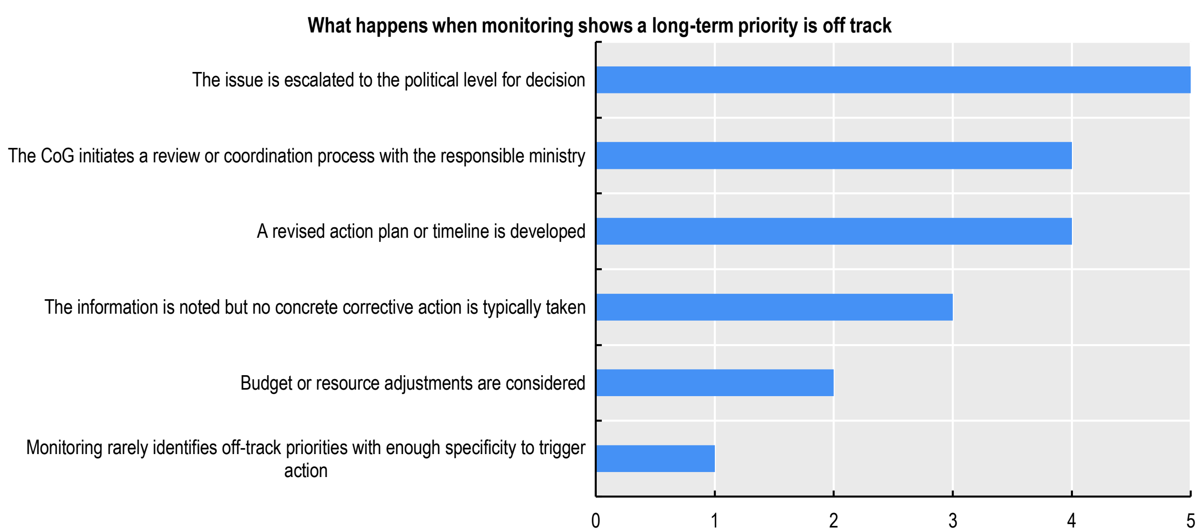
Most of the six centres of government examined in this report operate a centralised digital platform for tracking long-term cross-cutting priorities. The Bulgaria and Greek chapters include a focus on whether the data on these platforms shapes decisions in practice. Three conditions emerged from those discussions and from the country research. The first is integration with recurring decision-making settings, so that the platform feeds cabinet preparation and budget routines. The second is a reduction in the reporting burden on line ministries, achieved through one-time data collection that serves multiple purposes. The third is a gradual shift from descriptive output reporting towards outcome assessment and risk-based analytics.

Countries still face substantive challenges connecting data with decision making. Bulgaria's Monitorstat Information System illustrates the gap between an ambitious platform and its use. Launched in December 2019, the platform was designed as a centralised web-based system for monitoring European and national strategies, with the National Statistical Institute leading implementation in co-operation with the Council of Ministers Administration. Until recently, however, the Monitorstat Information System functioned primarily as a repository: ministries were not required to submit performance data regularly, only a small share of the more than 200 strategic documents was uploaded or regularly updated, and most indicators were not systematically updated since 2022. The current upgrade to the platform is an important step forward, intended to align indicators, targets and reporting mechanisms with strategic priorities and international commitments.

Greece illustrates the further step from a working platform to one that is being extended toward AI-supported analytics. The General Secretariat for Co-ordination monitors all reforms and investments centrally through MAZI, a single digital system through which the centre tracks implementation across the project lifespan. Chapter 6 below identifies two directions of further development. The first is decentralising parts of the monitoring workload: a version of the platform that would allow line ministries to enter their own milestone tracking is under development, which would free the General Secretariat for Co-ordination to concentrate on cross-cutting issues and would give line ministries clearer ownership of their reform reporting. The second is the structured exploration of AI tools for monitoring, including taxonomies for cross-government policy classification and use cases for forecasting and risk assessment. The Greek case suggests that the centre's monitoring function is increasingly an analytical and data-engineering function reflecting the growing integration of digital technologies and AI into the core business of governing, as much as an oversight one.

A number of centres of government are reflecting on ways of strengthening the role of the centre to act once a priority is seen as off track (Figure 1.17). Poland's 2025 architecture has been designed precisely to close the gap between data and decision-making. The Committee of the Council of Ministers for Supervision is responsible for establishing priority tasks in co-operation with members of the Council of Ministers, setting milestones and deadlines, monitoring implementation and reporting risks to timely delivery to the Council of Ministers and the Prime Minister. The wider system includes ministerial leaders and co-ordinators of individual government priorities, corresponding supervisors in the Department of Supervision, regular meetings held between the Minister for Supervision and members of government responsible for individual priorities, and an electronic inter-ministerial tracking system based on the platform used by the Ministry of Digital Affairs. The arrangement is recent, and the analysis in the country chapter does not yet allow assessment of its delivery impact. Its institutional logic is nevertheless instructive: it pairs the smaller priority list adopted in September 2025 with a routine that converts implementation reporting into recurring political conversations with ministers, supported by a shared digital tracker.

Figure 1.17. Managing long-term priorities when they are off track



Note: n= 10, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Poland, Finland, Romania, Ireland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, New Zealand.
Source: OECD (2026[18]), "Survey: Stewardship and Monitoring of Long-Term and Cross-Cutting Commitments at the CoG", unpublished.

There are also questions about how digital infrastructure can support policy development. Estonia's e-Cabinet offers one peer reference: the system enables ministers and senior officials to access cabinet agenda items in real time, indicate positions in advance and adopt without debate items to which no objection has been raised. Latvia's Unified Portal for the Development and Agreement of Draft Legal Acts is a complementary model covering the upstream phase, in which all line ministries submit draft legal acts to cabinet through a single digital portal that handles consultation, harmonisation, approval and publication, and is publicly accessible. The two systems together cover the policy development cycle from interministerial drafting through cabinet adoption, producing a continuous digital record that survives political transitions.

Country examples show that monitoring and broader digital infrastructure for the policy cycle acquire institutional value only when platforms are integrated with cabinet preparation and budget routines, and when data flow upward from ministries as part of normal reporting. In the absence of those conditions, investment in platform-building might contribute to transparency and accountability, but risks adding to the fragmentation of planning systems that several country chapters already describe as overcrowded. In addition, to fully realise this potential, these systems also require CoGs to develop capabilities to interpret and synthesise data across sources, translate technical outputs, including from AI, into actionable policy insights, and manage information flows that effectively connect political priorities with administrative implementation (OECD, 2025[15]).

1.5. Conclusion

As outlined at the beginning of this report, CoGs face numerous concurrent challenges: public trust in the government's ability to deliver on the most complex issues remains fragile; the centre must act faster and on more fronts at once; and it is burdened with decades of accumulated mandates and processes. All of these have stretched CoG capabilities beyond their traditional role.

There is no single CoG model which will meet all these challenges and work across different types of administrations. However, across the six countries examined, recurring institutional choices appear to shape whether cross-cutting priorities translate into delivery, across very different constitutional and administrative traditions. **Re-organising government to deliver** requires governments to use restructuring selectively and with clear purpose, and to manage the accumulation of mandates inside the CoG with the same discipline applied to ministerial portfolios. **Prioritising and planning to deliver** depends on whether selected commitments enter the routines through which cabinet prepares decisions and the budget is set, and on whether political ownership is sustained long enough for those routines to take hold. **Building capabilities for cross-cutting policy priorities** depends on analytical infrastructure and networks that the CoG can convene rather than substitute for, and on tracking and digital systems integrated with cabinet preparation and the budget calendar. Importantly, it also relies on a set of soft-skills at the centre of government to effectively navigate the political-technical interface including the ability to provide fair and frank advice. Cutting across these three dimensions is the effectiveness of the political-administrative relationship. Clear political direction and analytical capacity at the CoG are each necessary, but neither delivers on complex cross-cutting challenges without routines that connect them. Delivering on cross-cutting priorities over the long term is, in addition to a matter of institutional design, a matter of investment in the people, training, technology and routines (both formal and informal) that hold the political-administrative relationship together.

The following chapters examine these dimensions taking into account the institutional context of each participating country. In the chapters in **Part I**, the role of the centre is examined in terms of re-organising government to deliver core policy priorities and the functions of the CoG as a bridge between the political and technical levels of government. Chapter two examines machinery-of-government changes in Estonia and the role of the Government Office (Prime Minister's Office) in advising how to organise government to better deliver in multi-faceted policy areas. Chapter three looks at the role of the CoG in Portugal as a bridge between political and technical levels of government through the lens of PLANAPP and the REPLAN Network. The chapters in **Part II**, review the function of the CoG as a guide in helping governments to deliver on priorities set out in electoral mandates as well as long-term priorities. Chapter four examines the identification, communication and development of government priorities led by the Chancellery in Poland. Chapter five considers long-term strategic planning at the centre, with the implementation of long-term priorities in Bulgaria. The chapters in **Part III** focus on the CoG's stewardship functions and its capabilities to support effective policy co-ordination and policy development. Chapter five focuses on monitoring policy implementation from the centre in Greece, including data management and the use of AI tools. Chapter six addresses the conditions under which the centre in Ireland takes on cross-cutting priorities, drawing on the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office at the Department of the Taoiseach as an example. Each chapter includes a set of practical considerations for the country concerned to support efforts to address challenges that were identified.

The online Annex of this report includes a number of practical toolboxes that resulted from OECD research and peer-to-peer exchanges during six workshops (October 2025-April 2026) attended by the six countries and peers from OECD countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, New Zealand and the United Kingdom). The main recommendations and key messages from the chapters and toolboxes are distilled in the 'practitioner's tips' set out below.

1.6. Key messages and practitioner tips

The following sets out a number of key messages and practitioner tips for CoGs that emanate from the findings in the country chapters and toolboxes in the online Annex of this report. Not all of the tips below will be relevant to all countries given different administrative and legal traditions and cultures. They are nonetheless intended to support debate within and outside the CoG on how it can best meet today's multifaceted and complex challenges.

1.6.1. Re-organising government to deliver

CoGs are uniquely positioned to ensure that machinery-of-government changes are purposeful, based on data and analysis, and proportionate to the delivery problem they aim to solve. The following tips highlight ways in which CoGs can fulfil their advisory and co-ordinating role by testing options, managing trade-offs, and guiding implementation so that organisational change strengthens rather than undermines policy delivery.

- Set clear guidance for implementing machinery of government changes, in order to reduce the scope of case-by-case negotiations and simplify the process.
- Clarify the roles of actors and basic processes for implementing machinery of government changes (recognising that these may need to be adapted to specific circumstances).
- Develop manuals and support functions for change management to support leadership in designing, communicating, and implementing structural changes effectively.
- Set out ways to evaluate the results of machinery of government changes in the medium term to ensure objectives are being met.
- Develop a methodology and process to provide frank and fair advice to the political level on the benefits and costs of machinery of government changes over the short, medium and long term.

1.6.2. Planning and Prioritisation

A recurring challenge across countries is translating broad political programmes into a manageable, coherent set of priorities that can be financed, monitored, and delivered over time. The CoG plays a critical role in this process, helping to reduce fragmentation, establish hierarchy among competing initiatives, and embed priorities into core decision-making routines such as cabinet and budgeting processes. For CoGs, the tips below provide a practical framework to connect strategy to implementation and sustain focus on what matters most.

- Provide reviews to Cabinet of major cross-cutting proposals and set standards and guidance for priority identification processes to strengthen alignment with strategic priorities.

- Consider developing a framework setting out a strategic vision for long-term priorities and how the CoG can manage these across political cycles.
- Establish a co-ordination architecture or system that enables the integration of long-term priorities into routine policy design, planning, and budgeting processes.
- Enable better co-ordination between the CoG and the Ministry of Finance, developing systems for linking financial allocations to long-term strategic objectives, and ensuring the budget process is aligned with priorities and ministerial action plans.
- Strengthen the integration of foresight into strategic planning and policymaking at the CoG, including embedding foresight practices into the preparation of selected strategic documents.
- Consider establishing a digital cabinet system to improve strategic co-ordination alongside the preparation and follow-up of cross-cutting initiatives.

1.6.3. Capabilities for Policy Coordination and Development

Delivering cross-cutting priorities depends not only on structures and plans, but on the capabilities that allow governments to work across institutional boundaries. As outlined in the chapters below, CoGs increasingly act as facilitators and brokers, relying on analytical capacity, data systems, and networks to enable joined-up policy development and implementation. These practitioner's tips therefore address a central question for CoGs: how to build and leverage system-wide capabilities rather than substitute for line ministries and to support collective problem-solving. Strengthening these capabilities is essential to ensure that co-ordination is sustained, informed by data and analysis, and focused on outcomes, particularly in complex and resource-constrained environments.

- Introduce policy development tools and standards within the CoG to strengthen early-stage co-ordination of cross-ministerial initiatives
- Devise a strategy on how the CoG can facilitate collaborative working practices on cross-cutting policies and ensure that informal or formal forums/networks at the senior civil service level have a mandate to drive forward these policies in a cohesive manner.
- Convene a central analytical support unit to elevate capabilities for cross-cutting analysis within government including using policy labs as a testing ground for innovative approaches to shared challenges.
- Build measurement and data requirements into cross-cutting programme delivery from the outset rather than retrospectively.
- Ensure buy-in across government departments for shared monitoring systems and tools such as dashboards to enable decision-makers to assess key performance indicators.
- Manage overextension risk within the CoG itself by developing structured transition strategies that strengthen rather than supplant departmental capacity.
- Set out from the beginning and communicate to line ministries how the CoG can best add value across the policy system, distinguishing where it should lead, facilitate, or step back.

Part I Re-organising government to deliver

2 Estonia: Guiding machinery of government change

This chapter examines how centres of government can guide machinery of government reforms to better align administrative structures with complex, cross-cutting policy priorities, drawing on Estonia's experience. It shows that while re-organisation, such as the creation of a new ministry and transfers of functions can strengthen alignment between political objectives and delivery structures, its effectiveness depends on having clear objectives, robust ex-ante analysis, and strong central co-ordination. The chapter highlights the potential transaction costs and risks associated with re-organisation along with its alternatives. It underscores, in particular, the important role of the centre in advising on options, assessing impacts, and bridging the political – administrative interface all the while ensuring that organisational reform supports, rather than hinders, policy delivery.

2.1. Introduction

In the context of an increasingly challenging global landscape, centres of government (CoGs) are being called upon to support the delivery of complex and cross-cutting issues which frequently transcend the traditional scope of policy area divisions and require co-ordination and alignment across institutional and sectoral bounds. As a result of these complexities, governments are increasingly re-examining their machinery of government with the view that mergers, abolitions and the creation of new ministries or agencies might help to support better delivery of government objectives. CoGs as the body or group of bodies advising and supporting the highest level of the executive branch of government and council of ministers, are often one of the first ports of call when the decision is taken to re-organise government around multi-faceted and complex policy areas.

This chapter focuses on ongoing machinery of government changes made in 2023 and 2024 in Estonia. The term machinery of government refers in this context to the ways in which the central government apparatus is structured to achieve government priorities and how these structures are altered (OECD, 2012[27]). Broadly, Machinery of Government (MoG) change includes:

- The allocation of functions to and between ministries, agencies and other governmental organisations;
- The creation of new ministries or other governmental organisations;
- The amalgamation or abolition of existing ministries and other governmental organisations;
- And the co-ordination of the activities of ministries and other governmental organisations (OECD, 2012[27]).

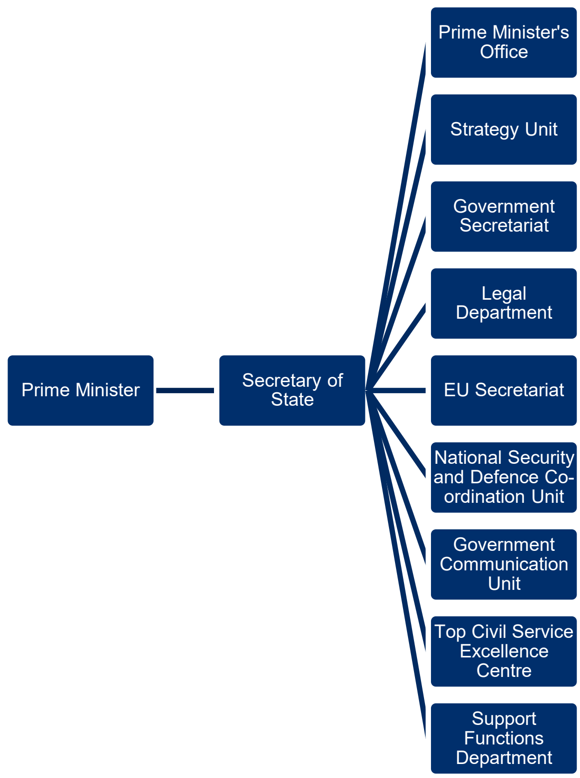
The centre of government has a strategic role to play during any machinery change as it involves aligning civil service organisations with ministerial mandates and functions at the political/administrative interface. A strategic approach to machinery of government change ensures that the division of responsibilities is adequately underpinned by the requisite sets of competencies to deliver, including oversight, monitoring and evaluation, and co-ordination.

In Estonia, a small state where coalition agreements are the norm, political trade-offs engender new challenges for the CoG and the public administration as a whole to manage. One recent example of this was the emphasis on new policy priorities which resulted in substantial changes to the structure of line ministries and agencies in Estonia's public service. While this restructuring can have positive impacts in terms of policy co-ordination, as outlined below, trade-offs need also to be understood and managed. The centre of government plays an essential role in steering these efforts but also in bridging the interface between the political requests for organisational change and administrative delivery.

2.2. Context: Estonia's changing machinery of government

2.2.1. Estonian governance structures

Figure 2.1. The Government Office is led by the Secretary of State and comprises nine individual units

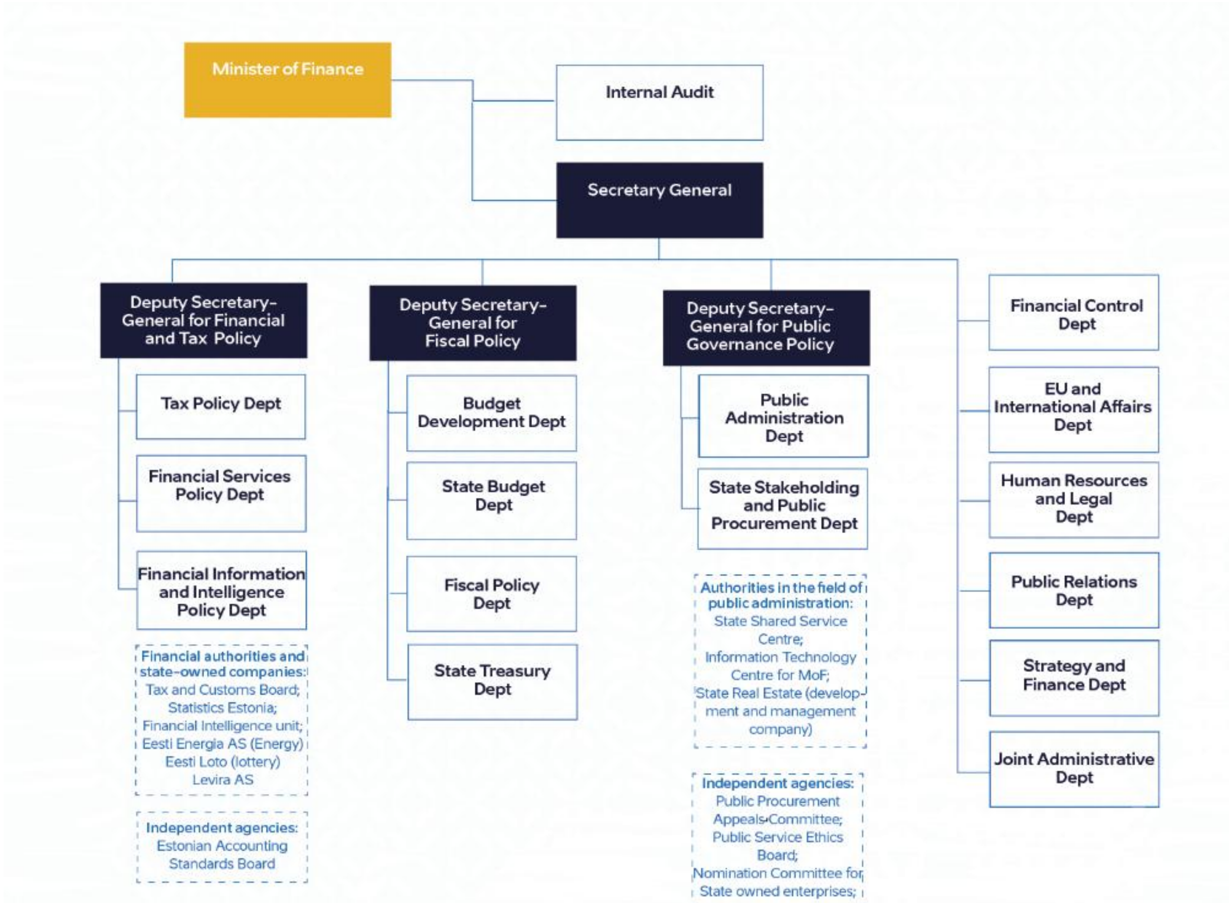


Source: Republic of Estonia (2026[28]), Government Office, https://www.riigikantselei.ee/en/organisation-news-and-contacts/government-office/about-government-office.

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) is headed by a dedicated Minister and currently employs a total of 260 staff members. The lead public servants in the MoF are the Secretary General (SG) of the MoF, and the Deputy Secretary Generals (DSG) who support the SG. All other Estonian line ministries follow the same basic structure, with the lead minister supported by a single SG and their respective DSG.

Within each line ministry, DSGs are respectively heads of individual departments. For example, within the MoF, there are three DSGs, responsible for the separate policy areas of Financial and Tax Policy, Fiscal Policy, and Public Governance Policy. Each of these policy areas are composed of multiple departments: for example, the Public Governance Policy area includes the Public Administration Department and the State Stakeholding and Public Procurement Department. There may be additional departments which are not directly organised under the umbrella of one policy area. Agencies which are independent or semi-integrated into the public administration system such as the Estonian Accounting Standards Board or the State Shared Service Centre are also important actors in the system, although are not included in the official civil servant headcount.

Figure 2.2. DSGs in the Ministry of Finance respond to the SG who works directly with the Minister

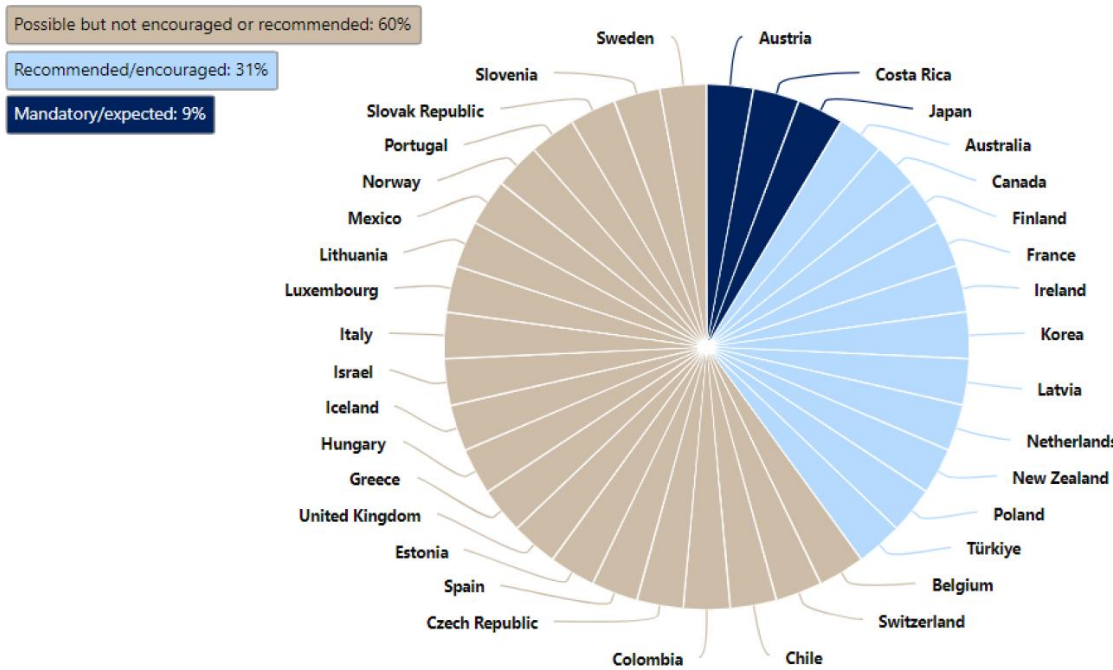


Source: Republic of Estonia (2024[29]), "Introduction to the Ministry", Ministry of Finance, https://www.fin.ee/en/ministry-and-contacts/organization/introduction-ministry.

The Estonian public service is made up of approximately 2500 civil servants (as of October 2024). At present, six line ministries in Estonia co-locate, sharing a single workplace in the Joint Building of the Ministries. For these six – the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Climate and the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture – collaboration across ministries is only a few floors away. However, there are some relatively concrete functional and administrative separations between line ministries.

One particularity is that each individual ministry is its own employer, and there is no centralised employer of the public service. In practice, this leads to differences in salary scales, and especially differences in operational matters such as annual leave or allowances and emoluments received in addition to salary. This may be a contributing factor to the strong attachment individual public servants in Estonia feel to their individual line ministry, rather than the public service as a whole. In Estonia, as in most OECD countries, internal mobility is possible for civil servants but not encouraged or recommended (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Mobility of civil servants across public administrations in central government in 2022



Source: OECD (2023[30]), *Government at a Glance 2023*: Estonia, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/06/government-at-a-glance-2023-country-notes_a95d10b5/estonia_6da66b3b/e1676b75-en.pdf.

Additionally, most line ministries have an individualised information technology (IT) system, referred to internally as an IT "house". At an operational level each line ministry has their own functional system for IT administrative support and staffing structures, as well as differing document sharing and access protocols, differing email domains, and different records management and archiving processes.

It is important to note, as seen in Figure 2.1, that the CoG, in particular the Government Office, does not have a separate higher authority over the individual line ministries. All ministers (and their respective Secretary Generals (SGs)) are equal, with no additional hierarchy between the line ministries themselves. This is relevant to note in relation to the role of the Secretary of State, who does not exert any formal legal power over line ministries or SGs, and who is not allocated any significant "policy" portfolio (Riigikogu, 1996[31]). In some respects, the most important role the Secretary of State plays is therefore as an advisor and broker to the PM, with the majority of the position's influence stemming from its proximity and ties to the PM's office.

2.2.2. Structural changes in Estonia

In March 2023, Estonia re-elected Prime Minister Kaja Kallas' Reform Party with a parliamentary majority, winning 31.2% of the 101 seats in the Riigikogu (parliament). The prime minister brought in a new cabinet replacing the one that had been in place since the last parliamentary elections held in 2019. In July 2023, alongside the announcement of Kallas' cabinet structure, several machinery of government changes were announced, including the creation of the new Climate Ministry. In this first round of changes, out of a total of 2 500 civil servants, 700 people (28%) were moved between all MoG changes. In 2024, Kallas was nominated to the European Commission, resulting in a cabinet change with Prime Minister Kristen Michal taking office and a new Cabinet structure announced. As a result of the cabinet changes, further machinery of government changes were announced, triggering a second round of restructuring (ERR News, 2024[32]).

For ease of reference, in this chapter the 2023 round of MoG changes as a result of the parliamentary elections will be referred to as Round 1, and the 2024 round of MoG changes as a result of the cabinet shuffle as Round 2.

There are several distinct differences in the way that Round 1 and Round 2 were undertaken, resulting in different perceptions of the success in the changes. The differences relate to the scope of the changes, the perception of the decision-making process, and the role of the CoG and the GO specifically in guiding and communicating these changes.

One of the first significant structural reforms, undertaken during Round 1, was the creation of the Climate Ministry. Officially, the Climate Ministry was created in line with the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, which changed its nomenclature and received significant new policy areas under its portfolio. In its new form, it was established with clear objectives and a robust mandate to drive transformative change in this policy area in Estonia. The initiative aimed to elevate related issues to the forefront of the national agenda and further demonstrate the governments' commitment to addressing this issue as a political priority. Since its inception, the Climate Ministry has demonstrated progress, most notably in the continued development of a new policy draft. The Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (MRAA) also underwent significant change during this round, as functions related to regional policy were moved into the MRAA. Approximately 100 new staff joined the ministry in Round 1, including as a result of the addition of the Spatial Planning Department from the Ministry of Finance. Throughout this process, the GO was heavily involved in the development of options for MoG changes and in co-ordinating their implementation. The GO prepared several rounds of analysis of potential MoG changes at the request of the government, which were used to inform a final decision taken by the council of ministers.

Round 2 introduced a second series of changes across various government departments. These included the prominent transfer of the Digital Policy Department from the Ministry of Economic Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. There were also a number of smaller changes made, including moving the spatial planning department into the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, marking the second time in two years this department was relocated. Unlike the first round of reforms, however, these changes were characterised by less clearly communicated objectives, leading to lower understanding within the civil service. Initiated in July 2024, the changes were implemented beginning on 1 January 2025. Throughout this process, the GO was minimally involved. The GO did not prepare any analysis for decision-makers prior to the decision, and was minimally involved in the roll-out process, having acted in some cases as a mediator or observer in negotiations between Secretaries General but without significant intervention.

2.3. Challenges and enablers for effective machinery of government change

2.3.1. Typology of reorganisations

There are a multitude of different ways in which line ministries and their subsequent departments, units, and agencies can be restructured. Box 2.1 provides examples from Ireland and Latvia. The most common are:

- Mergers: ministry-level merging of entities or significant functions into a single new organisation
- De-mergers: ministry-level de-merging of significant functions into their own entity
- Start-up: creation of an entirely new ministry with new functional priorities
- Acquisitions/transfers of functions: departmental level mergers and de-mergers of functions

The primary models of restructuring carried out in the Round 1 and Round 2 changes were transfers of functions, where departmental and unit-level changes occurred to shift functions across and within line ministries. The creation of the Climate Ministry in 2023 was also an acquisition/transfer of functions as it also drew most of its component elements from other ministries to centralise a set of strategic priorities and capabilities into one entity.

There were three primary types of transfers of functions in Estonia within the two rounds of restructuring.

Table 2.1. Types of transfers of functions within Round 1 and Round 2 of restructuring

Type	Definition	Example
Whole division	Single department, policy area, and/or unit relocated	Relocation of the Digital Policy Unit from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications to the Ministry of Justice
Partial division	Segment of department and/or unit relocated	Relocation of functions relating to regional development from the Ministry of Finance into the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (formerly the Ministry of Agriculture)
Policy stream division	Set of whole or partial departments and/or units relocated based on substantive policy functions	Creation of the Climate Ministry through relocation of policy streams relating to environmental protection

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Each of these types of divisions has its own set of challenges attached. Those affected generally agreed that the least complex type of transfer was the moving of a whole division. In contrast, partial divisions were reported to be more complex and challenging to manage. This is primarily due to the lack of clarity of what specific functions and competencies were to be moved, and how they were to be integrated into the receiving ministry's structure and systems. In all cases, for civil servants having experienced both the departure and the acquisition of new departments, the acquisition of new functions was experienced as the significantly more challenging scenario.

Box 2.1. Machinery of government changes in the justice sector in Ireland and Latvia

Reconfiguration of functions within the justice sector in Ireland

The Programme for Government 2025 stated that 'Government departments will be reconfigured, as agreed by the party leaders, to ensure greater policy coherence, programme implementation and a fair division of labour and responsibilities'. As a result, there were several significant transfer of functions including: (1) the transfer of responsibility for international protection accommodation and integration to the Department of Justice, which was redesignated as the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration; (2) the bringing of the National Centre for Cyber Security and the National Security Authority under the remit of the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to ensure proper alignment of national security infrastructure. Previously it had operated under the ambit of the Department of Communications; (3) transfer responsibility for property services and estate agents to the Department of Housing and censorship to the Department of Communications, Culture and Sport; and (4) responsibility for tourism matters were transferred to the restructured Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. Lessons learned from this change included the need to focus on the possible change as soon as it was highlighted as part of the programme of government and early preparation was key. This allowed support systems and mechanisms to be in place to ensure the machinery of government change was undertaken smoothly.

Reunification of the Chancellery and the Cross-sectoral Co-ordination centre in Latvia

In Latvia, the State Chancellery, and the Cross-sectoral Co-ordination centre (PKC) which were separate institutional structures at the Centre of Government since 2011, have established close functional links, support and co-ordinating procedures and share the same offices.

Nevertheless, as of 2023 the two structures were merged into one under the authority of the Prime Minister, in view of strengthening national development planning and co-ordination, improving oversight of government programme implementation, reducing fragmentation and overlaps in public administration, strengthening the centre of government and improving international co-operation, considering the lessons learned from managing the financial sector reforms, COVID-19 pandemic and other major policy challenges.

The merger aimed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency by delivering "professional, competent and compact public administration proofed for addressing todays and future challenges" with a strong lead from the centre of government. Essentially, a single structure at the centre of government was deemed to provide less fragmentation and better steer than two separate ones, even while functionally close.

Source: Government of Ireland (2025[33]), Programme for Government 2025 - Securing Ireland's Future, Department of the Taoiseach, Dublin, https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/publications/programme-for-government-2025-securing-irelands-future/; OECD (2024[34]), *OECD Public Governance Reviews: Uzbekistan: Towards a More Modern, Effective and Strategic Public Administration*, https://doi.org/10.1787/2f36d8ec-en.

2.3.2. Challenges in restructuring government from the perspective of the CoG

There were a number of significant consequences for the ability of the public administration to deliver sound restructuring plans. Some normal work processes were halted during the reorganisation, and support systems (e.g. HR, IT, and Finance) were significantly challenged (Government of Estonia, 2024[35]). OECD analysis and interviewswith senior civil servants from multiple line ministries undertaken for this chapter surfaced the following set of challenges resulting from the two sets of reorganisations.

Administrative burdens

The operational implications of moving hundreds of people between employers at once are significant for the administrative support apparatus of each line ministry. Each line ministry is characterised by a number of differences in terms of human resource management, IT structures, financial structures, and strategic planning. For example, differences in salary allowances, email domains, and the allocation of administrative support staff across line ministries creates a difficult environment for change. Making support services work is a particularly important area of focus and which CoGs, from their central position, can support through guidance and other tools.

IT support is managed differently by each line ministry. Each IT house has unique functions and features and is adapted to the needs of the ministry it serves. However, when moving across ministries, losing access – even temporarily – to critical business information stored in one IT structure makes the continuation of work difficult.

Ratios for support staff versus policy-oriented staff can be quite different across line ministries, creating a challenging starting point for negotiations. Practicalities such as the number of support staff who should move along with their colleagues becomes complex when the operational realities of dividing employees' time comes into play. The lack of common administrative standards and co-ordination between each line ministry creates general uncertainty, requiring ministries to negotiate transfers on a case-by-case basis, typically through their Secretaries General.

Employee stress

Despite high levels of engagement and efforts from senior management to effectively guide the civil service through the period of change, there were indications that the changes resulted in lower engagement, lowered productivity, and retention issues. Government surveys showed that Estonian civil servants tended to feel stronger commitment and loyalty to their line ministry, rather than to the Estonian public administration as a whole. Reports from senior human resources officials indicated that some impacted staff sought out positions in other units that would remain in the original ministry in order to keep to their current line ministry, if not in their current unit. Turnover rates as a result of Round 1 were estimated at between 5-10% (Government of Estonia, 2024[35]). The unit expected to transfer therefore experienced the loss of staff with established competencies in the relevant policy area, as well as institutional memory, creating a compounding effect and extending the time for the transferring unit to become productive and deliver on policy outcomes in the new line ministry.

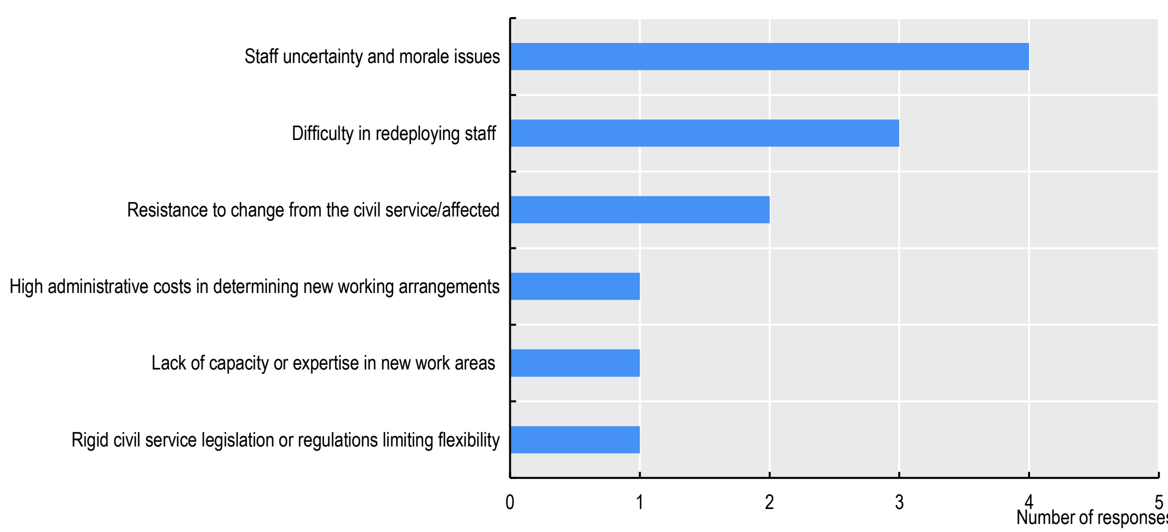
It was also indicated that units who were transferred in both Round 1 and Round 2, i.e. twice in two years, experienced lower satisfaction in their jobs. Approximately half of employees who were affected by Round 1 reported they did not feel that they had fully adapted to the restructuring one year later (Government of Estonia, 2024[35]). 60% of those surveyed as part of the internal analysis of Round 1 reported that the reorganisation lowered their motivation to work in the public sector, and at the managerial level increased stress and rates of burnout were reported (Government of Estonia, 2024[35]).

Agencies which respond to the line ministry are also affected as their leadership and direction may move between ministries. In one instance, the creation of a new agency was completely halted and restarted in a new ministry due to the removal of some functions related to the agency.

Cultural differences in the workplace between ministries

MoG changes are often done to facilitate joined-up policy development and service delivery, however doing so requires more than moving organisational pieces around (Figure 2.4). It requires significant leadership and management investment in aligning working cultures and processes to generate genuine collaboration. In Estonia, staff reported that ways of working are in practice quite different between ministries, suggesting the need for careful employee integration to reap the benefits of reorganisations. Senior civil servants interviewed for this chapter indicated that from the changes in Round 1, it took one full year to feel that the workplace culture was fully integrated and productive. Issues relating to feelings of belonging, identities, and working cultures were reported by staff and present challenges to integrating organisations (Government of Estonia, 2024[35]).

Figure 2.4. Workforce management challenges during MoG changes



Note: n=6, Estonia, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom.
Source: OECD (n.d.[7]), "Machinery of Government changes", unpublished.

Communication challenges within the administration and between the political and technical levels of government

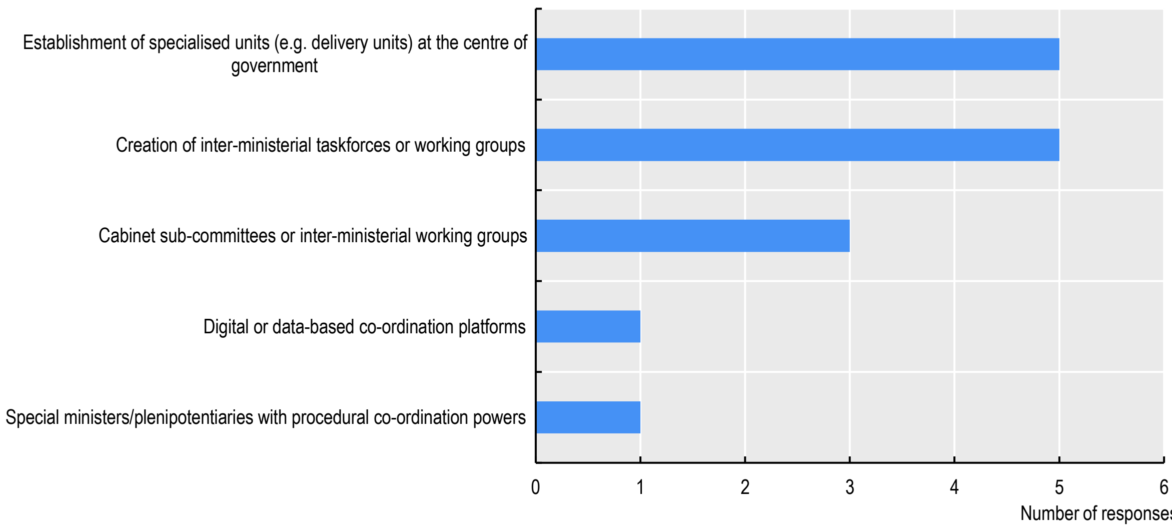
Concerted efforts were made to enhance communication across the administration. One positive development that was highlighted in the interviews for this chapter was bringing multiple line ministries together within one single building complex, reducing physical barriers to collaboration. Despite the challenges of separate IT systems, the majority of internal calendars were shared, allowing for simplified scheduling. And relationships between Secretaries Generals were reported to be strong and positive, with strong informal communication networks and working relationships across ministries. However, different levels of management had to decipher and communicate the purposes of the changes independently. Unified messaging did not adequately pass below the most senior levels of management, and independent interpretations created uncertainty (Government of Estonia, 2024[35]).

Communication between the political layer of government and the administration also presented a challenge. When fully enabled, the CoG through the GO could support with the communication of the vision, goals, and plan of the political side to the administration, and conversely, could convey ideas, analysis, and concerns of the administration to the political decision makers to improve the design of MoG changes. In Round 1, the GO provided analytical support to the political levels of government, however in Round 2 it played a much smaller role. The lack of adequate communication between the political and administrative actors influenced not only the operational-level guidance the administration received, it also negatively influenced the perception of the MoG changes and potentially led to other employee stress issues as outlined above which can be detrimental to productivity and delivery of policy outcomes. On the other hand, when the CoG took a significant and concrete role in advising decision-makers, they were better placed to oversee change management processes which improved overall productivity and effectiveness.

2.3.3. Alternative models to reorganisations

MoG changes can enable a better alignment of ministerial priorities and the administrative structures that deliver them. These transfers, however, can also result in significant disruption of day-to-day work and, in the short term, reduced productivity. This section explores alternative arrangements that could be considered to achieve similar objectives and the role of the centre of government. The six countries examined in this report highlighted a number of alternatives to fully-fledged machinery of government change (Figure 2.5). In defining a specific goal for the MoG changes, the CoG can be tasked with assessing different options to advise decision makers on the best approach to achieve their aims. While there are many possibilities for MoG changes, the four outlined below were highlighted by stakeholders in Estonia as being potentially the most fitting alternative options based on precedent and existing civil service structural considerations.

Figure 2.5. Alternative arrangements to full MoG restructuring to support cross-cutting policy areas



Note: n=6, Estonia, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom.
Source: OECD (n.d.[7]), "Machinery of Government changes", unpublished.

Multiple ministers within one ministry

One common approach to aligning ministerial roles without changing ministry structures is to have multiple ministers within one (usually large) ministry. In this scenario, the MoG restructuring is avoided by instead only carving up responsibilities within one existing ministry. This can be used to raise the profile of certain activities within one ministry and to balance ministerial portfolios across coalition partners. Given legislation which sets a maximum of 15 ministers in Estonia, there is already experience designating multiple ministers for a single ministry. This is a common arrangement in many countries, especially those which have a significant number of ministerial positions, as in Canada (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2. Multiple ministers within one ministry in Canada

Global Affairs Canada

The Canadian foreign affairs ministry, Global Affairs Canada, is under the shared leadership of three ministers. They are the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, and the Minister of International Development. While each minister is responsible for their individual portfolios of issues, they also work collaboratively to advance a whole-of-government approach to Canadian foreign policy.

Source: Government of Canada (2026[36]), "Ministers, Secretary of State and parliamentary secretaries: Global Affairs Canada" https://www.international.gc.ca/global-affairs-affaires-mondiales/corporate-ministere/organizational-organisationnelle/index.aspx?lang=eng.

In this case, however, the Secretary Generals may find themselves in the difficult position of responding to two Ministers with differing sets of priorities. One method which has been used to address this issue is the Finnish solution of "political State Secretaries" (Box 2.3). Estonian ministers may have political advisors, with functions and subordination to be determined directly by the relevant minister. While there is a unique context in Estonia given the small number of political civil servants, this arrangement could help reduce friction and better co-ordinate the roles of multiple ministers within one line ministry.

Box 2.3. The role of state secretaries in enabling co-ordination across government in Finland

In 2004, Finland enacted legislative changes enabling ministries to appoint political State Secretaries to support ministers. Previously, these roles were strictly non-political, except in the Prime Minister's Office. This reform addressed challenges arising in ministries with multiple ministers, particularly where responsibilities were divided between ministers from different political parties.

The introduction of political State Secretaries aimed to enhance political steering capabilities while maintaining a professional and impartial civil service. By attaching political State Secretaries directly to individual ministers, the reform ensured tailored advisory support, reducing the strain on civil servant State Secretaries (or Secretary Generals), who often had to navigate the demands of multiple ministers within the same ministry.

Political State Secretaries focus on advancing the government programme, supporting ministerial leadership, and representing the minister in selected contexts, including for example EU and international engagements. Crucially, they are not involved in cabinet or parliamentary proceedings, preserving the minister's direct accountability. Meanwhile, civil servant State Secretaries retain their mandate to ensure administrative effectiveness and inter-ministerial co-ordination.

Source: OECD (2015[37]), *Building on Basics*, Value for Money in Government, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264235052-en.

Minister with no designated ministry (Minister without portfolio)

A minister "without portfolio" is an appointed minister without a designated department/line ministry of which they are the head. This arrangement can allow governments to respond flexibly to political priorities, enabling ministers to focus on specific tasks or oversee cross-cutting initiatives without the constraints of managing a full administrative structure. A minister without portfolio may be appointed for example to work on a specific pressing political priority for which there is no existing corresponding structure. These ministers often work in conjunction with task forces, working groups, or other horizontal inter-governmental arrangements to address emerging challenges. Such roles are also common in coalition governments, where they help distribute responsibilities among coalition partners. Examples from other countries, such as France's "secretary of state" positions or the junior minister roles in Canada and the United Kingdom, demonstrate how similar positions can enhance government capacity and responsiveness (Box 2.4). There is precedent for this model in Estonia, as between 2003-2014 the Government of the Republic Act allowed for the appointment of a position titled Deputy Minister, which had a similar mandate and function until the notion was subsumed by the concept of Minister without portfolio (Riigikogu, 1996[31]).

Box 2.4. Structures for ministerial appointments without a full line ministry

Secretaries of State in France

In France, the position of Secretary of State is often used for ministers without portfolio. They are appointed to oversee specific issues or sectors but do not manage a full ministry. They report directly to the relevant minister, offering flexibility to address urgent or specialised policy areas. For example, in 2024, the Secretary of State for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Affairs (Ministre délégué chargé de l'Intelligence artificielle et du Numérique) focuses on France's digital transformation while responding closely with the Ministry for Higher Education and Research (Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche*)* but does not lead a separate ministry.

Three levels of support in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, three levels exist to support Cabinet (the most senior) Ministers. Ministers of State are the direct support to Cabinet Ministers whilst Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State/Parliamentary Secretaries in turn support the Ministers of State. For instance, the Minister for Education in the United Kingdom may have a junior minister responsible for specific sectors, such as further education or special educational needs, without managing a full department. These roles help streamline government operations by allowing ministers to delegate specific responsibilities while maintaining overall departmental cohesion.

Source: Devine, D. et al. (2019[38]), *Government ministers - Institute for Government,* https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/government-ministers; Government of France (2024[39]) *Composition du Gouvernement*, https://www.info.gouv.fr/composition-du-gouvernement.

This approach is particularly well-suited to Estonia, given its history of using ministers without portfolio effectively in coalition governments. Estonia's relatively small government structure makes this a pragmatic option for addressing specific policy priorities or co-ordinating complex, multi-sectoral initiatives. By enabling ministers to focus on strategic tasks without the need for a full ministry, this model can enhance agility in governance. Furthermore, it provides a mechanism to involve smaller coalition partners in decision making, fostering collaboration while maintaining a streamlined government. This type of arrangement and the significant precedent for its use in Estonia also serve to further suggest that Ministers can effectively carry out a political mandate without a designated line ministry/structure.

Similarly, mission-oriented approaches can be used as a tool in ensuring a focus on cross-cutting policy areas without resorting to extensive machinery changes (see Box 2.5).

Box 2.5. Mission-oriented approaches

Mission-oriented approaches can replace traditional interventions with time-bound, and measurable objectives to address complex, "wicked" societal challenges. Clear narratives and explicit theories of change signal long-term stability, which can help attract private capital and align disparate public policy tools. These approaches bridge the gap between high-level political ambition and operational execution by blending technological, behavioral, and organisational innovations to prevent policy fragmentation.

When governed from the centre of government, missions can support collaborative, solution oriented routines across traditional ministerial silos, driving institutional renewal and building public sector dynamic capabilities. This top-down administrative wiring shifts the state's role from merely fixing market failures to actively co-creating and shaping new markets. High-level institutionalisation, seen in France, Japan, Korea ensures that central bodies continually audit cross-departmental interventions to prevent strategic mission drift.

Source: OECD (2026[40]), *Forging New Frontiers in Mission-Oriented Innovation Policies*, https://doi.org/10.1787/d13d0142-en; OECD (2025[41]), *Harnessing Mission Governance to Achieve National Climate Targets*, https://doi.org/10.1787/781146eb-en; OECD (2024[42]), *Designing Effective Governance to Enable Mission Success*, https://doi.org/10.1787/898bca89-en.

Taskforces, working groups, and other common intergovernmental approaches

OECD findings show that the three co-ordination mechanisms CoGs most frequently used are interdepartmental taskforces, expert groups and advisory groups (OECD, 2024[2]) Permanent or temporary taskforces or working groups typically consist of representatives who meet to co-ordinate and align on policy issues and can be a useful way to drive enhanced collaborative approaches to cross-cutting issues. A second strong option would be the Thematic Government Cabinet Meetings, which were created to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The Thematic Cabinet Meetings allow for deliberations on a specific topic in a focused and dedicated session from a whole of government perspective, as they mandate the presence of the full Cabinet. On the other hand, government committees do not require the full Cabinet and do not always include the PM. Thematic Cabinet Meetings are ongoing on the topics of security and economy respectively. A similar model for levels of horizontal working arrangements exists in Finland. Vertical co-ordination beyond the ministerial level is equally as important as horizontal co-ordination, as the Austrian example of the Conference of General Secretaries also demonstrates (Box 2.6). Another model includes bringing a cross-cutting policy area such as Child Poverty and Well-being (see Ireland chapter) into the centre of government to help foster coherence without undertaking full machinery of government change.

Box 2.6. Inter-ministerial working arrangements in Austria and Finland

The Conference of General Secretaries in Austria

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

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

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

Finland has established a number of co-ordination mechanisms to support strategy and decision making supported by the CoG, particularly the government Strategic Department. They bring together different line ministries and are usually shared by one or two lead ministries, depending on the topic. Finland has created:

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

Source: OECD (2024[43]), *Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in Latvia: Assessment and recommendations roadmap*, https://doi.org/10.1787/2b43bc19-en; Government of Finland (2023[44]), *Ministerial Committees and Working Groups*, https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/governments/ministerial-committees-and-ministerial-working-groups.

Ministers with multiple/shared ministries

An additional, less common scenario exists where ministers work across multiple line ministries. For example, one minister could be responsible for Justice and Digital while leaving the Digital function in the Ministry of Economy. In practice, in Estonia this happened for a number of months in 2024 in order to continue functions in the interim period, as the actual transfers of functions announced in Round 2 of the MoG changes took place on 1 January 2025. With that precedent in mind, decision makers could take into consideration the possibility of simply reshuffling the portfolio of the minister(s) in question without necessarily restructuring the line ministry itself.

Under this scenario, there is an additional burden placed on the affected Secretary General, who is now in the position of responding to more than one minister. However, this would eliminate the significant other externalities and negative effects on productivity which might be caused by a full restructuring.

2.3.4. Decisions on what MoG changes are appropriate

Machinery of government changes are most effective when they are made with the intention of achieving a particular policy objective, which usually involves bringing previously separate parts of ministries together to work more closely and achieve a joined-up outcome. This was the case in the creation of the Ministry of Climate and the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture. The nature of the policy objectives being sought can influence the design of the reform – and point the government to an optimal solution. In many cases, that optimal solution may not require ministerial restructuring, but rather another form of less disruptive and costly cross-agency activity – ministerial restructuring being held as a last-resort measure. A framework developed by the OECD (Table 2.2) can help guide governments through a process to design more optimal solutions for working across existing agencies (Gerson, 2023[8]).

This chapter puts forward three questions that can be considered in defining the best approach:

- What kind of result is the initiative intended to achieve?
- What is the expected timing of the results (urgent, short-term long lasting)?
- How complex are the results?

The type of results the MoG changes in Estonia in both Round 1 and 2, are intended to achieve are what can be considered “policy-driven” initiatives. In other words, the aim of the reorganisation was to achieve better prioritisation to address complex, multidimensional problems of national scope. Other kinds of objectives could include improving administrative processes (e.g. the creation of shared service centres), or to improve service delivery for a specific community (e.g. creating one-stop shops for government services).

Setting out the specific time profile of the intended results can help decision makers identify if for example shorter, intense but temporary models will be effective, or if a longer-term result is intended, requiring a structure that can be sustained over time and adjust to changing circumstances. This is important given that ministerial restructuring takes time to implement, and experts generally agree that benefits take 2-3 years to materialise (White and Dunleavy, 2010[45]). Hence, these kinds of changes are only suitable to initiatives that are not of immediate urgency, and that have long-term permanent objectives.

The complexity of the objectives can also help determine the optimal model for results. Relatively simple objectives in a fairly stable operational environment may require a model focused on top-down information sharing, standardisation, control, and risk management – this may be the case in some internal reform implementation processes. In the case of more complex objectives, models may need to enable bottom-up information sharing, experimentation, innovation, learning and adaptation (Gerson, 2023[8]).

Additional factors that can help to determine the right model include the nature of agencies that are involved, and the government systems. When there are a high number of agencies involved, it will be harder to ensure long-term commitment to working together. The relationship between those agencies is also a factor – whether it is hierarchical or not, and the degree to which agencies trust each other. Governments systems determine various factors related to e.g. level of formality and legality needed, dynamics of coalitions vs. single-party governance, and others.

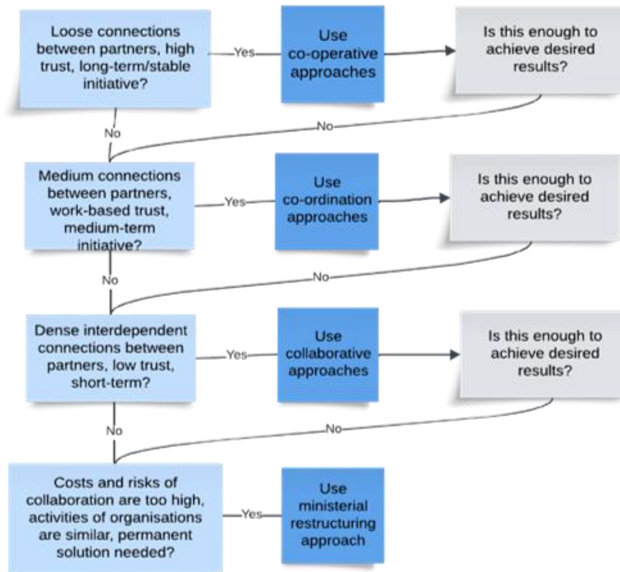
Table 2.2. Co-operation, co-ordination, collaboration, integration

	Co-operation (low intensity)	Co-ordination (medium)	Collaboration (intensive)	Integration (ministerial restructuring)
Description	• Adapting to each other or accommodating others' actions • Tacit information sharing • Independent goals • Power remains with organisations • Resources remain with organisations • Commitment and accountability to own organisation • Low risk/low reward	• Joint policies, programmes, and aligned resources • Structured communication flows, formalised project-based information sharing • Semi-interdependent goals • Power remains with parent organisations • Commitment and accountability to parent organisations and project	• System change • Frequent communication • Tactical information sharing • Pooled, collective resources • Negotiated shared goals • Power is shared between organisations • Commitment and accountability to network first and community and parent organisation	• Structural merging of previously independent agencies (partial or whole) • Integrated communication and information systems • One set of common resources • One set of organisational goals • Power is concentrated in the new organisation • Commitment and accountability to new organisation Benefits
Benefits	• Low transaction costs • Low risk • Clear accountability	• Higher potential impact than co-operation	• Higher potential impact than co-operation or co-ordination	• High potential impact • Lower long term transaction costs • Clear accountability • Easier to sustain over long term
Challenges	• Low impact • Low potential for lasting internal change	• Higher transaction costs • Harder to sustain commitment	• Very high transaction costs • Very hard to sustain • High risk (Depends on high levels of trust) • Blurred accountability	• Very high short term set up costs • Highly disruptive. • Risk of path dependency (hard to undo/stop) • Risk of agencification (e.g. if new entities are created from parts of old ones).

Source: Gerson, D. (2023[8]), “A framework for working effectively across public agencies”, https://doi.org/10.1787/c6b0d3a7-en.

The more intensive the changes envisioned are, the higher transaction and co-ordination costs they will engender. In other words, the more agencies are required to deviate from their usual processes, the more costs will rise. The most effective model will therefore be the one that reduces the intensity of change to the minimal level needed to achieve the desired result (Gerson, 2023[8]). The below decision chart can be used to ascertain the necessity of a more intensive approach.

Figure 2.6. What is the right intensity of model to use?



Source: Gerson D. (2023[8]), "A framework for working effectively across public agencies", https://doi.org/10.1787/c6b0d3a7-en.

CoGs can support decision makers by providing data and analysis around alternative models of organisational restructuring. In most cases they tend to be cheaper, faster, and more adaptable, and hence preferable if they can achieve the desired result. It is important to note that initiatives can pass through different kinds of approaches at different phases of their development – often beginning with collaboration in design phase, moving to co-ordination for implementation, and perhaps co-operation for reporting. Organisational restructuring is not nearly as adaptable – it is very costly and disruptive to put in place, and even more so to undo.

The below table provides an illustration of the types of questions that could be asked by the centre of government prior to a machinery change (White, A. and Dunleavy P, 2010) to further probe the necessity of such restructuring in Estonia's context, if that is the decision on the table.

Table 2.3. Questions to ask when analysing structural changes

Questions to ask before reconfiguring departments	Analysis shows that:
Have we considered alternatives to organisational restructuring?	Administrative savings and greater policy co-ordination can often be achieved through a lighter model.
Are we prepared to spend significant resources on this?	Administrative costs of restructuring can be high in many forms: loss of productivity, levelling up differential pay and allowances, higher attrition and turnover, investment to combine IT houses.
Can we afford a temporary loss of productivity and a minimum of two years before realising concrete benefits?	It can take two years for the new organisation to settle, and three or more to realise expected benefits.
Is this reorganisation primarily related to the politics of cabinet formation?	Changes undertaken for purely political reasons are the least likely to deliver real benefits.

Source: White, A., & Dunleavy, P. (2010[45]), *Making and Breaking Whitehall Departments: A guide to machinery of government changes*, https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/27949/1/Making_and_breaking_Whitehall_departments_%28LSERO%29.pdf.

2.3.5. Understanding the role of the CoG in changing the machinery

When considering MoG changes, decision makers and senior leadership of the public administration can work together to envisage the changes with a view to ensuring the effectiveness and the delivery of better policy outcomes. Three key enablers can be used to enhance the changes: defining a role for the CoG in guiding machinery change, setting frameworks to standardise restructuring processes, and strengthening change leadership and communication.

As the support structure for the highest-level forum of decision makers, CoGs are highly involved in fostering quality decision- making processes (OECD, 2018[46]). OECD findings show that a top priority for COGs (73% of the 26 CoGs surveyed) is providing policy advice to help decision makers debate policy options based on data and analysis and impact (OECD, 2024[2]). Most CoGs have a wide range of practices which compose this function, including agenda setting, managing the preparation, and follow-up of the work of the executive branch. Although MoG changes are most often a political decision, most CoGs are responsible for providing advice to the head of government on any such proposed machinery of government changes and, if required, preparing documentation necessary to give effect to the change.

Providing options with analysis for consideration is a key enabler for effective MoG change

The CoG can further enhance the delivery of MoG changes through its role as a bridge at the interface of the political and administrative spheres of government (OECD, 2024[2]). Particularly given the unique context of the very small proportion of Estonian civil servants who are political appointees – only 35 out of the civil service of 2500 – the GO can play an enhanced role in maintaining strong and trusted relationships between the political and the administrative levels of government. Through the role of the Secretary of State as the head of the public service and with the responsibility to observe and participate in Cabinet meetings, the GO is well placed to proactively communicate analysis and advice regarding MoG changes under consideration by a new government. By providing data-based analysis on such changes, based on previous experiences, early in the transition process, the GO can enhance its effectiveness in guiding new political leadership through potential MoG changes.

The centre of government’s capacities to synthesise data and develop strategic insights from their unique position between the political and administrative, as well as their technical expertise on relevant policy areas, makes it well positioned to support decision makers considering MoG changes. The centre of government in Estonia can further emphasise the value that the CoG has to offer decision makers in this context by requiring the development of analysis presenting multiple options for achieving joined-up results, including reorganisations, and their potential impacts prior to the confirmation of MoG changes. The GO would benefit from the development of methodologies that would helpto quickly assess the impacts, costs, time requirements, and other factors of proposed changes, as well as alternative arrangement based on institutional memory or what has worked in the past.

Taking such an approach has the potential to improve the design of MoG changes, reduce their frequency if policymakers find less disruptive solutions to achieve their objectives, and improve the legitimacy and acceptance of the changes within the public administration and among those who are called on to implement them. In the first round of MoG changes undertaken in Estonia in 2023, the GO provided analysis to the incoming cabinet regarding potential options and impacts for reorganising line ministries and implicated agencies. In Round 2, this analytical capacity was not utilised to its full potential, as the GO was not asked to provide analysis to decision makers as negotiations took place behind closed doors. This may be a contributing factor to the often-expressed lack of understanding of the rationale and necessity of the second round compared to the first.

Providing comprehensive and relevant technical analysis to support implementation

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) houses some of the more significant administrative and human resources functions in the CoG system of Estonia. Together with the GO, the MoF would benefit from collaboratively developing a framework for analysis of future MoG proposals. A recommended approach would be to conduct a quantitative internal impact assessment of the previous machinery changes in the Round 1 and Round 2 reorganisations, similarly to the analysis undertaken previously but on a larger scale. This evaluation could quantify changes which have been reported informally throughout the process of this report, such as changes in employee morale, attrition rates, and resourcing costs. A clear, centralised, and data-focused report gathering evidence on the costs of restructuring could be a significant basis for improved decision-making processes for future reorganisations. By leveraging this data, the government would also be able to project more realistic timeframes for achieving policy objectives, while ensuring that future reorganisations are informed by data-based insights and aligned with long-term strategic goals. Housing this impact assessment within the CoG implies a co-ordination role, however the primary data should be sourced from the affected departments and units.

Setting common frameworks and standards to facilitate MoG changes

Frameworks and standards play a crucial role in MoG changes as do good knowledge management practices. They help to reduce uncertainty and, hence, the space for negotiation on thorny issues such as budget transfers and support staff. By setting clear standards, methodologies and criteria, the CoG can help to ensure that all parties involved in the changes are heard from, and that processes are transparent, consistent and fair. This can help to speed up implementation by reducing the time needed to negotiate each element of the transfer – which was mostly done by Secretaries General themselves. Setting common standards through the CoG for the concrete, operational methodology of MoG changes can enable smoother and more effective change processes, as well as allow for enhanced analysis and foresight of envisioned changes ahead of time. The governments of Australia and the United Kingdom (Box 2.7) have established a set frameworks for calculating resource division between affected agencies, which is often a significant point of contention in MoG changes. By establishing a similar framework and set of guidelines, Estonia could avoid the lengthy case-by-case negotiation process between Secretaries General in the event of change and centralise the methodology.

Box 2.7. Frameworks for MoG change management in Australia and the United Kingdom

Australian Public Service, Australia

The APS Change Framework, developed by the APS Change Management Centre of Excellence within the Department of Home Affairs, is an enterprise change management framework tailored specifically for the APS. Created with input from stakeholders across the APS, the Framework supports, enterprise-wide change by providing guidance, tools, and templates for practitioners at all levels of expertise. Supporting resources and advisory services are available from the APS Change Management Centre of Excellence to assist organisations in adopting and applying the Framework effectively. The Framework is flexible and adaptable to changes of any scale or complexity and helps organisations navigate four key stages:

1. Understanding the change
2. Assessing impacts and stakeholders
3. Managing implementation
4. Embedding the change so the objectives are met for the organisation

Cabinet Office, United Kingdom

The Cabinet Office has also developed a guide to MoG changes, intended for those leading MoG change. It also establishes key principles and identifies key contacts to obtain more practical and operational guidance. The guide suggests a phased approach:

1. Phase 1: "Preparation," focusing on appointing key roles, planning, and initial communication
2. Phase 2: "Hitting the ground running," involves developing a detailed blueprint including building a transition team for the first 100 days to ensure business continuity and effective communication.
3. Phase 3: "Implementation," emphasises stabilising the affected organisations, ensuring staff involvement, and evaluating the successes of the MoG changes.

The guide also includes advice and analysis of previous MoG changes, and guidance on legal instruments, financial transfers, and resource management.

Sources: Government of Australia (2024[47]), *APS Change Framework,* https://www.apsacademy.gov.au/resources/aps-change-framework. Government of the United Kingdom (2016[48]), Machinery of Government Guidance, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81a03aed915d74e6233465/2016_07_29_machinery_of_government_guidance.pdf.

The setting of common standards and frameworks across government can enable more joined-up, effective work. In particular, two administrative separations were highlighted during interviews for this chapter as creating a challenge for MoG changes: separate IT houses, and separate employers. Although the issue is complex, shared IT services throughout all line ministries and agencies would significantly simplify not only MoG changes but also potentially improve whole-of-government policy action and co-ordination as a whole in the long term. This would enable in Estonia shared standards for records management and digital archiving, which could enhance institutional memory and co-ordinated action. Finally, the creation of a centralised state employer or a shared employment framework across ministries would also benefit Estonia by simplifying administrative difficulties of standardising allowances, benefits, and leave during MoG changes. It could potentially also aid in levelling the playing field in terms of perceived attractiveness of individual line ministries, as well as contribute to an overall sense of a more cohesive public service model.

Using the CoG to bridge the political-administrative interface

Machinery of government change is driven often by political considerations including placing political emphasis on a specific policy area (for instance the Energy, Sec and Net Zero reorganisation in the United Kingdom) or a reality such as Brexit which led to the Department of Exiting the EU also providing a signal to the public that the government was focused on 'Getting Brexit done'.

Effective leadership from decision makers and from the highest levels of the public service is crucial to manage MoG changes and ensure their success. A clear vision and mandate from political leaders can enable the public administration to deliver on stated aims. Translating vision and priorities into co-ordinated action benefits from a co-ordinated approach across the government and planning of the necessary resources to deliver on the priorities (OECD, 2024[2]). On 12 August 2024, the Prime Minister of Estonia, Kristen Michal released an address titled "Ministerial competences in the management of the ministry and ministerial responsibilities," announcing the upcoming transfers of functions (Government of Estonia, 2024a[49]). However, interviews undertaken for this chapter surfaced that some senior leaders of the public administration were made aware of the Round 2 changes through the media, rather than internally by the administration. Changes such as these should ideally be communicated directly from senior leadership as soon as possible. Public announcements of the changes can also be enhanced by developing a more targeted communications framework which would further clarify divisions of responsibility, as in Australia and Canada (Box 2.8).

Box 2.8. Setting and communicating goals from the centre in Australia and Canada

Australia

In Australia,Charter letters are provided to ministers to set out expectations in any machinery of government change. When responsibilities move between portfolios via an Administrative Arrangements Order (AAO), a new or amended charter letter is often issued to line ministries to communicate the updated expectations. They are therefore an important communication mechanism for making MoG changes operationally meaningful at the ministerial level. Charter letters at the state level have been made public in some instances- for instance in Queensland where in 2024, they set out values, deliverables, goals and KPIs that were expected to outline government accountability.

Canada

Mandate letters in Canada serve as a valuable governance tool for establishing clear policy objectives and driving change. These documents are issued by the Prime Minister to ministers and outline specific priorities and responsibilities, ensuring alignment with the government's overarching agenda. By explicitly communicating expectations, mandate letters enhance transparency and accountability, both within the government and to the public. The current government has provided a single-mission mandate letter, with cabinet ministers responsible for returning proposals that will realise the vision set by the CoG. This approach can help to enhance the communication of strategic priorities to the broader public administration, focusing all policy areas of the government on a handful of goals. This tool not only supports policy coherence but also helps build public trust by offering a clear roadmap for the objective of the government.

Source: Queensland Government (2024[50]), *Our priorities - Right to Information - Department of the Premier and Cabinet,* https://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/right-to-info/published-info/our-priorities;); Government of Canada (2025[51]), Mandate Letter, https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2025/05/21/mandate-letter; Government of Canada (2023[52]), *The Mandate Letter Tracker and the Results and Delivery approach*, https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/results-delivery-unit.html.

Setting clear standards and expectations for change leadership and management

Change management is challenging for even the most seasoned leaders, especially in government settings where regulations, hierarchy and general risk aversion tend to slow change processes and reduce the scope of action. Governments across the OECD are increasingly examining how to take a more sophisticated and institutional approach to change-management issues and strategies. Governments have begun to move away from top-down change-management processes to encompass a broader view of change which involves integrating bottom-up and top-down activities, including systematic problem identification, ideas generation, filtering of alternative solutions and their implementation (OECD, 2020[53]). The CoG can be an essential vehicle for enhanced change management processes through the setting of frameworks, standards, and the issuing of guidance, as is done in Australia (Box 2.7) and the European Union (Box 2.9).

Box 2.9. The European Union's Centre for Organisational Transformation

The European Commission's Centre for Organisational Transformation (CfOT) is another example of central support to re-organisations. It sits within the Secretariat-General. It was created to tackle the mismatch between traditional organisational structures and the complex, interconnected crises and challenges facing societies today. It aimed to support organisations to achieve their objectives and adopt participatory leadership methods. More specifically, it provides:

1. Consultancy, strategic advice, and support on transformation processes and collaboration
2. Capacity building, helping colleagues embrace more collaborative and flexible ways of working
3. Co-ordination of the Collaboration Hub, a community of practice for organisational transformation
4. Scientific advice on knowledge sharing, collaboration, and new ways of working
5. Strategic partnerships with external organisations. It is intended to support the Commission modernise how it works shifting away from top-down hierarchies toward more participatory, flexible, and sustainable ways of organising work.

Source: European Commission (2025[54]), *About the Centre for Organisational Transformation,* https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/node/82247_pl

While MoG changes tend to focus on structural and technical issues, the human factors should be at the heart of any change management strategy. Civil servants impacted by such changes often experience high levels of stress and anxiety due to uncertainty and fear of unknown. This can have significant impacts on their mental health, potentially resulting in retention challenges, ultimately and reducing overall productivity. The key to effective change management is communication – both related to the purpose of the change and process to expect – and individualised attention and support from line management, senior management and beyond. All people managers should be expected to undergo training on change management, emotional intelligence, and psychological safety, so as to foster an environment within which change processes contribute to productivity rather than the opposite. Employees should also have access to information resources, including online websites, townhall meetings, available advisors in HR departments and others. This kind of approach can be standardised and put into place whenever an MoG change is required. It would also benefit from being evaluated after every change to identify opportunities for improvement in the next process.

Setting effective timelines

MoG changes should clearly set out expected results and be accompanied by a realistic timeline for achievement. The CoG can play a larger role in ensuring this, by developing strategic advice to decision makers throughout the process of designing and implementing MoG changes.

The timeline of the changes must consider both administrative, legal, and budgetary contexts, and include a realistic medium-term proposal to achieve the stated aims. Given that the budgetary cycle is annual, changes made mid-year create challenges in adequately resourcing the new structures. A better alternative, as was done in Round 2 of the changes, is to implement changes if feasible in the beginning of the calendar year, regardless of the decision date. This timeframe balances the need to achieve quick wins with the necessary time to implement operational changes. However, it may also create a greater time lag between announced changes and implementation – requiring effective change leadership (see above section).

It could also be more effective to align major MoG changes with regular four-year parliamentary election cycles. At this point, when a cabinet shuffle is expected, change within governance structures is anticipated. Given that machinery of government changes are estimated to take at least two years to fully take root in the new functional structure, and two to three years to begin demonstrating results, a four-year cycle would be the minimum time needed for MoG changes to take root, their anticipated benefits to materialise, and the government to evaluate their success (White and Dunleavy, 2010[45]). Frequent or premature changes risk undermining outcomes from previous MoG changes and could detract from their overall effectiveness.

2.4. Options for further exploration

The following sets out a number of options for consideration by Estonia. This is complemented by the tool for the centre of government (online Annex) which sets out the questions that should be asked when embarking on a significant machinery of government change. The following options could be explored by Estonia going forward:

1. Develop a methodology and process to advise governments (particularly at the start of their mandate) on the cost/benefit of organisational restructuring and alternative approaches. This could include:
    a. Identification of likely direct and indirect costs based on previous exercises
    b. Timeline for benefits realisation
    c. Risk assessment and management.
    d. Alternative solutions to consider with associated pros and cons (see above section)
2. Articulate a set of principles that should be shared between the political and administrative actors stating when to consider structural changes and when they should be avoided. These could include aspects such as policy justification, timeline, frequency, and process.
3. Set clear standards for implementing MoG changes, in order to reduce the scope for case-by-case negotiations and simplify the process. These could include methodologies to calculate FTEs, associated support staff, budget transfers, strategic planning processes, and document transfers.
4. Clarify roles of actors and processes for implementing MoG changes – including for the government office, corporate services, and related bodies.
5. Develop a manual and support function for change management to support leadership in designing, communicating, and implementing structural changes effectively. This could be a role for the Top Civil Service centre in the GO.
6. Continue to unify and/or harmonise the structures of the public service to facilitate changes, including IT houses, employment frameworks (including pay, and benefits), and document archival systems.
7. Set out commitments to evaluate the results of the machinery of government in the medium-term to ensure objectives are being met and in particular the better delivery of complex and multi-faceted policy priorities.

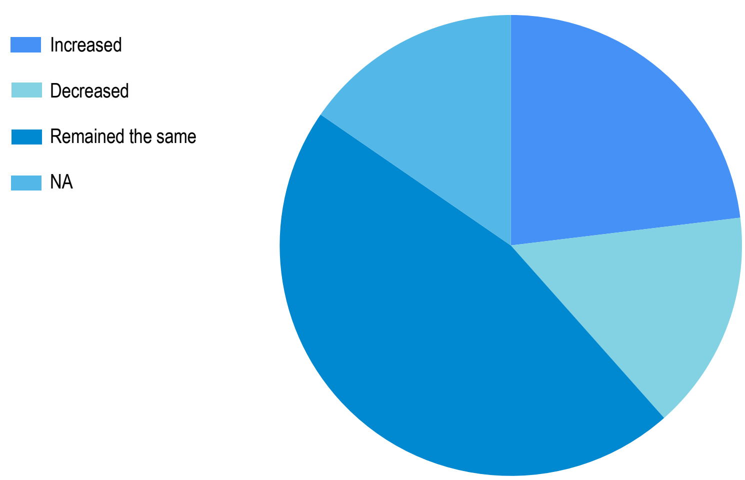
3 Portugal: Bridging the political-technical interface

This chapter examines how the centre of government (CoG) can strengthen its role as a bridge between political and administrative levels of government to improve the coherence, quality, and delivery of cross-cutting policies. The chapter examines, in particular, the institutional architecture that supports the General Secretariat of Government (SGGOV), the Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Public Policies (PLANAPP), and the REPLAN network. Whilst Portugal has developed an integrated framework combining strategic foresight, planning, monitoring and co-ordination functions, a number of challenges have emerged including fragmented systems, overlapping mandates and limited systematic use of technical input in upstream political decision making. REPLAN, as a cross-ministerial network of planning units, shows strong potential in aligning strategies, build analytical capacity and foster a shared policy culture. The chapter underlines the important role of the CoG as a bridge between the political cadre and administrative officials ensuring that political priorities are translated into viable, coherent, and effective policies.

3.1. Introduction

One of the defining roles of the CoG is to act as a bridge between the political and technical levels of government. This interface is fundamental to ensuring that political priorities are translated into coherent strategies and implemented effectively across the public administration (OECD, 2024[3]). In a context marked by increasing complexity, overlapping crises, and shifting political dynamics, the CoG's ability to manage this relationship is more critical than ever. Figure 3.1 illustrates how this interface has evolved across OECD countries, with many CoGs reporting changes in their capacity to engage with elected officials since 2019.

Figure 3.1. Change in navigating, influencing, or interacting with elected officials since 2019



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished.

Bridging the political-technical interface is essential because the public administration holds institutional memory, in depth knowledge of public sector processes, and a clear understanding of the enablers and constraints of policy implementation. The administration also brings new ideas to the table and is often well positioned to adopt a long-term perspective beyond political cycles.

Managing this interface is not purely a technical function but requires trust, clarity, and a skilled workforce. Within this context, the CoG must navigate distinct institutional logics, align short-term political imperatives with longer-term development goals, and preserve the neutrality and professionalism of the civil service while remaining responsive to political leadership. This demands not only well-defined roles and responsibilities, but also effective co-ordination mechanisms, sustained communication channels, and shared accountability structures.

Portugal has recognised the importance of strengthening this interface and has been undertaking important reforms to that effect since 2016. In 2021, the Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Public Policies (PLANAPP) was created at the CoG and the Public Administration Planning and Foresight Services Network (REPLAN). More recently, in 2024, Portugal created the General Secretariat of the government, reflecting the need to strengthen shorter term interdepartmental co-ordination in the implementation of cross-cutting policies. In this context, the creation of the Public Administration Forum (PAF) is expected to be tasked with the co-ordination of short-term and immediate priorities, alignment and implementation of cross-cutting public policies. All these changes belong to significant state reforms taking place in Portugal, with a dedicated Minister for State Reform in the present government. It is in this context that this chapter explores the mechanisms through which the CoG undertakes the bridging function and enables an effective relationship between the political and technical levels of government.

3.2. Context: Delivering on political priorities across government in Portugal

SGGOV and PLANAPP play a central role in the CoG, the SGGOV with a focus on shorter term issues and PLANAPP helping to steer and co-ordinate the strategic planning process, supporting greater alignment of priorities and improving the quality and consistency of strategic documents and choices. These co-ordinating CoG bodies cover the different stages of public policy cycles (foresight, planning, monitoring and evaluation). Whilst SGGOV and PLANAPP report to the Minister of the Presidency they are mandated at the same time to ensure ongoing collaboration with key sectorial ministries (Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Public Policies, 2023[55]).

SGGOV complements PLANAPP's role as it intervenes in the public policy cycle on short-term and immediate priorities, at both the decision making and approval stage. Its responsibilities in support of political decision making include the legislative and regulatory process, scheduling, interministerial co-ordination and alignment, and the production of knowledge.

In setting the organisational framework for policy implementation, SGGOV also strengthens the operational dimension, positioning itself as a public service delivery actor. The implementation of short-term monitoring and interim evaluation systems is critical to feeding policy implementation with useful, up-to-date and credible information, enabling the identification of any constraints or deviations from what was planned and the introduction of the necessary corrective measures.

Accordingly, SGGOV assesses the short-term outputs and results of public policy by monitoring progress in implementing public policies. At the same time, it drives and guides the operationalisation by sectoral ministries of rules, routines, processes, procedures and activities, so as to ensure effective and consequential government action.

PLANAPP also co-ordinates REPLAN, which serves as a platform for interministerial exchange and collaboration. REPLAN plays a key role in building internal capacities, facilitating peer learning, and helping align strategies and methodologies across ministries. It is increasingly positioned as an instrument for promoting data-informed policymaking, and for embedding participatory approaches in national foresight, planning, monitoring and evaluation. In a fragmented institutional landscape, PLANAPP (through REPLAN) helps strengthen the coherence of national strategies, supports the preparation of key public policies, and fosters capabilities across the administration.

Considering this institutional landscape, this chapter examines the institutional role of REPLAN, its current influence in supporting the CoG to bridge the political-technical interface, and opportunities and options to enhance its effectiveness. It identifies areas where Portugal's strategic decision making remains fragmented and where further institutional adjustments may be needed to strengthen the coherence and integration of government policy planning and delivery.

3.2.1. Portugal's strategic governance framework

Portugal's strategic governance framework brings together a diverse set of actors operating at the political, administrative, and technical levels. This system aims to promote coherent policy planning, long-term strategic alignment, and effective implementation across the central government. Despite being relatively recent in its current configuration, the framework builds on longstanding institutional arrangements that have evolved in response to new planning challenges and reform priorities.

At the political level, strategic direction is provided by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Presidency, line Ministers and Secretaries of State. These actors exercise political leadership, set cross-government priorities, and oversee implementation through two main key collective bodies: the Council of Ministers and the Meeting of Secretaries of State. The Council of Ministers is the main forum for policy decision making and co-ordination at the highest level of government. The meeting of Secretaries of State, governed by the Regimento do Conselho de Ministros, (Government of Portugal, 2025[56])functions as a preparatory and consensus-building platform, ensuring political coherence and cross-sector alignment before matters are elevated to the Council of Ministers. Both bodies are supported administratively and legally by the Secretary of State for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Administrative and technical co-ordination of short-term government action is ensured by the SGGOV. This body plays a decisive enabling role by supporting the Prime Minister and all members of government in interministerial co-ordination, in the systematisation and technical analysis of proposals, and in strengthening the quality of decision making by underpinning the process with information on relevance and coherence (e.g. quality control, deadlines and dependencies). It is responsible for ensuring the continuity of the decision-making process, from the moment an item enters the government circuit (Council of Ministers), through the technical preparation of legal instruments, the overall procedural consistency of the Council of Ministers workflow, the alignment of policy instruments with the government Programme, and short term interministerial co-ordination and articulation, through to the point at which it emerges as a formalised and operational decision as outlined in Decree-Law No. 43-B/2024 (Government of Portugal, 2024[57]).

A recent institutional innovation was the establishment of PLANAPP in 2021, restructured in 2024 by Decree-Law 67/2024. PLANAPP operates under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and is tasked with strengthening Portugal's strategic planning and evaluation capacity related with public policies, with its explicit purpose, according to the corresponding strategic guidelines for 2025-2027 being ~~"Good Public Policies, Better Society"~~. Its responsibilities include the preparation of national-level foresight or strategic public policies, the development of data and analysis-informed policies, and the co-ordination of strategic planning capabilities across the central administration, as well as monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of public policies.

PLANAPP is also responsible for co-ordinating REPLAN, the Public Administration Planning and Foresight Services Network. REPLAN is a cross-ministerial network of planning units based in each ministry. Established in 2021, it aims to strengthen technical collaboration across ministries, support the alignment of ministerial plans with national priorities, and promote common public policy standards. REPLAN members are embedded within ministries and contribute to sectoral strategy development, foresight exercises, and public policy implementation planning, monitoring and evaluation.

At the ministerial level, planning departments within ministries carry out day-to-day strategic and operational planning work. These units, which form the operational core of REPLAN, are tasked with drafting strategic documents, co-ordinating internal policy planning processes, and ensuring that their ministry's priorities are articulated within broader government strategies. Their work is often shaped by the availability of technical capacity, political will, and alignment with EU funding requirements or programme priorities.

Recent developments relating to the reform of the Portuguese public administration, as reflected in the legal instruments adopted between 2023 and 2025, point to a renewed focus on and definition of the CoG as a cross-cutting structure, functionally differentiated and grounded in complementary roles. In this model, SGGOV emerges as a hub for co-ordination of short-term policy priorities, ensuring continuity in decision making and the operationalisation of government decisions, while PLANAPP consolidates a distinct and complementary role in longer-term strategic planning, foresight, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of public policies. This institutional architecture reflects a shift from a predominantly procedural CoG towards a more strategic centre with an integrated system of capabilities, in which political, technical, strategic and evaluative functions coexist in an articulated manner, reinforcing the coherence of government action, the quality of public decision making, and the state's capacity to deliver sustainable results throughout the public policy cycle.

Together, all of the above institutions constitute a multi-actor, multi-level governance structure. This structure aims to enhance the coherence, predictability, and performance of government planning, efficiency and efficacy by institutionalising technical input, fostering collaboration, and supporting alignment between strategic and budgetary priorities. However, as the rest of the report explores, the interface between political and technical levels, as well as between central and sectoral planning, remains an area in need of further institutional development and operational reinforcement.

3.2.2. Governance reforms to strengthen the alignment between the political and technical levels of government

Within this broader reflection on the strategic nature of the CoG, REPLAN (Rede de Serviços de Planeamento e Prospetiva da Administração Pública) has emerged as an institutional co-ordination mechanism designed to strengthen public policy strategic planning, foresight, monitoring and evaluation capacities across Portugal's public administration. Co-ordinated by PLANAPP, REPLAN connects services of all ministerial areas through formally designated representatives. As of March 2026, the network encompasses 26 services across all of the 17 ministerial domains, reflecting its broad cross-government reach, at the level of its plenary, with additional entities which participate at the level of its multisectoral teams.

REPLAN's legal basis is enshrined in Decree-Law No. 67/2024, which defines its purpose as fostering interministerial collaboration, harmonising planning methodologies, and supporting more integrated and forward-looking public policy design. It is not a decision-making entity, but rather a structured and institutionalised network that enables knowledge exchange, methodological alignment, and co-operation throughout the planning cycle, including foresight, planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Within the wider governance framework, REPLAN plays a complementary role to PLANAPP and SGGOV. While PLANAPP and SGGOV operate from the centre of government, REPLAN is embedded in the ministries themselves and serves as a platform for operational co-ordination and shared technical work. This positioning enables REPLAN to connect central guidance with sectoral implementation and foster peer learning among planning units across the administration.

The REPLAN network is structured around its plenary and five multisectoral teams, each co-co-ordinated by relevant ministerial areas and supported by PLANAPP:

- Foresight
- Planning
- Monitoring
- Evaluation
- Regional Co-ordination

These multisectoral teams serve as thematic hubs for the co-production of tools, strategic frameworks, and technical outputs. Examples include the national megatrends report, foresight guidance documents, and a shared methodology for policy evaluation. Teams also contribute to national-level planning exercises, including the preparation of the *Grandes Opções* and the Medium-Term National Budgetary-Structural Plan.

REPLAN's direction is shaped by annual action plans, validated by the network's plenary. The 2025 plan prioritises the standardisation of planning practices, the development of joint reference materials, and the expansion of strategic foresight capacity. These plans also foresee the creation of a shared repository of policy studies and data to support effective planning.

By creating space for technical co-operation and mutual learning, REPLAN strengthens a shared public policy culture and reinforces horizontal co-ordination across government. It facilitates the articulation of ministerial strategies with national priorities and contributes to building planning capacity across the administration. In doing so, it plays a growing role in embedding strategic foresight and policy evaluation into government processes and outputs.

REPLAN is increasingly recognised as a foundational component of Portugal's strategic governance framework. As a network anchored in line ministries and co-ordinated by PLANAPP at the centre, it contributes to ensuring that whole-of-government objectives are informed by robust analysis, shared methodologies, and sectoral insights. However, REPLAN's effectiveness remains constrained by several structural and institutional challenges that limit its capacity to fully steer government decision making.

3.3. Challenges and enablers for an effective political-technical interface

3.3.1. Challenges to REPLAN's strategic influence

As noted in the 2023 OECD report, the strategic planning system in Portugal remains fragmented, with overlapping responsibilities across multiple institutions and an absence of a clearly defined planning architecture or hierarchy between long-term, medium-term and sectoral strategies (OECD, 2023[58]). While REPLAN's, PLANAPP's and SGGOV´s have formal mandates, other actors retain critical planning and strategic policymaking functions. In parallel, planning departments embedded in line ministries also exercise important responsibilities. These units serve as PLANAPP's peers in sector-specific strategy design and implementation, and are the operational base of REPLAN, through which cross-government co-ordination is pursued. This is not necessarily a problem, and it is common in OECD countries. Yet there is no overarching framework that clearly articulates how these roles should be co-ordinated. The lack of a common methodology, standardised processes, and a shared calendar for the preparation and alignment of strategic documents further contributes to duplication and incoherence.

For instance, there is no explicit mandate that ensures REPLAN members are consulted earlier in the strategic planning processes to assure that its recommendations and advice are systematically integrated into ministerial planning and national policy formulation. Stakeholders noted that REPLAN's contributions are often solicited on an ad hoc basis, with limited lead time to respond. This is particularly evident in the lead-up to meetings of Secretaries of State, with short time windows before decisions are taken by the Council of Ministers, and this limits the potential for meaningful ex ante advice. Strengthening REPLAN's direct connection to key co-ordination platforms and its recognised role in upstream policy development could further help to embed data and analysis more systematically across the public policy cycles.

Although REPLAN began to operate at full scale by the end of 2023, its work was temporarily interrupted following the 2024 government transition, due to the need to reappoint members. This procedural delay – common after changes in government – led to a gap of nearly six months before the network could resume its activities. Such interruptions can further limit the continuity and institutional memory required for effective strategic co-ordination.

As a relatively recent initiative, REPLAN is still consolidating its identity and function within Portugal's strategic planning architecture and, as several stakeholders noted, still needs to be empowered to undertake its full range of functions, especially in a context of several changes of government. Designed to serve as an interministerial network for planning and foresight services, its ambition is to build shared capacities, improve co-ordination across ministries, and, in particular, support the development and alignment of cross-cutting strategic priorities. In this context, REPLAN's potential to act as a strategic hub is not yet fully realised. The following section outlines a set of practices that Portugal could consider fostering for a more forward-looking and data and analysis-based governance system enabling a more effective bridge between political cabinets and technical levels of government.

3.3.2. Bridging the gap between political cabinets and technical units

Portugal's public administration is characterised, as in a number of other countries, by a partial divide between political decision making and the administrative apparatus. Across ministries, the degree of integration between planning departments and political leadership varies significantly. While in some ministries there is a high degree of integration between the two spheres – especially in those managing EU funding – in others, planning departments operate in some isolation from political leadership, with weak or irregular engagement in policy formulation.

This gap is present in other OECD countries (Fernández-I-Marín et al., 2024). To address it, some countries – such as Australia and Denmark – have taken steps to better codify the relationship between the civil service and the political level (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Public service neutrality in Australia and Denmark

In **Australia**, the Public Service Amendment Bill 2024 was intended to renew and strengthen understanding between ministers and agency heads on the apolitical nature of public service appointments. It included a new value of stewardship which was developed through extensive consultation with responses from over 1500 Australian Public Service (APS) staff and builds as a result on the capability and institutional knowledge into the future. It requires the Secretaries Board to prepare an APS Purpose Statement; requires agency heads to uphold and promote the APS Purpose Statement; provides that ministers must not direct agency heads on individual employment matters; requires agency heads to put in place measures to enable decision making to occur at the lowest appropriate classification; requires regular capability reviews; requires the Secretaries Board to request and publish regular long-term insights reports.

Denmark maintains a politically neutral, merit-based civil service, supported by a clear delineation of roles between elected officials and public servants. A central pillar of this arrangement is White Paper 1443/2004, which codifies the relationship between civil servants and politically appointed advisers. To safeguard the integrity and coherence of ministerial work, the government not only endorsed the White Paper's recommendation to limit the number of special advisers per minister to two or three, it went further, requiring that each minister should have no more than one special adviser. The adviser's primary responsibility is to support media and press relations, rather than to engage in political or tactical policy advice. This strict limitation reflects a deliberate effort to prevent confusion or overlap between partisan guidance and professional civil service advice. It also reinforces the role of the civil service as the primary source of comprehensive, objective policy expertise. The Danish system relies on ongoing collaboration and mutual respect between civil servants and advisers, grounded in clearly defined roles.

Source: OECD (2024[2]), *Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity: Compendium of Practices*, https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en; OECD (2007[59]), *Political Advisors and Civil Servants in European Countries*, , https://doi.org/10.1787/5kml60qnxrkc-en.

The disconnect in Portugal is driven by several factors: the short-term dynamics of political agendas, the 24 hours news cycle, the need for trusted personal advisors in ministerial cabinets, and a decline in the public administration's capacity to attract and retain young talent, to name a few. Ministers and Secretaries of State frequently prefer to rely on politically appointed advisors, which reduces the influence of senior civil servants responsible for strategic planning and policy formulation within the administration. In some instances, ministries lack a designated interlocutor for strategic planning, making it difficult for REPLAN to engage with the right representative within the cabinets in a structured way. This is often due to the absence of a dedicated body or unit in charge of public policies. In such cases, the interlocutors tend to be policy implementation units, such as directorates-general or agencies, which have comparatively narrower mandates and lower institutional visibility within their ministries.

The understandable dominance of political logic in agenda-setting means that strategic planning units operate largely as knowledge-producing bodies, rather than strategic actors. Many stakeholders noted that planning teams are often brought in late in the process and expected to validate documents already shaped by ministerial advisors. This dynamic not only marginalises the role of technical expertise but also leads to fragmented processes, where strategic goals are not adequately defined, monitored, or adjusted over time. If those in charge of planning are not systematically involved, strategic documents may lack coherence across sectors. Different ministries may move in parallel without co-ordination, which can result in overlapping strategies without alignment to shared national goals. Stakeholders interviewed for this chapter cited duplication of effort, lack of visibility over existing strategies, and the absence of a centralised overview as persistent issues.

The lack of structured routines linking planning units with political leadership further limits the influence of technical work. While forums for discussion exist – such as the weekly CoM's preparatory meetings of Secretaries of State – REPLAN members are not always systematically consulted or informed of the decisions that arise from these meetings. Strengthening this interface requires more than informal engagement; it demands institutionalised mechanisms – such as standing agenda items, structured feedback loops, or regular joint briefings – that create regular, early opportunities for technical input, backed by political will. The objective is not to over-engineer the process or slow down decision making, but to create formal working routines that support meaningful technical input, reinforce collaboration, and build trust between political and technical actors.

International experience suggests that bridging these gaps does not necessarily require rigid structures, but rather predictable interactions between political and technical levels around a limited number of shared priorities. In this regard, several OECD countries have adopted multiple arrangements that help overcome this disconnect between the strategic centre and political decision making, and to facilitate strategic co-ordination between technical units, political leadership and external actors. These platforms vary in format and formality but share the objective of supporting shared reflection on long-term challenges and aligning policy direction across ministries. For instance, Ireland has introduced formal mechanisms to strengthen the interface between political leadership and senior civil servants, offering useful models for embedding upstream technical input into high-level decision making (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2. Technical committees supporting decision making at the political level in Ireland

Ireland – Senior Officials Groups (SOGs)

In Ireland, each Cabinet Committee is supported by a corresponding Senior Officials Group, composed of senior civil servants from key departments and chaired by a senior official from the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister's Office). These groups meet regularly in advance of Cabinet Committee meetings and also convene independently to co-ordinate cross-departmental work on strategic issues that may not require formal political discussion.

SOGs play a pivotal role in Ireland's co-ordination ecosystem. Their responsibilities include preparing Cabinet Committee agendas, aligning departmental positions, brokering interdepartmental compromises, and escalating unresolved issues for political attention. This ensures that political decision making is supported by coherent technical inputs and cross-ministerial consensus where possible.

By operating in parallel to political committees and maintaining a direct link to the centre of government, SOGs contribute to institutional memory across political cycles. They are instrumental in advancing national efforts on complex, cross-cutting priorities such as child poverty and housing.

Ireland's experience illustrates how structured, formalised co-ordination among senior civil servants can strengthen the political-technical interface without introducing new bureaucratic layers, offering a useful model for other governments seeking to institutionalise early and meaningful technical engagement in policy development.

Sources: Government of Ireland (2021[60]), *Cabinet Committees of the 31st Government*, Department of the Taoiseach, https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/organisation-information/cabinet-committees-of-the-31st-government/

Based on these examples, three actions could enable a more effective interface between political and technical levels of government, through targeted governance adjustments.

Firstly, dedicating sessions for political and technical actors to collaborate on cross-cutting policy issues. In practice, this could result in Portugal dedicating periodic Council of Ministers sessions to a single cross-cutting policy issue, with REPLAN providing technical input. This would mean tasking REPLAN with producing analytical inputs and policy options ahead of each thematic session. Focusing each session on one issue would create the conditions for substantive cabinet deliberation on cross-cutting priorities. Over time, this arrangement would give REPLAN a concrete function in translating data and analysis into co-ordinated political dialogue, supporting the CoG's role in steering decision making and delivery.

Secondly, structurally embedding more frequent interactions between political and technical levels of government. This would foster more regular political-technical inteactions with REPLAN itself. Cabinet representatives could be designated to participate in REPLAN on a regular basis alongside technical staff. This arrangement would strengthen the links between political leadership and the planning network, enhance communication between ministerial cabinets and technical units, and help ensure that REPLAN's work is better aligned with cross-government priorities.

Finally, prioritising policy challenges, that require cross-cutting policy input. For Portugal, this could include the Council of Ministers identifying a small number of challenges (1 to 3) to be addressed by REPLAN each year, with the corresponding results and conclusions being reported back to the Council of Ministers by REPLAN.

Taken together, these actions aim to embed more structured, visible and strategically aligned interactions between Portugal's technical planning capacities and the political sphere. Of course, implementing such an arrangement would require political support at the highest level. The success of REPLAN in this role depends on whether the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister and the Secretary of State of the Presidency of the CoM are willing to open space in existing political routines for structured technical input.

3.3.3. Strengthening the co-ordination role of REPLAN in policymaking

In addition to its technical co-ordination functions, REPLAN could assume a stronger governance role by structuring upstream policy preparation across ministries. In several OECD countries, CoGs are increasingly steering the early stages of policymaking, not by centralising control, but by setting standards and routines that help ensure strategic coherence (OECD, 2024[3]). In Portugal, REPLAN is well positioned to fulfil a similar role by providing structured, anticipatory co-ordination for major cross-cutting initiatives. This would allow the network to move beyond information exchange, offering a more systematic contribution to the quality, alignment, and strategic orientation of key policies before they reach key decision-making platforms such as the Secretaries of State meetings or the Council of Ministers.

Currently, there is no shared approach to preparing policy initiatives requiring co-ordination across ministries. The current process varies significantly between departments, with different internal formats and timelines, and no structured requirements for early analytical input. In complex reform areas – such as digital transformation – this can lead to fragmented implementation, overlapping interventions, and missed opportunities for cross-government co-ordination.

Some countries have addressed this by introducing standardised procedures for early-stage policy development. In Australia, for example, all Cabinet proposals that are likely to have significant societal or economic impact must include a formal "Impact Analysis" document, developed using a structured framework and reviewed centrally (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Policy preparation through impact analyses in Australia

In Australia, the Office of Impact Analysis (OIA), housed within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, provides mandatory and comprehensive guidance to line ministries on how to prepare policy proposals for Cabinet consideration. This is codified in the Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis (2023), which is binding on all policy proposals expected to change rights, powers, or obligations and have significant community impact.

The Guide sets out seven structured questions that each proposal must answer, covering the problem definition, policy objectives, options analysis, consultation, and evaluation. These questions must be addressed using a standardised structure, with support from templates, methodological tools, and training provided by the OIA. All significant proposals must be accompanied by an "Impact Analysis" document, which is subject to assessment and public release.

The OIA also maintains an extensive library of past analyses, shares good practices, and reviews submissions in two formal assessment stages. The Impact Analysis is required for proposals to Cabinet that are assessed as "Any policy proposal or action of government, with an expectation of compliance, that would result in a more than minor change in behaviour or impact for people, businesses or community organisations". This ensures that policy advice is supported by rigorous data and analysis and aligned with government-wide expectations for analytical quality, consultation, and transparency (Australian Government, 2026[26]).

This system exemplifies how the CoG can shape better policy outcomes by formalising analytical standards and procedures across government, ensuring consistency and accountability.

Source: Australian Government (2023[61]), *Guide to Policy Impact Analysis*, Office of Impact Analysis, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, https://oia.pmc.gov.au

While the Australian model is highly formalised, its underlying approach of preparing proposals based on a clear rationale, defined objectives and considered alternatives offers insights that may be relevant in a broader context. For Portugal, a streamlined version could be adapted and institutionalised through REPLAN as an intermediate step in the preparation of significant policy reforms.

One enabler could be to mandate that selected cross-cutting reforms or major strategic proposals undergo a qualified technical review co-ordinated by REPLAN before reaching the preparatory meeting of Secretaries of State or the Council of Ministers. To support this process, REPLAN could develop a common policy preparation template, including a summary of the problem definition, links to existing strategic documents (such as the *Grandes Opções* or Portugal 2030), expected outputs and risks, and a short analysis of delivery options. This would not replace political discretion but would provide a structured input that enhances the quality and consistency of strategic proposals.

Piloting this governance mechanism in a few policy areas would allow it to evolve incrementally and test its utility for both technical teams and political decision makers. Over time, a structured REPLAN review step could improve the use of data and foresight, clarify alignment with national priorities, and reinforce REPLAN's role as a strategic interface between political ambition and technical planning.

Another enabler to facilitate upstream co-ordination is through the use of digital tools. In Portugal, co-ordination around cross-government strategies often relies on *ad hoc* communication and offline exchanges. For instance, ministries contribute to documents such as EU Medium-Term National Budgetary-Structural Plan through email or shared files, with limited visibility of parallel inputs or evolving drafts. Several interlocutors pointed to the absence of a shared digital workspace as a barrier to timely feedback and alignment during the preparation of strategic initiatives.

Estonia and New Zealand offer useful examples of how digital platforms can improve executive co-ordination, enabling shared access to evolving documents, tracking inputs and decisions, and allowing early feedback. While their design and use cases differ, both platforms provide structured, transparent environments for policy preparation and collective decision making. In Estonia, the e-Cabinet system allows ministers to review and comment on proposals in real time, significantly reducing the need for physical briefings and streamlining Cabinet meetings and in New Zealand, the CabNet platform ensures secure access to Cabinet papers and supports co-ordination across departments by enabling timely submission, revision, and tracking of proposals (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.4. Document management systems for Cabinets in Estonia and New Zealand

Estonia

The Estonian Government uses a dedicated digital platform, the e-Cabinet system, to co-ordinate cabinet-level decision making. The platform functions as a secure, multi-user information environment that enables ministers and senior officials to access all relevant materials for government meetings in real time.

e-Cabinet allows documents and preparatory materials to be submitted, reviewed and discussed electronically, reducing the need for physical paperwork and pre-meeting briefings. Items for discussion are organised and updated continuously, and ministers can consult the agenda, provide input, or flag items for debate directly within the system.

The system supports structured collaboration between ministries by enabling early access to policy proposals, facilitating cross-sectoral input, and reducing administrative burden. Since its implementation, the average duration of weekly cabinet meetings has decreased significantly, from 4-5 hours to around 30 minutes.

New Zealand – CabNet System

CabNet is a secure digital platform used to manage Cabinet and Cabinet committee processes in New Zealand. Maintained by the Cabinet Office, the system is used by government agencies and Ministers' offices to prepare, circulate and store Cabinet papers, track decision-making processes, and manage meeting agendas and minutes, and track decisions across the policy cycle. This allows officials in ministries and departments to remain informed and contribute effectively to interdepartmental co-ordination and policy development.

The platform enables structured co-ordination across departments during the preparation of submissions to Cabinet. By facilitating early access to proposals and allowing agencies to review and lodge documents digitally, CabNet supports timely decision making, improves document quality, and strengthens interministerial collaboration within the executive decision-making process.

Sources: e-Estonia (n.d.[62]), *Enter e-Governance*, https://e-estonia.com/enter-e-governance/; Government of New Zealand (n.d.[63]), *What is CabNet*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/what-cabnet; Government of New Zealand (n.d.[64]), *Secure Handling of Cabinet Material*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/secure-handling-cabinet-material.

In Portugal, a simple digital platform could be piloted to support technical level co-operation across government. Such a tool could serve as a broader governance instrument to facilitate co-ordination for a range of strategic purposes, including, but not limited to, the preparation of planning documents and cross-sectoral policy initiatives. It could include features such as draft sharing, comment tracking, and timeline management. Over time, the platform could enhance policy consistency and provide a shared, transparent space for interministerial collaboration.

3.3.4. Strengthening the institutional interface for data-driven public action

Integrated, high-quality data is essential for the CoG to effectively steer cross-cutting priorities and monitor the implementation of national strategies. As one stakeholder interviewed for this chapter noted, "*with the increased role of the CoG in cross-cutting complex issues that require evidence-informed decision-making, supporting the exchange of timely, high-quality data across the public administration is essential. The CoG can serve to co-ordinate the use of data across line ministries and other stakeholders*." This capacity is particularly important in Portugal's context, where complex policy challenges – such as population ageing or housing – demand co-ordinated responses grounded in shared information. Without the ability to access and integrate data from different sectors, the CoG's capacity to align strategies, anticipate risks, and evaluate results remains limited.

One of the most persistent obstacles to effective cross-government collaboration in Portugal is the difficulty of accessing and using data across institutions. Despite notable progress in digital transformation – most recently through the launch of the *Portugal Digital Strategy 2025* – the public administration still faces significant barriers to strategic data sharing. Many datasets remain siloed, ministries operate on incompatible systems, and there is no consolidated data infrastructure to support whole-of-government planning, monitoring, or evaluation.

These challenges have been echoed in recent studies (OECD, 2024[2]); (Sobral et al., 2024[65])), which point to interoperability, access, privacy concerns and data sharing as major obstacles to transforming findings into usable knowledge for policy. An additional challenge is maintaining the public's confidence that the efficient sharing of data is compatible with the protection of personal data which is an important component of trust in government. According to findings of the OECD Trust Survey 2025, only 52% of people across the OECD, and 44% of people in Portugal find it likely that government agencies use data for legitimate purposes only (OECD, 2026[1]).

Legal and institutional uncertainties exacerbate the problem. Ministries often face unclear or restrictive interpretations of data protection rules, and access to microdata – particularly important for evaluation purposes – is limited and inconsistently applied. As highlighted by the (OECD, 2024[2])public sector actors in Portugal frequently lack a predictable and secure framework for requesting or reusing data held by other institutions. This has made ex ante policy assessment and planning difficult in practice, particularly in areas that depend on integrated information, such as identifying vulnerable households across energy, health, and income datasets.

In response to these systemic issues, Portugal has taken a major step forward by adopting *Decree-Law 2/2025*, which transposes the EU *Data Governance Act* into national legislation. This regulation creates new mechanisms to promote the secure reuse of public sector data, even when such data cannot be shared as open data due to legal or confidentiality restrictions. It introduces rules for data intermediation services and establishes safeguards for neutrality, transparency, and public trust. Crucially, it creates pathways for "data altruism" – the voluntary sharing of data for purposes such as research and public policy – opening new opportunities for collaboration across sectors. Among the public entities now empowered under this framework are SGGOV, PLANAPP, ARTE and the National Statistics Institute (INE), which will play a central role in co-ordinating government-wide data systems and managing secure access infrastructure.

Within this evolving landscape, REPLAN has begun to operationalise its role in strategic data governance. As part of its 2023-2024 action plan, it established a Multisectoral Team for Data Access, tasked with contributing to the design of Portugal's future statistical and administrative data infrastructure. This includes supporting INE in defining co-ordination and methodological oversight mechanisms; and anticipating data needs for the monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

These efforts mark a promising step, but Portugal's data governance ecosystem remains fragmented. The SGGOV holds formal responsibilities for digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and data management across the CoG. At the same time, PLANAPP is tasked with overseeing planning, monitoring and evaluation systems, and co-ordinating REPLAN. A shared challenge is to align these institutions around a common vision for data as a strategic enabler of public policy. Institutional alignment between REPLAN, PLANAPP, INE, ARTE and SGGOV is now essential to ensure that data, planning and co-ordination systems evolve in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.

A relevant international model is New Zealand's Data Investment Framework, which prioritises strategic data needs and guides public investment decisions accordingly (see Box 3.5). The Framework enables the government to treat data as a system-wide asset, not a technical afterthought, and links planning, budgeting, and capability-building with long-term public value.

Box 3.5. Co-ordinating data governance through strategic investment in New Zealand

New Zealand's data governance model is led by the government Chief Data Steward (GCDS), located in Stats NZ. The GCDS co-ordinates data strategy, standard setting, and capability building across government. Its main tool is the Data Investment Framework, a system-wide planning instrument used to prioritise initiatives, assess budget proposals, and guide investment in data infrastructure and skills. The framework focuses on critical system issues – such as data interoperability, reuse, granularity, and secure access – and aims to deliver "system wins" that benefit the broader public sector.

Ministries proposing major data initiatives must align them with the framework and demonstrate how they contribute to long-term system sustainability and value. This ensures that data is used to solve complex policy problems, drive innovation, and build public trust. The model illustrates how centralised stewardship and cross-agency co-ordination can turn data into a pillar of strategic governance.

Source: Stats NZ (2022[66]), *Data Leadership and the Data Investment Framework,* https://www.stats.govt.nz/about-us/data-leadership/ (accessed 4 April 2025).

A similar model could be developed in Portugal. While SGGov holds operational responsibility for data systems and security, and PLANAPP leads on strategic planning, REPLAN is uniquely placed to connect data use with policy goals. It could act as a co-ordinating platform to anticipate and prioritise cross-government data needs for planning, foresight, and evaluation, linking statistical and administrative data with strategic decision making. Drawing on the New Zealand experience, REPLAN – working with PLANAPP, INE, ARTE and SGGOV – could support the creation of a Data Investment Co-ordination Mechanism to identify critical data needs, define cross-sector priorities, and guide standards and capabilities.

REPLAN could help ensure that data is systematically reused to inform planning and evaluation. Through its multisectoral teams, it can anticipate future data needs, support the development of shared methodologies with INE, ARTE and PLANAPP, and collaborate with SGGOV to align data infrastructure with strategic priorities. The goal is to ensure that data investments are driven by long-term government goals.

3.3.5. Developing outcome-oriented policies to foster cross-sector integration

Strengthening the interface between political and administrative actors also depends on the strategic use of governance tools that help align long-term vision with short-term action. A forward-looking governance approach integrates foresight and planning, enabling governments to anticipate future scenarios, define shared priorities, and translate these into deliverable objectives (OECD, 2020[53]). When deployed effectively, these tools ensure greater coherence in policymaking and support the delivery of cross-cutting reforms.

The development of high-quality strategies across public administration depends not only on institutional co-ordination but also on the use of clear guidance, tools and methodologies. A key challenge in Portugal, as identified in consultations with stakeholders, lies in the variability of strategic documents across ministries – regarding both structure and depth – and in the absence of formal guidance or templates that would support consistency and coherence. Officials acknowledged that while PLANAPP has provided methodological assistance on some occasions, such support is not yet systematic across the administration. This hampers the alignment of strategic documents with overarching government priorities and with each other (OECD, 2023[58]).

PLANAPP and REPLAN are taking important steps to foster the coherence of the planning system. In March 2025 a taxonomy of planning instruments and glossary of the public policy cycle were issued, providing clarity across the administration of what constitutes a strategy or a plan. However, efforts to co-ordinate or align planning across the administration still rely on informal practices, individual leadership, or *ad hoc* collaboration. The result is a planning system where strategic documents vary widely in scope and quality, and where policy coherence is difficult to achieve in practice. This institutional landscape shapes the daily work of PLANAPP, SGGOV and other REPLAN's members and defines both the limits and the opportunities for strengthening strategic steering from the centre.

One area where Portugal's strategic planning system could evolve further is in strengthening the alignment between departmental strategies, performance monitoring, and overarching government priorities. To address this, REPLAN could work together in developing a more structured outcome-based planning format to support their own ministries in aligning their strategies with government-wide priorities. Such an approach would enable clearer articulation of expected results, foster greater coherence across sectors, and provide a more consistent basis for monitoring and reporting. It would also contribute to setting clearer hierarchies between strategies (long-term/short-term). International practice offers useful models for how this can be done. In the United Kingdom (see Box 3.6), for example, the government introduced Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs) in 2021 as the primary instrument for departmental planning and performance.

Box 3.6. Outcome Delivery Plans in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom introduced Outcome Delivery Plans (being rebranded as Strategic plans as of 2026) in 2021 as the central instrument for departmental planning and performance monitoring. Outcome Delivery Plans replaced the previous Single Departmental Plans and are situated within a broader government-wide planning and performance framework that links strategy, budgeting, and accountability.

Each ministerial department prepares a strategic plan on an annual basis. These plans set out the department's priority outcomes, agreed with the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury, as well as the main activities, deliverables, and metrics associated with their achievement. Outcome Delivery Plans also include information on resourcing, risk management, and enabling functions such as workforce, digital transformation, and evaluation.

In cases where outcomes are cross-cutting in nature, departments are expected to co-ordinate and develop joint plans to support shared delivery. The plans are reviewed annually and reflect spending decisions made through multi-year Spending Reviews and updated at fiscal events such as the Budget.

Outcome Delivery Plans form the basis for internal government performance reporting and provide a structured approach to aligning departmental strategies with overarching government priorities. Progress is reported through Annual Reports and Accounts and through regular publication of performance data and statistics.

Source: Government of the United Kingdom (2023[67]), *The Government's Planning and Performance Framework*, Cabinet Office, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-and-performance-framework/the-governments-planning-and-performance-framework

These templates could help structure ministerial strategies around a clear set of objectives, supported by defined deliverables, indicators, and implementation timelines. In cases where priorities span multiple portfolios – such as housing or territorial cohesion – joint planning approaches could be explored.

Such an initiative would not require a wholesale overhaul of current practices. Instead, it could build on existing instruments, such as the Grandes Opções and sectoral strategies, while introducing greater standardisation and results orientation. By clarifying the expected contribution of each ministry to overarching government goals, this approach could also strengthen horizontal co-ordination, support a more transparent allocation of resources, and provide a foundation for more structured performance discussions at political and technical levels.

Over time, these outcome-based planning tools could also be linked to the future national evaluation agenda under development by REPLAN, reinforcing the connection between planning, performance, and learning. Through this, Portugal could gradually move toward a more integrated strategic management cycle.

3.3.6. Promoting a strategic foresight culture

The capacity to anticipate change and plan for the long term is becoming essential to address cross-cutting policy challenges. This is particularly relevant for CoGs, as they must balance short-term political pressures with the need to align national strategies with structural trends and emerging risks. In Portugal, the creation of PLANAPP and REPLAN reflect a strong institutional commitment to strengthen these forward-looking capabilities and embed them within the policymaking process.

PLANAPP and REPLAN's early involvement in emerging areas, such as artificial intelligence and demographic transition, demonstrates the value of engaging before political decisions are locked in. However, the challenge lies in extending this approach more systematically across government and building these capabilities across the administration.

Recent efforts, such as the identification of nine megatrends affecting Portugal, are promising, but remain disconnected from planning cycles in most ministries, a challenge that most OECD countries face. To move beyond isolated exercises, REPLAN could work to institutionalise foresight practices in a more systematic way.

Spain provides a compelling illustration of this approach. The *España 2050* strategy was developed under the leadership of the National Office for Foresight and Strategy, a unit housed directly within the Presidency of the Government. The strategy examined Spain's past, present, and potential futures using structured foresight methodologies to define 50 objectives across nine long-term challenges (see Box 3.7). From this analysis, actionable proposals were formulated to inform strategic decisions across government. The strategy was publicly launched by the Prime Minister, ensuring political visibility and commitment at the highest level. This combination of foresight, planning, and political endorsement gave the exercise institutional traction and positioned the unit as a driver of long-term policy thinking within the CoG.

Box 3.7. España 2050 and the National Office for Foresight and Strategy in Spain

The España 2050 strategy was developed by the National Office for Foresight and Strategy, a unit within the Presidency of the Government of Spain. Created in 2020, the Office reports directly to the Prime Minister and is tasked with identifying medium- and long-term challenges and opportunities and supporting anticipatory policymaking across government.

España 2050 is a strategic foresight exercise that combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies to define 50 long-term objectives and propose 200 policy actions across nine cross-cutting challenges. The strategy was informed by the work of over 100 experts from diverse disciplines and backgrounds. It includes scenario development, trend analysis, and a set of measurable targets to guide public action and monitor progress over time.

The strategy was launched publicly by the Prime Minister, providing high-level political visibility. Its development process involved collaboration with ministries, public institutions, academia, and civil society, reinforcing its legitimacy and outreach. The integration of foresight, planning and political leadership through a dedicated unit at the centre of government has helped to institutionalise long-term thinking and position the Office as a strategic actor in Spain's policymaking system

Source: Government of Spain (n.d.[68]), *National Office of Foresight and Strategy*, *Ministry of the Presidency*, https://futuros.gob.es/en/office

A similar approach could be explored in Portugal -where foresight is explicitly linked to strategic planning cycles, supported by structured methods, and connected to high-level political processes- thereby elevating the foresight work of REPLAN and PLANAPP, turning their insights into actionable and cross-sectoral policy agendas. In this regard, securing the CoM's mandate for a long-term strategy could provide REPLAN and PLANAPP with a concrete way to channel foresight activities and resources into a tangible policy and political outcome.

3.4. Options for further exploration

Below are a number of options for Portugal to consider to better support the CoG's functions as a bridge between the political and technical levels of government. It is complemented by the online Annex with a repository of tools and practical solutions that are in use by other countries.

3.4.1. Governance reforms to strengthen the political and technical interface

Dedicate periodic Council of Ministers sessions to a single cross-cutting policy issue, with REPLAN providing the technical input. Ensuring effective and coherent stewardship by the centre of government, task REPLAN with producing analytical inputs and policy options ahead of each thematic session.

As part of the above recommendation, mandate REPLAN to perform a technical review of major cross-cutting proposals. Key reform proposals could undergo a REPLAN-led technical review before reaching political deliberation, to strengthen alignment with strategic priorities and improve delivery. Such a review process would support more effective co-ordination within the CoG and deliberations in the Public Administration Forum.

The Council of Ministers could every year identify a small number of challenges (1 to 3) to be addressed by REPLAN, with the corresponding results and conclusions being reported back to the Council of Ministers by REPLAN.

Involve a small number of cabinet representatives in selected REPLAN meetings in order to build an open dialogue on specific cross-cutting policy priorities, with effective co-ordination from the CoG as the body with responsibilities in ensuring an effective political-technical interface. Such an open dialogue could support the future role of the Public Administration Forum which aims to align ministries on cross-cutting issues and resolve inter-ministerial deadlocks.

Establish a digital cabinet system to improve strategic co-ordination. In line with current efforts in this area, introduce a government-wide digital platform with stewardship from the CoG and where REPLAN can support the preparation, alignment and follow-up of cross-cutting initiatives, enhancing the coherence and traceability of policy development across ministries.

Co-ordinate data governance to align investments with national priorities. Task REPLAN, under the supervision of PLANAPP, INE, ARTE and SGGOV, to identify cross-government data priorities and guide investments in infrastructure and capabilities, linking data use to long-term policy objectives.

3.4.2. Governance tools to strengthen the political and technical interface

Introduce a policy development framework within the CoG to strengthen early-stage co-ordination of cross-ministerial initiatives. Develop and test outcome-based planning templates with selected ministries, structured around clear objectives, deliverables, indicators, and timelines. Test these tools in a few priority areas with the CoG keeping a stewardship role in the process.

Strengthen the integration of foresight into strategic planning and policymaking at the CoG. Consider embedding foresight practices, namely through PLANAPP and REPLAN, into the preparation of selected strategic documents, including the *Grandes Opções* and flagship cross-sectoral strategies. Develop a long-term strategy with a formal mandate from the Council of Ministers to channel foresight work into a tangible and politically endorsed outcomes.

Part II Prioritisation and planning for delivery

4 Poland: Stewardship of key policy priorities

This chapter examines how the centre of government (CoG) can strengthen its role in prioritising, co-ordinating and driving delivery when faced by a very large and fragmented set of government initiatives and competing political demands. It highlights the challenge faced by the centre in managing hundreds of commitments, ranging from legislative proposals to strategic initiatives, which risk overwhelming administrative capacity and weakening focus. The most recent institutional changes introduced in Poland in 2025are presented as efforts to compress this broad agenda into a more manageable framework with clear political and administrative ownership. The chapter underscores the importance of clear prioritisation, improved communication of government objectives, and stronger central oversight to ensure coherence across ministries. The chapter also highlights the importance of moving beyond agenda management toward a more strategic role in filtering priorities, aligning actors, strengthening analytical support, and embedding monitoring and feedback loops into routine decision making.

4.1. Introduction

Managing competing priorities in today's complex environment is more challenging than ever. In Poland, a relatively recent change in government has resulted in significant changes in policy directions. A large number of parties form the current governing coalition and bring a large breadth of political objectives which challenges the civil service to prioritise with their limited time and resources. This is a particular challenge for the Chancellery of the Prime Minister – the main CoG institution in the Polish Government. CoGs are commonly responsible for helping the government to define complex priorities and for then translating and co-ordinating the implementation of these across the whole of government. Codifying and tracking political priorities across the political level, the CoG, and responsible line ministries is no simple task, as is developing the strategic documents that can help identify and categorise these priorities.

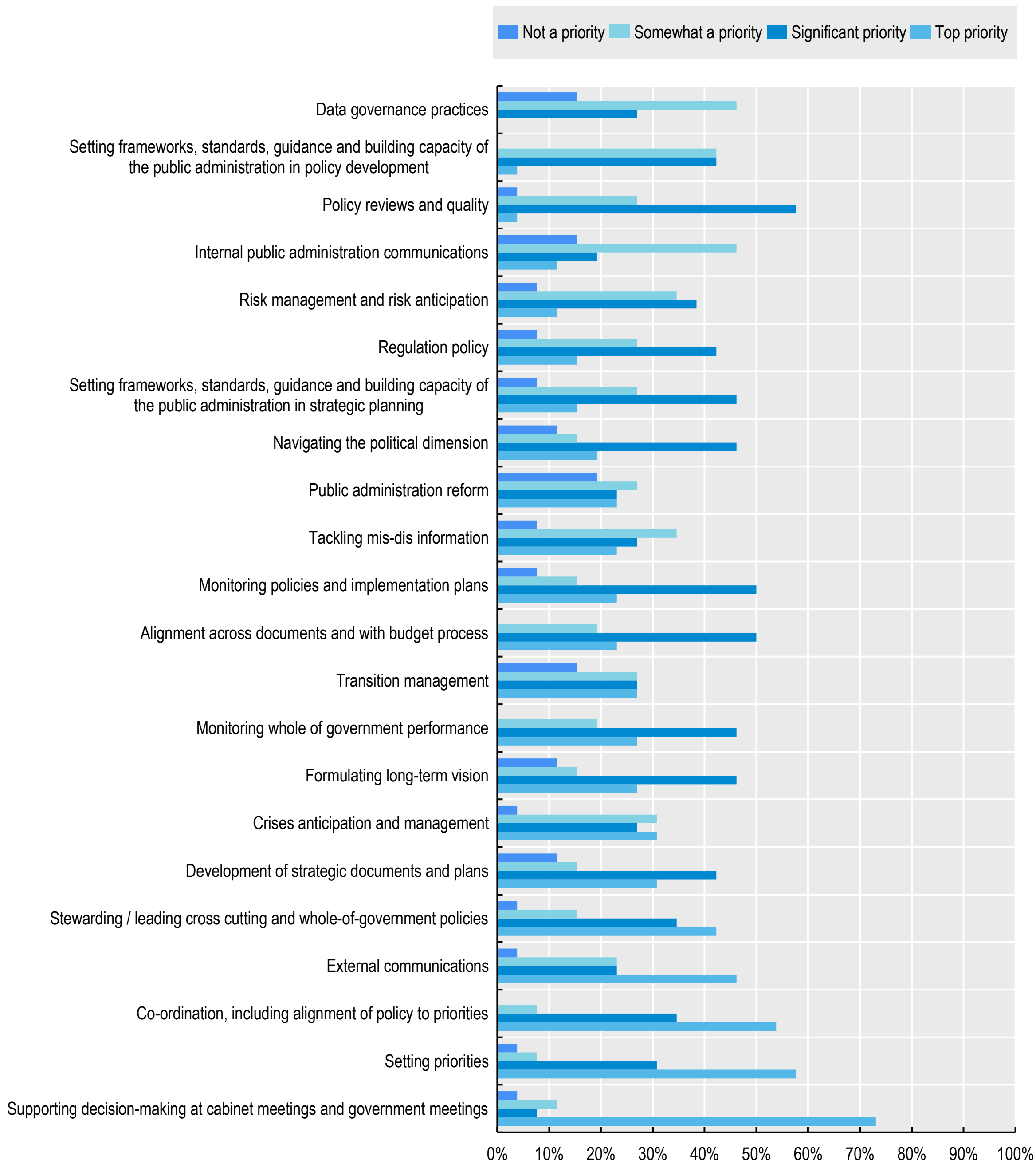
Setting a clear vision is key to stewarding outcomes across government. Identifying and defining priorities is the first essential step in moving towards the achievement of government aims. Without clear objectives from the government, the civil service cannot deliver. However, in a challenging global landscape, identifying and delivering on clear priorities is more difficult than ever. Setting clear priorities enables better allocation of scarce resources (people, money and time), thereby increasing the quality of follow-through and implementation; inadequate prioritisation can create issues such as duplication of work or incomplete work. It can dilute the focus of the civil service, resulting in less efficient implementation of the things that really matter (OECD, 2024[2]) (OECD, 2024[2]).

For the CoG, the set of actors typically responsible for supporting the government in defining clear priorities and co-ordinating their implementation, this role has become more difficult as government priorities also become more complex and cross-cutting (OECD, 2023[69]). CoGs must balance long-term development outcomes with immediate priorities and crisis responses. Furthermore, setting out clear priorities for the civil service to act upon is more challenging when the priority areas often sit across multiple areas of traditional divisions of responsibility (i.e. ministries and agencies), and requires a whole-of-government approach with strong leadership and a strong mandate for support and co-ordination from the CoG. In setting out clear priorities, the government enables the civil service to deliver on its stated aims.

4.1.1. Setting priorities with the CoG at the highest levels of decision making

In most OECD countries, Cabinet meetings are the principal forum for policy deliberation and decision making (OECD, 2023[69]). Most systems also involve a set of secondary bodies, including committees, state secretaries, and advisors to prepare and transmit advice to the Cabinet and head of government. The CoG thus has an important role to play in preparing these meetings, by verifying the quality of advice and the data and analysis this advice is informed by, co-ordinating and helping resolve disputes, and ensuring that all required procedures, such as Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs), consultations, or legal assessments, are followed as needed. Supporting decision making at cabinet meetings is considered a top priority for the majority of OECD CoGs. It is in this context, that this chapter reviews how the centre of government and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister in Poland can improve prioritisation process.

Figure 4.1. The CoG's main roles are to support decision-making and set priorities



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished.

4.2. Defining and managing priorities at the centre

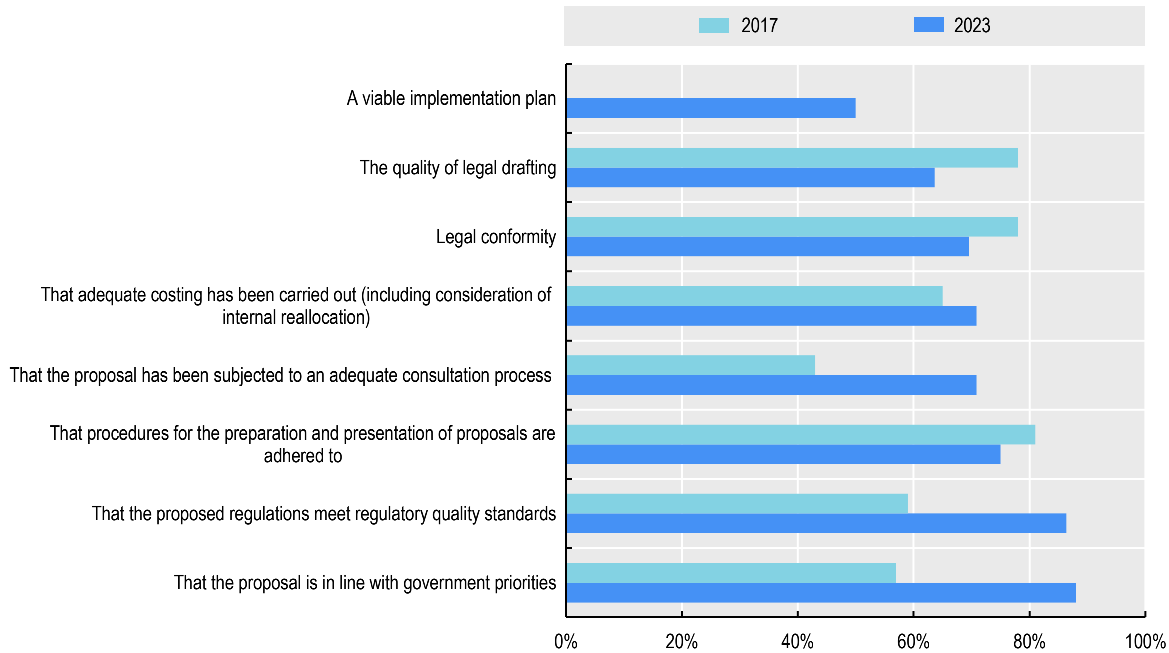
In Poland, the Council of Ministers (CoM), chaired by the Prime Minister (PM), is the highest-level executive body, and represents the highest level of authority in priority setting. Every Minister, including those with and without portfolio, is a member of the CoM. The Chancellery of the Prime Minister (hereafter referred to as the Chancellery) is the central CoG institution that supports the PM and the CoM.

The Standing Committee of the CoM (SCCoM) acts as a secondary body to the CoM, providing a forum for the preparation, and agreement on the positions of the CoM or PM. The Standing Committee provides an opportunity for discussion and the resolution of disputes which were not addressed during earlier inter-ministerial arrangements or consultations on draft government documents. The Standing Committee is led by the Chairman of the Standing Committee (a position of Ministerial rank) and every Minister with portfolio is represented on the Committee. The Chairman of this Committee (Minister for Government Policy Implementation) is in charge of the Committee of the Council of Ministers for Oversight of Government Policy Implementation (CCoMOGPI) which was created in September 2025. Other members of the Committee include the chairman of the Government Work Programming Team, the vice-chairman of SCCoM, the Secretary of the CoM, the deputy head of Government Legislative Centre and the director of the Department for Supervision of Government Policy Implementation as the secretary.

Many CoGs are being called upon to facilitate decision-making practices within their administration, and the Chancellery currently plays a role in this process. Within the Chancellery, the Department of Coordination of the Legislative Process manages the process of the CoM discussion. The Department is the primary unit serving the cabinet decision-making process. It prepares the agenda for the meetings of both the Council of Ministers (CoM) as well as its standing committee (SCCoM). In this capacity, it supports the policy formulation and cabinet decision-making process. The Department compiles and archives records from the CoM and Standing Committee. The Department acts as a gatekeeper for Cabinet discussion: responsible for the circulation and handling of draft government documents, their formal assessment, and their compliance with decisions taken by above-mentioned bodies.

In August 2025, a significant organisational change took place. The former Department of Public Policies and Programming of Government Work has been transformed into the new Department for Supervision of Government Policy Implementation to serve the newly created Committee of the Council of Ministers for Oversight of Government Policy Implementation. Functions related to the Government Work Programming Team (GWPT) have been vested in the Department of Coordination of the legislative process. This body is mainly composed of selected deputy ministers from ministers with portfolio. The GWPT's core responsibility is in selecting which items are included in the List of Legislative or Programme Works (LLPW) of the CoM. It includes both priority items but also numerous other governmental documents and therefore consists about of 700-800 projects. The list is constantly updated. The LLPW is managed by the GWPT and is available to the public via the Chancellery website (Government of Poland, n.d.[70]). The Team is also responsible for follow-up on developments in the items on the list. The GPWT plays the central role in managing the process of the general agenda of Cabinet. This also implies more than a mere procedural role: as mentioned, the gatekeeper role is a crucial part of the CoG's agenda-setting capacity, and the CoG can enable the priority identification process of government. These are functions common to many CoGs, and can be a strong enabler for ensuring the proposals from line ministries are in alignment with government priorities (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Monitoring and review are important functions of the CoG



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished.

In Poland, the priority identification and setting process is challenged by the amount and number of priorities the government sets, a lack of coherence on standards and forms of a priority, and a lack of a centralised methodology for communicating and monitoring priorities. During interviews undertaken for this chapter, civil servants reported referring to several sources for government priorities, including political party platforms and the Prime Minister's Exposé. In total, in January 2025, the number of government initiatives (mainly legislative) was estimated at around 700-800, including priorities. This significant number of objectives has the effect of overloading the civil service, as it can be challenging to address every item within the limited resources and capacity of each department, and particularly at the Chancellery which should be tracking mainly priorities. Additionally, the priorities set by the government which stem from campaigns or election promises are strongly tied to political aims, rather than long-term strategic goals and frameworks. This in turn results in priorities frequently changing, further hindering the work of the civil service in implementing the aims of the government.

The basic goal of priority setting is to allow the civil service to best align limited resources to achieve the most important objectives of the government. This works best when priority setting is aligned to a global vision of the future, that integrates all public action (OECD, 2023[69]). This allows governance to be systematic and streamlined, ensuring alignment between long and medium-term strategic plans, sectoral and whole-of-government strategies, and horizontal and vertical strategic planning processes. In this regard in the Polish context, it is also necessary to improve internal channels of communication and knowledge management on priorities and other initiatives in the Chancellery.

From their position at the core of the government apparatus, the Chancellery has a unique opportunity to act as a force for cohesion. In most OECD countries, CoGs facilitate government prioritisation processes (OECD, 2023[71]). The convening power of the CoG can support this, including through periodic, face-to-face meetings where representatives from the CoG and ministries can address relevant topics and meet with experts and stakeholders (OECD, 2024[2]). The material resources needed to support the CoG in addressing long-term and short-term priorities should also be considered, for instance in allocating budget and resources dedicated to initiatives over both time horizons (OECD, 2024[2]).

In July 2025, the Polish Prime Minister initiated a reform affecting the priority management architecture. These changes included the creation of a dedicated Minister for Government Policy Implementation responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring the implementation of government priority policies and the legislative process. This reform also included appointing a government spokesperson (at secretary of state rank), adding a third deputy prime minister who also had responsibilities as foreign affairs minister, eliminating three ministerial positions, and reducing the total number of Council of Ministers members from 26 to 21.

The new above-mentioned Committee of the Council of Ministers for Oversight of Government Policy Implementation was tasked with establishing priority tasks within the Cabinet policy, setting milestones and deadlines, monitoring and controlling the implementation of tasks, and reporting conclusions and risks to the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers. Furthermore, in September 2025, the government adopted 58 political priorities, with each minister identifying three tasks to be carried out by the end of the current term of Parliament in 2027. Some of these tasks have a deadline for implementation that extends beyond 2027. Implementation is supported by review meetings between the Committee and responsible ministers, and by a new electronic inter-ministerial tracking system modelled on the Ministry of Digital Affairs' existing platform. CCoMOGPI meets regularly to discuss, resolve and advise on policy issues relating to government priorities. On a regular basis and as required by the circumstances experts of the Department for Supervision of Government Policy Implementation meet with civil servants and other public servants responsible for priorities implementation.

At the administrative level, as outlined above, the Chancellery established a new Department of Supervision of Government Policy Implementation over the Implementation of Government Policy and an Office of the government Spokesperson, while transferring programming support functions to the Department of Legislative Process Co-ordination.

4.2.1. Implementation activities in the area of the new approach to priority management

In terms of priority management, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister has established a target system for overseeing the implementation of priorities, in parallel with initiating the oversight process. These include:

1. Each minister – a member of the government – is provided with three priority tasks for the second part of the government's term (until 2027). These are the most important tasks and will be subject to close monitoring. They will be implemented in parallel with existing plans and commitments. These priorities are established for four priority areas: Area 1. Safe Poland, Safe Poles; Area 2. Innovative and Competitive Economy; Area 3. Efficient State and High-Quality Public Services; Area 4. Modern Digital State. As for June 2026 a few priorities have already been delivered.
2. Publishing on the Chancellery's website 'the List of policy priorities of members of the Council of Ministers', adopted by the government in September 2025, and a joint press conference of the Minister for Government Policy Implementation and the government Spokesperson regarding the priorities.
3. Establishing ministerial leaders and co-ordinators of individual government priorities and corresponding priority supervisors in the Department for Supervision of Government Policy Implementation in the Implementation of Government Policy in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.
4. Monitoring the implementation of the 58 government priorities adopted by the government in September 2025, including the commencement of cyclical (three times a week) meetings aimed at

reviewing the status of implementation of the priorities of the minister for supervision with members of the government responsible for individual priorities.

5. Since 2025 an electronic inter-ministerial system for tracking priority implementation is used by both ministries and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. The system will be based on the electronic system for monitoring the implementation of this ministry's projects, used by the Ministry of Digital Affairs. This system ensures that the description of priority projects is standardised.
6. Establishing since the third quarter of 2025 a quarterly reporting scheme for ministers on implementation of priorities which has already resulted in preparing and publishing quarterly reports, adopted by the CoM.

4.3. Challenges and enablers to define and manage policy priorities

4.3.1. Practical mechanisms from the CoG to enhance priority-setting processes

The Chancellery can be a lynchpin to support the quality of decision making at cabinet and has traditionally played a key role in managing the agenda of Cabinet meetings (OECD, 2024[2]). Practically, the Chancellery can play two key roles in supporting the priority identification and setting process of government, firstly in managing the process of submission to Cabinet and the agenda, and secondly by acting as a gatekeeper of the substantive quality of submissions.

The setting of clear rules and procedures to govern the process of Cabinet submission is an essential enabler for the CoG to enhance the quality of decision makers' discussions. Poland has rules and procedures for submitting proposals to the Cabinet and is also working on a comprehensive e-legislation system. Support structures for line ministries including the development of tools, guidance, and frameworks, can help decision makers to refine available policy priorities and options. Mechanisms for simplification and streamlining the process have commonly included digital tools in recent years in Latvia (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Digital tools for the management of Cabinet discussions in Latvia

Latvia's centralised submission procedure similarly allows for all line ministries to submit draft legal acts to Cabinet through a single digital portal. The entire process of the drafting of legal acts is managed through the portal, including the beginning public consultation, harmonisation, approval, sending for publication, archiving, and circulation and control of tasks. The portal is available to the public, allowing a wide range of stakeholders to consult the development process of regulatory acts and to ensure the aim of continuity in the government's work, regardless of political changes.

Source: OECD (2023[72]), *TAP Portal – Development of legislation: From documents to data - Observatory of Public Sector Innovation*, https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/tap-portal-development-of-legislation-from-documents-to-data/; OECD (2024[2]), *Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity: Compendium of Practices*, https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en.

The CoG can issue frameworks and guidance to help decision makers refine and set priorities to enable the civil service to understand and deliver on the governments mandate. The setting of standards is a common function of the CoG, and in 2023 88% of OECD CoGs surveyed reported setting frameworks, standards, guidance, and building the capacity of the public administration in policy development as a priority (OECD, 2024[2]). By acting as a gatekeeper for Cabinet discussions, the CoG can elevate the conversation and ensure it is effective and efficient. Most CoGs play a role in refining options presented to Cabinet, and this can include the refinement of priorities.

Box 4.2. Setting standards and guidance from the centre to identify priorities

Setting clear priorities from the CoG is no simple task, but clear guidance from the CoG can help both decision makers at the highest level as well as within line ministries to articulate priorities, clarifying the respective role and responsibilities of the civil service. The following outlines a number of principles in the prioritisation exercise:

- Less is more: a smaller number of objectives – ideally a whole-of-government number between three and 10 – is more likely to lead to successful outcomes.
- Technical and political: the ideal priority should have broad, deep, and sustainable anticipated impact, and also align with the government's political values and objectives.
- Right ambition: priorities should be aligned with measurable targets that are high, but feasible.
- Right scope: priorities should be carefully considered with regards to specificity – for instance, typically targeting an entire sector is too broad, but a specific project is too narrow.
- Measurable: the best priorities are tied to clear and quantifiable indicators so that the government can monitor progress and communicate results.

Source: Hymowitz, D. (2016[73]), Choosing the First Among Equals. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

The CoG can be leveraged to support the alignment of outcomes with broader government objectives, including longer-term strategies. In Finland, for example, a systemic approach focuses on broader challenges in society to identify priorities which are then laid out in the government Programme.

Box 4.3. Systems-based approach to cross-sectoral policy prioritisation in Finland

Finland has established a strong governance model for a whole-of-government approach to cross-sectoral policy priorities through its National Commission on Sustainable Development. This multi-stakeholder Commission, led by the Prime Minister, brings together key government ministries, civil society, businesses, and other stakeholders to enhance the coherent implementation of sustainable development objectives.

A core strength of Finland's approach is its institutionalised co-ordination mechanisms. The Sustainable Development Co-ordination Network, composed of representatives from all ministries, ensures that sectoral policies align with national sustainability goals. Throughout the process, they define the situation based on key themes, a future projection exercise, and set the rhetoric and action-based objectives with output and impact-based targets.

The process was managed by thematic groups of political actors and supported by experts under the co-ordination of the government Strategy Department, that provides independent, research-based input. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda Youth Group ensures inclusivity by incorporating young people's perspectives into decision making.

These mechanisms have significantly improved policy coherence of cross-sectoral policy priorities across government by facilitating regular interministerial and stakeholder dialogue, strengthening policy coherence across government levels, and ensuring that sustainability goals are integrated into national and sectoral strategies.

Source: OECD (2024[2]), *Steering from the centre of government in times of complexity: Compendium of practices* https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en; Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (n.d.[74]), *Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development*, https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/commission.

Communicating priorities

Once the government has identified and set their priorities, they must be communicated throughout the civil service in order to begin implementation. Enhancing communication mechanisms for key priorities can help clarify the obligations of the civil service and enable them to work more efficiently on the key priorities of government. In Poland, the communication mechanisms for government priorities could be strengthened to enhance clarity and efficiency of priorities for the civil service to act on. Once a decision is taken at the CoM or otherwise, it can be unclear what the next steps should be in communicating the new priorities and objectives throughout the public administration in order to begin implementation.

4.3.2. Communication tools to support the prioritisation process

There are a wide variety of formal and informal mechanisms, tools, and platforms through which governments communicate their priorities and goals throughout the civil service.

Documents stemming directly from the head of government are one common mechanism through which governments communicate their priorities (OECD, 2021[75]). From a whole-of-government perspective, a decisive, clear mandate for action from the head of government can be a powerful communications tool to lead the civil service forward in a period of transition (Daley, 2020[76]). In Poland, this takes the form of the Prime Ministers' Exposé, which is publicly available on the website of the Chancellery. The Exposé is presented directly from the PM, and reflects the personal priorities set from the head of government. Donald Tusk's Exposé in 2023 outlined nine thematic groupings of priorities are set out, with each theme articulating several more specific measures to be taken (Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 2023[77]). The Exposé is clear, broad, and publicly accessible, however public servants report that they do not necessarily regard and rely on this document as the only articulation of the government's priorities. One reason for this could be the dynamic internal and external environment which affects the CoM agenda. Nevertheless, the document is a strong example of clarity of vision from the head of government. It is typically the responsibility of the CoG to translate the vision of government in documents such as these into policy options and implementation plans (Hymowitz, 2016[73]).

In other OECD countries, tools such as the King's Speech in the United Kingdom – which sets out the governments' legislative programme for the year – or the Speech from the Throne in Canada, are used as a means for the head of government to set out priorities and objectives for the programme of government in a decisive and public manner (Daley, 2020[76]). In some presidential countries, messages to the nation are given on or near the start of the legislative session. For example, in Chile, the Cuenta Publicá (Public Account) is a speech given by the president, to congress each year on 1 June, highlighting the accomplishments of the government in the past year. In the 2026 Cuenta Publicá, the president highlighted accomplishments on three priority areas; Security, Economy, and Social policy (Government of Chile, 2026[78]). Some countries, such as Estonia, are also using digital approaches to drive clearer communications, or other approaches such as in Portugal to link with international strategies (Box 4.4).

Box 4.4. Communication tools in Estonia and Portugal

Government Action Plan in Estonia

Estonia's Strategy Unit within the Government Office, the Estonian CoG, is responsible for the publishing of the government Action Plan to ensure clear and transparent communication of government priorities. This online platform allows the public and all stakeholders to see ministerial priorities and deadlines, broken down by specific Ministerial areas of responsibility. The high level of detail and published indicators make it a strong tool for media engagement and enhances public accountability. Ministerial initiatives can only be discussed at Cabinet if they are included in the action plan, reinforcing its role as a key reference point for government priorities. The plan is renewed annually.

Operational level communications in Portugal

Ensuring alignment with international strategies and frameworks, including for example the EU priorities, UN 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals is a key priority for Portugal. In order to manage these many priorities and responsibilities, the CoG is using an internal informational system managed at the level of the government. It is part of the ongoing discussions with parliament to ensure overall alignment. Each ministerial office can review, discuss, and provide inputs into the system in a centralised manner, which is managed overall by the Secretary of State who supports the minister for the Presidency of the CoM. The system provides a way for top-down and bottom-up communication to by synthesised and centralised through open dialogue.

Source: Information provided by representatives of the Estonian and Portuguese Governments.

While whole-of-government approaches can help direct the broader strategic orientation and alignment of government, a narrower approach can directly support line ministries and agencies. Two examples from Canada and Australia highlight the importance of targeted high-level communication in fostering alignment around priorities. While it is not necessary that these letters be released publicly, and it is not yet a normalised practice among OECD countries, doing so could enhance transparency and build accountability. Regardless, the development of clear targeted mandates for line ministries and agencies could be a useful means of priority setting within the public service.

Box 4.5. Fostering alignment around priorities through targeted communications

Charter letters from the Queensland Government

The Queensland Government publishes its cabinet charter letters publicly, following the principle of the public right to information. On the website of each Minister, the charter letter from the Premier of Queensland details the government commitments and priorities they are responsible for delivering through the agencies within their Ministerial portfolio. Each charter letter states the fundamental commitments that form the governments mandate, the core values of the portfolio the minister is to deliver on, and a series of specific key portfolio deliverables. These include outlining, for example, bodies such as committees that the minister is responsible for chairing, or the setting of targets the minister is responsible for achieving.

Mandate letters and departmental plans from the Government of Canada

The Government of Canada has multiple tools for communicating priorities to line ministries and the public. Mandate letters are similar to the charter letters seen in Queensland: in a process led by the CoG, they outline the key priorities of the government, and ask that each minister submit their plan on how they aim to advance policy that addresses those themes within their ministry. One other tool that could be of interest are the Departmental Plans, which are informed by the ministerial mandate letters with input from senior civil servants in the line ministries. These short-term strategic planning documents are the next step in the prioritisation process, and feature the specific initiatives the ministry will undertake in relation to the priorities set in the mandate letter.

Source: Queensland Government. (2024[79]), *Jarrod Bleijie MP Ministerial Charter Letter*, https://cabinet.qld.gov.au/ministers-portfolios/jarrod-bleijie.aspx; Queensland Government. (2024[80]). *Our priorities - Right to Information - Department of the Premier and Cabinet,* https://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/right-to-info/published-info/our-priorities.aspx; Government of Canada (2025[51]), *Mandate Letter,* https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2025/05/21/mandate-letter.

The budget can also be a strategic communication tool. Principle 4 of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Budgetary Governance suggests that governments ensure budget documents and data are open, transparent, and accessible. The publication of all budget reports fully, promptly, and routinely, and in a way that is accessible to various stakeholders, can be used to foster better understanding of the way government priorities are represented in concrete terms (OECD, 2015[81]). The current format of Poland's budget bill expresses the cabinet priorities on a limited scale. Poland could explore the option of extending the explanatory memorandum of the budget bill to present government priorities and basic information on their funding or a parallel document released in tandem with the full budget which could summarise in a more accessible format the key themes and outcomes reached in the budget. Poland could also consider developing this for an area which is a key priority. This approach could be an asset given that any budget process contains hundreds of initiatives, most of which are smaller in scale and scope and do not necessarily require support or attention from the centre. A more focused document could help try to identify a smaller and more manageable set of initiatives (Daley, 2020[76]).

Poland has a requirement in its public finance law for each Ministry to develop Activity Plans for the year ahead. These should identify the goals and indicators necessary to implement priorities. The law stipulates that the PM should receive drafts and may give an opinion. Currently the Chancellery reviews these plans but does not give a "competence opinion" on these, due to their limited usefulness as tools for management by objectives and limited analytical resources of the Chancellery. Improving the use of these plans could potentially provide an opportunity for better activity planning and co-ordination across the Chancellery, the Ministry of Finance and Line Ministries. The Greek Annual Action Planning process could be an inspiration in this regard. Annual action plans are developed in the fall for the following year, include all the reforms, investments and legislative acts expected for the year, and are tracked by the General Secretariat for Co-ordination. This enables a more efficient use of government resources and helps plan the forward agendas for the CoM and parliamentary legislative processes.

4.3.3. Challenges in communication structures

Clear communication structures can help enable the effective dissemination of priorities throughout the civil service. In Poland, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities has emerged for senior leadership communication, and issues in collaborative implementation processes. Fragmentation in the roles and responsibilities of senior leadership has resulted in gaps in co-ordination, creating obstacles to ensuring the effective and coherent communication of government priorities. There is a need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities for senior leaders in charge of co-ordination efforts. Building trusting relationships between the senior levels of the civil service and their political counterparts is essential in order to facilitate information flows. Typically, the most senior deputies of the minister act on behalf of the political decision makers to drive forward implementation of government aims. In Poland, while the role of the Deputy Minister exists in the form of the Secretaries and Undersecretaries of State, they are often from different political parties.

In many governments, the administrative head of the ministry (e.g. Director General, and Permanent Secretary) may be responsible for co-ordinating the policy development and service delivery activities in government. In Poland, Directors General (a senior position in the civil service corps) exist; however, they do not exercise policy functions – rather they manage administrative and internal functions. The Director General typically changes alongside the minister but in many cases this position is filled by experienced civil servants. The next level of civil servant, Directors, are leaders of specific policy areas, but tend to be numerous across ministries and therefore do not act as single points of contact for policy development in Ministries. Although the Secretary of State and Under Secretary of State should most likely fill the role as intermediaries, there is a lack of clarity on who the foremost co-ordinator and point of contact in line ministries should be. Clarifying the mandate for this position would fill an important gap in the communication machinery and establish a more coherent approach across line ministries.

4.3.4. Developing policy options & strategy for implementation

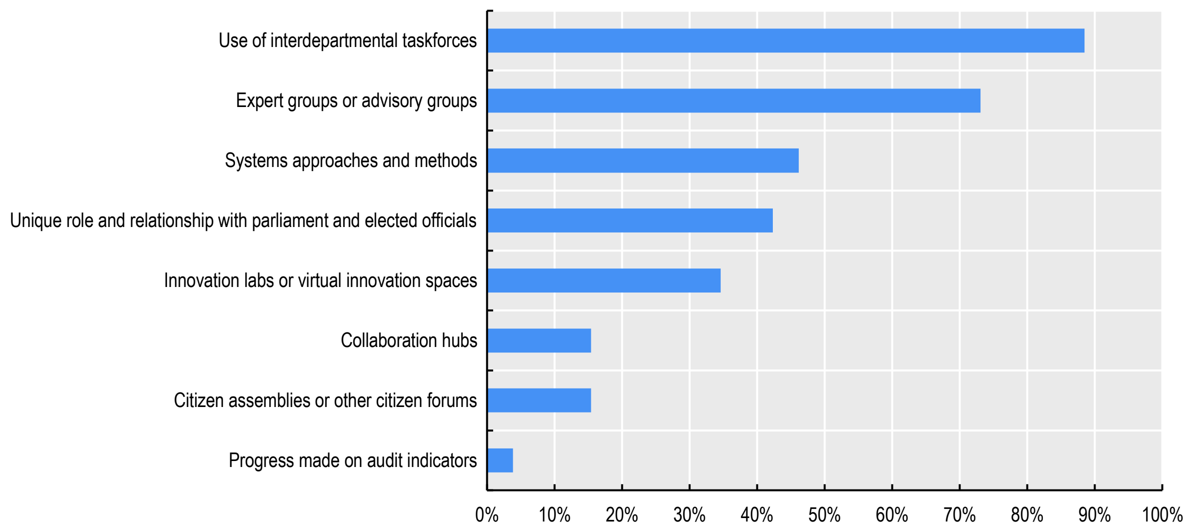
Communicating a clear vision is no simple task, but it must be followed by an actionable plan for implementation. The CoG can be a useful actor and forum for facilitating better co-ordination and planning to translate the vision of government into policy implementation. It can be an important hub for supporting the cross-governmental work of strategic planning and helping to balance long and short-term trade-offs, acting as a vector and hub for expertise and analytical support, and underpinning the complex process of policy development and implementation cycles.

One opportunity is to enhance the integration of analysis and expertise, as well as strategic development in the Chancellery. In doing so, the Chancellery could strengthen the work of the government and its implementation. Two potential areas for strengthening opportunities for cross-government mobilisation of expertise could be explored through optimisation of political and civil service-level working committees, or through the development of a broader forum for the discussion of public policy development. Both of these options could be further served and reinforced by the development of a specific unit of analytical expertise within the Chancellery to support the discussions in these forums.

4.3.5. Forums for early-stage policy development

Early-stage policy development can be a challenging area requiring increased co-ordination, as it requires convening the right stakeholders, obtaining the right data, and gathering expertise and analysis to develop policy options. CoGs can often play a role in policy development through the use of interdepartmental taskforces, expert groups, or advisory groups to leverage their convening power in co-ordinating decision makers access to expertise. In 2023, 88% of CoGs reported using some form of interdepartmental taskforce, and 73% reported the use of a type of expert or advisory group to support co-ordination and coherence Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Mechanisms used by the CoG to support co-ordination



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.

Source: OECD (2023[10]), "Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government", unpublished., Stakeholders interviewed for this chapter reported that there is a dilution of analytical competencies and resources which can lead to inadequate consideration of draft government documents, proposed legislation and policy options. In some areas, it was suggested that the Chancellery's reviews of draft government documents were too formalistic and not as substantive as they should be. This is due in part to the high volume of documents – an issue linked to the high number of activities and lack of clarity on which to prioritise. Draft government documents take significant time and resources to prepare and review at the Chancellery, however they often never reach the final stages of the process to be presented in front of the CoM. Clearer early-stage prioritisation could enable the Chancellery to channel limited analytical capacity more effectively to the priorities that are more likely to make their way through the full policymaking process. This could happen at the level of the Committee of the Council of Ministers for Oversight of Government Policy Implementation (CoMOGPI) or the government Work Programming Team (GWPT), with support from the Chancellery.

Furthermore, there is a perceived lack of analytical capabilities in preparing policy options and implementing government decisions. The use of data and analysis-informed decision making is the foundation of sound policy development, but is very much subject to individual and organisational capacity. Some potential areas for exploration to enhance this area emerged during research for this chapter: the development of more forums for policymaking discussion among civil servants and between the civil service and political leadership, as well as the development of a specific unit for analysis to support these.

4.3.6. Using committees and networks as platforms for early-stage policy development

Committees and subcommittees at the political level

Many governments use various committees and networks at multiple levels to co-ordinate and align the policymaking process. At the top level, this often involves cabinet committees and subcommittees, mirrored by similar committees at the senior civil service level, where technical matters can be aligned to support the political discussion. These can be particularly useful when the civil service is tasked with developing new strategies or cross-cutting policy initiatives. They can also be used to share relevant information across the policy community to ensure that ministries are aware of each other's initiatives and co-ordinate and collaborate as needed. Furthermore, such committees can be used to build capacity in relevant areas, sharing best practice and pooling training and development opportunities, thereby raising the skill level of civil servants across the government system to develop sound data and analysis-based policy.

The existing committees and networks in the Polish Government could be further cemented as platforms for early-stage policy development, including for example the Economic Committee. The use of cabinet committees as a forum for policymaking processes is a common arrangement in OECD countries, as it is in Poland. Cabinet committees can be broad or can be tailored to a specific topic or policy area of focus, and can be an essential forum for discussion, alignment, and further narrowing and focusing of the policymaking process to the specific aims of government.

In New Zealand and in Finland, committees are used to promote coherence and cohesion in policy development. In both examples, these fora provide opportunities for exchange and feedback ahead of the decision-making phase, thereby avoiding the wasting of resources on developing unpalatable options. This can increase efficiency during cabinet meetings and ensures that proposals that reach this stage align with government priorities and are supported by the cabinet.

Box 4.6. Support for cabinet meetings in Finland and New Zealand

Finland

To ensure policy coherence across government, Finland relies on a negotiated government Programme that sets the strategic direction for the full term of office. Developed during coalition negotiations, the programme is binding on all ministries and serves as a central reference for planning, budgeting, and delivery.

Its implementation is led by the Prime Minister's Office and supported by institutionalised co-ordination mechanisms. Ministerial committees, such as those on economic policy and EU affairs, meet regularly and are formally prepared by cross-ministerial working groups. These working groups are backed by a formal secretariat and include permanent experts, in both cases typically senior officials from key central ministries. Their responsibilities include preparing agendas, ensuring follow-up on decisions, and maintaining alignment with the government Programme.

What distinguishes the Finnish approach is the systematic integration of technical expertise into political co-ordination. Senior officials are appointed to serve in the secretariat or as permanent members, and the groups operate under formal rules of procedure. This contributes to continuity, predictability, and structured interaction between ministers and civil servants.

New Zealand

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

Source: Government of Finland (n.d.[82]), *What We Do – Finnish Government's Knowledge to Action Initiative, Prime Minister's Office*, https://tietokayttoon.fi/en/what-we-do; New Zealand Government (2023[83]), Cabinet Manual, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/cabinet-office/supporting-work-cabinet/cabinet-manual.

One pathway that could be explored to further strengthen the role of cabinet committees in the policymaking process in Polsnf is the creation of subject-specific subcommittees. These subcommittees could be an opportunity for further discussion at the Ministerial level on topics which are of importance to the government agenda. The existing example of the Economic Committee or CCoMOGPI could be used as a platform to develop these topical subcommittees. The creation of subject-specific subcommittees could help drive forward reform and emphasise priorities in specific areas – for example, in the event that a specific policy area became a top priority following a change in government, an immediate response could involve convening the subcommittee more frequently and therefore dedicating more resources to preparing policy options and responses in that area. While a joined-up, whole-of-government approach is essential, it may be also useful to explicitly provide dedicated forums that allow decision makers to negotiate on priority topics, thereby also signalling priorities to the civil service. For example, in Estonia special committees are held weekly on specific topics-the previous government held them on the economy, and currently still uses this format for regular discussion on security – a key priority for the current government.

Box 4.7. Targeted sub-committees for specific policy areas in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, Cabinet Sub-Committees (CSCs) in the Scottish Government serve as focused vehicles for policy development and decision making within the government. These sub-committees facilitate cross-ministerial collaboration on key issues that require sustained attention and co-ordination. Membership is tailored to each committee's purpose, typically including Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers, and legal advisors when required.

Current CSCs address diverse policy challenges. For example, the Legislation CSC focuses on approving legislative proposals, including primary legislation and responses to government bills in the United Kingdom. The Child Poverty CSC oversees initiatives such as the Best Start, Bright Futures programme, ensuring cross-sectoral efforts to reduce economic hardship among families. Additionally, the Investment and Economy CSC works on implementing Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation, shaping policies related to sustainable economic growth. By structuring decision making around targeted committees, the Scottish Government enhances policy focus, accountability, and implementation efficiency.

Source: Scottish Government (2024[84]), Cabinet sub-committees: factsheet - gov.scot, https://www.gov.scot/publications/cabinet-sub-committees-factsheet/

Committees and forums for policymaking at the civil service level

At the level of the civil service, there could be further exploration of forums for discussion and development of public policy. One option is the exploration of a standing committee of civil servants that mirrors the work of the Standing Committee of the CoM. The second option could include the development of a forum for public policy discussion and debate early into the problem identification process.

In the Polish context, there is an apparent lack of committee structure at the civil service level that mirrors the Standing Committee and Economic Committee or Committee of the Council of Ministers for Oversight of Government Policy Implementation – there does not appear to be a single network that brings together the relevant directors of policy and strategy development from each Ministry. Instead, such networks appear to be developed on an ad hoc basis for the development of a specific initiative. If the establishment of such a body was considered as both beneficial and accepted by the decision-makers then a standing committee of policy experts at the civil service level, hosted by the Chancellery could be organised. A pilot project for the standing committee is an option for further exploration and testing of a new approach. Such a committee could for example be composed of the highest-level civil servants in the line ministries, or by the Secretary of States or Undersecretaries of State. In Portugal, the REPLAN network is an interministerial network that provides a forum for discussion between the political and civil service sides of government.

Box 4.8. The Public Administration Planning and Foresight Services Network in Portugal

In 2021, the Portuguese government established an inter-ministerial network to promote co-operation, knowledge-sharing, and resource allocation in strategic planning, public policy, and foresight. Its objective is to support government sectors, builds institutional capacity, promotes best practices, and harmonises planning processes for cross-cutting issues. REPLAN serves as a forum for co-ordination, aligning sectoral policies with overarching strategies, assessing policies, developing monitoring metrics, and facilitating information exchange among government agencies.

In Portugal, the planning processes is expected to be underpinned by a wide range of sources of data and analysis. Yet, many inter-ministerial networks associated with the large range of planning instruments being enforced in Portugal can hinder the ability to explore synergies in the planning processes (Chapter 3). Streamlining the number of networks and prioritising those that concern the whole-of-government are strategic priorities for REPLAN.

It acknowledges the role the CoG can play as a central leadership hub, to facilitate co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation across the public administration, including through the use of foresight in the planning process. A number of success factors have been highlighted since its inception:

- The establishment of a long-awaited convening platform that brings together different practices such as foresight offers an opportunity for synergies, increased efficiency and effectiveness in core governance areas such as strategic planning and policy evaluation.
- A clear mandate, government empowerment and continuous political support.
- The engagement of relevant stakeholders from civil society, academia and the private sector to drive data and analysis-informed strategies and plans.

Source: OECD (2024[2]), *Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity: Compendium of Practices*, https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en; Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Public Policies (2023[55]), REPLAN - PLANAPP Presentation, https://www.planapp.gov.pt/apresentacao-replan/; Information provided by representatives of Portugal.

The second pathway that could be explored in combination with the specific analytical unit could be the creation of a forum for discussion of public policy. Poland's complex coalition structure and centralised decision-making process at the Cabinet, but large number of diffuse priorities create a challenge for policymakers on the political and civil service sides of government to best focus their efforts in policy development. Reportedly, significant time and resources are often spent on developing policy options that are ultimately unpalatable or do not align with current priorities of decision makers, which is an inefficiency that could potentially be addressed by creating further opportunities to build consensus around policy options at earlier stages. A policy forum could provide a platform where experts – for example, from the governmental research institutes – and civil servants from across government could present and exchange ideas. Such a forum could be chaired and led from the CoG, in order to bring a whole-of-government approach and leverage the convening power of the executive. One forum that could provide inspiration is the National Economic and Social Council in Ireland.

Box 4.9. Policy Forum in Ireland

Ireland's National Economic and Social Council (NESC) is an advisory body supporting the Taoiseach on strategic policy for sustainable economic, social, and environmental development. The NESC was established in 1973, and representatives are appointed for three to five-year terms. It includes members of the public from business, trade unions, agriculture, community, and environmental sectors, alongside government officials and independent experts.

NESC meetings take place quarterly and serve to foster cross-sectoral dialogue and develop data-based policy analysis. Its work programme is set annually with input from the Department of the Taoiseach at the CoG. NESC also engages at EU and international levels, collaborating with similar councils and organisations such as the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS).

Source: National Economic and Social Council (2024[85]), Our Organisation | The National Economic and Social Council – Ireland, https://www.nesc.ie/our-organisation/

A challenge for both of these options may be to identify the right participant from line ministries to sit in such a committee, as it was apparent that not all ministries had a unit responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating policy development and/or strategic functions. This may need to be developed. A related potential issue could be obtaining the necessary buy-in from line ministries to secure representation from the people at the correct levels and ensuring that the right level of expertise is present at the table. This is also linked to the issue identified by several representatives of different CoG units and line ministries of a perceived missing "link", i.e. a role in communicating between objectives and action is missing in the governments organisational design.

Strengthening the analytical support apparatus for enhanced policy development

In both the development of more political level or civil service level committees, analytical support from the civil service is necessary to ensure high-quality discussions in these forums. One factor that the strengthening of the analytical support structure would be able to provide is substantive input during the policy development process. The structure ideally would be supported and co-ordinated by the CoG, and would be enabled by relying on line ministry participants and expertise. One pathway that could be explored to fulfil this support role could be a dedicated analytical unit to enable enhanced policy analysis and development.

Capacities for analysis are diffused across the organisational structure of the Chancellery. Some analytical units are reportedly overwhelmed with large volumes of documents to review and therefore feel they are not able to provide the level of substantive analysis they would like to contribute.

An analytical unit could be staffed by senior advisors from the civil service and be a purely non-political body, in order to retain institutional memory and operationalise and advise with a long-term strategic perspective. It could enhance policy and strategy development with line ministries, particularly with regard to cross-cutting and long-term strategy development, by clarifying the roles and responsibilities within each line ministry for strategy development, through specific points of contact for co-ordinating such work. The unit would be a natural secretariat supporting the network discussed above. This could be a key enabler for more joined up work across the system of strategy development. One such example of an analytical support unit for cross-governmental support is the government analytical unit (VAU) in the Czech Republic (Box 4.10).

Box 4.10. The Government Analytical Unit in the Czech Republic

To address the lack of analytical capacities in policymaking, in 2023 the Czech Government established the Government Analytical Unit (VAU) within the Office of the Government under the Minister for Legislation. The VAU aims to provide expert analysis on cross-cutting policy issues and support ministries in conducting economic assessments for new policies and laws. Initially, its role includes assisting in Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) upon request, but its long-term focus will expand to strategic foresight, policy evaluation, and co-ordination of data-informed decision making across government. Additionally, the VAU is expected to foster collaboration with research institutions, pilot new policies, and integrate behavioural insights into public administration.

The creation of the VAU aligns with the objectives of the National Recovery Plan, which envisions the appointment of analytical co-ordinators in ministries and the establishment of a Central Analytical Unit under the Ministry of the Interior. This initiative aims to enhance analytical capabilities through training and inter-ministerial co-operation.

Source: OECD (2023[69]), *OECD Public Governance Reviews: Czech Republic: Towards a More Modern and Effective Public Administration*, https://doi.org/10.1787/41fd9e5c-en.

An analytical unit with the core role of integrating and developing expertise and analysis for the Chancellery and line ministries could also support more joined-up work across government by bringing more coherence to the existing hubs of analytical expertise in Poland. For example, research institutes already serve as an important source of data and analysis for line ministries but are not necessarily collaborating beyond their respective line ministries in a cohesive manner, such as the Ministry of National Education and the Educational Research Institute (IBE). The IBE conducts interdisciplinary research concerning the functioning and effectiveness of the education system in Poland and has developed strong data and statistical capabilities. It participates in national and international research projects, and prepares reports, expert opinions and carries out advisory functions. The IBE is supervised by the Minister of National Education. The IBE is a good example of an external body conducting parallel policy analysis and development functions, working closely with the ministry. The relationship is trusted to the extent that the ministry allows other agencies and units to work directly with the IBE for support in areas such as strategic development, emphasising the extent to which the IBE and Ministry are in alignment with each other. Multiple line ministries have an external institute which provide analytical capabilities, for example the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy. However, the level of trust and joined-up ways of working between the institute and the ministry varies greatly across each, impacting the effectiveness of the advisory capacity of the institutes.

Key enablers for the success of such a unit would be trust both within CoG and with the line ministries. The analytical unit or forum would need to work in close alignment with Ministerial direction, taking rapid responses from the ministry and pursuing a joined-up approach with the lead counterpart of the ministry – likely the Secretary of State or Undersecretary of State – and ensure a closeness between the two. The role of PLANAPP in Portugal of co-ordinating a similar model, could be a useful example in this case.

4.3.7. Enhancing strategy development for strengthened long-term prioritisation

Poland's strategy development framework is complex due to the multiplicity of priorities at the political level. While there are formal strategic documents prepared by the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (MDFRP) such as the New Strategy for Poland, these documents are sometimes perceived as not fully aligned with changes in the political, social and economic environment. In the context of the work of this project in responding to changing government priorities, capabilities related to strategy emerged as a focal point. While most line ministries have strategic units, they are not consistently effective on strategic capacities and are not systematically involved in co-ordinating and aligning new policy development with broader strategic frameworks and cross-cutting documents.

Based on research undertaken for this chapter, strategy offices within line ministries do not all have the same long-term strategic outlook and capabilities necessary to input into cross cutting strategic development. Stakeholders interviewed reported a gap between strategic thinking within line ministries, the MDRFP, and within the Chancellery. One potential reason that emerged is the lack of in-house expertise to handle strategic work effectively, with tasks being delegated to directors who may lack the required strategic vision and proximity to the political decision makers to ensure alignment. Directors of Strategy could be closely working with Ministers to enable their vision for government, but reportedly this relationship is highly variable. Capacity-building initiatives can be used to target senior officials and staff within existing strategic units in line ministries. Line ministries should be empowered with strategic capabilities in order to encourage buy-in and engagement with the strategy development process.

The creation of the informal network of strategy heads is a positive step towards a more joined-up approach to strategy development in the Polish Government. The MDRPF has recently been working with the heads of strategy from all different departments – usually the Director or Deputy Director of strategy from the ministerial strategic units, in updating the 2023 strategy created by the previous government. After an ex-post external evaluation was carried out, need was identified to develop a new strategic document due to changes in the external operating environment – COVID-19, or Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The use of the informal group is perceived as a useful tool for the MDRPF. Several other bodies are mobilised in this process – including the Committee for Co-ordination for Development Policy, and the Co-ordination Committee. However, one challenge in this process has also been in securing the right level of participation, in ensuring that the right people are at the table in order for expertise and decisions to be made. This network could potentially be formalised as one of the civil service networks described above and the Chancellery take on the role of co-ordinating secretariat.

One pathway that could be explored is redefining the division of responsibilities and mandate for whole-of-government strategy development. In the Polish government, much of the strategy is led through the MDRPF, which is not considered a part of the CoG itself. In most OECD countries the CoG plays an important role in the development and co-ordination of whole-of-government strategy and reform initiatives. In 69% of countries surveyed in 2023, the CoG leads in formulating a long-term vision for government, a key part of setting national level long term strategies. The CoG can be a useful means to further enhance strategy work within Polish Government in several ways. For example, one issue discussed in the Polish context of strategic work is the difficulty to mobilise line ministries which could be addressed by giving the CoG the role of mandating line departments to develop strategic plans in different cross-cutting areas, something which the CoG leads on in 38% of countries surveyed in 2023. The authority and proximity to the executive of the CoG may be an enabling factor in this scenario. One other enabler could be strengthening and clarifying the role of the Director of Strategy within the line ministries, further emphasising the importance of the role and ensuring clearer structure for cross-ministry co-ordination initiatives.

One model that has been effective for enabling strategic capacity development throughout the ministries is the Irish example of bringing civil servants together with strong strategic capacities in a single central unit and rotating these out to line ministries (Box 4.11).

Box 4.11. The Irish Economic and Evaluation Service

The Irish Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is an integrated cross-government service. It was established in 2012 with the aim of enhancing the role of economics and value for money analysis in public policymaking. The IGEES sits in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. IGEES policy analysts work cross-government with all departments and functions as a talent pipeline accessible throughout government.

The IGEES has targeted graduate recruitment processes and internships, bringing in young professionals into the public service and training them. Learning and development opportunities include platforms for discussion, policy discussion sessions, seminars, and conferences. It is a rotational programme where participants change positions every two years. The IGEES has been a successful way to develop analytical capabilities in a centralised hub and ensuring that their expertise is diffused across the civil service beyond the centre of government.

Source: OECD (2024[86]), *The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) – Ireland*, OECD Youth Policy Toolkit, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-youth-policy-toolkit_41fab624-en/the-irish-government-economic-and-evaluation-service-igees-ireland_7e9bb420-en.html

4.4. Options for further exploration

Below are a number of options developed in October 2025 for further exploration in the context of Poland's prioritisation and planning processes. It is complemented by the tool (online Annex) to help shape Poland's future work in this area.

1. Strengthen the role of the Chancellery in the priority-setting and refining process to drive forward work on key priorities of government. This could include refining processes to manage Cabinet agendas, setting standards and guidance for priority-identification processes, and using the Chancellery to foster alignment between competing priorities.
2. Enhance communication mechanisms for government priorities by strengthening the use of existing communication tools and better directing whole-of-government communications through the Chancellery. Use opportunities such as the budget process and the ministry Activity Plans to define priorities and related ministerial actions. Clarifying roles and responsibilities for senior civil servants in directing communication can further enable more joined-up work – possibly through networks or forums described above.
3. Continue developing further opportunities for the co-ordination of priorities and vision to be translated into implementation. Optimise forums for early-stage policy development and platforms, including interministerial committees that focus on specific priority policy areas.
4. Consider forums at the civil service level which allow senior civil servants to discuss and drive forward implementation in a cohesive manner.
5. Convene a supporting analytical unit to centralise and elevate capabilities for analysis within the government, to additionally support the work of any collaborative structures such as the above committees and forums.
6. Enhance the development of strategy within line ministries for better co-ordinated work on key priorities.
    - Consider strengthening and enabling the mandate of the CoG to lead on cross-cutting and long-term strategy development.
    - Formalise and cement the role of the existing informal network of strategy heads, and further define the roles and responsibilities of strategy heads in line ministries, particularly in relation to their respective Ministerial counterparts.
    - Continue to build the capabilities of line ministries and strategy units in line ministries to engage and drive forward the strategy development process.

5 Bulgaria: Guiding the implementation of long-term priorities

This chapter examines the challenges faced by the centre of government (CoG) in steering long-term and cross-cutting government priorities. It examines how a proliferation of strategies, weak institutional frameworks, and repeated political changes can undermine attempts to create a coherent hierarchy of priorities and link them effectively to budgeting and implementation processes. Bulgaria has undertaken several reform efforts, including the development of national planning frameworks, new co-ordination bodies, and digital monitoring tools such as Monitorstat Information System to strengthen its capacity to deliver on long-term priorities. The chapter underscores the difficulty of sustaining long-term policy direction in the absence of stable political backing and effective central co-ordination, as ministries tend to operate in silos with limited incentives for alignment. The chapter provides suggestions for gradually strengthening strategic governance through more realistic, incremental approaches such as piloting cross-cutting priorities, enabling technical networks to work across silos, improving data and indicators, and reinforcing links between strategy, budget and monitoring rather than relying on wholesale reforms.

5.1. Introduction

Achieving complex, long-term policy priorities requires effective governance structures capable of steering cross-cutting initiatives and managing interactions, trade-offs, and complementarities across policy areas over time. CoGs play a fundamental role in ensuring strategic coherence, co-ordinating policies across ministries, and maintaining alignment with national and international objectives.

For Bulgaria, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a salient example of such a cross-cutting and long-term policy agenda. Bulgaria has used the goals as a practical framework to strengthen policy coherence by highlighting interlinkages across economic, social, and environmental priorities, and by making potential trade-offs between policy choices more explicit. However, their successful integration into national frameworks depends on the ability of CoGs to exercise key functions: stewarding the policy process, ensuring coherence, acting as a bridge between the political and administrative levels, and fostering whole-of-government engagement (OECD, 2024[87]).

Bulgaria's experience highlights good practices and challenges of embedding a long-term vision into the policy process. In recent years, the country has taken important steps to enhance its planning architecture, including the adoption of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 (NDP 2030) as a long-term strategic planning framework, and the creation of new structures to support co-ordination and performance monitoring. Bulgaria has also made other attempts to strengthen its strategic planning capacity through more ambitious reforms. These reforms reflect a growing recognition of the need for more coherent and forward-looking policymaking.

Yet structural limitations remain. The lack of a legal framework to institutionalise and organise the strategic planning process, and limited mechanisms for cross-government co-ordination, have weakened Bulgaria's ability to integrate and implement strategic priorities effectively. While sectoral and thematic strategies exist, fragmentation and overlaps hinder coherence across government action. This fragmentation poses particular challenges for cross-cutting agendas which depend on sustained co-ordination across sectors and levels of government.

These governance challenges are not unique to Bulgaria. To address increasingly complex policy challenges, across OECD countries, CoGs have been evolving to take on greater roles in strategic foresight, co-ordination, monitoring and stakeholder engagement (OECD, 2024[87]). These expanded CoG functions are critical to aligning sectoral policies with long-term national and international commitments and to managing tensions between short-term political priorities and long-term sustainability objectives (OECD, 2024[88]).

The Bulgarian CoG, particularly the bodies directly supporting the Council of Ministers (CoMA), faces an opportunity to strengthen its role as a strategic orchestrator, ensuring that cross-cutting priorities and by extension other long-term national priorities are effectively planned, communicated, and implemented. From a policy coherence perspective, this implies moving beyond co-ordination as a procedural function toward a more strategic role in managing cross-cutting priorities, aligning objectives, resolving interministerial trade-offs, and ensuring that sectoral initiatives collectively contribute to shared outcomes.

This chapter examines how Bulgaria's CoG co-ordinates the delivery of complex, cross-cutting priorities through its strategic planning structures. It examines in particular the institutional and procedural mechanisms that enable -or hinder- the CoG's ability to provide strategic direction and steer long-term and cross-sectoral priorities in a coherent manner. It explores how governance frameworks can be strengthened to enhance coherence, political engagement, and whole-of-government alignment in tackling long-term priorities.

5.2. Steering long-term priorities - a demanding role for the centre of government

Bulgaria's public administration operates within a complex governance environment, shaped by historically rigid administrative structures, evolving European Union (EU) regulatory requirements, and domestic political dynamics. From a policy coherence perspective, this complexity increases the risk of fragmented decision-making, duplication of efforts, and misalignment between short-term sectoral objectives and long-term national priorities. As stated in the OECD *Centre of Government Scan of Bulgaria* (OECD, 2022[89]), the country's current governance ecosystem is characterised by more than 200 strategic documents, most of them sectoral, without a clear hierarchy of strategies and with limited links to the budget. This overcrowding of strategies has led to an overlap of policy priorities and, therefore, a lack of common understanding within the administration of what the country's key priorities really are. Such fragmentation undermines the government's ability to enhance policy coherence and using an integrating framework across policy domains. Moreover, most strategies present limitations related to the existence of robust KPIs, targets, and well-developed monitoring and evaluation procedures. This limits accountability for results and weakens the use of overarching indicators for whole of government goals as a tool to track progress, identify policy trade-offs, and adjust policies over time. All these elements become critical, as they directly affect the government's capacity to focus on policy implementation.

To address these challenges, over the past years Bulgaria has made several attempts to modernise its governance framework, particularly to set up a more robust planning system and establish a more structured governance framework. The NDP 2030 provides a national vision that offers a high-level framework for guiding policy priorities, marking a step forward in recognising the relevance of long-term planning and attempting to link national priorities with the budget and global development goals (Republic of Bulgaria, 2020[90]). However, from a policy coherence perspective, the effectiveness of such a framework depends on the existence of mechanisms that translate strategic alignment into co-ordinated sectoral action and resource allocation. Previous efforts included the establishment of the Strategic Planning Directorate in 2022 -under the Administration of the Council of Ministers-, the creation of a Development Council to the Council of Ministers in 2023, and the drafting of a Strategic Planning Law in 2023. The rationale was to create a better planning system to shift the administration's culture from strategy-setting to implementation.

However, due to changing political circumstances and differing approaches to public administration reform, most of these efforts were partially implemented or were not implemented in full scale. This weakens continuity in steering long-term priorities and poses particular challenges for implementation of long-term challenges, which requires sustained co-ordination across electoral cycles. As a result, the strategic planning system remains fragmented, facing challenges related to interministerial co-ordination, policy coherence, and implementation capacity. This fragmentation limits Bulgaria's ability to operationalise long-term strategies as a whole-of-government framework and to manage interactions and trade-offs between policy areas. The following section analyses the current planning system in Bulgaria and the attempted reforms as a means to understand the challenges and opportunities in the governance of long-term priorities.

5.3. Challenges and enablers to managing long-term priorities at the centre

The main body at the CoG responsible for defining and steering government policy priorities is the Strategic Development Coordination and Concessions Directorate (SDCC) at the Council of Ministers Administration (CoMA) and, until recently, the Strategic Planning Directorate (SPD). Created in 2022, the SPD was tasked with developing a framework for strategic planning, co-ordinating institutional responsibilities, and overseeing the development, implementation, and assessment of strategic documents. It also worked to integrate strategic planning with budgeting, collaborating with the Ministry of Finance to ensure financial feasibility. In March 2025, the SPD was dissolved, and most of its functions have since been transferred to the Strategic Development, Co-ordination and Concessions Directorate. This change reflects ongoing institutional flux and broader challenges of continuity at the CoG. Such discontinuity weakens the CoG's capacity to sustain long-term policy coherence and poses particular challenges for the implementation of long-term and whole of government agendas, which require stable co-ordination arrangements over time.

One of the key initiatives in recent years was the creation of the Development Council in 2023, which was responsible for co-ordinating the development, implementation, reporting, and evaluation of documents within the National Strategic Framework, in particular the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 (NDP 2030). Each time a new strategy was proposed to the CoMA, the Development Council was the body responsible for discussing its alignment with national government priorities. This gave the centre of government a key role, particularly for the SPD as it provided a stand-alone platform where their formal opinions on the alignment and methodological robustness of strategies were discussed. The Development Council also played a central role in monitoring and reporting on the NDP 2030. It was also responsible for steering the definition and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, this body and its working groups were dismantled upon the arrival of the new government in January 2025. The decision to dissolve it was based on concerns that it duplicated the functions of the Council of Ministers. The procedure for reviewing strategic documents was changed in December 2025. Proposals for a new strategic document, together with the opinion of the Strategic Development, Coordination and Concessions Directorate, is submitted for consideration and discussion at an operational meeting of the Council of Ministers on the basis of Art. 21, para. 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers and its administration.

In 2023, Bulgaria also created an informal network of experts on strategic planning, which promotes capacity-building activities and early-stage consultation on proposed initiatives within the strategic planning system. This network represents a positive step toward fostering horizontal co-ordination and shared understanding across ministries, although its informal nature may limit its ability to systematically support policy coherence of long-term and cross-cutting priorities.

Finally, another key milestone was the drafting of the Strategic Planning Law, also in 2023, which represented a major attempt to institutionalise and strengthen strategic planning processes by defining procedures, setting conditions, principles, time horizons, and clarifying responsibilities across government entities. The Law aimed to formalise mechanisms for aligning sectoral and subnational strategies under a common framework, thereby strengthening the institutional foundations for the implementation of long-term priorities.

This Law aimed to ensure that sectoral and subnational strategies are aligned under a National Strategic Framework, establishing a clear hierarchy of strategies, quality assurance and control mechanisms for drafting new strategies, and reducing the current number of existing strategies. However, as of 2026, the Law has not been approved, and there is no clear sign that it will be passed soon. In 2025, the Council of Ministers adopted a Methodology for Strategic Planning, which establishes general rules for the development, monitoring, reporting, control of implementation, and evaluation of national strategic documents, but it is not fully binding as it is adopted by a Council of Ministers Decision. In the absence of a binding legal framework, the CoG's capacity to enforce coherence and ensure consistent integration of cross-cutting and long-term priorities across strategies remains challenging.

There are different views among stakeholders regarding the potential effectiveness of such regulation, which may require additional efforts by the CoMA to ensure its acceptance and understanding across the administration. While some stakeholders interviewed for this chapter raised concerns about potential delays in planning processes that the approval of this law might bring, others highlighted significant benefits, including improved policy coherence, standardisation, and co-ordination, as well as the possibility of improving links between the planning and budgetary systems. The Law would also empower the National Statistical Institute (NSI) to formalise guidance on indicators, enhancing data quality and monitoring capabilities. Despite resistance from some line ministries, the law's adoption would contribute to a more coherent, efficient, and effective strategic planning system.

Furthermore, as outlined below, Bulgaria's entire planning and budgeting system, including programme budgeting, is organised mainly around line ministries, with each institution establishing its own objectives independently, rather than aligning with overarching national strategic goals.

Although these reforms aimed to improve Bulgaria's strategic planning system, challenges persist, particularly regarding the enforcement of planning processes, the alignment of national priorities with sectoral strategies, and the integration of the long-term and whole of government strategies into policymaking. In concrete terms, while the CoG still issues technical opinions on proposed strategies, there is no longer a stand-alone forum to discuss them, as they are now part of a broader set of formal opinions considered at the CoMA. This has resulted in a practical decrease in CoMA's capacity to shape and co-ordinate the whole-of-government planning system.

The following sections present Bulgaria's governance of the Sustainable Development Goals as an example of how they steered long term priorities within the current institutional setting.

5.3.1. A relevant framework struggling with implementation

Decree No. 52 of 10 April 2023, establishes the governance framework to support sustainable development in Bulgaria. The decree provides a comprehensive institutional and procedural structure that, if fully implemented, could enable more consistent tracking, co-ordination, and accountability. From a policy coherence perspective, the Decree also provides a basis for strengthening horizontal co-ordination across ministries and for aligning sectoral actions with shared national priorities. However, implementation to date has been partial and fragmented, limiting its impact on policymaking and cross-government co-ordination although it was instrumental in the co-ordination of the second Voluntary National Review approved in 2025.

The system outlined in the decree includes the following components. Collectively, these elements establish a potentially strong co-ordination architecture; however, their effectiveness depends on the existence of clear routines, incentives, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure coherent action across institutions:

- The Council of Ministers is responsible for steering the national SDG framework. It approves the list of lead and partner institutions, oversees reporting, and validates updates to the National Indicator List, proposed by the NSI. The Council is also in charge of endorsing the Voluntary National Reviews.
- Ministries assigned as lead institutions are tasked with overseeing monitoring and reporting for specific SDGs. Their responsibilities include co-ordinating partner institutions, appointing focal points, contributing to the national reform programme, and supporting stakeholder engagement. They are expected to report annually on progress toward their assigned targets and indicators.
- Supporting institutions contribute relevant information and report on sub-goals and indicators within their mandate. They assist lead institutions in gathering data, tracking implementation, and identifying challenges.
- The NSI is responsible for methodological oversight and statistical co-ordination. It maintains the national indicator list, updates indicator values, manages the SDG section on its website, and serves as the national counterpart for international statistical reporting.
- The Development Council, now dissolved, was in charge of supporting the Council of Ministers in its co-ordinating role. The decree formally expands the Council's mandate to include support for SDG monitoring and Voluntary National Reviews.

While responsibilities are clearly assigned, dispersing them across multiple institutions without a strong co-ordination mechanism can lead to uneven implementation, limited ownership, and weak integration into sectoral decision-making (OECD, 2019[91]). Despite the strength of the legal framework, implementation has remained partial and uneven. While the NSI has played a proactive role in maintaining and updating indicators, the operational routines foreseen in the decree (such as regular reporting by lead ministries, structured co-ordination with partner institutions, and strategic use of relevant data in policymaking) have yet to be fully established.

The legal foundation is in place, but its full potential will only be realised through more systematic implementation. That means establishing regular reporting cycles and working routines, ensuring accountability for lead institutions, and integrating monitoring of such long-term strategies with existing planning and budgeting tools.

5.3.2. Lack of substantive policy alignment undermines planning on long term priorities

A key function of the CoG is to ensure policy alignment by co-ordinating strategic priorities across ministries and linking national development objectives with sectoral policies (OECD, 2022[89])Effective policy alignment ensures that government strategies are coherent, mutually reinforcing, and operationally viable, preventing fragmentation, duplication, and contradictions in implementation. This can require a structured mechanism at the centre to steer cross-government integration, ensuring that national priorities are consistently reflected in sectoral planning, budgeting, and performance monitoring (OECD, 2024[2]). Without such co-ordination, policies risk being developed in isolation, with ministries and agencies pursuing parallel, and sometimes conflicting, agendas. Strengthening the CoG's policy alignment capacity is fundamental to ensuring that goals on sustainable development are not just referenced in strategic documents but are embedded in decision making, resource allocation, and accountability frameworks.

In Bulgaria, the main vehicle to translate sustainable development into national priorities is the national development strategy. The NDP 2030 is the country's highest-ranking strategic framework document. It provides an important reference point for aligning national objectives with the long-term priorities; however, the degree to which this alignment informs sectoral decision-making varies. Adopted in January 2020, it defines the country's vision, priorities, and goals for sustainable development up to 2030. The programme sets three overarching strategic goals:

- Accelerated economic development, aiming to enhance Bulgaria's competitiveness, innovation, and productivity.
- Demographic upswing, addressing challenges related to population decline and ageing.
- Reduction of inequalities, focusing on regional disparities, social inclusion, and access to quality public services.

The strategy organises policies and interventions into 5 integrated development axes and 13 national priorities. In turn, each of these 13 priorities includes multiple goals and actions, the latter called "*areas of impact*," which provide a general description of the measures to be taken. For instance, the area of impact *3.1.a. Digital tools and competences*, under the national priority *Smart Industry* states:

> *"Measures will be taken to stimulate the widespread use of digital technologies by businesses in order to increase the competitiveness of Bulgarian enterprises and improve the efficiency of business processes. Targeted efforts will be made to overcome the many barriers associated with limited human and organisational capital and knowledge gaps, including facilitating companies' access to digital know-how and information and communication technologies. The development of e-commerce tools and the implementation of management information systems, as well as the deployment of information security systems, will be encouraged. Bulgarian enterprises will be supported through training in the field of digital technology and information security, including using the opportunities of e-commerce and e-marketing to increase cross-border sales. Digital solutions for business development and promotion will be sought and implemented as a priority for improving the business*

> *environment. In parallel with stimulating the use of digital tools, increasing the digital competences of staff in enterprises and expanding opportunities to use digital technologies will be supported."*

Additionally, the National Development Programme specifies the relevant goals to which each area of impact relates. In this case, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth (Sub-goal 8.3) and Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (Sub-goal 9.c). It also includes a one-line assessment of the financial resources required, with an estimated amount and sources of financing listed (in this case from the state budget and European funds and instruments). While this illustrates an effort to map national priorities against relevant long-term priorities, such references do not, in themselves, ensure policy coherence or influence implementation choices, unless they are supported by clear targets, co-ordination mechanisms, and accountability arrangements. Although the NDP 2030 includes provisions for monitoring and evaluation, the country has not developed impact assessments to measure the actual effects of policies, making it difficult to determine their outcomes beyond expenditure tracking and basic implementation reporting. This limits the ability to assess whether policies contribute coherently to multiple sustainable development objectives or generate unintended trade-offs.

While the NDP 2030 represents an effort to showcase the alignment of national development priorities with long-term sustainable development goals, this alignment is largely symbolic rather than substantive. This suggests that long-term priorities are referenced ex post rather than used ex ante to inform policy choices and manage interactions between objectives. The mere reference to such long-term priorities within different areas of impact does not necessarily mean that they actively shape policy decisions, resource allocation, or strategic frameworks. Instead, they appear to be associated with existing priorities rather than being a driving force in policy formulation and implementation. This suggests that the NDP 2030 recognises the importance of global development objectives but does not fully embed them, and their integrated approach towards policymaking, into governance structures or decision-making processes.

As a result, this long-term priority is not fully integrated into Bulgaria's development planning. Policies may align with related themes on the surface, but without clear mechanisms for formulation, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement, their impact remains limited. While a regulatory framework is in place, including Decree No. 52/2023 and Council of Ministers Decision No. 613/2023, which adopts a national list of sustainable development indicators, the implementation of these frameworks remains limited. With the dismantling of the Development Council, there is no active inter-ministerial body ensuring that national targets actively contribute to these indicators. Although as of 2026 it is a requirement to include links between the strategic goals and the SDGs, there is no structured and systematic tracking progress towards the broader commitments. This weakens Bulgaria's ability to leverage such a long-term priority as a tool for policy transformation rather than just an aspirational reference.

Moreover, this symbolic alignment can create a false sense of progress, where the long-term priorities are formally acknowledged but lack meaningful integration into policymaking, which in turn weakens accountability and obscures responsibility for managing policy trade-offs across sectors. Without dedicated governance mechanisms, cross-sectoral co-ordination, and policy-specific funding allocations, national policies risk remaining fragmented, with sustainability considerations treated as an afterthought rather than a core planning principle.

This lack of substantive alignment can also create confusion among stakeholders. OECD analysis highlights that some policymakers recognised challenges in the integration of such a long-term priority into policymaking, others affirmed that there is full alignment through the 2030 strategy. This can lead to misplaced expectations, reduced accountability, and missed opportunities for genuinely integrating these goals into Bulgaria's governance framework.

5.3.3. Weaknesses in interministerial co-ordination delays implementation

The Development Council previously oversaw the development, implementation, and evaluation of national strategic documents, promoting alignment with the NDP 2030. Its functions included approving the three-year action plan, co-ordinating cross-sectoral policies, monitoring progress on strategic objectives, and aligning of the national and EU funding with the implementation of the country's governance programme. Its mission was also to lead Bulgaria's monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, multiple challenges undermined its effectiveness. Despite its intended role, stakeholders interviewed for this chapter noted that the Council lacked enforcement authority, allowing ministries to bypass its recommendations. While some regular written procedures existed to support the Council's work, its role in ensuring policy coherence was further weakened by irregular meetings and ministries' reluctance to share data and collaborate.

Several stakeholders noted that the Council's review processes were often procedural rather than substantive, leading to delays without necessarily improving strategic alignment. In many cases, ministries continued to operate independently, prioritising institutional goals over cross-sectoral collaboration. Some ministries engaged the CoMA early in the process of drafting strategies, but others did not, leading to inconsistencies in the integration of the goals.

Under the purview of the Development Council, the government established a permanent SDG Working Group in 2023, administered by the CoMA. Within this single group, lead ministries were designated for each of the goals, with responsibility for implementation, reporting, and contributing to the second Voluntary National Review (VNR). The establishment of this working group demonstrated a valuable practice for cross-sectoral co-ordination that, if reinforced with clearer mandates, standardised methodologies, improved data-sharing mechanisms, and CoG backing, could serve as an operational mechanism for enhancing policy coherence in the implementation of this long-term priority.

In sum, despite some obstacles, the Development Council represented an important effort in promoting co-ordination and alignment with long-term policy priorities. With its dissolution, there is now no designated body *specifically* focused on overseeing interministerial strategic alignment increasing the risk of fragmented implementation and inconsistent policy execution.

Additional efforts are needed to formalise governance structures that support cross-sectoral collaboration. While the SPD/SDCC supports alignment and co-ordination, its limited enforcement authority and the absence of a legally binding mechanism affects its capacity to fulfil this role. The establishment of network of strategic planning experts is an interesting step aiming to enhance institutional capacity and facilitate early-stage consultation on policy proposals. However, this network lacks the political influence across the administration to effectively foster co-ordination among ministries, meaning that co-operation often relies on personal relationships between officials.

Without a mandated co-ordinating entity, interministerial co-operation remains dependent on voluntary engagement, limiting the potential for systematic alignment. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity regarding which entities should arbitrate conflicting policy objectives, further complicating interinstitutional collaboration.

5.3.4. Building an actionable long term priority implementation framework

As mentioned, Bulgaria already has a comprehensive legal framework for co-ordination on the Goals in place through Decree No. 52/2023. The challenge at this stage is therefore less about the absence of institutional arrangements and more about translating this framework into regular practices that support co-ordination, prioritisation and coherence across government. Given the scale and complexity of aligning all sectors and institutions simultaneously, the government could adopt a phased implementation approach, starting with a limited number of cross-cutting priorities that reflect national strategic objectives.

The CoMA, together with the NSI and the Ministry of Finance, could initiate this process by focusing on one or two strategic policy areas, linked with policy priorities like the National Industrial Strategy, that involve multiple institutions. Such an approach would allow the CoG to test co-ordination arrangements, clarify roles, and identify practical challenges in aligning policies and instruments across sectors. This would involve setting up working-level routines for reporting, reviewing progress, and facilitating dialogue between lead and partner institutions as designated in the decree. Over time, such routines could help normalise collaboration across ministries and support more coherent implementation of long-term priorities. It would also create a space to strengthen co-ordination between planning, budgeting, and monitoring practices. A small co-ordination function or dedicated team within the CoMA could help steer this process, convene institutions, and ensure continuity. Rather than duplicating line-ministry responsibilities, such a function could focus on facilitation, synthesis, and follow-up, supporting the CoG's role in ensuring coherence across actions, including those related to the Goals.

To ensure broad engagement, academic institutions, business associations, and civil society organisations could be brought into the process. OECD experience suggests that structured stakeholder engagement can help identify policy interactions and implementation constraints, contributing to more coherent and realistic long-term policy goals. The objective is not to duplicate what already exists, but to activate the decree through sustained co-ordination, clear institutional roles, and gradual expansion; while ensuring alignment with international practices and enabling meaningful participation from the private sector. This incremental approach is consistent with OECD findings that effective implementation often builds on existing institutions, progressively strengthening co-ordination and coherence over time (OECD, 2019[91])

The example of Romania, presented in the box below, illustrates how placing the co-ordination of a long-term priority at the centre of government can support policy coherence and sustained implementation across government, particularly when supported by political commitment and dedicated co-ordination structures. While institutional contexts differ, several elements of this approach, such as clear mandates and structured interministerial networks, may offer relevant insights for Bulgaria.

Box 5.1. Co-ordination of sustainable development in Romania

Since December 2016, Romania has placed its CoG, the General Secretariat of the government (GSG), at the front of the implementation of sustainable development goals, ensuring high-level political co-ordination and coherence. Some features of Romania's co-ordination model are:

- High-level political commitment. The Romanian Government demonstrated sustained support for the implementation of sustainable development goals, with the GSG leading co-ordination efforts CoG. Established within the GSG, the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) oversees implementation, supports policy alignment, and engages with stakeholders.
- Romanian Sustainable Development Strategy 2030. This strategy sets national priorities, ensuring that policies across ministries align with the sustainable development goals. It introduces a monitoring system and aims to integrate sustainability principles into all policy areas.
- Interministerial co-ordination network. The government has created an Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development (ICSD) and Sustainable Development Hubs agents in all SDG-related sectoral ministries, to foster co-ordination and knowledge sharing. Each ministry designates officials responsible for integrating sustainable development principles into sectoral strategies.

The National Institute for Statistics works alongside the GSG to track progress on related indicators.

Romania's experience highlights the importance of strong political leadership at the CoG in driving the implementation of long-term priorities.

Source: OECD (2023[92]), *Coherence and Co-ordination at the Centre of Government in Romania*, https://doi.org/10.1787/3feaa33e-en

Finland's approach to structured cross-sectoral co-ordination also offers useful insights. Without introducing new institutions, Finland has built a durable mechanism for aligning sectoral policies with shared sustainability goals through regular interministerial dialogue and structured engagement with stakeholders (see Box 4.3 in Chapter 4).

5.3.5. Practices, methodologies and tools to improve planning and co-ordination of long-term priorities

Representatives at the CoG in Bulgaria are well-aware of the complexity and fragmentation of Bulgaria's planning system, and the Draft Strategic Planning Law is a clear example of its commitment to addressing these challenges. However, as mentioned, the current draft has not been approved yet, and it does not appear to be a priority at this stage for the government. In this context, strengthening policy coherence for cross-cutting agendas is likely to depend less on comprehensive legislative reform and more on the gradual adoption of practices that support co-ordination, learning, and alignment across government.

Within this context, Bulgaria may benefit from adopting an incremental approach to improving strategic planning. Rather than waiting for comprehensive legislative reform, Bulgaria could focus on gradual cultural shifts and the incorporation of new planning practices that do not require major structural transformations. OECD experience on policy coherence suggests that such incremental adjustments can help build trust, clarify roles, and strengthen co-ordination for complex and long-term agendas. Strengthening and incorporating new practices to inform planning, foster collaboration, strengthen monitoring, and improve the production and use of data and analytical systems could be initial steps toward a more effective planning system. These practices can support the CoG in moving from formal co-ordination toward more substantive policy alignment across sectors.

However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of co-ordination and collaboration in the absence of an explicit legislative mandate. Without a clear legal foundation, ensuring sustained co-operation across ministries can be difficult, and certain co-ordination tools may face limitations in their implementation. This underscores the importance of political signalling from the top of government to line ministries, and leadership from the CoG to reinforce the relevance of long-term priorities in national planning, supporting alignment and coherence among sectoral priorities and ensuring institutional buy-in despite the lack of binding legal provisions.

By fostering small but meaningful changes Bulgaria can lay the groundwork for more ambitious reforms in the future while maintaining policy continuity and administrative stability.

5.3.6. Strengthening planning networks across government

The informal network of experts on strategic planning, despite its limitations in capacity and influence, represents an important step toward enhancing cross-government co-ordination and ensuring greater policy coherence, offering a valuable space for exchange among planning officials. Such networks are increasingly used in OECD countries as low-cost mechanisms to support coherence on cross-cutting and long-term priorities. Building on this progress, the next steps could be to formalise the network's role within government structures. Giving the network a clear technical advisory mandate would allow it to more systematically support the CoMA in identifying and addressing cross-cutting government priorities, including the integration of long-term priorities into strategic planning processes. This could help strengthen early-stage co-ordination and reduce fragmentation across sectoral initiatives.

With a formal mandate and structured calendar of activities, the network could serve as a platform for early co-ordination on strategic initiatives, facilitate alignment across ministries, and improve the quality and coherence of policy planning. It could also provide a regular forum for surfacing implementation challenges, sharing good practices across institutions, and feeding lessons learned back into the planning cycle, supporting continuous improvement. Portugal's REPLAN network offers a useful example of how an interministerial planning and foresight network can support co-ordination and policy coherence on cross-cutting priorities without replacing formal decision-making structures (see Box 4.8 in Chapter 4).

5.3.7. Leveraging tools to enhance strategy-setting, co-ordination, and data-informed policymaking

Bulgaria could benefit from adopting more structured planning and collaboration practices that enhance policy coherence and long-term governance without requiring major institutional reforms. Such practices can help surface policy interlinkages, anticipate trade-offs, and support more integrated decision-making across government. By incorporating methodologies that encourage anticipatory policymaking, cross-sectoral dialogue, and iterative policy adjustments, Bulgaria can better respond to emerging challenges while maintaining strategic consistency towards implementation of long-term priorities.

One specific methodology that does not require large investments in terms of regulations, financial resources, or human resources is strategic foresight. Bulgaria's CoG could leverage strategic foresight as a method to inform future vision, strategic directions, and policymaking. Foresight can support policy coherence by encouraging cross-sectoral dialogue on long-term trends and by helping governments consider the cumulative effects of policy choices. This approach enhances long-term planning by enabling policymakers to systematically anticipate and prepare for potential future scenarios. It also fosters cross-sectoral discussions on trade-offs and policy choices, strengthening co-ordination across government and coherence in national priorities. Moreover, foresight promotes a data-informed policymaking culture, as it relies on data, trend analysis, and empirical research to build robust future scenarios. By incorporating foresight methodologies into policy development, Bulgaria could enhance resilience, improve adaptability to emerging challenges, and foster a proactive governance model (OECD, 2025[93]).

Bulgaria could progressively integrate strategic foresight into its governance system. Rather than requiring major structural reforms, foresight can be incorporated through targeted initiatives that complement existing planning processes. This may include pilot exercises linked to priority strategies, targeted training for officials, and light co-ordination arrangements within the CoG. Establishing a foresight unit within the SDCC or another CoG unit, embedding scenario planning in national strategies, and training policymakers in foresight methodologies would allow Bulgaria to develop a more anticipatory and resilient governance model.

Many countries have implemented strategic foresight as a tool to enhance long-term policymaking, improve adaptability, and strengthen governance. Countries such as Ireland, Spain, Finland, the Netherlands, and Singapore have developed institutional foresight mechanisms to systematically anticipate future challenges, integrate scenario planning into decision making, and foster a culture of anticipatory governance. The following box presents the cases of Singapore and Spain (Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Strategic foresight in national planning in Singapore and Spain

Singapore

The Singaporean Civil Service College (CSC) is a statutory board under the public service division of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The CSC is the learning and development arm of the public service. One of the missions of the CSC is to equip Singapore's public service to be future-ready. The Learning Futures Group is a business support unit and team in the CSC that helps develop futures capability and capacity.

Building futures capability is a collaborative effort between the CSC Learning Futures Group and the Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF), which has the mandate to produce and disseminate foresight work from a whole-of-government perspective. While the CSC does not directly build foresight capability, it works closely with CSF to complement its existing work in this area and provide public and civil servants with innovative foresight abilities, such as the use of gaming and simulations for policy development. One of the key initiatives of the Learning Futures Group is the Social Policy 101 programme, which not only examines current issues but also explores their future implications for policymakers. They emphasise through the Social Policy 101 programme the need for futures thinking in policymaking and the importance of building capability through gaming, simulations and role playing, as a means not only to explore issues but also their future implications.

Spain

Spain has institutionalised strategic foresight through the National Office of Foresight and Strategy, established in 2020 under the Cabinet of the Presidency. The office applies foresight methodologies such as scenario planning and megatrend analysis to assess long-term challenges and inform policy decisions. One of its key initiatives, Spain 2050, explores future trends in areas like demographics, and technology to support data and analysis-based policymaking. By using quantitative modelling and expert collaboration, it provides insights to help shape Spain's long-term strategic priorities.

Source: OECD (2025[94]), *Building Anticipatory Capacity with Strategic Foresight in Government: Lessons from Lithuania, Italy, and Malta* https://doi.org/10.1787/d7eb0bb6-en; Government of Spain, National Office of Foresight and Strategy (n.d.[68]), *Spain 2050 – Strategic Foresight Initiative*, https://futuros.gob.es/en

To ensure foresight efforts are directly relevant to national priorities, Bulgaria could begin with pilot foresight exercises focused on the three key challenges identified in the NDP 2030:

- Accelerated economic development: conduct foresight analysis on digital transformation and the future of work to anticipate skills demands, the impact of automation, and opportunities for innovation-driven growth.
- Demographic upswing: use foresight methodologies to explore future demographic scenarios, including migration trends, aging population challenges, and the long-term sustainability of social services.
- Reduction of inequalities: apply foresight to assess regional development trajectories, identifying strategies to reduce urban-rural disparities and improve access to public services.

By focusing on national priorities such as these, Bulgaria can ensure that foresight is policy-relevant, actionable, and progressively integrated into strategic decision making. Such exercises could also help clarify how progress on one objective may affect others, supporting more coherent implementation of long-term priorities. Initial efforts should emphasise practical applications, such as stress-testing policies against different future scenarios and facilitating cross-ministerial dialogues on long-term policy choices.

Moreover, Bulgaria could strengthen institutional capacity by developing targeted training programmes and collaborative activities on the Sustainable Development Goals. Establishing policy labs, hosted at the SDCC with key ministries, could serve as a testing ground to develop some innovative approaches, allowing officials to experiment with new policy solutions, assess feasibility and coherence before scaling them up. These labs could facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration, ensuring integration of this long-term priority is not siloed within individual ministries but embedded across government planning processes.

5.3.8. Developing integrated indicators into the planning system

The increasing complexity of policymaking and the sustained pressure to deliver measurable policy results have led to CoGs taking on a larger role in monitoring efforts. According to the OECD, 19 out of 26 CoGs identify whole-of-government performance monitoring as a top or significant priority function, highlighting the growing expectation that the centre not only sets strategic priorities but also ensures their implementation and impact are systematically tracked (OECD, 2024[2]). The role of the CoG in monitoring extends beyond data collection, as it is responsible for ensuring that indicators are meaningful, aligned with strategic priorities, and used to inform decision making rather than remaining a passive reporting tool.

Indicators are used by governments to foster alignment and co-ordination on long-term priorities. They provide a common framework for measuring progress, help ensure policy coherence, and facilitate data-driven decision making across ministries and agencies. Well-defined indicators also support monitoring and evaluation, enabling governments to track implementation, identify gaps, and adjust policies accordingly.

In Bulgaria, while some ministries have proactively integrated sustainable development into their policies and indicators, others have engaged only minimally, resulting in inconsistencies across sectors. Within the current administrative culture, without a centralised enforcement mechanism, ministries tend to prioritise their own sectoral objectives, leading to fragmented implementation. As a result, related initiatives vary in focus and commitment, depending on individual ministerial priorities rather than a co-ordinated national strategy.

The National List of Indicators is Bulgaria’s official framework for tracking progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. It was established to provide a standardised system for measuring policy outcomes and evaluating strategic implementation. The NSI is responsible for compiling, maintaining, and updating the list, while individual ministries and agencies submit data annually in accordance with reporting obligations (Republic of Bulgaria, 2023[95]).

The list includes indicators sourced from the United Nations Statistical Commission, Eurostat, the OECD, and European Commission Directorates-General (DGs), ensuring alignment with international reporting standards. The goal is to create a centralised, structured approach to tracking progress toward Bulgaria’s national and international commitments, facilitating data and analysis-based policymaking and performance assessment.

However, despite its role as a critical monitoring tool, the implementation of the National List of Indicators faces several challenges. One of the main deficiencies in Bulgaria’s monitoring framework in this area is the absence of a standardised methodology for setting targets, leading to inconsistent ambition levels and unreliable benchmarks. Ministries adopt varying approaches, with some relying solely on EU averages, while others fail to define measurable goals altogether, making it difficult to track national progress. Additionally, the lack of structured processes requiring ministries to use data systematically in policy development further weakens the role of indicators in data-based governance. Several key stakeholders identified the following challenges:

- Lack of defined target values for many indicators, limiting the ability to measure policy effectiveness.

- Limited use of indicators in decision making, as ministries primarily use them for reporting obligations rather than guiding resource allocation and policy reforms.
- Weak municipal-level data collection, making it difficult to assess regional disparities in sustainable development indicators

5.3.9. Establishing clear targets for long term priorities

Clear and measurable targets are essential to ensuring that government objectives translate into concrete policy action and can be effectively tracked. However, without a central mechanism to enforce consistency and alignment across ministries, targets risk being fragmented or set without clear benchmarks. According to the OECD (2024[2]), 54% of CoGs ensure compliance with baseline or target indicators, while 69% communicate specific government targets that must be delivered. Given its role, the CoG is a natural focal point for co-ordinating crosscutting target setting on policy priorities, ensuring they are not only defined but also that they reflect the political ambitions of the government.

Bulgaria primarily derives its targets from EU-wide frameworks, ensuring coherence with regional commitments. However, this approach presents challenges: in some cases, EU's average benchmarks are too ambitious given Bulgaria's starting position, while in others, they are not ambitious enough to drive meaningful progress. A more tailored approach to benchmarking would allow for a more accurate and strategic adaptation of targets to national circumstances.

The CoG could consider fostering the implementation of the OECD Distance to Targets methodology to set targets in a structured manner and following international standards. This approach would help define realistic, measurable, and internationally comparable targets while considering Bulgaria's national context.

Box 5.3. OECD Distance to Targets methodology

The OECD Distance to Targets methodology is a quantitative approach that measures how far a country is from achieving each specific national target by comparing its current performance against predefined benchmarks. Unlike basic progress tracking, this methodology prioritises policy efforts by ranking related targets based on their level of achievement and urgency for action.

It follows four key steps. First, a benchmark is established for each target, using either the official target, international agreements, or high-performing countries as reference points. Second, the current status of indicators is assessed, and the "distance" to the benchmark is calculated. Third, targets are ranked based on how far they are from full achievement, helping policymakers focus on areas needing the most effort. Finally, changes are monitored over time to track whether Bulgaria is closing gaps or falling behind. This methodology helps governments avoid blind spots in implementation. Instead of treating all targets equally, it highlights where urgent interventions are needed.

Slovenia applied this methodology in its National Development Strategy 2030 to set measurable targets. The country followed a structured process, using official targets where available, supplementing with other international agreements when nationally determined and specific targets were unclear, applying expert judgment to adjust targets based on national realities, and normalising values for comparability across policy fields. This enabled Slovenia to balance global commitments with national priorities.

Source: OECD (2022[96]), *The Short and Winding Road to 2030: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets*, https://doi.org/10.1787/af4b630d-en.

For the benchmarking process, Bulgaria could adopt a dual benchmarking approach, which would provide greater flexibility by allowing ministries to:

- Use the EU average as a baseline for defining minimum target values, ensuring that Bulgaria remains aligned with European commitments while acknowledging national constraints.
- Apply OECD averages or high-income country benchmarks in sectors where Bulgaria meets or exceeds EU targets, enabling the government to set more ambitious and internationally competitive goals.

This method would maintain regional alignment while allowing Bulgaria to tailor its targets to national conditions, ensuring a realistic yet progressive approach to sustainable development.

5.3.10. Strengthening the monitoring of **long-term priorities**

Monitorstat Information System, Bulgaria's national centralised monitoring platform, has the potential to play a central role for the CoG in linking long-term priorities, planning, and policy outcomes. Developed under the Operational Program "Good Governance" (OPGG) 2014-2020 and launched in December 2019, the system was designed as a centralised, web-based platform to support the monitoring of European and national strategies. As of 2025, Bulgarian authorities are upgrading the platform under a project financed by the EU's National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The NSI, in co-operation with the CoMA, is leading the implementation. The objective is to transform the Monitorstat Information System into an integrated tool for strategic planning, performance monitoring, and reporting on national strategic documents (National Statistical Institute, n.d.[97]).

This is a relevant initiative, as its current underutilisation limits its effectiveness as a tool for policy monitoring, evaluation and decision making. Ministries are not required to submit performance data regularly, leading to fragmented tracking, outdated strategies, and inconsistent reporting across government institutions. In this regard, the Monitorstat Information System serves primarily as a repository for strategic documents. Over 200 strategic documents exist, yet only a small number are uploaded or regularly updated in the platform, reinforcing concerns about weak co-ordination and accountability in strategic planning.

While most global, EU, and national indicators are included in Monitorstat, progress has not been systematically updated for most indicators as of 2022, with only a few exceptions. Additionally, no targets have been defined for any of the indicators, which undermines the system's potential for tracking progress and informing policy adjustments. The ongoing upgrade is expected to address some of these limitations by enhancing functionalities and introducing tools to better align internationally recognised indicators useful for benchmarking targets, and reporting mechanisms with strategic priorities.

Given that Monitorstat is currently undergoing an upgrade, it is essential that this process results in a platform that is regularly maintained and fully integrated into planning and monitoring cycles. The successful implementation of the ongoing project could significantly enhance the system's relevance for data and analysis-based decision making and long-term priority tracking. Ireland's SDG GeoHive represents an interesting example of how such platforms can be used effectively to monitor sustainable development progress.

Box 5.4. SDG GeoHive: A centralised data hub for sustainable development in Ireland

The SDG GeoHive is Ireland's public platform for accessing data related to the SDGs. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) developed the platform in collaboration with Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI), using geospatial technology provided by Esri Ireland.

The platform supports the monitoring and presentation of Ireland's progress on the goals using a set of indicators based on UN and EU frameworks. It includes data at multiple geographic levels, including NUTS3, county, and census local areas. The CSO is responsible for identifying, managing, and presenting national indicator data, and the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment oversees Ireland's official reporting on implementation.

The SDG GeoHive allows users to search for, view, and download indicator data in various formats. It also provides additional resources such as maps and visual materials to support data interpretation.

The platform is part of Ireland's whole-of-government approach to the implementation of the Goals, as outlined in the National Implementation Plans. Data sourcing is ongoing, with indicator coverage currently at approximately 80%. The SDG GeoHive is intended to be used by a range of actors, including public authorities, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Source: Government of Ireland (n.d.[98]), Ireland's SDG GeoHive, Sustainable Development Goals Data Hub. Central Statistics Office & Ordnance Survey Ireland, https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie

5.3.11. Strengthening alignment of long-term priorities through the budget

Effective integration of budgeting and long-term planning requires strong co-ordination between the CoG and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) to ensure that fiscal decisions align with strategic priorities. Budgeting is a critical instrument for translating cross-cutting objectives into concrete policy choices and resource allocations. The CoG plays a key role in bridging policy objectives with budget allocations, ensuring that financial planning reflects government commitments rather than historical expenditure patterns. OECD findings show that CoGs can strengthen this alignment by co-ordinating with budget authorities, setting clear spending priorities, and ensuring programme budgeting supports national development goals (OECD, 2024[99]).

Program budgeting plays a critical role by ensuring that financial resources are allocated based on policy priorities rather than historical spending patterns. When effectively implemented, programme budgeting can support policy coherence by clarifying how sectoral programmes contribute to shared objectives and by facilitating trade-offs between competing priorities. By linking budget allocations to measurable development outcomes, programme budgeting improves policy coherence and strengthens the government's ability to track progress toward long-term goals.

The Medium-Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) serves as Bulgaria's primary fiscal planning instrument, setting multi-year expenditure ceilings and defining fiscal policy priorities (OECD, 2022[89]). While the MTBF promotes fiscal discipline, its effectiveness in ensuring strategic coherence remains limited. In particular, the MTBF is not systematically used to prioritise or sequence expenditures in line with long-term objectives such as those articulated in Bulgaria 2030. Stakeholders highlighted that ministries prepare budgets based on historical spending rather than policy impact assessments, with no formal requirement to systematically link budget allocations to Bulgaria 2030 or targets related to the sustainable development goals.

Although programme budgeting was introduced to connect financial allocations with policy objectives, its implementation remains inconsistent. Ministries often regard programme budgeting as a procedural obligation rather than an analytical tool to improve expenditure efficiency. This limits its potential to support coherence across policy areas and to inform decisions on reallocating resources toward cross-cutting priorities. Additionally, expenditure ceilings under the MTBF do not necessarily align with the financial needs of national development priorities, creating a disconnect between fiscal planning and policy execution.

Moreover, as analysed in the last section of this paper, at the municipal level, local governments face challenges in aligning their financial planning with national priorities due to unclear guidelines and insufficient funding for initiatives related to sustainable development. This further weakens vertical policy coherence between national commitments and local implementation.

5.3.12. Strengthening policy coherence through spending reviews

Spending reviews are a key tool for improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and alignment of public expenditure with national priorities. They also provide an opportunity to assess whether spending across policy areas is coherent with long-term objectives and to identify potential reallocations or synergies. Spending reviews are widely used in OECD countries, and they have become a core instrument for expenditure prioritisation and reallocation and a permanent feature of the budget process in many countries, contributing to the sustainability of public finances (OECD, 2022[89]). In this context, CoGs can ensure that spending reviews align with national priorities, including cross-sectoral goals. While the Ministry of Finance leads on fiscal analysis, the CoG contributes by selecting review areas, ensuring policy relevance, and integrating findings into strategic planning.

Currently, Bulgaria lacks a systematic approach to spending reviews, relying instead on some ad hoc evaluations. This limits the government's ability to use spending reviews as a regular instrument for aligning expenditures with strategic priorities and for strengthening policy coherence. While the Ministry of Finance has conducted pilot spending reviews with the World Bank, these have not been institutionalised as a standard practice nor there is sufficient alignment with the CoG in the selection or review areas. Stakeholders emphasised that making spending reviews a mandatory component of the budget cycle would help identify inefficiencies, reallocate resources more strategically, and improve the overall effectiveness of government spending and therefore, of financing long-term priorities.

To advance in this direction, the CoG could work with the Ministry of Finance to adopt a structured framework for spending reviews aligned with the government's strategic policy priorities. In this context, the CoG's contribution would primarily relate to ensuring policy coherence and relevance, while the Ministry of Finance would retain responsibility for fiscal analysis. This would ensure that reviews are conducted regularly, linked to policy objectives, and used as a basis for budgetary decisions. The Netherlands provides a useful example of a well-integrated spending review process, demonstrating how co-ordination between the CoG and the Ministry of Finance can produce structured evaluations that enhance fiscal transparency and policy coherence (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5. Spending reviews in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, spending reviews are an integral part of government formation following general elections. The coalition agreement, which outlines the priorities of the incoming administration, typically includes a commitment to conducting spending reviews over the government's four-year term. While the coalition agreement is politically binding, it does not carry legal authority through parliament; rather, it serves as a guiding instrument for the executive branch.

Political leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the spending review process, with key stages including:

Selection of Review Areas: The Cabinet identifies key policy areas or government programmes for review, aligning them with the administration's priorities.

Approval of Review Framework: The Cabinet defines the terms of reference for each review and includes them in the Budget Memorandum, ensuring transparency and consistency in methodology.

Decision-Making on Recommendations: Once the review is completed, the Cabinet evaluates the findings and determines which recommendations to implement.

The Ministry of Finance oversees the process, co-ordinating a non-political working group that conducts the analysis. The findings of the review, along with the Cabinet's final decisions, are publicly released, ensuring transparency and accountability in the fiscal decision-making process.

Source: OECD (2024[100]), Spending Reviews: Lessons from the Netherlands, https://blog-pfm.imf.org/en/pfmblog/2023/03/spending-reviews-lessons-from-the-netherlands.

5.3.13. Localising national long-term priorities

Localising national long-term priorities is crucial to ensuring that national sustainability commitments translate into tangible improvements at the municipal level. In Bulgaria, municipalities are at the forefront of delivering public services that directly impact the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Effective localisation depends on the alignment of national priorities, local capacities, and financing mechanisms across levels of government. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on their ability to focus on sustainable development issues and systematically track, report, and align local progress with national targets.

Bridging the gap between national priorities and local implementation requires stronger co-ordination between central and municipal governments. Strengthening data collection, co-ordination mechanisms, and municipal engagement in the governance of long-term priorities is essential to bridging the gap between national strategies and local implementation. Weak localisation often reflects gaps in multi-level governance arrangements rather than a lack of commitment at the local level. As highlighted in Bulgaria's second Voluntary National Review, many of the obstacles to achieving the Goals could be addressed more effectively through stronger local policies and action at the territorial level. This reinforces the importance of multi-level governance mechanisms for ensuring coherence between national commitments and local implementation. The VNR emphasises the importance of building robust multi-level governance mechanisms and points to Bulgaria's intent to strengthen regional development efforts, align territorial policies with national sustainable development priorities, and enhance co-ordination between central and local authorities (Republic of Bulgaria, 2025[101]).

In this regard, in unitary countries such as Bulgaria, the CoG can help promote local administrations in systematically tracking progress, aligning their efforts with national priorities, and contributing meaningfully to reporting on long-term priority goals. In doing so, the CoG can play a facilitating role in strengthening vertical policy coherence, without encroaching on municipal autonomy. A more structured approach – co-ordinated by the CoG, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, and the National Statistical Institute (NSI) – could improve communication, data collection, integration into national reporting, and policy coherence. Norway's experience illustrates how structured and sustained dialogue between central and local governments can strengthen policy coherence across levels of government (Box 5.6).

Box 5.6. Localising long-term priorities in Norway

Norway's approach to localising sustainable development goals is anchored in a well-established multilevel governance framework, co-ordinated by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). For over two decades, Norway has conducted formal, structured consultations between the central government and local/regional authorities three times a year. This institutionalised dialogue has promoted trust, stable financing, and policy coherence, while limiting the need for top-down regulation and supporting significant local discretion.

This sustained co-operation and strong political commitment led to the publication of Norway's first Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) in 2021. The VSR documents the contributions, progress, and challenges of local and regional governments in implementing the goals, systematically integrating their perspectives into national reporting and reinforcing Norway's whole-of-government approach to sustainable development.

Source: KS & Nordregio (2021[102]), *Localising the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe: Perspectives for the north*, https://www.ks.no/contentassets/72ade1e76c514378a755f2e38762c8a1/KSReportSDGFinal.pdf; KS (2021[103]), *Voluntary Subnational Review – Norway: Implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in Norwegian Local and Regional Government*, https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/norway_2021.pdf

5.3.14. Strengthening data collection at the local level

One of the primary challenges in localising long-term priorities on sustainable development in Bulgaria is the lack of structured municipal-level data collection and monitoring. This limits the ability of the CoG to assess how national priorities are reflected in local outcomes and to identify regional disparities. While municipalities play a key role in implementing sustainability policies, there is no systematic approach to tracking their contributions, making it difficult to assess local progress against national targets. The absence of a common framework for collecting and reporting municipal-level data on sustainable development has resulted in inconsistencies, with data often aggregated at the national level and failing to reflect specific municipal efforts.

Many municipalities lack mechanisms to document and report on their sustainable development-related activities, limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to national planning. This reflects the absence of a common reporting framework and clear guidance, rather than a lack of local initiatives. While some cities, such as Sofia, have developed reports on the goal on Sustainable Cities and Communities, these initiatives remain uncoordinated and are not systematically integrated into national reporting structures. A major concern raised by stakeholders during the research for this chapter was that municipalities have no legal obligation to track or report progress in this area, leading to fragmented and inconsistent data collection.

The National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) plays an essential role in representing Bulgaria's 265 municipalities, facilitating their participation in governance discussions. The National Association is not a government body but it acts *de facto* as one. However, its involvement in sustainable development monitoring remains primarily consultative rather than operational, limiting its ability to support systematic vertical co-ordination. While NAMRB takes part in related working groups on water management goals and sustainable cities goals, these forums mainly serve as platforms for exchanging good practices rather than formalised data collection mechanisms. A key issue raised by stakeholders during research for this chapter was the limited capacity of municipalities to contribute effectively to Bulgaria's Second Voluntary National Review (VNR) due to time constraints and the absence of structured reporting tools. Some suggested that a baseline study on municipal contributions to sustainable development goals could improve the quality of local data and strengthen their role in future national reviews.

A more structured collaboration between the CoG, the NAMRB, the National Statistical Institute (NSI), and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works was identified as a necessary step to developing municipal-level indicators on sustainable development. Such collaboration could help align local data collection with national monitoring needs, supporting more coherent reporting and decision-making. Integrating these indicators into Monitorstat Information System, Bulgaria's national monitoring platform, could ensure more systematic tracking of local sustainability efforts while minimising administrative burdens for municipalities. Another relevant example from Norway is the KOSTRA system. This provides an example of how municipalities can systematically report financial and service provision data, facilitating transparency, accountability, and more data-driven local governance (Box 5.7).

Box 5.7. Digitalisation reform in Italy, and municipal reporting in Norway

Italy

Led by the Department of Public Administration within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and funded through Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), the "Digitalisation of SUAP and SUE Procedures" project covers Italy's more than 5 000 municipal one-stop shops for business activities (SUAP) and construction (SUE). It aims to replace fragmented exchanges of PDF documents via certified email with machine-to-machine data sharing through a central national hub, standardising procedures, communication protocols, and shared databases across national, regional, and local levels. Progress is monitored through binding milestones under the Plan and joint oversight by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the European Commission. Though still underway, the project shows how the COG can support large-scale digital infrastructure reform, and improve data quality, transparency, and processing times, while aiming to address uneven technical capacity across local administrations.

Norway

KOSTRA (Local Governments-State-Reporting) is Norway's national information system for tracking municipal and county government resource use. The system is based on consecutive data records and annual reports submitted by local authorities to Statistics Norway, containing detailed financial data and service provision metrics. These data are combined with demographic figures to generate key indicators on priorities, coverage rates, and the efficiency of public services. The indicators are published online, enabling municipalities to compare resource use, expenditures, and service outcomes with similar peers. By providing a comprehensive and transparent benchmarking tool, KOSTRA supports data-driven decision making, accountability, and strategic resource planning. This system helps local governments identify areas for efficiency improvements and ensures that public resources are used effectively to enhance service delivery.

Source: Norwegian Government (n.d.[104]), KOSTRA – Municipality-State Reporting, Government of Norway, Oslo, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/kommuner-og-regioner/municipal-economy/kostra-municipality--state-reporting/id1233/; Government of Italy (2021[105]), *National Recovery and Resilience Plan*, https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/en/strumenti/documenti/archivio-documenti/national-recovery-and-reslieince-plan.html.

5.3.15. Enhancing Policy and Financial Incentives for Local Implementation

Despite their responsibility for implementing sustainability policies, municipalities lack a structured role in co-ordination and decision making around sustainable development. This limits the alignment of local initiatives with national priorities and reduces opportunities for feedback between levels of government. NAMRB serves as the main representative body for local governments but does not have a formalised role in implementation. Municipalities have little to no influence on the national sustainable development strategy, further limiting their ability to align local actions with broader sustainability goals.

Frequent changes in government structures have contributed to uncertainty in municipal planning, complicating long-term sustainability strategies. Such uncertainty can weaken the coherence in their implementation, particularly for investments requiring long planning horizons. Decentralisation efforts have stalled since 2021, limiting municipalities' ability to develop independent sustainability strategies and secure dedicated resources.

Municipalities in Bulgaria remain heavily dependent on central government transfers, which account for approximately 70% of municipal revenue. This dependency underscores the importance of aligning national funding frameworks with local responsibilities related to long-term priorities to ensure coherent implementation. Stakeholders highlighted the need for increased funding for areas such as infrastructure and sustainability projects as municipal budgets often prioritise immediate service needs over long-term sustainability initiatives. While the EU programming period 2021-2027 includes funding for sustainable development, there are no legal requirements for municipalities to track sustainable development-related financial commitments, making it difficult to assess whether resources are effectively allocated toward sustainability goals.

A key challenge is the lack of awareness and guidance for municipalities on long-term priority planning and implementation. More systematic communication from the CoG and relevant ministries could help clarify expectations, priorities, and available support mechanisms, strengthening alignment across levels of government. There has been no active campaign from the central government to promote the benefits of adopting a sustainable development approach, whether in terms of communication, financial incentives, or technical support for local actors. In this regard, the CoG and Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works can also act as channels for communicating national sustainable development priorities to municipalities. The Voluntary National Review (VNR) process offers an opportunity to engage local administrations, highlight best practices, and promote more consistent implementation. By leveraging the VNR as a platform for dialogue and knowledge-sharing, the CoG can strengthen local awareness of sustainable development commitments, support capacity-building efforts, and facilitate better co-ordination between central and local governments.

Knowledge sharing is another challenge that impacts on the effectiveness of local inputs into long-term priorities. Municipalities lack a dedicated platform to communicate their sustainable development-related challenges, goals, and initiatives, which restricts collaboration. Some stakeholders emphasised that municipalities would benefit from greater access to structured platforms to exchange best practices and financing models for sustainability projects. Additionally, impact assessments at the municipal level remain largely absent, making it difficult to evaluate policy effectiveness.

Some discussions highlighted the potential benefits of tools that could allow municipalities to track sustainability-related expenditures more systematically. Other opportunities include performance-based municipal grants, which could incentivise municipalities to demonstrate measurable progress in implementation of sustainable development. Additionally, aligning related municipal strategies with EU funding opportunities – particularly in areas such as environmental resilience, infrastructure, and urban sustainability – could enhance financial support for local sustainability initiatives.

As mentioned, a more structured approach is needed to enhance municipal engagement in implementation of sustainable development goals. Given the diversity of municipal capacities across Bulgaria, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective. Instead, a differentiated strategy that combines capacity building, knowledge sharing, and targeted financial incentives could help municipalities integrate sustainable development more effectively into local planning and budgeting. Portugal's experience illustrates how structured collaboration, technical support, and digital tools can facilitate integration of long-term priorities at the municipal level, offering potential insights for strengthening localisation efforts.

Box 5.8. Municipal commitments to the 2030 Agenda in Portugal

Portugal has been actively localising the 2030 Agenda by integrating sustainable development goals into municipal governance. The *National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP)* has created a sectio*n of Municipalities for the SDGs*, now with 79 member municipalities, demonstrating a strong institutional commitment. Many municipalities have incorporated the goals into strategic planning, budgeting, and decision-making processes, ensuring that local policies align with national and global sustainability objectives.

To strengthen implementation of the goals, several municipalities have established dedicated technical teams. Awareness-raising efforts include public events, communication campaigns, and engagement with local stakeholders to foster broader participation. Additionally, municipalities are leveraging digital platforms like *ODSLocal*, which enables real-time tracking of progress, and the *Municipal Sustainability Index (CESOP-Local)*, which provides data-driven insights to measure sustainability at the municipal level.

Portuguese municipalities are also engaging in international sustainability networks, such as the *UN Habitat SDG Cities Programme*, reinforcing their commitment to sustainable urban development. By embedding the goals into governance, policy planning, and community initiatives, local authorities in Portugal are playing a crucial role in accelerating the national transition towards sustainable development.

Source: Government of Portugal (2023[106]), *2023 Voluntary National Review*, United Nations High-Level Political Forum, https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/Portugal_VNR_Report.pdf

To address these challenges, Bulgaria could consider the following measures, which aim to strengthen vertical policy coherence by improving co-ordination, data flows, and alignment between national priorities and local implementation capacities:

- Develop targeted training programmes for municipal officials, focusing on integrating sustainability into municipal planning, financial management, and service delivery. The NAMRB could play a leading role in organising these activities under the leadership of the CoG, and in collaboration with the NSI and the Ministry of Finance.
- Advance disaggregated data collection on sustainable development: the National Statistical Institute, in collaboration with NAMRB and line ministries, could progressively expand the collection of disaggregated data at the municipal level, ensuring that indicators reflect regional disparities. This could include incorporating subnational sustainable development data into the Monitorstat Information System, allowing for more granular analysis of progress across different municipalities.
- Conducting a baseline study on sustainable development governance at the subnational level. To better understand how municipalities currently integrate long-term sustainable development policies into their governance and planning frameworks, the government could launch a baseline study assessing municipal-level practices in this area. This study could map existing local sustainability initiatives, identify capacity gaps, and highlight opportunities for better co-ordination between municipalities and central government institutions.

- Establish a structured platform for municipalities to exchange best practices, discuss implementation challenges, and share data on progress. This could take the form of a digital knowledge hub or regular regional forums where municipalities showcase innovative sustainability initiatives, particularly those linked to EU funding opportunities.
- Strengthen the link between local initiatives and EU financing instruments. Municipalities could receive technical assistance in preparing project proposals that align with EU sustainability priorities, particularly in areas including in infrastructure, and urban development.

By adopting these measures, Bulgaria could create a more structured and effective approach to localising sustainable development goals, ensuring that municipalities play an active role in achieving national and international sustainability objectives.

5.4. Options for further exploration

This section outlines a set of options for further exploration that could support the CoG in strengthening its capacity to steer cross-cutting and long-term priorities. They are complemented by the repository of tools (online Annex) with country examples.

5.4.1. Strengthening the CoG capabilities to steer cross-cutting long-term goals

Strengthen the CoMA capacity to steer implementation by operationalising Decree No. 52/2023 through a phased and structured approach, aligned with the country's strategic priorities. This could allow the CoG to progressively move from a formal allocation of responsibilities toward a more functional co-ordination architecture that supports policy coherence across sectors. This includes:

1. Moving beyond the formal assignment of responsibilities to establish a functional co-ordination architecture that enables the integration of sustainable development into policy design, planning, and budgeting. Such an approach could help ensure that the long-term priorities are used as a shared reference point for aligning sectoral objectives and managing interactions between policy areas. The sustainable development goal framework should be used to support more integrated policymaking, developing shared goals across ministries and aligning long-term objectives with sectoral interventions.
2. Starting implementation with one or two priority areas, using them to align policy goals and initiatives, define joint indicators, and develop shared monitoring routines across institutions. This could provide an opportunity to test co-ordination arrangements, identify bottlenecks, and refine practices before broader application.
3. Establishing a small co-ordination unit within CoMA to support lead and partner institutions, align sustainable development monitoring with national planning cycles, and facilitate regular interministerial dialogue. Such a unit could focus on facilitation, synthesis, and continuity, rather than duplicating sectoral responsibilities. The unit should work closely with designated counterparts in the NSI and the Ministry of Finance to ensure methodological consistency, connect selected indicators to the budget process, and prepare periodic synthesis notes to inform strategic decisions.
4. Formalising the network of experts on strategic planning with a clear technical advisory mandate to support CoMA in identifying and addressing cross-cutting government priorities. This could strengthen early co-ordination and contribute to more coherent integration of long-term priorities into sectoral strategies. The network should serve as a platform for early co-ordination on strategic initiatives, support sustainable development integration, and facilitate dialogue across ministries on planning, implementation, and monitoring. To ensure relevance, it should be embedded into the policy cycle and operate on the basis of a structured annual work plan aligned with CoMA's strategic agenda.

5.4.2. Establish practices, methodologies and tools at the CoG level to improve planning and co-ordination

1. Foster awareness and collaboration on long-term priorities at the CoG and beyond. Develop collaborative activities on sustainable development, such as forums, seminars and a releant policy labs with key ministries a testing ground to develop some innovative approaches. These activities could support shared understanding of cross-sectoral interlinkages and contribute to more coherent approaches to policymaking on sustainable development.
2. Institutionalise foresight methodologies. Hosted by the CoMA, pilot strategic foresight exercises on key national priorities such as economic development, demographics, and regional inequalities, with a view to informing strategic discussions and supporting more coherent long-term decision-making.
3. Define targets by adopting the OECD Distance to Targets methodology, using international benchmarking, ensuring that they respond to the country's policy priorities and political objectives. This could support more transparent prioritisation and help align national ambition with Bulgaria's specific context, while maintaining consistency with international frameworks.

5.4.3. Foster a better integration of key initiatives and long-term priorities into budgeting

1. Develop a pragmatic system for tracking expenditures, linking financial allocations to sustainability objectives. Such a system could support analysis of how spending patterns align with strategic priorities and inform discussions on policy coherence at the CoG level. Work with the Ministry of Finance to introduce tools to inform budget allocation at the CoMA level on policy priorities. The CoG can support the definition of priority spending areas, facilitate co-ordination among ministries, and ensure that these tools contribute to strategic planning rather than remaining a purely technical exercise.
2. Institutionalise spending reviews. Establish a structured process for regular spending reviews, with the CoG ensuring that sustainable development-related public expenditures are systematically assessed for efficiency and effectiveness. The CoG should work with the Ministry of Finance to align spending reviews with national policy priorities, integrating findings into strategic decision making and facilitating cross-sectoral co-ordination to enhance the impact of budgetary planning on sustainability objectives.

5.4.4. Promote the Localisation of long-term national priorities

Bulgaria could consider the following measures which aim to strengthen vertical policy coherence by improving co-ordination, data flows, and alignment between national priorities and local implementation capacities:

1. Develop a differentiated approach to municipal integration of sustainable development. Work with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the NAMRB to strengthen municipal capacity-building initiatives, create knowledge-sharing platforms, and provide tailored financial incentives to support local implementation of sustainable development goals. This could help align national priorities with diverse local capacities, supporting vertical policy coherence.
2. Develop targeted training programmes for municipal officials, focusing on integrating sustainability into municipal planning, financial management, and service delivery. The NAMRB could play a leading role in organising these activities under the leadership of the CoG, and in collaboration with the National Statistics Institute (NSI) and the Ministry of Finance.

3. Advance disaggregated data collection: NSI in collaboration with NAMRB and line ministries, could progressively expand the collection of disaggregated data at the municipal level, ensuring that indicators on sustainable development reflect regional disparities. This could include incorporating subnational data into Monitorstat Information System, allowing for more granular analysis of progress across different municipalities.
4. Conducting a baseline study on governance of sustainable development at the subnational level. To better understand how municipalities currently integrate related goals into their governance and planning frameworks, the government could launch a baseline study assessing municipal-level governance practices. This study could map existing local sustainability initiatives, identify capacity gaps, and highlight opportunities for better co-ordination between municipalities and central government institutions.
5. Establish a structured platform for municipalities to exchange best practices, discuss implementation challenges, and share data on progress. This could take the form of a digital knowledge hub or regular regional forums where municipalities showcase innovative sustainability initiatives, particularly those linked to EU funding opportunities.
6. Strengthen the link between local initiatives and EU financing instruments. Municipalities could receive technical assistance in preparing project proposals that align with EU sustainability priorities, particularly in areas including amongst others infrastructure, and urban development.

By adopting these measures, Bulgaria could create a more structured and effective approach to localising sustainable development policies, ensuring that municipalities play an active role in achieving national and international sustainability objectives.

Part III Capabilities for co-ordination and policy development

6 Greece: Monitoring the implementation of priority reforms

This chapter examines how the centre of government (CoG) can strengthen its role in monitoring the implementation of priority reforms. It examines the evolution of Greece's General Secretariat for Co-ordination as a central actor in tracking government priorities and bridging political decision making with administrative execution. It analyses Greece's monitoring framework, centred on annual action plans, structured reporting processes, and the MAZI digital platform, which provides the CoG with system-wide visibility over reform progress and supports more regular engagement with line ministries. It also identifies several considerations for shifting from tracking to outcome- and impact-based assessment, such as resource and capacity limitations within line ministries, variations in data quality and opportunities to better integrate monitoring insights into decision-making. It emphasises the importance of embedding these tools within routine cabinet processes, strengthening incentives for performance, and decentralising responsibilities to enhance ownership across government. It highlights opportunities to strengthen the centre's monitoring of reform outcomes through improved data infrastructure, clearer policy taxonomies, and the potential use of AI-enabled tools for risk assessment and forecasting.

6.1. Introduction

As outlined in the introduction to this report, CoGs globally take a variety of different forms, but typically perform common functions (bridging, stewardship, guiding public administration, communicating, stabilising in times of crisis). Most relevant to this chapter are the dual functions of acting as a bridge between the political and administrative levels of government, and acting as a steward of cross-cutting, complex, and long and short-term issues by supporting strategic prioritisation, co-ordination of policy development, and driving sound decision-making practices.

Greece's CoG takes the form of the office of the Presidency of the government. One of the key responsibilities of the CoG in Greece is co-ordinating the implementation of key strategic reforms, and investments and decisions that underpin the government's core agenda. To support this, the CoG monitors the relevant progress of line ministries through strategic planning documents such as Annual Action Plans. Monitoring can often be a key responsibility of the CoG, as it helps to co-ordinate the implementation of the highest-level priorities of government across multiple policy areas and actors, as well as stewarding long-term vision and strategic planning. This chapter presents the current state of play of the monitoring system in Greece, as led by the General Secretariat of Co-ordination (GSCo) within the CoG, and examines some potential pathways for enhancement and further development.

6.2. Context: Monitoring key reforms from the centre of government

The GSCo was established in 2013 when its main role was to follow Memoranda of Understanding related to the economic adjustment measures taking place at the time. In 2019, following the legislative elections, new legislation was issued which reshaped the role of the GSCo within the executive branch. The Office of the Presidency of the government was created at this time, under Law 4622/2019 which describes the functions of the office and its individual units and areas of policy. The GSCo became a part of the newly created Presidency of the government, and now acts as a single structure responsible to the Prime Minister (Government of Greece, n.d.[107]). It has a mandate to support the PM in order to ensure the "coherence and effectiveness of the government work," which is consistent with most OECD CoGs key roles.

The Minister of State Responsible for the Co-ordination of Government Policies leads the work of the GSCo on whole of government co-ordination and monitoring efforts. The GSCo also serves to support the decision-making process at Cabinet, through the meetings of the Council of Ministers (CoM). The Council of Ministers consists of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, all Ministers, and Deputy Ministers by invitation. The GSCo prepares monthly reports for the CoM, which are then reviewed by the Minister of State for Co-ordination. The Ministerial report is based on existing monthly reporting routines in the GSCo.

The CoM provides an essential means of co-ordination. The CoM typically convenes once per month, and occasionally twice per month when the policy agenda is particularly full. The CoM serves as a central forum for endorsing all new policy initiatives. Within this process, proposals are first matured through the GSCOs structured engagement with line ministries, including a series of interministerial consultations. Initiatives that reach a sufficient level of maturity through this preparatory work are subsequently channelled to the Council of Ministers for final comments and approval. While this process applies to ministry-specific initiatives, it plays an especially critical role in addressing cross-cutting or inter-ministerial issues, ensuring coherence and alignment across government priorities.

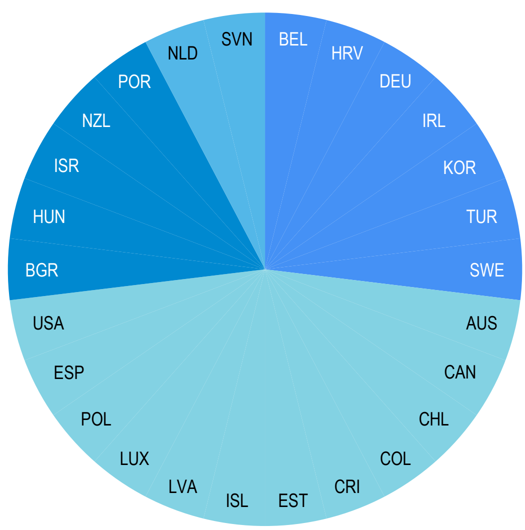
Secondary legislation is generally required to refine and implement policies contained in primary legislation. Often, this involves "multi-ministerial decisions" where the input of more than one line ministry is needed. Cross-cutting policy matters – whether reforms, legislation or investments, tend to be more complex and dispersed responsibilities have previously created challenges in correctly designating the lead ministry. Historically, unclear policy ownership produced administrative friction and execution delays across overlapping ministerial jurisdictions. The GSCo now leads the internal decision-tracking process in such cases.

The GSCo also has centralised data collection and monitoring functions. Most critical governmental reforms and investments are monitored directly by the GSCo throughout their whole lifespan of implementation, through a single digitalised system (MAZI NG). This mapping, aligned with the project management methodology applied by the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF), has strengthened the communication and data flows between line ministries and the CoG, as well as enhanced the visibility of the CoG over individual project level implementation.

6.2.1. Monitoring routines developed and used by the CoG

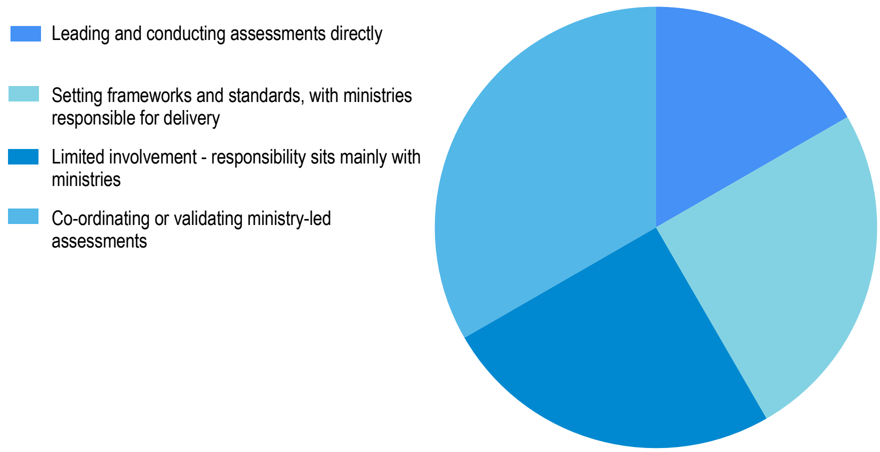
Monitoring performance refers to the ongoing and systemic collection and analysis of data on indicators to provide policymakers and stakeholders with information on the progress of commitments. This differs from policy evaluations, which are structured and data-based assessments of the design, implementation, and/or results of a planned, ongoing, or completed public intervention (OECD, 2022[108]). CoGs have taken on a greater role in monitoring performance in recent years, with 19 out of 26 CoGs reporting that monitoring whole-of-government performance was their top or significant priority function in 2023 (Figure 6.1). The CoG typically takes on a number of different roles in monitoring performance (see Figure 6.2). Greece is aligned with these results and conducts high-level monitoring through their CoG, specifically in the GSCo.

Figure 6.1. Most CoGs undertake whole-of-government monitoring as a top or significant priority



Note: n=26, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United States.
Source: OECD (2023[10]), “Survey on strategic decision making at the centre of government”, unpublished.

Figure 6.2. The typical role of the CoG generating or commissioning impact evidence



Note: n=8, Australia, Poland, Bulgaria, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Estonia, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (n.d.[25]), "Strengthening Impact Assessments of Reforms and Investments at the Centre of Government", unpublished.

Greece maintains a well-established hierarchy of reporting processes and timelines, beginning with the Consolidated Government Policy Plan, which incorporates the ministries' Annual Action Plans and is approved by the Council of Ministers and the Prime Minister. The General Secretariat for Co-ordination has the responsibility to ensure the compatibility of proposed legislative and regulatory provisions with government policy through the Annual Action Plan (AAP) process. Ministries begin preparing their AAPs in the summer, the Council of Ministers approves them in December, and Ministries may update them once a year in July. The AAPs include the planned primary legislation for the upcoming year, as well as key secondary legislation required to regulate and implement primary legislation, projects classified under investment programmes, and the quarter in which they will be issued. The GSCo may also set annual goals for the reduction or rationalisation of the regulatory volume, based on which the final Regulatory Planning of the government is prepared.

Regulatory planning is strongly and clearly linked to AAPs through the legislative planning sheet – legislative acts are listed with their respective target as it appears in the AAP. The GSCo monitors the timeplans for publication and implementation of the legislation (both primary and secondary). Each of these stages led by the GSCo are also recorded and monitored as "milestones" in the AAPs.

The Annual Action Plans are monitored through the GSCo and are an important means through which the government ascertains progress on a national level. AAP monitoring takes place through multiple stages and mechanisms, including weekly and monthly narrative reports produced within the GSCo and monthly updates to the milestones listed as associated with specific legislative acts in the AAP. The AAPs monitor at five levels, from the highest-level strategic choices, to goals, actions, projects, and finally milestones. The high-level strategic choices are informed by the "Five Greeces," linked to EU priorities, set by the PM following his election in 2019, and updated in 2023. These form the basis of the Blue Files that are shared with Ministries and support the development of the AAPs.

For enhanced monitoring – particularly of priority projects, defined as those assessed to have heightened significance for improving citizens' daily lives and the functioning of the state, and for ensuring proper implementation of EU law – a dedicated classification has been established within the Action Plans; these projects are designated as emblematic and subjected to distinct, focused oversight. Similarly, projects falling under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan are assigned a specific category that enables real-time tracking of all interim steps necessary for the successful completion of milestones, as well as discrete monitoring of milestones tied to each payment request.

On a weekly and monthly basis, policy officers in the GSCo for each department prepare standardised narrative-based reporting templates. The GSCo has undertaken measures to train line ministries on the reporting mechanism and its importance through the development of a dedicated manual and monthly meetings between the GSCo and line ministries.

During the monthly narrative reports, any discrepancies in the timeline of implementation of the line ministry such as a delay or other issue can be raised between the GSCo and the line ministry. The Minister of Co-ordination has the mandate to drive forward work across ministries based on these reporting outputs and can therefore meet directly with Ministers from implicated line ministries in order to develop a better understanding of potential barriers to continued implementation.

Efforts are being undertaken to develop a whole-of-government version of this reporting system, which would enable all of the line ministries to see and understand each other's progress. Preparatory work is underway to ensure that all ministries will be able to access, update and monitor the implementation status of their respective projects through the system, thereby strengthening transparency, ownership and real-time oversight across government. This project could serve to enhance cross-ministerial collaboration, as well as building better networks of communication between the GSCo and line ministries. With increased visibility from all line ministries, a comparative view on implementation could be a channel for more joined-up results. In parallel, a systematic stock-take of progress on government priorities is carried out at least on a semi-annual basis for each policy area and is published on the GSCo's website, drawing on the data recorded in the MAZI II platform.

6.3. Challenges and enablers for the centre's role in monitoring key priorities

6.3.1. Enhancing data collection and reporting processes

The reporting system is clearly mapped out and strategically implemented. The GSCo has developed a standardised monthly reporting template with specific fields to be completed by the ministries. This template enables homogeneous monitoring and the extraction of comparable results across ministries, thereby facilitating consistent performance assessment, timely identification of implementation gaps, and data-based decision making.

The electronic platform MAZI II functions as the primary mechanism for the effective management, monitoring, and co-ordination of the implementation of the full portfolio of projects under the remit of the GSCo, including the portfolio of reforms financed by the National Recovery and Resilience Fund. By consolidating project data, progress indicators, and governance workflows within a single information system, MAZI II enhances transparency, enables timely identification of implementation bottlenecks, and supports data and analysis-based decision making across responsible bodies. As the successor to MAZI, the platform preserves institutional continuity while introducing updated functionalities to better align oversight practices with the demands of large-scale reform programmes and to facilitate coherent reporting to national and European stakeholders.

By the end of 2019 a dedicated mechanism for monitoring secondary legislation had been advanced and a pilot version of the supporting information system went live in the first quarter of 2020. The mechanism comprises clearly defined teams, roles, deliverables, and procedures, all underpinned by a purpose-built information system. Since its launch the project has expanded substantially, adding functionalities such as a Business Intelligence dashboard and advanced search tools, and has been adjusted to reflect evolving institutional needs and the broader administrative environment. Co-ordinated and managed by the GSCo, the mechanism has operated effectively for more than four years, demonstrating both practical value and sustainability. The government's performance budgeting framework now includes a specific KPI on the issuance of mandatory secondary legislation, which the GSCo monitors and reports. The information system was developed in-house by GSCo personnel and was neither complemented by nor financed through other NRRP measures or national programmes. Its formal inclusion in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan under the Reform “Enhancement of Policy Planning and Coordination” further reinforced implementation, broadened institutional engagement, and facilitated integration into the wider governance and reporting architecture, thereby strengthening systematic oversight and compliance with EU legal obligations. Currently, line ministries do not have direct access to MAZI, but a version which would allow line ministries to fill in their own milestone tracking is in development. This could also serve to further clarify and specify some aspects of secondary legislation tracking in MAZI.

Since 2024 the GSCo has delivered a series of targeted training programmes, implemented through the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government, for co-ordination units within each ministry and for ministerial political offices. These programmes focus on the Annual Action Plans and the sectoral and horizontal actions overseen by the GSCo and are designed to standardise planning and reporting practices, strengthen interministerial co-ordination, and build institutional capacity for the consistent implementation and monitoring of priority measures. By familiarising both administrative and political actors with plan structure, performance indicators, and procedural requirements, the trainings have improved the quality and comparability of submissions to the GSCo, enhanced alignment between strategic objectives and operational execution, and supported more data-based performance assessment across ministries.

While the process of preparing the AAPs is well-understood and integrated into the line ministry workflow, the administrative capacity of ministries to propose projects that are appropriately linked to corresponding performance indicators remains a significant challenge. To address this, the GSCO, in collaboration with the Council of Economic Experts and the Expert Unit on Employment, Social Security, Welfare and Social Affairs, provides ministries with specialised indicator proposals tailored to their planned projects, with the aim of strengthening the quality, measurability and policy relevance of the AAPs. Building a meaningful culture of performance will therefore require not just new tools, but also sustained capacity-building within line ministries to improve their ability to develop, interpret, and act on data. Providing line ministries with access to MAZI for their own milestone tracking and management, including the ability to input their own milestones, together with targeted efforts to raise data literacy, would enhance monitoring processes and better underpin the analysis-based policymaking embodied in the AAP tool. There is a need to build a culture around monitoring that has real buy-in and engagement from line ministries, which requires creating an enabling environment and gives them capacity-building efforts to scale up data abilities as well as agency to participate in the process.

For the optimal management of government priorities, the monitoring system incorporates a prioritisation of emblematic projects by policy sector and of critical legislative work. This prioritisation enables focused oversight, targeted resource allocation, and accelerated implementation of measures that have the greatest impact on public service delivery and regulatory compliance. The example in Box 6.1 below highlights how monitoring progress can have a real impact on delivery. By distinguishing flagship initiatives and essential legislative milestones within the tracking framework, the system supports timely decision making, enhances interministerial co-ordination, and facilitates the systematic evaluation of progress against strategic objectives. Finally, a feature that is currently in development in MAZI II is the risk profile assessment. This feature uses historical data – both from the relevant project, and from other similar projects – such as past delays or barriers to implementation, to calculate a risk percentage of the project being off-track or incomplete. This feature, once developed, could also serve as a way for the GSCo to focus attention on those areas that are not progressing as anticipated.

Box 6.1. Risk-based business licensing reform in Israel

Led by Israel's Ministry of Interior and Prime Minister's Office, this reform (2018-2022) overhauled the licensing regime for around 200 business types. Previously, licensing took an average of 10 months, roughly a quarter of businesses operated without a license and requirements were fragmented and unclear. The reform introduced risk-based licensing tracks with binding timeframes, a "silence is consent" mechanism granting automatic approval when regulators miss deadlines, extended license validity, sworn compliance declarations placing responsibility on business owners and one-stop-shop centres for complex cases. The Prime Minister's Office Regulatory Policy Team evaluated implementation and published progress publicly. The 2022 update cut annual compliance costs by ILS 58 million for around 40 000 businesses. The reform shifted regulatory focus from pre-licensing bureaucracy toward post-licensing enforcement, strengthening both efficiency and legitimacy of the system.

Source: OECD (2025[22]), *Symplifying for Success,* OECD S4S Symposium Brief_Simplifying for success_Insights from OECD surveys.pdf

6.3.2. Strengthening competencies in line ministries

Strengthening competencies for project management and reform implementation within line ministries would be a key enabler for more decentralised monitoring. As monitoring responsibilities evolve and the complexity of reform implementation deepens, line ministries will need the capacity – not only technical, but also institutional – to manage, interpret, and act upon their own implementation milestones. This shift would require targeted capacity-building efforts, including training on project management and implementation methodologies, as well as ensuring the necessary digital reporting tools. It could also entail the establishment or reinforcement of internal co-ordination structures within ministries, for example through the data units present in some line ministries, to oversee reporting and liaise directly with the GSCo. Greece's approach thus far is linked to their approach to the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Ministries in a number of EU Member States monitoring RRF activities are often required to report directly into centralised dashboards but are also supported by sectoral co-ordination units with clear mandates. One other example that may be useful Greece's context is in Ireland, which has developed robust public administration reform plans, including the Civil Service Renewal Plan and Public Sector Reform Plan (Box 6.2). In the long term, building a culture of shared responsibility and accountability for monitoring can further enhance the outcomes from the GSCo.

Box 6.2. Civil Service Renewal Plan in Ireland

Ireland is currently in the process of implementing an ambitious 10-year reform strategy for the civil service. Civil Service Renewal 2030 is being implemented through a series of 3-year action plans, and the CoG, through the Department of Public Expenditure and Results, has a lead responsibility for monitoring its implementation. Ireland's Civil Service Renewal Strategy (CSR2030) is supported by a central Programme Management Office (PMO) that co-ordinates implementation using structured project and programme management methods. Project Managers are appointed for each strategic goal, while Secretaries General act as Project Sponsors. Reform initiatives are guided by detailed project plans with clear milestones and indicators, and progress is reported regularly to the Civil Service Management Board, which oversees delivery at the highest level.

The approach leverages existing structures to foster collaboration while embedding accountability through transparent reporting and annual public progress updates. A strong focus on staff engagement, supported by dedicated communications and regular Employee Engagement Surveys, helps build a culture of shared ownership and continuous improvement across the civil service.

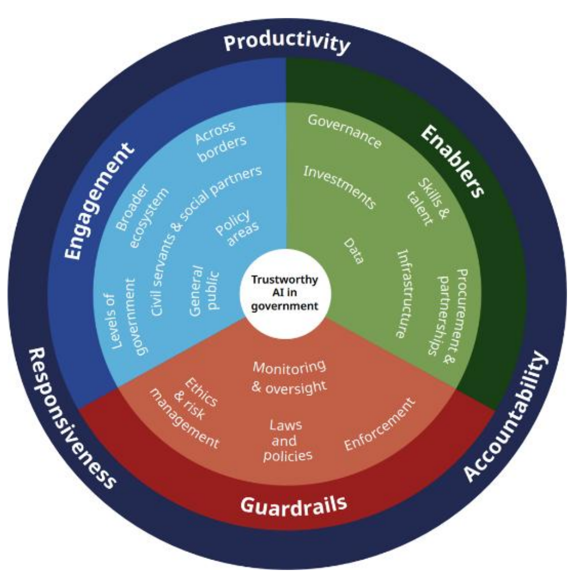
Source: Government of Ireland (2021[109]),. *Civil Service Renewal 2030,* https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-public-expenditure-ndp-delivery-and-reform/publications/civil-service-renewal-2030/

6.3.3. Strategic long-term approaches to data needs

AI practices

One area of importance is the potential for future implementations of AI and other data-driven practices to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of these outcomes. Looking ahead, future-oriented governance will increasingly rely on high-quality, structured data to enable more sophisticated AI-driven analytics, including for example scenario modelling. The use of AI in the public sector is a complex undertaking as outlined by the OECD's Framework for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in Government.

Figure 6.3. OECD Framework for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (2025)



Source: OECD (2021[110]), *Tools for trustworthy AI: A framework to compare implementation tools for trustworthy AI systems*, https://doi.org/10.1787/008232ec-en.

The OECD’s work in this area has highlighted five core actions to support the advancement of a more coherent and trustworthy development, deployment, and use of AI in and by the public sector. These include:

- providing a whole-of-government approach through strategic guidance, clear objectives and oversight to steer the integration and procurement of AI across sectors, ministries, and agencies in accordance with expected values and guiding principles.
- embedding participatory mechanisms within institutional arrangements to increase the engagement of and oversight by citizens and other relevant stakeholders in the design, development, and deployment of AI in the public sector.
- establishing robust data governance for the whole public sector to support access to and sharing of high-quality government data, often integrating data governance strategies with AI strategies; acknowledging that trustworthy use of AI relies on high quality data.
- ensuring the reliability of AI systems used in the public sector. This entails developing or using the right metrics and tools to systematically scrutinise AI systems and models used in the public sector to make sure they deliver wide-ranging and fair results. This includes also having guardrails to identify and mitigate risks such as biased or skewed outcomes, and other unintended consequences that may undermine fairness and trust in government.
- enhancing accountability in the deployment of AI within the public sector through greater transparency, explainability, and traceability, for instance through the establishments of algorithmic accountability standards and open registries of public algorithms (OECD, 2025[15]).

The OECD has also developed a simple classification of common types of AI tasks, some of which could be potentially integrated into the MAZI system and the monitoring process at the CoG more generally (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Tasks for AI systems

Task	What it does	Examples
Recognition	Identifies and categorises data (e.g. image, video, audio, and text) into specific classifications. Output is often one label.	Image & object detection; facial recognition. Audio, sound, handwriting, and text recognition; gesture detection.
Event detection	Connects data points to detect patterns as well as outliers or anomalies.	Fraud and risk detection, flagging human mistakes, intelligent monitoring.
Forecasting	Uses past and existing behaviours to predict future outcomes, generally to help make decisions. Contains a clear temporal dimension.	Assisted search, predicting future values for data, predicting failure, predicting population behaviour, identifying, and selecting best fit, identifying matches in data, optimising activities, intelligent navigation.
Personalisation	Develops a profile of an individual and then learns and adapts to that individual over time. The output is usually a ranking, e.g. a search engine ranking.	Recommender systems based on search and browsing (Netflix, Amazon), personalised fitness, wellness, finance.
Interaction support	Interprets and creates content to power conversational and other interactions between machines and humans (e.g. involving voice, text, images). Can be real time or not.	Chatbots, voice assistants, sentiments model and intent analysis, back-office process automation (rule based routing, moving information between systems)
Goal-driven optimisation	Gives systems a goal and the ability to find the optimal solution to a problem, which can be by learning through trial and error. It assumes a cost function is given.	Game playing, resource/logistics optimisation, iterative problem-solving, bidding and advertising, real-time auctions, scenario simulation.
Reasoning with knowledge structures	Infers new outcomes that are possible, even if they are not present in existing data, through modelling and simulation.	Expert systems, legal argumentation, recruitment systems, diagnosis, planning.
Content generation	Refers to the autonomous production of text, images, audio, or video from input data, often leveraging natural language processing and deep learning techniques.	Writing articles, generating product descriptions, creating artwork, producing synthetic speech, composing music, generating deepfake videos.

Source: OECD (2024[111]), *Governing with Artificial Intelligence: Are governments ready?*, https://doi.org/10.1787/26324bc2-en.

While much of the current focus remains on existing monitoring inputs and outputs, a more strategic investment in data infrastructure is likely to be needed in the medium-term to support anticipatory and predictive analytics. Such analytics could serve not only to track implementation progress but also to model risks, forecast implementation bottlenecks, and ultimately better calibrate public policy responses. This will require a step-change in the granularity, quality, and timeliness of data collected across the public sector, as well as political commitment to data transparency and sharing. For example, Korea's e-RFP Assistance System uses AI to automate the drafting of procurement documents and ensure regulatory compliance, reducing administrative workloads and streamlining internal processes ((OECD, 2025[112])In another example, the United Kingdom's "Parlex" system uses AI to analyse historical parliamentary data and forecast likely reactions to proposed policies, helping decision makers anticipate risks and adjust policy design accordingly (Government of the United Kingdom, 2025[113]; OECD, 2024[111]). For the GSCo, this type of automation could for example be used to take inputs from weekly and monthly reporting systems and automatically make the transfer between line ministries and the CoG, and ultimately to decision makers, thus making the work more efficient. Ideally, it could be linked to the systems line ministries are using, so that any update from the line ministry creates an automatic update in MAZI. This type of Application Programming Interface (API) would remove a significant reporting burden for the CoG. In this scenario, with AI fully integrated, reports could be generated to provide more than just general overviews, but targeted responses to specific questions to support more tailored information for decision makers.

AI could also eventually be used for forecasting and scenario modelling. Multiple governments are beginning to use AI in evaluating future scenarios or risks. In Brazil, the Federal Court of Accounts uses its "ALICE" system to analyse large volumes of procurement data and identify risks of irregularities, supporting more proactive oversight and prevention (OECD, 2025[15]). Spain's Comptroller General has used AI to identify high-risk instances of potential fraud in grant and subsidies programmes (OECD, 2021[114]). In France, the Paris-Saclay agglomeration of municipalities is using AI to simulate different energy management scenarios through a digital twin of their territory (Berryhill et al., 2019[115])and in New South Wales, digital twin technology is used to create dynamic models of infrastructure and urban environments, allowing authorities to simulate development scenarios and assess the potential impacts of planning decisions before implementation (OECD, 2026[116]). This is allowing officials to more effectively evaluate the environmental and financial impacts of projects and improve long-term planning capabilities. For the GSCo, this type of feature could be used to enhance for example the risk assessment calculation feature that is currently in development.

Better horizontal monitoring

In parallel, there was a recognition of the need to improve data interoperability across line ministries and public agencies in order to support the monitoring of increasingly complex and interdependent policy priorities. Paradoxically, although the data and monitoring systems are well-integrated and centralised through the GSCo, they are still somewhat fragmented, with siloed data representations for each project and limited mechanisms for horizontal integration or synthesis. The primary grouping for each project is based on the ministry who has a lead responsibility for the project, rather than any horizontal policy classification. A more interoperable data system, with shared definitions, integrated monitoring platforms, and common data standards, would allow for more holistic oversight of complex and cross-cutting reforms and facilitate cross-government monitoring and progress. The aim would not be to replace line ministry-level monitoring, but to create an additional layer of information which would allow the GSCo to focus its attention on long-term vision and aligning complex frameworks at the national and international level for cross-cutting priorities – something which is a priority for most CoGs (Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4). The new horizontal sector within the CoG, established in 2026, is moving in this direction and has responsibilities to propose and plan public policies; monitor and co-ordinate their implementation; and ensure uniform, systematic evaluation of policies through common methodologies, performance indicators, ensure data interoperability by policy area, and identify best practices in relation to National Plans and National Strategies.

One pathway to enable this could be the development and adoption of standardised taxonomies. This type of categorisation and labelling could improve visibility across reforms, allow for easier aggregation and comparison of progress across ministries, and reduce the monitoring burden through greater clarity and consistency. They are a key enabler to link activities related to the same policy fields across many ministries. Existing international frameworks and taxonomies such as the Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) could serve as a useful reference point (Box 6.3). While adaptation to the specific context in Greece may be necessary, anchoring monitoring efforts in internationally recognised standards could also enhance comparability with other countries and signal alignment with global good practices. COFOG is one of the standard classifications used within the System of National Accounts, specifically for categorizing government expenditure by function and in this case could be used to facilitate the linkages between monitoring and other important data, such as budgetary, and facilitate alignment with an international comparative perspective.

Box 6.3. Frameworks for labelling policy areas for more effective monitoring

The Classification of the Functions of Government, abbreviated as COFOG, was developed in its current version in 1999 by the OECD and published by the United Nations Statistical Division as a standard classifying the purposes of government activities. The classification has three levels of detail:

- divisions;
- groups;
- classes.

Divisions describe the broad objectives of government, while groups and classes both define the means by which these broad objectives are achieved.

Table 6.2. Overview of divisions and groups

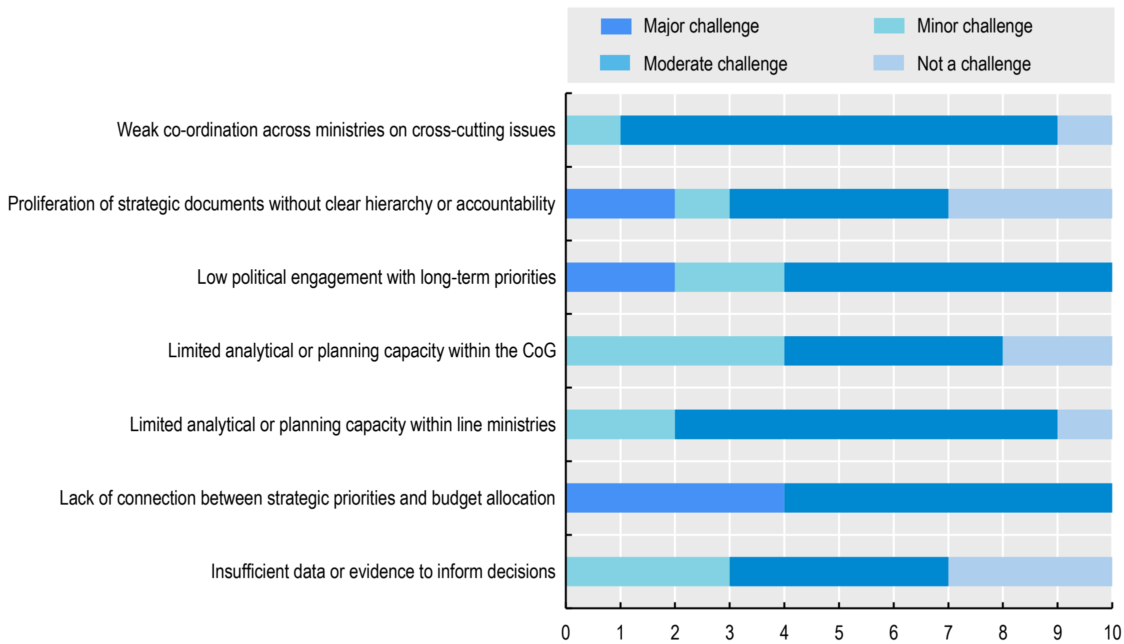
Government broad objective (division)	Sub-items (groups)
General public services	Executive and legislative organs, financial and fiscal affairs, external affairs; foreign economic aid; general services; basic research; R&D related to general public services; general public services n.e.c.; public debt transactions, transfers of a general character between different levels of government.
Defence	Military defence; civil defence; foreign military aid, R&D related to defence; defence n.e.c.
Public order and safety	Police services; fire-protection services; law courts; prisons; R&D related to public order and safety; public order and safety n.e.c.
Economic affairs	General economic, commercial, and labour affairs; agriculture, forestry; fishing and hunting; fuel and energy; mining, manufacturing, and construction; transport; communication; other industries, R&D related to economic affairs; economic affairs n.e.c.
Environmental protection	Waste management; water waste management; pollution abatement; protection of biodiversity and landscape; R&D related to environmental protection.
Housing and community amenities	Housing development; community development; water supply; street lighting; R&D related to housing and community amenities; housing and community amenities n.e.c.
Health	Medical products, appliances, and equipment; outpatient services; hospital services; public health services; R&D related to health; health n.e.c.
Recreation, culture, and religion	Recreational and sporting services; cultural services; broadcasting and publishing services; religious and other community services, R&D related to recreation, culture, and religion; recreation; culture and religion n.e.c.
Education	Pre-primary and primary education; secondary education; post-secondary non-tertiary education; tertiary education; education not definable by level; subsidiary services to education; R&D Education; education n.e.c.
Social protection	Sickness and disability; old age; survivors; family and children; unemployment; housing; R&D; social protection and social exclusion n.e.c.

Source: Eurostat. (n.d.[117]), *Classification of the functions of government (COFOG)*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Classification_of_the_functions_of_government_(COFOG)

6.3.4. Steering long term monitoring practices

Aligning government activity in order to achieve long-term priorities is considered to be one of the most important roles CoGs play – but it is also the area they find most challenging (Figure 6.4). Some of the key enablers in this area could include developing a longer-term planning instrument.

Figure 6.4. Most important challenges to the effective stewardship of long-term cross-cutting strategies



Note: n= 10, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Poland, Finland, Romania, Ireland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, New Zealand.
Source: OECD (2026[18]), "Survey: Stewardship and Monitoring of Long-Term and Cross-Cutting Commitments at the CoG", unpublished.

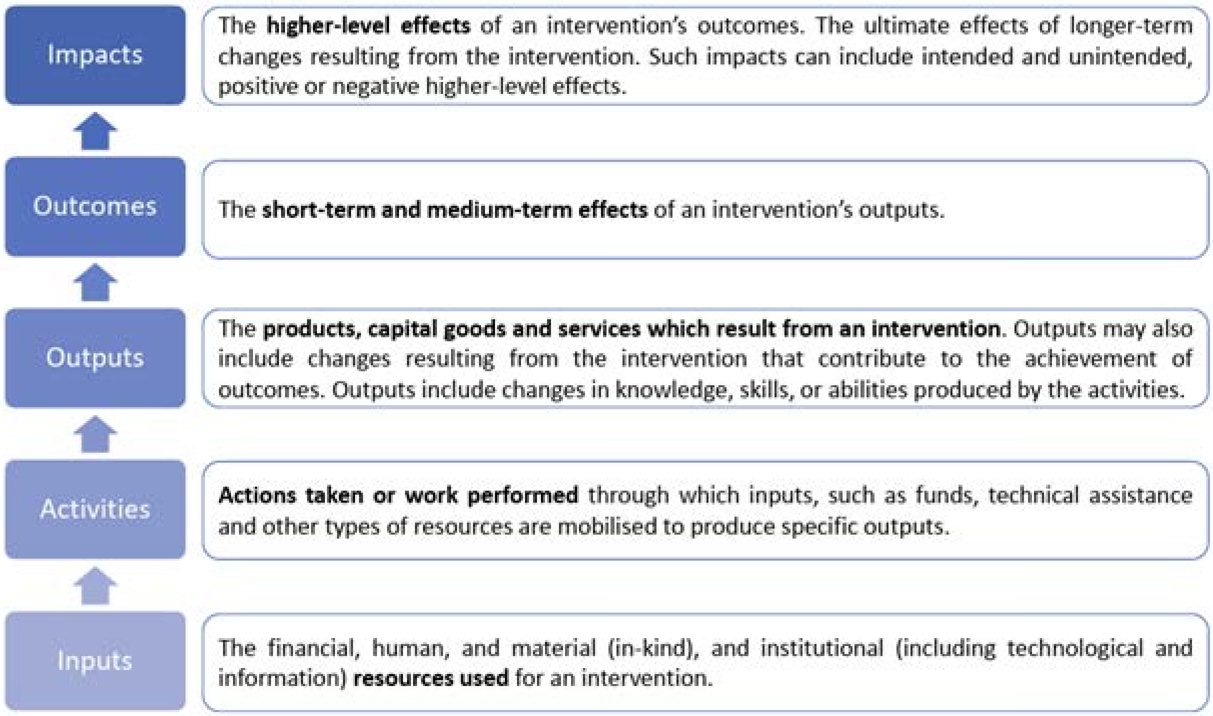
Enhancing the development of the monitoring and tracking system within the GSCo could entail a shift from a focus primarily on inputs and outputs, to one that can links these to outcomes and impact. This transition implies asking not only "Are we doing things right?" – a question largely within the remit of line ministries – but also "Are we doing the right things?" – a much broader strategic question that the CoG through the GSCo can help to inform. While line ministries should continue to be responsible for the technical and procedural dimensions of implementation, the GSCo can help foster a culture of results by embedding impact-based performance logic into the design and monitoring of AAPs.

Once the horizontal tagging and taxonomising system is developed and implemented, there could be potential to develop cross-cutting indicators that track progress on complex and cross-cutting priorities, for example on the multi-ministerial decisions. These types of horizontal metrics would allow the government through the GSCo to better monitor reforms that transcend traditional institutional silos, and which are often the most transformative but also the most complex to implement. To ensure coherence over time, this effort could be linked to the exploratory development of a multi-year monitoring framework – one that moves beyond the current annual cycle of the AAPs. At present, unfinished actions are simply rolled over from year to year, which limits the capacity to evaluate long-term policy effectiveness or trajectory.

The long-term planning instrument currently used by the GSCo is the Consolidated Government Policy Plan (CGPP) issued annually and aligned with the four-year governance cycle established by Law 4622/2019**.** The CGPP is approved each November by the regular Cabinet alongside each ministry's Annual Strategic Plan and is published on the GSCo website in accordance with Article 49 of Law 4622/2019, ensuring public accessibility to strengthen transparency and governmental accountability. Embedding AAPs within the CGPP framework enables planners to align short-term milestones with medium- and long-term outcome indicators, set explicit expectations for success across the four-year cycle, and provide a coherent basis for evaluating impact beyond procedural outputs. The UGPP comprises: (a) a concise report of each ministry's work for the previous year; (b) a four-year work programme for each ministry; (c) the government Policy Plan for the reference year; (d) Annex I – key projects and milestones for each ministry for the reference year; (e) Annex II – the government's annual regulatory programming for the reference year; (f) Annex III – annual recruitment planning for Public Administration and Local Government for the reference year; and (g) Annex IV – ministerial certification confirming the CGPP's consistency with the General Government Budget and the Medium-Term Fiscal Strategy Framework.

Integrating these elements into the AAP cycle leads to a more strategic, data and analysis-based approach to planning, implementation, and evaluation, thereby enhancing the government's capacity to deliver on complex, cross-cutting policy objectives over the medium and long term. A deeper formation and systematic utilisation of long-term outcome and impact indicators within the UGPP, would materially improve the government's capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate complex, cross-cutting policies over the medium and long term. This approach would also support continuity and coherence across policy cycles. As reforms often take several years to mature, especially those with behavioural or institutional dimensions, the ability to monitor them over multiple planning cycles is crucial. Establishing mechanisms for ministries to report back on these longer-term indicators, even as new AAPs are developed, could ensure that reform momentum is not lost and that lessons learned from implementation are fed back into policy design. This could be supported by the use of logic frameworks or results chains that link inputs and outputs to intermediate and long-term outcomes – thus helping to create a clear, structured narrative of change. This is something that has been developed at the GSCo, however faced challenges in implementation and uptake throughout line ministries. One common analytical framework to structure a results chain is through the theory of change approach. This framework, as outlined below (Figure 6.5), focuses on what a policy does (inputs, activities, and outputs) and how these are linked clearly with what it aims to achieve (outcomes and impacts). The toolkit for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of public administration reform and sector strategies offers a comprehensive monitoring framework to support this approach, ensuring long-term priorities progress through the theory of change by assigning specific indicators, baselines, and targets to each stage of the results chain, enabling the systematic tracking of reform progress over time (Vági and Rimkute, 2018[118]).

Figure 6.5. Theories of change can be used to assess and align long-term results



Source: OECD (2024[119]), *Guidance for a Monitoring and Evaluation System for Italy's Universal Civil Service*, https://doi.org/10.1787/a8b73d4b-en.

6.3.5. Data communication through enhanced visualisation and analytical tools

Securing the engagement of both decision makers and line ministries for this type of reform is critical but often challenging. Historically, governments have developed projects aimed at improving indicator development where many line ministries struggled to internalise and apply the new frameworks. This underscores the importance of not only designing technically sound indicators but also creating the institutional conditions for their use, through leadership engagement, consistent political support, capacity-building efforts, and the co-development of tools that are user-friendly and responsive to the realities of work being undertaken in line ministries or at the centre. Simply mandating the use of longer-term indicators is unlikely to succeed unless ministries see a clear benefit, both in terms of policy learning and in meeting their strategic objectives. The CoG, through the GSCo, is well placed to provide this support and can serve to standardise methodologies, promote good practices, and ensure that monitoring becomes an integral part of a broader performance and accountability culture across government.

The GSCo has already taken on a role as a catalyst for more sophisticated and digital monitoring and tracking processes. Continuing to act as a development hub for strengthening monitoring capacities across the administration could enhance the system of monitoring throughout the whole-of-government. Going beyond central reporting, the GSCo has taken on a more proactive role in building the tools, methodologies, and capabilities needed to support high-level monitoring across the whole of government, with for instance the in-house development of MAZI. This pathway could be further explored to use the GSCo as a hub for elevating capacities to monitor progress across government. This could involve not only training and technical assistance as the GSCo has already done with the manual and monthly meetings with line ministries, but also the co-design of monitoring solutions with line ministries to ensure usability and relevance. A concrete starting point could be the development of more accessible and interactive dashboards to visualise progress on reforms and investments. Such a dashboard, being developed within the GSCo, ideally embedded within the existing MAZI platform, would allow users to drill down by sector, policy area, or specific reform trajectory – enabling both vertical and horizontal visibility across monitoring efforts.

Such tools would be particularly useful for tracking cross-cutting, multi-ministerial reforms, where policy ownership is distributed and co-ordination challenges are greater. By providing a clear and intuitive interface – linked to milestone frameworks and enriched with narrative reporting and risk assessments – the GSCo could ensure that decision makers at all levels have access to cross-cutting horizontal information. Filtering systems that allow users to sort by sector, thematic area, or emblematic priority would further support targeted oversight and reduce the risk of information overload.

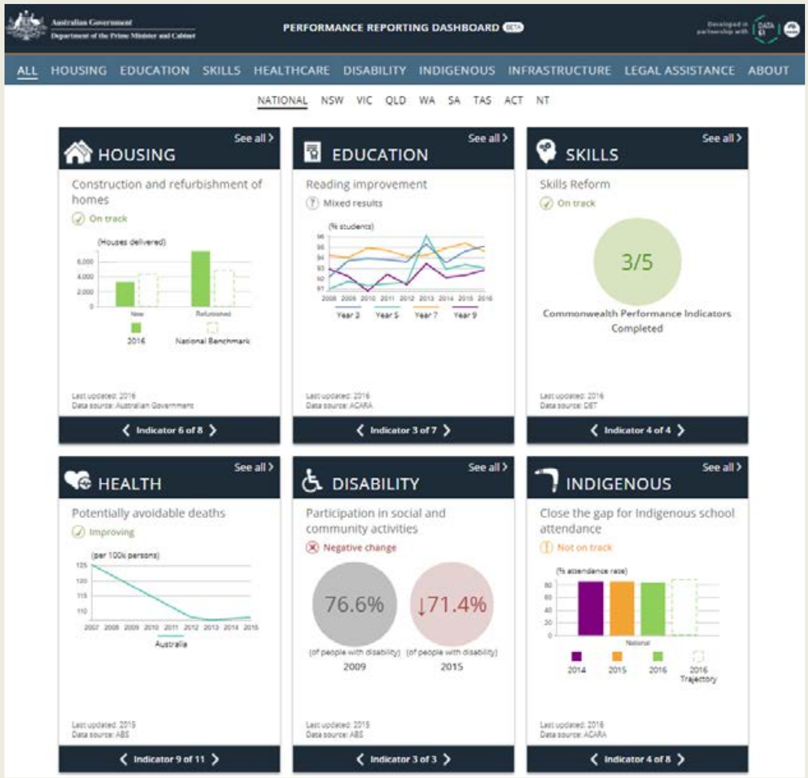
There is also work towards creating a more visual and interactive presentation of the monitoring system, which is being undertaken in Spain (see Box 6.4 below). This could enable clearer and more effective communication of high-level information to decision makers, enhancing data and analysis-based decision-making processes. Other countries such as Australia and Canada have developed similar tools to synthesise and present data in more sophisticated ways (Box 6.4).

Box 6.4. Public policy indicators in interactive dashboards

Performance Reporting Dashboard in Australia

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Performance Dashboard, launched in 2017, provides a transparent, color-coded overview of how states and territories are progressing on intergovernmental commitments across areas like health, education, and disability services. Replacing lengthy annual reports, the dashboard enabled quick, accessible tracking of policy implementation and highlights where jurisdictions are meeting targets or falling behind. Managed by the Productivity Commission, it promotes accountability and data-driven decision making in a federal context, while also enhancing public visibility into government performance.

Figure 6.6. Project dashboards in Australia



Executive Project Dashboards in Canada

The Government of Canada, through the CoG, has developed an executive project dashboard tool to monitor progress at the project level. The tool includes three worksheets: the Dashboard worksheet, the Financials worksheet, and the Supplementary Information worksheet.

The Dashboard worksheet contains the executive project dashboard template. Most information is entered directly into this template, except for the financial data, which are entered in a separate worksheet.

The Financials worksheet contains tables in which to enter financial data. These tables are then used to populate the Financial Summary table located in the Dashboard worksheet.

The Supplementary Information worksheet is for projects included in the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat CIOB oversight portfolio. This worksheet contains tables in which to enter project information regarding Treasury Board briefings and alignment to the whole-of-government framework.

In 2013, the Government of Canada developed the GC Infobase, an interactive data-visualisation platform to improve the availability and accessibility of complex federal government data. By combining multiple sources of data into one common platform, GC Infobase makes understanding government's operations more accessible to parliamentarians, public servants, and Canadian citizens.

The platform consolidates information from several key sources, currently organised around five thematic pillars: finances, COVID-19, people, results, and services. The finances module provides a breakdown of government expenditure over the previous five years alongside projected expenditure for the following three years, enabling users to identify spending trends and assess fiscal trajectories over time. The people module presents data on the federal public service workforce, while the results module links departmental spending to planned and actual outcomes, supporting performance accountability. The services module tracks how federal services are delivered and used across government.

GC Infobase is designed as an interactive and visual tool, allowing users to filter and explore data at varying levels of granularity, ranging from government-wide data, specifying down to departmental levels. This flexibility makes it a valuable resource not only for oversight and accountability, but also for evidence-based policy analysis and public transparency.

Cumpliendo dashboard in Spain

The Government of Spain's Cumpliendo dashboard, launched in 2020, provides an interactive digital overview of how the executive branch is delivering on its key political commitments. Identifying progress on election commitments as "fulfilled," "activated," or "not activated", this dashboard allows citizens to track legislative processes and the actions of government. Developed alongside independent academic experts, the platform democratises access to complex administrative data, allowing citizens to filter performance metrics at varying levels of granularity. Such a tool makes it easy to understand the progress of government, enhancing public understanding and trust in the government's delivery of public policies.

Sources: Australian Government (2017[120]), Enhanced Transparency and Accountability, https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/reports/publications/annual_reports/2016-17-HTML/content/about.html; Government of Canada (Government of Canada, n.d.[121]), GC Infobase, https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#start; OECD (2025[122]), *Empowering fiscal reporting with digital and interactive approaches,* https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2025/02/empowering-fiscal-reporting-with-digital-and-interactive-approaches_3bd128d8/Case%20study-Canada.pdf;
Government of Canada (2010[123]), *Guide to executive project dashboards*, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2011/sct-tbs/BT48-4-4-2010-eng.pdf; Government of Spain, (2026[124]), *Informe 'Cumpliendo'*, https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/paginas/cumpliendo/rendicion-de-cuentas-diciembre-2025.aspx

6.4. Options for further exploration

Below are a number of options for Greece to consider to better support the CoG's functions around monitoring and tracking key reforms. It is complemented by the online Annex with practical solutions that are in use by other countries.

- Identify opportunities to shift some of the monitoring responsibilities to line ministries, by prioritising the development of functions and a common set of processes and procedures that allow them to input and track their own data. This will also require efforts from GSCo to train and develop line ministries capacities in high-level monitoring for performance management. This could also entail supporting the development of more sophisticated performance management systems within line ministries in order to fluidly link with portfolio level management carried out at the GSCo level.
- Continue enhancing and developing more sophisticated data collection and monitoring systems, by taking a long-term strategic approach to data needs.
- Investments in digital infrastructure could enable system upgrades to drive more efficient and effective work, for example through integrating AI.
- Implementing a taxonomy for policy areas and integrating it with existing systems could allow greater understanding of complex and interdependent policy priorities, and enable a more whole-of-government approach to monitoring that is currently based on line ministry area of responsibility.
- Continue to enable and strengthen long-term vision through the CoG and GSCo by developing mechanisms for longer term planning, to ensure continuity and cohesion between AAPs.
- Further engagement with developing more sophisticated outcome and impact-focused indicators will require significant engagement with line ministries, but could enable progress towards long-term priorities.
- Enhance communication and knowledge-sharing throughout the CoG and line ministries by working towards enhanced means of data presentation and communication, such as dashboards. These types of communication mechanisms can also enable better horizontal co-ordination by allowing cross-ministerial visibility into performance management and monitoring. Tools such as these can also be used to enable public-facing communications, which could contribute to reinforcing trust in government.

7 Ireland: Ensuring an effective and agile centre of government

This chapter examines how the centre of government (CoG) in Ireland (Department of the Taoiseach), is playing a role in steering and co-ordinating the delivery of high-profile, cross-cutting priorities such as child poverty and well-being. It highlights a shift from a primarily co-ordination-focused role toward more direct involvement in implementation and oversight, exemplified by the creation of dedicated programme offices in the centre that convene cross-government actors, structure delivery frameworks and maintain political attention on key priorities. While this central involvement can improve coherence, visibility and momentum, the chapter underscores the associated risks of overextension, blurred mandates, and reduced line ministry ownership over priorities. It identifies the importance of establishing clear criteria for CoG engagement, strengthening existing co-ordination mechanisms, and ensuring robust feedback loops between political and administrative levels of government. It highlights the importance of the centre in setting out transition or legacy strategies to sustain results over time once there is less need for central steering. Overall, it argues that the CoG's effectiveness lies in its ability to act as a convenor, broker, and enabler of cross-government collaboration, maintaining strategic focus without displacing departmental responsibility for implementation.

7.1. Introduction

Governments today operate in increasingly fragmented policy environments, often shaped by short-term political cycles, stretched delivery systems, and growing public expectations. In this context, the CoG can play a central role in maintaining clarity of purpose, reinforcing shared priorities, and connecting political ambition with administrative implementation. OECD findings highlight how CoGs are being asked not only to facilitate co-ordination, but to help set strategic direction, hold focus across time, and enable coherence between planning, policy, and budgeting (OECD, 2024[2]). These expectations are especially relevant when the issues at stake are politically visible, cross-cutting by nature, and not easily anchored in any one department.

Ireland is no exception. The country's governance model is shaped by coalition governments, a high degree of ministerial autonomy, and a long-standing reliance on informal co-ordination. The Department of the Taoiseach (Department of the Prime Minister) serves as Ireland's centre of government, supporting the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and Cabinet in setting direction and convening cross-government processes, in close co-operation with the Finance and Public Expenditure Ministries. The Department of the Taoiseach has traditionally focused on sustaining the overall coherence of government policies, including through a set of social-partnership agreements. However, these agreements fell into abeyance following the financial crisis of 2008-09. In recent years, the Department of the Taoiseach has seen a shift toward more active involvement in implementation and strategic oversight of significant cross-sectoral issues. This shift has been driven in part by the experience of managing crises such as Brexit and COVID-19, as well as growing pressure to deliver on complex national priorities such as housing.

The creation of the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office in 2023 reflects this evolving role. Situated within the Department of the Taoiseach, the Office was established as part of the Taoiseach's commitment to reduce child poverty and address long-standing gaps in co-ordination across departments. Child poverty had previously been addressed through a mix of policies led by departments responsible for areas such as children, social protection, sports, housing, and education. However, no single actor had the mandate or capacity to drive a sustained, whole-of-government response. The decision to place the Office at the centre reflected both political priority and institutional necessity.

The Programme Office was designed to bring greater coherence, visibility, and follow-through to the child poverty agenda. It supports alignment across six strategic focus areas: income support, cost of education, early years and childcare, service integration with respect to health and well-being, family homelessness, and participation in culture and sport. It provides a focal point for policy analysis, cross-departmental co-ordination, and public engagement. The Programme Office has also introduced a consolidated approach to monitoring progress, supporting local service integration initiatives, and bringing a child poverty lens to the national budget process. The Office does not control budgets or programmes, but works through relationships, convening power, and the ability to frame a shared narrative. Its establishment has also helped elevate the visibility of child poverty and well-being inside and outside government, supported by a growing network of departmental contact points and the annual Child Poverty and Well-being Summit.

As previously described (OECD, 2023[125]) , Ireland's Department of the Taoiseach has recognised the need to take a more structured and coherent approach to determining when and how the centre should become involved in these priorities. There is increasing awareness that taking on too many issues can risk overextension, reduce traction, and weaken the ability of the centre to provide sustained leadership. In this context, the challenge lies in balancing responsiveness with focus, and in maintaining the institutional space needed for deeper engagement where it is most needed.

The first part of this chapter examines how Ireland's CoG functions in practice. It explores how its stewardship of complex policy issues is extending beyond the Department of the Taoiseach's traditional oversight through Cabinet Committee structures, and how the centre can best calibrate its engagement when political priorities, institutional capacity, and the complexity of the issues themselves are increasingly shifting. In particular, it considers whether the CoG's role should be to strengthen capacity in line departments through iterative performance routines, how it can maintain political visibility on key priorities amid competing demands, and how it can plan for the point at which it steps back.

The second part focuses on the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office as a case study of how these issues are highlighted and addressed in practice. It analyses how the Office operates within the Department of the Taoiseach and the role of the Cross-Government Network it convenes. The case examines how the Office contributes to strengthen capabilities across government within their realm of work.

7.2. Context: The Irish Government's role in steering cross-cutting priorities

The Department of the Taoiseach is considered the CoG institution in Ireland, as it supports the Taoiseach -the Prime Minister- and government in providing strategic direction, overseeing key policy priorities, and facilitating co-ordination across government departments. Its functions are similar to the ones of other OECD countries: define and sustain long-term priorities, ensuring co-ordination between the political and administrative levels, promoting good governance and policy standards, maintaining operational stability in times of disruption, and supporting the communication of shared government direction.

The Department of the Taoiseach carries out these roles through a compact institutional structure. It is organised into Divisions, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, each of them reflecting core governance functions (parliamentary liaison, and international affairs) or policy priorities (housing and infrastructure). These divisions work together to support the work of the Taoiseach and Cabinet, co-ordinate input across departments, and facilitate decision making through the cabinet committee system.

Figure 7.1. Policy areas of the Department of the Taoiseach

Source: Information provided by officials within the Department of the Taoiseach

The Department of the Taoiseach is positioned as a steward to support co-ordination on cross-cutting issues through its central location within government and proximity to political leadership. In its day-to-day operations, the Department works closely with other departments to support policy development and monitor progress on key issues. Much of this co-ordination occurs through formal mechanisms such as Cabinet Committees and associated Senior Officials Groups (SOGs). These are defined in the Irish Cabinet Handbook as structures to assist the government in carrying out its responsibilities regarding major policy areas or issues of significant public importance or sensitivity that have a cross-cutting dimension. They serve as primary fora for interdepartmental alignment and oversight.

The Department of the Taoiseach prepares the agendas and follow-up materials for Cabinet Committees, shaping how strategic issues are framed and discussed. In some areas, the Department of the Taoiseach has supported the creation of delivery and performance frameworks to help maintain focus over time. Examples of cross-cutting priorities overseen or co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach include child poverty, housing, disability, and the Shared Island initiative -a whole-of-government programme aimed at strengthening North-South co-operation through joint investment, research, and dialogue.

In these cases, the Department's role has ranged from convening delivery boards and facilitating targeted budget discussions (as in child poverty) to overseeing performance frameworks (in housing) and shaping strategic narratives (in the case of Shared Island) (Government of Ireland, 2025[126]). Table 7.1 provides an overview of these initiatives.

Table 7.1. Cross-cutting initiatives involving the Department of the Taoiseach since 2012

Initiative	Year established	Current status	Co-ordination structure
Disability	2025	Active	Dedicated unit.
Child Poverty and Well-being Programme	2023	Active	Department of the Taoiseach Programme Office.
Ukraine	2022	Active	Cabinet Committee, Senior Officials Group, and various sub-groups on issues such as communications and data.
Housing for All	2021	Active	Delivery Group of Secretaries General, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach
Covid Pandemic	2020	Inactive	Cabinet Committee and associated Senior Officials' Group
Shared Island Initiative	2020	Active	Coordination Unit at the Department of the Taoiseach with dedicated fund.
Climate Action Delivery Board	2019	Active	Coordination Unit and Delivery Board co-chaired by Department of the Taoiseach.
Policing Reform	2018	Inactive	Programme implementation Office and Intergovernmental Group
North-East Inner City	2017	Active	Programme Implementation Board
Brexit	2016	Inactive	Cabinet Committee, Secretary Generals Group, and related inter-departmental groups to ensure co-ordination
Action Plan for Jobs	2012	Inactive	Bespoke Monitoring Group reporting into Cabinet Committee

Source: Author's own elaboration

The Climate Action Delivery Board, for instance, provides strategic direction and leadership to ensure co-ordinated implementation of the government's action agenda in this area, monitors departmental performance against emissions targets, and identifies pathways for barriers to achieving the government's objectives. Similarly, there is a Secretary General Delivery Group devoted to housing – chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach – with dedicated workstreams on investment, industry capability and public service delivery.

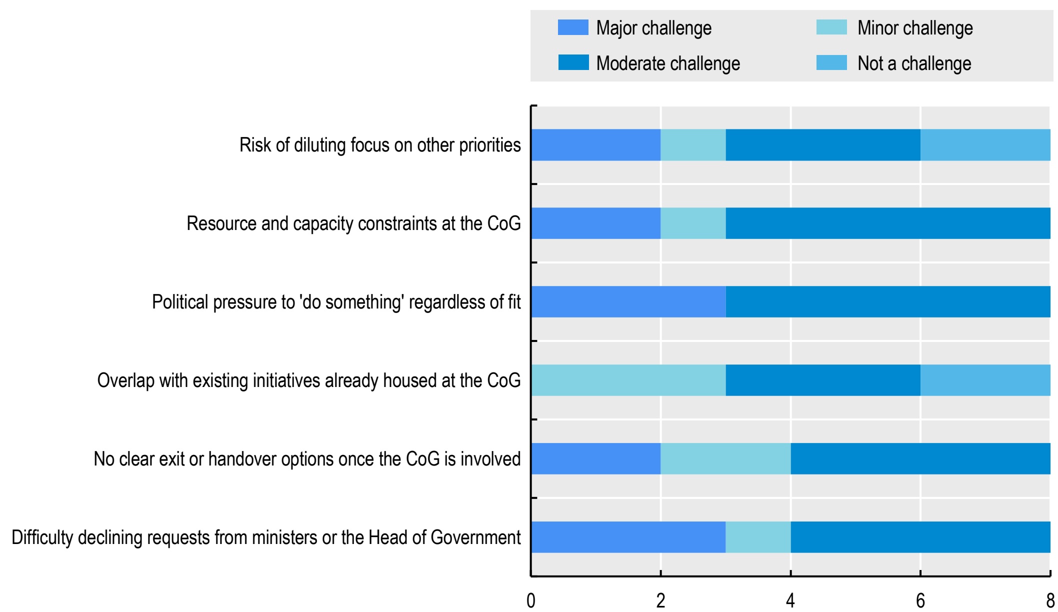
While the Department's institutional configuration and co-ordination mechanisms provide a stable foundation, the way in which it engages with policy challenges is shaped not only by its formal role, but also by informal working relationships. These informal tools have a number of benefits such as quicker decision making or increased ownership over those decisions, but also carry with them a number of risks- in particular around institutional memory.

As outlined in previous reports (OECD, 2023[125]), there has been an ongoing internal reflection on how to ensure the Department of the Taoiseach's involvement in cross-cutting priorities is structured and sequenced to ensure the best possible outcomes. The following section examines this issue.

7.3. Challenges and enablers for the CoG in stewarding cross-cutting policies

OECD analysis and findings highlight the rationale behind the CoG's decision to take on a new cross cutting issue. These may be multi-faceted and cover both political, administrative and technical reasons (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2. CoG decision to take on a cross-cutting issue and the challenges it aims to resolve



Note: n=8, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic.
Source: OECD (2026[6]), "Agile and Dynamic Stewardship of Cross-Cutting Policies at the CoG", unpublished.

As the number of cross-cutting priorities grows, the Department of the Taoiseach has recognised the risk of taking on too many issues. This has prompted discussion on how to set clearer internal thresholds for engagement, how to transition responsibilities to line departments over time, and how to support continuity in the face of shifting political attention.

In recent years, the Department of the Taoiseach has taken on a wider set of responsibilities. Officials interviewed for this chapter noted that responsibilities often land at the Department of the Taoiseach when issues are politically visible, span multiple departments, or carry significant implementation risks. Civil society advocacy and media attention can also elevate issues, reinforcing the expectation that the CoG will provide co-ordination, visibility, and momentum. This reflects a broader trend observed across OECD countries, where CoGs become the default hub for strategically important or politically sensitive issues that do not fall neatly within existing ministerial boundaries (OECD, 2023[125]).

This potential for expansion has resulted in a governance model in which the Department of the Taoiseach is expected not only to initiate and align multi-sectoral strategies, but also to manage delivery risks and mediate between departments in real time. The growing number and scope of whole-of-government priorities have created a complex co-ordination environment, in which the Department of the Taoiseach is called upon to support a broadening portfolio of initiatives requiring both interdepartmental collaboration and sustained political attention.

The case of the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office illustrates this dynamic in practice. The decision to locate this portfolio at the Department of the Taoiseach reflected its political visibility as a personal priority of the then-Taoiseach, who felt strongly committed to the reduction of child poverty and wanted to see sustained progress on the issue. It also resolved a practical challenge: no single department was willing or positioned to take full ownership of such a cross-cutting agenda.

While this case-by-case approach allows for responsiveness, this piecemeal agenda raises questions about role clarity, strategic capacity, and long-term sustainability. It is not uncommon in OECD systems, where political priority is a legitimate driver of central engagement, but this poses the challenges of ensuring that central involvement is used where it adds value, without allowing responsibilities to accumulate in ways that dilute focus or create ambiguity about institutional roles. The case-by-case approach can also neglect commonalities across policy areas which reduces the possibility of explicit and clear learning from previous approaches, particularly in terms of whether and how the involvement of the CoG assisted in cultivating more effective, mainstreamed approaches.

Many countries face similar challenges in determining how and when CoG should engage in cross-cutting issues. International guidance recommends internal mechanisms such as filtering criteria, role allocation tools, and transition pathways to help CoGs remain focused on issues where their involvement provides strategic added value (OECD, 2023[127]; Davies and Vági, 2023[128]). While the SIGMA Principles of Public Administration do not prescribe specific entry or exit criteria, they highlight the importance of harmonised planning processes, clearly defined institutional responsibilities, and coherence across strategic instruments. Several Irish stakeholders interviewed for this chapter similarly suggested the development of simple internal tools, such as informal engagement guidelines or decision-support checklists, to support consistency in how and when the Department of the Taoiseach engages, though others acknowledged that such tools may oversimplify what is, in most cases, a political decision driven by context.

While few governments have codified criteria for assigning cross-cutting issues to the CoG, international experience reveals a set of factors under which central co-ordination is typically warranted. Table 7.2, presents a number of factors that whilst not exhaustive can provide useful inspiration and guidance.

Table 7.2. Factors leading to centre of government involvement in cross-cutting issues

Dimension	Description
Political salience	The issue is sensitive, visible, or politically charged, requiring high-level attention.
Cross-sectoral scope	The issue spans multiple sectors or ministries without a clear lead, demanding whole-of-government alignment.
Authority	Formal authority from the centre is needed to align efforts across departments.
Neutrality	The issue requires impartial oversight, free from the influence of sectoral interests.
High implementation risk	Significant delivery risks or implementation challenges exist.
Absence of a co-ordination mechanism	No existing lead institution or framework is in place to manage the issue effectively.

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on (OECD, 2024[2]; Evans, G., et al., 2010[129]).

However, as mentioned, assessing where and how the Department of the Taoiseach can add value is not a mechanical exercise. A number of determinants are less explicit, harder to codify, and not always immediately visible. These require judgement, strategic analysis, and an explicit balancing of priorities in light of the specific context.

In this context, two considerations stand out from the analysis. The CoG should be mindful of the risk of duplicating activities more appropriately carried out by line departments, which could displace them from their mandates and weaken system-wide ownership. It should also ensure that any additional responsibilities can be assumed without undermining its capacity to deliver on its core functions.

At the same time, the scale and urgency of certain issues – as Ireland experienced with Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic – will necessitate direct CoG engagement irrespective of any formal criteria. This underscores a broader point: the centre of government's role is inherently dynamic, shaped by political, economic, and social developments. In practice, this means calibrating engagement over time, mobilising actors and resources quickly when issues escalate, and shifting from operational management to strategic steering where appropriate.

7.3.1. Co-ordinating and ensuring coherence and continuity

Determining when the CoG should engage in cross-cutting issues cannot be separated from understanding the environment in which it operates. In Ireland, coalition dynamics and an increasingly complex political-administrative interface have created conditions that both necessitate and complicate central co-ordination. These dynamics fundamentally shape what the CoG can realistically achieve and how it must position itself.

Ireland's coalition governments since 2020 reflect a shift in the country's political configuration. For the first time, the historic rivals Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael entered government together, joined by the Green Party under a rotating Taoiseach model. This setup has been maintained in the current government arrangements, formed in January 2025, with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and a number of independent members of the parliament.

The co-ordination role of the Department of the Taoiseach, as a fundamental part of the CoG, has been evolving since the 1970s. Ireland's accession to the then European Economic Community expanded the range of policy areas requiring cross-government co-ordination and increased the Taoiseach's role in representing Ireland in collective decision making at European level. Over time, the growing prevalence of coalition governments has further reinforced the importance of co-ordination over direction, while the increasing pace and continuity of government business has heightened the need for coherence across departments. These developments have increased the importance of the CoG's co-ordinating role, particularly in relation to complex cross-cutting policy challenges such as housing and decarbonisation.

At the same time, across OECD countries, the interface between political and administrative levels is changing. Ireland is no exception. Several officials noted that the growing role of political staff in what have traditionally been more technical co-ordination processes reflects a broader tension between the need for short-term political responsiveness and longer-term policy development.

These political and policy dynamics have practical implications for the civil service. As one senior official noted during interviews for this chapter, "working in coalition governments is more complex. (…) We need to be more careful while addressing cross-cutting issues". As a result, the Department of the Taoiseach's convening and brokering functions have become more prominent, as it works to align diverse agendas - both political and technical- and ensure the continuity of cross-cutting initiatives. Departments may look to the Department of the Taoiseach to resolve inter-departmental disputes and provide political cover when navigating contentious issues. As one official put it, "initiatives fall back one or two years when leadership is unclear", a dynamic that underscores a reliance on the centre's role in playing that leadership role, sustaining momentum, supporting follow-through and shared accountability in terms of delivering on commitments contained in the Programme for government.

The Department of the Taoiseach, therefore, plays a critical role in maintaining policy coherence and continuity. Effective bridging requires not only technical capacity, but also the institutional authority to uphold neutrality, navigate political transitions, and support sustained implementation over time (OECD, 2024). In a system shaped by informal co-ordination, fast-paced announcements, and rotating leadership, the Department of the Taoiseach helps provide continuity and maintain attention on longer-term priorities. While this function is rarely codified, its value was widely recognised across departments during the meetings, particularly in relation to whole-of-government issues such as housing and child poverty amongst others. The key question is how the CoG can support line departments in a way that is both effective and targeted, while recognising that the intensity of its involvement cannot be sustained indefinitely.

7.3.2. Balancing direction and empowerment

Once the decision is made to engage the CoG on a priority issue, the question becomes how it can add value in practice. These functional choices can determine not only the immediate effectiveness of central involvement, but also the sustainability of reforms and the feasibility of eventual transition back to line departments.

The way CoGs engage in implementation and co-ordination varies significantly across countries, reflecting differences in administrative tradition, political structure, and the maturity of cross-government collaboration (OECD, 2024). While some CoGs focus on setting strategic direction and convening actors, others adopt a more hands-on delivery role, providing active support to line ministries in shaping and executing joint initiatives. This evolving function can take many forms: from facilitating co-operation across ministries to more structured, interventionist models, depending on where each country's system draws the line between central steering and ministerial autonomy. In all cases, the challenge lies in balancing the CoG`s strategic oversight with its capacity to catalyse sustained collaboration across institutional boundaries.

Ireland's current governance model and political dynamics means that CoG has to increasingly work to balance its directive and facilitative roles, encouraging line ministries to take ownership of policies while adopting practices that improve co-ordination across sectors. This is particularly important given the cross-cutting nature of challenges such as housing, poverty, or migration. As one key stakeholder put it, a role that the Department of the Taoiseach plays in some policy areas is to "build connective tissue across departments". In this context, the Department is increasingly taking on responsibilities as a policy broker and strategic integrator, fostering interdepartmental collaboration capabilities on shared priorities. It supports departments in collecting and synthesising data and in monitoring government-wide initiatives, particularly in high-profile areas. However, as these collaborative arrangements take shape, a key challenge is to ensure that line departments are able to absorb and sustain them independently, especially as the Department of the Taoiseach shifts its attention to new or emerging priorities. During interviews for this chapter, some stakeholders highlighted the need for clearer guidance on the nature, scope and -if possible- timing, of the Department of the Taoiseach's engagement, although there is a question whether this can be fully defined ex-ante given the intrinsically dynamic nature of the CoG.

The debate centres around whether CoGs can adopt a more explicit approach to helping line departments work together on cross-cutting priorities. Ireland stands out among OECD countries in institutionalising policy development as a core civil service capability (OECD, 2023[130]). The establishment of the IGEES, the adoption of a unified policy framework underpinned by the principles of evidence, feasibility and legitimacy (Government of Ireland, 2025[131]), and the stewardship of the Civil Service Management Board collectively demonstrate a mature and system-wide approach to professionalising policy advice. These initiatives position Ireland at the forefront of efforts to embed analytical rigour and cross-government coherence in policymaking. As the OECD previously highlighted (OECD, 2023[125]), the next step lies in ensuring that these frameworks translate into consistent policy development infrastructure across all departments. This will require deepening practical skills in design and delivery planning, fostering stronger horizontal collaboration during early stages of policy formulation, and developing more structured feedback loops between the centre and line departments to strengthen collective ownership of policy outcomes.

A broader strategic approach for the Department of the Taoiseach would be to focus on strengthening the state's ability to work across boundaries over time. In that sense, the role of the CoG would not simply be to intervene where co-ordination challenges arise, but to help build the underlying capacities that allow line departments to respond, adapt and collaborate more effectively in a changing environment. This would imply combining strategic steering with a deliberate effort to strengthen how government analyses problems, co-ordinates across organisational boundaries, and supports delivery, rather than relying mainly on ad hoc central intervention (Kattel, 2022[132]). In Canada, new agencies have been developed to support cross-cutting policy issues, including the Major Projects Office, aimed to bring together various stakeholders on infrastructure projects.

Box 7.1. Major Projects Office in Canada

In Canada, the Major Projects Office is a federal agency designed to co-ordinate across federal departments and work with provinces, territories, Indigenous Peoples, and private-sector participants to fast-track the development of major infrastructure projects. By providing a single point of contact and leadership on major infrastructure projects referred to the office, the aim is to streamline regulatory approvals, facilitating financing and removing government barriers in order to bring large infrastructure projects to fruition more quickly. In so doing, the Office contributes to an emerging cross-cutting economic agenda involving various policy areas and stakeholders.

Source: Government of Canada (2026[11]), Major Projects Office, https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/major-projects-office.html

One avenue for putting this into practice would be for the Department of the Taoiseach to provide guidance, capacity building for structuring joint working arrangements, and targeted policy support in areas such as design, delivery planning, or outcome definition. This would allow the centre to play a more enabling role: not replacing line departments but helping them develop the routines and capabilities needed to sustain collaboration themselves.

A promising approach to tailoring this type of support, and also build accountability with line departments, is through structured feedback from line departments. The Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office, for instance, has conducted surveys to gather feedback from line departments to inform its work. While these were not carried out in a fully structured way, they represent an interesting practice to take into consideration. Periodic surveys or structured consultations could be conducted across departments to assess existing capabilities and identify where the Department of the Taoiseach can add most value. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury jointly surveyed departments to understand barriers to cross-government working, using the insights to design targeted tools and guidance (see Box 7.2).

Box 7.2. Surveying departments to strengthen central support in the United Kingdom

In 2022, the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury conducted a survey of over 200 departmental officials to identify how the centre could better support cross-government working. The responses highlighted several priority areas where departments needed more help, including governance, data-sharing, finance, and organisational culture.

In response, the Cabinet Office worked with the cross-government Policy Profession to create a joint-working hub. The hub provides departments with tools, guidance, and examples to help establish clear accountability structures and co-ordination practices. It also serves as a signposting mechanism for existing cross-government support and resources. This initiative reflects a broader effort to strengthen the centre's enabling function by actively gathering practitioner feedback and using it to tailor policy support.

Source: National Audit Office, United Kingdom (2023[133]), *Cross-Government Working*, https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/GPG-cross-government-working.pdf

New Zealand's Policy Project also provides an interesting model for this kind of enabling approach (see Box 7.3). Hosted within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, it equips policy practitioners, teams, and agencies with frameworks, tools, and support to strengthen capability across the public service. Drawing on this example, the Irish CoG could help build system-wide capacity to design and deliver coherent responses to complex priorities.

Box 7.3. The Policy Project as a system-wide support platform in New Zealand

New Zealand's Policy Project, hosted within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, helps strengthen the quality of policy advice and capability across the public service. Rather than focusing solely on central oversight, the initiative provides practical tools and training for policy practitioners, teams, and agencies to improve their work and align with whole-of-government priorities.

The Policy Project promotes three integrated frameworks that guide system-wide improvement: the Policy Quality Framework, the Policy Skills Framework, and the Policy Capability Framework. These provide clear standards for what good policy looks like, the skills required to deliver it, and what constitutes an effective policy unit.

To support day-to-day implementation, the team has developed tools such as:

- The Policy Skills Framework and Development Pathways Tool, which help practitioners plan professional growth across levels of seniority.
- Policy Tools, a curated repository to help teams select appropriate development methods.
- A Start Right Guide and a Commissioning Worksheet for Policy Papers, which guides teams through the early stages of defining and structuring policy work.
- Workshops and training on topics such as policy fundamentals, intervention logic, and starting successful projects.

The Policy Project operates as a support unit to the policy profession, rather than a regulator or approver. Its value lies in equipping the system with shared resources, structured learning opportunities, and a clear vision of quality policymaking. For CoGs exploring ways to support better cross-government co-ordination, it offers a practical model of enabling policy capacity from within.

Source: Government of New Zealand (2026[134]), *The Policy Project*, https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project

While national governance initiatives, such as those in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, offer useful normative frameworks, it is also important to recognise the challenges of embedding them in mainstream practice. An evaluation of the New Zealand Policy Project found, for example, that officials responsible for day-to-day implementation were not always aware of the resources provided by the CoG. This suggests that CoG interventions require active implementation support to ensure uptake, and that early momentum should not be assumed to be self-sustaining.

This point also highlights that the value of CoG support often lies in its novelty and limited duration. Prolonged involvement can dilute impact and risk disempowering the actors it is intended to support. This underlines the importance of well-defined exit strategies that are linked to criteria and demonstrate the required capabilities in the relevant institutions.

7.3.3. The exit: planning the path forward and avoiding losing political momentum

A recurring challenge in public governance is how to hand over responsibility from the CoG to line ministries without losing coherence or momentum. Stakeholders noted that while CoG engagement might be essential during the launch and framing of cross-cutting initiatives, these functions often remain concentrated in central units longer than necessary. The result can be overstretched co-ordination units and blurred lines between delivery and strategic guidance.

Defining a structured transition or "legacy" strategy could help mitigate this risk if it is linked to a capability assessment. Such strategies should aim not to withdraw central support too early, but to plan systematically for when, how, and under what conditions specific functions should shift. This may include readiness assessments to evaluate the technical capacity, governance clarity, and institutional stability of departments, as well as stakeholder alignment and accountability arrangements.

There are few examples of structured approaches to managing this transition. Estonia offers a case of how responsibilities can successfully evolve from temporary, central co-ordination to more permanent institutional arrangements in a planned way. Its experience with policy co-ordination illustrates how a CoG can design and implement a gradual "exit strategy" once policy frameworks and capacities have matured (see Box 7.4).

Box 7.4. Machinery of government changes in Estonia

Estonia provides a clear example of how responsibilities can successfully transition from central co-ordination to dedicated ministerial structures (see Chapter two). In 2022, responding to the need for fundamental shifts in climate policy design and implementation, Estonia established an co-ordination unit within the Government Office to tackle this issue. This central approach included three key elements: a Committee of Green Transition Policy led by the Prime Minister, an expert group with private sector and scientific representatives, and a dedicated green transition team within the government Office to co-ordinate government-wide processes.

The central co-ordination model proved effective in securing a political mandate and driving sectoral planning across government. However, recognising the long-term nature of this issue, Estonia planned from the outset to transition leadership to a dedicated ministry. In 2023, this transition occurred with the creation of the Climate Ministry, which assumed responsibility for the Committee of Green Transition Policy and overall process leadership.

This approach demonstrates how CoG co-ordination can serve as an effective incubator for cross-cutting priorities while planning systematically for institutional transition. Estonia's experience highlights key success factors: securing initial political leadership through central co-ordination, allowing sufficient time for institutional development, and maintaining flexibility in implementation approaches.

Source: Kaur, M. et al. (2023[135]), *Steering responses to climate change from the centre of government: A stocktaking*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b95c8396-en.

In Ireland, a relevant example can be found in the policing reform process (Box 7.5). This case illustrates how the Department of the Taoiseach can support implementation during a critical phase of reform while also creating the conditions for responsibilities to be transferred back to the relevant line institutions over time.

Box 7.5. Facilitating policing reform at the centre of government

The Commission on the Future of Policing (CoFPI) in 2018 recommended that an Implementation Group for Policing Reform (IGPR), with an independent Chair, should be established to ensure delivery of the reform programme, and that an Implementation Programme Office resourced with the appropriate expertise should be established to support the IGPR in its work. The IGPR had collective responsibility for the delivery of the Implementation Plan, with the core membership of the IGPR comprising of senior officials from the organisations most closely involved in driving the transformation programme: An Garda Síochána, Department of Justice, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and Department of the Taoiseach.

The Department of the Taoiseach took on a co-ordinating role in a number of ways:

Firstly, the High-Level Steering Board on Policing Reform (HLSB), was established to guide the work of the IGPR and was chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach. It also acted as a clearing house for issues that could not be adequately resolved by the IGPR, or where particular blockages were experienced in the implementation of A Policing Service for our Future. The Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Public Services provided political oversight of the implementation plan.

Secondly, a Policing Reform Implementation Programme Office (PRIPO) was established in the Department of the Taoiseach with the purpose of driving implementation. The Office was staffed by personnel with expertise in the areas of project management, policing, justice, and public service reform. The PRIPO provided progress reports on the delivery of the Plan to the HLSB and the relevant Cabinet Committee. The PRIPO was also committed to publishing periodic progress reports at key stages of the reform programme to reinforce oversight and transparency of the implementation of the Plan and monitored and drove the agenda for the IGPR.

Part of the progress achieved was deemed the result of the fact that the locus of implementation was situated in Department of the Taoiseach with an independent Chair, who had been a member of the Commission – bringing continuity, and supported by a dedicated programme office with full-time resources, was seen as crucial and enabling credible oversight of the transformation process.

At the end of the mandate of the Implementation Group for Policing Reform (IGPR), the next steps in the reform process were devolved back to departments with a new governance framework as well as continuing political oversight through the Minister of Justice. It was seen as appropriate to shift the locus of oversight back to the respective line department and related agencies as set out in legislation, and the enhanced reform capabilities of the police organisation was a guarantor of further change. The cabinet committee structure devoted to Justice and related matters exists to ensure that policing is seen as a collective responsibility across all relevant government bodies.

Source: Government of Ireland (2023[136]), *A Policing Service for our Future: Implementing the Report of the Commission of Policing in Ireland*, https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/a-policing-service-for-the-future/implementation-plan.pdf

The example of policing reform suggests that the Department of the Taoiseach’s role is not only about convening and steering but also about managing how and when responsibility is handed back to line ministries. While such transition strategies are not common in OECD governments, developing a more structured approach could be seen as an innovative step: one that helps preserve coherence without overstretching the centre, while embedding reforms more firmly within the machinery of government.

7.3.4. Case Study: The Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office

The Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office was established in 2023 within the Department of the Taoiseach to improve the visibility, coherence, and co-ordination of Ireland's response to child poverty. Designed to work with and complement Young Ireland, the overarching policy Framework for children and young people and aligned with the EU Child Guarantee.

The decision to locate the office at the Department of the Taoiseach reflected both political and institutional dynamics. On the political side, child poverty had been identified as a personal priority of the Taoiseach at the time, warranting high-level visibility. Administratively, the issue spanned multiple departments, including Social Protection, Children, Education, and Housing, without a single lead ministry. During the interviews for this chapter, stakeholders described how proposals to house the Office in line departments proved unworkable, as no department was willing or positioned to take full ownership of the agenda.

Applying the factors outlined in Table 7.2, child poverty in Ireland combined high political salience, a broad cross-sectoral scope, and the absence of a single lead institution, all conditions that made central co-ordination both legitimate and necessary. From its inception, the Office has functioned as a facilitation and co-ordination hub rather than a delivery unit. It does not develop new programmes or directly manage funding. Instead, it co-ordinates inputs from departments, builds a shared narrative, and enhances interdepartmental exchange (Government of Ireland, 2025[126]). The Office has also played a behind-the-scenes role, reviewing draft materials, connecting actors across policy areas, and encouraging consistency in how children's well-being is framed across government.

In its initial 24-month Programme Plan, *From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Well-being 2023-2025*, the role of the Programme Office was defined as follows: " enhance delivery across six key priority areas, provide a focus on specific issues that require urgent attention and action, and to support strategic initiatives that will amplify the impact of these initiatives (Government of Ireland, 2023).

The six focus areas were selected to deliver tangible improvements for families and children living in poverty. They are necessary, though not sufficient, to realise the government's ambition to make Ireland the best country in Europe to be a child. The priority areas are:

- Income support and joblessness
- Early learning and childcare
- Reducing the cost of education
- Family homelessness
- Consolidating and integrating family and parental support, health and well-being
- Enhancing participation in culture, arts and sport for children and young people affected by poverty

In addition, the Programme Office undertakes a small number of strategic initiatives which have the potential to increase the impact of current and emerging measures to fight child poverty and support child well-being. In the first Programme, the goals were to strengthen the focus on child poverty in the annual Budget, developing a national framework to support service integration for children and families, promoting key tools to enhance policy and implementation focus on child poverty, and supporting the cross-Government focus on the children's services workforce (Government of Ireland, 2023).

In addition to the more 'traditional role of monitoring and oversight of relevant government policy, since its inception, the Office has achieved several milestones. A central achievement was bringing greater focus on child poverty in the annual Budget process, resulting in greater co-ordination of spending plans on child poverty for the first time and the preparation of two cross-government Budget reports with a third under development.

As a system convener, the CPWPO successfully established a Cross-Government Network (CGN) on Child Poverty and Well-being and hosted two Child Poverty and Well-being Summits (2024 and 2025), which have promoted focus among stakeholders and showcased strong political commitment. The Office has also progressed a number of strategic initiatives including convening and leading work in relation to developing new strategic directions on enhancing service integration and on the important question of family homelessness.

During the interviews for this chapter, stakeholders consistently emphasised the value of this Office; which combines the formal monitoring and policy support functions of its mandate with a more informal role in brokering, quality assurance, and promoting consistency and co-operation across departments. One stakeholder noted that if the Programme Office didn't exist, policies would likely continue in a more siloed fashion, while another described how it has promoted a more co-ordinated, cross-government approach, particularly through informal quality assurance and brokering support. Others saw its symbolic contribution as equally important, highlighting that the Office provides visibility and "political weight" to the child poverty issue.

Rather than providing a comprehensive description of all of the work of the Programme Office, the rest of this chapter will focus specifically on one initiative – the cross-government network on child poverty and well-being. Many stakeholders identified this network as a key contribution of the Programme Office, making it valuable to explore this area of work in greater depth.

7.3.5. The Cross-Government Network on Child Poverty and Well-being

One of the Programme Office's innovations is the establishment of a Cross-Government Network on Child Poverty and Well-being, which provides a space for informal alignment and relationship-building across departments. Convened by the Office and hosted within the Department of the Taoiseach, the network brings together senior officials from key departments, agencies, and local authorities. It was created to improve visibility, coherence, and informal alignment around the national child poverty agenda. Although it is not a formal decision-making body, it serves as a trusted space for cross-departmental exchange, shared learning, and relationship-building.

The network has been widely welcomed by stakeholders, who credit it with enhancing the profile of child poverty across government and helping to foster both formal and informal connections. In a system where co-ordination often relies on personal relationships, the network fills an important gap. OECD data shows that over 50 percent of Irish civil servants depend on informal contacts outside their department for policy development (OECD, 2023[125]), and participants consistently cited the meetings as a rare opportunity for honest, cross-cutting dialogue.

Despite these strengths, several stakeholders noted that the network's current format may limit its strategic potential. Participants recognised its value in knowledge sharing, updates, and fostering informal relationships across departments. However, many observed that once the initial trust-building phase is achieved, the co-ordination process needs to evolve. To remain effective, the network should offer more tangible value to its members.

Viewed through the lens of dynamic capabilities (Kattel, 2022[132]) , co-ordination networks -among other public sector bodies - can play three complementary roles: (i) facilitating sense-making, through sharing analytical perspectives on what is working; (ii) enabling connecting, by building alliances that strengthen collective ownership; and (iii) supporting shaping, or in other words, developing shared tools, standards, and working routines that embed improved practice across departments.

A recent innovation of the Network has been the establishment of a series of Action Learning Sets (ALS). These projects are led by network members who have identified a particularly challenging or "wicked" problem in their work (OECD, 2017[5]). They convene an ALS with others who share a stake in the issue, in order to explore its root causes and identify potential innovations and experiments. ALS is an established methodology that not only creates opportunities for deeper exploration, but also provides a forum for action-based collaboration and for building capacity in multidisciplinary working. The advantage of the Department of the Taoiseach convening these ALS is that it provides not only support to the convenors, but also credibility and legitimacy in seeking out new working relationships. While there is significant variation across the ALSs, several of them have met multiple times over a period of months and the Network is planning a convening session to share learning early in 2026. Five of the ALSs presented their emerging learning at the 2025 Child Poverty Summit.

The ALS model as an experiment in enhancing the role of the network, has parallels with 'policy lab' approaches for surfacing and refining shared goals, testing outcome targets and sub-targets, and exploring how departments can collectively support delivery (see example from Estonia in Box 7.6). A policy lab aims to host "*challenge*" sessions around complex programmes and pilot short, time-bound policy sprints focused on advancing specific priorities, such as school meals, early years access, or child homelessness. The Programme Office's ALS model and policy lab formats preserve flexibility while encouraging practical collaboration.

Box 7.6. Innosprint: A scalable policy sprint format in Estonia

Estonia's Innosprint is a design sprint model tailored specifically for the public sector. Developed by the government Office's Public Sector Innovation Team, it introduces civil servants to design thinking, co-creation, and problem-solving methods through a structured sprint format.

Each Innosprint runs over five days spread across six weeks. A distinctive feature is the time allocated between sessions for participants to conduct user research, such as interviews or fieldwork. This approach helps shift civil servants' mindset from internal process orientation to user-centred problem definition.

To date, Innosprint has engaged 381 participants from 85 organisations across 53 project teams. Teams apply to the sprint with a real policy or service challenge and are supported by facilitators - trained civil servants known as "sherpas"- who guide them through the sprint process. Innosprints are run fully online, making them scalable and accessible across Estonia.

The model has been successfully replicated by other public sector bodies and is recognised for its practical value, low cost, and capacity-building benefits. It has led to stronger procurement design, wider adoption of collaborative methods, and improved confidence in using innovation tools across government.

Source: OECD (2023[130]), *Observatory of Public Sector Innovation*, https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/innosprint-a-design-sprint-for-the-public-sector/

The Programme Office is well positioned to guide the future evolution of the Network by broadening and deepening its role in three directions, aligned to supporting the development of dynamic capabilities: strengthening shared analytical perspectives on what is working, building alliances across departmental boundaries, and embedding improved working practices that can be sustained without continuous central involvement.

7.3.6. Prioritisation and thematic focus

This section summarises the role of the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office at the centre of government. It considers how clearer prioritisation and thematic focus could strengthen the Office's capacity, how a stronger measurement framework with targets and milestones could support alignment around shared objectives, how budget co-ordination could be further developed to deepen cross-departmental engagement, and how sustaining political momentum requires a longer-term approach to institutional development. Taken together, these themes illustrate both the opportunities and challenges of embedding child poverty reduction as a national priority and inform the evolving role of the centre of government.

Effective co-ordination across government depends not only on the ambition of a shared agenda but also on the ability to focus attention and resources on a manageable set of priorities over time. The initial six priority areas of the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office were selected for impact and intended to capture the multidimensional nature of child poverty, nonetheless they represent a wide-ranging agenda, one that spans income, services, education, housing and participation (Government of Ireland, 2025[126]).

This breadth has helped give visibility to the complexity of the issue and encouraged engagement from a wide range of departments. At the same time, there was broad agreement among stakeholders that trying to advance all six strands simultaneously, with limited staff and without implementation authority, has stretched the Office's capacity. Several departments noted that while the Office has successfully convened actors, the wide scope of its mandate can make it harder to maintain depth of focus, facilitate strategic dialogue or support follow-through on specific actions (Government of Ireland, 2025[126]); (OECD, 2023[125]).

A number of stakeholders interviewed for this chapter suggested that a more focused and sequenced approach could enhance the effectiveness of the Programme Office's work. Rather than advancing all six objectives with equal intensity, the Programme Office could prioritise specific areas where co-ordination is most needed or where implementation challenges are particularly acute. This might involve selecting one or two priority themes each year - such as child nutrition, school exclusion, or housing - as focal points for targeted cross-government collaboration, even as implementation continues in the other priorities. Prioritisation would not narrow the agenda, but instead provide a practical mechanism for focusing attention, facilitating strategic dialogue, and enabling more sustained follow-through.

Looking ahead, the development of the Office's second Programme Plan offers an opportunity to embed this kind of thematic sequencing. Annual summits, budget preparation and cross-government network activities could be aligned around selected themes, enabling participating actors to prepare more concrete contributions and support a more coherent policy cycle.

7.3.7. Measuring progress: balancing targets, milestones, and learning

In cross-government initiatives such as child poverty reduction, the question of how best to measure progress is as much political as it is technical. Targets can be powerful: they provide visibility, signal ambition, and help align departmental efforts toward shared outcomes.

Just before the Child Poverty and Well-being Summit in September 2025, the Taoiseach and the Minister for Social Protection announced the government's new target on child poverty: by the end of 2030, no more than 3% of children should live in consistent poverty. Framed as one of the most ambitious commitments in Europe, the target will be accompanied by a dashboard of well-being indicators designed to capture how children are doing across all dimensions of their lives (Government of Ireland, 2025[137]). During the interviews for this chapter, many stakeholders underlined that shared targets could improve strategic focus and shared accountability across government.

While the new target is significant, responses from interviews for this chapter and international experience point to the limits of relying solely on headline targets. Child poverty outcomes are shaped by many factors, including those difficult for ministers to control - household composition, employment, migration, or housing availability - making attribution difficult and political accountability highly exposed. Such concerns are not unique to Ireland and reflect a wider body of evidence cautioning against over-reliance on fixed measures. Research on Goodhart's Law, for example, underscores how indicators risk distortion when turned into rigid targets, as actors may focus on improving the metric itself by shifting resources, narrowing effort to what is measured, or gaming the system – rather than tackling the broader problem it was meant to capture (CNA, 2022[138]).

The establishment of the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office has created an institutional anchor for cross-government collaboration and increased the visibility of child poverty as a shared policy concern. The Office has made significant progress in developing monitoring frameworks, producing a first detailed annual progress report (Child Poverty and Well-Being in Transition: Learning and Adapting to Accelerate Change in Children's Lives) that captures activities and investment flows across departments, and conducting cross-government budget analyses (Government of Ireland, 2025[126]). These contributions have helped to sustain attention on child poverty across government. Yet, as some stakeholders have stressed, they remain largely descriptive and focused on inputs, making it difficult to assess whether current initiatives are contributing to structural change.

Several OECD reviews have noted the importance of building iterative performance routines, milestones, and shared delivery mechanisms to steer complex agendas (OECD, 2024[2]) . Rather than viewing targets as "magic bullets," these approaches are rooted in the importance of building performance management systems and working routines that work. In other words, that are tailored to the policy challenge at hand. Some countries such as the United Kingdom, for instance, implement milestones instead of indicators to track progress on infrastructure projects, as it is an easier way to measure progress considering the complexity of delivery. The goal is to build broader frameworks that allow for course correction and learning, and more importantly, a shared understanding of the common goals and clear accountability measures. In practice, this can include targets but also interim trajectories and process milestones that can help sustain political momentum, like in the case of Australia with its National Health Reform Agreement (Box 7.7).

Box 7.7. Measuring progress in the National Health Reform Agreement in Australia

Australia's *National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA)* offers lessons for steering complex reforms. Endorsed by all Health Ministers, the Roadmap set a shared vision and identified seven priority reform streams (from prevention and well-being to enhanced health data). Each stream was accompanied by an Outcome Map, which laid out intended outcomes, contributing actions, deliverables, and timeframes for 2021-25. These maps made explicit how short-term deliverables were expected to contribute to intermediate outcomes and, over time, to the longer-term reform goals. They also clarified responsibilities across the Commonwealth and state governments, creating a transparent chain of accountability.

A mid-term review in 2023 concluded that while the Roadmap provided clarity and transparency, progress was uneven. It found that reforms advanced most where milestones were well-defined, backed by data systems, and resourced with joint governance structures. By contrast, areas with vague milestones or diffuse accountability lagged. The Review recommended strengthening the performance framework by adding patient experience and outcome measures, creating a new 10-year Funding and Payments Framework with measurable milestones, and establishing a dedicated National Innovation and Reform Agency to maintain momentum. Overall, Australia's experience shows that roadmaps with outcome maps can help keep governments focused on long-term ambitions while ensuring flexibility for adaptation and iterative learning.

Source: Government of Australia (2026[139]), *National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA)*, https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/national-health-reform-agreement-nhra

Some practices could be considered by Ireland to measure, manage, and communicate progress in a more structured way such as the ‘dashboard’ (Government of Ireland, 2026[140]), which could bring together outcome data in key areas of children’s lives. International experience - such as Scotland’s National Performance Framework - shows how such platforms can sustain political attention and public trust.

Another practice is to use milestones alongside indicators. Instead of relying solely on long-term outcome measures, and without the need to rigidly formalise process or output indicators, the Programme Office could support the identification of short-term milestones for each of its priority areas (e.g. roll-out of universal school meals, expansion of early learning access, reductions in homelessness among children). These milestones should be time-bound, realistic, and jointly owned by the responsible departments. The U.S. performance management framework is a well-known example: each government policy priority has a political appointee and a senior civil servant responsible for its implementation, creating a clear sense of accountability.

As part of New Zealand's Results Programme, the government chose to measure 'intermediate outcomes' as a method of milestone tracking. Intermediate outcomes sit between outputs (goods and services delivered by agencies), which are easily controllable but have limited intrinsic value on their own, and end outcomes (the ultimate societal changes desired) which have high intrinsic value but are slow to materialise). This approach allowed public servants to observe the consequences of their actions and adapt, while still pursuing results that citizens could recognise as genuinely valuable.

Finally, some stakeholders have pointed to the potential value of a child poverty ‘roadmap’, which could set out expected milestones across the six thematic areas of the Programme Office and identify priority metrics to be tracked over time. Drawing inspiration from Australia’s use of outcome maps, such a roadmap could illustrate how near-term deliverables and medium-term outcomes link to the 2030 headline target, while allowing for periodic revision and learning. This would not only clarify the contribution of individual departments, but also provide a shared frame for accountability and communication with the public.

Regardless of the specific tools or practices, the main goal is to develop a monitoring system that proves useful for decision making, accountability and transparency. Ideally, it should address all three dimensions simultaneously, ensuring that Ireland’s political commitment to reduce consistent child poverty to 3% by the end of 2030 is matched by an equally robust framework for tracking and sustaining progress.

7.3.8. Budget co-ordination

Ireland’s budget process is highly centralised, with decision making concentrated in the final weeks of the cycle and shaped primarily through political negotiations. Within this context, departments face limited opportunities to co-ordinate in advance or advocate for joint priorities. While informal communication channels can support alignment, several participants noted the need for more structured entry points to enable shared proposals and cross-departmental engagement.

The Programme Office has taken steps to strengthen visibility around child poverty-related spending. In 2023, 2024, and 2025, it led the preparation of cross-government budget analyses -presented as part of the *Breaking the Cycle* reports - that identified new or expanded allocations across the Programme’s six priority areas (Government of Ireland, 2025[141]). These efforts were widely welcomed as an important innovation, contributing to greater transparency and signalling government attention. The formal post-Budget analysis builds on informal networking, outreach, and engagement undertaken in advance of the Budget. The Programme Office engages with all relevant departments to explore possible spending plans, provide feedback on which areas could have the greatest potential impact, and reminds departments that child poverty is a key priority area for government. This engagement enables the Office to build a broad picture of the potential landscape of initiatives and serves as a resource for enhancing connectivity across the system. It does not, however, represent a formal or structured role in the Budget decision-making process, which is progressed bilaterally between departments, their Ministers, and the Department of Public Expenditure.

The Office has a valuable assessment and mapping role, however it currently does not directly participate in formal budget planning discussions, nor does it have a formal mechanism to co-ordinate investment proposals linked to child poverty outcomes. Departments prepare their estimates independently, and although the Office has played an important role in promoting prioritisation of spending within line departments on child poverty-related themes, shared priorities are not always reflected in the final submissions. The Office contributes to the Taoiseach's own budget engagement and leverages governance structures, such as the Cabinet Committee on Children and Education, to strengthen the profile of child poverty within government.

An interesting innovation contained in the secondary Budget report was the inclusion of a set of core principles which can inform decision making. The Budget report offered an analysis of how the Budget aligned with the following principles:

- Principle 1: Universal measures can provide an important safety net, but progress on universal measures should not be to the detriment of targeting those with the greatest need.
- Principle 2: Prevention and early intervention supports are particularly important for the most disadvantaged children.
- Principle 3: Responses to child poverty and well-being need to address income as well as broader supports and services.
- Principle 4: Given the ambition to eliminate child poverty, income of low-income families must increase by more than the general population.
- Principle 5: The most significant investment the State makes in ending child poverty is through existing programmes and supports; new measures should address gaps or seek to replace or evolve programmes which have become obsolete.
- Principle 6: Decisions need to be cost effective, efficient and fiscally sustainable.

International experience suggests that alignment between social priorities and public spending can be enhanced through the use of clearly defined indicators and targets, supported by structured reporting, shared metrics, and collaborative planning routines (OECD, 2019[142]). As discussed above, targets not only clarify expected outcomes but also enable more strategic budgeting: they help identify which interventions require greater investment, justify additional allocations based on projected results, and provide a basis for spending reviews that improve efficiency across the expenditure cycle. In New Zealand, for example, the Child Poverty Reduction Act requires the publication of a Child Poverty Report alongside each national budget (see Box 7.8).

While the Programme Office will continue to work within the specificities of the Irish budget system, it is well placed to support a potentially similar shift in Ireland. While the Office does not control spending decisions, it can contribute by identifying strategic gaps, facilitating joint investment planning, support multi-annual planning and helping departments align their submissions with measurable outcomes. Over time, deepening engagement in the budget cycle – particularly during pre-estimates discussions – could help embed child poverty as a shared policy concern and strengthen the connection between data, analysis, prioritisation and public investment.

Box 7.8. Embedding child poverty targets in budgeting in New Zealand

In New Zealand, cross-government co-ordination on child poverty is supported through the formal integration of targets and reporting into the annual budget process. Under the *Child Poverty Reduction Act (2018)*, the government is required to publish a Child Poverty Report alongside each Budget. This report prepared jointly by the Treasury and the Ministry of Social Development - explains how new budget measures are expected to contribute to poverty reduction targets.

New Zealand's Social Investment Agency also plays a central role in child poverty reduction by directing funding and resources toward early interventions for at-risk youth and disadvantaged families.

The Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 sets out three primary measures for poverty reduction (e.g. low income before housing costs). Statistics New Zealand publicly reports on progress against reducing child poverty using these measures each year.

This model illustrates how structured reporting, shared accountability and cross-departmental co-ordination can help embed social priorities in fiscal planning.

Source: Office of the Auditor-General New Zealand (2025[143]), *Effectiveness of Arrangements for Reducing Child Poverty*, Wellington. https://oag.parliament.nz/2025/child-poverty

While stronger planning routines and pre-budget engagement could help the Programme Office improve alignment across departments, several stakeholders also highlighted the potential to explore other concrete incentives to sustain collaboration. One way to foster co-ordination is through shared or pooled resources. Even modest funding streams, structured around joint proposals or cross-government priorities, can encourage departments to work together in new ways. The United Kingdom's Shared Outcomes Fund offers one such example. It allocates time-limited funding for projects that require collaboration between departments, linked to clearly defined outcomes and joint reporting (see Box 7.9).

Box 7.9. Funding cross-departmental collaboration in the United Kingdom

Launched in 2019, the United Kingdom Shared Outcomes Fund (SOF) was created to improve co-ordination on complex policy issues that cut across departmental responsibilities. Administered jointly by HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office, the fund supports pilot initiatives that require collaboration between two or more government departments, with an emphasis on delivering shared outcomes and generating data and analysis through evaluation.

Departments apply by submitting joint proposals that must include governance arrangements and plans for monitoring and evaluation. The fund prioritises projects that test new approaches to joint delivery and produce insights on what works. Successful pilots may be considered for scale-up where evaluations demonstrate positive results.

By May 2023, the fund had supported 44 initiatives across areas such as public health, family justice, youth mental health, digital connectivity, and refugee integration. These projects bring together departments and agencies under shared governance and are designed to inform future cross-government policy and delivery.

A review by the National Audit Office found that the Shared Outcomes Fund has incentivised collaboration and surfaced practical lessons for aligning policy, delivery, and outcomes across a system traditionally structured around individual departmental mandates.

Source: National Audit Office (2023[144]), *Lessons Learned: Cross-Government Working*, HC 1659, Session 2022-23, National Audit Office, London, https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/012220-BOOK-Cross-government-working-Summary.pdf

7.3.9. *Sustaining political momentum with a clear long-term strategy on the future of the Programme*

The creation of the Programme Office at the centre of government has been instrumental in generating political attention and shared commitment to child poverty as a national priority. As an initiative of the Taoiseach, its convening power has enabled a more coherent approach to an issue that cuts across traditional departmental boundaries. This central positioning helped bring visibility and focus to child well-being during the Programme's early stages.

Yet there is broad recognition that this initial momentum cannot be sustained indefinitely through political capital alone. As the system begins to refocus on other priorities – such as disability inclusion – stakeholders have emphasised the need to strengthen institutional underpinnings that support co-ordination and shared ownership. A key part of this shift involves clarifying how the Programme Office and its functions might evolve over time, and at what stage of development would these functions be appropriately handed over the line departments or will be no longer required.

Interviews with stakeholders undertaken for this chapter underscored that the Office was never intended to become a permanent unit. Its core purpose lies in shaping direction, aligning departments, and embedding long-term goals that can be progressively internalised by the system. Some of the policy and governance options outlined in this paper could contribute to lay the ground for this transition.

Over time, some functions may shift to line departments, while the Department of the Taoiseach retains a high-level strategic convening and oversight role. Transitioning in this way can reduce the risk of over-concentration at the centre, prevent mandate drift, and support the long-term institutionalisation of reform goals by building capabilities across government.

7.4. Options for further exploration

The analysis in this chapter points to two main areas where the Department of the Taoiseach could strengthen its approach to steering cross-cutting priorities. These are complemented by the online Annex which includes questions that can support better decision-making around cross-cutting policy priorities and practical solutions that are in use by other countries:

- **Clarify how the CoG adds value across the policy system.** The Department of the Taoiseach could develop a more explicit approach to how it supports line departments on cross-cutting issues, by facilitating collaborative working practices, iterative performance routines, and shared learning. Further examinations of domestic and international experience, including through peer-to-peer exchanges, would offer useful reference points for what this facilitative role can look like in practice.
- **Develop structured transition strategies.** To manage the risk of overextension and ensure that central engagement strengthens rather than supplants departmental capacity, the Department of the Taoiseach could develop clearer frameworks for transferring responsibilities back to line departments. These could include readiness assessments, handover criteria, and phased timelines, building on the experience of initiatives such as policing reform or international practice.
- Strengthening the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office:
- The Programme Office has made significant progress in establishing co-ordination and visibility around child poverty. The following areas of development could deepen its strategic role and strengthen the capabilities needed for long-term impact:
- Refining the cross-government network into a platform for alignment and collaborative problem-solving, as well as shared learning.
- Working together with the network's participants to progressively embed milestones on child poverty into departmental planning.
- Introducing thematic prioritisation to sharpen focus and resource allocation and enhancing budget co-ordination to incentivise joint action, so the Office can further strengthen coherence across government while building the capabilities needed for long-term impact, and ultimately for its own withdrawal.
- Any enhancement of the capacity of the Programme Office will require situating its role within a broader strategic vision of the centre of government's long-term responsibilities for child poverty.

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OECD Public Governance Reviews

Building Centre of Government Capabilities to Steer and Deliver Complex Priorities

Synthesis Report

Governments face complex, cross-cutting and fast-moving challenges that require effective co-ordination across policy areas, clear prioritisation, and enhanced delivery capacity at the centre of government (CoG). This report examines how CoGs steer and guide the delivery of strategic priorities across government. Drawing on applied examples from Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal, it explores how CoGs can align institutional structures, planning processes, and analytical capabilities with government objectives.

The report examines the functions of CoGs across three dimensions in these six countries. First, it assesses how the centre supports efforts to align the machinery of government with government priorities. Second, it examines how CoGs support planning and address persistent challenges such as fragmented strategies, few links to resources, and limited hierarchies among initiatives. Third, it analyses the capabilities needed for effective coordination and policy development.

The findings underscore the role of CoGs as strategic advisors, bridging political and administrative spheres through collaboration with ministries. The report provides practical examples and policy options on the core roles and functions of centres of government.

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