

Boosting trust and transparency

09/07/2021 – The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated governments' ability to respond to a major global crisis with extraordinary flexibility, innovation and determination. However, emerging evidence suggests that much more could have been done in advance to bolster resilience and many actions may have undermined trust and transparency between governments and their citizens, according to a new OECD report.

[Government at a Glance 2021](#) says that one of the biggest lessons of the pandemic is that governments will need to respond to future crises at speed and scale while safeguarding trust and transparency. "Looking forward, we must focus simultaneously on promoting the economic recovery and avoiding democratic decline" said OECD Director of Public Governance Elsa Pilichowski. "Reinforcing democracy should be one of our highest priorities."

Countries have introduced thousands of emergency regulations, often on a fast track. Some alleviation of standards is inevitable in an emergency, but must be limited in scope and time to avoid damaging citizen perceptions of the competence, openness, transparency, and fairness of government.

Governments should step up their efforts in three areas to boost trust and transparency and reinforce democracy:

- Tackling misinformation is key. Even with a boost in trust in government sparked by the pandemic in 2020, on average only 51% of people in OECD countries for which data is available trusted their government. There is a risk that some people and groups may be dissociating themselves from traditional democratic processes.
- It is crucial to enhance representation and participation in a fair and transparent manner. Governments must seek to promote inclusion and diversity, support the representation of young people, women and other under-represented groups in public life and policy consultation. Fine-tuning consultation and engagement practices could improve transparency and trust in public institutions, says the report. Governments must also level the playing field in lobbying. Less than half of countries have transparency requirements covering most of the actors that regularly engage in lobbying.
- Strengthening governance must be prioritised to tackle global challenges while harnessing the potential of new technologies. In 2018, only half of OECD countries had a specific government institution tasked with identifying novel, unforeseen or complex crises. To be fit for the future, and secure the foundations of democracy, governments must be ready to act at speed and scale while safeguarding trust and transparency.

Governments must also learn to spend better, according to *Government at a*

Glance 2021. OECD countries are providing large amounts of support to citizens and businesses during this crisis: measures ongoing or announced as of March 2021 represented, roughly, 16.4% of GDP in additional spending or foregone revenues, and up to 10.5% of GDP via other means. Governments will need to review public spending to increase efficiency, ensure that spending priorities match people's needs, and improve the quality of public services.

The report, the seventh edition of the OECD's two-yearly overview of public governance, compares OECD and partner countries in areas such as public finance, employment, budgeting, digitalisation and public service delivery. The data can be used to benchmark governments' performance, track national and international developments over time, and monitor governments' progress in public sector reform. [Read the full report](#) and [country notes](#).

For more information, journalists should contact [Spencer Wilson](#) in the OECD Media Office.

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