

5 Communicating in an evolving and fast-paced digital age

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

Introduction

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

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

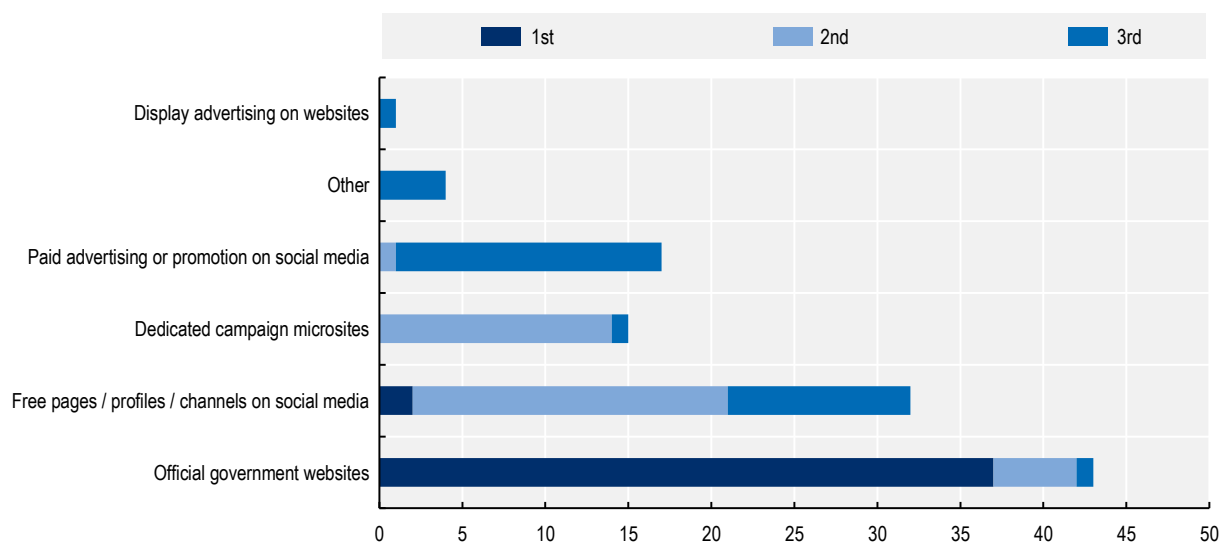
Against this backdrop, the chapter will explore avenues for governments to communicate effectively in a continuously evolving and fast-paced digital environment. It will begin by taking stock of how CoGs and MHs are communicating in today's online landscape to identify trends and establish how this function is perceived and valued. It will advocate for a shift in the focus of public communication from information sharing to engagement through a "digital by design"¹ approach promoting integrated online and offline omnichannel² delivery models. In doing so, the chapter will assess emerging practices and salient issues governments can consider when operating in a digitally intensive environment.

How are Governments communicating in a digital age?

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

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

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

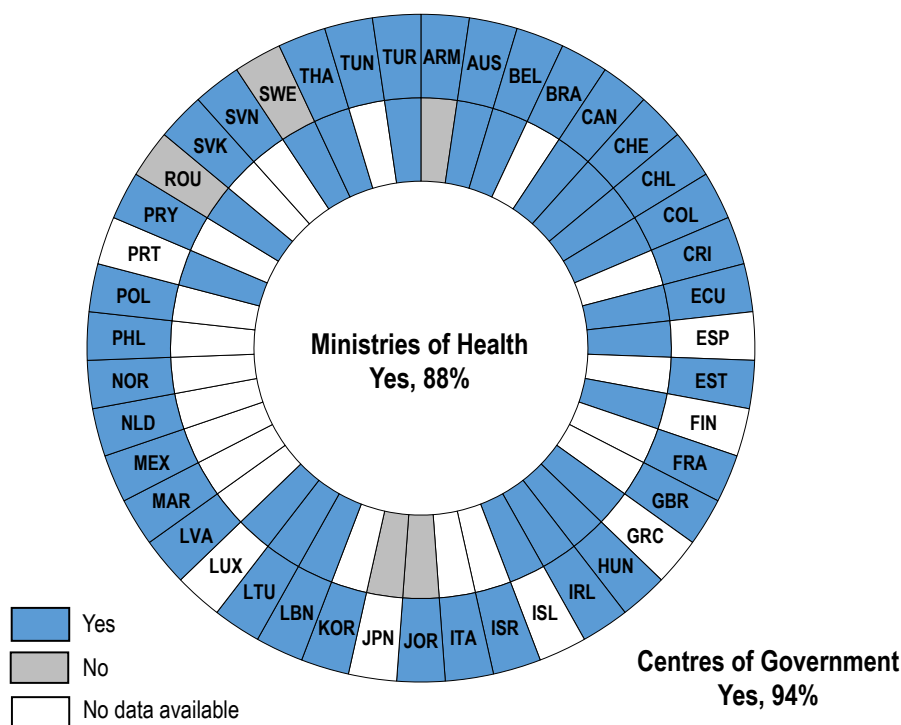


Note: The number of countries in the “official government website” option is greater than 39 given that BEL, PHL and SVK selected the option in two or three different ranks to reference different online interfaces.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding public communication”.

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

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



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

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

Mobile technologies

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

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

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

Table 5.1. M-government

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

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

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

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

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

Box 5.1. The CoronaNOW application in Korea

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

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

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

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

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

Box 5.2. Data protection framework in the European Union

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

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

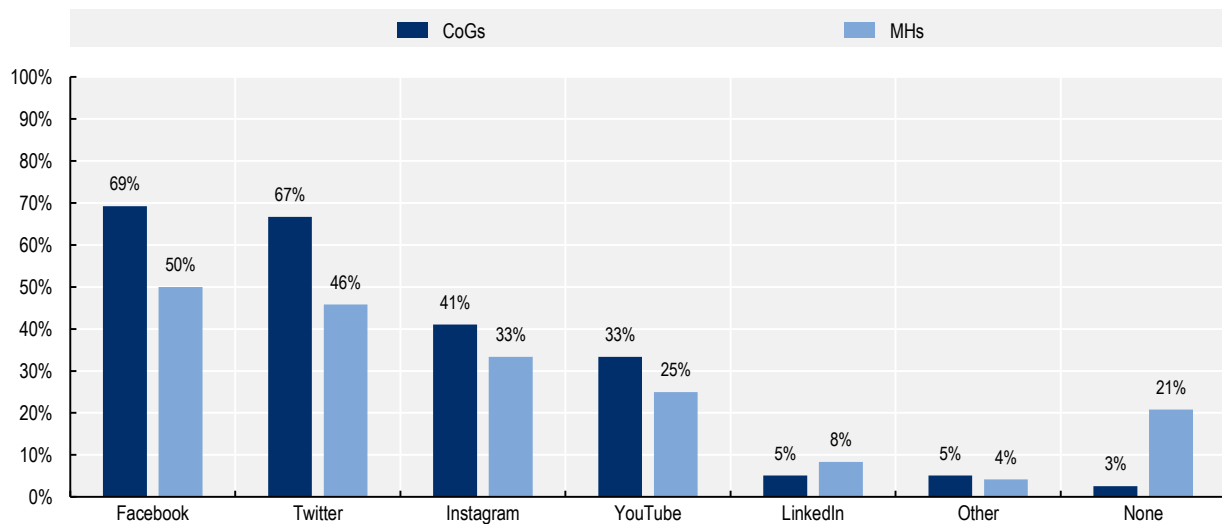
To ensure that these rules are well respected and applied, the GDPR established an independent body, the European Data Protection Board (EDPB), composed of representatives of the national data protection authorities of EU and EEA countries. To this end, the EDPB tasks include providing general guidance,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

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

Social media

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

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

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

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding public communication”.

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

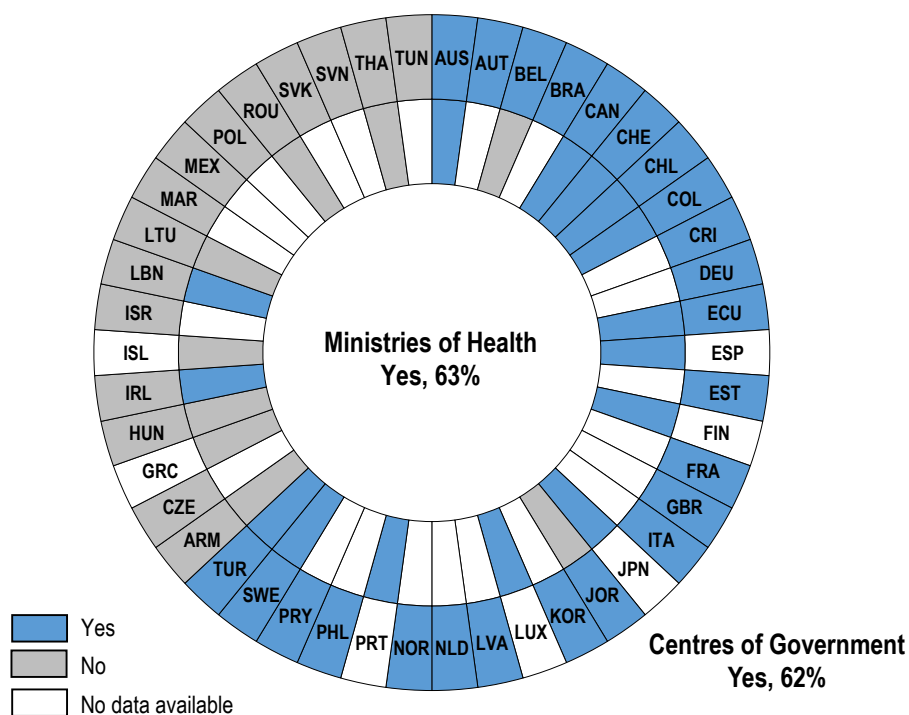
Against this backdrop, the following section will reflect on how CoGs and MHs are taking advantage of these platforms through an in-depth assessment of guidelines for government social media use. In doing so, it will build on the OECD’s framework in this field to identify the key challenges ahead for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

Promoting purpose-oriented communication by governments through social media

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

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

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



Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

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

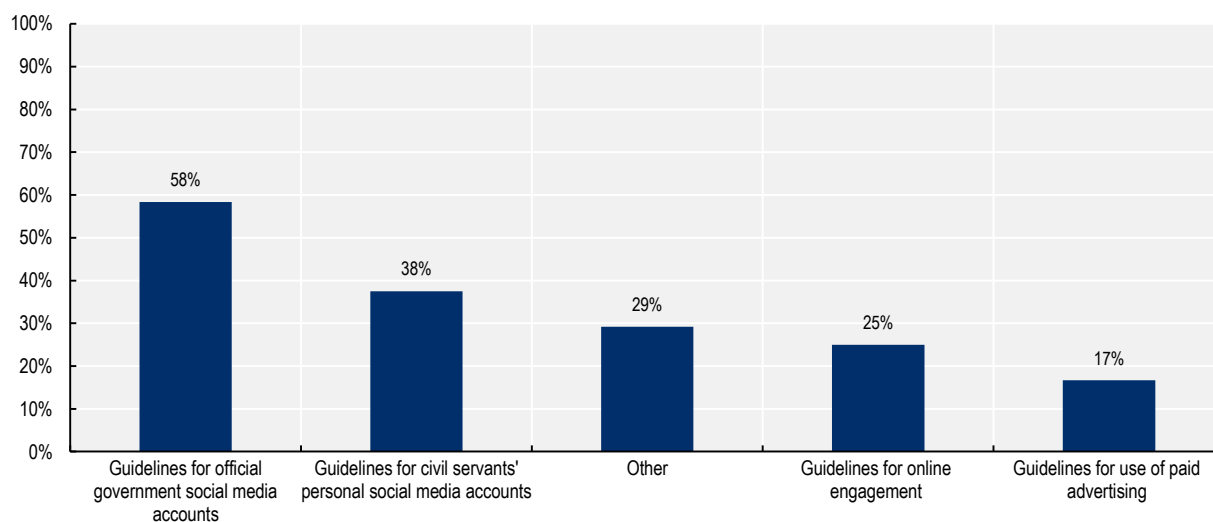
Issue	Questions to be raised and answered
Objectives and expectations	What is the core mission of my institution? What are the most important information and services provided by my institution? How important is public communication for achieving my institution's core objectives? How can social media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

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

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

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

Figure 5.5. Types of social media guidelines shared by CoGs



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Box 5.3. The Government of Chile’s Digital Kit

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

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

Source: Author’s own work, based on <https://kitdigital.gob.cl/>.

To improve the effectiveness of social media use by public institutions, guidelines must be updated continuously to reflect changing trends. This will be all the more important, as 9 out of 15 guidelines shared by CoGs⁴ were published or updated prior to 2018, with the oldest document dating back to 2011. Indeed, increasingly fragmenting audiences and emerging technologies require governments to keep up with the fast pace of trends through the adoption of new working methods and tools. Continuously adapting the overall strategic vision for using these platforms in line with broader public communication strategies can also enable leaner and more flexible ways to design, validate and release content.

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

Open government data portals

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Box 5.5. The French COVID-19 open data portal

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

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

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

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

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

Emerging technologies

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

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

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

Table 5.3. Examples of emerging technologies

Transparently immersive experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Augmented reality Connected home Brain-computer interface Artificial body parts, exoskeletons Nanotechnology 3D and 4D printing Graphene and new materials: materials with new features Virtual reality
Digital platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5G Edge computing Distributed ledger technology Smart contracts Global cryptocurrencies, local crypto currencies, programmable money, crypto KYC regulation Internet of Things (IoT) platforms Software-defined security Li-Fi
Artificial intelligence solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual assistants (chat bots or voice bots) Speech recognition Natural language generation Natural language processing Biometrics Computer vision Machine learning Deep learning Swarm intelligence Robotics Recommender systems Expert systems Affective computing Intelligent decision support systems Digital twin

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

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

Box 5.6. The use of chatbots in Korea

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Box 5.8. The Start4Life “Breastfeeding Friend” by Public Health England

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

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

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

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

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

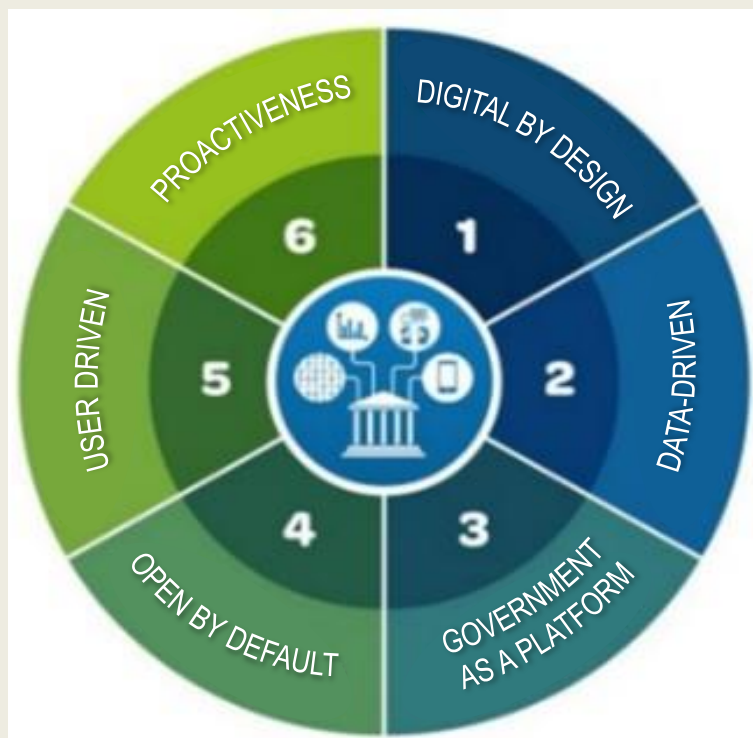
The previous sections provided an overview of the use of various means for CoGs and MHs to communicate in increasingly digitally intensive societies. Each explored existing practices and trends in utilising social media, OGD, mobile and other emerging technologies. Despite the ample adoption of these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

Indeed, the ample constellation of purpose-specific tools underlines the need to take a “*digital by design*” approach, maximising reach and enhancing the inclusiveness of public communication policy. This concept refers to the ability of government to embed relevant technologies from the outset of a policy or campaign to enable a multi-channel approach to the delivery of a particular function or service (see Box 5.9). A digital-by-design approach thus implies an integrated strategy of online and offline channels that allows governments to invest in digital resources while simultaneously addressing communication inequalities that may emerge as a result of digital divides. As such, it does not seek to “narrow the service delivery channel to a digital one, but rather allows users to access non-digital channels, which still offer the same quality of service” (OECD, 2020_[11]).

Box 5.9. Applying the OECD’s principle of “digital by design”

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

Figure 5.6. The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework



Source: OECD (2020^[11]), “The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government”, *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 02, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en>.

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

Source: OECD (2020^[11]), “The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government”, *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 02, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en>.

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

Placing stakeholders at the heart of digital communication efforts

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

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

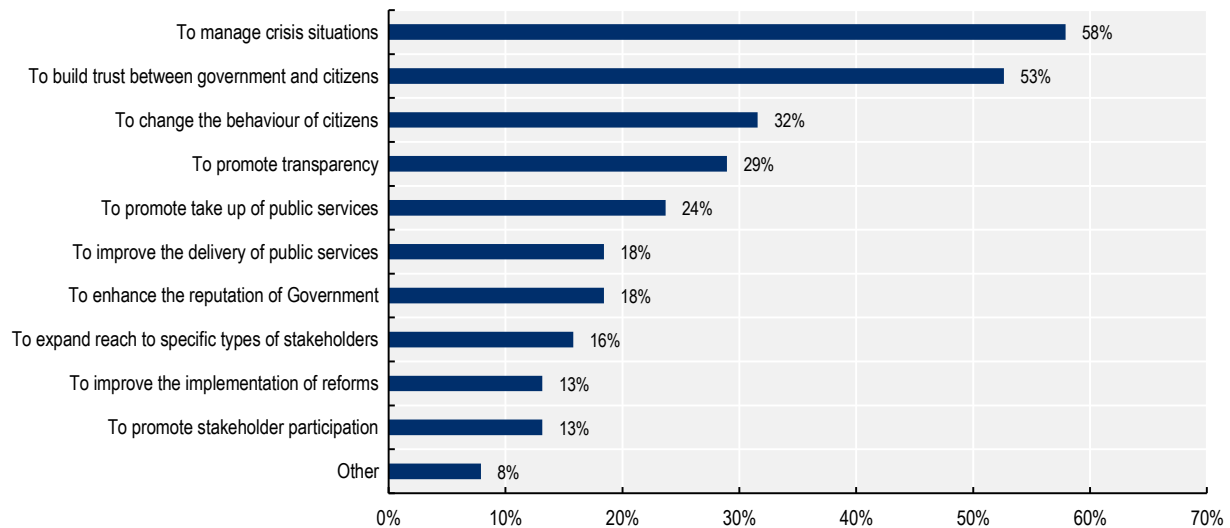
- Informing the public about the existence of participation opportunities and digital platforms for dialogue and exchange on key policy issues.
- Mobilising stakeholders to partake in consultations and innovative citizen participation initiatives.
- Equipping stakeholders with the right information to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

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

Shifting the focus of digital communication from information sharing to engagement

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

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



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

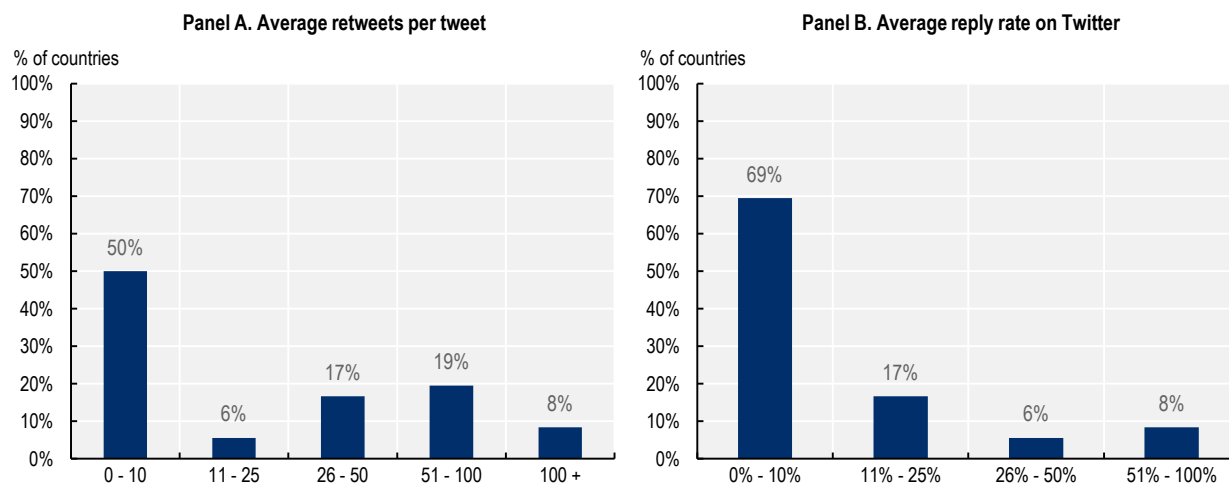
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In regard to promoting stakeholder participation, however, findings revealed that public communicators in OECD member and partner countries still predominantly use digital tools to unilaterally share information, and could make a greater effort to using such tools more interactively to promote two-way communication. As Figure 5.7 above illustrates, a small share of CoGs considered promoting stakeholder participation (13%) and engaging citizens through these tools to improve the implementation of reforms (13%) as priority objectives for digital-led communication. Promoting transparency is also not widely considered as a top priority when conceiving these efforts (29%), even though it is a precursor of stakeholder participation in public life. Together, these insights suggest that governments have not yet grasped the full potential of the interactive and networking benefits of digital tools (Murphy, 2019^[21]) (Mergel, 2012^[26]).

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

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

Figure 5.8. Average rate of engagement through Twitter



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

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

Colombia

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

New Zealand

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

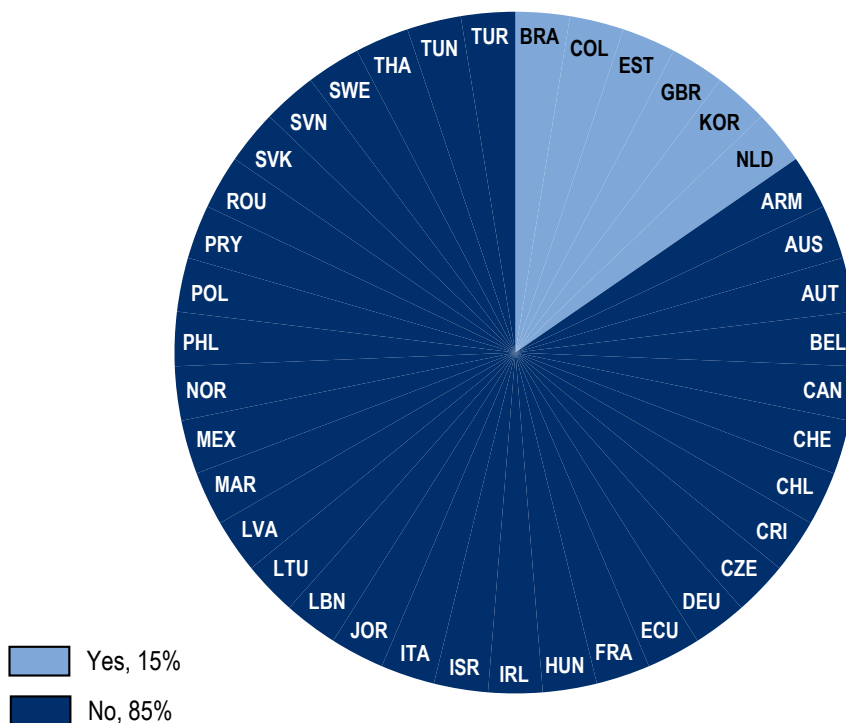
Luxembourg

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

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

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

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



Note: n = 39 CoGs.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding public communication”.

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

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

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

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

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

Source: Author's own work, based on

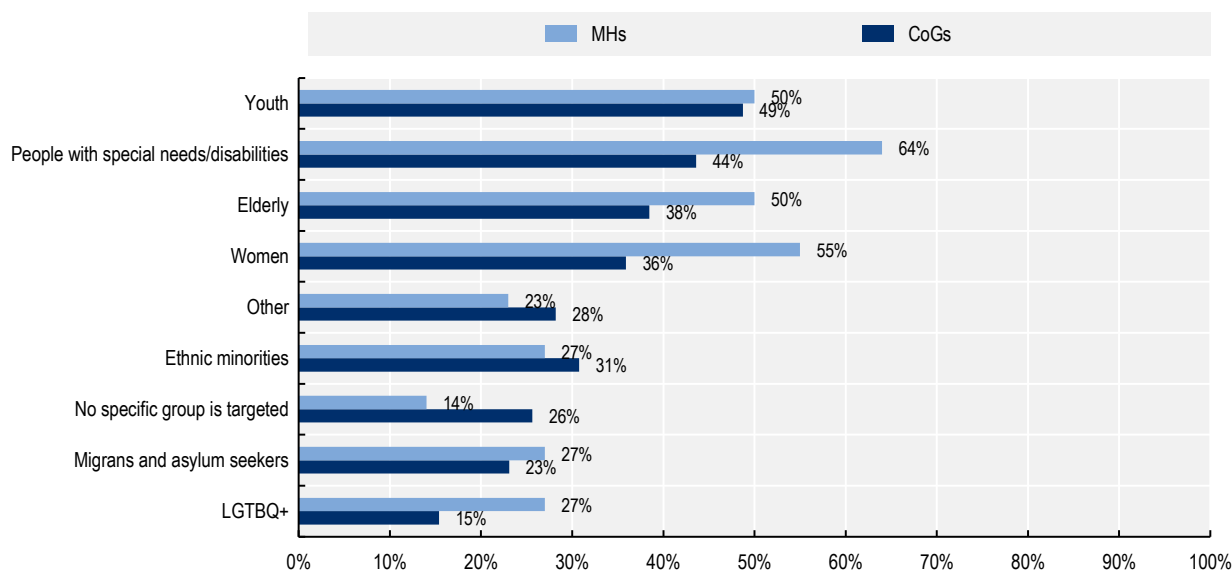
<https://dapre.presidencia.gov.co/normativa/normativa/CIRCULAR%20N%C2%B0%2001%20DEL%2022%20DE%20MARZO%20DE%202019.pdf>;
<http://www.gobiernoenredes.gov.co/protocolo-interaccion-redes-sociales/>.

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

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

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

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



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

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding public communication”.

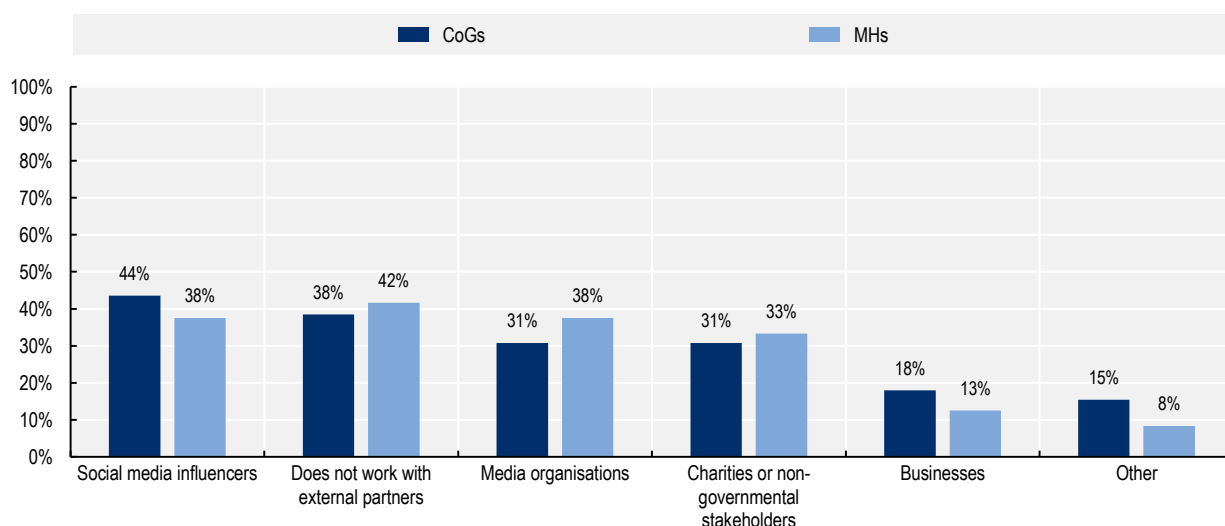
The following section will reflect on a series of avenues for CoGs and MHs to further embed a whole-of-society approach that takes advantage of the opportunities provided by digital tools to increase participation, including:

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

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

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

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



Note: n CoG = 39; n MH: 24 MHs.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

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

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

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

Box 5.12. Influencer partnerships for communication in OECD countries

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

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

The “Thanks Challenge” in Korea

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

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

The #soschützenwiruns campaign in Switzerland

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ensuring the accessibility of online communications

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

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

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

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

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

Principles of accessible design

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

Web content accessibility guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Box 5.17. Open Data user stories in Canada

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

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

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

Addressing communication inequalities in an era of growing digital divide

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: Author’s own work, based on <https://kitdigital.gob.cl/>.

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

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

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

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

1. E-mail and phone: Through the use of traditional means, ministries can answer questions about the Government’s policies by phone, email and letters in real time.
2. Institutional website. Information, news and FAQ regarding the Government’s work in response to COVID-19 are regularly published on the website. Contact information for ministers, state secretaries and press secretaries are also available therein.
3. Live broadcast of press conferences: Digital press conferences and press briefings are held with the prime minister and ministers on a weekly basis. It is an opportunity to communicate new decisions and actions, often together with the responsible authorities. A question time with the media is broadcasted live to the general public and is available on the official website, YouTube and Instagram.
4. Social media: Information and news are published on Instagram (the account of the Swedish Government) and comments are utilised to engage in a direct dialogue with the population on relevant matters.

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

Key findings and way forward

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

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Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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