

# Foreword

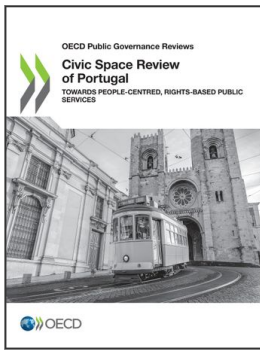
Delivering public services that are centred on citizens' needs and expectations is vital for strengthening trust in public institutions, which is a key priority for OECD Members. A vibrant civic space provides the foundation for a people-centred approach to the design and delivery of public services. Civic space is understood by the OECD as the set of legal, policy, institutional and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise and participate in public life. In other words, it is about creating the necessary environment within which people can exercise their democratic rights and express their voices. At the same time, the OECD recognises that, in democratic societies, a diverse range of citizens and other stakeholders should be involved in rethinking public services. Public sector accountability is based on the relationship between citizens (as rights-holders) and public institutions (as duty-bearers), where performance is measured by citizen satisfaction with services. Designing and delivering services that are responsive, inclusive and accessible for all is fundamental to empowering 21<sup>st</sup> century societies and effectively meeting their needs, while strengthening democratic governance.

Over the past decade, the government of Portugal has embarked on an ambitious reform process to place citizens at the heart of service design and delivery reforms. It has been championing pioneering efforts that recognise human rights and civic space as central to achieving people-centred reforms. These ambitious priorities are rooted in a strong service delivery and digital culture in Portugal, coupled with the Guiding Principles for a Human Rights Based Approach on Public Services, developed by the Portuguese Administrative Modernization Agency in 2021.

Within this context, Portugal asked the OECD to undertake this *Review of Civic Space in Portugal: Towards people-centred, rights-based public services*, to assess and advise on how protected civic space can contribute to more inclusive and responsive public services for all members of society. The Review provides actionable recommendations on how the government can promote inclusion, empowerment and equity in the way services are planned, designed, delivered and evaluated, while furthering digital transformation. The Review combines the OECD's analytical frameworks on civic space and digital government maturity, which were tailored to meet Portugal's particular needs. For the purposes of this report, Portugal selected two critical government services to be assessed in detail (the Digital Mobile Key and the Family Benefit for Children and Young People), and, based on this assessment, asked the OECD to make recommendations to improve the design and delivery of public services more broadly.

The Review offers a perspective on evaluating and reforming public services that will be widely applicable across the public sector in Portugal, as well as other OECD countries seeking to make their services more responsive. The OECD stands ready to further support Portugal and other Members and Partners in their endeavour towards delivering better public services for all.

The Review was approved by the OECD Public Governance Committee on 26 October 2023 and prepared for publication by the Secretariat.



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