

4. INSTITUTIONS

Roles of the centres of government

Each country's centre of government (CoG) is a product of diverse historical, cultural and political forces and has developed incrementally over time. Despite this heterogeneity, strong similarities emerge with respect to the functions that the centre of government performs. CoGs have been traditionally responsible for serving the head of government and cabinet; however they are increasingly expected to combine their traditional role with a more active role in other functions such as policy development, co-ordination, implementation and monitoring mechanisms, which require a higher level of integration and co-ordination with other government departments and agencies.

The financial and fiscal crises have put the spotlight on the ability of governments to take decisive action and mobilise key partners in support of those actions. Across the OECD countries, a variety of constitutional models shape how decisions are taken. In presidential systems, a combination of bilateral meetings with key ministers or with groups of advisors tends to be more common, with full meetings of cabinet occurring less frequently. For the majority of OECD countries, regular cabinet meetings remain the principal channel for policy discussion. In spite of the differences, the role of the CoG is to control the quality of evidence, verify the objectivity and inclusiveness of options presented, and ensure that procedures are respected. Effective preparation of these policy meetings includes a range of tasks such as careful review of supporting materials and pre-meeting dispute resolution. Based on the available data from the OECD survey, on average, almost 60% of the CoGs were responsible for co-ordinating discussions of agenda items with ministerial committees prior to cabinet meetings, while around 40% of the surveyed CoGs were also responsible for the production of briefings or other tasks. On the other hand, CoGs in Spain, Norway and Hungary are not responsible for the co-ordination of discussions prior to cabinet meetings.

According to the OECD survey carried out in 2013, CoGs provide an additional range of services. Among all the functions undertaken by CoGs, the following four are the most relevant across OECD countries. Firstly, 89% of the CoGs analysed in OECD countries are the main players responsible for the preparation of cabinet meetings. Secondly, 68% of the CoGs are responsible for policy co-ordination across government units. Thirdly, the preparation of the government programme was one of the main priorities for 57% of the OECD countries analysed. Finally, a large number (54%) of CoGs mentioned their responsibility for monitoring the implementation of government policies.

OECD countries vary considerably in the number of functions for which the CoG is responsible. On the one hand, centres of government in countries such as Italy and New Zealand are exclusively responsible for 10 out of the 15 functions analysed. On the other hand, CoG in the United States and the Slovak Republic mainly share responsibilities with other government ministries and agencies (more than 10 out of 15 of the functions are shared).

Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government (33 countries, of which 28 OECD countries and 5 non-members, and the European Commission, responded). Respondents were senior officials who provide direct support and advice to heads of government and the council of ministers, or cabinet and provided information for the period 2008-12.

Centre of government (CoG) refers to the administrative structure that serves the Executive (president or prime minister, and the cabinet collectively). The centre of government has a great variety of names across countries, such as General Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Chancellery, Office/Ministry of the Presidency, Council of Ministers Office, etc. In many countries the CoG is made up of more than one unit, fulfilling different functions. A unit that is shared by virtually all CoGs is the unit that serves specifically the head of the government, but not the CoG collectively. This too has a variety of names, such as the Cabinet of the Prime Minister or the Private Office.

Further reading

OECD (2015), "Centre Stage: Driving Better Policies from the Centre of Government", GOV/PGC/MPM(2014)3, OECD, Paris, [http://www2.oecd.org/oeclinfo/info.aspx?app=OLIScodeEN&Ref=GOV/PGC/MPM\(2014\)3](http://www2.oecd.org/oeclinfo/info.aspx?app=OLIScodeEN&Ref=GOV/PGC/MPM(2014)3).

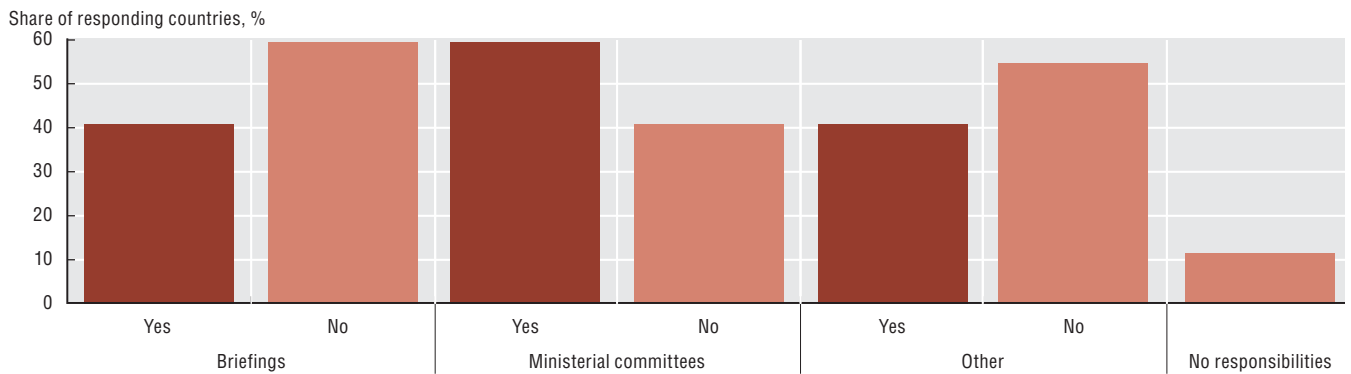
Figure notes

Data for Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mexico and Poland are not available. Only OECD countries are included in the figure.

4.4: Data for Sweden are not available.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

4.4. Responsibilities of centres of government for co-ordination discussions of agenda items prior to cabinet meetings



Source: 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248698>

4.5. Key roles of the CoGs classified according to their level of responsibilities

	Preparing Cabinet meetings	Communicating government messages	HR strategy for the public administration	Public administration reform	Strategic planning	Risk management/strategic foresight	Preparing the Government Programme	Policy analysis	Policy co-ordination	Regulatory quality and coherence	Monitoring policy implementation	Relations with sub-national government	Relations with the Legislature	International Development and aid	Supranational co-ordination/policy
Australia	●	○	□	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○
Austria	●	●	○	○	○	□	□	○	●	○	○	●	○	□	○
Belgium	●	●	□	□	●	●	●	●	●	□	●	●	○	□	○
Canada	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	○	●	□	●	○	●	□	□
Chile	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	□	○
Denmark	●	○	□	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	□	●
Estonia	●	●	□	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	□	●	□	○
Finland	●	●	□	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	□	○	□	○
France	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	□	○
Germany	●	○	□	□	●	□	●	○	●	□	○	○	○	□	○
Hungary	□	○	□	□	○	○	●	○	○	□	●	□	○	□	○
Iceland	●	○	□	○	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	□	●	□	□
Israel	●	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	□	□	●	□	□
Italy	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Japan	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	□	○	○	□	□	○	□	□
Korea	○	○	□	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○
Netherlands	●	○	□	□	○	□	○	□	●	□	○	□	○	□	○
New Zealand	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	□	●	□	□
Norway	●	○	□	□	○	○	○	●	●	□	□	□	●	□	□
Portugal	●	●	□	□	○	□	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○
Slovak Republic	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○
Slovenia	●	●	□	□	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	□	●	□	□
Spain	□	○	□	□	○	●	●	○	○	□	○	○	○	□	○
Sweden	●	○	□	□	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	□	○
Switzerland	●	○	□	○	●	□	●	□	○	○	●	○	○	□	□
Turkey	●	●	○	○	□	□	□	□	○	●	○	□	●	□	□
United Kingdom	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	□	○
United States	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
OECD Total															
●	25	10	3	6	14	7	16	4	19	7	15	5	14	0	1
○	1	18	9	13	13	15	10	20	9	14	10	12	14	6	18
□	2	0	16	9	1	6	2	4	0	7	3	11	0	22	9

- Responsibility of the CoG.
- Shared responsibility between the CoG and another body.
- Responsibility of another part of government.

Source: 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248705>



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