

2 Towards a more effective use of public communication: Key governance pillars

This chapter discusses the prerequisites for effective governance of public communication. Based on the OECD surveys and related research, it focuses on institutional structures and mandates, strategies and planning, co-ordination, as well as human and financial resources that can support the institutionalisation and professionalisation of this key government function. It makes the case for how these pillars enable a more strategic use of public communication, which goes beyond mere information sharing but rather contributes to government priorities, strengthens trust and increases transparency and dialogue with citizens.

The governance of the public communication function

Building a more effective public communication function – one that acts as a key instrument for policy and furthers the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation – rests on a sound public governance approach and on the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the function. These factors constitute the first pillar in the OECD analytical framework presented in Chapter 1, and take different forms in governments around the world, both in terms of the way communication is structured at the institutional level and the purpose and scope it is given through policies and mandates.

The governance of public communication refers to a range of mechanisms and practices that collectively define the role of communication within the government and how it is conducted according to certain operational, professional, and ethical standards. Sanders and Canel (2013^[1]) have proposed a useful framing of governments' approaches to governing their communication function along two main axes: tactical versus strategic, and (political) party-centred versus citizen-centred.

Building on this framework, a tactical approach to communications is one that is primarily oriented towards the pursuit of short- or medium-term goals that are loosely defined. Activities mainly aim to widen the reach of a piece of information at a given time without necessarily relying on evidence to guide and measure its dissemination. This is the case for example when the government wishes to circulate a new strategy it adopted, and proceeds with posting it on its websites and social media pages without a prior assessment of key target audiences, their preferred channels and the messages that would resonate most with them. Tactical communications are often ad hoc, dispersed, and with minimal to no internal co-ordination. Consequently, this approach offers at best an auxiliary function to an institution's operations.

Conversely, a strategic approach to communication revolves around the achievement of an institution's core objectives, be it policy implementation, public service uptake, transparency or engagement. It identifies a communication-based solution to a problem, and typically entails seeking a change in behaviour or perceptions from a well-defined public. As a more sophisticated way to conceive of and deliver communication, an initiative can be deemed strategic when it is insight-driven and set against concrete and measurable objectives. Moreover, it should aim to answer specific needs of the public, creating opportunities for a more responsive and interactive type of exchange. This can be seen when governments implement a communication campaign to encourage more women to apply to specific public-sector jobs for example, with targeted messaging that speaks to this particular group.

The strategic approach described above helps ensure that communication can be effective in achieving its stated purpose, while the distinction between party-centred versus citizen-centred communication relates to purpose attributed to this function. Although communication mandates are often codified in official documents, in practice these mandates tend to reflect the priorities that senior and often politically affiliated leadership attribute to it. Therefore, the choice of leveraging public communication as a service to citizens rests in good part with senior officials.

While this report makes the case for public communication's potential as a means for a more open government, in practice it is still less than commonplace for this function to be understood as such. As it emerged in discussions with members of the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication, this is the case especially at the higher levels of government for whom controlling messages and narratives on sensitive issues and managing the government's reputation often remains priority. A key challenge lies in the fact that transparent and interactive communication can often be perceived as a risk, causing resistance from the top (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016^[2]; Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins, 2007^[3]).

Such resistance presents a significant missed opportunity for governments to cater to citizens' needs and expectations. Public scepticism about what is perceived as "spin" means that governments get diminishing returns in terms of public opinion and trust if they do not communicate openly and honestly. Instead, the risk of public disengagement and distrust will remain unaddressed. In this respect, re-defining the mandate

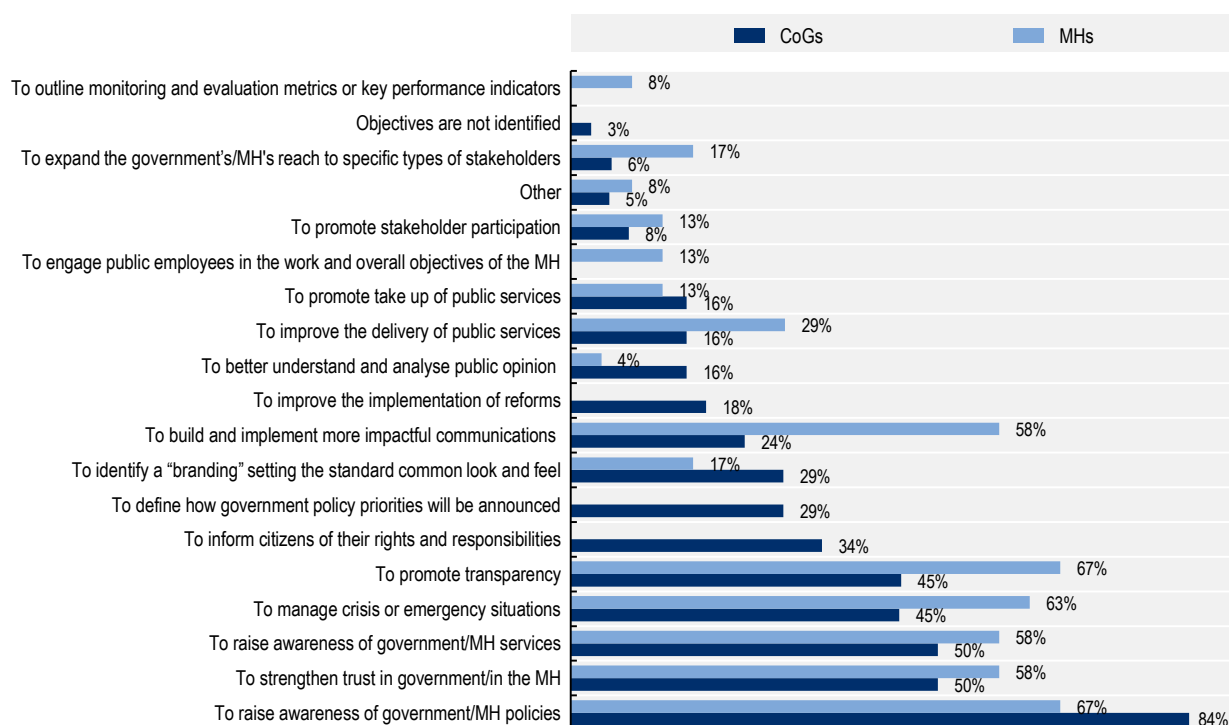
for public communication based on the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation is an essential way in which the potential of this function can be realised.

Mandates and objectives of public communication

Understanding the role of public communication within government requires an analysis of the objectives it aims to achieve. The international overview from the OECD survey data in this respect is somewhat mixed, although some trends can be noticed. The selection of top objectives for the public communication function pointed to a prevalence for informing over dialogue, or “speaking” over “listening” (Macnamara, 2017^[4]). Among the priority objectives selected by institutions that participated in the OECD survey, proactive ones – such as supporting the implementation of policy or the delivery and take-up of public services – lag behind more passive uses of communication – such as raising public awareness of the same policies and services. Similarly, citizen-centric types of objectives (e.g. about understanding and analysing public opinion and promoting participation) were selected by fewer respondents than government-centric objectives that relate to defining how priorities will be announced or managing crises (Figure 2.1).

In practice, the objectives and mandate of the public communication function are often - if at all - outlined in a range of policy documents with varying levels of official status – from law or administrative policy, to handbooks and internal guidelines. Albeit varied, these serve to define the parameters for the function such as its purpose, duties and responsibilities, its core values, its line of reporting and place within government structures. They can also determine practical guidance and protocols, define what resources ought to be allocated to communication, or the relevant co-ordination and oversight mechanisms.

Figure 2.1. Primary objectives of public communication (top five responses)



Note: n CoG = 38 ; n MH = 24. Austria did not provide data for this question.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding Public Communication”.

The analysis of a sample of such policy documents¹ complements and substantiates the above data on the objectives and uses of public communication (see Box 2.1 for examples of different documents). A common trend identified is an emphasis on the centrality of information to democracy and on the right of citizens to be informed of their governments' actions, often drawing on constitutional provisions. This is found explicitly in the Netherlands' Government Communication Policy (n.d.^[5]), for example, which states that "[t]he public has a right to government information. Actively sharing information is therefore one of the government's most important communication tasks [...] People are also entitled to communicate with the government. For example, they can request information, take part in policy making, give their opinion or make a complaint. This means that they must be able to contact the government easily". Similar provisions regarding information as a prerequisite for democracy and participation are reflected in the Norwegian (Ministry of Government Administration, 2009^[6]) and Brazilian (Ministry of Communication, 2021^[7]) policies, among others.

Box 2.1. Examples of documents governing public communication in Canada, Estonia and Mexico

The Government of Canada's Policy on Communications and Federal Identity

The Government of Canada issued the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity, effective since 2016, providing context and rules for how the government should communicate with the public on policies, programs, services and initiatives. The document emphasises the importance of communications for public trust in the government. It explicitly encourages the use of innovative digital tools and online platforms, as well as tailored messaging, to reach specific and diverse audiences.

In addition, the policy emphasises the importance of whole-of-government co-ordination, citizen engagement and cost-effective communications.

The Policy is further complemented by a Directive on the Management of Communications. It defines the different roles and responsibilities of key government organisations. Specific responsibilities for heads of communications are defined in relation to managing and co-ordinating federal identity, social media, advertising, media relations and external partnerships. For example, the Privy Council Office is responsible for advising departments on government priorities, whereas Public Services and Procurement Canada is responsible for managing a central media monitoring service. The Directive also includes mandatory procedures for advertising and public opinion research. Additionally, the document provides processes to manage and create official social media accounts, what approval is required, etc.

Government Communication Handbook, Estonia

Estonia's Government Communication Handbook is a resource for guiding communication personnel within government bodies. The document sets the main purpose of public communication which includes clearly communicating government goals, decisions, actions and activities, and sharing timely and transparent information. Moreover, the handbook stresses the importance of political neutrality, professionalism, freedom of the press, and co-ordination for effective communications.

The document elaborates more practically on the key principles to include in communication plans and the composition of communication units. It also contains guidelines for enhancing citizen engagement, media relations and countering misinformation. Lastly, it includes detailed instructions for successful crisis and digital communication.

Finally, specific standards are set out in relation to press releases, conferences and briefings, as well as communication related to the state budget.

Social Communication Policy, Mexico

In Mexico, the Social Communication Policy of the Federal Government (2019) sets standards for all campaigns conducted by public institutions and funded with public resources to ensure their integrity and effectiveness. It outlines the requirements that campaigns must follow, as well as key elements to be avoided, such as misleading information, use of personal information from public servants or inciting violence. It sets the ceiling of funds to be spent via a single communication medium to 25% of the total of the campaign's budget. The policy also mandates that all information on spending on communication campaigns be uploaded to each entity's transparency portal in an open format.

Sources: <https://www.gob.mx/sfp/documentos/guia-para-ejercer-el-derecho-de-acceso-a-la-informacion-publica>; <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=30682>.

In this regard, although it is often implicit, government communication policies validate the notion that this function serves countries' open government agenda. In the case of the Government of Canada, this is made into an explicit requirement for senior officials of “[e]nsuring that all their department’s communications activities support the Government of Canada’s principles of open government and its practices” (Government of Canada, 2016^[8]). Both the OECD survey data (Figure 2.1) and the review of the communication policies in the sample confirmed the significant emphasis on government transparency. For instance, Sweden’s CoG communication policy is among several to highlight the centrality of furthering transparency and explicitly note it as a core value, alongside factualness, comprehensibility, relevance and timeliness (Prime Minister’s Office, 2012^[9]). Other governments, including Norway’s (2009^[6]) and Brazil’s (2021^[7]), highlight in their policies the duty of engaging the media and providing journalists with access to government information. This emphasis can support the linkage with both greater transparency and government accountability.

Moreover, despite being selected as a primary objective by only about a tenth of survey respondents, promoting participation and engagement with citizens features regularly among the communication mandates reviewed. This discrepancy may suggest a gap between the mandate and its implementation in practice, that is between the official vision of the purposes public communication should serve and the capacity of public officials to actualise it. For instance, Norway’s communication policy (2009^[6]) emphasises “openness” as its guiding principle and contains provisions for outreach to specific stakeholder groups to be involved in the policy processes that concern them. This and related approaches are illustrated further in Chapter 7.

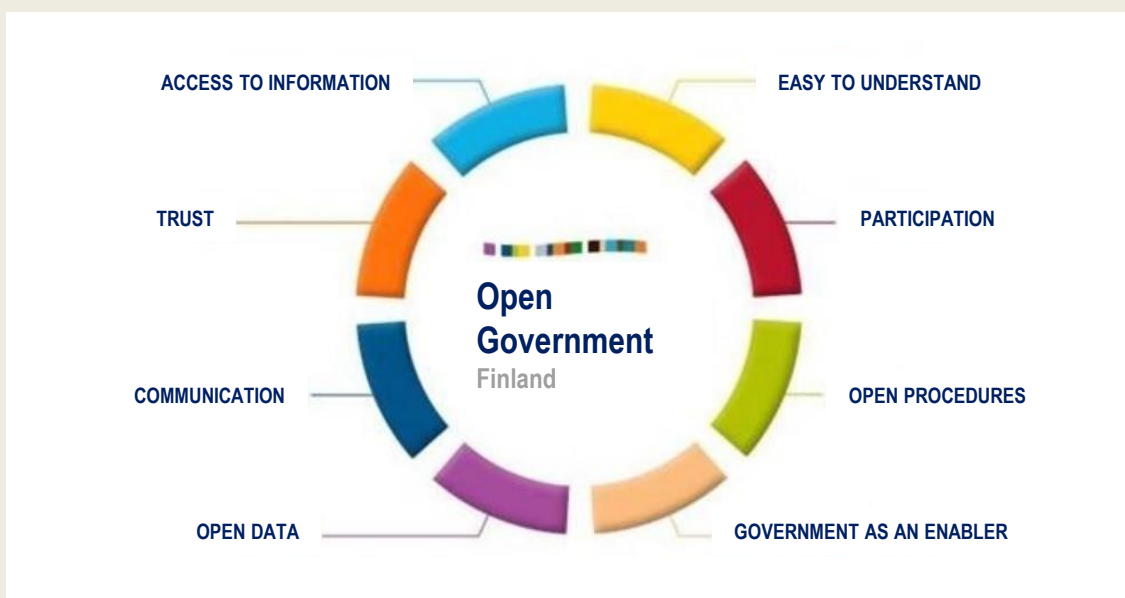
Conversely, public communication rarely features explicitly in countries’ open government strategies or initiatives. Finland and Lithuania stand out in this respect as examples of countries that explicitly integrated public communication in their open government agenda, with dedicated provisions featuring in their Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plans (Box 2.2). Building on the evident synergies between these two areas of work will be instrumental both in executing the public communication mandates and furthering openness objectives.

Box 2.2. Communication as a pillar of open government agendas in Finland and Lithuania

Finland's 4th Open Government Partnership National Action Plan (2019-2023)

Finland's 4th OGP National Action Plan features public communication as one of its 8 core pillars to effectively implement the country's open government agenda. The Plan highlights the importance of strengthening internal communication to better co-ordinate and align key messages around open government reforms, as well as leveraging external communication to establish a two-way dialogue with the public. The Plan also underlines the need to ensure that government texts, services and reforms are clear and easily understandable by citizens.

Figure 2.2. National Action Plan (2019-2023), Finland



Source: The Open Government Partnership (2019^[10]), Finland's 4th OGP National Action Plan (2019-2023), available online at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Finland_Action-Plan_2019-2023_EN.pdf.

The plan includes concrete commitments to strengthen co-ordination between levels of government, share good practices on effective communication and open digital feedback channels for the preparation of Finland's Open Government Strategy. In addition, the plan foresees the development of a dedicated communication plan for the country's open government unit, which will allow improving the way it interacts with citizens and better showcase the results of this agenda.

Action Plan for Lithuania's Participation in the International Initiative 'Open Government Partnership' (2021-2023)

The Government of Lithuania clearly and explicitly acknowledges the value of public communication to strengthen the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation. The *Action Plan for Lithuania's Participation in the International Initiative 'Open Government Partnership' (2021-2023)* highlights key priorities for the government and outlines operating principles in the implementation of the provisions of their programme.

The need for “open government communication” is highlighted as playing a central role in this endeavour. Specifically, the plan underlines the importance of unbiased, relevant, and clear information being disseminated in the civil sphere. This includes, for instance, procurement data which the plan states should be shared widely to increase transparency as well as accountability. Finally, this function is envisaged to open up dialogue between citizens and their representatives, taking into account their inputs during the deliberation of complex issues.

Source: The Open Government Partnership (2019^[10]), Finland’s 4th OGP National Action Plan (2019-2023), available online at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Finland_Action-Plan_2019-2023_EN.pdf and <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/lithuania-action-plan-2021-2023/>.

Another prominent feature across policy documents is clarity and accessibility in communications. Across countries, communication is framed as having a duty of inclusion and service to citizens. Tailoring content and language to be clearer and more widely understood is a recurring feature of communication policy and guideline documents, including in Italy’s Guidelines for Communication Programmes of Public Administrations (2018^[11]) and Sweden’s communication policy (2012^[9]). In the United States, the clarity and accessibility of language used in government communication and documents is even codified by law (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. The United States Plain Writing Act of 2010

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 was issued to “enhance citizen access to government information and services by establishing that government documents issued to the public must be written clearly”. Ultimately, the purpose of this Act is to improve accountability and effectiveness of government agencies by promoting clear and comprehensive public communication.

Government documents include any form necessary for complying with, obtaining or providing information on Federal Government requirements, benefits or services. The Act requires each head of agency to elect one or more senior officials to oversee its implementation, communicate and train employees on Act requirements and plain writing, and designate agency points-of-contact to receive and respond to public enquiries. Moreover, each agency is expected to create and maintain a plain writing section on its website, to inform agency compliance with this Act and provide a mechanism for public input. Within this section, institutions are required to publish both initial and annual compliance reports on the agency’s plan and compliance with the requirements of the Act.

The Director of the Office of Management and Budget is responsible for developing and issuing guidelines on the implementation of the Plain Writing Act requirements. The Director may also designate a lead agency or use interagency groups to assist in developing this guidance.

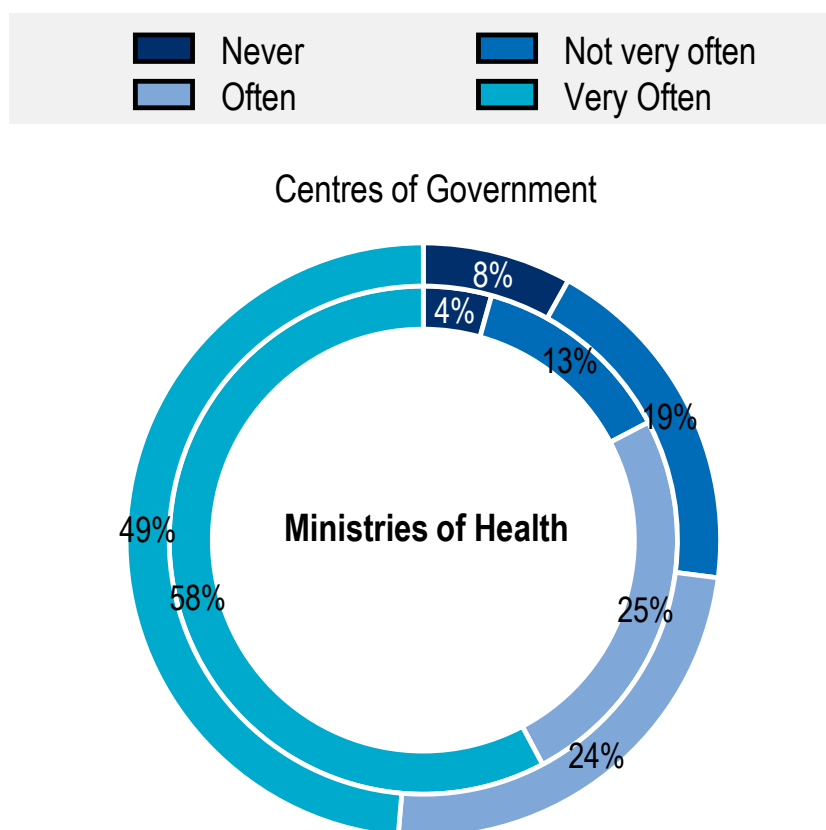
Source: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf>.

To foster greater inclusion of all groups in society, the Government of Canada’s Policy on Communications and Federal Identity makes explicit reference to communicating in its official languages (Government of Canada, 2016^[8]), whereas Costa Rica’s² government communication manual includes guidelines on communicating with vulnerable groups and on sensitive topics (including migration, gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ rights, and people with disabilities). As such, it appears that governments view the communication function as having a duty to democratise information by making it more accessible, relevant and intelligible to the widest publics.

The sample of communication policy and guideline documents reviewed also confirms the understanding of the communication function as an instrument for policy design and implementation. This is recognised explicitly in the relevant Brazilian, Canadian, Dutch, Italian and Norwegian documents among others, whereas specific applications of communication for policy are explored further in Chapter 7. Nonetheless, it is important to note that despite this, interactions between communicators and policy makers or programme teams are less frequent than desired. Only about half of CoGs and MHs claimed to work with public policy and service development teams with high regularity (Figure 2.3), which has been noted in literature as a challenge for fulfilling communication’s potential (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016^[2]; Sanders and Canel, 2013^[1]). Integration between Behavioural Insights and communication teams, for instance, has been one of the leading areas of cross-fertilisation that has supported policy objectives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chapter 3).

Finally, several governments have been working to update relevant policy frameworks to reflect the increasingly digital-first nature of public communication, as is the case with the Italian law governing communication (Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica, 2020^[12]) and the Government of Canada’s communication policy (2016^[8]). The digitalisation of public communication does indeed call for the revision of policies to ensure they adequately reflect the opportunities but also challenges of communicating via digital channels, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 2.3. Frequency of interactions between communication and policy or programme development teams



Note: n CoG = 37 (Austria and Germany were treated as non-applicable) ; n MH = 24.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding Public Communication”.

Policies and practices for ethics and to support a greater separation of political and public communication

Central to the governance of the communication function are its implementation in an ethical and non-partisan manner. Similarly to all public officials, communicators are expected to abide by public sector integrity standards. However, non-partisanship is a more delicate matter insofar as government communication is inevitably somewhat political in nature. Sanders and Canel (2013^[11]) rightly recognise that the most important distinction in this respect is whether the de facto purpose of communication is to safeguard the reputation and electoral prospects of incumbent political parties or whether it is primarily focused on informing and engaging citizens on matters that concern them, consistently with the mandates discussed above.

The risk of high degree of politicisation of public communication is a primary challenge to the effectiveness of the function as a tool of open government and for rebuilding and maintaining public trust. This is especially acute in an environment where information is increasingly weaponised not only by a variety of external actors but also by political parties and movements, and where mis- and disinformation remain a prominent issue.

To help mitigate such risks and progressively move towards a more impartial and open communication, governments have adopted several approaches that help better define the boundaries between political and public communication. In some of the countries surveyed, relevant provisions were included in policies and laws overseeing public communication. This is the case of the Netherlands, which Principles of Government Communication state that information shared by governmental sources “should always be focused on the content of policy, not on image building for individual members of government. With that in mind, ministers and state secretaries are never to be visible in central government publicity” (Ministry of General Affairs, n.d.^[5]). While the implementation of such measures is challenging, they are nonetheless fundamental in limiting to the extent possible the likelihood of abuse of communication activities for political gains. Other common frameworks include laws and protocols forbidding civil servants from engaging in some types of politically partisan activities, including in the communication field. The Hatch Act of 1939 in the United States is one such legislation that applies to all employees of the executive branch, and to the communication function by extension, and requires them to conduct their role with political neutrality and refrain from taking part in partisan initiatives (U.S. Office of the Special Counsel, n.d.^[13]). Often, these provisions are also included in ethics guidelines or codes of conduct for public officials, as illustrated below (see Box 2.4).

Box 2.4. Norwegian guidelines for impartiality of communications

Norway

In 2019, the Norwegian Government developed a set of guidelines concerning ethics and the relationship between political leadership and the civil service. They provide guidance for both politicians and civil servants on how to handle ethical dilemmas that may arise on a day-to-day basis, including in the context of communication.

The document identifies several core obligations: legality, truthfulness, professionalism, development and co-operation, responsibility and management, openness about errors, and party-political neutrality. A set of case studies accompany the guidelines to illustrate these obligations practically, touching on topics including authority, freedom of expression, openness and transparency, professional integrity and political neutrality.

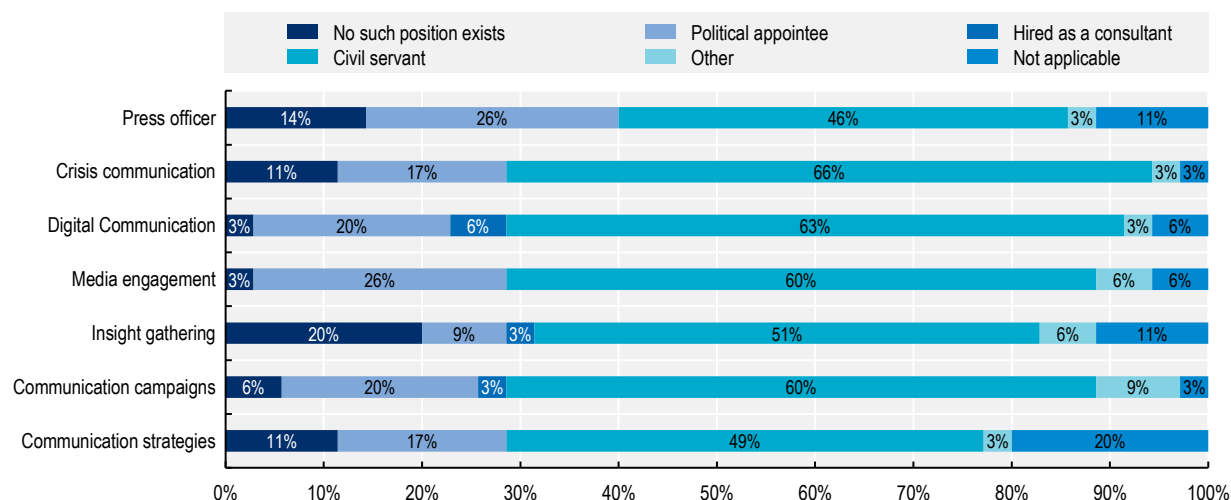
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https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/8145632385cb477cba018d4a8dfaf6f8/about_the_relationship_between_political_leadership_and_the_civil_service.pdf; https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/c21df76243db416d859ad18e957d24ae/dilemmasamling_om_forholdet_mellom-politisk-ledelse-og-embetsverk.pdf.

Rules and practices on the appointment of senior communication roles and on the definition of responsibilities of politically appointed versus civil service personnel are similarly important to manage. In Italy, Law 150 of 2000 designates public communication roles and responsibilities to be covered exclusively by civil servants, whereas press office and spokesperson roles can be appointed externally. The latter in particular are intended as external professionals recruited by the political leadership of a ministry or agency and have distinct roles (Forum PA, 2020^[14]) (for related examples see Box 2.5). Data from the OECD survey in this regard show the prevalence for appointments of senior communication positions from the civil service. This was the case for all seven types of senior roles in the Survey, with about half of CoGs reporting that civil servants filled each of these roles (see Figure 2.4).

Between 9% and 26% of CoGs employ political appointees for each of these positions. Media engagement and press office roles are notable exceptions, with slightly over a quarter of CoGs stating that these functions are led by politically appointed staff.

Figure 2.4. Overview of how CoG senior communication roles are appointed across selected competencies



Note: The 8 core roles include: Head of communication strategies, communication campaigns, insight gathering, media engagement, digital communication, crisis communication, press officer and “other” to allow respondents to include relevant options for their specific context.

n CoG = 35, Germany, Israel, Austria and Ireland did not provide data for this question.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding public communication”.

Another notable aspect of these data is the proportion of politically appointed senior communication staff in a given organisation. In this respect, only a small minority – or about 15% of COGs – have over half of senior roles covered by political affiliates. This finding supports that, at least formally, a majority of governments take steps that contribute a certain measure of separation between political and public communication.

Box 2.5. Legal provisions for the appointment of high-level administrative positions in Belgium and France

In Belgium (at federal level) and France (at central government level), and similarly to other OECD countries, certain senior administrative positions may be politically appointed. To ensure transparency and integrity in the selection process and the appropriate execution of duties, these countries have introduced dedicated legal provisions.

In France, a central legal framework regulates recruitment for the highest positions at the discretion of the government, and provides that appointments to such positions “are essentially revocable, whether they concern civil servants or non-civil servants”. A decree of the Council of State grants that high-level posts are to be appointed by the incumbent government but covered by these safeguards. The roles concerned include the Head of the Government Information Service (SIG).

Similarly, the highest administrative functions in Belgium are subject to specific regulations, including the appointment of the Director General for external communications. Among others, safeguards include specified requirements, competencies and knowledge to be able to participate in the selection process. The decree also elaborates on the recruitment and duties of the eventual appointees in serving the public interest and implementing their missions.

Source: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000006450553/; https://fedweb.belgium.be/sites/default/files/2001-10-29%20KB_AR_management_SPPFOD_SPPPOD.pdf.

In sum, setting clear standards, directives, guidance or procedures on managing to the extent possible the distinction between the political and institutional realms of communications is a useful and necessary practice to ensure this key function is conducted in the interest and service of the public. Such policies ought to acknowledge explicitly that unbiased information is essential to empower citizens to participate constructively in public life and hold their governments to account. The primary challenge will continue to be the implementation of relevant policies and respect for these boundaries in day-to-day practice. To this end, leadership from both political and civil service will remain essential. The move towards a greater professionalisation of the public communication function as described later in this chapter will also likely contribute to these efforts.

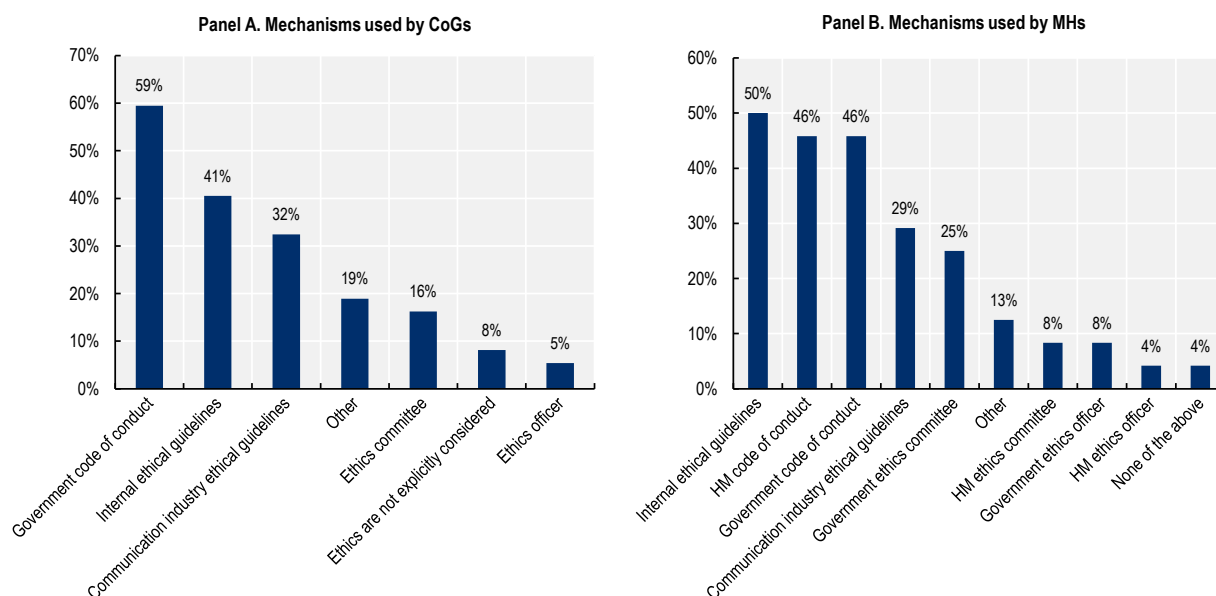
Ensuring ethics and integrity in public communication at all times

Together with mitigating risks of politicisation, upholding high ethical standards in the conduct of public communication is central to its effective governance and its role for transparency. Integrity considerations can affect the roles of communicators just as in any other public office, but they can especially concern risks related to the misrepresentation or withholding of information, or the disclosure of personal, classified or damaging data. Integrity risks also include conflicts of interests, particularly in the context of procurement and of revolving doors between public relations or political affairs consultancies and public offices. A wider range of risks and related prevention and mitigation mechanisms are elaborated in the *OECD Public Integrity Handbook* (OECD, 2020_[15]).

Data from the OECD survey confirmed that nearly all respondents took steps to support the ethical conduct of public communicators, relying on a variety of mechanisms. Guiding documents include government-wide codes of conduct (in place in 59% of COGs and 50% of MHs), ethical guidelines specific to the unit or institution (in 41% of COGs and 55% of MHs), and specific to the communication profession (in 32% of COGs and MHs). A minority of respondents introduced more rigorous mechanisms for monitoring or enforcing these rules, in the form of ethics officers or committees (see Figure 2.5).

Specific measures are also in place with regards to use of official and personal social media channels, as well as advertising. With the rise of new technologies and their applications to public communication, guidance for the ethical use of data is emerging across a number of countries (see Chapter 5). The *OECD Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector* provide concrete advice to support public officials in the implementation of data ethics, including on how to manage data with integrity (OECD, 2020_[16]).

Figure 2.5. Mechanisms used by CoGs and MHs to ensure ethics in communications campaigns



Note Panel A: n=37 countries

Note Panel B: n=22, (Japan did not provide data for this question; Sweden stated that the CoG does not run campaigns and as such, this question is treated as not applicable).

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Based on the analysis of a sample of documents submitted by respondents to the OECD survey, ethical conduct guidelines and standards commonly covered the following dimensions:

- Values, including integrity, honesty, impartiality, flexibility, excellence, etc.
- The necessity to implement communication functions serving the public interest and debate.
- Accessibility of information, openness and engagement.
- Completeness, reliability and accuracy of information used and shared.
- Warnings on risks of conflicts of interest.
- Oversight mechanisms for advertisement or funding (ads, campaigns, etc.) and transparency of procurement and spending.

However, practical guidance on handling sensitive information, maintaining transparent and honest communication, and granting equitable treatment and access to all media are important to ensure the function is conducted with integrity.

Delivering on public communication's mandate through the use of strategies

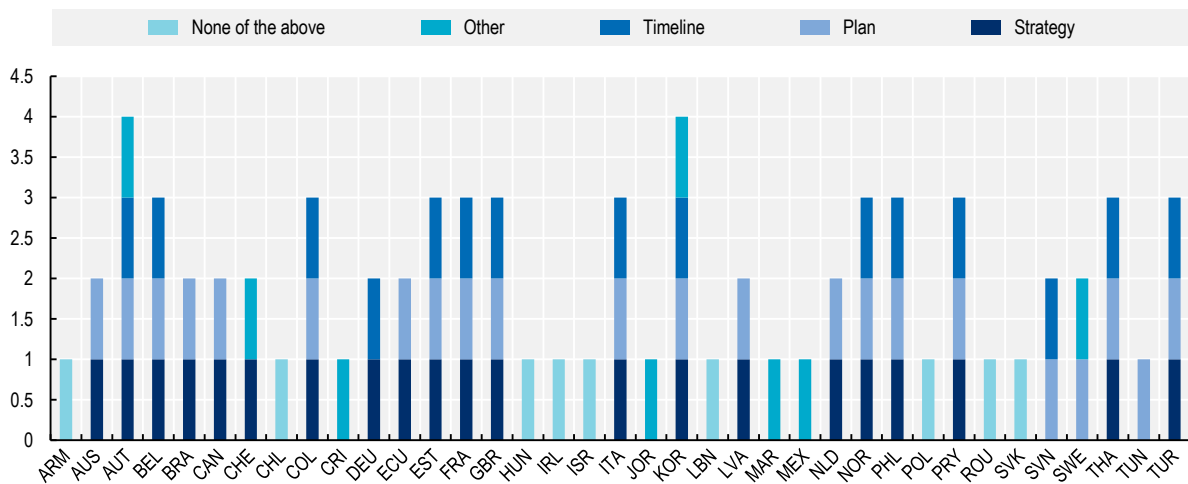
Whereas the above sections focused on the governance of public communication in terms of the policies, directives and standards that apply to the function, this section turns to another core aspect of its governance: the use of strategies. While policy documents set out the purpose and operational requirements of communication, dedicated strategies lay out its execution and substance: the policy objectives it will seek to achieve, the shape that communication will take (i.e. the key messages and the content to deliver them), and the evidence and metrics that will inform its design and performance, among other elements. In brief, strategies are core to ensuring communications fulfil their mandate in practice.

For the purpose of this report, and based on the OECD survey, a communication strategy is a written, time-bound document that identifies a communication solution to a problem, sets the approach to achieve its objectives, and defines the activities and tactics to be carried out. It is commonly complemented by a communication plan that details the content to be delivered and actions to be taken in sequence. It can be broad in scope, for example encompassing communications for the whole-of-government or entire ministries and sub-national administrations, across multiple policies and issues. Often, they can be specific to each policy area or programme, and the same institution may have several simultaneous strategies dedicated to distinct issues.

Periodically elaborating a strategy, however narrow or all-encompassing, is a pre-requisite for strategic communication. It is a key step towards achieving measurable impact and moving beyond the implementation of ad-hoc activities. Indeed, it allows for communication priorities to be agreed upon in consultation with policy makers and key stakeholders, and to ensure that they meet the official mandate of the function and align with the government's goals. Another pre-requisite is to ground it in evidence, as is discussed in Chapters 3 (on audience and behavioural insights) and 4 (on evaluation).

In this respect, the data from the OECD survey underlined that more countries could be making use of communication strategies to strengthen impact, improve co-ordination and reinforce coherence. As many as 43% of CoGs and 57% of MHs surveyed have not developed any strategy document in the previous three years. Communication timelines are also not commonly used, as only 41% of CoGs reported they developed them. Finally, as much as a quarter of CoGs have not developed neither a strategy, plan nor a timeline in the past three years (see Figure 2.6).³

Figure 2.6. Use of strategies, plans and timelines across COGs



Note: n CoG= 37. Lithuania and Czech Republic did not provide data for this question.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication."

A likely challenge to explain the low uptake of strategies is the relatively demanding process that goes into developing and executing them – from the research and insights-gathering phase to the elaboration, planning, validation, and eventual evaluation phases. This endeavour requires an important commitment of staff and time, as well as a long-term horizon, which can be difficult to manage in a fast-paced environment.

Indeed, over half of CoGs (53%) reported finding the development of government-wide strategies to be one of the most challenging communication competencies. They identified lack of co-ordination and constraints on human and financial resources as the main obstacles they face in this domain. The picture is very similar

for MHs, for 54% of whom developing strategies is the most challenging competency. Based on these findings, governments aiming to invest in more effective communication or transition towards a strategic approach will be well-served by supporting capacity-building and additional resources for this area.

Nevertheless, responses from those institutions who reported having developed strategies allow a number of observations. Several (including CoGs in Austria, Australia, Sweden and Slovenia) noted having multiple such documents for distinct areas and initiatives, tied to priorities in a given period. Conversely, the United Kingdom and Latvia are among a smaller group of CoGs that develop overarching strategies that direct whole-of-government communication (see Box 2.6). This all-encompassing type of document offers the advantage of codifying a unified vision and voice for the entire administration on priority areas and favours a more cohesive communication across line ministries. In practice, as discussed below, many respondents work to achieve such alignment through co-ordination led by the CoG, without necessarily formalising it in writing.

Box 2.6. The United Kingdom's whole-of-government communication priorities

The United Kingdom's Government Communication Plan for 2019-2020, developed by the Government Communication Service (GCS), identifies three overarching priorities and outlines approaches to address them:

1. Raising standards
 - Implementing an ambitious portfolio of new improvement programmes to drive transformation across departments and agencies;
 - Raising the profile of government marketing through a series of events, trainings and transformation of media buying;
 - Accelerating digital skills and culture transformation to drive innovation and help communication professionals commit time and resources to personal and team upskilling.
2. Strengthening democracy
 - Tackling misinformation and disinformation through fixed models providing long-term strategic responses to disinformation;
 - Partnering with government departments and a network of embassies to provide support to government and institutions internationally.
3. Delivering for communities
 - Launching cross-government campaigns, such as the Prepare for EU Exit campaign, to disseminate important information to citizens;
 - Implementing a series of campaigns to communicate measures being taken in relation to areas including education and skills, economy and industry, health and well-being, housing and social mobility.

Source: <https://communication-plan.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/>.

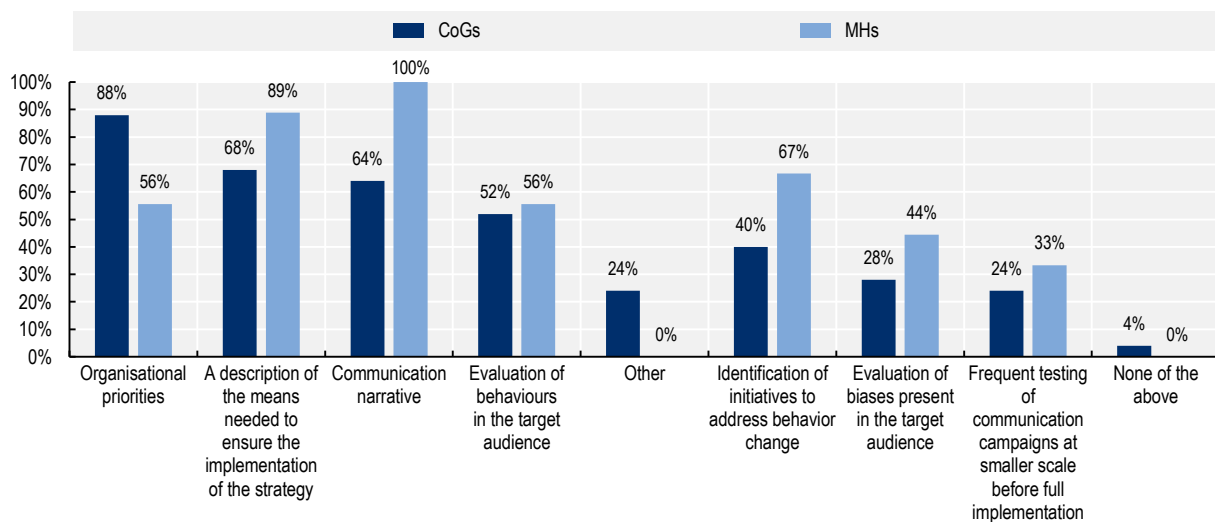
Other prevalent aspects of communication strategies are highlighted in Figure 2.7 and illustrated through selected examples in Box 2.7. Setting the overall communication narrative as a primary output of a strategy document was selected by all MHs and about two-thirds of CoGs. Alignment on organisational priorities and the elaboration of the means for the adequate implementation of the strategy are two other primary elements included by most respondents. In this respect, Ecuador's CoG communication strategy additionally specified mechanisms for review and evaluation, whereby a Communication Plan Review Committee ("Comité de Revisión de Planes de Comunicación") reviews, analyses and approves the strategies of individual ministries and evaluates their performance at the end of the year (see Box 2.7).

Likewise, several strategy documents submitted by CoGs refer to monitoring and evaluation, including the United Kingdom, Italy, Turkey, Colombia and Paraguay. Finally, the use of evidence on audience perceptions and behaviours is common to around half of respondents, and indeed several of those who selected “other” specified their strategies feature analyses about target audiences and stakeholders.

In sum, from the above analysis of strategies submitted and responses to the OECD survey, it emerges that, despite the definition of strategies provided, different institutions have different understandings of communication strategies. Indeed, at the initial stages of data collection and during validation meetings, the variety of documents and answers obtained from respondents indicated that several of them did not necessarily differentiate communication policies or simple plans from strategy documents for example. Moreover, this finding suggests that a good proportion of respondents are missing the opportunity to use this tool to take forward a whole-of-government approach to communication (see next section for further details).

This discrepancy could be linked to an organisational culture within the public administration that does not encourage the development of such documents, prioritising instead the more tactical approach to communication described above. It could also be due to the relative scarcity of standards and examples to inform a more unified understanding of the components that differentiate a communication strategy from plans. Overall, this lack of clarity is further evidence of the diverse nature of this government function around the world, and suggests that strategic communication remains a hybrid field with approaches differing even among mature countries.

Figure 2.7. Elements included in CoGs and MHs communication strategies (and plans, where applicable)



Note: n CoG = 25, includes Slovenia, Sweden and Tunisia that reported having a plan only. Germany and Jordan did not provide a response to this question. Respondents could select all applicable options. n MH = 9

Source: OECD 2020 Survey “Understanding Public Communication”

Box 2.7. Examples of whole-of-government communication strategies and plans

The Netherlands' Public Communication Strategy (2020-2021)

The Communication Council's Programme of 2020 establishes government priorities, and poses a series of initiatives to address overarching communication challenges. These include enhancing communication with the public and encouraging inclusivity in their communication outputs. The programme also recognises internal objectives on whole-of-government co-ordination and increased capacity-building through training.

The programme is complemented by the Public Information and Communication Office (DPC) Activity Plan of 2021. The plan sets out one main strategic objective through its mission statement of "helping the government in improving communication with citizens and equipping professionals with the necessary market knowledge and training". It further outlines the government's substantive communication objectives and the actions to pursue them, along with details on financial resources, including structural and advertising costs, media purchasing and yearly budgets.

Italy's Government Communication Plan

The yearly Government Communication Plan is the main instrument through which the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and central state administrations set out to achieve communication objectives. The plan is a compilation of each administration's own communication programme, which identifies and sets priorities, target audiences, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and financial resources. To harmonise the programmes into an overall government-wide plan, clear guidelines and requirements are provided for each institution to define its key objectives, target groups, communication channels and content.

The plan also elaborates on the need to include a phase for monitoring and evaluating results of campaigns at multiple stages. It raises the necessity of estimating overall financial resources before carrying out any programme. Finally, the communication plan gives a clear structure for co-ordination and collaboration between different entities, to ensure communication activities are aligned for the whole-of-government.

The 2020-2022 communication strategy for Ecuador's Presidency

This document sets the general direction of communications for the Ecuadorian Presidency. It outlines the mission and vision of the institution, underlining its role as the leading arm of communications and emphasising the transparent, efficient and participatory nature of its work. Furthermore, the strategy identifies 3 key goals, notably to raise awareness of the international community of the work of the government, inform internal and external audiences of the activities and results of the public administration and promote cultural initiatives led by the Presidency. For each objective, a series of actions are defined with details on the target audience, main messages, Key Performance Indicators, allocated budget and responsible entity for its delivery. It concludes with information on the timeline of each activity.

Source: Estonia: https://www.valitsus.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/failid/government_communication_handbook_eng_13.09.2017.pdf; Netherlands, Italy and Ecuador: Submission as attachments to COG responses to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

The institutional organisation and structures for executing public communication

Whereas the policies, mandates, and strategies discussed above define the mission for communication, the institutional structures in place are the vehicle for implementing them in practice. Indeed, the way the public communication function is organised within government and the resources allocated to it are essential enabling factors. As noted in the previous section, some of these aspects about the structures dedicated to the communication function are determined in official documents. In practice, these are also evolving according to changing demands and increasing areas of specialisation in the field.

This section of the Chapter discusses how governments have institutionalised their public communication in terms of offices, funding, areas of responsibility, and co-ordination mechanisms. The following section instead looks in depth at the professionalisation of the function, given the centrality of human resources, specialised competencies and capacity building for both its institutionalisation and the quality of its outputs.

Across virtually all countries that took part in the OECD survey, communication was conducted by dedicated offices that are typically present in each ministry or agency and in the CoG. Indeed, the prevalent arrangement for these structures is to be decentralised and specialised on thematic issues relevant to each ministry, with varying degrees of co-ordination and oversight from the CoG. Noting this distinction, one reason for surveying both CoGs and MHs for this report was indeed to capture the similarities, differences, and interactions between them, to understand the role of this function in governments from both a central and sectoral perspective.

Across the CoGs surveyed, a majority (72%) claimed to share the primary responsibility for communications with other ministries. However, almost half also reported having primary responsibility for at least four out of seven competency areas,⁴ even though others are shared. This reinforces the notion that in a considerable proportion of countries the CoG plays a very prominent role in the implementation of public communication. Conversely, countries where the CoG fully centralises communication responsibilities, or looks after its own communications only, are the exception.

Alternative arrangements are found in federal governments, such as Germany, Belgium, Australia and Switzerland, where communication responsibilities were often distributed between national and sub-national level. For instance, the Belgian Directorate General for External Communication of the Federal Public Service (FPS) Chancellery of the Prime Minister is responsible for drafting and disseminating the decisions of the Council of Ministers,⁵ but many other competencies are decentralised.

Other countries, such as Brazil (Ministry of Communications, SECOM), Paraguay (Ministry of Technology and Information Communication) or Korea (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) have placed the main mandate for public communication with dedicated ministries or teams outside of the CoG. In a similar vein, some governments have also taken steps to consolidate their central offices into full-fledged agencies located in the CoG. The United Kingdom (UK) has established the Government Communications Service (GCS) as a whole-of-government body comprising all public service communicators. Likewise, France's *Service d'Information du Gouvernement* (SIG), Italy's Presidency of the Council of Ministers Department for Information and Publishing (PCM-DIE), and Slovenia's Government Communication Office, are examples of dedicated departments and agencies attached to the CoG tasked with conducting whole-of-government and inter-ministerial communication.

As is also discussed in the below section on human resources, the size, internal structuring, and level of specialisation of the bodies in charge of communications vary considerably across respondents. These factors all contribute to the capacity of these offices to perform the function to a high standard. Another important consideration is the centralisation or decentralisation of resources. Indeed, in some governments the CoG or dedicated ministry overseeing public communication often benefit from having bigger teams or more financing, particularly in relation to highly specialised or resource-intensive competency areas.

In some countries, such as the United Kingdom or Singapore, capacity is developed at the centre and put at the disposal of other ministries. This is more common, for example, in the areas of media and digital monitoring services, counter-disinformation, behavioural insights specialists, and training experts, which can be located at the centre but serve the whole administration. Such a system can offer advantages to harmonise the capacity of ministries with smaller teams and budgets. It can be especially helpful in less mature contexts where investments to develop the public communication function across all of government can be considerable and require a longer time horizon.

The next section looks in depth at another primary aspect of the institutional set up of public communication: its co-ordination across the public administration.

From cross-government co-ordination to a whole-of-government communication

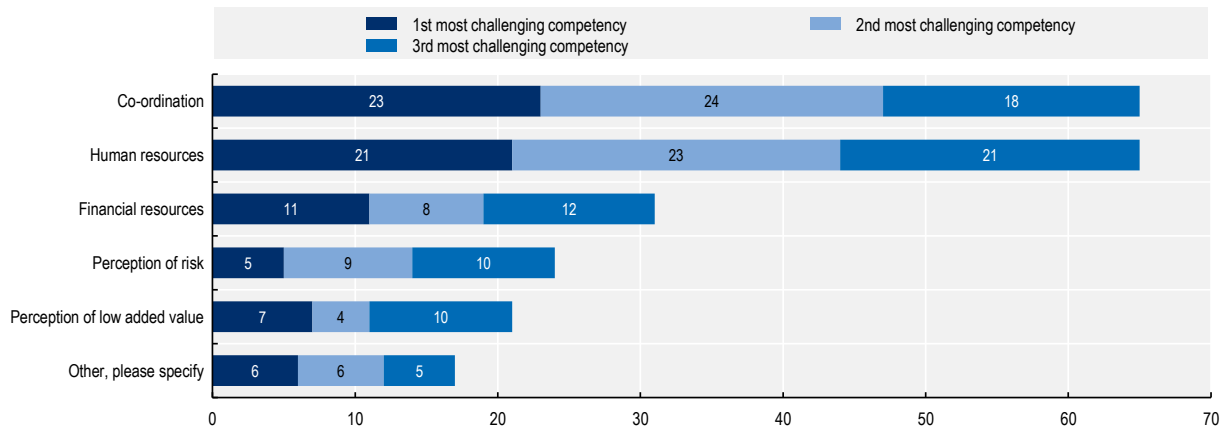
Given the often-dispersed structures tasked with conducting communication across government, mechanisms to co-ordinate and streamline activities are priority factors for ensuring the delivery of information efficiently and effectively. Notwithstanding the different degrees of centralisation of communication responsibilities, governments can build on such co-ordination efforts to achieve a fully whole-of-government communication and speak with one voice, as this section discusses.

As for many domains, policy co-ordination is a powerful enabler of greater coherence (OECD, 2020^[17]). It has become acutely relevant for many OECD member and partner countries, partly due to the increase in cross-cutting, multi-dimensional policy challenges. This is demonstrated by the high proportion of countries reporting a rise in cross-ministerial policy initiatives since 2008, as documented in a recent OECD (2020^[17]) study. As a result, some CoGs have expanded their central co-ordination role and capacity, including in the domain of internal and external communication (OECD, 2020^[17]), particularly given the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2020^[18]).

The co-ordination of public communication, whether horizontally across the administration, or vertically across levels of government, brings numerous advantages. It serves to avoid conflicting or duplicating messages, thereby allowing greater coherence in the information audiences perceive. Where relevant, it can facilitate cross-government support to a given ministry or team with regards to priority activities. Moreover, effective co-ordination has the potential to foster an environment conducive to the sharing of practices and lessons among practitioners. In turn, this contributes to greater efficiencies and improved outcomes for communication.

Co-ordination can also become burdensome if not structured appropriately. It is indeed the most commonly cited reason why many competencies are challenging according to OECD survey responses (Figure 2.8). For example, 73% of CoGs underline co-ordinating as a main reason why performing crisis communication is challenging, 40% for campaigns and 36% for evaluating communication. Indeed, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, communicators from multiple countries have noted great complexity with co-ordinating and aligning efforts in real-time to meet peak demand for information.⁶ These trends, including in ubiquitous competencies such as implementing campaigns, highlight the inherent complexity of implementing joint, aligned and coherent actions across government. For this reason, identifying and adopting effective mechanisms that strike the right balance between being highly formalised and process-heavy at one extreme, and too informal and ad-hoc at the other, is an important priority.

Figure 2.8. CoGs' three most important reasons for selecting their three most challenging communication competencies



Note: n CoG = 38. Romania did not provide a response. This question is conditional to the selection of three challenges. Six countries did not select any challenging competency (either one or all three).

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

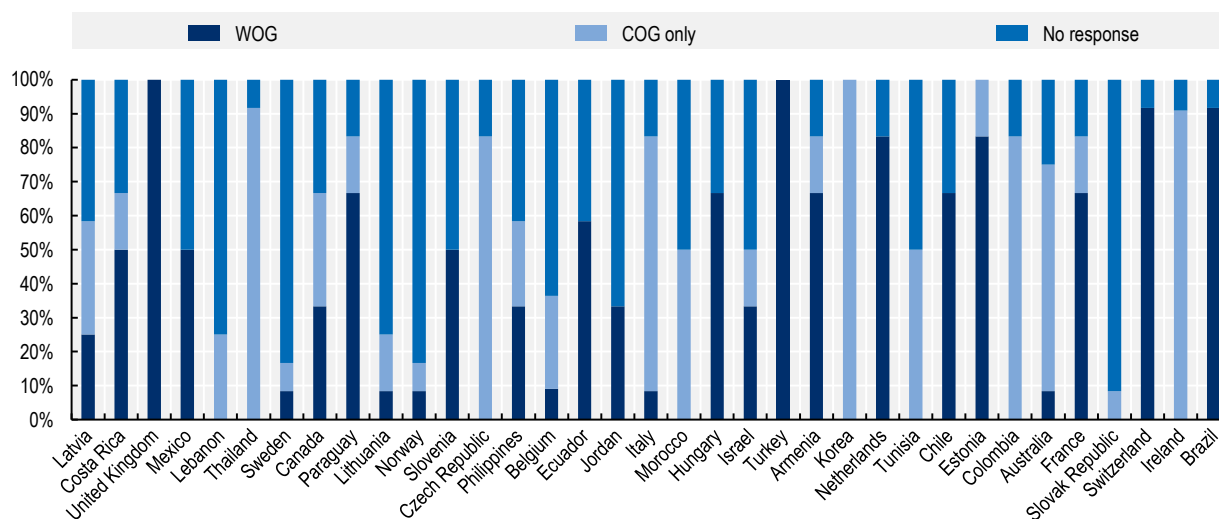
Along the trajectory towards a greater institutionalisation of this function, governments could envision moving beyond simple co-ordination to achieve a whole-of-government communication. This is intended as a unified approach that provides a cohesive and holistic direction for communication activities across the administration.

Indeed, siloed approaches to communication across ministries and agencies reflect internal administrative structures, and do not necessarily cater to the expectations of citizens and other stakeholders who instead tend to perceive governments as unitary. Building such a unified identity is already a trend visible in some governments' branding and online presence (OECD, 2020_[19]). Countries like France and Italy, for example, have introduced clear and recognisable visual branding guidelines that apply across all of the executive to all content and materials. In France, this first step towards a national branding strategy was followed by the introduction of a "digital design system"⁷ of the State in July 2021. Similarly, the United Kingdom was one of the first governments to bring all public sector websites under the same roof in its GOV.UK website. In Ireland, the establishment of a unified visual identity and gov.ie as a single online point of access by the Government Information Service promotes a coherent communication approach within the administration and facilitates citizens' access to official sources of information. By extension, the same principles behind these efforts to create a whole-of-government image can be applied to help administrations speak with one voice.

Ultimately, a whole-of-government approach to communication strengthens coherence of messaging, allows the administration to convey a clear narrative, and helps amplify official content amidst the crowded and fast-paced information ecosystem described in Chapters 1 and 6. By combining resources and minimising dissonance, it can contribute to overarching communication goals that depend on actions by all institutions, including furthering transparency and participation and rebuilding public trust.

In light of this discussion, evidence from the OECD survey indicated that co-ordination through different means is prevalent among respondents, and that several countries are taking steps towards whole-of-government approaches (Figure 2.9). The data suggested that there is no one-size-fits-all system in this area, and institutions surveyed have adopted a range of formal and informal mechanisms to co-ordinate their activities.

Figure 2.9. Share of CoGs communication responsibilities conducted for the whole-of-government



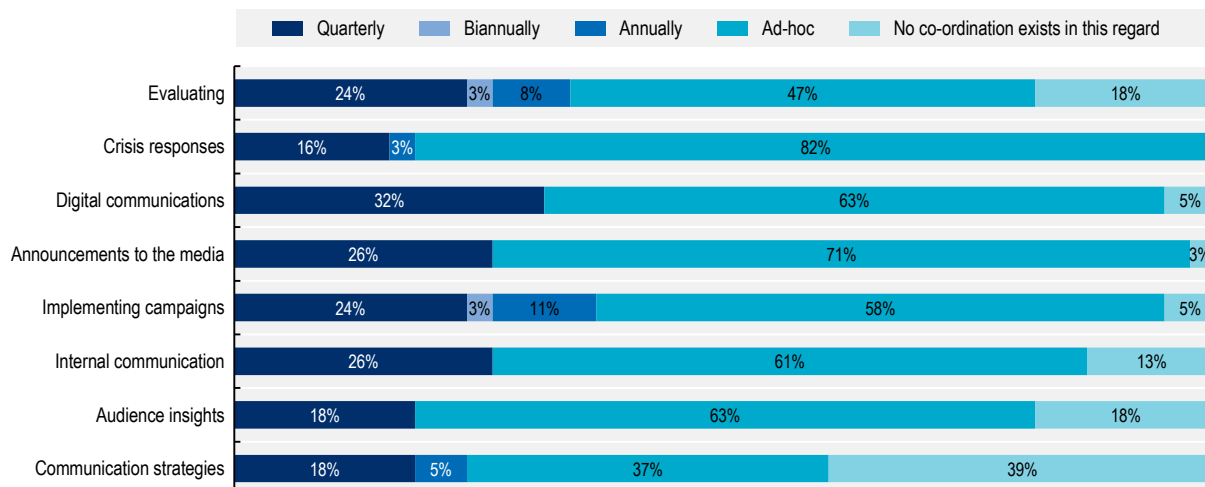
Note: n CoG = 35, 12 functions were included in the survey: communication strategies, communication campaigns, insight gathering, media engagement, digital communication, crisis communication, internal communication, evaluating communication activities, promoting stakeholder participation opportunities, countering disinformation, training and other. Austria, Germany, Poland and Romania did not provide an answer to this specific survey question.

Source: Survey OECD 2020 "Understanding Public Communication".

Based on the OECD survey data, some areas of public communication are more commonly co-ordinated than others, with the CoG typically playing a central role. These functions include crisis and digital communications, media relations, and implementing campaigns (Figure 2.10). For example, three quarter of CoGs co-ordinated with colleagues in other ministries on at least one campaign in 2019, and 97% reported having co-ordination mechanisms in place for crises.

Other strategic and time-intensive tasks such as monitoring and evaluation, collecting audience insights or the development of strategies are among the functions that are less often co-ordinated by CoGs (Figure 2.10) and where some efficiencies could be created through closer collaboration. Nonetheless, a number of practices indicate that some governments have benefited from introducing structures that support a co-ordinated, consistent and efficient approach to evaluating public communication (for the United Kingdom example see Chapter 4, Box 4.2, for Ecuador see Box 2.8 below). Such experiences highlight the value of capitalising on specialisation and lessons learned to increase overall standards in different competency areas.

Figure 2.10. Frequency of CoG's communication co-ordination with other government ministries, departments and agencies



Note: n CoG = 38. Austria did not provide data for this question.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

To implement these co-ordination functions, OECD member and partners countries rely on a range of instruments. Planning and scheduling tools and regular meetings are common in Colombia, Ireland, Latvia, Mexico, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. In some cases, these meetings take official status as happens with dedicated inter-ministerial committees in Estonia, Paraguay or Norway (Box 2.12). In this regard, in the Netherlands, the heads of all communication directorates across the government meet on a bi-weekly basis in the Communication Council.

Box 2.8. Co-ordinating strategies and evaluation of public communication in Ecuador

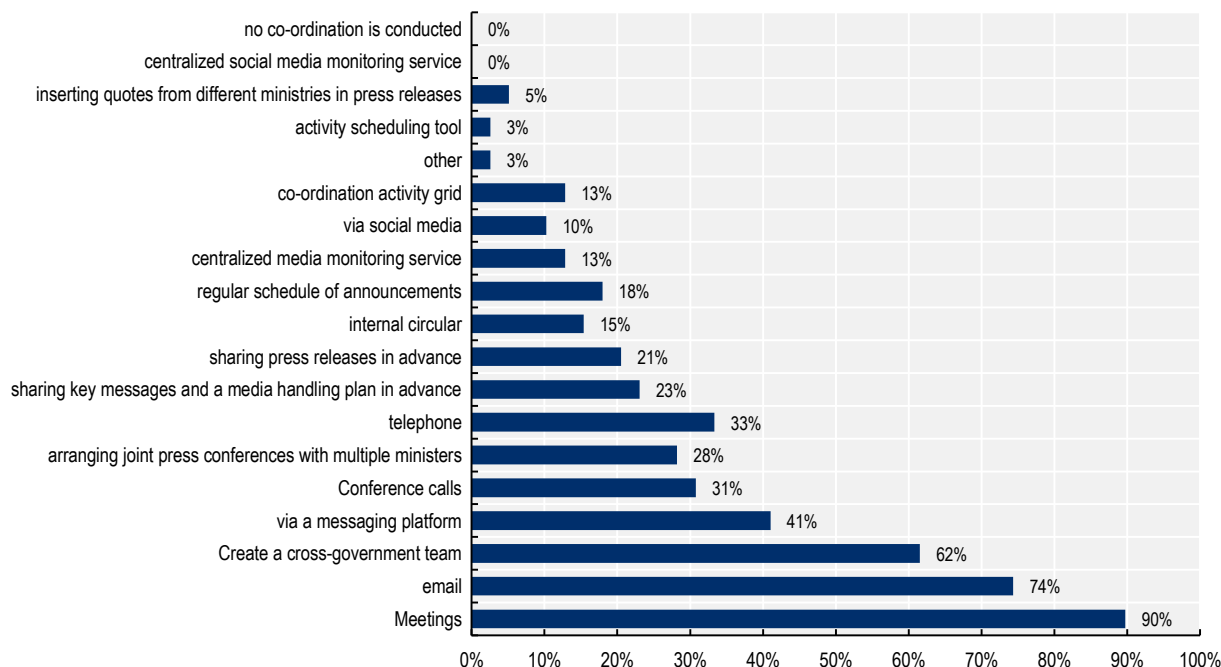
The General Secretariat of Communications in Ecuador, located under the Prime Minister's Office, is in charge of whole-of-government communication. It is responsible for the review and approval of all ministerial communication plans to ensure that activities are in line with the country's overarching strategy. To translate this document into action, the Secretariat created an internal Communication Plan Review Committee (or "Comité de Revisión de Planes de Comunicación") to review, analyse, approve and evaluate ministry-specific directives and actions. In this respect, the committee has reviewed a total of 110 documents, from which 65 Communication Plans were approved and 17 communication investments projects endorsed. Furthermore, the Committee oversees the annual evaluation of all ministerial strategies based on their specific indicators.

Source: Adapted from inputs shared by the government of Ecuador to the OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Co-ordination in the areas discussed above takes various forms. An effective way to structure activities is through the use of collective planning tools and shared materials, common to Colombia, Ireland, Latvia, Mexico, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. These tools can often be as simple as a table or "grid" with forward-looking information about activities and key moments, but if shared and updated frequently by all relevant stakeholders can offer a powerful and low-cost solution. However, these tools are less common among CoGs, who prioritise informal exchanges via emails, calls and messaging platforms (Figure 2.11).

Regular meetings, on a weekly or monthly basis, are instead the primary avenue for peers across departments and ministries to exchange and co-ordinate their work: 90% of CoGs noted them as a top method of co-ordination. These meetings have become more formal in a number of countries with the formation of dedicated inter-ministerial committees, as is the case in Estonia, Paraguay or Norway (Box 2.11). The Netherlands has similarly established a Communication Council that groups the heads of all communication directorates who meet at fortnightly intervals.

Figure 2.11. Most important ways in which the CoG co-ordinates across government (top five responses)



Note: n CoG = 39.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Box 2.9. Inter-ministerial committees or working groups for whole-of-government co-ordination

In **Estonia**, a Council on the co-ordination of governmental communication meets every week at Stenbock House. It discusses government communication issues and makes proposals on how to organise related activities. The meetings are chaired by the Director of Government Communication, and include the heads of the communication departments of all ministries. The public relations advisor to the Justice Chancellor and the head of the Communication Department within the Office of Government Oversight also participate. These meetings allow for an improved exchange of information between communication units of several ministries and agencies, by harmonising content and enhancing parallel organisation of communication activities.

In **Norway**, an inter-ministerial working group was formed in 2015 under the Prime Minister's Office. It comprises communication advisors from Norwegian ministries to co-ordinate and to create standards for how ministerial communication departments employ social media outlets in order to inform and engage with stakeholders.

In **Paraguay**, the Vice-Ministry for Communication, which is the governing body in charge of the formulation of communication policies and implementation of plans and projects within the executive branch, acts as the chair of the Coordination Instance for Communicators of the State and Capacity building (*Instancia de Coordinación de Comunicadores del Estado y Capacitaciones*). It brings together the practitioners of all ministries to co-ordinate actions, share good practices, and offer capacity-building opportunities.

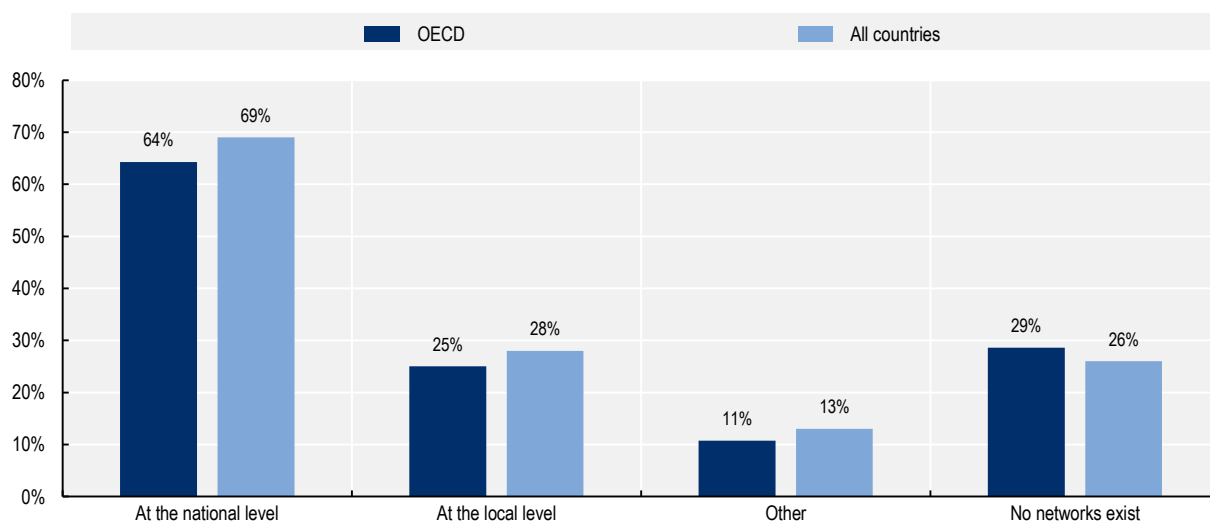
Source: <https://tropico-project.eu/cases/administration-costs-for-bureaucracy/social-media-coordination-in-norwegian-ministries-the-case-of-digit/>; adapted from responses of the government of Paraguay to the OECD 2020 Survey « Understanding Public Communication »; <https://www.mitic.gov.py/noticias/mitic-y-pnud-llevan-adelante-ciclo-de-capacitaciones-para-comunicadores-del-estado>; <https://www.mitic.gov.py/noticias/comunicadores-del-estado-participan-de-capacitacion-en-comunicacion-estrategica>.

While the aforementioned tools and mechanisms usually applied to central governments and seldom included subnational actors, co-ordinating vertically across levels of government is an important component for moving towards a more whole-of-government outlook for public communication. Peers networks have emerged as important platforms for exchange in countries including Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Philippines, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey and the United Kingdom (Box 2.10). In countries such as France or Australia, such networks have formed outside government under the leadership of private or civil society stakeholders. The French co-operative Cap'com is an example of this, and brings together national and local French communicators for sharing practices, research and training.

Networks of peers and professionals have an important role beyond co-ordination, as they also serve to foster co-operation, collective learning, and sharing of good practices. These are present in a majority (69%) of countries at the national level (Figure 2.12), but similar networks are also growing at the international level, particularly in Europe. For example, the Club of Venice is a longstanding grouping of senior communicators from European governments, having been established over three decades ago. Similarly, EuropCom brings together European communicators from national, regional and local administrations across the continent, to discuss emerging trends and challenges. The European Union's (EU) Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism Crisis Communication Network (CCN) brings together crisis specialists and practitioners from EU bodies and member governments.

In sum, none of the CoGs who took part in the OECD survey have reported not conducting any co-ordination. This is indicative of the importance of this activity for the overall effectiveness of public communication. Moreover, responses indicate that around half of CoGs are assuming multiple activities at the whole-of-government level at least in some areas. This could point to a trend towards greater integration and cohesion of public communication across the government that will have likely accelerated in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.12. Networks of public communicators



Note: n CoG = 39. "Other" includes community networks as well as networks at international level.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding Public Communication".

Box 2.10. Networks to support communication co-ordination across levels of government

Federal and subnational networks in Belgium

In Belgium, there exists two networks at the federal level that offer communication professionals the opportunity to learn, meet colleagues and share experiences: with its 660 members, the COMMnet network brings together federal communicators several times a year for activities organised on themes related to communication, whereas the COMMnetKern network, network of administrators who are responsible for communication within the federal administration, stimulates the federal communications policy and supports federal communication managers.

At the local level, WBCOM' is a network for francophone communication professionals aiming to support members through trainings, exchange of expertise and practices, thematic conferences, workshops and media coaching. The network is comprised of 200 regular members, and 800 professional contacts.

Co-ordinating through networks across levels of government in the Philippines

In the Philippines, each department at the national level has its own Public Information Division or Office, mainly tasked to handle public relations, answer media queries and in some cases, manage IT systems and infrastructures. The heads of these offices are part of a national network of government communicators led by the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO). At the local level, the same structure usually exists in local government units (LGUs), who also have their own Public

Information Division or Office and take part in o a network of local government communicators led by the Philippine Information Agency (PIA).

Moreover, the PCOO closely co-ordinates with its attached agencies. For example, the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) is the official public information arm of the Government of the Philippines which works closely alongside the PCOO. They have regional offices scattered all over the country to ensure a quicker and more efficient co-ordination with LGUs, the media, the youth sector, and other key actors, as they have a wide range of networks scattered across the Philippines.

Cap'com: a non-governmental network of public communicators in France

In France, Cap'Com is a non-governmental co-operative that connects professionals, elected officials, students and all those interested in communication at the level of local communities, administrations and public bodies. For more than 30 years, Cap'Com has brought together 25 000 communication professionals of local authorities, national and local administrations and non-governmental actors. It supports them through information sharing, networking training programmes, the organisation of thematic events and the annual Public Communication Forum. The network is led by the Cap'Com Steering Committee, which relays the concerns of the entire profession, reflects on developments in the profession and guides activities. It brings together around a hundred professionals and observers of public communication and meets 6 times a year.

Source: Author's own work, based on responses to the 2020 OECD Public Communication Survey;
https://fedweb.belgium.be/fr/a_propos_de_l_organisation/communication/a_propos_de_la_communication_federale/reseaux;
<https://wbcom.be/nos-membres-et-partenaires/>; <https://www.cap-com.org/qui-sommes-nous>

Ensuring adequate financial resources for public communication structures

The structures that underpin the public communication function ultimately depend on adequate funding. Translating the strategic vision of communication into action requires setting dedicated budgetary allocations against concrete objectives, linked to government priorities, evaluated against key performance indicators and made publicly available (OECD, 2019^[20]). In this regard, formal and consistent resources not only help ensure the delivery and sustainability of efforts, but also attribute tangible value to this function and recognise it as a profession in itself.

Despite its importance, evidence suggested that dedicated financing streams for public communication remain a challenge for many countries. According to OECD survey results, the lack of financial resources was selected by 45% of CoGs and 54% of MHs as one of the three main challenges to implementing core communication functions. In this regard, funding was the most cited challenge for communicating during a crisis (7 out of 17 CoGs and 1 out of 13 MHs), planning or implementing communication campaigns (6 out of 17 CoGs and 6 out of 13 MHs) and producing communication strategies (6 out of 17 CoGs and 6 out of 13 MHs) respectively.

Challenges in terms of financing for the profession have been exacerbated over the last decade resulting from mounting budget pressures following the 2008 financial crisis, the rapid pace of technological change, immigration influxes and other socio-economic factors (Macnamara, 2020^[21]). While these pressures introduced a greater focus on transparency and accountability for public sector expenditure, communicators must balance tensions between budgetary constraints, upscaling delivery and ensuring value-for-money. Overall, these elements together illustrate the importance of a strategic management of public communication expenditure, from its planning to implementation and evaluation.

In practice, types of funding structures and available resources for the public communication profession vary significantly across countries. Overall, OECD survey results revealed that 92% of CoGs have a formal financing stream dedicated to this function – whether in the form of dedicated or ad hoc budgets for core

These trends were also predominant at the health sector level. As Figure 2.13 above illustrates, over a fourth of MHs (22%) lacked available budget information on public communication activities. Of those with available resources, 26% claimed to have a dedicated budget for 4 or more communication competencies and 52% to have mixed funding structures for less thematic areas. Similar to those at the CoG level, campaigns (9 out of 23 MHs), media monitoring (8 out of 23) and digital communication activities (7 out of 23) are the primary competencies prioritised in dedicated funding streams at the health sector level. Interestingly, in half of the LAC countries surveyed, MHs have a larger number of dedicated budgets for specialised competencies in comparison to their CoG counterpart.

While financing structures vary, OECD survey results also revealed countries faced difficulties in identifying the sources of public communication funds available. In fact, at least 8 CoGs and MHs were unable to provide budget-related information for various reasons. The most common reason selected by countries behind this was the cross-subsidised nature of communication activities, which are often covered by other budget lines in the institution. Countries also indicated that, in some cases, budget lines are not clearly specified for the profession. For example, the Government of Armenia noted that communication funds were part of the broader budget of the Prime Minister's Office with no dedicated line items assigned for this function.

OECD evidence also revealed good practices adopted by countries to publish budgetary information on communication activities proactively, and in some cases, their evaluations regarding value for money. This trend is consistent with the fact that budgetary transparency⁸ is a well-established principle across public administrations in OECD countries (OECD, 2019_[20]). For instance, the 2019 Social Communication Policy of the Mexican Government outlines budgetary restrictions on campaign expenditure to avoid the misuse of resources and unfair market concentration. The Policy also mandates beneficiary institutions to upload all relevant information on campaign spending in their respective transparency portal in an open format. In a similar fashion, several countries (Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Germany and Italy) stated that they publish available communication budget information in their institutional websites according to survey results. In the case of Ecuador, the Government also produces an annual accountability report with a section detailing the funds that were allocated to communication, how they were spent, and their results. Such “open budgets” are critical instruments to promote government accountability, performance budgeting and fiscal transparency (OECD, 2020_[15]).

Ensuring a transparent reporting of public communication expenditures will be all the more important as countries embark on a recovery path from the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, disruptions from the crisis prompted public communicators to act quickly, develop partnerships with external stakeholders and re-deploy pre-existing resources. They however were urged to innovate and “do more with less” (OECD, 2020_[22]), which has provided a number of good practices countries can build on going forward.

The professionalisation of the public communication function

Professionalising the public communication function is fundamental in an environment characterised by rapid technology development and increasingly multi-faceted challenges. Indeed, the skill sets commonly used within the public sector are said to “be no longer keeping up with the pace of change in the societies they aim to support and improve (OECD, 2017_[23])”. This presents a two-fold challenge for the public communication profession. On the one hand, it calls on governments to identify the adequate set of resources, tools and skills needed to ensure that communication services are fit-for-purpose today and into the future. On the other hand, it implies addressing questions on the required investments for these capabilities in terms of attraction, recruitment and development of staff.

Strategic human resources management is an effective means to improve the efficiency, quality, and responsiveness of a range of government services, from which communication is no exception. This starts with the recruitment stage, and continues throughout training, and the development of talent through

performance management and appraisal (Visser and Van der Togt, 2016^[24]). To this end, the *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability* calls for a values-driven culture and leadership, as well as investments in capabilities and responsive employment systems to ensure that the public service is fit-for-purpose (OECD, 2019^[25]). It sets out a series of principles regarding:

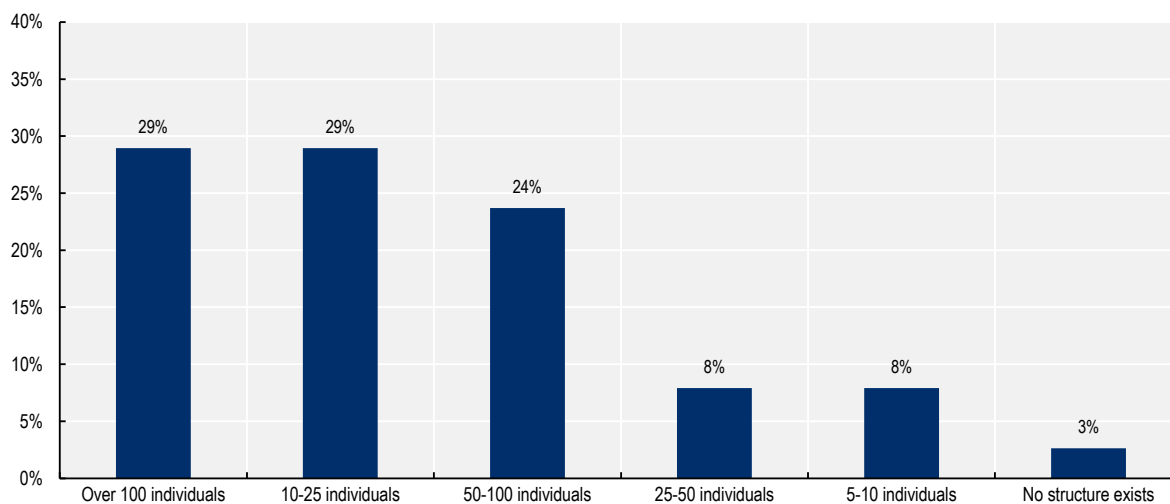
- Recruiting, selecting and promoting candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes.
- Continuously identifying skills and competencies needed to transform political vision into services that deliver value to society.
- Developing the necessary skills and competencies by creating a learning culture and environment in the public service.
- Attracting and retaining employees with the skills and competencies required.
- Assessing, rewarding and recognising performance, talent and initiative.

The following section will explore a series of avenues to push forward the professionalisation of the public communication function. It will first take stock of the composition of communication teams in CoGs and MHs to understand the challenges and opportunities in consolidating a well-staffed and specialised workforce. The section will then examine existing training and professional development opportunities to up-skill staff, retain talent and promote career progression. In doing so, the final section will reflect on the importance of modernising skills in today’s fast-paced digital landscape to empower a workforce fit for the future.

Ensuring communication structures are fit-for-purpose

Public communication as an “under-skilled” and “under-staffed” area continues to be a shared issue in OECD member and partner countries across the world. According to OECD survey results, human resources was selected by more than three-fourths of CoGs (76%) and MHs (79%) respectively as a key factor inhibiting the effective implementation of core communication functions. Equipping relevant teams with the right resources and skills remains a challenge governments need to prepare for given the constantly evolving and fragmenting media and information ecosystem in which they operate. Indeed, countries are “required to fill positions that did not exist a decade ago”, with a need for applicants with an increasingly diverse background including in data analysis, programming, storytelling, marketing, behaviour insights, as well as new skills such as the use of AI and predictive insights (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016^[21]).

As Figure 2.16 illustrates, there is a high disparity across OECD member and partner countries in terms of available human resources for public communication. In fact, survey results indicated that close to 53% of CoGs tended to employ from 50 to more than 100 individuals in contrast with close to 47% hiring less than 50 individuals, if at all. Countries on the lower side of the spectrum reported having insufficient communicators at hand, where staff must often deliver on multiple functions alongside their primary role. Differences in regards to the size of public communication teams reflected the diverse structures of institutions across the world, in particular in federal countries (i.e. Germany, Mexico, Brazil, etc.) where responsibilities tended to be decentralised across various ministries or levels of government.

Figure 2.14. Number of public communication structures with full time individuals at the CoG level

Note: N= 38 CoGs. Austria did not provide data for this particular survey question. Percentages were rounded up according to their decimals but are included herein for the purposes of clarity: Over 100 individuals - 28.95%; 10-25 individuals - 28.95%; 50-100 individuals - 23.68%; 25-50 individuals - 7.89%; 5-10 individuals - 7.89%; No structure exists - 2.63%.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

In addition to their size, the degree of specialisation of public communication teams in countries was found to differ. As Table 2.1 illustrates, several specialised functions lacked dedicated teams, whereas others were better staffed. Indeed, human resources were distributed rather unevenly across different functions, with the majority of CoGs having small teams between 1-5 members. Some of them were highly specialised, such as the case in Costa Rica, where responsibilities were divided among different teams or individuals according to survey results. The Government of the Philippines, on the other hand, divided teams across different offices and/or programmes within the CoG, with a team of cross-functional individuals, which assume one or several roles based on the project as well as expertise required. Results broadly suggest that team members will sometimes work across multiple functions, stretching skilled staff over several different areas. That being said, countries in small teams in particular may not have the capacities to assign responsibilities to single team members due to resource scarcity. Overall, the lack of available staff and specialised teams can help explain why human resources was selected by CoGs as one of the most challenging reasons for realising the profession's potential.

Table 2.1. Number of individuals working full-time in a particular structure in CoGs

Country	Communication strategies	Communication campaigns	Insight gathering	Media engagement	Digital Communication	Evaluating communication activities	Promoting stakeholder participation	Countering disinformation
Labels: ● 1-5 ▲ 5-10 ■ 10-25 □ 25-50 ♣ 50-100 ♠ 100+								
Australia	▲	▲	●	●	▲	○	○	○
Belgium	●	●	○	○	▲	○	○	○
Canada	■	●	●	●	■	○	●	○
Chile	○	▲	▲	■	▲	■	▲	○
Colombia	▲	●	○	●	▲	▲	▲	▲
Costa Rica	●	●	●	▲	●	○	●	●
Czech Republic	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
Estonia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
France	■	■	●	●	●	■	▲	●
Italy	■	■	●	▲	▲	●	○	●
Latvia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Lithuania	○	○	○	▲	▲	○	▲	○
Mexico	■	■	○	▲	▲	○	○	○
Netherlands	●	▲	●	●	♣	▲	●	○
Norway	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲
Poland	○	■	○	■	■	●	♣	♣
Korea	■	●	□	■	■	▲	●	●
Slovenia	○	▲	○	▲	●	▲	○	●
Sweden	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
Switzerland	▲	●	●	●	▲	●	●	●
Total OECD								
● 1-5	5	8	10	10	7	6	8	8
▲ 5-10	4	5	2	6	8	5	5	2
■ 10-25	5	4	0	3	3	2	0	0
□ 25-50	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
♣ 50-100	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
♠ 100+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
○ No structure exists/ NA (0)	6	3	7	1	1	7	6	9
Armenia	○	▲	●	●	●	●	●	●
Brazil	■	□	■	♣	♣	□	■	♣
Ecuador	●	▲	○	●	▲	●	○	○
Jordan	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Lebanon	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○
Morocco	○	●	○	●	▲	●	●	●
Paraguay	▲	●	▲	●	●	●	●	○
Philippines	■	○	○	○	□	■	□	■
Romania	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●
Thailand	■	♣	♠	□	♣	■	♠	■
Tunisia	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	●

Total non-OECD								
● 1-5	4	5	3	8	5	4	4	5
▲ 5-10	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0
■ 10-25	3	0	1	0	0	2	1	2
▣ 25-50	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
♣ 50-100	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1
♠ 100+	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
○ No structure exists	3	2	5	2	1	4	4	3

Note: Austria, Germany and Turkey did not provide data for this particular survey question. Brazil provided an aggregate number of SECOM and other relevant entities in the Ministry of Communication. Some respondents noted individuals in certain teams cover more than one of the above functions and may be double-counted. In certain countries, dedicated resources can still be available even when no dedicated structures exist for certain competencies (such as the case of the Government of Canada for example).

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Concerning the skillsets required for such positions, 15 CoGs and 20 MHs shared specific competency frameworks or job descriptions. Profiles varied widely depending on the technical specialisation of the job and the seniority level required. Differences in terms of the background and skill requirements ranged across the fields of journalism, social sciences, statistics, marketing, design, project management and public relations - illustrating the highly-technical and multi-faceted nature of jobs in the profession. As part of these responses, the use of communication competency frameworks was identified as a good practice to formalise skill requirements, hiring processes and professional development opportunities across institutions. Competency frameworks, like those in France, Lithuania and the United Kingdom detail specific expectations in terms of skills and background (i.e. educational and professional), provide a career progression path, and outline entry points for the profession (see Box 2.11).

Box 2.11. Communication Competency Frameworks in OECD and partner countries

France

The directory of public communication professions in France defines specific knowledge and skills required, including developing and steering the institution's overall communication strategy, and overseeing implementation, co-ordination and evaluation. In particular, communication managers are responsible for co-ordinating internal and external networks, communicating in crisis, designing and implementing global communication campaigns, managing the budget, and setting up a system for evaluating communication actions.

Lithuania

The competency framework for civil servants in Lithuania provides specific templates on how job descriptions, including positions in public communication teams should be designed. Indeed, each template provides descriptions of professional competencies for general, managerial, administrative and leadership activities. Key competencies include creating value for society, communication skills, reliability and accountability, analysis, strategic approach and performance management. Moreover, the job description template includes the scope, job level and title, detailed functions, required education and work experience, as well as language proficiency. This approach allows public institutions to define core communication competencies, align hiring practices, and promote professional development opportunities.

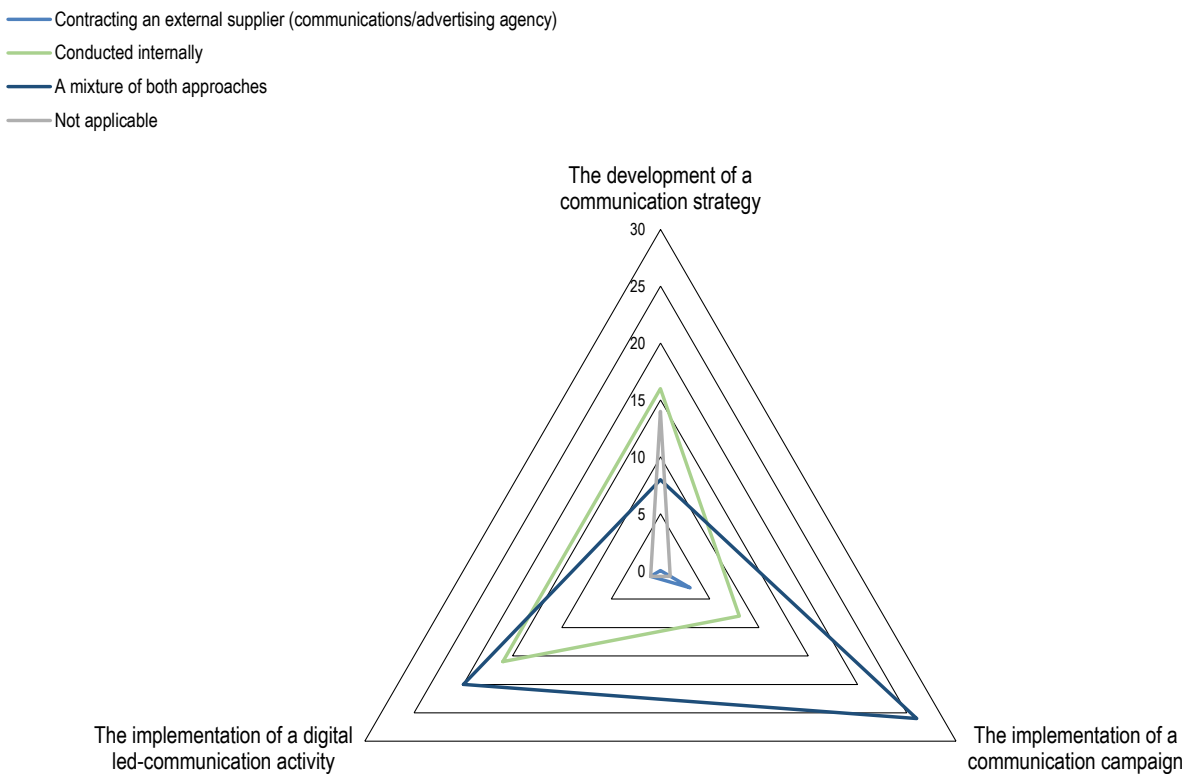
United Kingdom

The UK GCS Career Framework identifies job profiles at different levels, enabling civil servants to better understand what is expected of them. The framework defines roles across several communication disciplines, including external affairs, marketing, internal communication as well as media and strategic communication. Moreover, it specifies different routes for vertical and horizontal advancement in the profession, which include internal movement, direct mainstream recruitment, and accelerated development programmes. The framework further describes the key elements in assessing candidates: experience, strengths, ability, technical skills and behaviours. The competency framework also presents the wide range of opportunities to build skills and expand knowledge, including courses, trainings, networking and mentoring opportunities. Finally, career profiles in the form of cases studies are included to exemplify opportunities available across the GCS.

Source: <https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/responsable-de-communication>.

Another common practice found to fill skill gaps in the profession involves outsourcing to external contractors. According to OECD survey results, most CoGs (30 out of 38) and MHs (19 out of 24) used a mixed approach to carrying out essential functions by contracting external suppliers in addition to internal staff for the development of campaigns, digital-led activities and communication strategies primarily (see Figure 2.15). Only 4 CoGs and MHs respectively fully outsourced one or several of these tasks to the private sector. In some cases, countries relied upon recruiting former private communicators or consultants to ensure skilled resources for specific technical functions. For example, survey results indicated that the Netherlands and Korea look to external communication agencies or freelancers in order to fulfil temporary functions as well as develop the knowledge of public officials.

Figure 2.15. Number of CoGs carrying out key communication functions through internal or external means, or through a mixture of approaches



Note: Austria did not provide data for this particular survey question.
Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

Investing in professional development opportunities for public communicators

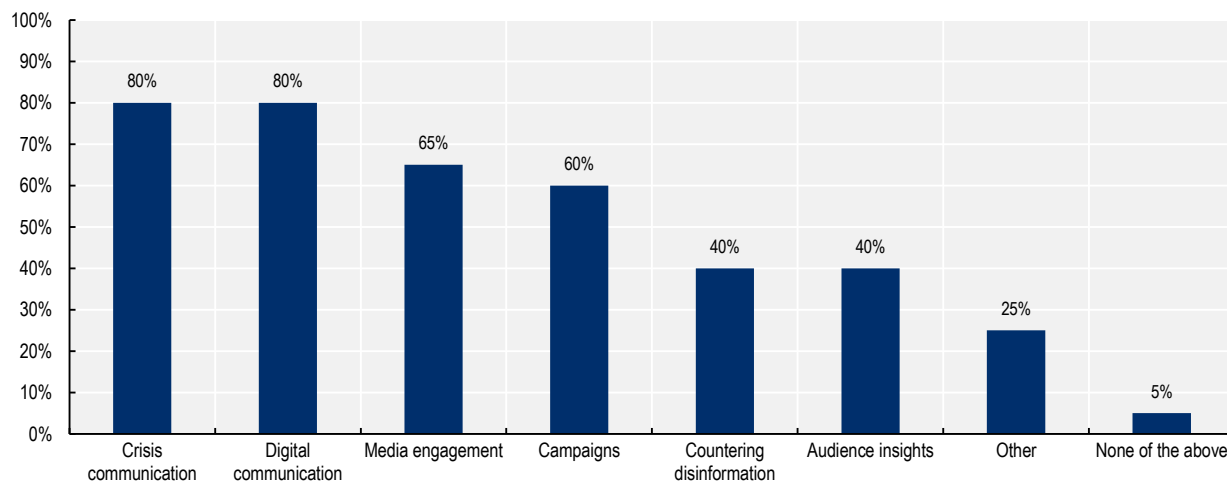
A key means of ensuring effective communication is recognising public communication as a profession in itself, one that requires investments, guidance and training. Indeed, the highly specialised nature of this function and the speed of change that communications operate in requires regular professional development opportunities through training, career progression and performance appraisals. In doing so, public sector institutions can promote a culture of continuous learning to ensure that skills are fit-for-purpose and can keep up with emerging trends in the field (OECD, 2017^[23]).

OECD evidence suggested, however, that a lack of sufficient training remains a key challenge. In fact, only 20 out of 32 of CoGs (63%) reported having a specific structure or individual responsible for providing training. These findings are consistent with those from the WPP report, which suggested that only half of respondents believed they have the right tools and resources to do their job, with 43% reported working in the profession for more than 10 years and few having built up modern communication skills in that time (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016^[21]).

Where training is designed or delivered by CoGs, survey results suggested these cover a wide range of technical domains. As Figure 2.16 illustrates, out of 20 CoGs that provided training most opportunities are focused on digital communications (80%), crisis communication (80%) media engagement (65%) and campaigns (60%). Despite the recent infodemic, countering disinformation (40%) and audience insights (40%) were less prioritised by countries. This shows a need to improve these areas, especially in the wake of the infodemic linked to COVID-19 (see Chapter 6). Improving and expanding the range of skillsets

available for public communicators may empower them to face unprecedented challenges in a crowded media and information landscape (OECD, 2020^[17]).

Figure 2.16. Competency areas that are covered in trainings developed and implemented by CoGs



Note: N= 20 CoGs who claimed to have a structure, team or individual in charge of training.

Source: OECD 2020 Survey "Understanding public communication".

While trainings may vary according to their degree of technical specialty, survey results indicated that countries tended to either complement existing in-house efforts with or fully resort to programmes delivered by external experts or other entities within government. In Italy, for example, the Training Policy Service within the Human Resource Department provided specialised training in areas such as digital transition, anti-corruption, smart working, as well as legal, administrative and accounting requisites. According to survey results, the private sector was also a primary partner in several countries (i.e. Belgium, France, Jordan, Morocco and Thailand) for the provision of capacity building on highly technical areas such as audience segmentation, data science, storytelling, social listening and impact evaluation (Box 2.12). As will be discussed in the next section, Public Administration Academies are becoming key partners for the delivery of relevant, ongoing and formal curricula to support communication-related professional development efforts. These trends are particularly relevant for the health sector, where only 9 out of 22 MHs indicated to have a dedicated structure, team or individual in charge of training. Indeed, findings point to most efforts being provided by private sector organisations or another entity within government.

Box 2.12. Partnerships with private sector firms for public communication training in Belgium and France

Belgium

In Belgium, the UBA Academy, a private sector initiative for both private companies and public institutions, offers several trainings, master classes, workshops and communication management classes on themes ranging from content marketing, agency management, B2B, paid media, strategy and branding, public affairs and regulation. The trainings are also offered on three different levels: advanced, beginner and expert. More than 300 training courses, tools, coaching and support for civil servants and federal organisations are also available through the Federal Public Service Strategy and Support (BOSA). The themes of the courses include leadership, administrative matters, communication, IT, organisational management, languages and well-being.

France

In France, the private sector is a primary partner for the provision of public communication training and capacity building. Indeed, public communication professionals benefit from workshops delivered by specialised firms. For example, trainings are provided by the CELSA-Sorbonne University (l'école des Hautes Études en Sciences de l'information et de la Communication), a communication and journalism school, in the areas of brand content and evaluation, whereas les Gobelins, a school of visual communication and arts, provides capacity building for Photoshop, InDesign, and multichannel communication. Finally, the National Audiovisual Institute (l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel), a repository of French radio and television audio-visual archives, provides training on audio-visual skills.

Source: Author's own work, based on France's responses to the CoG survey.

After attracting and developing a skilled public communication workforce, governments must also be ready to offer relevant professional development opportunities to retain talent and ensure a culture of ongoing learning (OECD, 2017^[23]). This is especially relevant in the context of the public communication profession, where high turnover can be a threat in systems with a large share of politically appointed staff and in those suffering from frequent government reshuffles (OECD, 2021^[26]). Staff turnover can also be a pressing issue for small teams where a single individual is charged with multiple functions or holds highly technical expertise that cannot be easily transmitted throughout the organisation. Similar to other countries in the LAC region, the Government of Brazil's public communication strategy (2019-20) identified in its SWOT analysis the issue of staff retainment as a priority weakness to address.

To mitigate these risks, countries can invest in a variety of professional development opportunities. Firstly, various countries (e.g. Canada, France and the United Kingdom) recognised high-impact campaigns and celebrated innovative practices through yearly award ceremonies. Giving visibility to impactful initiatives not only allows to disseminate best practices, reward and incentivise outstanding performance, but it can also help garner buy-in from senior officials to further invest in the profession. Secondly, continuous learning through performance evaluation and appraisal is a key element for motivating teams and identifying capacity gaps. In Thailand, for example, communication units are monitored and evaluated against progress on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), according to survey results. Third, the establishment of a dedicated competency framework defines clear opportunities for vertical and horizontal career progression as well as means for professional development in terms of training and skills. Together, these types of mechanisms can aid in nurturing talent and setting professional standards for a highly capable public communication workforce able to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Empowering a skilled public communication workforce for the future

As digital technologies accelerate the rate of change in the public communication profession, governments must develop the capacity to continuously adapt and innovate. It is no longer sufficient to establish a dedicated team, but rather, it is critical to modernise the skills and resources available to futureproof the profession (namely, anticipating and planning reactions to potential changes). Doing so allows the public service to better harness opportunities for innovation and respond to emerging challenges in an ever-changing digital landscape. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have particularly accentuated the relevance of empowering public communicators with the right tools and competencies in efforts to build resilience to external shocks and ensure the continuity of operations with social, economic and political activity migrating to the online sphere.

Achieving a fit-for-purpose public communication workforce is critical for unlocking the potential of digital technologies and data for the establishment of a two-way dialogue with the public. The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector offers a three-pillar approach for “guiding the public sector to acquire digital talent and equip public servants with digital skills” (OECD, 2021^[27]). While there are no simple solutions, OECD evidence reveals an ample diversity of practices in OECD and partner countries to empower skilled public communication services in today’s digital intensive environment.

A means for OECD and partner countries to build capabilities within digital communication teams is through the provision of technical training delivered by public sector academies or external providers. According to survey results, in Australia, Belgium, France and Morocco private sector firms have been commissioned to provide training on online brand content, social media monitoring, Photoshop, data science and other relevant expertise areas. In line with OECD Recommendations, the Ministry of State for Media Affairs within the Prime Minister’s Office in Jordan is collaborating with expert civil society organisations in the field to design a comprehensive capacity-building programme for the national network of spokespeople, in which digital capabilities are a core component (OECD, forthcoming, 2021). The Government of Italy complemented training efforts on relevant regulation and social media courses by exposing public communicators to congresses, technical webinars and case studies highlighting good practice. Training programmes are also being delivered through public sector academies in Austria, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (Box 2.13). These programmes have been particularly relevant in promoting the reach, relevance and sustainability of professional development opportunities across all levels of government.

Box 2.13. Public sector academies in OECD countries with a public communication curricula

Austria

In Austria, tailored training is available at the Federal Academy of Public Administration and through on-demand contracted specialists. The Academy offers a wide variety of public communication seminars from how to formulate messages in the most concise and understandable manner to how to reach a target group sustainably. Amongst the different fields of interest, the Academy offers seminars focused on search engine optimisation, writing, tips and tricks for social media, copywriting, media training, the art of free speech, and crisis communications. Another topic covered is neurolinguistics programming, through an in-depth seminar explaining what natural language processing is and how to practice it efficiently.

United Kingdom

Through its vision to build professional standards across government, the *Government Communication Service Academy* in the United Kingdom aims to improve the performance of communicators and help build their careers through a robust offer of trainings and online resources.

The Professional Standards Team works with the heads of each communication discipline to design and deliver relevant development and training opportunities. Through its online and day courses, the academy provides workshops on themes such as campaign excellence; understanding disinformation; crisis communication; behavioural insights; and presenting with impact. It makes its offer readily available to communicators through an online site centralising all upcoming workshops. The academy also collaborates with external professional bodies, such as the Public Relations Consultants Association and the Market Research Society to expand its offer of webinars and learning resources.

In 2018, the GCS set up the Accelerate programme to offer industry-leading professional development, consultancy, and training across government and ensure that GCS is leading the way digitally. Notably, the programme drove innovation and allowed communication professionals to commit time, resources, and energy for personal and team upskilling. By 2019, the programme offered over 500 learning opportunities, published a podcast and developed relationships with partners, including Facebook.

Source: Author's own work, based on responses to the 2020 OECD Public Communication Survey.

Other practices are emerging to foster digital communication capabilities for internal knowledge exchange and team building through informal coaching programmes and peer-to-peer learning efforts. According to survey results, the German Press and Information Office, for example, established a partnership programme for on-the-job experience sharing through informal settings such as bingo events and brown bag lunches where workmates provide insights into current issues and onboard new members. It also developed new open space work areas for the digital editorial office (Redaktion Digital) for knowledge and ideas to flow easily between colleagues. In Thailand, the Government benefits from a peer-to-peer coaching system that foster cross fertilisation between communication teams to respond to future digital trends. In Canada, public communicators are also provided development opportunities, such as assignments, rotational acting, job shadowing, mentoring, and ongoing learning opportunities. These mechanisms can be particularly attractive in countries where a lack of financial resources, or the ad hoc and low supply of training, may inhibit competency building for a digitally enabled civil service.

Efforts in some countries also benefit from communities of practice dedicated to digital communication at both the technical and strategic level to build expertise and foster the exchange of good practices. Thematic networks of public communicators in Canada, Belgium and the United Kingdom meet on a regular basis to exchange good practices and lessons learned on technical issues such as data management, social media use and online storytelling (see Box 2.14). At the strategic level in Norway, the network of heads of communication organise weekly meetings to align overarching priorities and streamline a unified digital communication presence. OECD survey results also revealed that the Government of Paraguay similarly established a network of public communication directors and front-line employees to define priorities and co-ordinate around communication on social media and other channels.

Box 2.14. Digital communication communities of practice in OECD and partner countries

Canada

In Canada, the Communications Community Office (CCO), operating within the Privy Council Office, provides overarching advice, support and information on the function of communications, as well as information and career planning services to communicators across the federal government. The CCO is in charge of co-ordinating the Communications Communities of Practice (COPs), which are thematic networks driven by federal communicators with targeted specialties, including those on digital communication such as digital analytics, social media use, natural language processing and others. This community-led structure allows members to share best digital communication tools, relevant trends and information, discuss common challenges, and exchange new practices.

United Kingdom

The Digital Centre of Expertise (DCOE) is a cross-government forum managed by the central Government Communication Service (GCS) Digital Content team, an open to all central government Heads of Digital. The forum ensures continuous co-ordination and improvement of central government digital content and publishing activity, by hosting monthly sessions for government content and publishing leaders and industry experts to network and exchange best practices.

Source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/communications-community-office.html>; for the United Kingdom practice: Author's own work based on responses to the 2020 OECD Public Communication Survey.

Key findings and way forward

- The governance of the communication function is core to determining whether it will be effective as an instrument for public policy and citizen trust. The policy documents that provide its mandate are a primary avenue for reform for governments seeking to improve how communication can better serve strategic objectives. Indeed, in many countries, the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation are already common across these documents and show the crucial contribution public communication can make to democracy.
- To achieve more effective communication, governments will also benefit from transitioning away from purely tactical approaches and pursuing more strategic ones. This entails increasing the use of communication strategies as blueprints that can concretely guide the execution of the function against its stated mandate. Presently, only a minority of CoGs and MHs make use of these tools.
- Adequate institutional structures are equally essential to the implementation of public communication. In this respect, virtually all respondents demonstrated having dedicated teams and offices in place, with a wide range of formats. This reinforces the finding that the function varies considerably between countries, and there is no single dominant model for how it is organised. Nevertheless, the core responsibility for communication is often located in the CoG, which plays a leading and co-ordinating role in about half of the governments surveyed.
- Co-ordinating public communication activities emerged as both a high priority and the biggest challenge for OECD survey respondents. A number of practices in this area highlight how relevant teams are investing in more cohesive and aligned communication through shared planning tools and dedicated networks and committees. Going forward, governments can seek to achieve greater efficiencies and speak more effectively with one voice by pursuing a truly whole-of-government communication.
- Communication cannot be effective without adequate financial and human resources. As an “under-skilled” and “under-staffed” area, this continues to be a pressing issue in OECD member and non-member countries. Indeed, the lack of human resources and skilled staff was selected by more than three-fourths of CoGs (76%) and MHs (79%) respectively as one of the top three challenges to carrying out core communication functions.
- Enabling a workforce that is equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century calls for public communication to be recognised as more than just a support function, but rather as a core component of policy making and as a profession in itself. Promoting efforts toward the professionalisation of this function will benefit from dedicated trainings, including on new digital trends, and from retaining talent through ongoing learning opportunities and setting good practice standards.
- Future research is needed across all the core themes discussed in this chapter due to their centrality to the communication function. Further unpacking the role of communication strategies emerges as an important priority. Limited evidence is available to this date about how these documents can or have served to drive communication efforts towards policy impact. Moreover, the diverging approaches across different countries to strategies’ design and execution highlight an opportunity to harmonise this area of practice through further enquiry.

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Notes

¹ Policy documents reviewed include: Brazil, Canada, Italy, Estonia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

² ‘Manual de Comunicación: Narrativa de Gobierno del Bicentenario (2018-2022)’, document submitted to the OECD as attachment to the response of Costa Rica’s Presidency to the OECD survey.

³ The OECD received 14 documents of which 10 met the criteria provided in the survey for communication strategies.

⁴ From the survey question these are: communication strategies, communication campaigns, insight gathering, media engagement, digital communications, crisis communications, evaluating communication activities.

⁵ The Belgian CoG noted in its responses to the survey it is notably tasked with the “organisation of events for the Prime Minister, organisation of campaigns at the request of the Council of Ministers or the Prime Minister, provision of information to citizens regarding the federal authorities’ activities and co-ordination of federal initiatives and campaigns”.

⁶ Discussions during the first meeting of the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication on 30 September 2020, highlighted that the pandemic exposed and amplified these difficulties, but also created momentum for strengthening co-ordination (for further details see: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/oecd-experts-group-on-public-communication.htm>).

⁷ See www.systeme-de-design.gouv.fr for more information.

⁸ The OECD Toolkit on Budget Transparency defines budget transparency as being “fully open with people about how public money is raised and used” in a clear, reliable, timely and accessible manner (OECD, 2017_[28]).



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