

## Executive summary

The financial and economic crisis and its aftermath have led many OECD governments to implement structural adjustment plans to restore the health of their public finances. However, trust in governments has declined considerably, as citizens' growing expectations have been hard to address with limited government resources. Between 2007 and 2012, confidence in national governments declined from 45% to 40% on average, making it difficult for national authorities to mobilise support for necessary reforms.

A new approach to public governance is needed if governments are to meet citizens' expectations with the limited means at hand. This approach should be built around creating strategic capacity, strong institutions, effective instruments and processes and clear measurable outcomes. The indicators presented in *Government at a Glance 2013* show how far OECD countries have progressed towards developing that strategic state.

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### Key findings

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- **Public finance challenges remain, despite the significant efforts made by countries to restore financial health.** The OECD has produced estimates of improvements in the underlying primary balances that would be required to reduce gross public debt to 60% of GDP by 2030. On average, in OECD member countries, an increase of around 3% of potential GDP is needed from the fiscal position in 2012. However, several OECD countries continue to face rising public debt-to-GDP ratios, with government spending on average in 2011 outstripping revenues. This was partly due to the cost of stimulus packages and stagnant revenues because of the crisis, as well as increases in ageing-related spending.
- **Countries have adopted new budgetary practices and developed new governance institutions.** Changes in the global economic governance framework, which were necessary as existing mechanisms proved ineffective to maintain fiscal discipline, are driving countries to refine the current tools and implement new strategies. For instance, 97% of OECD countries currently have fiscal rules in place and the average number of rules per country has increased. Between 2009 and 2013, eight countries established Independent Fiscal Institutions to promote fiscal discipline, generate economic information and ensure that resources are allocated where they will be the most useful.
- **Public employment levels tend to remain stable over the longer term.** General government employment remained relatively unchanged between 2001 and 2011, at just under 16% of the total labour force. This figure is relatively small when compared to average government expenditures, which represented 45.4 % of GDP in 2011, showing the important role of outsourcing. Despite the fact that several OECD countries announced recruitment freezes and employment reductions as part of their fiscal consolidation plans, significant reductions in public employment are hard to sustain in the long run, as citizens demands keep growing.

- **Further mechanisms are needed to close the public sector gender gap.** Governments have taken a variety of steps to guarantee equal opportunities for their female and male employees, such as implementing recruitment and promotion targets as well as measures to facilitate greater work-life balance. However, data show that women occupy more than 50% (in certain cases, nearly 90%) of secretarial positions, but they are far less represented in more senior posts. Measures to correct such disparities include, for example, gender responsive budgeting (GRB), which inserts a gender perspective into all stages of the budgetary cycle. It aims to avoid “gender-blind spending” and to make government programmes more effective by identifying gender-disproportionate consequences of spending appropriations. However, less than half of OECD countries have instituted GRB.
- **Countries are using public procurement more strategically.** Many OECD countries are using innovative procurement tools to achieve economies of scale (94% use framework agreements, for example), restructuring their purchasing functions, consolidating their purchases and adopting ICTs in the procurement process (97% use a national e-procurement system for calls for tender). Moreover, many OECD members use public procurement policies not only to foster value for money but also to pursue other policy objectives such as innovation, sustainable growth (73% promote green procurement), SMEs (70% promote the use of SMEs) and a level playing field to access economic opportunities.
- **Asset and private interest disclosure by decision makers continues to be an essential tool for managing conflict of interest.** Nearly all countries require decision makers to make public their assets and income sources. However, few countries require the disclosure of previous employment and liabilities.
- **Open Government Data (OGD) is gaining importance as a governance tool.** Just over half of OECD countries have a national strategy for providing OGD to citizens; 12% indicate the existence of separate strategies in this field for individual line ministries, and 28% have both national and lower level strategies. Key OGD priorities include transparency and openness, volume increase for private sector business and creation of new businesses. In addition, the potential of OGD to improve service delivery is well understood by countries; however its potential impact on citizen engagement in public debates and in the decision-making process does not appear among the top priorities.
- **Citizens have more confidence in the public services they use than in the abstract notion of national government.** Despite diminishing trust in “government”, citizens report being pleased with the services provided by governments. For instance, on average 72% reported having confidence in their local police force. Almost the same percentage considered themselves satisfied with the availability of quality health care, and 66% were satisfied with the education system and schools in their city or area. Levels of satisfaction remained fairly consistent, on average, during and immediately following the global financial and economic crisis.
- **Governments in OECD countries are increasingly concerned with delivering quality public goods and services to a wide range of citizens.** Many countries are introducing service delivery performance standards and implementing mechanisms to measure and integrate citizen feedback into the process. For the first time, *Government at a Glance* compares four dimensions of service quality – affordability, responsiveness, reliability and citizens’ satisfaction – not only among countries, but also across the key public services of education, health care, justice and tax administration.



**From:**  
**Government at a Glance 2013**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
[https://doi.org/10.1787/gov\\_glance-2013-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2013-en)

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2013), "Executive summary", in *Government at a Glance 2013*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/gov\\_glance-2013-3-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2013-3-en)

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