

Roles and responsibilities of the centres of government

The centre of government (CoG), also known as the Cabinet Office, Office of the President, Privy Council, General Secretariat of the Government, among others, is the structure that supports the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers (i.e. the regular meeting of government ministers). The CoG includes the body that serves the head of government and the Council, as well as the office that specifically serves the head of government (e.g. Prime Minister's Office).

The scope of the responsibilities assigned to such a structure varies largely among countries. In Greece, the CoG is responsible for 11 functions, including communication with the public, policy formulation and analysis. In Ireland and Japan, only the preparation of cabinet meetings falls entirely under CoG responsibility. When considering both shared and exclusive tasks, the CoG has the broadest influence in Mexico, the United States and Greece (16 areas of responsibility in total). At the other end of the spectrum, in the Netherlands the centre is responsible for co-ordination and communication functions, but not policy content (e.g. it is not responsible for preparing the government programme or for policy analysis).

All OECD countries assign the preparation of cabinet meetings to the CoG. The preparation of such meetings is mostly co-ordinated through briefings, ministerial committees and inter-ministerial or department meetings.

In addition, CoG is involved in reviewing items submitted to the cabinet. All CoGs ensure that the procedures for preparation and presentation are respected, and the majority also ensure that the item has been subject to an adequate consultation process (e.g. with external stakeholders). In Estonia, the Ministry of Justice is also involved when the items in question is a draft law. In Finland, Japan and Switzerland, the CoG is not involved in reviewing the consultation process. The CoG is responsible for ensuring that the items presented to the cabinet are in line with the programme of the government in 28 countries. In Finland, Japan and Norway, this is the responsibility of the sponsoring ministry.

When reviewing the costing of items, the CoG is the sole responsible in 11 countries, and it shares the task in another 9. The Ministry of Finance is involved in reviewing the costing of items in Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey.

The responsibility for co-ordinating policies across government falls under the CoG in all OECD countries, either alone or together with another body. Four countries (Australia, Estonia, Iceland and Mexico) indicated that the Ministry of Finance is also involved in this task and another four (Ireland, Italy, Norway and Sweden) specified that each ministry is responsible for policy co-ordination. The preferred mechanisms for co-ordinating policies are regular cabinet meetings (mentioned by 28 countries), followed by ad hoc meetings of senior officials

(26 countries). Australia and the Netherlands use a wide range of instruments, including performance management and providing written guidance to ministries. Hungary and Spain, on the other hand, use only regular cabinet meetings for this purpose.

The CoG is involved in strategic planning in all OECD countries, except for Turkey – where the Ministry of Development is mandated with this task. In six countries (Chile, Estonia, Iceland, Lithuania, Mexico and the United Kingdom) the responsibility is shared with the Ministry of Finance.

Transition planning and management falls under the sole responsibility of CoG in 21 countries and is shared with other bodies in another 11. In five of these, each ministry is responsible for briefing the incoming government. Relations with Parliament fall within the scope of CoG responsibilities in all OECD countries. In 16 of them, the CoG is solely responsible for this task. In another 18 countries, this responsibility is shared with other ministries, according to the subject at hand.

Methodology and definitions

The data were collected via the 2017 OECD Survey on Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, to which 34 OECD countries and 4 other economies responded. Respondents were senior officials who provide direct support and advice to heads of government and the council of ministers or cabinet and provided information for the year 2016.

Typical units of the centre of government include the ministry or general secretariat of the presidency, the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet Office, although these functions can in some cases be performed by units based in other parts of the government (e.g. finance, planning, budget office).

Further reading

OECD (2018), *Centre Stage II: The Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government in OECD countries*, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/centre-stage-2.pdf>.

OECD (2014), *Centre Stage: Driving Better Policies from the Centre of Government*, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/Centre-Stage-Report.pdf>.

Figure notes

Data for Korea and Poland are not available. On data for Israel, see <http://doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>. Data for Italy, where available, refer to 2019.

4.3 (Involvement of CoG and other bodies in reviewing items sent to Cabinet) and 4.4 (Mechanisms for co-ordinating policies) are available online in Annex F.

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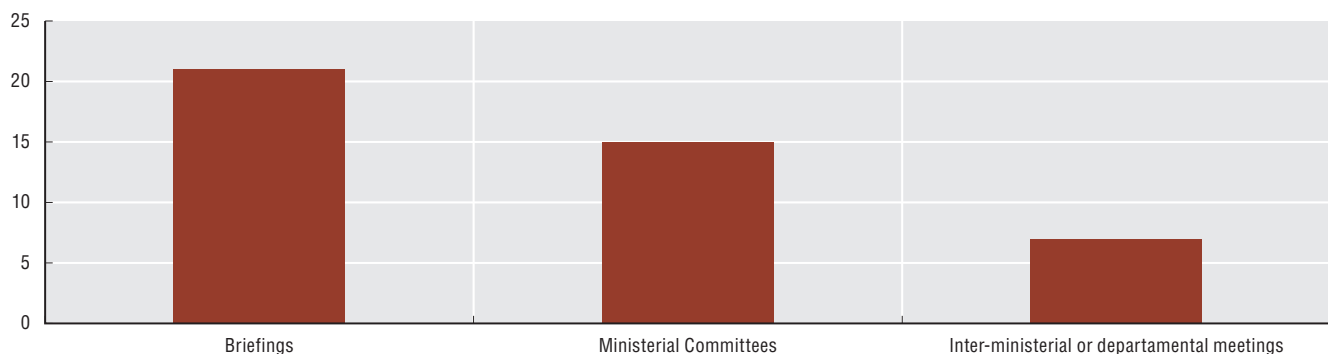
4.1. Responsibilities of the centre of government, 2016

	Preparation of Cabinet meetings	Policy co-ordination	Transition planning and management	Strategic planning	Government programme	Monitoring of government policy	Relations with parliament
Australia	●	◐	◐	●	◐	◐	◐
Austria	●	◐	●	◐	◐	●	◐
Belgium	●	●	◐	●	●	●	◐
Canada	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chile	●	●	◐	◐	◐	●	●
Czech Republic	●	●	●	◐	○	◐	◐
Denmark	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	◐
Estonia	●	◐	●	◐	●	●	●
Finland	●	●	●	●	◐	●	●
France	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
Germany	●	●	●	●	●	●	◐
Greece	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hungary	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Iceland	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	●
Ireland	●	◐	◐	◐	○	◐	◐
Israel	●	●	●	●	◐	●	◐
Italy	●	◐	●	●	●	◐	◐
Japan	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	○	◐
Latvia	●	●	●	●	●	●	◐
Lithuania	●	●	●	◐	●	●	◐
Luxembourg	●	●	●	●	◐	◐	●
Mexico	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐
Netherlands	●	●	◐	●	○	○	◐
New Zealand	●	●	◐	●	●	●	●
Norway	●	◐	●	◐	◐	○	◐
Portugal	●	●	○	●	◐	◐	●
Slovak Republic	●	●	◐	●	●	●	●
Slovenia	●	●	◐	◐	◐	●	●
Spain	●	◐	●	●	●	◐	●
Sweden	●	◐	●	●	●	◐	◐
Switzerland	●	◐	◐	●	●	●	◐
Turkey	●	●	●	○	●	◐	●
United Kingdom	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	●
United States	●	●	●	●	◐	◐	◐
OECD Total							
● Responsibility of the CoG	34	24	21	20	18	16	16
◐ Shared between CoG and another body	0	10	11	13	12	15	18
○ Responsibility of another body	0	0	1	1	4	3	0
Brazil	●	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	●
Costa Rica	●	●	●	●	◐	●	●


Source: OECD (2017), OECD Survey on Organisation and functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032130>

4.2. Instruments to co-ordinate discussion of Cabinet agenda items prior to meeting, 2016



OECD (2017), OECD Survey on Organisation and functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032149>



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