OPEN GOVERNMENT FOR STRONGER DEMOCRACIES:
AN INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Highlights

OECD

1 REINFORCING DEMOCRACY THROUGH OPEN GOVERNMENT

Open government can be a powerful catalyst strengthening democracy, public trust, and inclusive growth. In 2017, 43 countries adopted the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, which outlines a set of ten provisions to enhance government transparency, government accountability, citizen and stakeholder participation and protection of civic space. The report Open Government for Stronger Democracy: A Global Assessment provides a detailed account of how countries are applying the Recommendation and indicates the way forward.
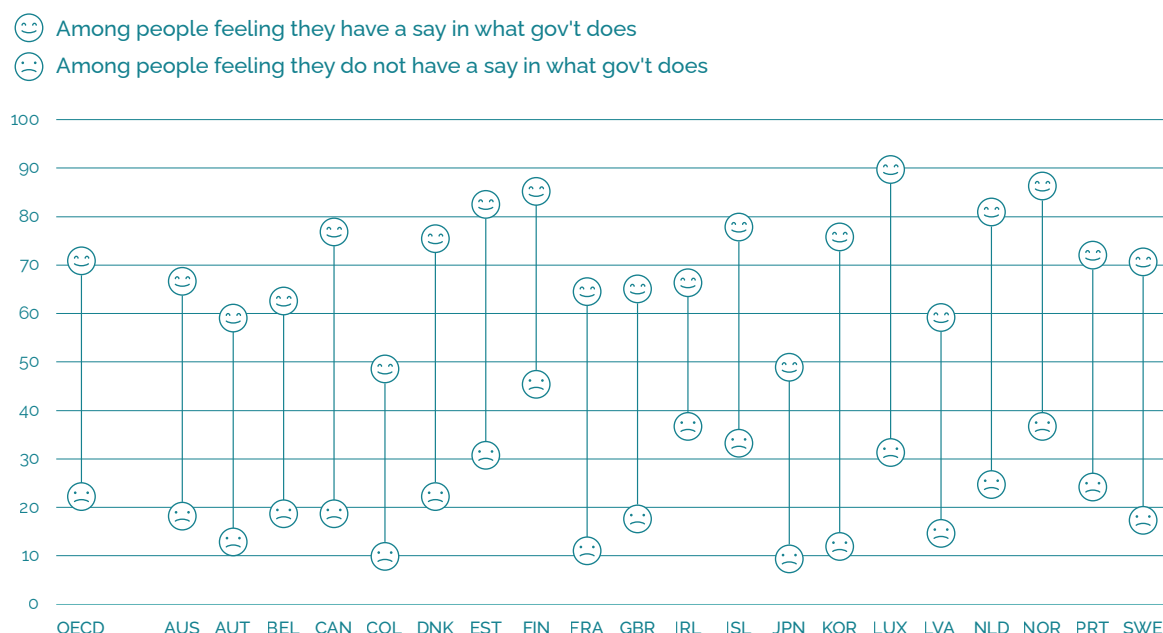
INTRODUCTION

The world faces an era of multiple crises that have the potential to undermine the resilience of our democratic systems. In recent years, OECD countries have been exposed to various shocks to their social and economic stability, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, the energy shock, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Governments have been instrumental in responding to these shocks, but many citizens have doubts about their government's preparedness to address them. As shown in the results of the 2021 OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, only 41.4% of citizens across OECD countries have high or moderately high trust in their national government (OECD, 2022*[1]*). Roughly half of citizens (49.4%) believe that their government would be prepared in the event of a pandemic and only 35.5% of citizens are confident that their country will succeed in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years.

The results of the OECD Trust Survey confirm that open government policies and practices can be among the key drivers of citizens' confidence in their government. People who feel they have a say in what the government does report higher trust in government (Figure 1.1), highlighting that governments must do better, both in giving all people a voice and in responding to those voices to meet citizens' evolving expectations (OECD, 2022*[1]*).

Figure 1.1. People have higher trust in government when they feel they have a say in what the government does

Share of respondents reporting they trust the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) by whether they feel they have a say in what the government does, 2021.

☺ Among people feeling they have a say in what gov't does

☹ Among people feeling they do not have a say in what gov't does

Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions: "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, in general how much do you trust the national government?", and "How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?" Shown here is the proportion of respondents that report to trust the national government (response categories 6-10) by whether they feel they have a say in what the government does. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at *http://oe.cd/trust*.

*Source: OECD Trust Survey (**http://oe.cd/trust**)*

Through the 2017 Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (henceforth the Recommendation), OECD Members recognised the vital role of open government policies and practices for strengthening democratic governance (OECD, 2017**[2]**). The Recommendation requires the monitoring of its implementation by the OECD Secretariat three years following its adoption and every five years thereafter. The report 📄 *Open Government for Stronger Democracies: A global assessment* (OECD, 2023**[3]**), published in November 2023, is the first such monitoring report. It builds on the evidence collected through the 2020 OECD Survey on Open Government, the 2021 Perception Survey for Delegates of the OECD Working Party on Open Government (WPOG) as well as numerous country reviews conducted by the OECD over the past years. It covers the progress in the implementation of the ten provisions of the Recommendation across the 43 countries that have adhered to it, highlights common trends and provides recommendations on how to move forward. **These highlights summarise the key findings of the report**.

OPEN GOVERNMENT TO REINFORCE DEMOCRACY

The findings of the OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions indicate that democracy is facing significant challenges in many OECD countries. Governments are seen as unresponsive to people's demands: Only one-third of people (32.9%) think their government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation. On average, only about four in ten respondents say that their government would improve a poorly performing service, implement an innovative idea or change a national policy in response to public demands. Only three in ten say the political system in their country lets them have a say (OECD, 2022*[1]*).

The 📄 *OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative (RDI)* identifies *enhancing representation, participation and openness in public life* as a main challenge for mature democracies. By ensuring inclusive participation and deliberation, protecting civic space and making policymaking more inclusive, public institutions can serve the interests of its citizens better.

2 OPEN GOVERNMENT: A MATURING FIELD

Open government represents a transformative shift towards a new culture of governance, emphasizing government transparency, integrity, accountability and the inclusive participation of citizens and stakeholders. Specific open government policy objectives, however, vary from one country to another, reflecting unique challenges and priorities. The Open Government Partnership (OGP) has played a pivotal role in promoting the implementation of domestic reforms in a range of areas. This section explores the evolution of open government practices, at both national and local level, and how they are becoming part of an integrated policy field.

OPEN GOVERNMENT – AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE OF GOVERNANCE

The OECD Recommendation on Open Government defines open government as "a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth" (OECD, 2017*[2]*). Initiatives to foster open government principles have existed for a long time, but in the past decade countries have started to conceive and implement more holistic and integrated strategies to promote them (OECD, 2022*[4]*).

For example, the 43 countries under consideration in the monitoring report have started crafting their own definitions of the concept of open government, in most cases building on those promoted by the OECD (19 countries, or 61.3% of respondents) or the Open Government Partnership (67.7%). Among the respondents, 28% have one or several official definitions in place, while 72% have one or multiple working definitions and only 17% do not have a definition at all. National definitions mostly associate the concept of open government with transparency (90.5%), accountability (76.2%) and participation (76.2%) (OECD, 2023*[3]*).

While definitions show nuances and variations, countries all share a similar overall goal of making governance more inclusive through open government. For example, when asked about the actions of a state that indicate its level of openness, delegates to the Working Party on Open Government underlined the importance of citizen and stakeholder participation (Figure 2.1), selecting most frequently actions such as "hearing the views of non-public stakeholders when developing policies" (26 out of 32 respondents) and "using the feedback provided by citizens and/or non-governmental stakeholders to improve the functioning of public institutions" (23).

Figure 2.1. Perceived dimensions of state openness

In your opinion, what actions of a state are the best indications of its level of openness?
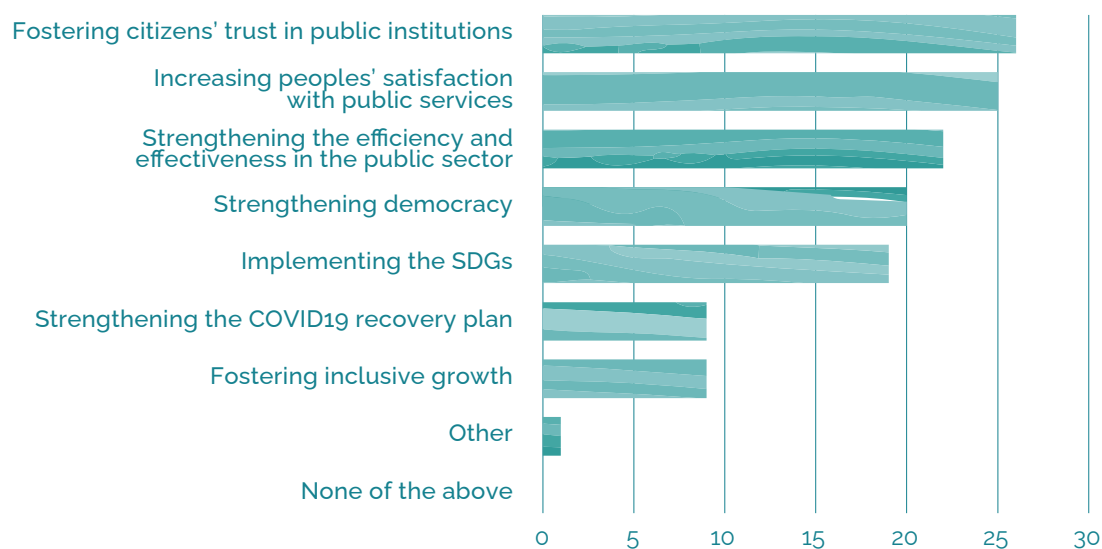

Note: N=32. Multiple selection possible

Source: OECD (2021[6]), Perception Survey for Delegates of the OECD Working Party on Open Government.

OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICY OBJECTIVES VARY ACCORDING TO COUNTRIES' PRIORITIES

Promoting the principles of open government is not an end in itself but relates to concrete policy objectives. Evidence from the 2021 OECD Perception Survey on Open Government shows that, "fostering citizens' trust in public institutions" is the main policy objective in 26 out of 32 respondents, "increasing peoples' satisfaction with public services" appears in 25 cases and "strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector" in 22 (OECD, 2021[5]). Policy objectives such as implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering inclusive growth appeared less frequently in the respondents' answers.

Figure 2.2. The main policy objectives of open government agendas

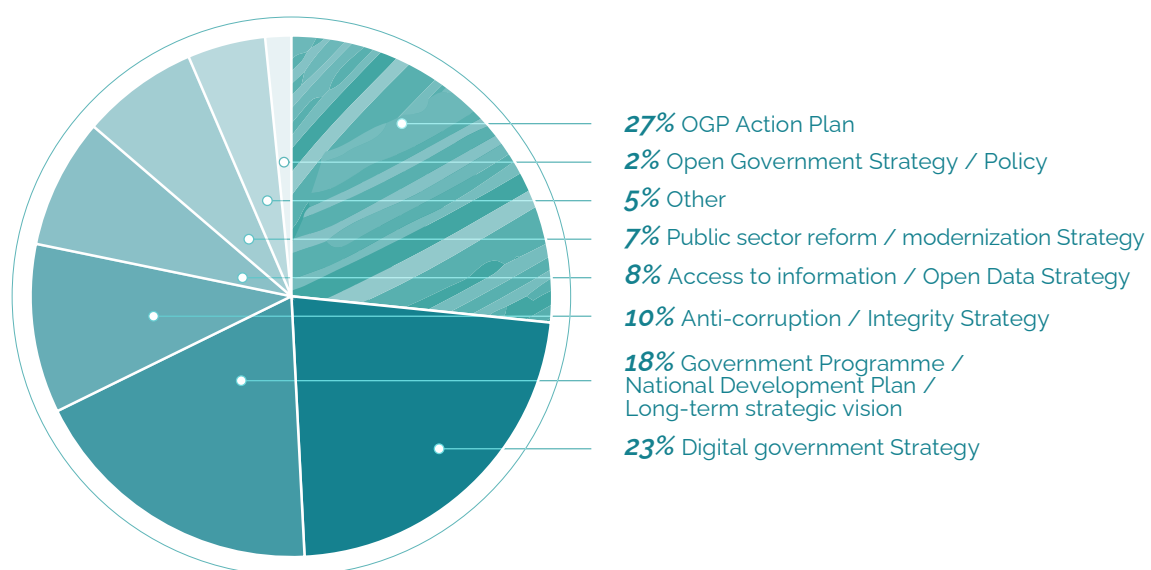With which of the following policy objectives is your government's open government agenda linked?

Note: N=32, multiple selection possible

Source: OECD (2021[6]), Perception Survey for Delegates of the OECD Working Party on Open Government

THE OGP HAS SHAPED NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORKS

34 out of 43 Adherents to the Recommendation on Open Government are part of the Open Government Partnership (OGP)[1]. The 2020 OECD Survey on Open Government (OECD, 2020[4]) asked respondents to identify up to five policies documents that they considered as their countries' "main policy documents promoting the open government principles". Out of the 124 policy documents submitted by 38 respondents, the largest share (27%) was the OGP Action Plans (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Main policy documents promoting open government policies and practices at the level of the central government (up to five per Adherent)

27% OGP Action Plan
2% Open Government Strategy / Policy
5% Other
7% Public sector reform / modernization Strategy
8% Access to information / Open Data Strategy
10% Anti-corruption / Integrity Strategy
18% Government Programme / National Development Plan / Long-term strategic vision
23% Digital government Strategy

Note: Data is shown as % of policy documents. Based on 124 policy documents by 38 Adherents

Source: OECD (2020[7]), 2020 Survey on Open Government.

As a consequence, countries' implementation frameworks for open government reforms are often closely associated with their OGP Action Plan cycles. Among the countries under consideration, the OGP Action Plan cycle has served as a catalyst to advance and strengthen the overall implementation of open government initiatives and to produce educational materials, such as toolkits and manuals on relevant laws and regulations, aimed at spreading open government literacy. Overall, for most countries under consideration, their OGP Action Plan has been the first and main attempt to cluster a wide range of initiatives under the umbrella of open government.

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1   The Open Government Partnership is an international partnership between governments and civil society to promote open government. Launched in 2011 by eight countries, the OGP currently consists of more than 75 countries around the world, a growing number of local governments as well as numerous civil society organisations. Upon joining this partnership, governments work together with civil society organisations to develop and implement two-year Action Plans that include concrete commitments to foster the open government principles.
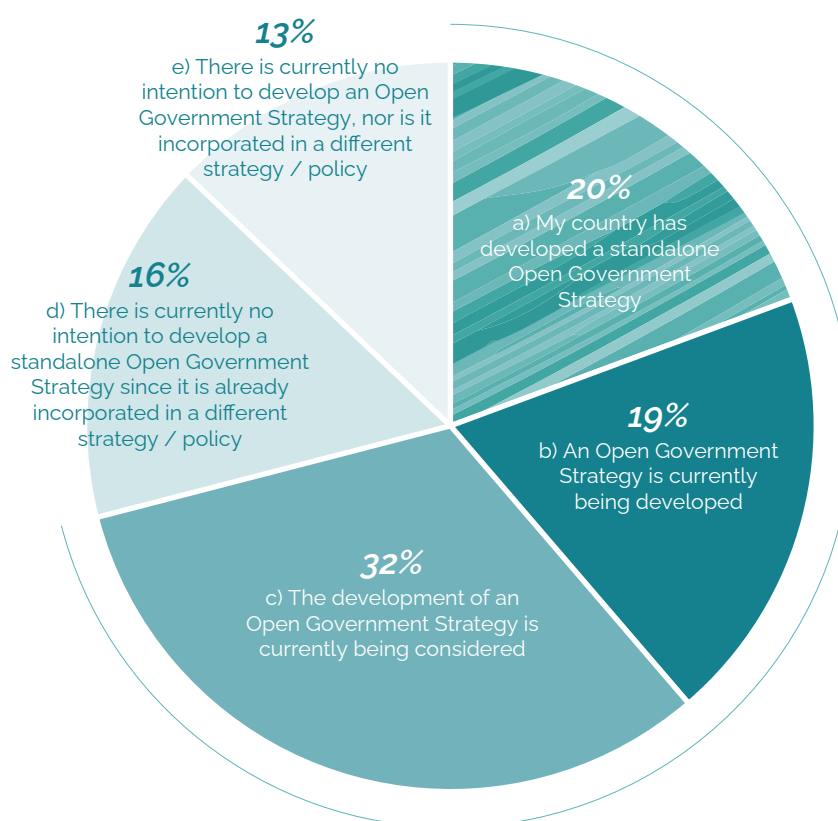
OPEN GOVERNMENT IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING AN INTEGRATED POLICY FIELD

In most responding countries, OGP Action Plans have traditionally served as the main framework for advancing and executing open government reforms and initiatives. OGP Action Plans constitute action-oriented series of priority initiatives focusing mainly on short-term policy issues. However, an emerging trend involves the development of more holistic, integrated, and long-term open government agendas, as evidenced by the increasing interest in standalone Open Government Strategies at the Central/Federal level (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Current and planned development of a standalone Open Government Strategy for the Central/Federal Government

Has your country developed or is your country planning to develop a standalone Open Government Strategy for the Central/Federal Government?

13%
e) There is currently no intention to develop an Open Government Strategy, nor is it incorporated in a different strategy / policy

16%
d) There is currently no intention to develop a standalone Open Government Strategy since it is already incorporated in a different strategy / policy

20%
a) My country has developed a standalone Open Government Strategy

19%
b) An Open Government Strategy is currently being developed

32%
c) The development of an Open Government Strategy is currently being considered

Note: N=32

Source: OECD (2021[5]), Perception Survey for Delegates of the OECD Working Party on Open Government.

3 THE GOVERNANCE OF OPEN GOVERNMENT: LAWS, POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Open government policies and practices are often incorporated into constitutional and legal frameworks, providing a clear mandate for reforms in these areas. Dedicated open government offices now oversee a broad range of initiatives across various sectors. Co-ordination mechanisms have also evolved, becoming more integrated and expanding their scope and responsibilities. Additionally, Multi-Stakeholder Forums (MSFs) play a pivotal role in facilitating collaboration with non-public stakeholders. To ensure that both public officials and stakeholders possess the necessary knowledge and skills to engage effectively, efforts to promote open government literacy are underway in most countries. This section explores all the topics above, alongside the emergence of digital government tools to facilitate open government initiatives.

OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES ARE ENSHRINED IN CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

National legal and regulatory frameworks build the basis for any country's open government agenda. Enshrining open government policies and practices in constitutions, laws and regulations ensures their institutionalisation, provides public officials with a clear mandate, and gives stakeholders a means to hold governments accountable.

Evidence collected through the OECD Open Government Reviews shows that the underlying constitutional, legal and regulatory basis for the promotion of open government policies and practices is broad. Today, most of the countries under consideration have included references to the principles of open government and associated specific rights and obligations in their constitutional law, often covering access to information (Figure 3.1), certain aspects of citizen participation (e.g. referenda) and the protection of civic space (e.g. freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly). Since constitutions are the foundation of law and regulation making and are modified rarely, this finding indicates that there is a solid basis for the development of open government agendas across respondents.

Figure 3.1. Countries with the right to access information enshrined in their constitutions, 2020.
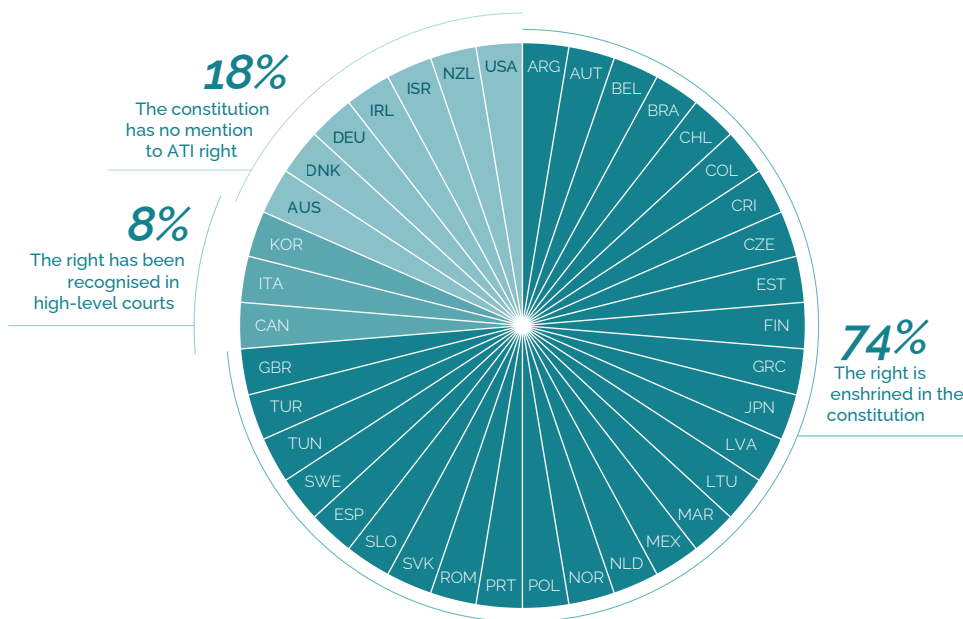
Note: Preliminary data up to 24 April 2022. In the case of the United Kingdom, which does not have a written constitution, a series of acts are considered to be its equivalent. The Human Rights Act 1998 is one of these. Article 10 of the act mentions the right to information as part of the right to freedom of expression: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers." No data available for France, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

Source: OECD (2020[6]) 2020 Survey on Open Government and the Global Right to Information Rating.

Laws and regulations exist on open government topics, such as access to information, or the involvement of stakeholders in law-making, regulatory policy and other specific policy processes (e.g. environment, infrastructure, land use) (OECD, 2022[4]). Moreover, a small number of national (and subnational) governments have established dedicated regulatory documents – often directives or decrees – to clarify obligations of public authorities and rights of citizens and stakeholders related to open government as a whole (e.g. United States, Canada and the Autonomous Community of Extremadura in Spain) (Box 3.1) (OECD, 2020[7]). The presence of these new pieces of legislation or regulation highlights the increasing interest of countries in mainstreaming open government practices across a range of policy domains.

> **Box 3.1. Integrated regulatory documents on open government**
>
> 🇺🇸 In 2009, the Office of Management and Budget of the United States issued an Open Government Directive to create and institutionalise a culture of open government across the US federal government.
>
> 🇨🇦 The Directive on Open Government of Canada from 2014 applies to all federal government departments and promotes actions to support transparency, accountability, citizen engagement and socio-economic benefits.
>
> 🇪🇸 The Open Government Law of 2013 of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura (Spain) details concrete measures to foster openness across different institutions of the regional government.
>
> *Source: OECD (2022[4])*

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES HAVE EXPANDED

For countries that are OGP Members, the open government agenda is often coordinated by an Open Government Office, which is usually the result of the evolution from the initial role of OGP's Point of Contact (PoC). The OGP PoC is often part of an office that co-ordinates a range of open government initiatives that cut across the entire executive at national level. Countries that are not part of the OGP usually do not have such an institutional arrangement. Nevertheless, many of them have a government office which concentrates core responsibilities for the promotion of open government initiatives. Specifically, 33.3% of Open Government Offices are situated in the President's or Prime Minister's office while 24.2% are in the Ministry of Public Administration/Modernisation/Planning and 21.2 % are in line ministries.

Responsibilities of Open Government Offices have expanded over time. In some of the countries under consideration, the open government agenda was initially coordinated by government institutions tasked with specific policies such as digital transformation and anti-corruption programmes. Nowadays, the Ministries in which Open Government Offices are placed commonly have a broader range of responsibilities relating to open government. For example, public sector reform and modernisation is most frequently part of the portfolio (81.2%, 26 out of 32 offices), followed by open government data (71.9%), public sector innovation, citizen participation (both 68.8%) and digital government (65.6%) (Figure 3.2).

In some countries, Open Government Offices that were initially established for the implementation of the OGP Action Plans have now broader responsibilities. Among them are, for example, open data strategies (Argentina and Portugal), consultation platforms (Portugal) and the developments of guidelines and tools for participatory processes (Slovak Republic) (Box 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Portfolio of Open Government Offices' parent institution/ministry
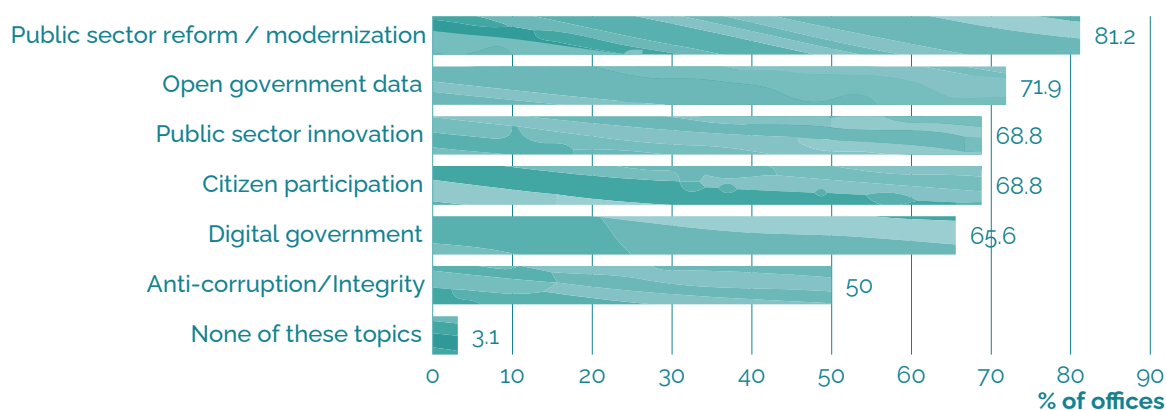
Note: N=33. Multiple selection possible

Source: OECD (2020[7]), 2020 Survey on Open Government

Box 3.2. Responsibilities of Open Government Offices in responding countries

In some countries, the Open Government Offices – initially established to coordinate the design and implementation of the OGP Action Plans – are now also responsible for open government policies and practices, such as fostering the use of open government data or citizen participation across the public sector.

In Argentina, the National Directorate for Open Government, located in the Prime Minister office (Jefatura de Gobierno) is also responsible for the design, implementation and evaluation of the Open Government Strategic Plan (2020-2023), as well as the open data agenda and the coordination of the National Public Data Portal.

In Portugal, the Open Government Office located in the Administrative Modernization Agency (AMA) is also responsible for the country's official open data portal (**dados.gov. pt**) and the consultation portal Simplex on administrative simplification.

The Slovak Republic's Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for the Development of Civil Society is responsible for EU-funded initiatives that strengthen citizen participation. It also cooperates with other ministries as well as with central and local institutions on topics related to open government, such as the fight against corruption.
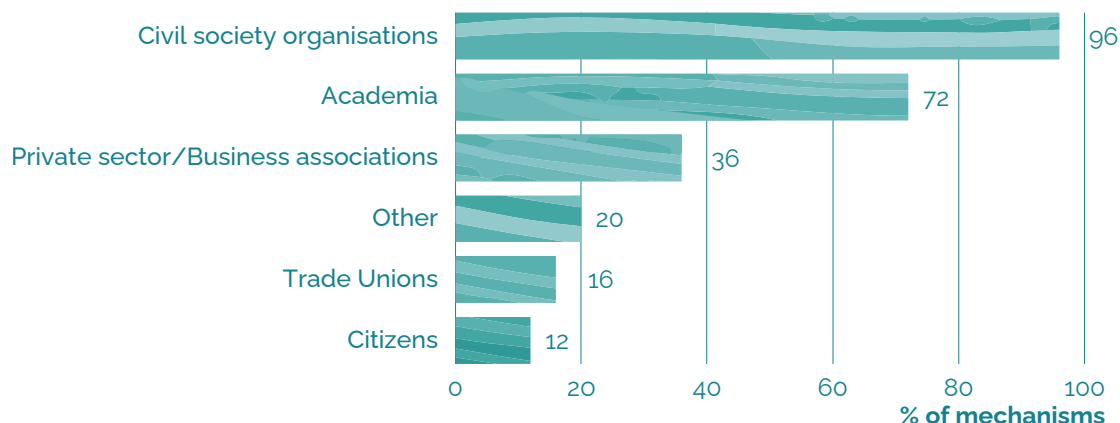
*Source: OECD (2020***[6]***) OECD Survey on Open Government.*

CO-ORDINATION MECHANISMS HAVE BECOME MORE INTEGRATED AND INCREASED THEIR COMPETENCES

Most of the countries under consideration have long-standing institutional co-ordination mechanisms (e.g. Councils, Networks, Committees, etc.) in different areas that have links with or contribute to open government (e.g. mechanisms to co-ordinate open data policies, integrity policies, digital government policies, etc.). 61 out of 111 policy documents (55%) submitted by 37 respondents to the 2020 OECD Survey on Open Government are governed by a mechanism that includes non-public stakeholders.

However, the creation of mechanisms to co-ordinate integrated approaches to open government is a relatively recent trend. The most common form that these mechanisms take is that of a "Multi-Stakeholder Forum" (MSF), a consultative or decision-making body that includes both government and civil society representatives and for which the Open Government Office usually functions as the secretariat. The specific set-up of the MSF can vary from country to country. Non-public stakeholders represented in MSFs are diverse, with civil society organisations being the most represented (present in 80.7% of respondents' MSF), followed by academia (64.9%) and private sector organisations (52.6%) (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Non-public stakeholders represented in countries' OGP Multi-Stakeholder Forum

Note: N=25. Multiple selection possible.

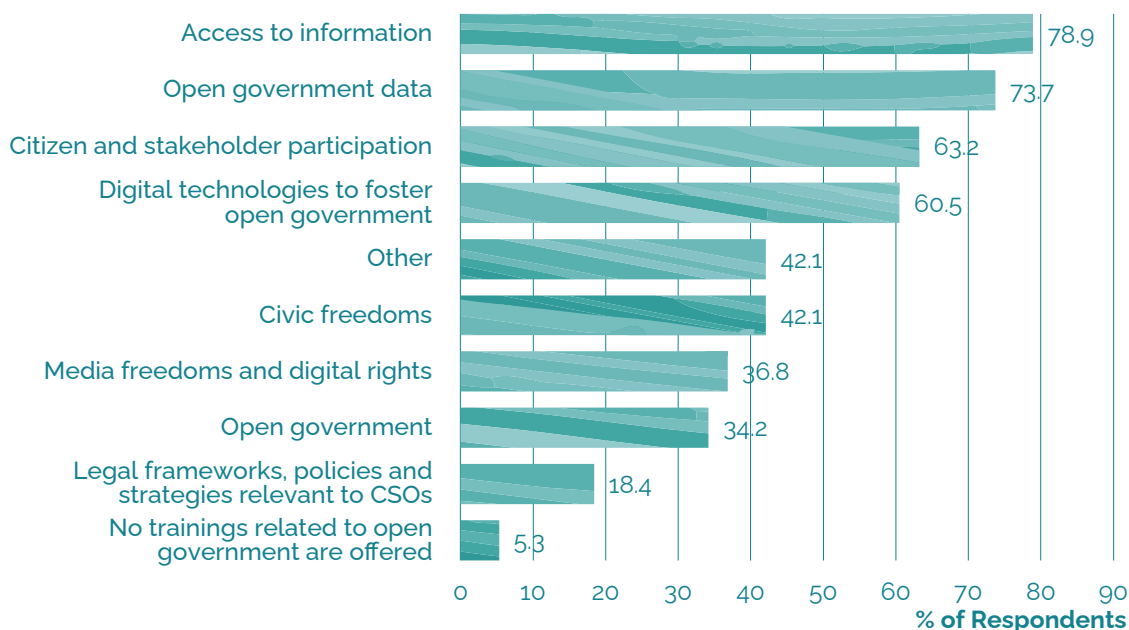*Source: OECD (2020[7]), 2020 Survey on Open Government*
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All MSFs were initially established to fulfil the needs of the OGP Action Plan process. However, in many countries, they started taking over responsibilities for the wider open government agenda, given their usefulness as a general platform for dialogue with non-public stakeholders. Evidence shows that this is already the case for 33.3% of respondents' MSFs (nine out of 27) (OECD, 2020*[6]*).

TOOLS TO PROMOTE OPEN GOVERNMENT LITERACY ARE WIDELY AVAILABLE BUT TEND TO FOCUS ON SPECIFIC OPEN GOVERNMENT AREAS

Open government literacy – understood as the combination of awareness, knowledge, and skills that public officials and stakeholders need to engage successfully in open government strategies and initiatives – is key to transforming a country's culture of governance.

The provision of trainings, courses and capacity-building events can be a way of ensuring that both public officials and non-public stakeholders are better equipped to implement open government initiatives. Trainings on different open government policies and practices are now widely available in many adhering countries (OECD, 2020*[6]*). 78.9% (30 respondents) offer trainings on access to information, followed by trainings on open government data (73.7%, 28 respondents) and on citizen and stakeholder participation (63.2%, 24 respondents). While the number has been growing, for the time being, only 34.2% (13) of respondents have dedicated trainings on Open Government as an integrated policy field (Figure 3.4) (Box 3.3). A similar trend exists in terms of guidelines: only 28.8% of respondents affirm that their central or federal government provides civil servants with guidelines for "Open Government", whereas 89.5% declare that guidelines are available for open government data, 78.9% for citizen and stakeholder participation, 68.4% and 65.8% respectively for reactive and proactive disclosure of information.

Figure 3.4. Available trainings for civil servants at the central/federal government in respondents

Note: Multiple selection possible. N=38.
Categories not displayed: "Legal frameworks, policies and strategies relevant to CSOs", "Other".

Source: OECD (2020[6]), 2020 Survey on Open Government

Box 3.3. Spain's effort to foster open government literacy across the administration and within society

Spain's National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF) developed a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to train primary and secondary school teachers as well as public officials and stakeholders on open government pillars and values. The project was part of a commitment of the OGP Action Plan 2017-2019.

Source: OPSI (2018[8]).

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT TOOLS ARE INCREASINGLY USED TO FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION

Harnessing the potential of digital technologies is essential to expand the scope and the scale of open government policies and practices. The use spans from government communication channels to the creation of digital spaces for citizen and stakeholder participation, for example through participatory portals. Several of the countries under consideration have deployed government-wide participation portals (88.6% of respondents), institution-specific portals (25.7%) and in some cases both. Other types of portals, most commonly dedicated to specific policy documents such as the OGP Action Plan, exist in eight countries (22.9%).

Digital participatory portals deployed by governments are most frequently used to inform about past participation opportunities (70.7%) and to carry out online consultations or citizen engagement (69.5%). It is less common for participation portals to provide information about citizens' rights to participate (32, 39 %), to provide feedback to users on how the government implemented their inputs (27, 32.9%) and to redirect to institutional participation portals (18, 22%) (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5. Functions of participation portals
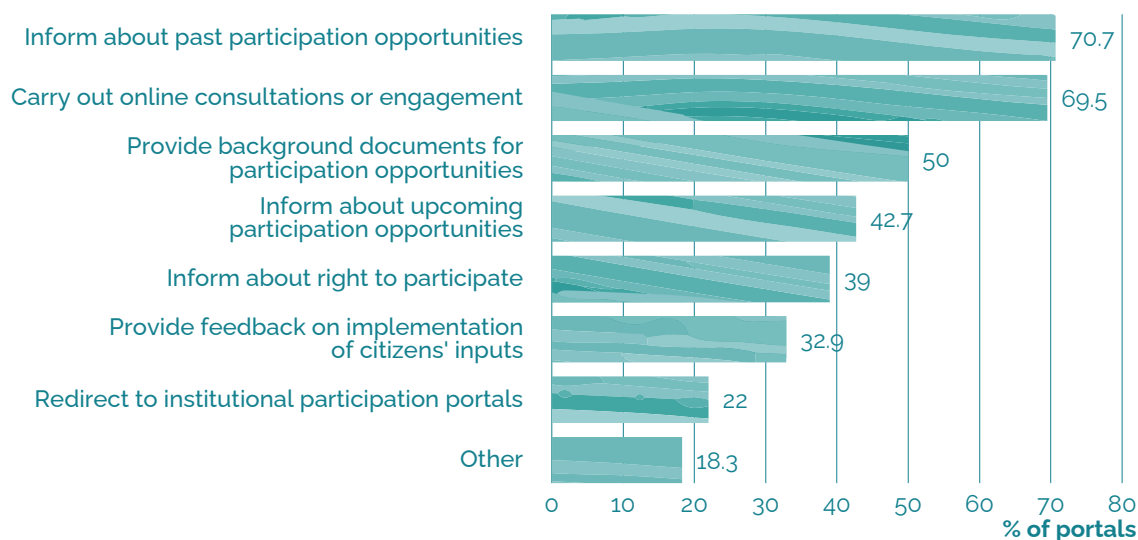
Note: N=35 for 84 portals.

Source: OECD (2020[7]), 2020 Survey on Open Government.

Box 3.4. Examples of Government-wide digital tools for citizen participation

Since 2008, the Government of Iceland has been regularly using the open-source platform Your Priorities to involve citizens in the decision-making process of numerous policies, both at the national and sub-national level.

In 2023, the Government of Brazil adopted Brazil Participativo, a digital platform to enable citizen participation at the federal level. The platform uses the open-source software Decidim, developed in 2016 in Barcelona, Spain. Additionally, the Ministry of Planning and Budget of Brazil has launched a digital participation initiative to involve citizens in the creation of the 2024-2027 Multiannual Plan.

4 FROM PRINCIPLES TO ACTION: A FOCUS ON TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION

Adherents to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government have taken steps forward in ensuring that the ten principles contained in the Recommendation spark tangible change within countries. To this effect, legal, institutional, policy and implementation frameworks for transparency and access to information have been strengthened, ensuring that citizens have easier access to government data and information. Participation and deliberation opportunities are also on the rise, providing citizens with a voice in decision- and policy-making processes. Moreover, there have been remarkable strides in the field of open government data, enabling citizens and organisations to access digital information and data to drive innovation, research and accountability.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION FRAMEWORKS HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED

Laws and regulations on access to public information constitute a key pillar of open government. They have become a common practice among countries and, more in general, are widely diffused in OECD countries (all Members but one now have an ATI law in place) (Figure 4.1)

**Figure 4.1. Evolution of the adoption of access to information laws , 1766-2018**
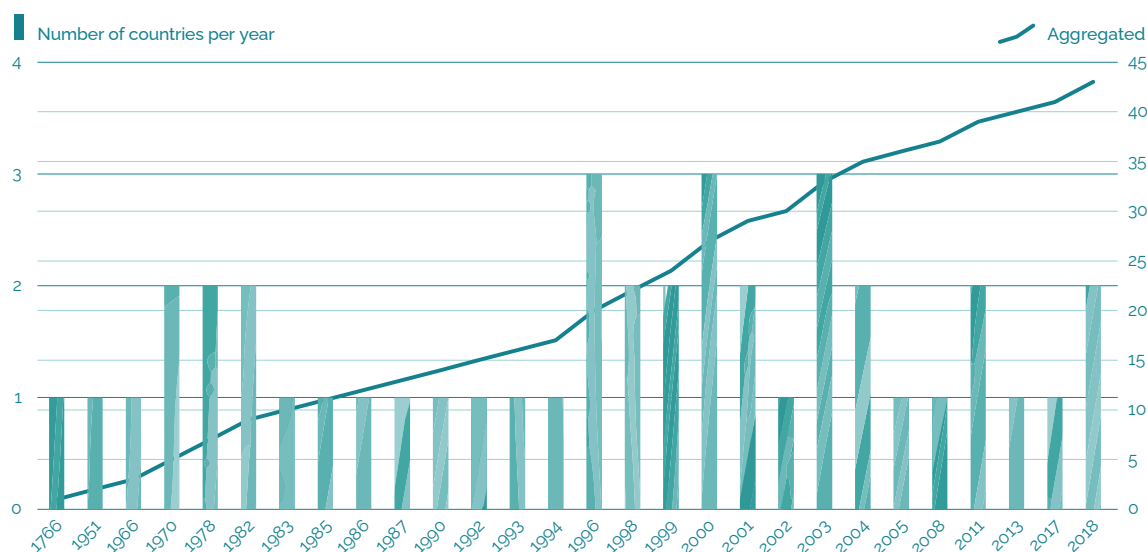
Note: Costa Rica does not have an ATI Law

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on Global Right to Information Rating (n.d.[9]), "By country".

Proactive disclosure – which refers to the act of regularly releasing information without the need for a request by stakeholders – reduces the administrative burden for public officials handling individual ATI requests and favours timely access to public information for citizens and other stakeholders (OECD, 2016[10]). The most disclosed items are those related to the public institution itself: its functions (88% of respondents), the organigram (88% respondents) and the services offered (69% of respondents) (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Information proactively disclosed by central/federal governments as stated in the law or any other legal instrument, 2020
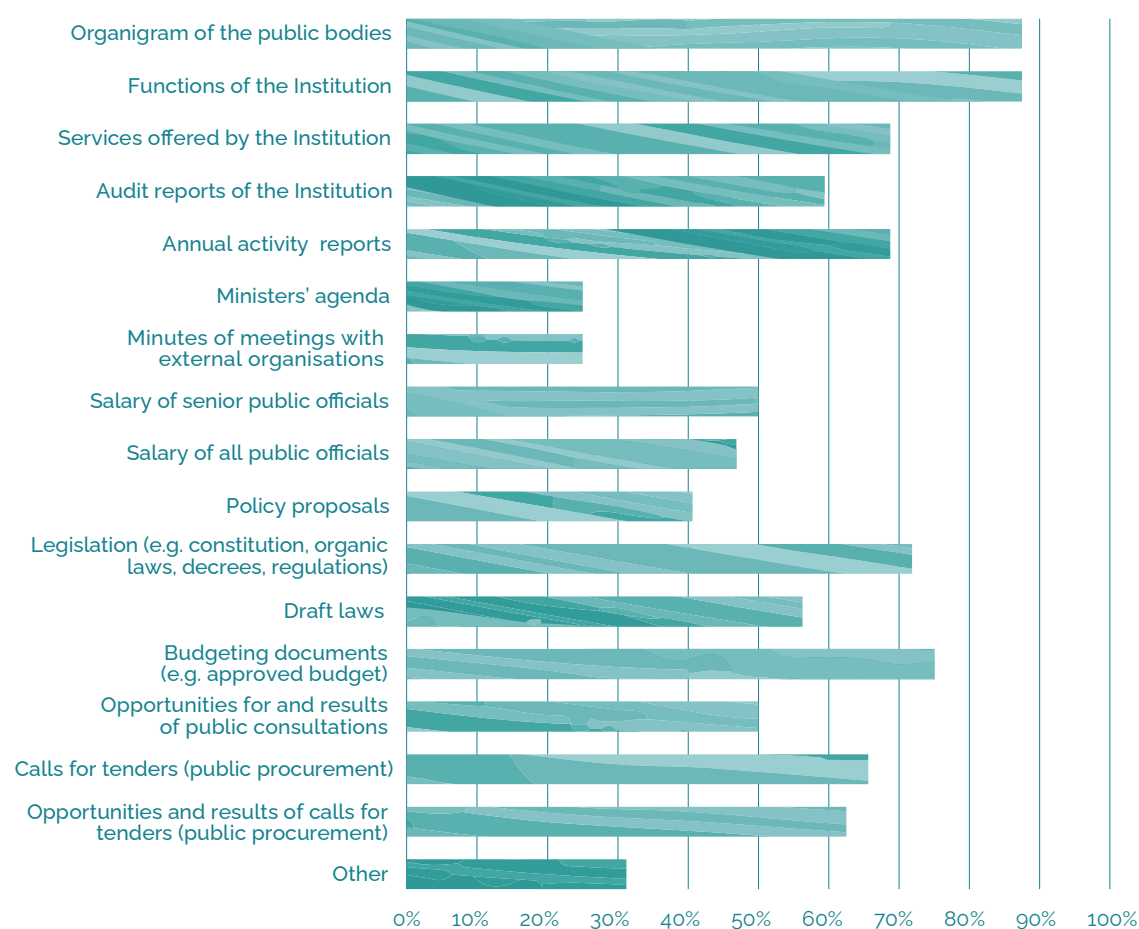
Note: N=32. For Costa Rica, the information relates to the Executive Decree applying to the Executive branch.
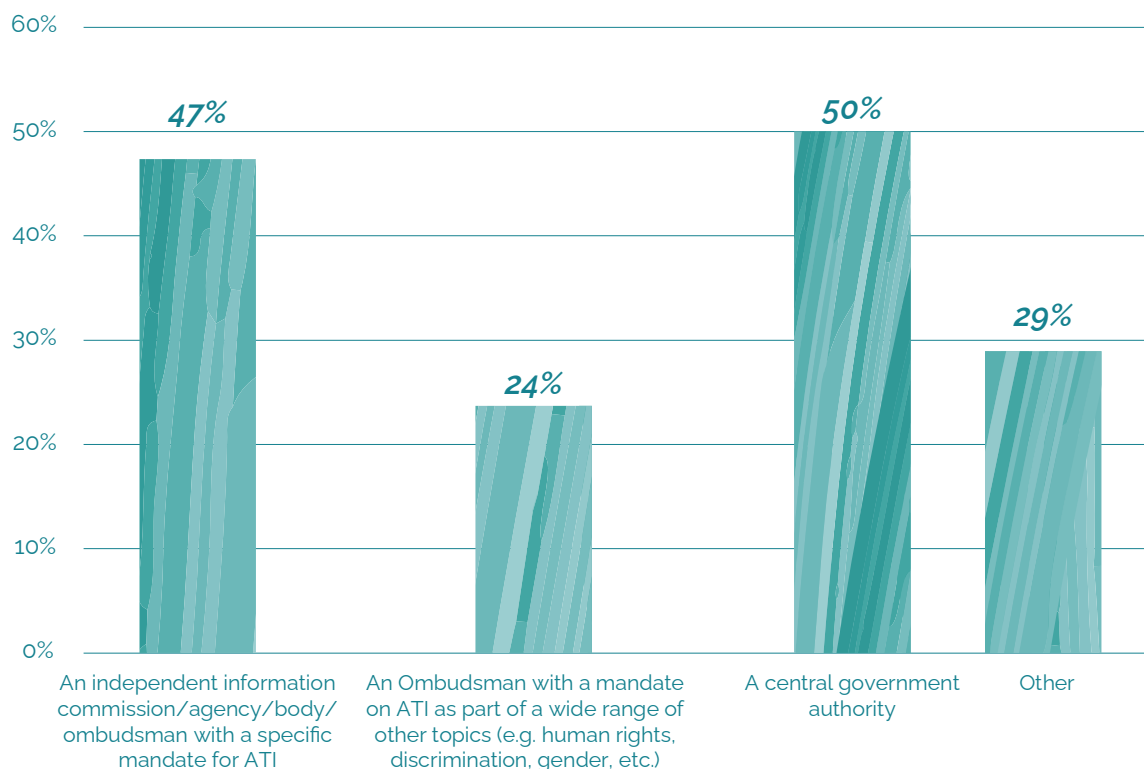
Source: OECD (2020[6]), 2020 Survey on Open Government.

Institutionalised and effective oversight mechanisms are crucial to protect the right to access to information and to ensure the correct implementation of ATI laws and policies. Among the countries under consideration, oversight is performed by independent bodies, either with a specific mandate (independent information commissions, 47% of respondents), as part of a wider remit (Ombudsman institutions protecting human rights in 24% of respondents) or by a central government body (50%) (Figure 4.3). In most cases, multiple oversight bodies are involved. The mandate and responsibilities of these bodies usually cover promotion, monitoring and enforcement of ATI laws. Their independence and enforcement capacity (in terms of human and financial resources), namely to properly detect and sanction non-compliance, is crucial to the effective implementation of ATI.

Figure 4.3. Bodies responsible for the enforcement, monitoring and/or promotion of ATI laws, 2020

Source: OECD (2020[7]), 2020 Survey on Open Government.

# PARTICIPATION AND DELIBERATION OPPORTUNITIES ARE INCREASING BUT COULD BE MORE INCLUSIVE

Citizen and stakeholder participation, defined by the OECD as "all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery" (OECD, 2017[2]), is a key dimension of open government. It aims to complement traditional mechanisms of democratic participation and representation (e.g. the election of representatives in legislative bodies) and deepen the relation between governments and the public they serve throughout the policy cycle and in service design and delivery.

Fostering participation beyond the ballot box is one the main focus areas of countries' open government agendas. Participatory processes, such as the French Grand Débat and the Conversación Nacional in Colombia, showcase exemplarily the ambition of large-scale participatory processes with high visibility in multiple countries under consideration.

Almost all countries under consideration have legislative provisions in place to support citizen and stakeholder participation: 89.5% (34) of respondents have adopted legislation to handle citizen's complaints, 84.2% (32) on the use of direct democracy mechanisms and 78.9% (30) on petitions and other forms of citizen initiatives.

However, countries often do not have specially designated offices with a mandate dedicated to citizen and stakeholder participation. Notably, the availability of dedicated staff in charge of participatory practices varies substantially across countries. 22.9% of respondents (eight out 35) declare that dedicated staff is present in all government ministries at central/federal level, while 17.1% state that this is the case only for up to one quarter of all ministries (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4. Percentage of government ministries at central/federal level with dedicated staff in charge of citizen and stakeholder participation.

% of Respondents
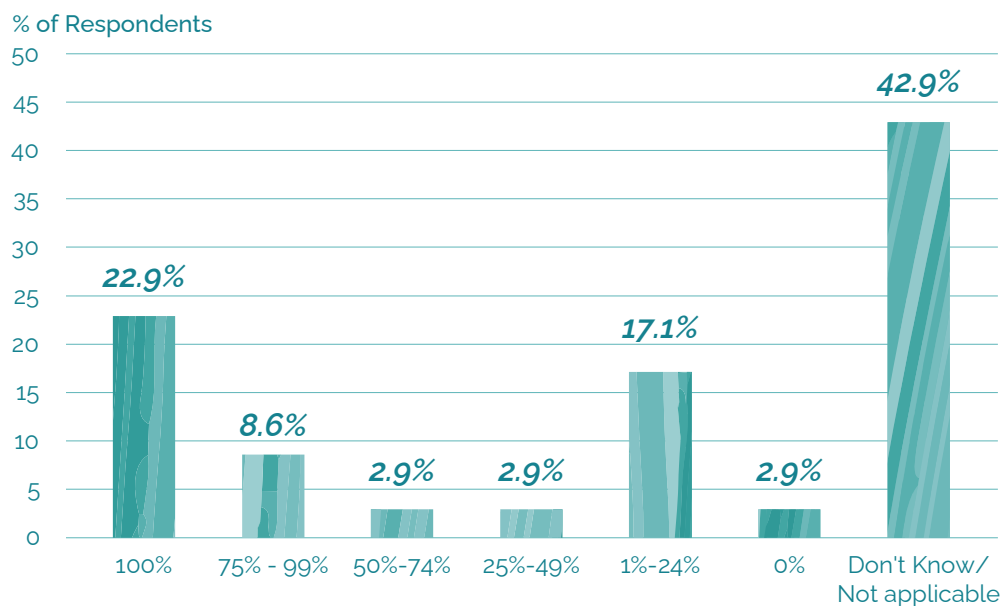
Note: N=35

Source: OECD (2020[6]), 2020 Survey on Open Government.

Evidence collected through the OECD Open Government Reviews and Scans and the OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2023[11]) **shows that new and innovative ways to involve citizens and stakeholders are emerging**. Countries are now implementing a more diverse set of participatory mechanisms ranging from more traditional ones such as public meetings, in-person consultations, roundtables and workshops, to more innovative approaches like representative deliberative processes. The OECD has gathered 715 cases in OECD countries from 1979 to 2023 (OECD, 2023[11]) (Figure 4.5).

Governments are also turning to CivicTech, or the use of digital technologies for democratic governance, to enhance participatory and deliberative practices. CivicTech can help create new ways for citizens to interact with public institutions and with each other or complement existing in-person mechanisms. Among the benefits, CivicTech can help reach out to a larger number of individuals, allow asynchronous participation, innovate how citizens express their opinion and process large amounts of citizen inputs For example, 27 of 32 OECD countries (85%) have a government-wide online consultation portal to involve citizens and stakeholders (OECD, 2021[12]).

Figure 4.5. Growth of the "deliberative wave" over time

Number of representative deliberative processes over time (total annually and on average per year), 1979-2021
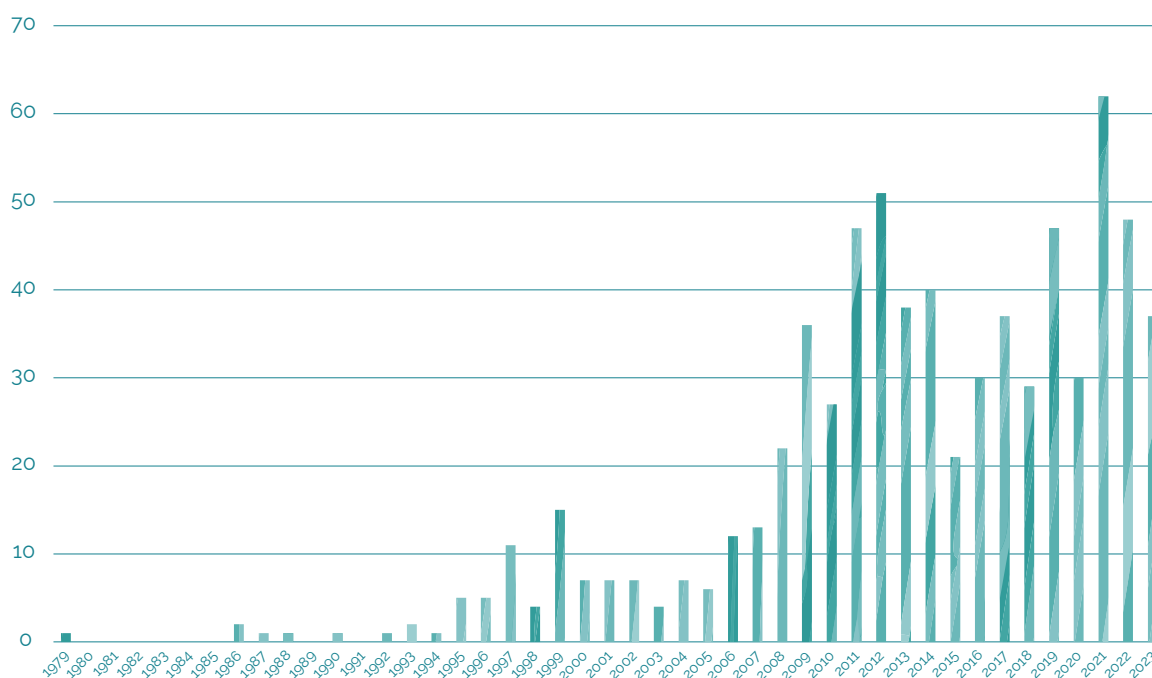
Note: N=715. Data is based on 26 Adherent countries plus the European Union.

Source: OECD (2023[11]) 2023, Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions.

Countries are increasing their efforts to enhance inclusion by implementing strategies to ensure the participation of underrepresented groups in policy processes. In particular, 67.6% (23) of respondents have a strategy or policy to specifically foster the inclusion of youth, 47.1% (16) to increase women participation, 35.3% (12) for people with disabilities and 23.5% (eight) for LGBTQI+ communities. However, there remains room for improvement regarding the inclusiveness of these processes. The main audience and participants, in fact, tend to be organised civil society and business organisations, while individual citizens, and specifically those from underrepresented groups of society, participate less.

MORE OPEN GOVERNMENT DATA IS BEING PUBLISHED

Open Government Data can be a key tool to foster government openness. Access to public sector information in open data formats fosters transparency and empowers citizens to hold governments accountable and to monitor policy progress in areas such as public procurement and budgeting, anti-corruption, climate and investments in public infrastructure. It also plays a crucial role in citizen participation in public decision making, and in fostering collaboration, engagement and the co-creation of public services, often together with CivicTech and GovTech actors (OECD, 2023*[13]*) In order to be "open", government data must be freely accessible, available in open and non-proprietary machine-readable format and re-usable (OECD, 2019*[14]*). The OECD Open Useful Reusable Data (OURData) Index measures data openness according to three pillars: data availability, data accessibility and government support for data reuse.

Consistent with previous editions of the Index, the results of the 2024 OECD OURData Index show that OECD countries perform significantly better concerning data accessibility and availability compared to government support for data re-use (OECD, 2023*[13]*) (Figure 4.6) Data availability is driven in parts by the fact that all countries have formal requirements in place to publish government data in open format "by default". The adoption of the "open by default" practice improves the access to information for all stakeholders since it pre-empts the need for re-active disclosure processes. The lack of systematic engagement with potential data users and external stakeholders remains an obstacle preventing OECD countries from fully realising the benefits of open government data.

**Figure 4.6. 2023 OURdata Index, results by country**
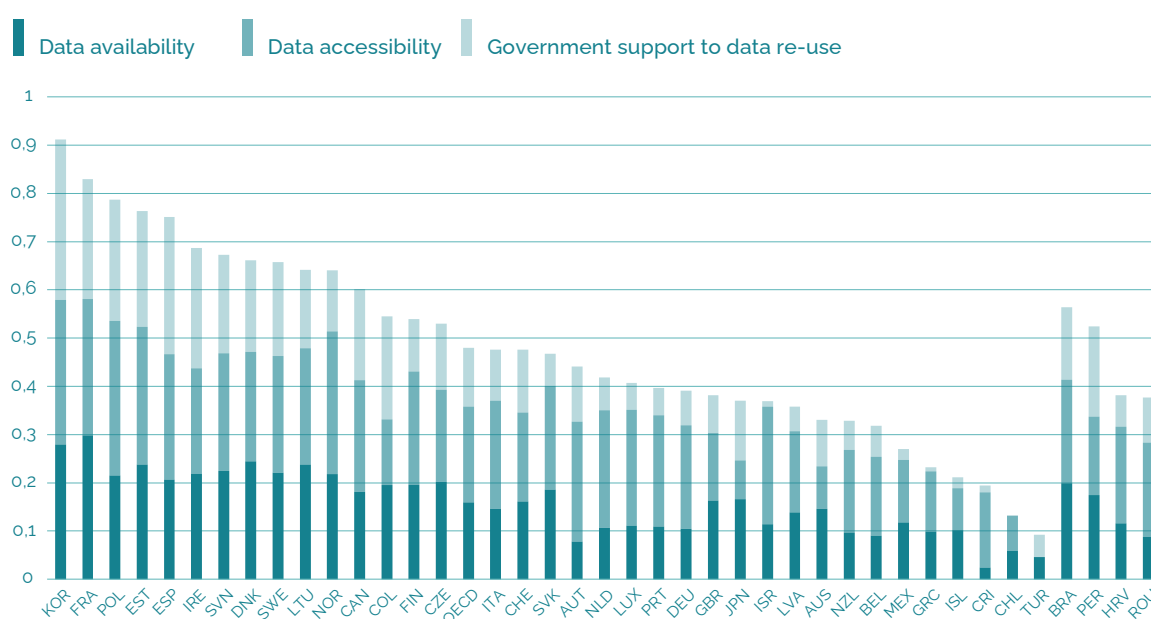
Note: Data is not available for Hungary and the United States. On data for Israel, see ***https://doi. org/10.1787/888932315602***.

*Source: OECD (2022**[15]**), Survey on Open Government Data 5.0*

Specifically relevant for open government, high-value datasets related to government finances and public accountability are rarely available. As results from the 2023 OURData Index show, countries perform relatively better in making statistics and geospatial data available, whereas weaker performance include data related to areas such as justice, education, health and government accountability (Figure 4.7). This shows the relevance of OECD countries further connecting the open government data agenda to other public governance areas such as public procurement, public sector performance, public integrity and anti-corruption efforts.

Figure 4.7. Availability of high value datasets, OECD average
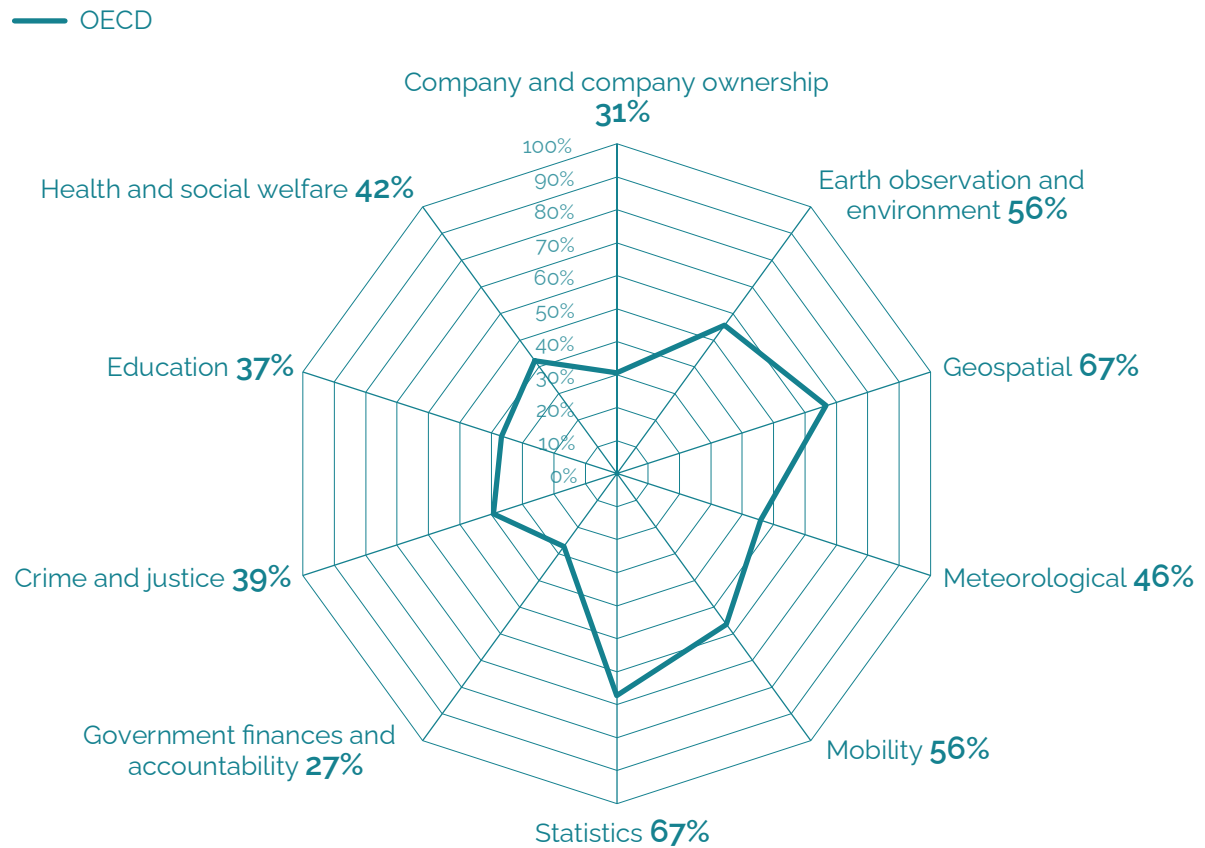
Source: OECD (2022[15]), Survey on Open Government Data 5.0

5 CONCLUSIONS: FRONTIERS OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

The findings of the Report show that open government matters for effectively addressing the challenges that democracies are facing today. Indeed, many countries are increasingly opening their governments to citizens' inputs and scrutiny and have established mechanisms and processes to govern their open government agendas. Building on these foundations, some pioneering countries are moving towards integrated open government agendas by designing holistic open government strategies. Nonetheless, challenges remain, including in monitoring and evaluation of open government initiatives, as well as concerning the protection and promotion of civic space. This section provides eight high-level policy recommendations and invites the open government community to join forces in addressing them.

Box 5.1. Key recommendations moving forward

The report Open Government for Stronger Democracy: A Global Assessment concludes with eight high-level policy recommendations for countries to strengthen Open Government in a time of poly-crisis and great geopolitical turbulence. These recommendations are:

1. Continue protecting and promoting access to information, and ensure that its implementation in practice matches the legal frameworks that serve to safeguard it, including by making access to information processes more inclusive and accessible for all social demographics, particularly marginalised groups.

2. Implement additional reforms and measures to ensure the sustainability, inclusion, quality and impact of citizen and stakeholder participation processes. These should enable all interested citizens and stakeholders to effectively influence the activities and decisions of the government and actively participate in the public lives of their countries in all sectors and at all levels.

3. Foster and institutionalise mechanisms for public accountability, including by strengthening complaint mechanisms, independent oversight bodies and Ombudsmen institutions, while identifying incentives for government to provide feedback to citizens and CSOs.

4. Design and implement comprehensive and integrated Open Government Strategies. These strategies should provide a well-structured framework to existing but scattered initiatives ("add-up"). They should also bring the commitment to Open Government to a more political level and link open government policies and practices with objectives relating to reinforcing democracy ("scale-up").

5. Continue protecting and promoting access to information, and to ensure that its implementation in practice matches the legal frameworks that serve to safeguard it, including by making access to information processes more inclusive and accessible for all social demographics, including marginalised groups.

6. Implement additional reforms and measures to ensure the sustainability, inclusion, quality, and impact of citizen and stakeholder participation processes. These should enable all interested citizens and stakeholders to effectively influence the activities and decisions of the government and actively participate in the public lives of their countries in all sectors and at all levels.

7. Continue the move towards an open state, broadening open government reforms beyond the executive branch, including by designing joint initiatives and reforms with subnational governments and other branches of the state and by working with actors such as the media in related efforts.

8. Design and implement comprehensive and integrated Open Government Strategies. These strategies should provide an umbrella to existing but scattered initiatives ("add-up"). They should also bring the commitment to Open Government to a more political level and link open government policies and practices with objectives relating to reinforcing democracy ("scale-up").

JOINING FORCES TO ADDRESS TODAY'S KEY CHALLENGES FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT

1. Access to information: Fostering implementation

Laws and regulations on access to information (ATI) are the backbone of an open government. All OECD Members have a robust legal framework on ATI, which in most cases covers both proactive and reactive disclosure of information and data (OECD, forthcoming[16]). However, more efforts are needed to monitor and evaluate this legal framework to ensure its proper implementation and its long-term impact on broader policy objectives like governments' transparency, accountability and integrity.

To enforce ATI laws, countries have established a variety of institutional set-ups according to their national contexts, both independent from the national government, such as independent information commissions or Ombudsman institutions with an ATI mandate, or within a central government body. For these bodies to effectively fulfil their mandate, their competencies must be clearly defined, their effective independence must be verifiable, and their human and financial resources must be adequate. In particular, they should have the capacity to enforce compliance and apply sanctions or other concrete measures to counter non-compliance. Eventually, countries should consider establishing an independent entity on ATI, equipped with adequate resources, as well as ATI information offices or officers in all public bodies.

2. Citizen participation: Promoting innovation

Citizen participation has become a central focus of open government agendas over time, aiming to reinforce the relationship between governments and the public they serve by complementing traditional representative democratic mechanisms with more direct forms

of involvement throughout the whole policy cycle. Almost all countries under consideration have adopted a legal framework in support of citizens and stakeholder participation in public decision making, as 84.2% (32) have rules on the use of direct democracy mechanisms and 78.9% (30) on petitions and other forms of citizens initiatives (OECD, 2023[3]). In particular, some countries have implemented nation-wide innovative participatory processes to address priority issues (e.g. the France's Citizen Convention on Climate).

Moving forward, countries should intensify their efforts to institutionalise participatory mechanisms and shift from consultative processes to more meaningful involvement of citizens and stakeholders in decision making. The adoption of Open Government Strategies and the establishment of central Open Government Offices could help countries to steer a holistic participation agenda and bring participatory mechanisms to all policy areas. Finally, more effort needs to be made to ensure that participatory mechanisms are inclusive and accessible to all, with a particular focus on marginalised and underrepresented groups of society.

To support countries in implementing meaningful citizen participation initiatives, the OECD published in 2022 the 📄 *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*. The guidelines outline ten steps to design and implement participatory processes with concrete recommendations to perform each step at best. Focusing on the innovative format of deliberative processes, the OECD also published in 2020 the report 📄 *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave* .

3. Social accountability: Empowering Ombudsman Institutions

The 2018 OECD report The Role of Ombudsman Institutions in Open Government notes that ombudsman institutions are essential actors in promoting the open government principles of transparency, accountability and citizen participation, and in safeguarding civic freedoms for the protection and promotion of civic space (OECD, 2018[17]). Moreover, they are uniquely placed given that they play a fundamental role as mediators between citizens and public administration at the supranational, national and local levels as well as across many policy sectors (e.g., health, youth, etc.) that have direct impact on citizens' lives. More needs to be done to analyse the expanding responsibilities of Ombudsman institutions in safeguarding freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the digital sphere, too. For instance, it would be valuable to identify ways in which Ombudsman offices can encourage citizen and stakeholder participation in public decision making and establish mechanisms for feedback for a more responsive public administration overall.

4. Open government strategies: Integrating agendas

The design and implementation of holistic and integrated open government strategies has the potential to significantly enhance countries' open government agendas. Integrated open government strategies that go beyond Action Plans (see Table 5.1 for a list of differences between "strategies" and "Action Plans") provide an umbrella policy framework to align all strategies and initiatives that are linked to openness and bring them together under a coherent medium- to long-term narrative. For example, Open Government Strategies can lift the profile of countries' efforts to respond to citizens' demands to be informed and involved and bring discussions surrounding the open government principles to the Cabinet table. Over time, they can allow to create more far-reaching governance mechanisms (e.g., empower the Open Government Office) and increase their monitoring and evaluation efforts (OECD, 2022[4]).

Table 5.1. The difference between a "strategy" and an "Action Plan"

Strategy (or "policy")	**Action Plan** (or "implementation roadmap")
Translates high-level government commitments into policy objectives and implementation priorities	Makes a strategy operational
Provides a strategic implementation framework	Relies on the strategic framework to define concrete activities
Applies to the whole-of-government or an entire sector	Applies to specified institutional actors
Outlines the vision and high-level objectives	Includes targeted commitments and initiatives aimed at contributing to high-level objectives
Outlines major initiatives and projects	Translates major initiatives and projects into concrete implementation steps
Gives guideline to achieve objectives	Includes short-term deliverables
Allocates resources	Delineates how to use resources
Foresees governance arrangements	Includes a progress reporting structure and a measurable timeline
Timeframe: medium to long term (4-15 years)	Timeframe: usually 1-2 years
Outlines strategic KPIs and high-level indicators	Contributes to data collection for high-level indicators

Source: OECD (2022**[4]**).

An increasing number of countries under consideration have started designing and adopting holistic open government strategies as an integrated whole-of-government roadmap for their open government agendas. Among them are Costa Rica, Finland and Argentina. Based on the paper 📄 *__Taking an integrated approach to the promotion of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholders' participation: Towards an Open Government Strategy__*, the OECD is currently supporting countries such as Canada, Italy, Tunisia and Morocco in developing their first Open Government Strategies.

5. Civic space: Promoting and protecting a foundation for open government

Civic space[1] is recognised as a cornerstone of functioning democracies and a key pre-condition for open government reforms and policies to succeed. Countries adhering to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government have acknowledged the relevance of civic space for

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1   The OECD defines civic space as the set of legal, policy, institutional and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise and participate in public life (OECD, 2022**[24]**).

open government as evidenced by the results of the Perception Survey on Open Government in which 56% of respondents consider civic space "fully relevant" to their work (OECD, 2021). Nonetheless, about 20% of OECD Members are experiencing challenges in areas related to the protection of civic space, and all surveyed countries face at least some issues, particularly related to civic space for minorities and marginalised groups.

The OECD established the OECD Observatory on Civic Space in 2019 and has since then undertaken six country assessments of civic space, with Finland being the first OECD country to request such a review (OECD, 2021[18]). In this case, the OECD provided methodological support for a deliberative Citizens' Panel on Freedom of Expression to protect people in public professions from hate speech while also safeguarding free expression of opinion (Jäske et al., 2021[19]). In 2022-23, the OECD undertook further reviews of Brazil (OECD, 2022[20]), Tunisia (OECD, 2023[21]) Romania (OECD, 2023[22]), Portugal (OECD, 2023 (forthcoming)[23]) and Morocco (forthcoming). In Portugal, the methodology was adapted to focus on utilising protected civic space for public service reforms. In Romania, the findings are informing the drafting of a national Open Government Strategy, with a dedicated component on civil society involvement in decision making.

These reviews are based on a standardised methodology but are tailored to individual country needs and provide tailored, actionable policy recommendations that respond to national challenges. In 2022, the OECD report on The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance provided a baseline of data on trends and challenges in OECD Members and non-Members. It identified protected civic space as a precondition for open government reforms and a cornerstone of democratic governance (OECD, 2022[24]). The report includes ten evidence-based high-level recommendations on protecting and promoting civic space. In 2024, the OECD will publish a Practical Guide for Policymakers on Protecting and Promoting Civic Space to further support governments in taking practical steps to strengthen legal and policy frameworks, monitor implementation of civic freedoms and counter any negative trends. The guide will feature a host of infographics, checklists and guidance on key policy areas.

6. Impact: Measuring results

As countries advance in the implementation of their open government agendas, there has been an increasing need to measure their effectiveness, as well as their contribution to broader policy goals, such as fostering trust in government and socio-economic outcomes. Many of the countries under consideration have established processes to monitor the implementation of their OGP Action Plans (e.g. through the OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism). Some countries have also deployed additional efforts to evaluate their open government agendas by designing quantitative indicators (e.g. Mexico's Open Government Metrics) or performing a qualitative review (e.g. Canada). However, there still is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of open government efforts. Process evaluations were conducted only for 21.2% of 118 open government policy documents, and impact evaluations were performed for only 7.8% of 116 policy documents (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Share of policy documents with impact evaluation

% of policy documents
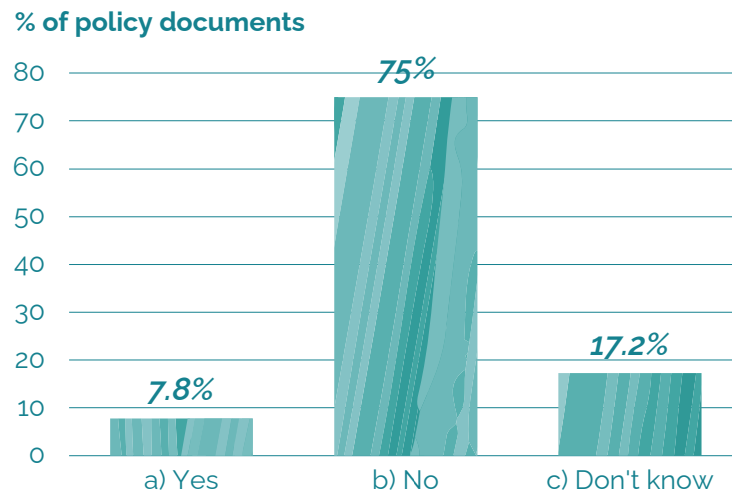
Note: N=37 for 116 policy documents.

Source: OECD (2020[7]), 2020 Survey on Open Government.

To close this evidence gap, the OECD is working on the design of the Citizen Participation Index (CiPI). As one of the deliverables of the Reinforcing Democracy Initiative, the CiPI has the ambition to focus on the outcomes and impacts of open government policies and initiatives. The index combines three dimensions: (I) access to information and data, (ii) dialogue and citizen involvement in the decision-making process and (iii) protection of civic space and civic freedoms. A forthcoming OECD Working Paper will detail the conceptual framework and the design process of the CiPI.

In this endeavour, the OECD is supported by the OECD Network on Open Government Indicators. The network is an informal platform of the OECD Working Party on Open Government. It has been created to provide international experts and practitioners from OECD Member and Partner countries a space to exchange good practices and lessons learned in the design of open government indicators. Alongside delegates of the Working Party itself, participants include representatives from other central or subnational government authorities with a demonstrated interest in and/or responsibility for indicators design, as well as representatives from civil society and academia. Among others, the network's objectives include supporting the design of OECD indicators in the field open government, including the Citizen Participation Index.

7. Open State: Gradually expanding open government policies and practices to all branches of the state and to all levels of government

The purpose of an open state[2] approach is to create greater synergies and alignment between branches and levels of government to reach common objectives. Adherents to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government recognise that open government strategies and

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2   Open state is defined in the OECD Recommendation on Open Government as "when the executive, legislature, judiciary, independent public institutions and all levels of government – recognising their respective roles, prerogatives and overall independence according to their existing legal and institutional frameworks – collaborate, exploit synergies and share good practices and lessons learned among themselves and with other stakeholders to promote transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation, in support of democracy and inclusive growth" (OECD, 2017[2]).

initiatives are a shared responsibility of the whole-of-government and the entire state, according to their existing legal and institutional frameworks, and that therefore the provisions of the Recommendation are relevant for all (OECD, 2017*[2]*). Almost two-thirds (64.9%, 24 out of 37) of respondents have implemented joint open government initiatives in the three years preceding the data collection and 59.5% have shared practices and experiences in the same period. More rarely, countries have adopted a joint programmatic document (16.2%) (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Open state initiatives in respondents

% of Respondents
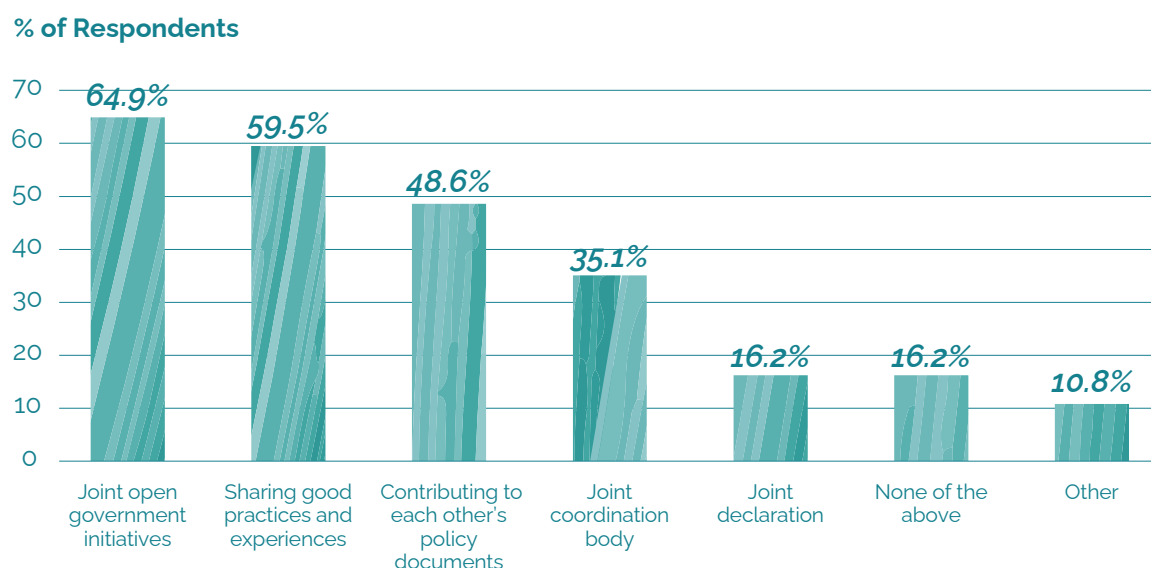
Note: N=37. Multiple selection possible.

Source: OECD (2020), Survey on Open Government

The OECD introduced the concept of Open State for the first time in the Open Government Review of Costa Rica (2016) and, since then, has supported countries such as Colombia, Argentina and Brazil in pursuing integrated open state agenda. The OECD has gathered evidence and good practices from its Member countries on the different paths to build an open state. Member countries such as Costa Rica are signing high-level declarations, others such as Colombia are adopting policies and many countries like Spain and Mexico are building multi-level coordination bodies on open government. More recently, the Open Government Review of Romania included a chapter on open state with concrete recommendations for Romania to move towards an open state. This Review is also the first OECD open government review to integrate an Open Parliament perspective.

8. Communication: Exploiting public communication's potential to strengthen open government principles

Public communication is understood as the government function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good and of democratic principles. It is considered distinct from political communication, the legitimate but partisan communication conducted by elected officials, political parties and figures that supports personal, party or electoral objectives (OECD, 2021*[25]*). Internal and external communication of the open government agenda enhances awareness across public officials and non-governmental stakeholders, facilitates engagement beyond commonly involved stakeholders and, ultimately, can help reinforce the impact of open government policies and practices.

Among countries who are also OGP Members, external public communication about the main steps of the OGP process (such as the launch of the design phase of the OGP Action Plan), is largely developed. There is a particular focus on the early stages of the Action Plans, i.e. the co-creation and launch of the OGP Action Plans. Concerning internal communication, the 2021 OECD Perception Survey on Open Government highlights that open government as a concept is not yet well known: only 19% of respondents report that more than 75% of public officials know about the concept (OECD, 2021*[5]*). Furthermore, in a 2021 OECD report, only 6% of the offices in charge of whole-of-government communication considered the open government principle of participation as one of their priorities (OECD, 2021*[25]*), while transparency is a priority in 37% of surveyed countries. This represents a missed opportunity as OECD countries are increasingly recognising public communication as a potent tool for engaging in a dialogue with citizens, hearing their voices, and involving them in policy and decision-making processes.

The OECD has taken several steps to promote public communication for open government. The OECD Public Communication Network (PCN) is a sub-group of the OECD's Working Party on Open Government. It was formed as a platform to steer international dialogue, facilitate multilateral cooperation and promote a more people-centred public communication function as an instrument of policy making and open government. It consists of government officials and non-governmental stakeholders, including representatives from academic institutions, civil society and the private sector. To date, the PCN has informed the development of several reports including the 📄 *Report on Public Communication: the Global Context and the Way Forward* (OECD, 2021*[25]*), 📄 *Accessible and inclusive public communication: Panorama of practices from OECD countries* (2022) and the forthcoming ***Public Communication Scan of the United Kingdom: Unlocking Public Communication's Potential for Stronger Democracy and Increased Trust***.

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