

## Introduction

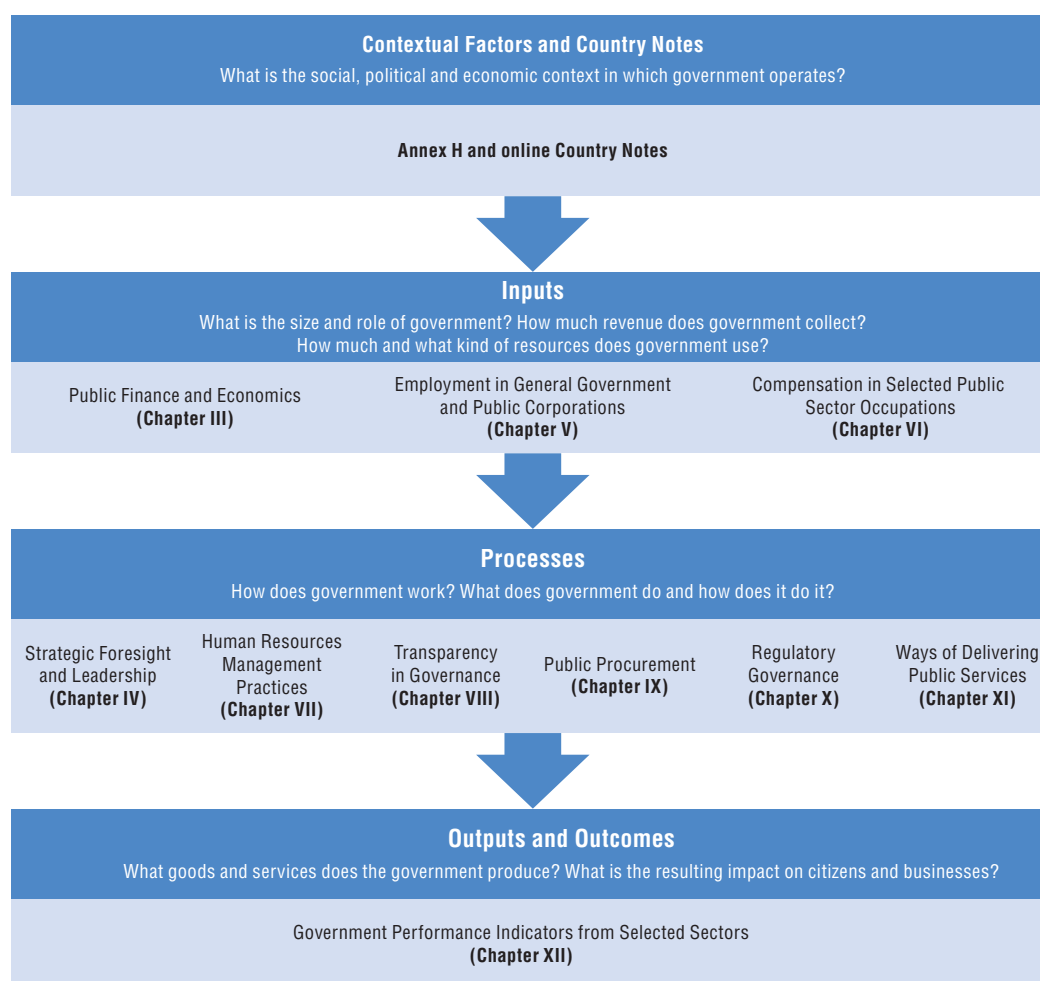
### Structure of the publication

The *Government at a Glance* series is designed to enable evidence-based policy making in member countries by allowing them to benchmark their activities and results in order to facilitate peer learning, and ultimately improve their own performance. The imperative of supplying internationally comparative evidence for public policy making is the guiding principle behind the selection of indicators for the publication. Policy makers and citizens need data on inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes to evaluate how their governments are performing and to make informed decisions about resources, policies and programmes. The framework for this publication reflects this important sequencing: it is structured according to the production chain of government performance (Figure 0.1).

### What's new in *Government at a Glance 2011*?

Compared with *Government at a Glance 2009*, the 2011 edition is larger in scope both in terms of its country coverage and its data points. In this edition, the number of indicators has nearly doubled (from 31 to 58), building on many of the core indicators introduced in the 2009 edition. Additionally, data on public finance and economics in the 2011 edition are presented for years 2000, 2007 and 2009 to showcase both trends over this decade and the impact of the financial and economic crises. This edition also moves further up along the chain of government production, adding data on key aspects of governmental performance related to outputs and outcomes in selected sectors. New performance indicators include fiscal performance (government deficits, debt and fiscal sustainability); results related to fairness objectives, both in terms of income distribution and access to health and education services; as well as outputs, outcomes and some efficiency measures for tax administration, education and health. It thus responds to the strong interest expressed by OECD member countries for performance data. In addition, this year's edition includes a chapter on strategic foresight and leadership of government (Chapter IV). If anything, the crisis highlights the importance of governments' capacities to manage risk and consider long-term impacts. Fiscal sustainability is taken as a proxy of governments' abilities to forecast trends and adapt accordingly. This chapter also includes new data on the extent to which HRM practices at the top levels of government and in the civil service serve to foster a more strategic approach to policy making. Finally, there are indicators that are included as a special feature addressing topical issues at the time of publication, such as green procurement and co-production in service delivery.

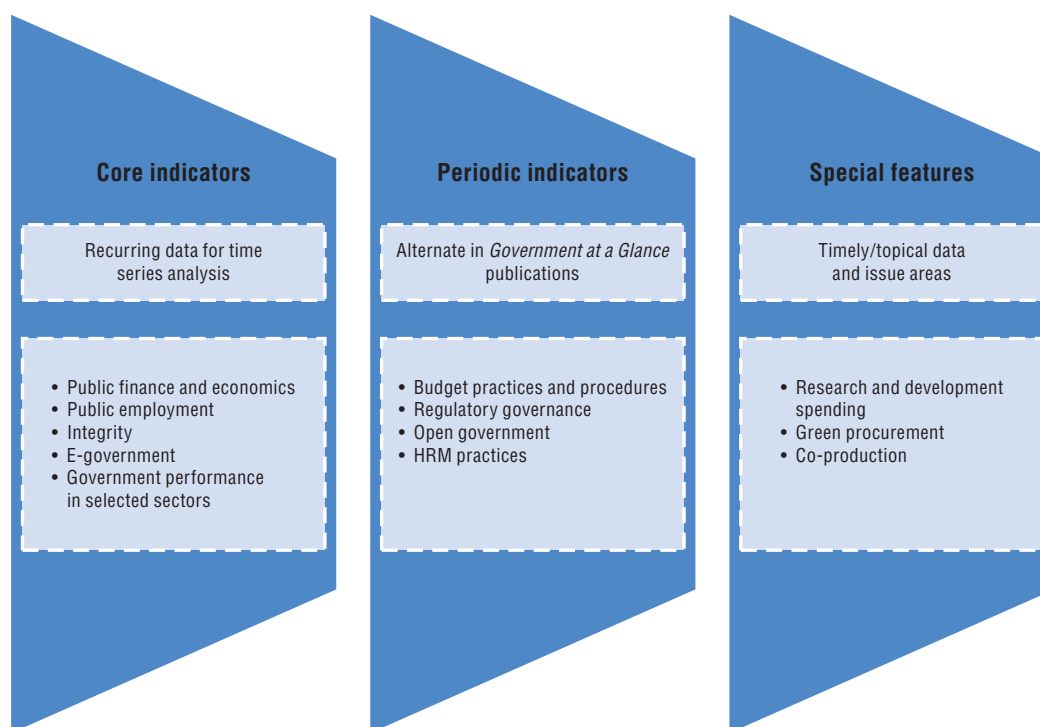
Four countries (Chile, Estonia, Israel and Slovenia) joined the OECD in 2010. They are included in the 2011 edition when data are available. *Government at a Glance* also includes data beyond the 34 OECD members, allowing countries to benchmark their performance against OECD accession countries (the Russian Federation) as well as other major economies on the world stage such as China, India, Indonesia and South Africa. Last, for some indicators, data from observer countries to the Public Governance Committee (Brazil, Egypt and the Ukraine) have been included. These countries are playing a significant and increasing role in the world economy and in international political structures.

Figure 0.1. **Conceptual framework for Government at a Glance**

The release of *Government at a Glance 2011* coincides with the 50th Anniversary of the OECD. The publication opens with a special chapter that reflects upon the role the OECD has played on the world stage in the areas of public management and public governance over the last 50 years and identifies some of the key challenges ahead. It is followed by a policy chapter that focuses on the topical issue of fiscal consolidation and the recent reforms announced in member countries. Data presented in Chapters III-XII highlight the need for better evidence on the impact and usefulness of various reform tools adopted.

### Typology of indicators

*Government at a Glance* comprises three kinds of indicators: core, periodic and special features. Core indicators are those on government revenues, expenditures, employment, and those which reflect compliance with core public values such as integrity and transparency. Indicators on various public management and governance practices periodically alternate between editions, as these practices change less frequently. For example, the 2011 edition focuses in detail on human resource management practices, while the 2013 edition plans to showcase changes in the budget practices of OECD countries. Finally, some indicators are included as special features which address topical issues at the time of publication; the current edition features new data on green procurement, for example.

Figure 0.2. **Typology of indicators included in *Government at a Glance***

Planning for future editions is also currently underway, where the results of new work in performance measurement will be featured. Amongst the public management themes currently being explored for indicator development are: the quality of key services provided by governments, rule of law, civil servants' experiences with corruption in the public sector and e-government expenditures. In addition, indicators will be developed to assess the performance of regulatory governance systems, and indicators on budgeting practices and procedures will be renewed. Close co-operation with other organisations – among these, the World Justice Project and/or European Commission – will help ensure the comparability of data across countries as well as enlarge the sample of countries with available data (see Box 0.1).

### Presentation of indicators

As in the 2009 edition, each indicator is presented on two pages. The first page is text that explains the relevance of the topic and highlights some of the major differences observed across OECD countries. The “Methodology and definitions” section provides important information necessary to interpret the data. The “Further reading” section cites useful background literature which provides context to the data displayed. The second page showcases the data. These figures show current levels and, where possible, trends over time.

### Definition of government

*Government at a Glance* examines the performance of governments, but the meaning of this term can vary. In general, data on public finances presented in this publication are based on the definition of the sector “general government” found in the *System of National Accounts* (SNA). In these terms, government comprises Ministries/Departments, agencies, offices and some non-profit institutions at the central, state and local level as well as social security funds. Data on revenues and expenditures are presented both for central and

### Box 0.1. Synergies between *Government at a Glance* and the World Justice Project

Strengthening the rule of law is a key factor in achieving effective governance and, as such, the definition of government performance adopted by *Government at a Glance* refers not only to measures of efficiency or value-for-money, but also to how well countries are upholding core values of integrity and transparency, critical elements underpinning the rule of law. *Government at a Glance* is interested in expanding this base, developing also measures for other aspects of rule of law.

The World Justice Project ([www.worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/](http://www.worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/)) is an international non-profit organisation that has developed composite indices which measure the extent to which countries around the world adhere to 9 different dimensions of rule of law. There are several interfaces between these indices and with data featured in *Government at a Glance*: both the first and second editions, for instance, examined aspects of the rule of law through indicators on conflict of interest and whistle-blowing protection, transparency in public procurement, regulatory management, and access to information legislation.

Given the complexity surrounding the scope and concept of the rule of law, future work in this field could benefit from the strong conceptual foundation developed by the World Justice Project for its Rule of Law Indices. Furthermore, co-operation between the World Justice Project and *Government at a Glance* could also lead to the exchange and triangulation of data to improve accuracy. Indeed, the OECD's approach to indicator development focuses on data collected directly from governmental sources, rather than population polls and expert judgments used by the WJP. Juxtaposition of the two datasets could help validate and improve the quality of both.

sub-central (state and local) levels of government and (where applicable) for social security funds. On the other hand, data on public management practices and processes refer to the central level of government only. Finally, data on employment refer to the public sector, which expands the definition of government to include public corporations, such as publicly-owned banks, harbours and airports.

## Data limitations

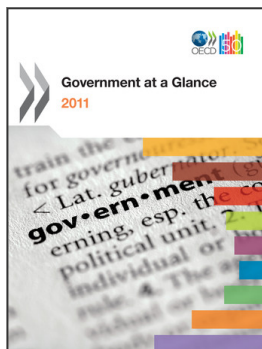
True to its name, *Government at a Glance* provides a selection of the key indicators on various dimensions of government activities that are often based on more in-depth research and analysis. Taken individually, indicators included in this publication provide a window into dimensions of government performance which may warrant further attention and analysis. However, performance is best measured with a wider lens, taking into account several pieces of data.

Limitations in data comparability are described in the “Methodology and definitions” section as well as in the figure notes. While information for the indicators has been requested from all OECD member countries, occasionally non-response or insufficient quality of the data precluded the inclusion of countries in the publication. The figure notes indicate when data are not available for OECD members.

## Data sources and collection methods

Most of the data in *Government at a Glance* 2011 has been compiled by the OECD. However, data are also drawn from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Eurostat. Data sources are described in detail in the “Methodology and definitions” section of each indicator.

OECD data are collected via standardised surveys that are filled out by representatives/government officials of member countries. As such, the data represent either official government statistics or the country's own assessment of current practices and procedures. The only exception in this publication is the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) data, which represent the results of standardised tests completed by students in member countries. Every effort is made to ensure that the information that government officials provide is correct. To the extent possible, OECD data collection instruments use standardised definitions and common units of measurement. Member countries are consulted in the design of surveys, which are also piloted before data are collected from all members. Results of the questionnaires are verified by experts at the Secretariat and for some surveys, a peer review process is also used (*e.g.* for the regulatory governance data). Preliminary results are presented and discussed in detail by the working parties and expert groups of the various OECD Committees before they are published in *Government at a Glance*.



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