

Preface

The current financial, economic, social and environmental challenges place governments at centre stage. Having responded successfully to the unprecedented financial crisis of 2008, governments are now striving to exit from their exceptional interventions and to return economies to self-sustained growth. Meanwhile, they are also looking for policy solutions to climate change, poverty, ageing populations, migration and a host of other long-term concerns. Designing and implementing these policies draws on the capacity of governments to serve the public interest and to strengthen frameworks for well-functioning markets.

Against the backdrop of this renewed stewardship role for governments, the OECD is releasing *Government at a Glance*. This new publication aims at broadening the understanding of how governments can deliver on these public policy challenges. It does so by analysing and comparing governments' capacities, outputs and performance across a broad range of policy areas.

The publication's current set of quantitative and qualitative indicators include data on the size and role of government at the central and local levels in terms of revenues, expenditures and employment. It also presents indicators on a number of public management processes, such as regulation, budgeting and procurement – all three crucial in the current search for fiscal consolidation and reformed market mechanisms. There are also interesting insights into the underlying values of public service, and the instruments with which high standards are upheld.

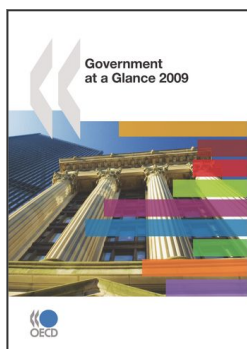
This first edition brings some interesting and unexpected results. It shows a significant shift in core public service values. The percentage of countries identifying transparency as a core public service value almost doubled over the past decade, to 90%. Efficiency scored 80%. Outsourcing turned out to be increasingly common in OECD countries, with 43% of the value of public goods and services produced by the private sector. It also illustrates that OECD countries are still behind in some policy targets. For example, fewer women are represented at senior levels within central governments than in the wider labour force. Finally, it presents fundamental challenges facing governments, such as the need to cut spending in the face of rising debt levels. On average, over 50% of all expenditures in OECD countries are on social programmes, including health, education and unemployment. Any efforts to curb spending may affect the delivery of these programmes.

Government at a Glance is meant to be a snapshot of the quality of public governance in OECD countries. The ambition is for future editions to present comparable data over time, cover different policy areas and include more countries beyond OECD members, beginning with the ones on their way to accession to the OECD (Chile, Estonia, Israel, Slovenia and Russia) and those with whom the OECD is building an "enhanced engagement" partnership (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa). They will thus offer a true "glance" at governance issues across the globe.

This new publication will contribute to substantiating a debate on how governments perform and can meet their ultimate objective to build stronger, cleaner and fairer economies and societies. I hope that citizens, elected officials and government employees will find *Government at a Glance* to be thought provoking. But, above all, I expect that it will be instrumental in our constant efforts to improve public governance.



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