

# **An Updated OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions to Meet Current and Future Challenges**

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# An Updated OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions to Meet Current and Future Challenges

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Trust between citizens and their governments is crucial for the legitimacy and functioning of democracies. This paper discusses the main determinants of people's trust in public institutions and their measurement, in times of crisis as well as for a long-term, strong, inclusive and green recovery. It presents evidence on the great variation in the levels and drivers of trust across public institutions, across levels of government within countries, and among population groups. It also identifies three main trust challenges for public governance that were heightened by the COVID-19 crisis: i) people's views on the credibility and effectiveness of government action on intergenerational and often global challenges; ii) the changes in political participation and political attitudes; and iii) an increasing distrust of and disengagement from democratic processes. Building on previous OECD work, and taking into account lessons from other crises and handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, the paper introduces a revised and expanded version of the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. Furthermore, it discusses how this Framework is applied in the OECD Trust Survey. Both the Framework and the Survey aim to provide governments with actionable evidence to build and maintain people's trust as the basis for successful planning and policy reforms, allowing democracies to be fitter, stronger and more resilient in the future.

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# Introduction

Trust is essential for the legitimacy of governance institutions and a functioning democratic system. Trust in public institutions was vital during all stages of the COVID-19 pandemic as governments sought to save lives and livelihoods. And yet, on average across OECD member countries, only about half of the people say that they trust their national government. This scepticism has serious implications for the strength and sustainability of some of the world's oldest democracies.

Past experience shows that it takes time and effort for democratic governments to regain trust following a crisis. Trust in government plummeted after the 2008 financial crisis, and while in many OECD countries trust levels have improved since, the decline has weighed heavily on the functioning of long-established democratic countries. Current data suggest that after initial increases in public trust due to the “rally-round-the-flag” effect at the beginning of the pandemic, most countries have seen trust in government and public institutions revert back to pre-pandemic levels. In the medium and longer run, governments need the trust of citizens to act ambitiously on societal challenges and implement an inclusive and green recovery from the COVID-19 emergency.

This paper presents important revisions and additions to the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>), a critical tool for governments building back from the pandemic. These updates to the Framework are informed by lessons learned during the pandemic and motivated by the increasing importance for countries to strengthen their democratic governance models and to enhance people's trust.

This OECD Framework was first developed in 2017 as an analytical tool to understand the main drivers of trust in public institutions. Its goal has been to provide countries with actionable evidence to build and maintain people's trust as a key element for successful government plans and policy reforms. The Framework identifies five main public governance drivers along two dimensions:

- competence: government's responsiveness and reliability in delivering public services and anticipating new needs
- values: government's principles of integrity, openness, and fairness (OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>).

These drivers have been tested in a few countries via the OECD TrustLab, and informed by the measures included in the OECD Guidelines for Measuring Trust (OECD, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>), as well as by nationally representative population samples from in-depth country studies in Korea (OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>), Finland (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>) and Norway (OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions has been reviewed and expanded to help guide public action to recover trust during and after the crisis. Framework revision has been carried out through a consultative process, including the webinar series “Building a new paradigm for public trust”, that has engaged over 800 policy makers, civil servants, academics, data providers and representatives of non-governmental organisations.<sup>1</sup> The revision has also led to refining and upgrading of the measurement work, building on the questionnaire included in the OECD

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<sup>1</sup> Agendas, summaries and presentations from the webinar series can be found at [www.oecd.org/fr/gov/webinar-series-building-a-new-paradigm-for-public-trust.htm](http://www.oecd.org/fr/gov/webinar-series-building-a-new-paradigm-for-public-trust.htm).

Guidelines for Measuring Trust, as well as population surveys carried out in Korea, Finland and Norway. This work was guided by an Advisory Group composed of countries' representatives and National Statistical Offices. As a result, in March 2021 the Public Governance Committee of the OECD agreed to carry out the survey in all OECD countries at the same time. The survey is being implemented at the end of 2021 in 20 OECD countries and it includes all the Framework's revisions presented here, while results will be available in mid-2022.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 1 discusses the role of public trust during crises and its implications for medium-term recovery efforts and long-term reforms. Section 2 presents evidence on the great variation in the levels of trust across public institutions, across levels of government within countries, and among population groups. This evidence calls for developing more detailed measures of trust that can support decision making. Section 3 identifies three main trust challenges for public governance and political systems that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. These are: citizens' confidence in the sustainability and effectiveness of government action on intergenerational and (often) global challenges, changes in of political participation and political attitudes; and increasing distrust and disengagement from democratic processes. Section 4 presents the new OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions and discusses how the Framework has been applied through a population survey.



# 1 Trust in public institutions in periods of crisis and recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a renewed focus on trust between citizens and their governments, given that trust facilitates the implementation of public policies. The pandemic occurred against a backdrop of ongoing concerns about the ability of democratic governments to address globalisation and digitalisation, steer the needed green transformation of our societies, and maintain social cohesion in the face of growing political polarisation.

Trust is a dynamic concept, and people are constantly updating their beliefs and perceptions – perhaps even more so in the face of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has helped to illuminate how public institutions have fostered trust – and where they have fallen short. Accordingly, OECD work on understanding and measuring the factors driving trust in public institutions has evolved since 2013 (Box 1). The COVID-19 crisis has heightened the importance of people’s trust in government’s ability not only to overcome sudden crises – such as a global pandemic – but also to credibly and sustainably address long-term, intergenerational challenges such as climate change, ageing populations and technological change.

Even before the onset of the pandemic, in 2019, only 45% of people in OECD member countries stated that they trust their government (OECD, 2019<sup>[6]</sup>). Data show increasing disparities in economic, social and political outcomes, as well as persistent feelings that elites have captured democratic processes. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2020, 48% of respondents across 15 OECD countries felt that the political system was not working for them, and 57% reported that it only served the interests of a few (Edelman, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>).

How, then, can governments foster public trust during a crisis and maintain this trust during recovery times? A better understanding of what drives people’s trust in public institutions at such a time can help in identifying effective responses to shocks and help countries strengthen their democratic governance models to tackle major challenges.

This section provides evidence on how government’s performance during a crisis affects citizens’ trust in the short, medium and long term. OECD evidence shows that a government’s competence – i.e. its responsiveness and reliability in delivering public services and anticipating new needs as they arise – together with the level of integrity, fairness and openness of its institutions is a strong predictor of public trust (OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>). While many factors influence people’s trust and therefore policy outcomes, including the economic situation, culture, and personal characteristics and preferences, institutional settings, OECD evidence show that the performance and reputation of institutions are important and independent factors contributing to trust (Bouckaert, 2012<sup>[8]</sup>; Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>).

### Box 1. OECD work on understanding and measuring drivers of trust in public institutions

The 2008 global financial crisis led to a decrease in public trust in a large number of OECD countries, a development that had profound implications for their democratic foundations. This highlighted the need for monitoring trust in institutions as well as the analytical capacity to understand the main factors influencing it. Accordingly, at the 2013 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, countries made a call to “strengthen efforts to understand trust in public institutions and its influence on economic performance and well-being”. Moreover, while trust in public institutions was an issue already widely discussed in public administrations and the political science literature, there was no encompassing analytical framework that could help organise concepts, links and drivers. Most importantly, using existing empirical measures was difficult for policy makers since they did not identify the main drivers behind levels of public trust (OECD, 2013<sub>[10]</sub>).

OECD work in this area set out to tackle these issues by developing a conceptual framework and statistical guidelines for measuring the drivers of trust in public institutions, which were both released in 2017 (OECD, 2017<sub>[2]</sub>; OECD, 2017<sub>[1]</sub>).

The framework identified five main determinants of people’s trust in government: the responsiveness and reliability in delivering public services and anticipating new needs (government’s competence), and institutions’ perceived integrity, openness and fairness (values underlying public actions).

Since 2018, country studies in Finland, Korea and Norway have tested the robustness of the analytical framework; adapted it to their specific institutional, cultural and historical contexts; and provided policy recommendations to enhance trust in government. Section 4 of this paper presents the revised OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions.

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on (OECD/KDI, 2018<sub>[3]</sub>; OECD, 2021<sub>[4]</sub>; OECD, 2017<sub>[2]</sub>; OECD, 2013<sub>[11]</sub>; OECD, 2013<sub>[10]</sub>; González and Smith, 2017<sub>[12]</sub>; OECD, 2017<sub>[1]</sub>).

## 1.1. Addressing immediate concerns: The role of trust in government during the COVID-19 crisis

High levels of public trust have proved pivotal for effective public governance (Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017<sub>[13]</sub>; OECD, 2017<sub>[1]</sub>). Trust is even more important in periods of crisis when swift and wide compliance with policy measures is required to minimise potentially disastrous impacts for society as a whole (Rothstein, 2020<sub>[14]</sub>; Fukuyama, 2020<sub>[15]</sub>). For example, compliance with containment policies during the first wave of the COVID-19 virus in European regions was influenced by pre-pandemic levels of trust towards policy makers (Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020<sub>[16]</sub>).

The importance of trust in times of crisis is based on the notion that people with higher confidence in their governments’ institutions are more likely to follow rules, especially when restrictions are drastic (Marien and Hooghe, 2011<sub>[17]</sub>; Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020<sub>[16]</sub>). Studies of previous epidemics such as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa highlight the importance of trust in complying with public health rules (Vinck et al., 2019<sub>[18]</sub>; Dhillon and Kelly, 2015<sub>[19]</sub>), and an increasing number of studies refer to the importance of public trust in reducing the spread of COVID-19 (Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020<sub>[16]</sub>; Brodeur, Grigoryeva and Kattan, 2021<sub>[20]</sub>; Bavel et al., 2020<sub>[21]</sub>; Devine et al., 2020<sub>[22]</sub>; OECD, 2021<sub>[4]</sub>). For instance, European subnational regions with higher levels of trust in government experienced a sharper decline in non-essential mobility after the adoption of emergency measures restricting population movement (Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020<sub>[16]</sub>). A study using cell phone data to track people’s mobility reports similar findings in the

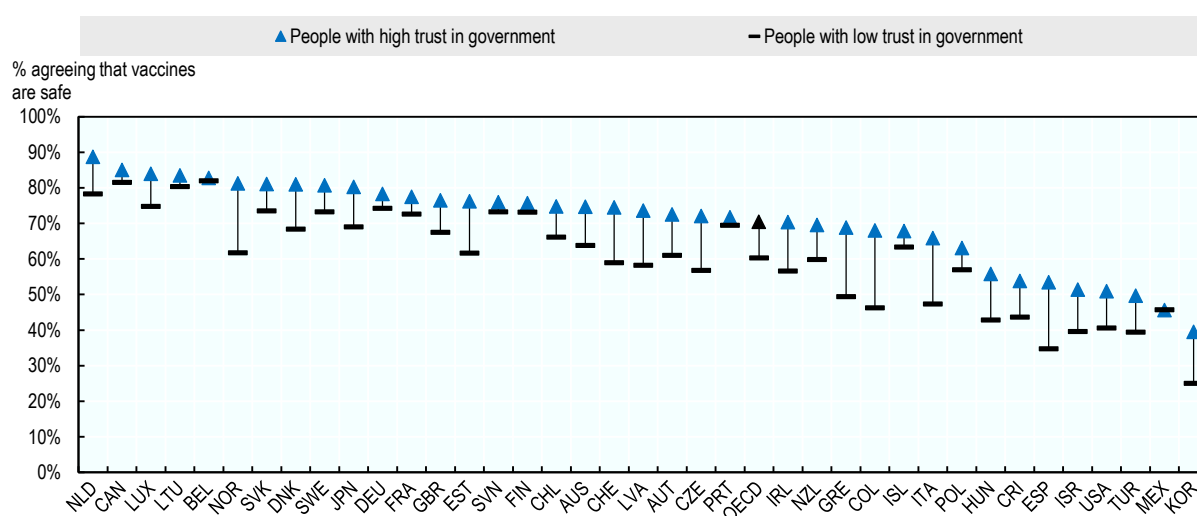
United States (Brodeur, Grigoryeva and Kattan, 2021<sup>[20]</sup>), and another study in Denmark meanwhile shows that willingness to distance is related to higher levels of political and social trust (Olsen and Hjorth, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>).

Evidence from previous pandemics shows that trust has also played a large role within countries in determining whether people take up vaccines (Bish et al., 2011<sup>[24]</sup>). For example, data from 28 OECD countries dating from before the COVID-19 pandemic show that the share of people who believe that “vaccines are safe” is always higher among those who have great trust in the government than among those who have low trust in the government. That difference is over 15 percentage points in Canada, Denmark, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, the Slovak Republic and Sweden (Figure 1).

While further analysis is needed to understand vaccine hesitancy during the different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, OECD analysis shows that trust in vaccination greatly depends on a nexus of various government actions, including the perceived competence and reliability of institutions and regulatory agencies; the transparency of processes that guide government decisions in vaccine procurement, distribution, prioritisation, and administration; and the effectiveness of the accompanying public engagement and communication activities (see Box 2). Hence, analysing trust and vaccine uptake as a strategy to exit the ongoing pandemic can also hold lessons for the success of vaccination campaigns in the future.

**Figure 1. People with high trust in government are more likely to perceive vaccines as safe**

Percentage of people agreeing that “vaccines are safe”, by levels of trust in government; 2018



Note: High trust is measured as “A lot” or “Some” trust in national government, and low trust measured as “Not much” and “No” trust in national government.

Source: OECD/TrustGov calculations based on Wellcome Global Monitor 2018 data.

### Box 2. Enhancing public trust in COVID-19 vaccination: The role of governments

The rapid development of vaccines for COVID-19 was a successful example of promptly addressing urgent global public needs. But the successful vaccination of billions of people will depend not only on the availability and distribution of vaccines across the world but also on how countries ensure people's trust in vaccines and in the institutions responsible for their administration.

Data from OECD countries show that trust in vaccination and in the ability of governments to successfully deliver a vaccination programme greatly depends on:

- the extent to which the government can instil and maintain public confidence in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines, but also in the competence and reliability of the institutions that deliver them
- the principles and processes that guide government decisions and actions in vaccine procurement, distribution, prioritisation and administration
- the capacity, transparency and effectiveness of regulatory agencies in handling issues and communicating openly and consistently as events arise, while retaining public confidence in their review processes
- the effectiveness of public engagement and communication activities.

Successful vaccination campaigns also require governments to partner and support community organisations in conducting extensive and well-managed community engagement to understand specific concerns of different population groups; prior experiences with both vaccination and the health system in general; religious and/or political affiliations; and socio-economic status. Some countries have improved transparency in vaccination by:

- ensuring that government actions are open to public scrutiny
- proactively releasing timely information on vaccination strategies, modalities and accomplishments in disaggregated and open formats
- enhancing transparent and coherent public communication
- managing public expectations and explaining why it is fair that particular population groups within a country are prioritised for vaccination.

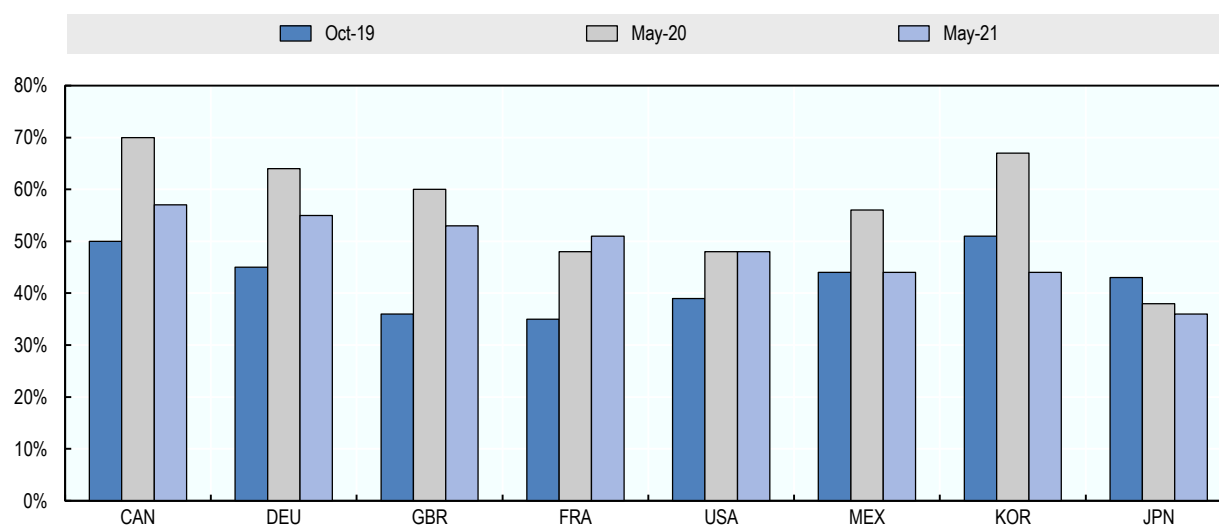
Source: (OECD, 2021<sup>[25]</sup>)

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stress test for governments everywhere. Yet an interesting and well-documented phenomenon is that in times of crisis, people tend to gather or “rally” behind their leaders. This happens particularly when a crisis is sudden and of international significance, and there is a general perception that a nation as a whole is under threat. In these cases, there is a heavier media presence and coverage of national leaders, senior civil servants and new policies in general, which is also accompanied by a reduction or complete absence of criticism from the opposition (Baker and Oneal, 2001<sup>[26]</sup>). Based on a feeling of “we are all in this together” there can be a surge in public trust, a “rally-round-the-flag” effect (Mueller, 1970<sup>[27]</sup>).

Tracing public trust over the course of the pandemic is often challenging, as it requires representative data at short time intervals. However, a surge of trust in government during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic was documented in the Edelman Trust Barometer (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Trust in government increased temporarily during first months of the pandemic**

Percentage of people stating they “trust the government to do what is right”; 2019-2021, selected OECD countries



Note: Survey based on 1 200 respondents per country uses a 9-point scale, where choice of 6-9 indicates “trust” (shown here).  
Source: OECD calculations based on Edelman Trust Barometer data.

This rallying effect observed in most countries during the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic –for example see (The Economist, 2020<sup>[28]</sup>; Jennings, 2020<sup>[29]</sup>; Cunningham, 2021<sup>[30]</sup>)– was likely driven by a diversity of feelings, including solidarity, patriotism, national unity and empathy, with citizens acknowledging the challenge of governing in times of crisis (Kritzinger et al., 2021<sup>[31]</sup>).

The fact that people interacted more frequently with government institutions also helped, as public trust is often formed (or lost) during these interactions (Blind, 2006<sup>[32]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>). Moreover, interaction often involved institutions that have traditionally enjoyed higher trust from citizens, including the health system and local government (González, 2020<sup>[33]</sup>). In fact, governments in OECD countries and elsewhere took unprecedented levels of action and delivered a wide array of rapid policy responses and regulatory measures (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>), including medical advice and treatment, the issuing of guidelines regarding mask-wearing and social distancing, and income support or furlough schemes to directly support households, workers and firms.

Trust in public institutions may have also benefited from the public appearance of medical experts and scientists alongside politicians and high-level civil servants, adding to their credibility and legitimacy (Albertson and Gadarian, 2015<sup>[35]</sup>). Governments that demonstrate their competence through quick and decisive actions are able to underline their reliability and responsiveness in terms of keeping citizens safe, which are both key drivers of public trust in institutions.

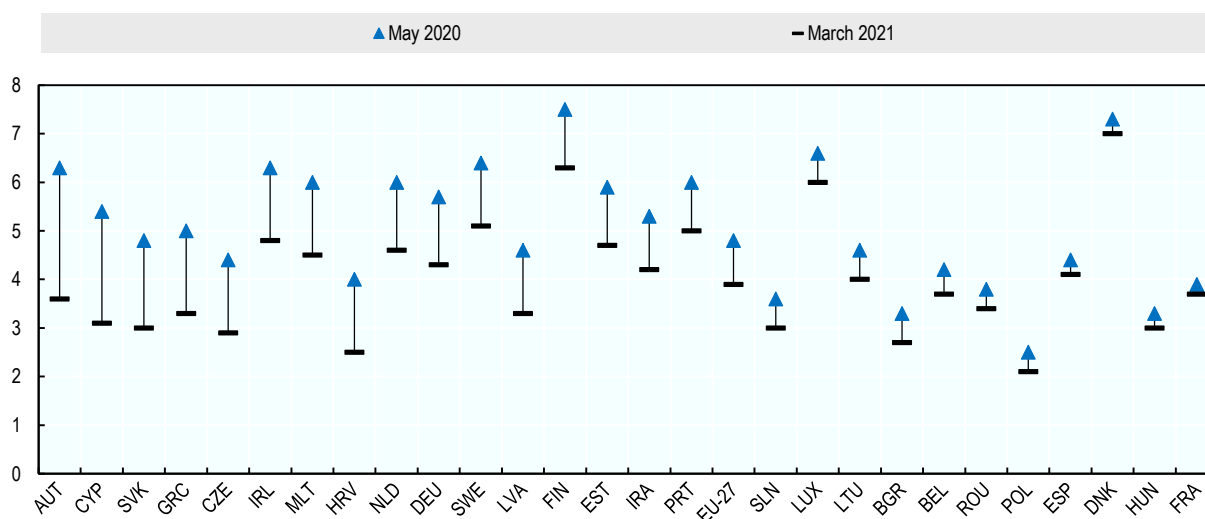
Measures of public trust tend to be very volatile in times of high uncertainty, which is also why it is key to consider longer time periods to better assess changes and trends in trust. The initial surge in trust during the first weeks of the pandemic dropped off sharply by 2021 in most countries and fully reversed to pre-crisis levels in Mexico while in South Korea it fell considerably lower (see Figure 2). France is the exception among surveyed countries as levels increased further (+2 p.p.) over this period. Moreover, by May 2021 a further surge in trust is visible in the United Kingdom and the United States, perhaps related to the early vaccination successes in these countries. The reasons why trust is dropping again could be similar to why trust increased in the first place. Citizens and opposition parties begin to question government responses and choices as the crisis continues and more information becomes available. People will increasingly also

think beyond the crisis and demand plans for the recovery period, the climate transition, and reinforcing governance systems for future crises.

This pattern of decreasing trust in government is confirmed by a cross-European online survey conducted by Eurofound via social media channels on quality of life and trust in institutions of EU citizens over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound, 2020<sup>[36]</sup>; Eurofound, 2021<sup>[37]</sup>). Comparing levels of trust between May 2020 and March 2021 shows that trust had dropped in all EU countries (see Figure 3); unfortunately, the time series does not show what happened in the early months of the pandemic when trust likely rallied upwards, nor after vaccination began in European countries. For EU-OECD countries, the decline is most pronounced in Austria, Cyprus, the Slovak Republic and Greece, and least pronounced in France, Hungary, Denmark and Spain. In addition, at least for this period of analysis, the data do not show any significant differences in declining trust based on people's gender or age.

**Figure 3. Public trust in government dropped in all EU-27 countries between May 2020 and March 2021**

Respondents' average trust in government on a 1-10 scale



Note: Trust is measured on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 signals no trust at all and 10 signals complete trust. Data sorted left to right by size of drop in trust (high to low). Survey participants were recruited via "snowball sampling methods and social medial advertisements" through an "online tool, using non-probabilistic sampling methods, instead of the traditional random probability methodology" and hence the survey was open to anyone across the globe (Eurofound, 2021<sup>[37]</sup>).

Source: OECD calculations based on Eurofound (2021) data.

Trust between citizens and their government works as a two-way relationship. Putting less stringent measures in place during emergencies may save not only time, but also enforcement and surveillance costs. In contrast, strict emergency measures – which can include tracking people's movement, forced isolations, and fines or prisons sentences for non-compliance – could be seen as excessive, invasive or even authoritarian, creating a vicious instead of virtuous circle in terms of trust. When these rules disproportionately target specific groups or places, that can lead to a reduction of trust in government since people expect government institutions to be fair, inclusive and operating in an open and transparent way (OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>).

Evidence is mixed on the effect of emergency measures, including exceptional powers to enforce lockdowns and other measures, on trust in democratic institutions. A survey carried out in Spain before and right after the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 finds widespread demand for strong leadership and

willingness to give up individual freedom, and a sharp increase in support for technocratic governance at the expense of democratic accountability (Amat et al., 2020<sup>[38]</sup>). On the other hand, some commentators have suggested that the unprecedented curbs on civil liberties in 2020 (including curfews, movement restrictions, limiting or banning gatherings) went beyond what may be permissible under international law regarding limitation of rights during public health emergencies (Narsee, 2021<sup>[39]</sup>); there have been widespread social protest movements in some countries, including OECD countries (Trian, 2020<sup>[40]</sup>; Gideon, 2020<sup>[41]</sup>). Related to this, in a recent OECD webinar experts expressed concern regarding the defence of human rights and civic space in times of crisis, and highlighted the importance of ensuring that emergency measures remain under sunset clauses and are evaluated over time (OECD, 2021<sup>[42]</sup>).

Additionally, times of crisis often mean that decision making and policy design processes are heavily accelerated and streamlined across institutions (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>). Emerging evidence suggests that, as expected, many governments have operated with lower standards of consultation, transparency and oversight by the public or parliaments during COVID-19. Governments have introduced thousands of emergency regulations, often on a fast track; only post-crisis evaluations of government accountability on how decisions during a crisis were made and how effective their results were can help to understand how/whether this impacted public trust. Some alleviation of standards may be inevitable in an emergency, but the scope and timing must be limited to avoid damaging citizens' perceptions of the competence, openness, transparency and fairness of government (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>). Evaluations of how decisions during the crisis were made and how effective their results are still limited. Some evidence is provided of the potential impact in OECD countries of regulatory easing introduced during the crisis (such as removing regulatory impact assessment, shortened stakeholder engagement, etc.) and of requirements on industry (i.e. suspended performance reporting) (OECD, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). This evidence highlights the importance of time-bound measures and post-implementation reviews.

Periods of crisis can be an opportunity for building trust when government institutions can demonstrate and communicate that they are doing all within their power to keep citizens safe, provide emergency support, and relieve economic and social hardship. Enhancing government accountability through transparent evaluations and communication with the public can be key to increasing trust in government. In terms of the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions it relates closely to the driver of government openness, which includes the concepts of transparency and inclusiveness. For example, sharing data on risk assessments publicly and proactively – rather than having the information leaked – can increase trust in government's digital applications and services. Besides, promoting open government practices can counterbalance the spread of disinformation, especially during a crisis.

At the same time, the arrival of contact tracing apps and digital wallets for vaccination records (e.g. the Anticovid app in France) underlined the importance of government transparency in terms how personal data are processed, stored and used, and provided a strong argument to have real-life practical tools that individuals can use to have control over their data (e.g. data deletion functions, electronic identification [eID], citizens' folders) (OECD, 2021<sup>[44]</sup>). This also illustrates how meeting the needs of people through public service delivery in the digital age calls for mature digital governments to provide confidence and trust in the digital interactions of citizens with the public sector. With the overnight shift to remote service delivery, many countries had to rapidly digitise public services and strengthen existing critical digital tools such as digital identity to provide safe access to public services (OECD/Italian G20 Presidency, 2021<sup>[45]</sup>).

Besides, promoting open government practices, including open government data on a developing crisis, can counterbalance the spread of disinformation. At the same time, open government data can provide a tool for the design and first-hand delivery of public services that respond to the more immediate needs of people when facing a crisis (e.g. that help them to find medical supplies) (OECD and Govlab, 2021<sup>[46]</sup>). This is more likely to happen when governments can demonstrate their competence, responsiveness

(e.g. use of digital technologies to continue public service delivery<sup>2</sup>) and willingness to reform policy areas affected by the pandemic in a fair and transparent way (see Box 3 for further details).

### Box 3. Maintaining public trust during prolonged periods of crisis

Maintaining public trust during extended periods of crisis is a challenge due to the fact that people and policy makers are living under conditions of heightened and prolonged stress. However, when policymakers and politicians manage to demonstrate competence (responsiveness and reliability) through their actions – while maintaining high levels of integrity – public trust is less likely to take a nosedive.

The following examples illustrate the emerging view among experts that clear and open communication with citizens and a commonly shared vision that is outlined in a transparent way with supporting messaging from the scientific community and trusted third parties, and with peer-to-peer approaches, could help maintain citizens' confidence in government's capacity to handle a crisis, although an evaluation of their effectiveness and influence on public's trust has not yet been carried out.

- *Engaging citizens in consultations and focus groups* – In Finland, the government engaged in what were called “lockdown dialogues” to gather citizens' feelings and views on the challenges they were experiencing during lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. These continued after restrictions were eased and were converted into the “Finnish National Dialogues”. In total the government engaged in over 100 dialogues.
- *Bringing the scientific community into the communication process* – Many political leaders have chosen to bring experts from the scientific community or senior civil servants to press conferences and statements. For instance, the Prime Minister of Canada (among others such as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) appeared along with the country's chief health officer in all his speeches in order to validate the underlying scientific evidence and thus bolster the public credibility of the messaging. In some cases experts also led their own communication interventions without policy makers.
- *Delivering communication that is frequent, transparent and inclusive* – Some governments have tried to remain transparent and acknowledge the unknown. There have also been efforts to better reach groups that have traditionally been excluded or have reason to doubt what the government tells them. For example, in Canada focus groups with diverse segments of society, including Indigenous groups and migrants, helped to understand specifically how messages could be communicated more effectively. As part of this effort government messages have been translated into 30 languages.
- *Adhering to high ethical standards despite accelerated processes and reduced public or legislative oversight* – This includes not cutting corners in terms of due diligence or engaging in favouritism, fraud or corruption. During the pandemic there were reports that contracts for personal protective equipment were awarded to dubious companies that could not deliver, or charged non-market rates. One positive example was the Office of Government Procurement in Ireland, which developed a guidance note on good practices for contracting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>; Sapir, 2020<sup>[47]</sup>; Allcott et al., 2020<sup>[48]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[49]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[50]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>)

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the *G20 Compendium on the Use of Digital Tools for Public Service Continuity*, prepared by the OECD under the 2021 G20 Italian Presidency at <https://assets.innovazione.gov.it/1628073696-g20defoecdcompendiumdigitaltools.pdf>.



## 1.2. Medium-term concerns: Challenges in rebuilding trust after crises

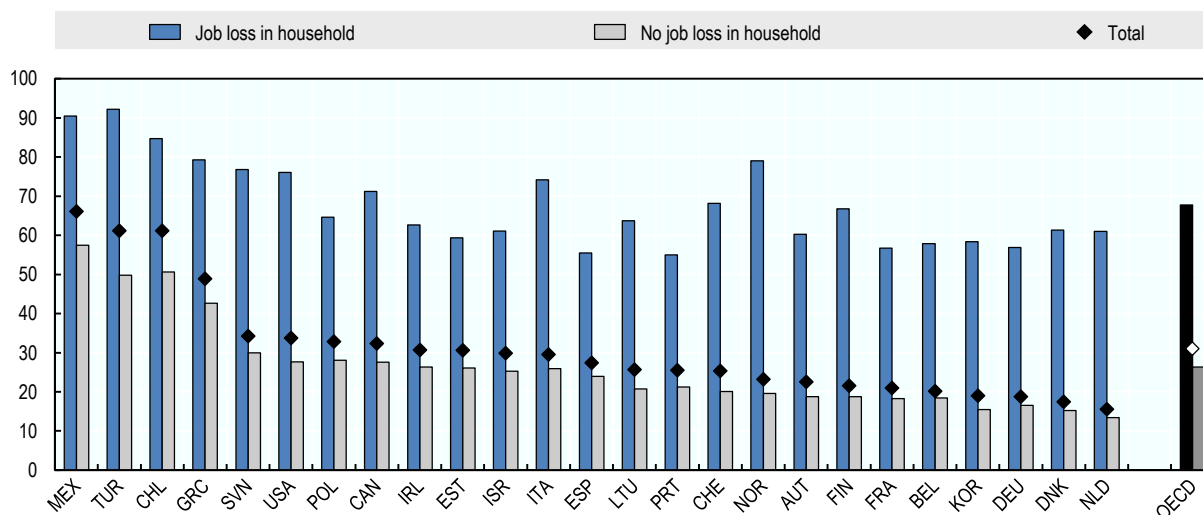
Beyond short-run and often transitory effects, a crisis can also affect trust dynamics in the long run. There is considerable evidence of this from the 2008 global financial crisis, after which levels of trust in government in OECD countries followed a slow U-shaped curve. After a rapid plunge, it took more than 10 years for trust to return to pre-crisis levels in the OECD area (OECD, 2019<sup>[6]</sup>). On average for the OECD area, trust dropped by 4 percentage points between 2007 and 2012, and has increased since to 51% in 2020. The drop in trust was much larger in some member countries such as Ireland (-28 percentage points), Greece (-25), Slovenia (-24) and Portugal (-22). In Belgium, Chile, Spain and Australia trust levels in 2020 are still well below 2007 values (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>).

Economic crises can also lead to a deterioration of interpersonal trust and life satisfaction more broadly (Ananyev and Guriev, 2019<sup>[52]</sup>; Zak and Knack, 2001<sup>[53]</sup>). The economic recession of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures contributed to both declining trust in political institutions and the rise of populism, accelerated also by globalisation, automation and cultural backlash (Guriev and Papaioannou, Forthcoming<sup>[54]</sup>). A study using data for 217 regions in 25 European countries finds that economic insecurity and rising unemployment after 2008 are strongly related to declining trust in governments, political institutions and legal systems (Algan et al., 2017<sup>[55]</sup>). Evidence shows that there is a risk that a crisis associated with a large economic downturn can do permanent harm to democratic institutions and lead to a rise in voting for anti-establishment parties (Guriev and Papaioannou, Forthcoming<sup>[54]</sup>). In line with this argument, studies from the United States show that experiencing a crisis or economic downturn in early adulthood can have a lasting negative effect particularly on younger people's confidence in public institutions and decrease political participation (Giuliano and Spilimbergo, 2013<sup>[56]</sup>; Eichengreen, Saka and Aksoy, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major economic shock that has already increased economic insecurity, particularly for less educated people (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020<sup>[58]</sup>; Eurofound, 2021<sup>[37]</sup>). Indeed, in 2020 OECD member countries recorded an average decline of almost 5% in real GDP, as 22 million jobs were lost compared to 2019 (OECD, 2021<sup>[59]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[60]</sup>). A recent OECD survey shows that the pandemic has left many people more economically insecure, with more than one-third reporting job-related disruptions including losing a job, reduction in working hours or a fall in income (see Figure 4 and (OECD, 2021<sup>[61]</sup>)). At the same time – and largely in contrast to the 2008 recession – governments across OECD countries rolled out large fiscal stimulus packages to support businesses and households. Government and central bank support and progress in vaccination have resulted in a strong economic recovery in the second half of 2021, with global GDP now above its pre-pandemic level. However, the recovery remains uneven across and within countries (OECD, 2021<sup>[62]</sup>), and levels of inequality and economic precariousness will be influenced by the size and shape of still-changing social protection measures. The recovery presents a challenge for the maintenance and recovery of public trust.

**Figure 4. Households that experienced a job loss are more likely to report financial difficulties across OECD countries in 2020**

Percentage of respondents whose household experienced financial difficulty since the start of COVID-19, grouped by experience of job loss in the household, selected OECD countries, 2020



Note: Figure shows percent of respondents in September 2020 reporting at least one financial difficulty since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, by reported experience of job loss in the household (household with job loss, household without job loss, and aggregate percentage across those two groups) since the start of the pandemic. Bars add up to >100% since they refer to different groups (those with job loss and those without). OECD average based on 25 OECD countries.

Source: OECD, *Risks That Matter 2020*.

The COVID-19 pandemic, while affecting people differently, has exacerbated existing inequalities across population groups – including generational, economic and social divides – and created a sense of vulnerability. People that were particularly hard hit include those in low-paying occupations, the young, people on fixed-term contracts, and those with lower levels of education (OECD, 2021<sup>[60]</sup>). A focus on government support to people and businesses hit hard by the pandemic, targeted in particular to the young, the less-skilled and other vulnerable groups, can not only strengthen the economic recovery but also avoid a downturn spiral of disengagement, polarisation and social unrest.

Together with economic measures, governments should tackle the roots of citizens' distrust and their perception of being left behind. The COVID-19 crisis is further worsening political divides, nurturing polarisation and favouring populist movements (Devine et al., 2020<sup>[22]</sup>) and recovering trust is as important as economic recovery. Steering countries out of the crisis without deterioration of the social tissue will rely on people's perceptions that policies are fair and worthy of popular support, and that governments will deliver. Evidence from the Latinobarometro shows, for example, that reforms aimed at redistributing power and wealth and mitigating social inequalities were effective mechanisms for building trust in the long term in some Latin American countries.<sup>3</sup>

In that sense, trust plays a double role as countries move into the recovery. First, a high degree of trust is necessary to ensure public institutions' ability to implement ambitious and effective policies that are necessary to rebuild and enhance resilience for future crises. Second, lack of trust compromises the willingness of citizens and business to respond to public policies and as such is a source of instability for a resilient recovery, such willingness could be monitored alongside other non-economic risk factors. In the

<sup>3</sup> Presentation by Marta Lagos during the OECD webinar series *Building a New Paradigm for Public Trust* (see Box 6), [www.oecd.org/gov/oecd-trust-divide-marta-lagos.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gov/oecd-trust-divide-marta-lagos.pdf).

current juncture, monitoring citizens' confidence – and not just consumer confidence – may help governments to prioritise, sequence and communicate actions in the recovery plans. For these reasons, measures of trust, detailed by types of institutions, socio-economic characteristics and geographies, should be developed to deliver evidence and assess how countries, specific population groups and places within countries fare.

### 1.3. Intergenerational concerns: Key societal and global challenges

Public trust can facilitate the acceptability of and compliance with reforms (Heinemann and Tanz, 2008<sup>[63]</sup>; Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). However, there is little evidence on the specific role of trust in building public support for long-term policies whose outcomes will only be fully visible in the future and that often confront governments with intergenerational trade-offs. This typically takes the form of policies or investments with short-term costs, at least for some segments of the population, that offer potential payoffs for future generations – so long as governments can credibly and effectively commit over time.

Lessons from the global financial crisis reveal that it will likely be very important for governments to garner public support for COVID-19 recovery efforts, since a high degree of public trust will support national and international institutions' capacity to act. However, this will involve more than government capacity. To tackle major, long-run societal challenges like climate change, inequalities, fiscal sustainability and digitalisation, governments will need to build support for intergenerational redistribution – i.e. long-term payoffs for short-term costs. That requires credible policy commitments and public confidence in the effectiveness of policy choices, since the main beneficiaries of such policies are future generations. Such a commitment is a challenge for all governments, even those perceived as the most trustworthy.

More evidence is needed to understand the role of trust in building public support for long-term policies and reforms that carry these intergenerational trade-offs. Trust is indeed a dynamic concept. Individuals form trust by evaluating experiences and available information that allow them to continuously “update” their preferences and expectations of positive behaviour of institutions (or other people). It depends on the congruence between citizens' circumstances and preferences – their interpretation of what is right and fair and what is unfair – and the perceived functioning of government (Bouckaert and van de Walle, 2003<sup>[64]</sup>).

Changes in public policies and the way these policies are designed and implemented (governance) can influence the trustworthiness of public institutions and thus expectations of future behaviour (Ben-Ner and Halldorsson, 2010<sup>[65]</sup>; Johnson and Mislin, 2011<sup>[66]</sup>). Section 3 presents an analysis of the role of trust in government in facilitating implementation of long-term policies such as climate policies.

# 2 Patterns in trust across public institutions and population groups

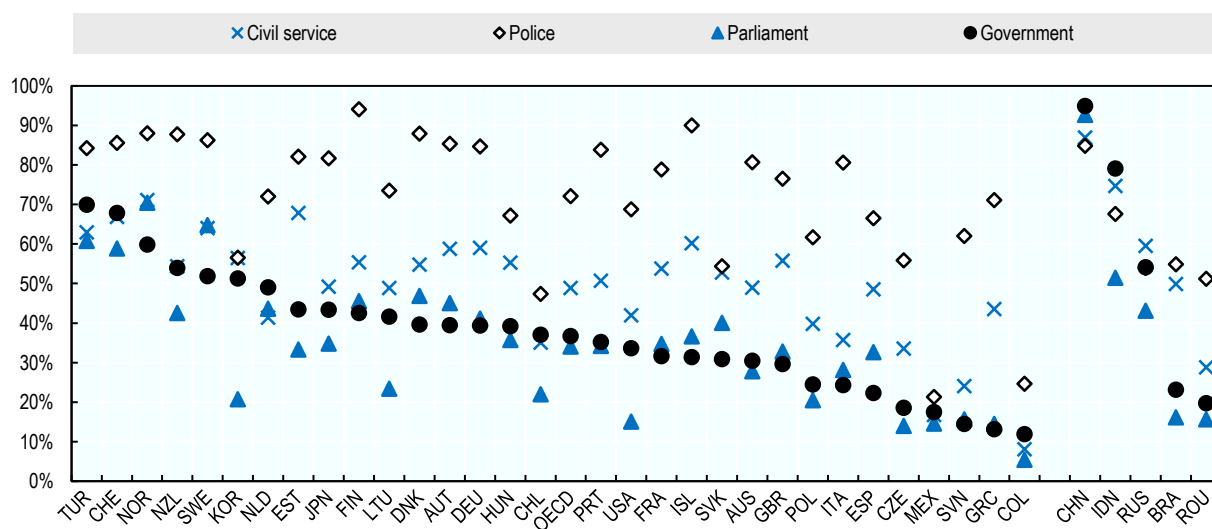
People's life experiences differ greatly depending on their age, gender, educational background and earnings, and where they live. This makes it important to unpack aggregate measures of trust to gain better evidence on structural barriers for certain population groups that should be tackled in the design and delivery of public policies. In-depth OECD country studies of South Korea, Finland and Norway show that the drivers of public trust differ considerably depending on who is asked and which institution is considered (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>). Of equal importance is that the COVID-19 crisis has hit some groups harder than others and there is a real risk that differences in trust in government institutions could be further exacerbated. Going forward, it is important to monitor trust across groups and places to see who might need more attention from policy makers.

## 2.1. Trust differs across public institutions

The level of trust people have in public institutions differs. On average in the OECD area, 72% of the population trust the police, 49% trust the civil service, 37% trust the national government and about one in three trusts their national parliament (see Figure 5). These differences suggest that people seem to have a clearly differentiated perception of trustworthiness towards individual institutions, which also differs across countries. For instance, while trust in parliament and government is relatively low in the United Kingdom, trust in that country's civil service and police is above the OECD average. On the other hand, trust in government and parliament is above OECD average in the Netherlands, but well below in the case of the civil service.

**Figure 5. People’s trust differs considerably across public institutions**

Percentage of people who have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in their national government, parliament, civil service and police; 2017-20



Note: Data sorted left to right by trust in national government (high to low). Data collected between 2017 and 2020 depending on country (see Annex A). OECD average based on 32 OECD countries.

Source: (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>); calculations based in the World Values Survey (WVS) and European Values Study (EVS).

Monitoring people’s trust across a range of public institutions and levels of government is particularly important given that the drivers or determinants also vary across them. For example, in Finland, responsiveness and reliability of the public sector were found to be the main determinants of people’s trust in the national government, while interpersonal trust and government openness matter more for people’s trust in local governments (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>). Reliability was also a key factor in explaining trust in the national government in Norway, yet trust in the local government was mainly driven by people’s satisfaction with services (OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). In Korea, integrity was found to have the greatest influence on levels of trust in political parties, while the ease of finding information or fair treatment in service provision primarily influence trust at the administrative level (OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>). According to data for a set of European countries, trust in parliament, the police and the legal system are strongly correlated with people’s evaluation of equality before the law, protection against poverty, and fair elections (European Social Survey, 2014<sup>[67]</sup>).

Differences in the levels of trust towards the government and the civil service in a country can provide key information to public administrations on how citizens experience and evaluate the delivery of policies and services. In most of the OECD area trust in the civil service was higher than trust in government in 2017-20, with the exceptions of Chile, Colombia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Turkey (Figure 5). In addition, analysis shows that the performance of public institutions, as viewed by citizens, also influences levels of political trust (Dahlstrom and Lapuente, 2017<sup>[68]</sup>).

Evidence from 173 European regions shows that impartiality of civil servants and the absence of corruption seem to be the strongest institutional determinants of citizens’ trust in public administration (Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020<sup>[69]</sup>). Moreover, a study found that public administrations in which recruitment and promotion of government employees are based on merit and where civil servants are accountable to peers instead of politicians tend to have a higher control of corruption and government effectiveness, and are perceived as more impartial (Dahlstrom and Lapuente, 2017<sup>[68]</sup>). For instance, in New Zealand the political neutrality of the civil service and a culture of innovation within the civil service have been identified as key

elements in maintaining citizens' trust in government during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Box 4). Further, higher motivation levels of people working in the public sector and confidence in the institution they are part of, were found to be related to higher public confidence in key national public institutions, as well as to higher sense of citizens' rights (Taylor, 2010<sup>[70]</sup>). In turn this may increase levels of inter-institutional trust, which is key to strengthening co-ordination in the public sector and thus to better delivery.

#### Box 4. Civil service neutrality and innovation in the response to COVID-19 in New Zealand

The response to the pandemic in New Zealand relied on citizens following public health guidelines, and public trust in the civil service was a key enabler.

Political neutrality is a key principle of the New Zealand civil service, and through the pandemic response the role of civil servants was clearly differentiated from that of politicians. This allowed New Zealanders to distinguish political announcements and advocacy for policies from information shared by politically neutral public health experts. New Zealanders could trust that the health information they received was not influenced by partisan politics.

Indeed, although originally the country's system of government was based on the Westminster model – where politicians (ministers of the Crown) sit within and lead government departments – the country has gradually increased the separation between politicians and the public administration, especially through the public service reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, and their emphasis on “freedom to manage”.<sup>1</sup> Civil servants are responsible for implementing the policies set by ministers, but the chief executives and other civil servants in New Zealand also have a range of statutory obligations with which politicians cannot interfere. The principles that guide civil service, such as merit-based appointment, political neutrality, and stewardship<sup>2</sup>, were included in the 2020 Public Service Act, passed during the pandemic. The Act also strengthened provisions relating to preserving, protecting and nurturing a public sector ethic (a “spirit of service to the community”).

The New Zealand Government was able to build strong support for its public health measures in the early stages of the pandemic, due also in part to a communication strategy based on duty rather than self-interest (a “team of five million”), and on messages of kindness and compassion. Civil servants needed to be innovative and work quickly in order to make it easier for people to comply with public health measures, but also to ensure that public services could be delivered in a compassionate manner. Some initiatives that were developed were:

- The *Epidemic Response Committee* – a Parliamentary select committee composed of 11 members. It was chaired by the leader of the opposition, and 6 of the 11 members represented opposition parties. This democratic innovation allowed different branches of government to work together swiftly, and bringing opposition into the process contributed to broader cross-party support for the response and ensured that the government could move at the speed required. It also helped to manage the risks associated with suspension of normal processes.
- The COVID-19 *All-of-Government Response Group* – which mobilised the collective capacity of government in eliminating COVID-19 while preserving economic conditions and social cohesion. The Group worked with agencies to shift resources to the greatest emergency need. It ensured a co-ordinated response and provided advice to the Cabinet based on dedicated data analytics capability.
- The *wage subsidy and leave support scheme*. Government took a different approach to risk management, focusing on which adverse outcomes were reversible (e.g. recoverable over payments) versus irreversible (e.g. businesses failing), and developed a package of financial support paid out to businesses to stop widespread unemployment. The scheme was

unprecedented in its turnaround of less than two days, which required the government to accept a greater up-front risk of fraud or payments-in-error, with costs recouped later.

- The *distance learning initiative* – A co-ordinated effort between ministries and education providers ensured learners had access to at least one channel for distance education over the lockdown period. The initiative was notable for its focus on accessibility, with Internet-based solutions augmented with free-to-air television channels. Universal accessibility made it easier for people to follow social distancing guidelines.
- The *silent call system* – Government-installed silent call buttons in supermarkets (one of the few services that remained open throughout lockdown) that allowed victims of family and sexual violence to request support discreetly and safely in their only out-of-home activity. This was intended to address the risk that violence would increase over lockdown while victims would have less access to support and reprieve out of their homes.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Scott, R.J., M. Macaulay and E.R.K. Merton (2020), "Drawing new boundaries: Can we legislate for administrative behavior? – Symposium on Decision-Making in Public Organizations: The Continued Relevance of Administrative Behavior, London.

<sup>2</sup> Scott, R.J. and M. Macaulay (2020), "Making sense of New Zealand's 'spirit of service': Social identity and the civil service", *Public Money & Management*, Vol. 40, No. 8, pp. 579-88.

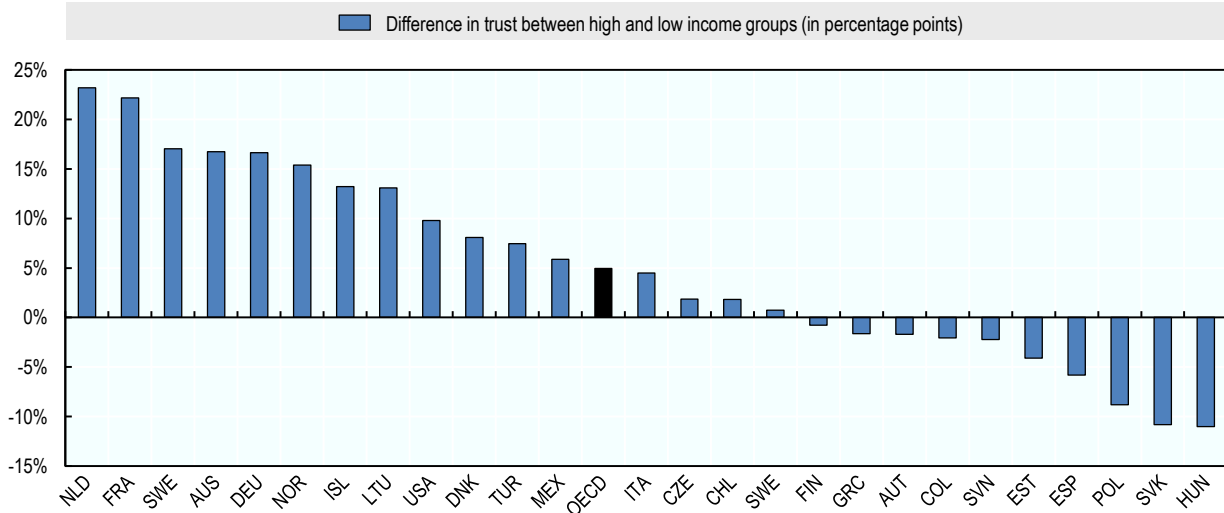
Citizens' expectations evolve over time and require the public sector to innovate and adapt quickly in order to meet those expectations and address challenges effectively. Yet, innovation in the public sector has often been (or been perceived to be) a more reactive process, and slow to embrace new methods of working and technologies (OECD, 2018<sup>[71]</sup>). A future-oriented model of public service delivery can lead to better services, and build trust in citizens that public institutions will always be "up to the task". This requires the capacity to continuously test solutions and be experimental, which can ensure that new solutions are appropriate before scaling. In Norway for example, the current government has pledged a "trust reform" of the public administration, to enhance innovation and experimentation in the civil service as a way to rebuild trust and increase effectiveness of policies and maintain citizens' trust (OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

## 2.2. Trust varies across demographic and socio-economic characteristics

Demographic and socio-economic factors such as gender, age, income and education are important in capturing differences in public trust in government and often combine with other factors such as perception of the government's competence and values. Figure 6 shows that in most OECD countries, people with higher incomes tend to have higher levels of trust in government. The same holds for people with higher levels of education in around half of OECD countries (see Figure 7). Countries with the biggest gap between high and low income groups are found mainly in Western Europe (the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Germany, Norway), as well as Australia. However, for a number of countries mainly in Eastern Europe (Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Poland, Slovenia) as well as Spain, trust seems to be higher for lower income groups. For education the picture is more mixed, though again in most Western European countries and Australia trust seems to be highest for groups with university-level education. On the other hand, countries where trust from the most highly educated is lowest include Austria, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Turkey and the United States.

**Figure 6. In most OECD countries trust in government is positively associated with income**

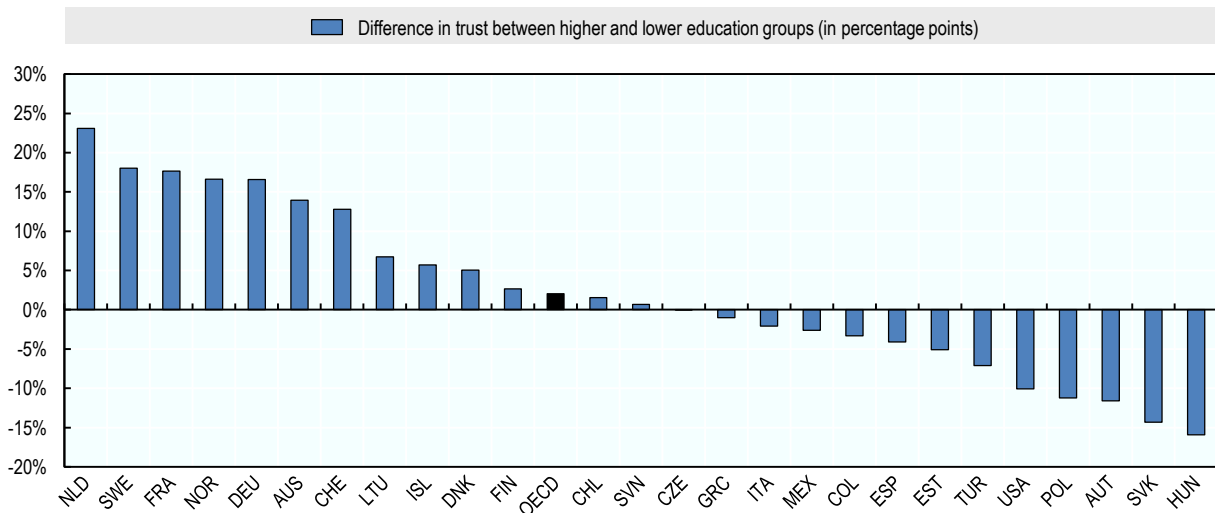
Percentage point difference in average trust in government between higher and lower income groups, 2017-20, selected OECD countries



Note: Income divided into deciles in national income distribution as follows: low (deciles 1-3) and high (deciles 8-10). Data sorted left to right by the absolute gap in average trust between higher and lower income groups. Data collected between 2017 and 2020 depending on country (see Annex A). OECD average based on 27 OECD countries.  
 Source: OECD/TrustGov calculations based on World Value Survey Wave 7 data.

**Figure 7. In half of OECD countries trust in government is lower for more highly educated people**

Percentage point difference in average trust in government between higher and lower education groups, 2017-20, selected OECD countries



Note: Education divided into two groups based on ISCED as follows: Lower (ISCED 0-2) and Higher (ISCED 5-8). Data sorted left to right by the absolute gap in average trust between most and least educated group. Data collected between 2017 and 2020 depending on country (see Annex A). OECD average based on 27 OECD countries.  
 Source: OECD/TrustGov calculations based on World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 data.



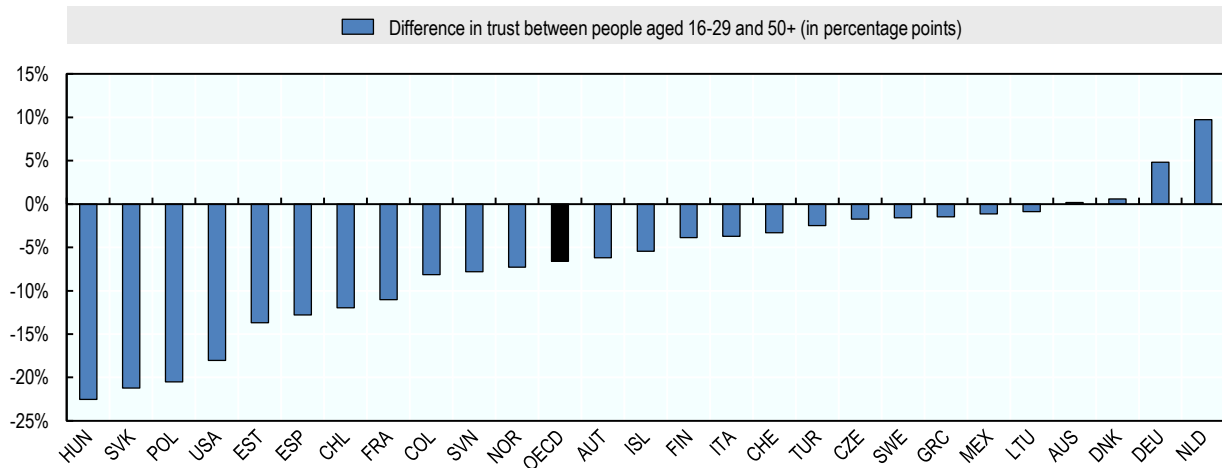
Results for age and gender are more mixed, although on average in most OECD countries trust in government is lower for younger age groups (see Figure 8). That matters, given that the COVID-19 pandemic risks exacerbating inequalities across generations as young people in particular struggle with education, early employment and mental health, but also among young people depending on their socio-economic background (OECD, 2020<sup>[72]</sup>). At the same time younger age groups also have shown the largest decline in satisfaction with democracy and decreasing trust in government following the financial crisis of 2008 (Eurofound, 2021<sup>[37]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[72]</sup>). Analysis of 34 OECD countries, 8 selected non-member countries and 81 youth organisations shows a number of legal, policy and institutional, and decision-making arrangements that countries can put in place to support the young and enhance intergenerational justice. The comparative analysis identifies three main public governance areas that would have an impact on increasing youth trust in public institutions. They refer to adopting a holistic governance approach to support youth in their transition to an autonomous life; increasing youth participation and representation in public life and their relationship with government; and integrating considerations of intergenerational fairness and justice into policy making (OECD, 2020<sup>[72]</sup>).

Differences in trust in government by gender are less pronounced in most OECD countries according to data from the World Values Survey (Haerpfer, 2020<sup>[73]</sup>). Yet, trust levels seem to be higher for women in the United States, Mexico and Greece, while men report higher average trust in France, Switzerland and Germany. However, while some differences in public trust by gender are visible, it is not clear what exactly is driving them. For instance, differences in income or education for different groups could be related to gender and be driving differences in average trust, rather than gender itself.

Trust in government institutions often differs by racial and ethnic identity, although this crucially depends on which racial or ethnic group and country is being considered. Existing studies and surveys have looked at a range of factors including racialisation, immigration, Indigeneity and religion, and it is difficult to make any general statements regarding what is driving racial or ethnic differences in trust. In the US context, where racial or ethnic identity tends to be relatively more salient than in other OECD countries, trust in government is usually found to be lower for African Americans than for white Americans. This can be due to a range of factors, including historical experiences of institutionalised discrimination, African Americans' relatively poorer economic conditions, racial group consciousness, and Black Americans' lower levels of representation relative to white Americans (Avery, 2008<sup>[74]</sup>; Avery, 2006<sup>[75]</sup>; Magnum, 2016<sup>[76]</sup>; Wilkes and Wu, 2017<sup>[77]</sup>). Few comparative analyses have been carried out on differences in trust between native populations and people who immigrated to a country. Here, the country of origin can play an important role as it provides a positive or negative frame of reference in terms of expectations towards institutions, while discrimination also matters (Röder and Mühlau, 2012<sup>[78]</sup>). Clearly better data and more research on this important topic are needed, particularly outside the United States context.

**Figure 8. Younger people tend to have lower trust in government across OECD countries**

Difference in the share of respondents trusting their government between people aged 16-29 years and people aged 50 or higher, percentage points, selected OECD countries



Note: Figure shows percentage point difference in share of respondents that have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the government (WVS Q71) between people aged 16 to 29 and people aged 50 or above. Data collected between 2017 and 2020, depending on country (see Annex A). OECD average based on 27 OECD countries.

Source: OECD/TrustGov calculations based on WVS Wave 7 data.

### 2.3. Trust gaps between rural and urban areas within countries

Trust in institutions displays some clear geographical patterns and divisions, and on average trust in government in OECD countries seems to be higher in urban areas. The picture is mixed however, as in around half of the OECD countries with available data trust is actually higher in rural areas (see Figure 9); those countries include Spain, Austria, the Slovak Republic and the United States. Public trust also differs considerably across regions, and the differences in trust between the regions with the highest and lowest average can be very large. For instance, there is a 40 percentage point gap in trust in the national government in Mexico, Colombia and Turkey, and considerable gaps can also be found in the United States, Chile, Italy, Lithuania, Belgium, Costa Rica and New Zealand (OECD, 2020<sup>[79]</sup>). Policy makers need to pay attention to these existing gaps, as regional resilience to the health and economic shocks triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic vary greatly (OECD, 2021<sup>[80]</sup>) and territorial disparities in trust risk hindering a balanced and inclusive recovery.

Three main factors appear to explain levels of trust in government at the regional level. The first relates to long-term regional economic performance (Rodríguez-Pose, 2017<sup>[81]</sup>) and in most OECD countries, regional disparities are stronger a decade after the 2008 financial crisis than they were before. This lack of economic dynamism and opportunities in lagging regions, the so-called “places that do not matter”, is likely at the root of the surge of discontent following the financial crisis (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018<sup>[82]</sup>; McCann, 2019<sup>[83]</sup>). In the European Union, regions that were once wealthy and dynamic but have declined over time are more likely to express distrust and support anti-establishment political parties. At the constituency level, discontent is mainly the result of regional economic and industrial decline combined with lower employment and a less educated workforce (Lewis Dijkstra, Hugo Poelman and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, 2019<sup>[84]</sup>).

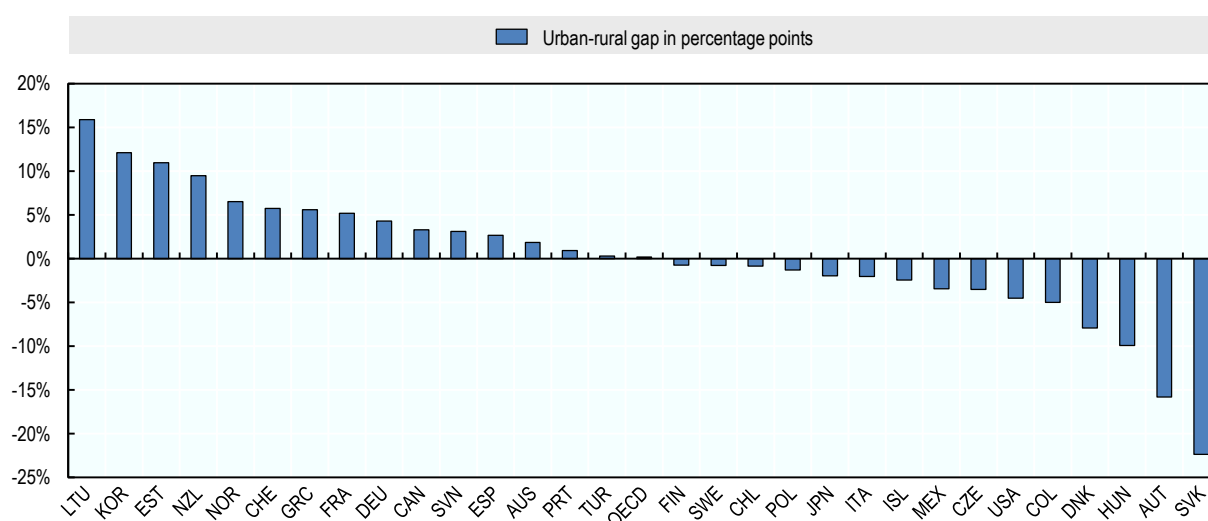
Second, regional labour market outcomes matter, at least in the short term, by affecting individuals and their communities (Algan et al., 2017<sup>[55]</sup>), and how those individuals perceive the state of the national economy on the basis of their experience of the regional economy (Reeves and Gimpel, 2012<sup>[85]</sup>; Mitsch,

Lee and Ralph-Morrow, 2021<sup>[86]</sup>). Depressed wage growth may discourage labour force participation and training and thus affect a person's life satisfaction, political evaluations and trust in government (Bauer, 2018<sup>[87]</sup>). In the European Union for example, increases in regional unemployment rates between 2008 and 2014 had a causal effect on decreasing trust in national parliaments and increasing votes for populist parties (Algan et al., 2017<sup>[55]</sup>). In Australia, rising regional unemployment rates also correlate with higher minor party votes (Grattan Institute, 2018<sup>[88]</sup>).

Finally, geography matters, as trust between urban and rural areas in some countries decreases with greater distance to urban centres, lower population density and lower access to government services (Mitsch, Lee and Ralph-Morrow, 2021<sup>[86]</sup>). In Australia, support for minor parties is increasingly correlated with the distance to the general post office or central business district (Grattan Institute, 2018<sup>[88]</sup>), indicating that the geography of discontent has become more acute in recent years. Other factors that partially explain differences in regional levels of trust might be due to differences in ideologies and cultural identities. For example, perceptions that politicians do not care about the area people live in also play a role (McKay, Jennings and Stoker, 2021<sup>[89]</sup>).

### Figure 9. There is no clear pattern of trust in government in cities compared to rest of country across OECD countries

Difference in the share of respondents trusting their government between people living in cities with more than 100k inhabitants and the rest of the country, percentage points, selected OECD countries



Note: "Trust" measured by share of respondents answering "A great deal" or "Quite a lot" to the question of how much confidence they have in the national government based in their capital city. Positive percentages indicate higher trust in urban cities. Data collected between 2017 and 2020 depending on country (see Annex A). OECD average based on 31 OECD countries.

Source: OECD/TrustGov calculations based on WVS Wave 7 data.

Considering the complexity of the trust divide between rural and urban areas, which also heavily intersects with demographic factors, government policies to tackle the divide need to consider a range of factors. These are further explored in Box 5 and involve not only being mindful of differences in economic performance and outcomes (often rooted in structural changes in the economy and society) but also accounting for socio-economic differences and expectations towards public services.

### Box 5. The role for place-based policies in bridging territorial divides

Regional disparities in trust in government reflect disparities in economic outcomes and access to public services in a territory. Increasing the focus on places in decline by developing place-based strategies for regional economic development, and improving public services delivery in rural areas and deprived urban areas, can help address these territorial divides. For example, investing in infrastructure and skills in lagging areas can spur regional development and address the underlying causes of distrust manifest in these regions, while ensuring policy efficiency and equity in the framework of distributed development. Several factors ought to be considered:

- Place-based policies need to take into account place-sensitive characteristics by targeting under-performing areas and address their specific socio-economic challenges. For example, investing in infrastructure and skills in lagging areas can spur regional development and address the underlying causes of low trust in these regions while ensuring policy efficiency and equity in the framework of distributed development.
- Policies should improve access to and delivery of public services to enhance the attractiveness of rural regions, manage depopulation trends and generate greater economies of scale. Developing and benefiting from the digital infrastructure could help coping with low population density. Rural depopulation affects public service costs and effective delivery, and puts a downward pressure on tax bases. In most EU countries, the distance to education and health services is significantly higher in sparse rural areas and villages than in cities, town and suburbs.
- Governments should support regional convergence by designing rural development strategies to unleash productivity and potential growth in lagging regions, particularly among regions in the middle-income trap. Rural development policy can add value to economic activity in lagging regions, through smart specialisation strategies targeted toward increasing diversification, participation in global value chains, and improving links with frontier regions, for example by strengthening firm concentration.
- A well-designed approach to decentralising tasks and granting fiscal autonomy to subnational governments, combined with sufficient regional and local capacity to deliver services and policies, could translate into higher trust in government. In decentralised settings, trust is generally higher and regional disparities lower. Fiscal decentralisation, and especially revenue decentralisation, tends to narrow down differences in regional GDP per capita within countries. Promoting citizen engagement in place-based policy making can also help build trust over time. There is evidence indicating that in cities with better open data and articulated citizen engagement strategies, residents report higher levels of city and life satisfaction.

Source: (Neumark and Simpson, 2014<sup>[90]</sup>) (Lewis Dijkstra, Hugo Poelman and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, 2019<sup>[84]</sup>) (Iammarino, Rodríguez-Pose and Storper, 2018<sup>[91]</sup>) (OECD, 2020<sup>[92]</sup>) (OECD/EC-JRC, 2021<sup>[93]</sup>) (Blöchliger, Bartolini and Stossberg, 2016<sup>[94]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[95]</sup>) (OECD, 2021<sup>[96]</sup>)

All in all, this section underlines the importance of collecting more disaggregated data on trust and its drivers among population groups, geography and institutions. This will help to ensure that policy design tackles existing inequalities and allows for a disaggregated view of the impacts of policies and governance on different groups in society. Lessons from the pandemic show that one way to enhance the understanding of institutional trust would be to improve the representation of population groups that may be systematically excluded from population surveys, especially in the case of non-official statistics (Brezzi, González and Prats, 2020<sup>[97]</sup>).

# 3 Trust-related challenges for public governance

Not only has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing economic, social, generational and cultural inequalities. It has also spurred many countries to think about how to rewire public trust and democratic processes. As governments struggle to address new and ongoing challenges, citizens are increasingly worried about the capacity of governments to act – and to do so fairly. On average, less than half of people (40%) in 26 OECD countries believe the political system in their countries allows people like them to have a say in what the government does. Similarly, 49% of respondents to the 2020 OECD Risks That Matter Survey feel their government does not take into account their views when formulating public policies. These figures are strongly associated with lower levels of satisfaction with democracy and public trust (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>).

The OECD consultative process “Building a new paradigm for public trust” (see Box 6) informed three key “lessons learned” from the crisis in terms of ensuring public trust in institutions. These three lessons are incorporated in the revised OECD Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions Framework (Section 4). All three considerations, if monitored and addressed, can contribute to stronger and more resilient democracies. These lessons are:

- understanding citizens’ views on the credibility and effectiveness of government action on intergenerational and global challenges
- examining forms of, and access to, political participation and monitoring political attitudes
- monitoring increasing levels of distrust and disengagement.

Addressing these issues is critical to support countries’ efforts in transforming public institutions to strengthen democracy and restore trust. These issues – embedded within the new Framework – are also important considerations for the OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative, which aims at strengthening the resilience of democracies from a governance system point of view (OECD, 2021<sup>[98]</sup>). The OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative builds on three pillars: preventing and addressing mis- and disinformation; enhancing new modes of participation and representation; and building greater capacity for national governments to address global challenges.

## Box 6. OECD webinar series “Building a New Paradigm for Public Trust”

The webinar series “Building a New Paradigm for Public Trust”, a consultative and knowledge-sharing process organised by the OECD Public Governance Directorate, engaged over 800 policy makers, civil servants, academics, data providers, and representatives from non-governmental organisations as well as the private sector. The series aimed at better understanding the linkages between trust and its policy drivers. A series of six webinars was held between June 2020 and July 2021.

The webinars explored varying topics including the measurement of trust after a crisis (organised with the OECD Statistics Directorate); the role of social dialogue and public engagement in building trust;

the relation between inequality and trust in government; transformation of the public sector and skills of civil servants to enhance people's trust; the role of trust in facilitating or hindering government's responses and building resilience (organised with the OECD Economics Directorate); and territorial divides in trust (organised with the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities).

Highlights, presentations and a full recording of the webinars can be found at [oe.cd/webinars-public-trust](https://oe.cd/webinars-public-trust).

### 3.1. The role of trust in governing for intergenerational and global challenges

This section discusses available evidence on people's attitudes towards future-oriented policies, the role that trust in government plays in facilitating public support to reforms with intergenerational trade-offs, and the policy and governance changes needed to increase the perception that long-term policies are effective. Based on this evidence, the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Section 4) and its measurement has been revised in an attempt to better incorporate attitudes towards policies with intergenerational consequences and perceptions of the long-term sustainability of policy choices.

These policies include first and foremost strategies to deal with climate change and public finance, issues that are central today. Other “megatrends” – such as population ageing, technological change, migration, among others – similarly need a forward-looking perspective. Governments increasingly need to anticipate the distributional impact of policies (and perceptions of them), as well as better understand the configuration of interests needed to help build consensus and broader coalitions. Fundamental aspects of the OECD Framework on Trust in Public Institutions – such as transparency, openness, and fairness – are relevant to many aspects of developing sustainable policies with intergenerational impact.

The expectation that governments will plan for the future partially falls under the “reliability” driver in the OECD Framework. The reliability component captures governments' mandates to protect citizens by anticipating and adapting to evolving risks and to minimise uncertainty; clarifying long-term priorities and acting in a consistent and predictable manner; and providing a stable environment for business and citizens. OECD analysis shows that public sector reliability is a factor most highly influencing people's trust in national government in Finland, Korea and Norway (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>; OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>). For example, the empirical analysis based on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions survey in Finland in 2020 shows that if people's perception of the capacity of institutions to address future challenges grew by one point, trust in government is estimated to increase by 0.47 points.

And yet fostering public trust will require more than improving perceptions of government's reliability. Trust is a dynamic concept that evolves over time. It is therefore likely that citizens' expectations will also have evolved in recent times given major evolutions in climate policy, public finances and, of course, public health. Governments' ability to tackle key societal challenges and ensure a resilient and fair recovery from COVID-19 will require support for intertemporal transfers, i.e. across generations and into the future.

Tackling these megatrends will also require people's confidence in government's ability to sustain public choices over time and influence future outcomes. The main costs will be born in the short run, the main policy outcomes will be felt in the future, and the main beneficiaries of such policies will be future generations. Therefore, an additional driver of public trust is public confidence that policy choices are sustainable over time, in terms of both credibility of what is promised and governance mechanisms to ensure their effective implementation.

Adding complexity to these processes is the fact that many of the long-term challenges faced by countries at the domestic level are increasingly of a global nature. Many would argue that some of the most critical issues can only be addressed effectively through collective responses, international co-operation and multi-level governance – though this is a debated topic. The growing importance of these so-called “global”

challenges requires a better understanding of citizens' expectations of national government's performance on global agendas, as well as their perceptions of priorities and room for co-operation, which will help countries better anticipate and adapt while strengthening global governance.

### **3.1.1. Trusting the government to address intergenerational challenges**

Long-term and global megatrends pose challenges for governing. Climate change presents fundamental, existential threats today and to future generations. The weakened sustainability of pension systems and welfare states due to population ageing, and skill shortages and rising unemployment due to skill mismatches caused by digitisation and automation, are other examples. These challenges share a common temporal structure and require public trust that government action will be sufficient and sustainable in the long term.

These megatrends often also require multilateral co-operation across national governments. Indeed, only long-lasting and effective global commitments can overcome challenges like climate change. Yet global governance occupies a complicated space in relation to public trust. Public protests against fuel taxes, or nationalistic protectionism around fossil fuels, are simple reminders that global governance presents challenges for national governments that seek to build trust in their governing institutions. Future work should consider carefully how many of the drivers of trust in public institutions – such as responsiveness, reliability, fairness, openness – can help inform discussions around global governance. These discussions can eventually help serve the goal of reaching public buy-in for global governance to address global challenges.

In thinking about public trust in domestic government, policy makers face a tension between maximising welfare through the intertemporal and intergenerational allocation of resources while also ensuring relative equity across various groups of society. Various factors help political actors take the initiative to embark on long-term action. For instance, an incumbent government has to have a certain degree of electoral safety, meaning the proposed policy would not get them voted out or drawn out of office immediately. The long-term benefits of the policy must demonstrably exceed the short-term costs imposed in the present, and thirdly, public institutions need to have the capacity to not be co-opted by special interest groups (Jacobs, 2016<sup>[99]</sup>; Jacobs, 2009<sup>[100]</sup>). The importance of a strong “electoral mandate” has also facilitated structural policy reforms across OECD countries, as has effective communication and government unity behind the proposed reform (Tompson, 2009<sup>[101]</sup>).

Of course, many other factors influence both this political decision making and the enactment of long-lasting reform by institutions. Trust in government and effective action on policies with intergenerational effects are interdependent. On the one hand, citizens' distrust and disengagement from traditional democratic processes make long-term policy choices more complex to implement. In a low-trust climate, citizens will prioritise immediate, appropriable and partial benefits, and will induce politicians to seek short-term and opportunistic gains through free-riding and populist attitudes (Gyorffy, 2013<sup>[102]</sup>).

Trust in public institutions can be eroded by previous failures to address standing challenges; lack of transparency in decision making; real or perceived unfairness in the system of cost and benefits; and lack of consistency in pursuing long-term policies. Policy failures may have a long-standing effect on trust in institutions, especially when experienced by young people. Survey data on institutional trust in Italy, 25 years after a large corruption scandal (“Tangentopoli”), show that people who experienced the scandal in their formative years have lower levels of trust in government and political institutions than the other population groups, partially contributing to rise of populism (Aassve, Daniele and Le Moglie, 2018<sup>[103]</sup>). Similarly, the experience of an economic crisis or recession can also change preferences. A study of the United States shows how people who experienced a recession in early adulthood are more in favour of redistribution and believe luck is more important than personal effort in determining success in life (Giuliano and Spilimbergo, 2013<sup>[56]</sup>).

Citizens' support for long-term policies and public investments depends also on whether they believe that the promised policy will be delivered. Survey-based experimental evidence shows that uncertainty about long-run policy commitments can substantially depress support for costly investments in public goods (Jacobs and Matthews, 2015<sup>[104]</sup>). A recent survey conducted during the Gilets Jaunes movement in France found that the respondents perceive that carbon tax would remain regressive even after the government would include a lump sum to compensate people from funds of the carbon tax (Douenne and Fabre, 2020<sup>[105]</sup>). The latter perception may be due to lack of trust that the government will continue to keep the compensation over time (Blanchard and Tirole, 2021<sup>[106]</sup>).

Incumbent democratic governments themselves may reduce investment in long-term policy goals if they believe that future governments may deviate from these policies (Jacobs, 2009<sup>[100]</sup>; Bernauer, 2013<sup>[107]</sup>), as they would sacrifice not only political short-term credits but also future broader gains. New governance mechanisms and institutional arrangements may be needed to lock in policy choices, increase the accountability of government's plans and commitments, and ensure intergenerational justice, while preserving democratic processes (Blanchard and Tirole, 2021<sup>[106]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[72]</sup>).

Finally, lack of support for intergenerational redistribution may be due to beliefs about policies' lack of effectiveness rather than undervaluation of future generations (Fairbrother et al., 2021<sup>[108]</sup>).

### **3.1.2. Does trust in government influence the feasibility and effectiveness of intergenerational policies?**

Trust matters for the capacity of governments to adopt structural reforms. A high degree of trust can lessen obstacles to reforms, in particular by increasing the information about and credibility of the expected outcomes, enhancing co-operation among population groups, and facilitating acceptance from people who might incur some losses. Reforms with uncertain distributional consequences are easier to implement in a high-trust environment, since compensation promises are more credible (Heinemann and Tanz, 2008<sup>[63]</sup>). A trusted environment also increases people's acceptance of government actions and proposals, including some that are vital for societal well-being (Citrin and Stoker, 2018<sup>[109]</sup>).

Similar arguments hold in explaining the role of trust in public acceptability of long-term policies with intergenerational trade-offs. Public attitudes towards policies to address climate change, for example, strongly reflect political trust (Klenert et al., 2018<sup>[110]</sup>). If public trust is low, citizens will not be convinced that spending resources now will actually have the intended long-term benefits, despite their potential willingness to give up resources now for positive future returns. Research on this topic is limited but evidence shows for example that in high-trust societies, public concerns about climate change tend to translate into support for policy actions, whereas in lower-trust societies they do not (Fairbrother, Johansson Sevä and Kulin, 2019<sup>[111]</sup>).

Around the world, then, while surveys show that most people are concerned about climate change and other environmental problems, they are also sceptical about the efficacy of potential policy responses. As a result, public opposition has sometimes prevented environmental policy makers from pursuing otherwise promising initiatives (Steg, 2018<sup>[112]</sup>). At the same time, public trust can mitigate the perception of risk, by giving individuals confidence in policies' effectiveness and fostering individuals' willingness to make sacrifices for the benefit of others (Rudolph, 2017<sup>[113]</sup>). Box 7 provides examples of how high levels of trust in government can facilitate the acceptability and ultimately the effectiveness of climate policies.

Notwithstanding the theoretical arguments, evidence on whether trust explains support for long-term policies and intergenerational justice is mixed, most likely because both trust and policy support could be largely determined by the same factors, such as the perception of effectiveness of policy choices or lack of capacity to deliver the results. Therefore, it will be useful to gain a better understanding of how the institutional allocation of authority affects the credibility of long-term policies, and whether changes in the governance of implementation can change people's support for public investment. This might entail, for



example, providing transparent and open information on costs; creating independent oversight structures to work on long-term issues; engaging stakeholders on a sustainability analysis of the budget process; and reinforcing accountability and the fairness of outcomes.

To this end, the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey includes questions on attitudes towards key societal challenges and on the perceived effectiveness of policies, including on the capacity of government to address these challenges at the proper scale (local, national and global). This evidence will help shed a light on whether government's competence, integrity, fairness and openness can convey public support for future-oriented policies and how that support varies across countries and population groups.

### Box 7. How trust in public institutions can facilitate implementation of climate policies

There is broad consensus in many countries that climate change is a major problem requiring a government response. Ninety-three per cent of Europeans believe climate change is a serious problem, and 75% believe that their government is not doing enough to tackle it. Yet, consensus on the desirability of tackling the climate crisis is alone not sufficient to ensure effective policy responses and public acceptability of the proposed policies; the political and institutional barriers discussed in this section illustrate the challenges to taking action, even on an issue that has wide political appeal.

People's trust in public institutions can affect the feasibility and effectiveness of climate policies in four ways:

- *Overcoming collective action problems among citizens* – The costs of climate policies may be deeply felt by some segments of society, while the benefits are more diffuse. This creates a collective action problem, which is best solved by public institutions. Individuals who doubt the effectiveness or fairness of public institutions have few incentives to ask government to find collective solutions to environmental problems, no matter how worrying they are.
- *Building sustainable long-term policies* – Climate policies may involve costs now in return for potential benefits for future generations. Survey evidence shows support for future-oriented policies on climate is affected by people's trust in the effectiveness of public institutions. While most people believe that mitigating climate change will make future people's lives better and that national debt could be used for that purpose, they may not be willing to support future-oriented policies if they doubt that governments will deliver. Citizens must trust that public institutions will effectively deliver policies over a sufficiently long period to generate benefits, or they will be unwilling to accept the costs.
- *Ensuring acceptability of environmental policies* – The success of policies to address environmental pressures will depend on the trust people have in the capacity of governments to plan and deliver policies that are fair, carried out with high integrity standards, and are open to public scrutiny.
- *Facilitating the creation of broad coalitions that exceed electoral cycles* – Responsive, transparent and fair institutions help strengthen social consensus and engage citizens. Policy reliability and sustainability can contribute to consistently change behaviour required for climate mitigation and overcome political opposition that in some contexts has prevented promising environmental initiatives from being implemented.

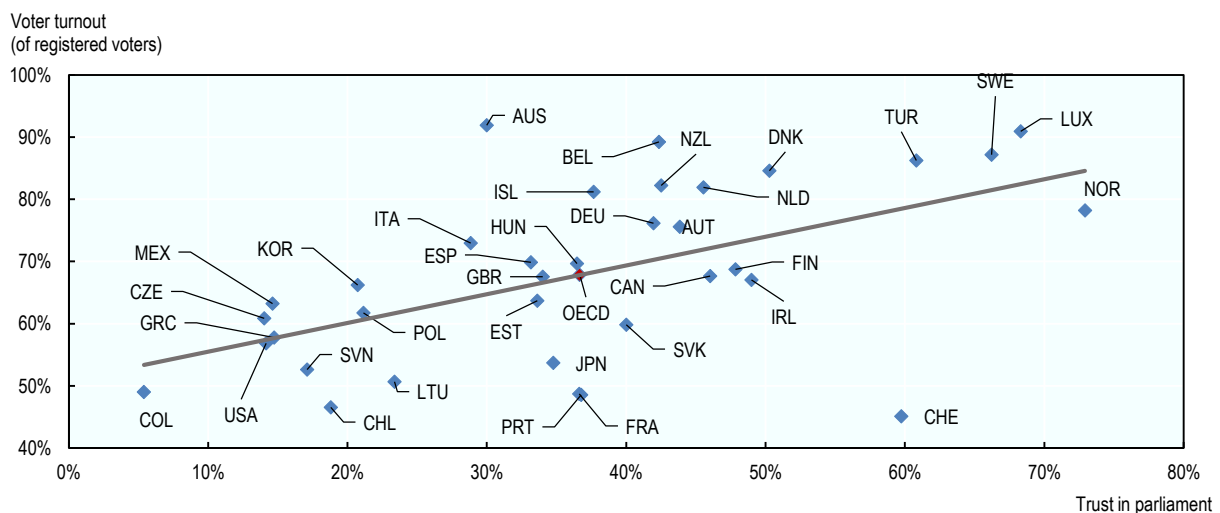
Source: Authors adapted from (European Union, 2021<sup>[114]</sup>; Fairbrother et al., 2021<sup>[108]</sup>; Steg, 2018<sup>[112]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[115]</sup>)

### 3.2. Enhancing citizens' participation and better monitoring political attitudes

Participation is a cornerstone and a key indicator of a well-functioning democracy. Political participation strengthens democracies both at the individual and systemic levels: when people actively engage, they develop stronger democratic values and civic skills, and at the same time provide legitimacy to the system. In turn, participation and trust are mutually reinforcing (Putnam, 2000<sup>[116]</sup>). Civic-minded citizens are found to participate more and have higher levels of trust than passive people (Almond and Verba, 1963<sup>[117]</sup>; Brehm and Rahn, 1997<sup>[118]</sup>). Conversely, as participation encourages the sense of having a stake in collective endeavours and builds trust, lack of participation is associated with lower levels of trust (Parvin, 2018<sup>[119]</sup>). In fact, trust can be considered as a prerequisite of political action, and is related to higher levels of different forms of participation (Figure 10), such as being part of elections (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007<sup>[120]</sup>), signing a petition (Lee and Schachter, 2018<sup>[121]</sup>), contacting government officials or being part of political parties (Hooghe and Marien, 2013<sup>[122]</sup>).

**Figure 10. Trust in parliament is positively associated with voter turnout in OECD countries**

Share of people trusting the parliament and voter turnout in parliamentary elections, 2017-20; 35 OECD countries



Note: Voter turnout relates to the parliamentary election that was temporally nearest to when the year when trust data were collected (“nearest” defined in following order: election in same year, following year, previous year, following two years, previous two years). In the case of BEL, IRL and LUX data are only available before 2017. A full overview of year of trust data and nearest election is provided in Annex A. Voter turnout is calculated by dividing the total number of votes cast by the number of people on the vote register. Correlation coefficient is 0.56. OECD average based on 36 OECD countries.

Source: OECD/TrustGov calculations based on data from World Values Survey/European Value Study (WVS/EVS) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Voter Turnout database.

Political participation in a democracy ensures that diverse interests and needs are equally considered, and helps to prevent small powerful groups from exerting influence to further their own priorities at the expense of the public interest. Indeed, higher levels of trust are related to perceptions of a more equal distribution of political power, though causality is surely bidirectional (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>).

During the past decades voter turnout has globally decreased, as have other forms of participation in with traditional political parties. This in turn may affect the legitimacy of democratic processes and levels of trust in government (Dalton, 2017<sup>[123]</sup>) (Figure 10). The pandemic has worsened figures, and electoral participation has decreased in many of the polities most affected by the COVID-19 (Santana, Rama and Bértoa, 2020<sup>[124]</sup>). Further, many countries put in place emergency procedures in order to allow for the

necessary flexibility that the situation demanded, but lockdown decisions reduced room for participation in decision-making processes, and in politics in general. As a result, participation gaps were broadened and some interests, because of their privileged access, may have had more influential power.

In spite of decreasing political participation, lessons learned from the OECD "Building a new Paradigm for Public Trust" webinar series highlight the importance of people-centred approaches for building institutional trust (see Box 6). Indeed, national and local dialogues and inclusive public participation are nodal elements during crisis periods, especially when they span across a long period. For instance, "Lockdown Dialogues" in Finland aimed to reach the people left behind and went beyond the usual communication, giving citizens the opportunity to talk about their feelings regarding uncertainties and concerns, and expectations on policy choices for the future (see Box 8).

### Box 8. People-centred initiatives for decision making

The following examples of citizen-centred initiatives were shared by speakers and participants during the "Building a new Paradigm for Public Trust" webinar series (see Box 6).

#### The "2020 Adaptation Strategy" in Milan

The "2020 Adaptation Strategy" in Milan suggests that open conversations that allow people to express their needs and expectations can improve both policy design and service delivery. Defined after the COVID-19 lockdown, it relies on extensive consultation with citizens who submitted proposals on sustainability (e.g. expanding bicycle lanes), services (e.g. increasing green areas), and labour (e.g. smart working).

#### Open North Canada

Open North Canada partnered with the Standards Council of Canada to organise a national consultation and a collaborative workshop in July 2020 to understand participants' data needs on the topics of disease spread, government action, and community impact. The results of the consultation indicate that long-standing barriers to data use have been exacerbated by the pandemic, while citizens want more data that are open, integrated and easily accessible.

#### Finnish Lockdown Dialogues

As part of the responses put forward by the Finnish Government to monitor the evolution of COVID-19 and with the intention of taking on board people's feelings, opinions and expectations, the government initiated Lockdown Dialogues. These dialogues not only have been a vivid testimony of the social experience caused by the pandemic in its different phases, but also have helped identify issues that may require government attention, becoming inputs for shaping policy responses. The dialogues started during the first months of lockdown and continued after the restrictions were lifted (renamed Finnish National Dialogues). Between April and September, over 100 dialogues were organised with over 1 000 participants, including civil organisations, individual citizens, municipalities and government offices. Information gathered during the dialogues has fed into the government's COVID-19 crisis management co-ordination, as well as its exit and recovery strategies.

#### Use of deliberative processes by parliamentary committees

The Scottish Parliament has commissioned multiple Citizens' Juries since 2019: on Land Management and the Natural Environment (21 randomly selected citizens) and on Primary Care (35 randomly selected citizens took part on three panels). Recommendations that members of these representative deliberative processes developed then informed land management and the natural environment inquiry, and fed into and the primary care inquiry. In June 2019, six Select Committees of the UK House of Commons jointly called a Citizens' Assembly on how the country should tackle climate change (Climate

Assembly UK, 2019). The Citizens' Assembly took place from January to March 2020 and brought together 108 randomly selected citizens. The UK Government has since used the Climate Assembly's recommendations in its report to inform its Net Zero Strategy.

Source: (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>), based on the webinar series "Building a new paradigm for public trust" ([www.oecd.org/fr/gov/webinar-series-building-a-new-paradigm-for-public-trust.htm](http://www.oecd.org/fr/gov/webinar-series-building-a-new-paradigm-for-public-trust.htm)); GOV/PGC(2021)21.

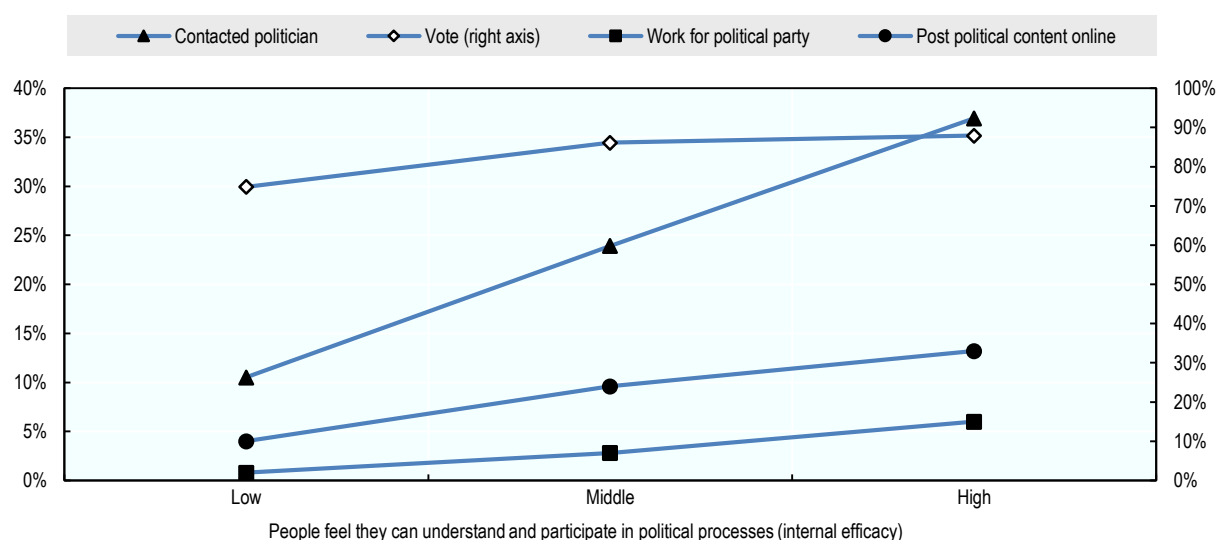
The way governments design, implement and communicate policies has a long-lasting impact on whether citizens believe that institutions trust them and that they can provide a meaningful contribution to policy making. Governments are already experimenting with new forms of open, collaborative public decision making and public service design and delivery. For example, public authorities are increasingly using civic lotteries, a tool used to convene broadly representative groups of people, based on the ancient practice of random selection (sortition), to tackle public policy challenges through Citizens' Assemblies and Juries. These representative deliberative processes broaden participation to a much wider, more diverse group of people. They guard against the outsize influence of organised interest groups and lobbies. By giving people time and resources to hear from experts and stakeholders, deliberate, and formulate collective recommendations, these processes create the conditions for everyday people to grapple with complexity and exercise public judgement (OECD, 2020<sup>[125]</sup>). The reviewed Framework (Section 4) aims to gather evidence on the different forms of public participation and assess the public's role in building people's trust in government.

Active participation in the democratic system depends also on political attitudes, or having the capability to participate in politics. People's perception of their ability to understand and participate in political processes, (i.e. internal efficacy) is positively related to higher levels of different forms of participation: voter turnout, contacting a politician (which has a very similar trend as boycotting products), posting political content on line (which has the a very similar trend as working in an association) and working in a political party (Figure 11). Research on 30 European countries highlights that an individual's perception of their ability to understand political processes has a positive effect on any form of participation. On the other hand, people's perception of not having a say in what the government does (i.e. external political efficacy) may reorient them towards different political activities. For instance, it has a positive impact on working in a political party or voting, but a negative one on posting political content on line (Prats and Meunier, 2021<sup>[126]</sup>).

Having the feeling of understanding and being able to participate advances people's character in a more active, effective way in politics (Almond and Verba, 1963<sup>[117]</sup>; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993<sup>[127]</sup>; Finkel, 1987<sup>[128]</sup>) and the more people feel able to understand politics and have their voice heard, the more likely they are to pursue democratic endeavours (Gil de Zúñiga, Diehl and Ardévol-Abreu, 2017<sup>[129]</sup>).

**Figure 11. Higher political efficacy corresponds to higher levels of participation**

Average share of people in 30 European countries that voted in last national election (right axis), or contacted a politician, posted political content on line, or worked in a political party over the past 12 months (left axis), by levels of internal political efficacy



Note: Average share that voted in last election shown on right axis. Data averaged for 30 European countries, including 22 OECD countries. Internal efficacy to question: “How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?”. Three levels of efficacy measured as follows: low (responses to the categories 1 “not at all confident/not at all” and 2 “a little confident/very little”); middle (category 3 “quite confident/some”); and high (responses to categories 4 “very confident/a lot” and 5 “completely confident/a great deal”).

Source: (Brezzi, González and Prats, 2020<sup>[97]</sup>); data from European Social Survey 2018

Better understanding and monitoring of political attitudes can help enhance political participation, and in turn increase trust. A recent study with data from European countries found that the positive effect of government’s openness on public trust is affected by people’s perception that they can participate and influence political systems (Schmidhuber, Ingrams and Hilgers, 2020<sup>[130]</sup>). Findings from the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey show that if people’s feelings of having a say in what government does increased by 1 standard deviation point, trust in government is estimated to increase by 0.18 and 0.23 points in Norway and Finland, respectively (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Evidence on the linkages between political attitudes, participation and trust will be key to informing and developing governments’ strategies to enhance social cohesion, reach out to those left behind, and engage people with new forms of inclusive policy making.

### 3.3. A better understanding of the increase in distrust and disengagement

In many countries, governance of the COVID-19 pandemic has been deeply shaped by distrust towards governments, policy makers and scientists. In some cases distrust threatens the legitimacy of democratic governments in responding to it, and challenges the quality of democratic representation. In July 2021, 56% of people in 25 countries, among which 18 OECD countries, believed that “their country’s society is broken” and 64% would support a strong leader “to take the country back from the rich and powerful”, according to the Ipsos Global Advisor Poll (Ipsos, 2021<sup>[131]</sup>). There is also a strong perception that “traditional” parties and politicians do not care about people like them. The uneven impact of the crisis on certain groups in society and the failure of governments to deliver equitable and sustainable economic and political progress, may fuel further distrust and political polarisation during the recovery.

While trust is the recognition that an organisation or institution will generally take account of someone's interests, and act in line with the expectation of positive behaviour, distrust is associated with a heuristic response based on beliefs or biases, which are not necessarily associated with actual performance but often with endemic cynicism or disengagement and expectations of betrayal (Citrin and Stoker, 2018<sup>[109]</sup>). The complexity of different varieties of trust has also been described as a “family of trust concepts” (Jennings et al., 2021<sup>[132]</sup>), which includes “mistrust” as the recognition for citizens to be vigilant, and monitor or evaluate performance and intentions, and question when judging whether to trust an organisation or institution (Lenard, 2007<sup>[133]</sup>). As a form of “sceptical trust”, mistrust is seen as a critical element of democracy (Table 1).

**Table 1. Trust concepts, 2021**

Trust types	Orientation	Associated attitudes	Behavioural consequences
Trust	Trust expressed towards the political system in its entirety or its components	Loyalty, commitment, confidence	Compliance, sympathetic judgement, participation
Distrust	Distrust expressed towards the political system in its entirety or its components	Insecurity, cynicism, disengagement, contempt, fear, anger, alienation	Withdrawal, defiance, support for populist challenge or empowerment movement
Mistrust	Political mistrust expressed through vigilance in judging components of the political system	Caution, watchful, questioning	Making effort to be informed, alert, on standby to act

Source: (Jennings et al., 2021<sup>[132]</sup>)

Distrust has the potential to affect people's behaviour in different ways unlike low levels of trust (Van De Walle and Six, 2013<sup>[134]</sup>). For example, an empirical analysis of four countries during the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020 shows that distrust is related to lower behaviour adjustment to fight the pandemic (the daily lives and routines of individuals at the micro level) in the United Kingdom and United States, potentially as those distrusters rejected the severity of the pandemic and advice of scientific experts and government (Jennings et al., 2021<sup>[132]</sup>).

While measures of trust in government and “trustworthiness” of public institutions are becoming more widely tested and used since the OECD Guidelines for Measuring Trust (OECD, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>), there are still a certain number of empirical challenges in measuring “distrust” at the individual level. Discussions on measuring distrust often refer to feelings of alienation, the sense of being disadvantaged compared to others in society, and perceptions of being treated unfairly and having one's priorities neglected (see (Bertsou, 2019<sup>[135]</sup>) for a review).

A recent study links distrust to people's perception of governments treating them unfairly or without respect, or providing unreliable information and ignoring the person's community (Jennings et al., 2021<sup>[132]</sup>). Surveys carried out in seven OECD countries during 2020-21 show that a substantial proportion of citizens express attitudes of distrust towards politicians and/or government across different measures (see Table 2). For example, the highest proportion of citizens who believe government or politicians “don't respect people like me” and that “politicians are incompetent and ineffective” is found in the United States (56% and 61% respectively). Overall these findings suggest that some countries suffer from high levels of distrust (e.g. United States and Italy), while others show rather lower levels of distrust (e.g. Germany and France).

**Table 2. TrustGov survey finds considerable feelings of distrust across range of indicators in 7 OECD countries**

Survey item	USA	GBR	AUS	ITA	FRA	DEU	ESP
Measures related to Distrust							
The government acts unfairly towards people like me	40%	38%	32%	36%	38%	36%	40%
Politicians/government* don't respect people like me	56%	51%	41%	48%	41%	35%	36%
Politicians are often incompetent and ineffective	61%	56%	48%	67%	-	-	-
Government cares less about people in my area than people in other parts of the country	-	-	-	-	33%	28%	44%
Politicians/government* usually ignore my community	49%	49%	41%	50%	39%	30%	47%

Note: Online survey conducted by Ipsos (USA, UK, Australia, Italy) in May-June 2020 and YouGov (France, Germany, Spain) in October 2021, with sample size of N=1,000 per country.

\* For these items, the survey asked about 'the government' in France, Germany and Spain and "politicians" in the United States, the United Kingdom and Italy.

Source: TrustGov & Ipsos/YouGov, 2020-21

Four main factors seem to explain increasing distrust. First, economic and financial insecurity, employment instability, unemployment and economic inequality are clear drivers of distrust. For example, using data for European countries in the period 2001-16, Inglehart and Norris show a significant and positive correlation between economic insecurity and distrust towards parliaments and elected politicians (Norris and Inglehart, 2019<sup>[136]</sup>). Rising unemployment following the global financial crisis together with declining trust in institutions has been shown to be a key driver of voting for non-mainstream parties (Algan et al., 2017<sup>[55]</sup>).

Second, the sense of social disintegration and feelings of being alienated, disconnected or disenfranchised by the political system and democracy affect people's engagement negatively and can fuel anti-system votes. As such, distrust can be seen as a catalyst for revolting against elites and populist voting as people become dissatisfied with democracy (Guriev and Papaioannou, Forthcoming<sup>[54]</sup>). Support for radical parties in European countries seem to be connected to lack of social integration, which implies not only relations between individuals but also their sense of being valued members of society (Gidron and Hall, 2019<sup>[137]</sup>).

Third, distrust of national leaders and public institutions can emerge in the wake of very specific or contextual events, such as large scandals, especially when they reveal a lack of integrity or fairness in the political system. For example, the "Lava Jato" (Car Wash) corruption scandal in Brazil in 2014 exposed nepotism and clientelism in the country's political system and led particularly young voters towards new parties running on anti-establishment agendas (Foa, 2021<sup>[138]</sup>). Ongoing discussions about some governments being captured by private interests during COVID-19 could have similar effects if corruption emerges in the wake of the crisis.

Finally, distrust is also fuelled by the spread of mis- and disinformation, and the use of social media platforms to amplify polarised content. Social media platforms may facilitate the spread of emotional and polarising content (Smith, 2019<sup>[139]</sup>; Allcott et al., 2020<sup>[140]</sup>) and have a tendency to bias information, building and strengthening echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021<sup>[141]</sup>), limiting the exposure to diversity and reinforcing polarisation (Klein and Robison, 2019<sup>[142]</sup>) – which all lead to disengagement, more radical feelings and distrust. A recent study in the United Kingdom, for instance, shows that those who distrust government and used social media as their main source of information were more reluctant to get COVID-19 vaccines (Jennings et al., 2021<sup>[143]</sup>). The expansion of mobile broadband Internet and use of social media was found to have a negative effect on confidence in government, driven by the exposure of government corruption when the Internet is not censored (Guriev, Melnikov and Zhuravskaya, 2020<sup>[144]</sup>). Results from a survey experiment on the influence of social media in political trust found robust and

statistically significant declines in trust among people who were exposed to negative online messages, especially if they had higher levels of engagement with social media platforms (Aruguete et al., 2021<sup>[145]</sup>).

The negative economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly on some groups, brings a sense of urgency to better understanding the interplay between economic insecurity, political disengagement, distrust and populism. Creating clear and coherent empirical measures will go a long way towards understanding the drivers of distrust and the point at which it starts to undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions and systems (Citrin and Stoker, 2018<sup>[109]</sup>; Lenard, 2007<sup>[133]</sup>).

In an effort to improve our understanding of the role of distrust and mistrust in governance, the OECD Trust Survey presents a continuum of response choices to questions about levels of trust and also asks for background information on respondents' sources of information, economic instability, and perceived capacity to participate in political processes.



# 4 An expanded framework and a new measurement strategy

This final section presents the revised OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, which expands on the previous framework (OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>) to include lessons learned during the pandemic and the three trust-related challenges discussed in Section 3.

Revision of the framework also led to an update of the measurement work and resulted in the launch of the OECD Trust Survey in 20 OECD countries, building on the evidence put forward in the OECD Trust Guidelines (OECD, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>), and further developed through country case studies in Finland, Korea and Norway (OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). This section closes by presenting the main characteristics of the Survey.

## 4.1. OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

Literature on the drivers of institutional trust is prolific and expanding rapidly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, at least three trends emerge from the academic literature for understanding what drives levels of trust in public institutions. A first theory emphasises the role of culture and argues that individuals learn to trust or distrust based on early socialisation and interpersonal networks, which in turn influence their trust in institutions (Tabellini, 2008<sup>[146]</sup>). A second stream of work recognises the importance of the economic cycle, and economic and personal characteristics and preferences (Algan et al., 2018<sup>[147]</sup>) (Algan et al., 2019<sup>[148]</sup>). In turn, institutional theories focus on the performance and reputation of institutions, both in terms of processes and outcomes, as the key determinants explaining levels of institutional trust (Bouckaert, 2012<sup>[8]</sup>; Rothstein, 2013<sup>[149]</sup>; Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>).

While institutional trust is probably influenced by a combination of elements driven by culture, economic conditions and institutions, the OECD work on understanding drivers of trust in public institutions has, since it was launched emphasised the importance of highly performing institutions for building public trust.

Understanding the effects of institutions on trust depends on the congruence of people's preferences (their interpretation of what is right and fair and what is unfair) and the perceived actual functioning of government (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003<sup>[150]</sup>). Other authors have drawn a distinction between "trust in competence", in terms of the ability to deliver on expectations, and "trust in intentions", to perform in good faith according to the best competence (Nooteboom, 2006<sup>[151]</sup>). These distinctions are furthered by (Choi and Kim, 2012<sup>[152]</sup>) as well as by (Bouckaert, 2012<sup>[8]</sup>), all of whom distinguish between (i) the "logic of consequences" where trust is derived causally from outcomes, and (ii) the "logic of appropriateness", where trust is based on values, such as integrity and transparency.

There is consistency across the literature on institutional trust in at least two key aspects. First, there are two different but complementary components that matter in understanding and analysing trust: i) competence, or what concerns operational efficiency, or ability, capacity and good judgement to actually deliver on a given mandate; and ii) values or the underlying intentions and principles that guide actions and behaviours. Second, there is consistency in the literature regarding specific attributes that matter for

trust, both in relation to the “competence” and “values” components. Competences and values further broken down into five dimensions were the core elements of the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions as developed in 2017 (see Table 3).

**Table 3. OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, 2021**

Levels of trust in different public institutions		
Trust in national government, <b>local government</b> , civil service, parliament, police, <b>political parties</b> , courts, legal systems and <b>intergovernmental organisations</b>		
Public Governance Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		
Competencies	Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide efficient, quality, affordable, timely and citizen-centred public services <b>that are co-ordinated across levels of government and satisfy users.</b></li> <li><b>Develop an innovative and efficient civil service that responds to user needs.</b></li> </ul>
	Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anticipate needs and assess evolving challenges.</li> <li>Minimise uncertainty in the economic, social and political environment.</li> <li><b>Effectively commit to future-oriented policies and co-operate with stakeholders on global challenges.</b></li> </ul>
Values	Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide open and accessible information so the public better understands what government is doing.</li> <li>Consult, listen, and respond to stakeholders, including through citizen participation and engagement opportunities that lead to tangible results.</li> <li><b>Ensure there are equal opportunities to be part of and participate in the institutions of representative democracy.</b></li> </ul>
	Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align public institutions with ethical values, principles, and norms to safeguard the public interest.</li> <li>Take decisions and use public resources ethically, promoting the public interest over private interests while combating corruption.</li> <li>Ensure accountability mechanisms between public institutions at all levels of governance.</li> <li><b>Promote a neutral civil service whose values and standards of conduct uphold and prioritise the public interest.</b></li> </ul>
	Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve living conditions for all.</li> <li>Provide consistent treatment of businesses and people regardless of their background and identify (e.g. gender, socio-economic status, racial/ethnic origin).</li> </ul>
Cultural, Economic and Political Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual and group identities, traits, and preferences, including socio-economic status; interpersonal socialisation and networks.</li> <li>Distrust of and disengagement from the system.</li> </ul>		
Perception of government action on intergenerational and global challenges		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceptions of government commitment to and effectiveness in addressing long-term challenges.</li> </ul>		

Note: New elements in bold were added to the 2017 framework.

The two broad dimensions of public sector competence and values remain a robust framework for understanding the main drivers of people's trust in government, as tested through country studies in Finland and Norway. At the same time, the revision of the conceptual framework resulted in several adjustments.

First, a greater emphasis is placed on the importance of *improving the representation of diverse population groups* that may be systematically excluded from voicing their views in traditional democratic processes, either due to personal characteristics (e.g. living in remote regions, their socio-economic background) or because they persistently distrust “the system” and opt out of opportunities to have their voice heard.

Second, a *number of public institutions are included*, both of a political and administrative nature, as previous analysis shows significant variation of trust across them. More specifically, the analysis on the determinants of trust is carried out at three levels: national government, local governments and the civil service. Other public institutions are included, since empirical analysis suggests that people's responses can be grouped into three categories: i) political/administrative institutions, ii) law and order institutions, and iii) non-governmental institutions (González and Smith, 2017<sup>[12]</sup>).

Third, the revision re-emphasises the importance *that levels of satisfaction with services* have for influencing public trust (Kumlin and Haugsgjerd, 2017<sup>[153]</sup>; Van Ryzin, 2007<sup>[154]</sup>) as well as the *types of capabilities of the civil service and the enabling environment* within the administration that will result in a trust-building administration (Dahlstrom and Lapuente, 2017<sup>[68]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>).

Fourth, the revised framework underlines the importance of ensuring peoples' *equal opportunities to participate in the institutions of representative democracy* and enhance political representation.

Fifth, the revised framework presents an “overlay” of the aforementioned *cultural, political and materialist/economic factors* that, at both an individual and group level, strongly influence levels of trust in government. These factors necessarily interact with the institutional and public governance factors that are the focus of the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. The addition of the final rows of the table serves as a reminder that institutional competence and values are in fact mediated by individual and group identifiers, traits and preferences – including political attitudes. They are also mediated by the perception of government's capacity in the short run and the long run, across generations.

These revisions attempt to emphasise more strongly the role played by political attitudes, including disengagement from the system, in explaining institutional trust. Finally, the revised framework underlines the role played by people's confidence in the sustainability and effectiveness of policy action in addressing long-term and global challenges (e.g. climate change, fiscal sustainability, digitisation, inequalities) (Brezzi, González and Prats, 2020<sup>[97]</sup>).

### Box 9. Surveying as a way to engage people and strengthen government's accountability

Among the many mechanisms and initiatives to promote stakeholder engagement and participation, population surveys are a frequently used and key tool to consult people and allow them to voice their opinion. When participating in regular population surveys, citizens are invited to provide their feedback on different public governance-related aspects, which allows governments to gather input and hear the people's voice beyond electoral processes. Besides, governments and policy makers can use survey results to better inform policies, identify citizens' priorities and concerns, and assess the support or impact of different initiatives.

#### The Citizen Survey in Norway

Since 2009 the Agency of Public Management in Norway carries out a "Citizen Survey". The survey provides a substantial knowledge base for assessing the performance of public services across sectors, and insights that can help to develop the public sector in the long term. The survey is understood as an additional way to engage citizens apart from direct mechanisms, and it addresses perceptions, expectations and areas of improvement, aiming to develop public outputs and services in a more user-friendly manner, based on citizens' needs and expectations.

#### The Citizen Experience Survey in Australia

Since 2019, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Australia has carried out the Citizen Experience Survey. The regular, national survey measures public satisfaction, trust and experiences with Australian public services, helping the public service to continually improve. Its aim is to have a whole-of-Australia Public Service and a cross-sectional view of service experience, which could complement individual agencies' initiatives and measurements.

Source: [www.nsd.no/nsddata/serier/innybyggerundersokelsen\\_eng.html](http://www.nsd.no/nsddata/serier/innybyggerundersokelsen_eng.html); [www.pmc.gov.au/public-data/citizen-experience-survey](http://www.pmc.gov.au/public-data/citizen-experience-survey).

## 4.2. Measuring trust in public institutions through population surveys

The revision of the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions has also entailed updating the measurement strategy on the determinants of public trust. Traditionally, metrics of public governance dimensions have been generated through expert-based assessments aimed at capturing how governments work and only sporadically through general population or household surveys (González, Fleischer and Mira d'Ercole, 2017<sup>[155]</sup>). In the recent years, more efforts have been made to develop measures of outcomes of public governance – such as trust, evaluation and satisfaction with public services – through household surveys. Box 9 presents examples of well-established household surveys in Australia and Norway that aim at measuring public governance outcomes incorporating people's views (Fukuyama and Recanatini, 2018<sup>[156]</sup>). Similarly, the OECD has carried out a Drivers of Trust Survey in Korea (OECD/KDI, 2018<sup>[3]</sup>), Finland (OECD, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>) and Norway (OECD, forthcoming 2022<sup>[5]</sup>) through nationally representative population samples.

These surveys aim at incorporating an assessment of people's expectations and experiences with the public sector and as such they can also enhance government's accountability. Furthermore, they provide actionable data to guide policy changes to reflect people's needs and wants. For example, a number of governance actions were identified by Finland, Korea and Norway based on the results of the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey (Box 10).

## Box 10. Countries have implemented recommendations and reforms based on results of the OECD Trust Survey

### Korea

The OECD Trust Survey in Korea found that people trusted public service institutions significantly more than political institutions. In addition, the ability of civil servants to innovate, the availability of information and engagement opportunities, and increased transparency were identified as key drivers of trust. The government set out a strategy of transformation of the public sector that had the explicit objective of improving the relative performance of trust indicators. A number of commitments were made, including to:

- define a set of long term national priorities agreed upon beyond the five-year political cycle and review all risk management frameworks to increase co-ordination of measures across institutions and levels of government
- promote a flexible environment and an appropriate mix of skills of civil servants as a critical aspect of the Government Innovation Strategy
- pursue an open government – fully disclosing information, sharing resources with the public, and creating meaningful engagement with citizens
- refine integrity frameworks and work towards a fair and transparent public service.

### Finland

Following the results of the case study, where the responsiveness of services and reliability of policies were identified as key drivers of trust in government and openness and engagement of trust in local government, the Finnish Government has set up an inter-agency expert group to discuss concrete actions based on the report's recommendations. These include:

- Reinforce and promote the core values of serving people as part of the administrative culture, and profile and display the work carried out by the administration, including during crises. Address the noxious effects brought about by hate speech and higher exposure of civil servants through social media.
- Reform the formulation process of government programmes by clarifying responsibilities and enhancing dialogue between the political leadership and the senior civil service to facilitate the inclusion of subjects such as climate change, intergenerational justice, equality, etc. in the recovery plans.
- Strengthening political efficacy by engaging citizens in policy choices and monitoring results, and by furnishing regular feedback on inputs provided by civil society.
- Keep measuring people's trust in government, allowing the identification of pockets of distrust that may fracture the Finnish social contract and as a key element for collectively addressing the societal transformations in Finland (e.g. ageing, climate change, a more diverse society).

Source: OECD/KDI (2018), Understanding the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Korea; OECD (2021), The Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Finland.

While in a few contexts there is a long tradition of collecting measures of trust in government through population surveys, it is only from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that cross-country comparative statistics

of institutional trust became widely and regularly available.<sup>4</sup> González and Smith (2017<sub>[12]</sub>) reviewed these metrics and found seven cross-country comparative surveys (commercial and non-commercial) that have regularly collected levels of trust since 2002. These have different coverage periodicity and work under different criteria of statistical quality. The most used of these surveys are the Gallup World Poll, given its extensive country coverage, time extension and annual frequency of data, as well as the World Values Survey, which has collected data on trust since for over 20 years.

However, measures of trust in public institutions traditionally generated through cross-country comparative surveys have a number of shortcomings. Some are technical (sampling, scale, level of representativeness for some population groups), while others are conceptual (meaning of “government”). The OECD Guidelines for Measuring Trust provide an analysis of the accuracy of existing trust measures (OECD, 2017<sub>[2]</sub>). In particular, the Guidelines found solid evidence of the reliability of existing trust metrics, while encouraging further research to improve the validity of these measures. The statistical feasibility and empirical relevance of the questions on public governance drivers of trust were tested in six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and the United States) through the OECD TrustLab in 2018 (Murtin et al., 2018<sub>[157]</sub>). More recently the OECD Trust Survey has been reviewed to ensure its feasibility in different contexts and tested in Finland, Korea and Norway with an expanded questionnaire and more comprehensive population surveys, as well as in 12 European countries through the online panel survey CRONOS-2 of the European Social Survey.

While the population survey remains the core method used by the OECD to measure trust in public institutions and its drivers, a range of other methods could be considered to generate complementary measures, strengthen the robustness of current ones, and overcome some methodological issues (Box 11).

### Box 11. Measuring trust in institutions beyond household surveys

There have been various attempts to measure people’s trust in public institutions and its drivers, with varying degrees of success. This box reviews some of them and suggests others.

- Qualitative methods such as focus groups can uncover how people experience issues and how they make their political judgements. There is value in understanding what it means to people to trust, or distrust, and how that may connect to processes that might restore trust in the government and politics more widely. They can be combined with survey or experimental quantitative designs in several ways: as a pre-test for survey questions; as a method of triangulation for qualitative insights; and as an explanation of survey findings.
- Some elements or modules of the OECD Trust Survey could also be refined by cognitive testing and survey-based experiments (e.g. split sample question variations).
- New data sources (or “big data”) could potentially provide some new insights (e.g. from administrative datasets, or revealed preferences stated on social media), although there could be concerns regarding the validity of proxy measures and the representativeness of the sample. For example, a large experiment involving social media users finds that uncivil partisan discourse they encounter on social media leads to a decrease in political trust (Aruguete et al., 2021<sub>[145]</sub>).
- The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is an experiment-based technique, where respondents are asked to rapidly sort a list of words along a scale, relying on the idea that the more familiar

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the PEW research centre has collected “government confidence” in the United States since 1958 and the American Election Studies (ANES), collected by the Centre of Political Studies at the University of Michigan, have collected survey data based measures of trust, associated to electoral cycles, since at least 1952.

concepts will be sorted more quickly (Murtin et al., 2018<sup>[157]</sup>). Other experimental techniques should be explored, as they could provide new insights.

- People who distrust the system may be more reluctant to answer survey questions, and in general vulnerable and marginalised groups may be systematically excluded from sample surveys. While this issue is well-known and long-standing in survey research, more research is needed to assess who belongs to these “hard-to-reach” groups in each country and to design innovative outreach mechanisms to capture their views, for example through social media analysis. Along similar lines, it would be useful to better assess how surveys that are conducted on line could potentially solve some of these issues (e.g. geographical distance) but also generate new ones (exclude people without Internet access).

### 4.3. OECD Drivers of Trust Survey

The OECD Drivers of Trust Survey has been revised and expanded to reflect lessons from the Guidelines on Measuring Trust, the updates of the framework, and its applications in Finland and Norway. The Survey questionnaire has been thoroughly reviewed by an Advisory Group comprising representatives from OECD countries and National Statistical Offices between May and October 2021; the Group addressed questions of wording, scale and cultural interpretation among others to strengthen international comparability.<sup>5</sup> For the first time, the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey has been carried out simultaneously in 20 OECD countries in November 2021.

The Survey brings four innovations with respect to existing data and previous measurement work on trust in public institutions. First, the Survey differentiates types of institutions (the national government, parliaments, civil service, police, etc.), and levels of government (national and local), for which the drivers of trust seem to vary, which could signal risk factors associated with their performance. Second, it assesses government performance and the quality of governance principles, such as integrity, openness and fairness, as experienced by citizens; as such, these outcome measures can complement existing input and process indicators of public governance to provide a better understanding of the impact of governance on society. Third, it investigates how citizens perceive government actions to meet long-term and global challenges and their participation in public debates and policy-making. Finally, the measurement goes beyond static indicators of citizen perception or satisfaction to capture, in a way similar to consumer confidence indices, the “trustworthiness of a given institution” through situational questions about people’s expectations of conduct from and experience with public institutions and service.

Typical behavioural questions, as used in psychology or sociology, shed light on the subjective reaction of individuals when faced with a specific situation. However, the situational questions are not stereotypical behavioural questions: they do not focus on the individual’s behaviour but rather on their expected positive conduct from a third party, in this case public institutions. As such, it rather provides measurement of the trustworthiness of a given institution or public agent. In contrast with surveyed attitudes (passive response) and behaviours (active response), trustworthiness is based on expectations of positive behaviour that lie at the heart of the working definition of trust being considered in this paper. In general terms, a situational approach to measuring trustworthiness is based in the following type of questions: If x happens, how likely or unlikely is it that [public institution] will do [expected positive behaviour]? Examples of situational questions included in the OECD Trust Survey are presented below (see Table 4).

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<sup>5</sup> The OECD Public Governance Committee has mandated the Secretariat to carry out the Drivers of Trust Survey in OECD countries in 2021 in its meeting of 22 March 2021, and established an Advisory Group to accompany the process.

**Table 4. Sample situational questions from OECD Drivers of Trust Survey**

Dimension	Examples of questions
The following questions are about your expectations regarding the behaviour of public institutions. Please respond on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means very unlikely and 10 means very likely.	
Responsiveness	If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be improved?
Reliability	If a new serious contagious disease spreads, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that government institutions will be prepared to protect people's lives?
Openness	If a decision affecting your community is to be made by the local government, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your views?
Integrity	If a public employee were offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would refuse it?
Fairness	If you or a member of your family would apply for a government benefit or service (e.g. unemployment benefits or other forms of income support), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?

#### 4.4. Conclusion and next steps

Refinement of the analytical framework and adaptation of the measurement strategy through the OECD Trust Survey are important steps for improving outcome measures, strengthening the evidence base on public governance, and building comparable cross-country evidence. Looking ahead, four main elements can contribute to further consolidating this work and increasing its impact.

- First, the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey 2021 will provide a baseline for the determinants of public trust that will allow for comparability across countries. However, tracking improvements or decline in trust measures over time will require building time series and repeating the Survey at regular intervals. Reissuing the Survey in the future will enable assessment of the effects of policies aimed at improving trust and will allow progress to be monitored.
- Second, it remains important to further advance the actionability of the drivers identified through the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey and to develop guidance on the type of actions that could contribute to enhancing public trust. Results from the OECD Drivers of Trust Survey will allow measuring of the relative relevance of the different governance drivers in each country and their impact on trust in the various institutions. This evidence can provide the baseline for countries to develop a roadmap of actions to improve public administration effectiveness and enhance capacity to address long-term challenges.
- Third, the revised Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions will be tested, and if necessary adapted through in-depth country studies, to provide a comprehensive tool for evidence-based policy making.
- Finally, there is room for adapting the Framework and Survey to other institutional contexts and regions outside the OECD area. Such an adaptation needs to consider not only the different institutional and political settings, but also socio-cultural aspects that may impact structural patterns of interpersonal and institutional trust. Also to be considered is how trust dynamics change by different levels of economic development, particularly with regard to adapting citizen expectations of the public sector.



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## Annex A. Details on OECD country coverage across different databases

Table A.1. Details on OECD country coverage across different databases

OECD Country	Country ISO code	WVS survey year	IDEA election year
Australia	AUS	2018	2019
Austria	AUT	2018	2019
Belgium	BEL	2009	2010
Canada	CAN	2020	2019
Chile	CHL	2018	2017
Colombia	COL	2017	2018
Czech Republic	CZE	2017	2017
Denmark	DNK	2017-18	2019
Estonia	EST	2018	2019
Finland	FIN	2017-18	2019
France	FRA	2018	2017
Germany	DEU	2017-18	2017
Greece	GRC	2018	2017
Hungary	HUN	2018	2018
Iceland	ISL	2017-18	2016
Ireland	IRL	2008	2007
Italy	ITA	2018-19	2018
Japan	JPN	2017	2017
Lithuania	LTU	2017-18	2016
Luxembourg	LUX	2008	2009
Mexico	MEX	2018	2018
Netherlands	NLD	2017-18	2017
New Zealand	NZL	2017	2020
Norway	NOR	2018	2017
Poland	POL	2017-18	2019
Portugal	PRT	2020	2019
Slovak Republic	SVK	2017	2016
Slovenia	SVN	2017	2018
South Korea	KOR	2020	2020
Spain	ESP	2018	2016
Sweden	SWE	2017-18	2018
Switzerland	CHE	2017-18	2019
Turkey	TUR	2018	2018
United Kingdom	GBR	2018	2019
United States	USA	2017	2018

Source: World Values Survey (WVS) ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp)), European Values Study (EVS) (<https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13560>), IDEA Voter Turnout Database ([www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout](http://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout)), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).