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Centre of Government Scan of Bulgaria

Strengthening Strategic Decision-making at
the Centre of Government



OECD Public Governance Policy Papers

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About this paper

Responding to today's dynamic and complex policy problems puts significant pressure on governments in delivering on their policy goals and mandates. Improving public governance and public sector effectiveness is critical if governments are to ensure they meet their citizens' expectations. There are number of areas where governments can focus efforts. This set of public governance scans focuses on three of them. First, it is important to reaffirm and communicate core public sector values and ethics, including integrity, to counter decreasing levels of public trust in institutions and enhance the ability of integrity frameworks to control corruption. Second, to overcome complex and multi-faceted challenges, the government must be able to prioritise among high-level policy objectives, and the centre of government (CoG) must have the capacity to lead and co-ordinate strategic planning, policy design and implementation across government. Third, sound regulatory frameworks and policies are essential for improving the functioning of the public sector as a whole, implementing government objectives, and delivering better economic and social outcomes for citizens and business.

Within the framework of the "Driving Public Administration Reform Forward" project, the OECD provided support to Bulgaria to improve co-ordination among public integrity bodies, enhance the co-ordinating and strategic visioning functions of the CoG, and refine the use of regulatory management tools by developing concrete reform proposals based on good practices and international standards. The project was funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. Ultimately, this support will help Bulgaria create a more co-ordinated, reliable and favourable institutional environment for more efficient policy design and implementation. The project has led to three different policy scans of Bulgaria that provide an integrated set of recommendations to support Bulgaria's reform efforts:

- The **Public Integrity Scan** analyses the country's institutional and legal public integrity framework and provides proposals to mainstream integrity in all public entities and improve implementation of standards.
- The **Centre of Government Scan** analyses the functions and institutional arrangements underpinning the CoG and provides an assessment of its role in decision- and policy-making systems. The Scan further looks at strategic planning and the CoG's ability to define government priorities and commitments across government and translate them into measurable objectives.
- The **Regulatory Policy Scan** assesses the country's regulatory management capacity by taking stock of regulatory policies, institutions and tools, describing trends and recent developments, and identifying gaps in relation to good practices.

The three Scans were prepared under the auspices of the OECD Public Governance and Regulatory Policy Committees and form part of the Public Governance Directorate's broader engagement with Bulgaria. They draw on the OECD's expertise on public governance, including its work on centres of government, public sector integrity and regulatory policy and contribute to the OECD's programme of work on public sector effectiveness.

This Centre of Government Scan was approved by the OECD Public Governance Committee on 27 May 2022 and prepared for publication by the OECD Secretariat.

Abstract

The OECD Centre of Government Scan of Bulgaria assesses the functioning and organisation of the centre of government (CoG) in Bulgaria. It focuses on three main areas: 1) the functions and mandates of the CoG to perform a strategic and steering role, 2) the CoG's supportive role in decision- and policy-making systems, and 3) strategic planning and the CoG's ability to define government priorities across government and translate them into measurable objectives. The Scan forms part of the project "Driving Public Administration Reform Forward in Bulgaria" which aims to support the implementation of Bulgaria's reform priorities. Together with the Public Integrity Scan and Regulatory Policy Scan this policy paper forms part of the governance scan series carried out with the financial support from the European Union via the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support.

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Executive Summary

The OECD Centre of Government Scan of Bulgaria assesses the functioning and organisation of the centre of government (CoG) in Bulgaria. It focuses on three main areas: 1) the functions and mandates of the CoG to perform a strategic and steering role, 2) the CoG's supportive role in decision- and policy-making systems, and 3) strategic planning and the CoG's ability to define government priorities across government and translate them into measurable objectives.

The Scan forms part of the project "Driving Public Administration Reform Forward in Bulgaria" which aims to support the implementation of Bulgaria's reform priorities. Together with the Public Integrity Scan and Regulatory Policy Scan this policy paper forms part of the governance scan series carried out with the financial support from the European Union via the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support.

Functions and mandates of the CoG to perform a strategic and steering role

The Council of Ministers Administration (CoMA) constitutes in great part the core of the centre of government in Bulgaria, playing key functions traditionally attributed to CoGs across the OECD. As in many OECD countries, the CoG in Bulgaria does not exclusively exercise all its functions, but shares responsibilities such as co-ordination, regulatory policy, and strategic planning with other government units and bodies. In particular, the great number of shared functions with the Ministry of Finance manifests the ministry's important role.

The Bulgarian CoG's performance is hampered by several challenges. Institutional atomisation and a high fragmentation of CoG functions and activities within the CoMA and the Ministry of Finance have led to considerable overlap and duplication in the roles and responsibilities of the CoG's units. Important overlaps in mandates between the two institutions exist particularly for administrative burden reduction and business regulation, EU co-ordination, and the implementation of investment programs. The fragmented structure of the CoG in Bulgaria thus requires a consolidation of functions and clearer defined mandates with detailed value propositions and a focus on results. Moreover, the Scan identifies a number of gaps in the CoMA's mandate worth addressing related to verification of legal quality, whole-of-government strategic planning, the implementation of strategic priorities, risk management and strategic foresight, policy coordination, monitoring, regulatory oversight and quality control.

In addition to mandate gaps and overlap of functions, a perceived lack of institutional leadership and absence of clear vision for the centre are challenges for improving the CoG's core functions. Creating a shared vision and narrative with a set of joint objectives and goals may help consolidate the CoG and a more strategic CoMA with a leadership role in Bulgaria.

The CoG's supportive role in decision- and policy-making systems

The Scan finds that administrative silos and an insufficient policy co-ordination and development role of the CoG reduce the effectiveness of decision- and policy-making in Bulgaria. Limited formal co-ordination between CoG units weakens the consistency of the CoG's actions and overall policy coherence. In addition, the structure and quality of the collaboration between CoG units and line ministries differ widely, depending on the CoMA directorate and policy sector. One area with particularly limited horizontal co-ordination with line ministries is the strategic planning process well as the co-ordinated implementation of the various strategies.

As in the vast majority of OECD countries, Bulgaria's CoG is responsible for reviewing items submitted to the Council of Ministers on form, content and alignment with the overall government strategy. However, in practice the CoG plays this role only to a limited extent, since submitted items are not always reviewed and existing timeframes for review are often disregarded. No formal resolution mechanism and arbitration processes led by the CoG exist to resolve inter-ministerial conflicts over policy issues in advance of final decision by the Council of Ministers.

The CoMA's Directorates encounter challenges related to the management and exchange of documents and information. Specifically, the slow pace of adaption to digitalisation, the fragmentation of information systems, an inadequate level of digital skills in the CoG could be addressed. In addition, in the case of the CoMA, the monitoring of government policies and strategic plans, as well as the use of impact assessment, are still underdeveloped, leading to the need to create a clear monitoring and evaluation system of all government policies.

The CoG's role in strategic planning and visioning

The CoG in Bulgaria is tasked with co-ordinating long-term strategic planning across government. However, the responsibilities are split between different bodies in the CoG and the Ministry of Finance and no dedicated unit is in charge of strategic planning and monitoring overall strategic direction. In addition to strategic planning, the CoG in Bulgaria plays a limited role in strategic foresight and visioning. While dedicated foresight units exist in line ministries, the Scan shows that strategic visioning and anticipation activities are limited.

The Scan finds a lack of clear alignment between existing strategic documents and only limited linkage between the different goals and priorities included therein. As a result, a significant number of strategies overlap in content and a great number of different strategies exists. To streamline and align sectoral strategies, the creation of a clear institutional and policy framework that define responsibilities and set the process of developing strategies as well as quality criteria should be a priority. To ensure that strategic goals are underpinned by sufficient financial allocations, it is further important to systematically link strategic planning with the budget.

1 Introduction

The Government of Bulgaria has identified several challenges that hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of its public administration. The challenges the government outlined include, among others, the difficulties of the Administration of the Council of Ministers (CoMA) to lead and co-ordinate strategic policy design, implementation and monitoring; the inability of Bulgaria's integrity framework to control corruption significantly; limited improvement in the regulatory environment in the country despite frequent changes and initiatives; and the lack of dedicated operational programme for public administration reform after 2020.

In this context, Bulgaria requested support for the implementation of its reform priorities in the Public Administration Development Strategy 2014-2020 and for the design of the strategic framework post-2020, by identifying public administration performance gaps and reform actions based on good practices and international standards. Ultimately, this support will help Bulgaria create a more co-ordinated, reliable and favourable institutional environment to increase the efficiency of the policy design and implementation process, improve levels of public trust, and lastly make the business environment more attractive.

The Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) of the European Commission provides support to Bulgaria, together with three teams in the OECD Public Governance Directorate (Governance Reviews and Partnerships Division; Public Sector Integrity Division; Regulatory Policy Division) in the area of public administration reform with the purpose of developing concrete reform proposals. In the context of this project, the OECD delivered three scans including recommendations in the following key thematic areas:

- **Public Integrity Scan:** The OECD will conduct a mapping of the institutional and legal integrity architecture and lead an analysis of possible recommendations to support the strengthening of the institutional arrangements and the implementation of integrity standards.
- **Regulatory Policy Scan:** The OECD will conduct a scan of the policies, tools and institutions employed by the Bulgarian government to conduct regulatory impact assessment (RIA), existence of a whole-of-government policy and effective oversight of regulatory policy procedures and goals, stakeholder engagement and ex-post evaluation of legislation and provide policy recommendations to enhance its approach.
- **Centre of Government (CoG) Scan:** The OECD will provide an assessment of the CoG's role in steering/coordinating the development and pursuit of a national strategic vision that defines the development priorities for the next decade, and the government's associated action plans to implement the vision.

As a new strategic vision for the country is being set, the centre of government has a significant role to play. The central co-ordinating functions and the capacity for strategic planning of the CoMA will be decisive in determining the successful design and implementation of government priorities for the next decade. The current CoG context therefore offers an ideal opportunity to assess the organisation and functioning of the CoG, and design a more strategic centre that can help the government deliver on its policy priorities.

In order to collect information and data for the Centre of Government Scan of Bulgaria, the OECD developed two comprehensive questionnaires: A total of 7 CoMA units responded to the CoG

questionnaire and 7 ministries answered to the line ministry questionnaire. Following the OECD's established methodology, the data collection process for this scan also included a (virtual) fact-finding mission (FFM) to Bulgaria, the purpose of which was to conduct 21 extensive interviews with a wide variety of government and non-government stakeholders. Both the draft assessment as well as the advice and recommendations included in this version of the scan, were discussed with representatives of the Government of Bulgaria in Q1 2022.

This scan was prepared prior to the administrative restructuring of the CoMA, which is planned to take effect in 2022 and is supposed to significantly change the organisation and functioning of the centre. Since the OECD's data collection terminated prior to this process, the information provided in this scan reflects the composition of the CoMA until May 2022.

2 Functions and mandates of the CoG to perform a strategic and steering role

This first section of the scan analyses the functions and institutional arrangements underpinning the CoG in Bulgaria. Following an overview of the composition of the centre, the section outlines the Bulgarian CoG's responsibilities and how its structure and functions were adapted to tackle the COVID-19 crisis. The section concludes with an assessment of the challenges the CoG faces, most notably related to the mandates of its directorates, the vision, institutional leadership and performance management.

2.1 Composition, functions and mandates of the CoG in Bulgaria

The Administration of the Council of Ministers constitutes in great part the core of the centre of government in Bulgaria

The OECD defines the centre of government (CoG) as the “body or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to heads of government and the council of ministers, or cabinet” (OECD, 2018^[1]). The structure and composition of the centre of government varies considerably across countries. Following an institutional or structural definition of the centre of government, some countries established a CoG comprised of a set of bodies located in a single institution attached to the head of government they serve. Other countries follow a more functional approach and include several institutions and units performing core government functions outside the formal structure linked to the head of the executive (e.g., agencies or ministries performing crosscutting functions) in their definition of the CoG. However, despite certain well-defined features, the definitions of what encompasses a centre of government very much depend on the set of functions that it carries out. Setting up and defining the structure of the centre also very much depends on each country's history, political system, and administrative tradition. A broader, more functional approach to defining the CoG tends also to include institutions or agencies which perform core crosscutting governmental functions, even if they are not reporting directly to, or supporting, the Head of Government/Head of State.

In Bulgaria, the Administration of the Council of Ministers constitutes the core of the CoG, playing key functions traditionally attributed to CoGs across the OECD, particularly with regard to co-ordination, decision-making, and providing direct support to the Council of Ministers and the Prime Minister. Art. 105 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria provides the legal basis for the establishment of the Council of Ministers (hereafter CoM). “The Council of Ministers shall ensure the public order and national security and shall exercise overall guidance over the state administration and the armed forces” (Government of Bulgaria, 1991^[2]). It is a high-level political body that governs and implements the country's internal and foreign policy (Cheshmedzhieva, 2020^[3]). The structure and functions of the Administration of the Council of Minister are laid down in Art. 52-77 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers

and its Administration (hereafter RPCMA) (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[41]), while the organisation of its work is based on Art. 78-80 of the RPCMA. The administration is tasked with assisting the government in exercising its powers, as well as co-ordinating the activities of the central and territorial administrations of the executive power. It is organised in general and specialised directorates, other administrative units and individual positions in accordance with Appendix № 3 of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[41]). The constituent entities of the Administration of the Council of Ministers (hereafter CoMA) at the time of the drafting of this scan are the following:

- Secretary-General
- General Inspectorate
- Information Security Unit
- Finance Controller
- General Administration
 - Government Chancellery Directorate
 - Budget and Finance Directorate
 - Administrative and Legal Services and Property Management Directorate
 - Government Protocol Directorate
- Specialised Administration
 - Modernisation of the Administration Directorate
 - Economic and Social Policy Directorate
 - Co-ordination of Issues with the European Union Directorate (“EU Affairs Directorate”)
 - Religions Directorate
 - Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate
 - Good Governance Directorate
 - Legal Directorate
 - Administrative and Regional Co-ordination Directorate / (Government Information Service Directorate)

In comparison to the General Administration, which is responsible for the smooth organisation of the CoM’s day-to-day business as well as for administrative services for citizens and legal entities, the Specialised Administration provides direct support to the CoM with the exercise of its power. The OECD’s assessment thus focuses on the organisation and functioning of the CoM’s Specialised Administration.

The **Modernisation of the Administration Directorate** supports the Council of Ministers with the general management of the state administration and proposes initiatives for optimisation, creation, and transformation of administrative structures. It provides expert opinions on the internal structuring and functions of the administrative bodies and works on increasing transparency and public access to information. In addition, the Directorate oversees quality management systems and recruitment procedures. It also participates in the elaboration of the legislative and operational program of the Council of Ministers, for which it provides methodological assistance to the executive authorities and the administrations under them in carrying out impact assessments and compiling annual reports. Lastly, the Directorate is responsible for the maintenance of several administrative and information portals, and acts as a secretariat for the Council for Administrative Reform and the Regulatory Board. Its mandate is based on the general legal basis for the Council of Ministers, namely Art. 52-77 and 78-80, as well as appendix No. 3 of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[41]).

The **Economic and Social Policy Directorate** prepares expert opinions on the appropriateness of draft strategies, programs and acts submitted for consideration by the Council of Ministers in matters regarding economic, infrastructure and social development. Furthermore, the Directorate supports and co-ordinates

the administrative regulation of business activities and investment programs. With regards to monitoring and evaluation, the Directorate takes on responsibility in the fields of horizontal policy and national integrated infrastructure development programs. In addition, the Directorate performs the functions of a secretariat of the Development Council, an inter-ministerial body composed of ministers from all line ministries that co-ordinates, monitors and controls the development, implementation and reporting of the Government Management Programme. Other areas of responsibility include the support of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Demographic Policy as well as the maintenance of the Consultative Council Portal. The Directorate also organises the procedural representation and legal protection of the CoM. Its work is based on Art. 2 (items 1-5 and 10-14) of Decree 110/2010 (SG No. 44, 2010), on Art. 72 of the RPCMA, as well as on Art. 41 of the Concessions Act (Government of Bulgaria, 2006^[5]).

The **European Union Affairs Directorate** ensures the active, consistent and co-ordinated participation of the Bulgarian administration in EU decision-making processes. This responsibility comprises the continuous monitoring of EU policies and the implementation of Bulgaria's commitments, including compliance with existing EU law. Furthermore, the Directorate co-ordinates Bulgaria's response to infringement procedures related to Art. 258 – 260 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) as well as the pre-infringement information phase. It also acts as the national SOLVIT centre in the framework of the European cross-border problem-solving network for issues caused by the misapplication of internal market legislation. Its mandate is based on the RPCMA and Ordinance No. 85 (2007) concerning the organisation and co-ordination of European Union affairs.

The **Central Co-ordination Directorate** carries those responsibilities related to the overall management system of EU funds. This includes the communication with the EU Commission and other funding organisations, the horizontal co-ordination within the system, the development of strategic documents for the use of EU funds as well as the drafting of legislation related to the management of EU funds. The Directorate also maintains the information systems for management and monitoring and develops the communication strategy for EU funds. Its work is based on the Rules of Procedure and the provisions related to the management of resources of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Act.

The CoMA's **Legal Directorate** provides expert opinions on the legality of draft acts and constitutional matters. It ensures compliance with existing laws and the overall strategic orientation of the Council, and develops own draft acts where needed. Furthermore, the Legal Directorate provides procedural representation and legal protection for the Council of Ministers and the Prime Minister before all judicial instances. Its mandate grounds on the general legal basis for the Council of Ministers, namely Art. 52-77 and 78-80, as well as appendix no. 3 of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[4]).

The **Good Governance Directorate** is the managing authority of several operational programmes. As such, it ensures their implementation along objectives and financial plans and co-ordinates the work of the committees for monitoring the operational programmes, acting as their secretariat. As part of this task, the Directorate prepares annual reports to the EU Commission and therefore maintains data for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and auditing. It ensures that all documents related to the implementation of operational programmes are kept in accordance with the requirements of European Union law and applicable national law. Furthermore, the Directorate proposes adaptations to operational programmes and co-ordinates interventions in the field of e-government, administrative reform and management of the funds from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). In addition, the Directorate is responsible for procedures containing anti-fraud measures. Its mandate stems from Art. 77a and 5 (paragraph 1) of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[4]).

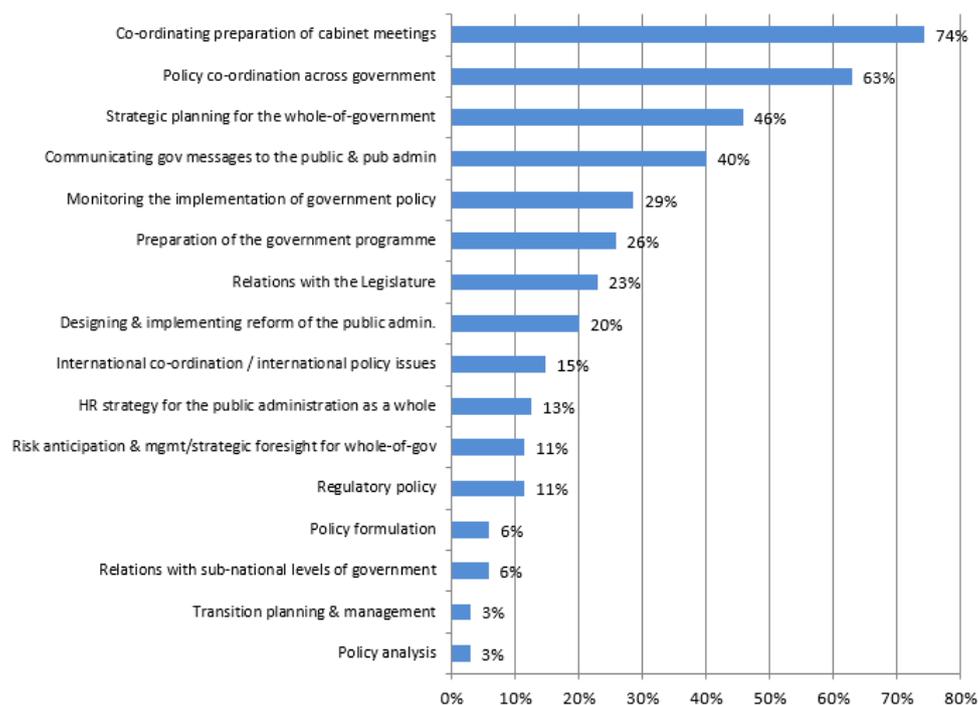
The **Administrative and Regional Co-ordination Department** supports the preparation of electoral processes and referenda. It also co-ordinates the activities of the regional administrations and supports their interaction with the central bodies of the executive branch. Furthermore, it participates in initiatives related to the development of administrative capacity and state services at regional level. In addition, the Directorate ensures the maintenance of the integrated information system of the state administration, the

Unified Information System for Human Resources Management as well as the integrated system for the legalisation of documents. In this function, it co-ordinates the process of updating the information in the systems and the preparation of the report on the state of administration. Its mandate is based on the general legal basis of the Council of Ministers, namely Art. 52-77c and 78-80, as well as Appendix No. 3 of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[4]).

Due to its role and functions, in particular regarding strategic planning, it can be argued, that in Bulgaria the **Ministry of Finance** also forms part of the extended centre of government. No strategic or legislative document can come into existence without preliminary approval from the Ministry of Finance (Art. 35 of the RPCMA). The Ministry of Finance co-ordinates the process of the assessment of financial impacts of draft legislation and reviews relevant information as presented in the financial justification statement. The ministry's unit for national reform and development carries out initiatives aimed at removing regulatory and other barriers for investment and reducing administrative burden.

The formal responsibilities of the CoG in Bulgaria are broadly in line with the role of CoGs in OECD countries

In OECD member countries, the CoG is key to organising and supporting the head of government's decision-making processes to guarantee the delivery of government priorities. It also plays a key role in co-ordinating policies across government, ensuring evidence-based, strategic and consistent policy implementation. The CoG also supports strategic management and planning and performs additional crosscutting functions such as monitoring and improving performance, and communications and accountability functions) (Figure 2.1) (OECD, 2020^[6]). Other common tasks performed primarily by the CoG include taking care of the relations with parliament and communicating government messages within government and to the public (OECD, 2020^[6]). While the range of responsibilities carried out by centres of government vary across countries, some functions are common to most such as co-ordinating the preparation of cabinet meetings and policy co-ordination across government. The centre takes almost exclusive responsibility for those functions. Whole-of-government strategic planning and monitoring the implementation of government policy are also high on the agenda across OECD countries (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Key responsibilities of the centre of government in OECD countries

Source: Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD (2017), (OECD, 2018^[11])

The CoG in Bulgaria assumes a number of formal responsibilities specified in its mandates that are traditionally associated with the centre of government in OECD member countries. As Figure 2.1 shows, co-ordinating preparation of cabinet meetings is the most frequently reported task of CoGs across the OECD. In Bulgaria, the Government Chancellery Directorate is responsible for the preparation of the draft agenda for the meetings of the Council of Ministers (Art. 65 (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[7])). The second most identified responsibility of CoGs in OECD countries is policy co-ordination across government. In the case of Bulgaria, the CoM and its administration are in charge of co-ordinating across government. Two other main responsibilities of the CoMA in line with the functions assumed by centres of government in OECD member countries is the preparation of the government programme and the management of the government's relations with the legislature. As in 16% of OECD countries, the CoG in Bulgaria, notably the Modernisation of the Administration Directorate, is responsible for designing and implementing reforms of the public sector (Figure 2.2).

As in many OECD countries (see Figure 2.2), the CoMA in Bulgaria does not exclusively exercise all its functions, but shares certain responsibilities with other units and bodies inside and outside the CoG:

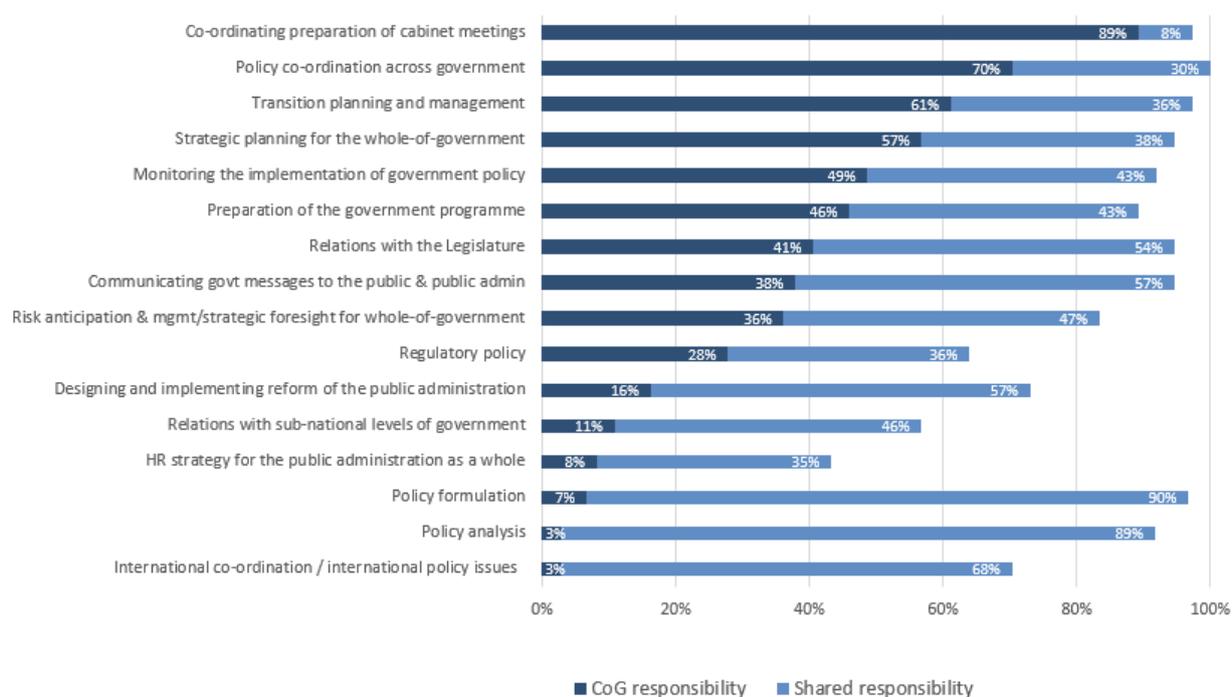
- Policy co-ordination across government:** The CoMA has a key co-ordination role for the whole-of-government, and co-ordinates policies in several policy areas such as EU affairs, public administration reforms, concessions, and religious matters (see Section 3.1 for more information on horizontal co-ordination). In particular, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate has formal duties related to the co-ordination of economic and social policies. The Development Council, under the leadership of the MoF and the support of the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, co-ordinates the development, implementation and reporting of the Government Management Programme. The Ministry of Finance also assumes responsibility for the co-ordination of policy in the field of public finances, tax policy, government debt management, financial services and financial markets, and internal control.

- **International co-ordination** and the responsibility for international policy issues is naturally shared with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministries of Finance, Economy and Interior for Bulgaria's membership of the Eurozone and in international (financial) organisations (e.g., the World Bank). Regarding EU affairs, the CoMA's EU Co-ordination Directorate shares the co-ordination task with the MFA's Co-ordination of EU Policies and EU Institutional Issues units. However, when it comes to EU co-ordination in relation to EU operative programs and funds, the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate in the CoMA is in charge.
- **Regulatory policy:** Besides the CoMA's Modernisation of the Administration Directorate that is in charge of impact assessment for the executive branch and (not exclusively) of reducing administrative burden, regulatory policy is also assigned to the Ministries of Finance and Economy and independent regulatory bodies such as the Financial Supervision Commission, the Commission for the Protection of Competition, the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission (for an overview of regulatory gaps and overlaps see Section 2.2).
- **Strategic planning:** Among the most important shared responsibilities is the strategic planning function. Strategic planning for the whole-of-government is shared with line ministries and state agencies in their specific area of competence. This competence is only shared in 38% of OECD countries (Figure 2.2) (OECD, 2018^[11]). According to responses to the OECD questionnaire, each line ministry/agency initiates strategic planning in its respective policy area in Bulgaria. As will be further explained in the Section 4, the CoMA only sets the overarching priorities and is in charge of strategies in areas that fall within the competence of several ministries or state agencies (for instance the Strategy for Development of Public Administration 2014-2020). However, the main institution that co-ordinates strategic planning for the government has recently been the Ministry of Finance, particularly when it comes to the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030. The ministry is also exclusively in charge of aligning the strategic whole-of-government policy with the budget/fiscal framework as prescribed by the Public Finance Act (for an overview of the gaps in strategic planning see Section 2.2).

There can also be ad-hoc structures and responsibilities put in place for specific cross-cutting areas. For example, in the case of strategic planning for COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 recovery efforts, strategic planning is a shared effort between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Crisis Headquarters under the Prime Minister as a temporary task force.

- **Risk anticipation and management** for the whole-of-government is a competence shared with the Ministry of Finance, which has responsibilities related to risk management under the Financial Management and Control in the Public Sector Act (for more information see Section 4 of this scan).
- **Transition planning** and management between an outgoing and incoming government is shared with line ministries. In addition, **policy analysis** and managing **relations with sub-national levels of government** and **relations with the Legislature** are not exclusive responsibilities, but are shared with line ministries.

The great number of shared responsibilities with the Ministry of Finance (MoF) manifests the key position and strong role of the ministry vis-à-vis the CoMA and line ministries. The traditional functions of the CoG in Bulgaria are thus effectively split between the Administration of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Finance. In particular, as further elaborated in Section 4, due to the limited strategic planning activities and the lack of a dedicated planning unit in the CoMA, the MoF plays a key role for strategic planning and aligning the strategic whole-of-government policy with the budget/fiscal framework. Moreover, given the interdependencies between the budget process and the achievement of government-wide policies, a close working relationship between the MoF and the CoMA is indispensable – as recommended by the OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance (OECD, 2015^[8]).

Figure 2.2. The CoG's share of various responsibilities

Note: n=37; Respondents were asked "For each area of responsibility, please indicate whether it comes under the responsibility of the CoG in your country, whether it comes under the responsibility of another part of government, or whether it is a shared responsibility of CoG and another body."

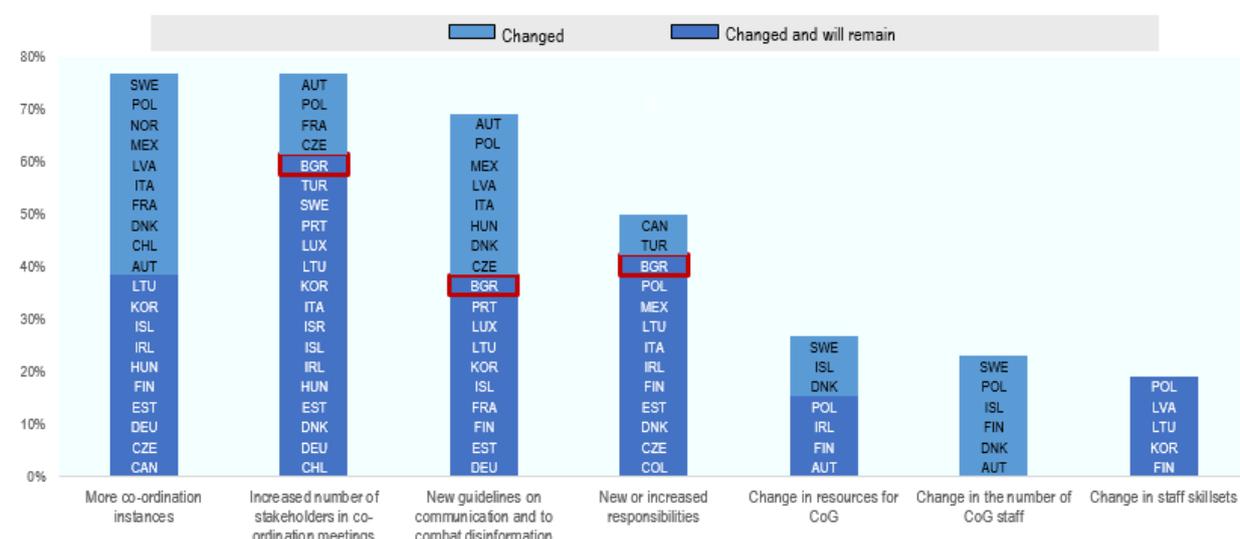
Source: (OECD, 2018^[11])

The CoG's structure and functions were adapted to tackle the COVID-19 crisis

Among the 26 OECD countries for which data were available, one of the most notable changes in the functioning of CoGs in response to COVID-19 was having to provide support to more co-ordination instances (20 out of 26, 77%) (OECD, 2021^[9]). In comparison to many OECD countries, Bulgaria did not create a special unit or co-ordinator within the CoG to respond to COVID-19 (Figure 2.3). The government instead established a temporary inter-ministerial co-ordination body in the form of a crisis task force under the Prime Minister. Despite increased responsibilities and more complex workloads during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CoG in Bulgaria did not experience a change in the number of staff nor to the number of resources available to the centre. Moreover, contrary to a majority of OECD countries, Bulgaria did not establish new protocols to support better data management on COVID-19.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, CoG units in Bulgaria experienced mainly three changes (OECD, 2021^[10]). First, more stakeholders (e.g., scientific experts, business associations, CSOs) participated in the co-ordination meetings called by the Bulgarian Council of Ministers. Most OECD member countries also reported more stakeholders participating in co-ordination meetings called by the CoG (19 out of 26, 73%) (OECD, 2021^[10]). Second, CoG units in Bulgaria reported to have received new or increased responsibilities. This is in line with the change in the number of tasks in the CoG's portfolio (for example over risk management, policy analysis) in 46% (12 out of 26 CoGs) of the surveyed OECD countries (Figure 2.3). Third, the Government of Bulgaria adopted new protocols/guidelines on communication and to combat disinformation/misinformation about the COVID-19 disease.

Figure 2.3. Changes experienced by centres of government since the COVID-19 outbreak that will remain when planning the recovery of the crisis, 2021



Note: Data for Australia, Greece, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States are not available.

Source: OECD (2021), Survey on Building a Resilient Response: The Role of Centre of Government in the Management of the COVID-19 Crisis and Future Recovery Efforts (OECD, 2021^[9]).

2.2 Main challenges faced by the CoG in performing its mandate and functions

The CoMA's functioning is hampered by gaps and overlaps in the mandates of its Directorates

Institutional atomisation and a high fragmentation of CoG functions and activities in Bulgaria within the Administration of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Finance have led to considerable overlap and duplication in the roles and responsibilities of the CoG's various units.

Compared to functions performed by CoGs in OECD countries, significant gaps exist in the mandates of the Bulgarian centre's units. Responses to the OECD questionnaire showed that 75% of the surveyed CoG bodies identify functional gaps in the CoMA's constituent units. These can hamper the functioning of the CoG and its institutional relations with other government entities, and were reported by the CoMA's units as one of the main challenges for carrying out their mandate efficiently (OECD, 2021^[11]). Based on fact-finding interviews and questionnaire responses, the OECD has identified a number of gaps in the CoMA units' mandates in the following areas:

- Verification of legal quality:** According to Art. 70 of the Organisational Rules of the Council of Ministers (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[7]), the CoMA's Legal Directorate prepares opinions on the legality of the draft acts of the Council of Ministers. This function is in line with practice in the majority of OECD countries. In 29 out of 37 countries (78%), who participated in the 2017 OECD survey on the organisation and functions of the centre of government (OECD, 2018^[1]), the CoG reviews the quality of legal drafting and legal conformity (e.g., constitutionality, plain language drafting, coherence with the existing body of law). Contrary to 57% of the responding countries, the CoG in Bulgaria, however, does not have the authority to return items in case of insufficient quality, but only provides its opinion. The Legal Directorate does thus not have the mandate to effectively ensure that adopted draft acts meet minimum legal requirements by returning items for

improvements. Moreover, the Directorate's current mandate does not foresee its involvement in the development of draft acts. Accompanying line ministries throughout the development and drafting phase can offer a possibility to point to issues relating to constitutionality and conflict with existing laws early on in the policy-making process.

- **Whole-of-government strategic planning:** Despite the responsibility of the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate, the Modernisation of the Administration Directorate, and the Economic and Social Policy Directorate for prioritisation and developing strategies in areas that fall within the competence of several ministries or state agencies, there is no dedicated unit in the CoM tasked with translating the government's priorities into strategic whole-of-government plans. In comparison, some 61% of OECD countries have a special unit dedicated to strategic planning or monitoring overall strategic direction (OECD, 2018_[11]). In a majority of OECD countries (68%) the CoG co-ordinates the design of long-term plans with line ministries (OECD, 2018_[11]). Instead of a unit in the CoMA, which was dissolved several years ago, the body responsible for the development of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and submission for adoption by the Council of Ministers is the Development Council, established as an inter-ministerial body composed of ministers from all line ministries. However, in practice, Bulgaria 2030 was reported to be elaborated under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, which also co-ordinates strategic planning for the government. This unclear institutional framework with various bodies sharing the responsibility for strategic planning, can lead to limited whole-of-government alignment, to the multiplication of strategies and to the lack of clear, shared vision on priorities. Strategic documents and priorities are not primarily defined nor co-ordinated by the CoMA, which only plays a limited role in ensuring the alignment of horizontal and sectoral policies. This leads to the multiplication of unarticulated sector strategies across government. The weak horizontal co-ordination within the CoMA as well as with the line ministries in the strategic planning process was identified as a major impediment for the CoG's functioning in the OECD questionnaire (OECD, 2021_[11]).
- **Implementation of strategic priorities:** For the implementation of strategic priorities, the Development Council co-ordinates with line ministries, monitors the implementation and reporting of the Government Management Programme and ensures compliance of the national and sectoral strategies as well as the programming documents prepared in connection with Bulgaria's membership in the European Union with the goals and priorities of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030. While the Economic and Social Policy Directorate in the Administration of the Council of Ministers performs the functions of the secretariat of the Development Council, there is no particular institution entrusted with the responsibility of co-ordinating the implementation of strategic plans across government and levels of government. Responses to the OECD's questionnaire reveal limited co-ordination for the implementation, with very little monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of strategic documents and rarely ever corrective measures in case of poor implementation of a strategy.
- **Risk management and strategic foresight:** As analysed in detail in Section 4, the Bulgarian CoG has developed a Strategy for Risk Management for the Council of Ministers Administration. All units in the CoMA practice risk management by maintaining risk registers and presenting annual reports with risk assessments. With regard to strategic foresight, the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate, the Modernisation of the Administration Directorate, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, and the EU Co-ordination Directorate use strategic foresight approaches. All line ministries report to have one or more dedicated unit(s) in charge of strategic foresight and risk anticipation. For matters of national security, the Security Council, a consultative body at the CoM level, and its secretariat that forms part of the CoMA, have functions related to risk management. The 2017 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functioning of Centres of Government showed that the vast majority of CoGs (83%) do assume some responsibility for risk management, however, in most cases this responsibility is shared with other institutions and in just over a third (36%) of the surveyed countries, the CoG has primary responsibility (Figure 2.2) (OECD, 2018_[11]).

Despite the existing practice in CoMA units and line ministries, the Ministry of Finance's responsibility for risk management under the Financial Management and Control in the Public Sector Act, and the Security Council's responsibility for national security, currently no institution is in charge of risk management and foresight for the whole of government.

- **Policy co-ordination across government** (see also Section 3.1): In the majority of OECD countries (70%), it is one of the CoG's key responsibilities to co-ordinate policy across administrative boundaries and sectors (Figure 2.2). In Bulgaria, the CoMA is formally tasked with coordinating the activity of the central and territorial administration of the executive power according to the Rule of Procedures of the Council of Minister. However, following the CoMA Directorates' mandates, it effectively co-ordinates policies only in a few policy areas, most notably EU affairs, public administration reforms, business and building concessions, and religions. Although the Economic and Social Policy Directorate is formally in charge of co-ordination of economic and social policies (Art. 72 RPCMA), these functions are reported to be executed in a limited manner and according to responses to the OECD questionnaire and interviews held with key stakeholders, some of these co-ordination functions are not sufficiently carried out. The Development Council is expected to be a central body for co-ordinating the development, implementation and reporting of the Government Management Programme across the government but has been reported not to fully play this role. Policy co-ordination roles and mechanisms also differ depending on CoMA units and sectors, leading to policy areas in which sectoral ministries effectively co-ordinate policies across the government. The EU Co-ordination Directorate's co-ordination role has for instance seen this role expand over time, while other Directorates have not been able to perform their co-ordination roles.
- **Monitoring the implementation of government policy** (see also Section 3.3): While the EU Affairs Directorate monitors the implementation of the Republic of Bulgaria's commitments to the European Union, including compliance with the EU law, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate is nominally in charge of monitoring the government's horizontal policies (Art. 72 RPCMA). However, several respondents to the OECD questionnaire flagged the need to improve the overall monitoring and evaluation of horizontal policies. The new draft methodology for monitoring and evaluation of policies, developed under the operational Good Governance 2014-2020 programme, will provide an opportunity to monitor and assess the implementation of horizontal policies.
- **Regulatory oversight¹ and quality control** (detailed assessment in the forthcoming OECD Regulatory Policy Scan of Bulgaria (OECD, 2022_[12])): Bulgaria, like many OECD countries, has a fragmented institutional landscape for regulatory oversight, where several bodies share critical oversight functions. The Modernisation of the Administration Directorate at the Council of Ministers is Bulgaria's main regulatory oversight body. It is responsible for quality control of regulatory impact assessments (RIA) and public consultation for draft laws and regulations initiated by the executive. However, the Directorate only assumes partial functions in the regulatory policy area. Other bodies with regulatory oversight functions such as the Regulatory Board, which is mandated to review the level of administrative burden introduced by draft legislation, and the Impact Assessment Working Group that provides support to ministries on the RIA process and serves as a forum to exchange best practices, are currently inactive. The Ministry of the Economy developed an SME test as part of the impact assessment; however, it does not oversee its implementation or support ministries with the assessment. The Ministry of Finance assesses the financial impacts of draft legislation and reviews relevant information presented in the financial justification statement that accompanies all draft acts. The ministry's unit for national reform and development carries out initiatives aimed at removing regulatory and other barriers for investment and reducing administrative burden. This institutional set-up results in oversight and quality control of regulatory management tools being ineffective. Quality control of RIA and engagement processes takes place too late in the process to have an impact and are largely mechanistic. Ministries are not receiving sufficient support. There is no quality control mechanism in place for ex post evaluation of existing regulations.

The lack of a proper assessment of functions and responsibilities as well as fragmentation often leads to gaps in mandates. Despite the challenge existing gaps pose for the CoG's functioning, Bulgaria has not carried out a functional review of the different bodies and units in recent years with a detailed mapping of the current functions of the CoG and its different units with a view to identifying mandate gaps. The review could also help raise the awareness at the political level of the potential role of the CoMA in policy development, co-ordination and planning.

Important overlaps between mandates also exist in different policy areas between CoMA units

The institutional fragmentation of the CoG functions within the Administration of the Council of Ministers and line ministries as well as frequent institutional changes within the centre have led to overlap and duplication in the mandates of the CoG's constituent units. One fourth of the surveyed CoG bodies in Bulgaria (OECD, 2021^[13]) identify challenges with overlapping mandates in the following areas:

- **Reducing administrative burden and business regulation:** In Bulgaria, several bodies are in charge of developing and implementing measures for reducing administrative burden and regulating business activity. An overlap of competencies in this area, creates obstacles to effective regulation making (OECD, 2022^[12]). The Modernisation of the Administration Directorate, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, the Administrative Reform Council, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Finance all share the responsibility for the reduction of administrative burden (OECD, 2021^[13]). Following Art. 72 of the Organisational Rules of the CoM, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, prepares expert opinions on the draft strategies, programs and acts related to the economic, infrastructure and social development submitted for consideration by the CoM. The Directorate is further responsible for supporting the development of the policy for the regulation of business activities and for ensuring the co-ordination and support for the implementation of the programmes and projects for investments. On the other hand, the Modernisation of the Administration Directorate supports the CoM by proposing initiatives and measures to reduce the administrative burden and improve the provision of administrative services (Art. 77 (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[7])). The Administrative Reform Council, established by Decree in 2009, acts as an advisory body to the CoM for the co-ordination of regulatory burden reduction on both business and citizens. The Ministry of Economy prepares and implements initiatives for reducing administrative burdens, such as the three consecutive action plans for administrative burden reduction on businesses. The ministry also developed a test to analyse impacts of draft legislation on SMEs as part of the impact assessment process. The Ministry of Finance carries out initiatives aimed at removing regulatory and other barriers for investment and reducing administrative burden. The shared competence thus necessitates solid co-ordination between these five bodies. During the OECD fact-finding mission, stakeholders reported that in the past, a siloed approach to reducing administrative burden has led to limited alignment between parallel projects that in some cases contradicted each other.
- **EU co-ordination:** Responses to the OECD questionnaire show that an overlap exists in the mandates of the EU Co-ordination Directorate and the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate in relation to the co-ordination of the process of preparing and approving Bulgaria's draft framework positions on issues addressed by the European Council, the Council of the European Union and its auxiliary bodies. Following Art. 73 of the Organisational Rules of the Council of Ministers, the EU Co-ordination Directorate supports the CoM in conducting a coherent policy towards the EU and prepares the Annual Programme for participation in the respective EU decision-making process. It is responsible for co-ordinating the process of preparing and approving Bulgaria's draft framework positions and co-ordinates the preparation, adoption, and implementation of the annual Action Plan. The Directorate is further tasked with co-ordinating and monitoring the adoption of acts introducing measures at national level to implement EU law. Stemming from Art. 75 of the

Organisational Rules of the CoM, the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate supports the Deputy Prime Minister with the overall co-ordination, organisation and management of EU funds. It plans and co-ordinates policies financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), co-ordinates the development of programmes, initiatives, investment instruments, and develops the regulatory framework and methodology for the management of European funds and assist with the implementation of European and national legislation related to the management of ESIF funds.

- **Implementation of investment programmes:** There is also an overlap in the mandates between the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate and the Economic and Social Policy Directorate in relation to co-ordination and support of the administration for the implementation of programmes and projects for investments. Pursuant to Art. 72 of the Organisational Rules of the Council of Ministers, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate is tasked with ensuring the co-ordination and support for the implementation of the programmes and projects for investments. The Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate plans and programs policies funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other donors, and co-ordinates them by summarizing, consolidating and preparing strategic documents.

Participants in the OECD fact-finding mission reported a certain degree of ambiguity in the demarcation between the functional responsibilities of the MoF and the CoMA, due to a sometimes unclear definition of the functions and tasks of the Ministry of Finance and the CoMA. This lack of clear distribution of tasks between the CoM and the Ministry of Finance is a main challenge for further improving the CoMA's core functions and mechanisms, leading to certain tasks and processes being unclearly divided or duplicated between the two institutions and creating confusion for other stakeholders involved in strategy and policy-making. Clearer roles and responsibilities and better synchronisation between the two entities are crucial for improving policy co-ordination and strategic planning in Bulgaria.

The fragmented structure of the CoG in Bulgaria requires a consolidation of functions and clearer defined mandates with detailed value propositions and a focus on results. A review of all the existing CoMA units (and of bodies responsible for CoG functions) will allow Bulgaria to determine which units' mandates need to be revised and can help ensure their mandates are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive – and define the value proposition of each. The result could be a simplified framework for thinking about the CoG's organisational architecture. Streamlining certain functions and assigning them to single bodies and units could in addition further help reduce institutional fragmentation. To ensure the necessary legitimacy and impetus, the Minister overseeing public administration reform could steer a review of the Organisational Rules of the Council of Ministers to reflect the changes to units' mandates and enshrine their competencies in legislation. For the CoG to be able to fulfil its role, Directorates need strong procedural and material law provisions that allow to request information. The alignment of mandate and functions can also be supported by better internal co-ordination between the different Directorates of the CoMA, for instance by establishing a regular formal meeting between the Directorates to co-ordinate on activities, including for the preparation of the CoM.

A lack of vision and institutional leadership are considered crucial challenges for the CoG in Bulgaria

In addition to challenges related to mandate gaps and overlap of functions, several other challenges related to the functioning of the CoG were reported in Bulgaria's responses to the OECD questionnaire and during the OECD's fact-finding mission. A major challenge for further improving the Bulgarian CoG's core functions is the perceived lack of institutional leadership and lack of vision for the centre. During the OECD's interviews, the CoMA was described by line ministries to be more of an administrative than a policy-making body with the competency and task to shape policies for the whole-of-government. CoGs across the OECD and beyond are playing an increasingly active role in serving the Head of State/Government and the executive, in co-ordinating policies across the government and providing

services that range from strategic planning to policy advice and intelligence, and from leading major cross departmental policy initiatives to monitoring progress and outcomes (OECD, 2018^[11]). In some countries, governments adapt the bodies and units at the centre to create a strategic outward-looking (set of) institution(s) with a focus on outcomes for citizens instead of being organised around the inputs of government (Brown, Kohli and Mignotte, 2021^[14]).

In Bulgaria, there is currently no policy document that describes a set of joint objectives and goals the CoG is supposed to accomplish to perform a strategic role for the whole-of-government. Bulgaria has established Rules of Procedure that define the mandate of each institution, but no shared vision or narrative exists in terms of goals, functions and responsibilities. Creating a shared vision and narrative may help consolidate the CoG and create a more strategic CoMA with a true leadership role in Bulgaria. While the National Development Plan Bulgaria 2030 could provide such a vision that sets the priorities for the CoG, the CoMA provides only secretariat support to the Development Council, while the Ministry of Finance is in charge of agenda-setting. This makes it very difficult for the CoMA to help set and steer a vision and strategic policy goals as well as take the leading role in the regular policy cycle. The CoMA plays in that regard more of a reactive than an agenda-setting role.

To help define the CoG's purpose as the efficient and effective manager of the whole-of-government with a focus on results for, and with, citizens, the government should consider establishing a performance framework that describes the set of joint goals and outcomes the CoG – both CoM units and institutions such as the Ministry of Finance - are working to accomplish. It will be important to make sure that policy priorities are clear and do not exhibit ambiguity. The policy document could also present how the government seeks to accomplish these objectives and include clear responsibilities for individual institutions. Compared to other strategies, the framework should be more operational and provide more detailed tasks and guidance and could include performance indicators and targets. The Modernisation of the Administration Directorate may take the lead in developing such a framework due to its long-standing experience with state modernisation and public administration reform. In order for this to have the desired impact, political support and leadership are indispensable in recognising the importance of the CoG for policy-making and for all reform efforts, in particular vis-à-vis line ministries.

An example of a performance framework in a federal OECD member country is the US Federal Performance Framework (see Box 2.1) that presents an integrated overview of the government as a whole and could serve as inspiration for a CoG-focused performance framework in Bulgaria.

Box 2.1. Performance Framework in the United States of America

In the US, a dedicated website (Performance.gov) communicates the goals and outcomes the Federal Government is working to accomplish, how it seeks to accomplish them, and how agencies are performing. Agencies are identifying both short and long-term goals to be reflected in four-year strategic plans, annual performance plans, and a limited number of agency priority goals. The public is able to explore those goals, and the progress being made to meet them, online on a central website that provides a comprehensive picture of government performance.

Based on the 2010 Government Performance and Results Modernisation Act (GPRAMA), the government wide framework requires federal agencies to set performance goals that deliver results for the American people, establish management processes to review progress, and regularly communicate progress being achieved against those goals.

Source: (General Services Administration & the Office of Management and Budget, n.d.^[15])

During the OECD's fact-finding mission, participants also pointed to the lack of harmonised procedures across CoG units. While more clearly defined roles and responsibilities of individual bodies can be conducive to creating clearer procedures between units, setting up performance management processes and working routines to focus on performance delivery and review progress on the CoG's goals could further help Bulgaria ensure a focus on managing for results. The Government of Bulgaria could, for instance, consider the following three non-sequential routines (Brown, Kohli and Mignotte, 2021^[14]):

- Goal co-ordination: the government could define crosscutting goals and the respective bodies' contributions (see Section 4 on strategic planning and prioritisation).
- Goal clarification: a plethora of different goals may further erode clarity and reduce the CoG's focus. A potential routine to be introduced is the definition of a small number of goals that are backed with high-level political support (see Section 4 on strategic planning and prioritisation).
- Data-driven review: limited performance review due to unmanageable amount of data can be overcome by establishing a routine of regular data-driven reviews of performance information, potentially with the involvement of different bodies.

3 The CoG's supportive role in decision- and policy-making systems

This second section will provide a more in-depth understanding of the role played by the CoG in decision- and policy-making systems in Bulgaria. In particular, this section will analyse horizontal co-ordination across administrative silos and policy-sectors and how the CoMA plays the challenge function vis-a-vis line ministries to ensure quality, arbitrates in the case of policy conflicts and fosters the provision of good quality policy advice. Finally, this section will assess the effective management of information in the CoG.

3.1 Horizontal co-ordination within the CoG and across the government

Formal co-ordination between CoG Units appears to be limited, weakening the consistency of the actions of the CoG and overall policy coherence

While the functioning of some CoMA units was positively highlighted during the fact-finding mission, the perception of challenges with the internal co-ordination of the CoMA differs between directorates. Some directorates stressed that even greater levels of integration between the different CoG units and a further strengthened role of the CoMA are needed to ensure effective co-ordination, not only between the CoG and the other ministries, but also within the CoMA itself.

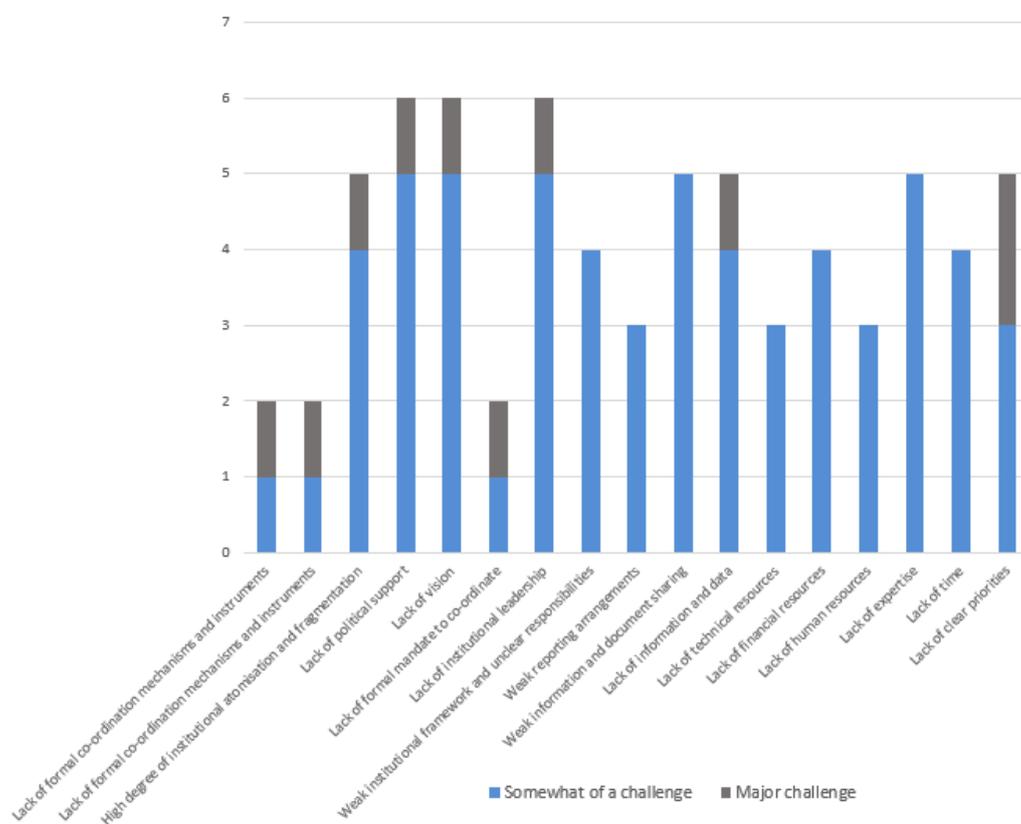
Besides the general functions and duties of the Secretary General of the CoM (Art. 57 Organisational Rules of the CoM), there are no legally defined mechanisms and instruments for co-ordination between the various units in the Bulgarian CoG. The CoMA units use only a few formal co-ordination mechanisms, especially at the higher level. Existing formal mechanisms include co-ordination meetings, for instance between the Central Co-ordination Unit and the Good Governance Directorate and between the general administration and the specialized administration units. Also the Economic and Social Policy Directorate reports weekly co-ordination meetings. Most of the CoMA directorates are not involved in the regular CoM meeting or the long-term policy co-ordination and planning cycle. This can diminish their role and reduces opportunities to be involved in the priority-setting process and policy co-ordination across government, which may also decrease their relevance to the political level.

Despite the existence of a few formal co-ordination mechanisms and instruments, the co-ordination of policies and actions at CoMA level does usually not happen in a strictly institutionalised manner and rather uses informal channels. Due to the strong administrative culture and the small size of the CoG in Bulgaria, many public servants in the CoM know each other and possess significant institutional memory. In their daily work, units and directorates therefore often resort to *ad hoc* co-ordination meetings or exchange e-mails and written opinions for co-ordination at the operational level. This finding matches with the conclusion that relatively few formal co-ordination mechanisms are in place to systemise the approaches

towards yielding results. While the adoption of informal arrangements can positively affect co-ordination, the prospects for forging co-ordination through *ad hoc* meetings may not involve all relevant bodies and can be expected to vary according to the involved individuals and might consequently depend on participants' personality, knowledge and interpersonal relations. Co-ordination meetings can also help harmonise practices across units and share common approaches with line ministries.

Figure 3.1 shows that a lack of political support, a lack of vision and lack of institutional leadership are seen as the main challenges for effective intra-CoG co-ordination. A high degree of institutional atomisation and fragmentation, weak information and data sharing, a lack of information and data as well as limited expertise and a lack of clear priorities were each reported to be challenging by 5 of the CoMA's Directorates.

Figure 3.1. Main challenges for effective internal (intra-CoG) co-ordination



Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked "From the point of view of your unit, what are the main challenges for effective internal (intra-CoG) co-ordination? Please rate the relevance of the challenges below by selecting (i) major challenge, (ii) somewhat of a challenge or (iii) not a challenge."

Source: (OECD, 2021^[11])

With regard to limited political support, participants in the OECD's fact-finding mission pointed to a difficulty to co-ordinate between CoMA units, when these units report to different deputy prime ministers from different political parties within a coalition government. The CoMA's internal co-ordination may thus be hampered by the evolution of different institutional silos. An overarching challenge for the CoG is the lack of a joint vision, which results in a limited orientation for the CoMA units and is closely linked to the lack of clear priorities for the CoG's work. As discussed in the previous section, creating a shared vision and narrative with a set of clearly defined joint objectives and goals the CoG is aiming to accomplish, may help

create a more strategic CoG and can also help foster intra-CoMA co-ordination. The negative effect of a high degree of institutional atomisation and fragmentation on co-ordination can be reduced by clearly defined mandates with detailed value propositions and a focus on results. The planned changes to the CoMA's institutional architecture and the proposed continuous review of the CoG units' mandates may support the clarification of mandates to reduce some of these challenges.

The OECD finds that there is also limited use of co-ordination tools within the CoG. The most inclusive and comprehensive co-ordination tool appears to be a uniform (online) document and information management system that supports effective document and information workflow processes (see also Section 3.3 on information and document management). A specific Unified Management Information System (UMIS) exists for the management of operational programmes and projects related to EU funds. The various platforms for the collection and exchange of information and documents, do not seem to satisfy the needs and expectations of the majority of CoMA directorates. Limited availability of data, partly as a result of insufficient monitoring and evaluation practices in the implementation of existing strategies, poses a significant risk to adequate co-ordination within the CoMA and ultimately to the success of its work. The Government of Bulgaria should thus conduct an assessment of existing challenges with the availability of information and data for decision-making at the CoG and promote the open and regular exchange of relevant information and key documents across the CoMA's units. In addition, the government should ensure the proper functioning of online information and document management system (e.g., with joint document storage, inter-unit tracking system, etc.) that supports effective, transparent, accountable document workflow processes (e.g., through easy and secure access and sharing of documents) and facilitates the digital co-creation of joint policy and planning documents across units.

The use of human resources management measures to promote co-ordination within the CoG is reported to be limited. Currently, only four out of seven CoMA Directorates make use of only one measure to promote co-ordination through their human resource activities. The most common ones are job descriptions. In their responses to the OECD questionnaire, 5 CoMA Directorates confirm to include co-ordination references in staff's job descriptions, terms of references or competency frameworks (OECD, 2021_[11]). In 3 Directorates the performance evaluation criteria include the ability to maintain effective and efficient co-ordination and the performance of senior public officials is particularly assessed against these criteria (OECD, 2021_[11]). While efficient co-ordination is not determined as a separate competence for any category of staff, but only included in managerial and teamwork competencies. Consequently, ensuring good co-ordination is part of the managerial competence of senior civil servants and senior officials (Appendix № 1 to Art. 15 of the Ordinance on the terms and conditions for evaluating the performance of the employees in the state administration). No specific performance-linked incentives were reported to further motivate staff to work across administrative units. Only 2 CoMA Directorates inform staff about the importance of co-ordination upon hiring and through annual trainings (OECD, 2021_[11]) and only the EU Affairs Co-ordination Directorate includes the need to work across organisational units in job descriptions, where applicable.

Public officials' capacities and expertise are among the most pressing challenges for intra-CoG co-ordination that CoMA units observe (Figure 3.1). To allow for effective co-ordination, it is thus important to increase the awareness, understanding and capacity of public officials. Training can help to create the skills and competencies needed for effective co-ordination. Courses could focus on internal communication, document management, information sharing as well as on the necessary IT skills. Specific skills and competencies in the field of project management and team leadership may further be helpful to increase the capacity of appointed persons in charge of co-ordination or the management personnel (e.g. chairperson) of institutional co-ordination structures (e.g. taskforces). Moreover, training can raise awareness of the importance and scope of co-ordination within the CoG and can contribute to a changing organisational culture, where co-operation across administrative boundaries is a more natural reflex than the work in institutional silos.

The Bulgarian government suffers from administrative silos and insufficient policy co-ordination led by the CoG

The role of the CoG is becoming increasingly important as the multidimensional challenges that governments are aiming to respond to require ever more co-ordination across line ministries and agencies, and the CoG is one of the few players that is able to convene across government (Brown, Kohli and Mignotte, 2021^[14]). Some new and challenging fields and cross-governmental priorities such as digitalisation, climate change and artificial intelligence for example, which require a more streamlined institutional approach, clearly demonstrate the need for a stronger CoG co-ordination and involvement in setting clear responsibilities and urging line ministries to take a pro-active and forward-looking approach.

A number of different mechanisms and instruments exist to foster collaboration between the CoG and line ministries in Bulgaria. Collaboration relies on what has been described by several stakeholders as a “three tier-system”, including the Council of Ministers, the different inter-ministerial councils and workings groups at ministry level. Even though shortcomings and gaps in existing co-ordination mechanisms have been observed by all stakeholders (OECD, 2021^[16]), line ministries do not observe a general lack of formal co-ordination mechanisms and instruments (see Figure 3.3). The most frequently used co-ordination mechanism are the regular cabinet meetings that take place every Wednesday (see Figure 3.2). *Ad hoc* cabinet discussions on a specific policy issue are also reported to be used to collaborate across administrative boundaries and sectors. In particular, the meetings and consultations between the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister and the secretary generals/chiefs of staff of individual line ministries are worth mentioning in this regard. In OECD countries, more than a third of CoGs organise systematic cabinet preparatory meetings with high-level representatives of ministries (secretaries of state, secretaries general or equivalent) and almost all do so at least occasional (OECD, 2018^[11]). While there is great variability in the roles and responsibilities of state secretaries (i.e. the administrative head of a ministry; may also be known as permanent secretary, chief executive or (non-political) Deputy Minister), they meet in cross-governmental policy co-ordination groups or committees in 29 OECD countries (OECD, 2018^[11]).

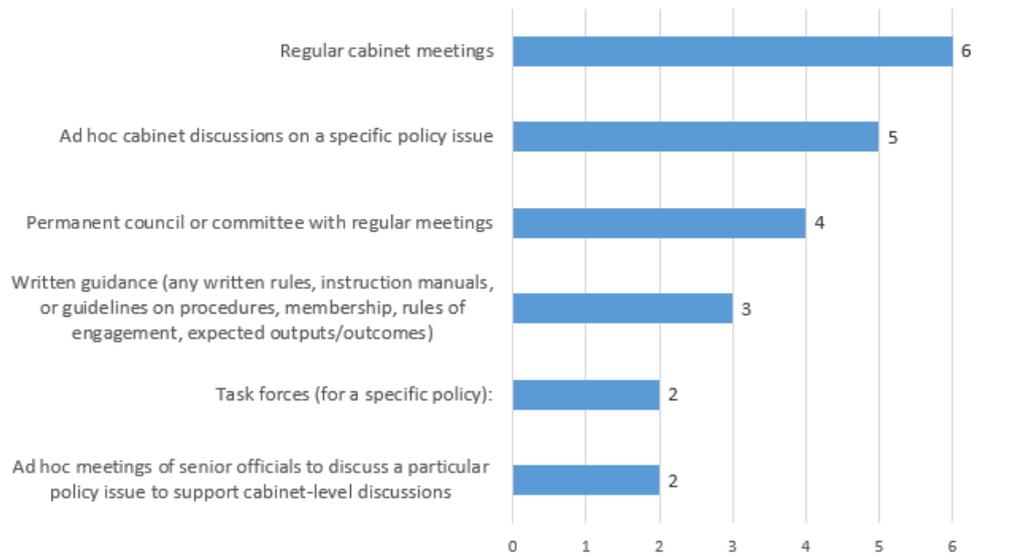
Based on Art. 21 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers Administration, the government also established a significant number of inter-ministerial councils or committees (such as the Development Council, the European Affairs Council and the Co-ordination Council for the Management of European Union Funds) as permanent advisory bodies that meet on a regular basis (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[17]). The role of CoMA units however differs in these different bodies, from a secretariat function to limited participation. For instance, the EU Affairs Directorate plays the role of Secretariat in the European Affairs Council that is led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Similar to governments in OECD countries, CoMA units report to have developed supporting written guidance documents such as instruction manuals, toolkits, guidelines and handbooks focusing on policy coherence and effective co-ordination for policy-makers.

The work of inter-ministerial task forces and working groups is often perceived as a preparatory stage for the discussions at the Council of Ministers, but specific collaboration arrangements can differ. Pursuant to Art. 24 of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[17]), they can be established by a decision of the CoM or by order of the Prime Minister to draft acts or other expert proposals on specific issues within the competence of the government with the participation of representatives of different institutions. In particular, for co-ordination at the technical level, task forces are an important co-ordination mechanism. Despite the existence of task forces and working groups as instruments to ensure policy co-ordination across government, only one-third of the surveyed line ministries confirm their regular use (Figure 3.2). Moreover, the track record of working groups and consultation councils for the co-ordination of individual policies was put into question during the OECD’s interviews.

With regard to particular instruments used by the CoG, co-ordination between the CoMA and line ministries is characterised by several information exchange systems. One of the most frequently used instruments for co-ordination with line ministries is the System for Exchange of Electronic Messages. This automated

electronic system is used for the secure exchange of digital information and documents and represents the backbone of cross-departmental exchange. It is flanked by the electronic document exchange system that directly provides all documents to and from the CoMA with electronic signatures to track origin and interventions. In addition, the Integrated State Administration Information System (ISAIS) helps the government gather data from various institutions to prepare the annual Report on the State of the Administration.

Figure 3.2. Main institutional mechanisms used by the CoG to ensure policy co-ordination



Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked "What are the main institutional instruments used by the CoG to ensure policy co-ordination?"
Source: (OECD, 2021^[11])

The co-ordination role and structures differ widely across CoMA Directorates

The structure and quality of the collaboration between CoG units and line ministries in Bulgaria differ widely, depending on the CoMA directorate and policy sector. Participants in the OECD's fact-finding mission reported an insufficient co-ordination and policy development role of the CoMA in most policy areas. As pointed out in Section 2.2, the co-ordination function of the CoMA mainly refers to policy areas such as EU affairs, public administration reforms, concessions, and religious matters as well as those related to the management of EU funds and programmes underlining very different co-ordination roles and position depending on the CoMA unit. Due to the Economic and Social Policy Directorate's and Economic and Financial Policy Directorate's roles as co-secretariats of the Development Council, the CoMA and the MoF also share the responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Council. Line ministry representatives highlighted the strong focus of the CoMA on the co-ordination and provision of support with administrative issues, but the CoG is often not seen as a body with the competency and task to shape policies. Policy co-ordination and development on the technical level in most policy areas are thus led primarily by line ministries. In addition to the co-ordination with line ministries, there seems to be little to no co-ordination with state agencies that report directly to the CoM and also play a role in developing and implementing policies.

Despite the CoMA's role in the Development Council, one area with particularly weak horizontal co-ordination with line ministries is the strategic planning process – the development of strategies as well as roadmaps and action plans as well as the co-ordinated implementation of the various strategies. A direct consequence of low levels of co-ordination for strategic planning is the disconnect between policy planning

and financial planning due to the CoMA's limited co-ordination on budget and financial matters with the Ministry of Finance. Following provision 2 of the OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance, governments should closely align budgets with their medium-term strategic priorities (OECD, 2015^[8]). A close working relationship between the CoMA and the Ministry of Finance is thus needed. Another major impediment reported is the sometimes limited co-ordination at the political level (for instance by the Deputy Prime Ministers). These issues will be further examined in Section 4.

At the same time, there are CoMA units that exercise a strong co-ordination function such as the EU Affairs Directorate. In general, EU driven structures in Bulgaria seem to have proper capacities and a clear co-ordination mandate. Though the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still chairs the EU Co-ordination Committee, the EU Affairs Directorate's co-ordination role and capacity has grown over time and the directorate has established itself as a main co-ordination body in its policy area.

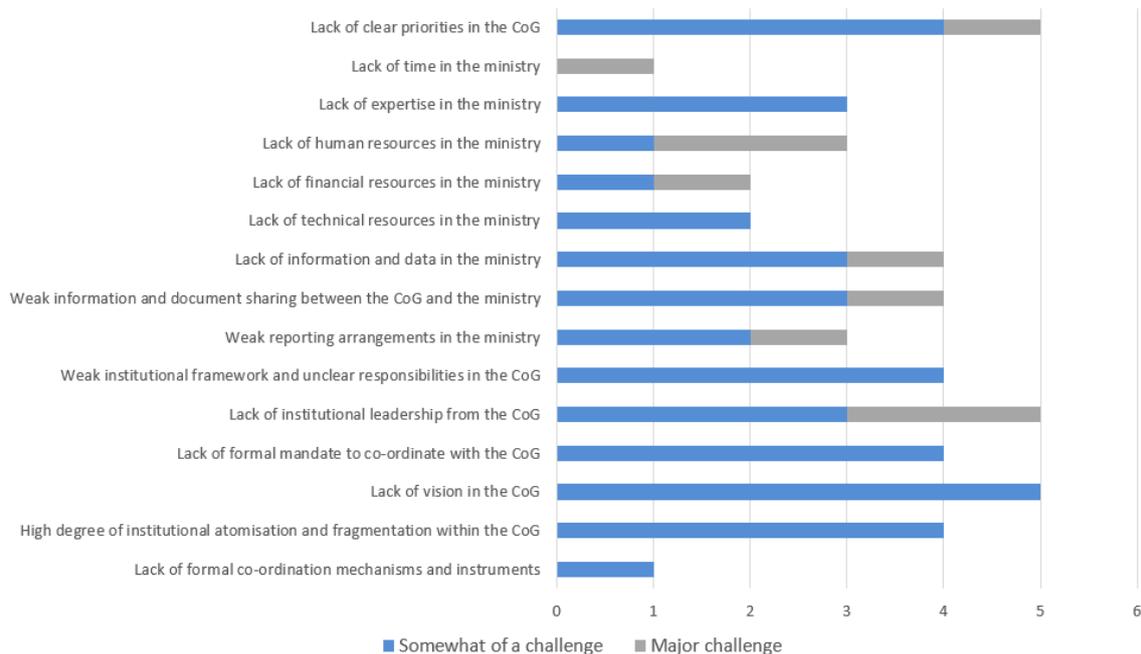
The lack of priorities and vision and the limited incentives are seen as key obstacles to effective co-ordination by the CoG

From a line ministry perspective, the main factors undermining effective co-ordination with the CoMA relate to a lack of clear priorities in the CoG, lack of institutional leadership from the CoG and a lack of vision in the CoG (see Figure 3.3). As analysed in the previous section, Bulgaria's CoG lacks a vision with a set of joint objectives and clear priorities the CoG is supposed to accomplish to perform a strategic role for the whole-of-government. A relatively weak institutional framework with a high degree of institutional atomisation and fragmentation and unclear responsibilities of individual units might further be the reason for the CoG often not being able to play an effective leadership and arbitration role for policy co-ordination and development. Another important obstacle for effective co-ordination across government is the lack of information and data in line ministries as well as weak information and document sharing between the CoG and the ministries (Figure 3.3).

During the OECD's fact-finding mission, stakeholders also highlighted that only few incentives exist for CoMA units to promote effective co-ordination across ministries and agencies that echoes the lack of incentives for internal CoMA co-ordination. Besides the legal framework that establishes clear obligations for units to co-ordinate, financial incentives only exist for European Structural and Investment Funds, where ministries have to cooperate in order to receive EU-funding for crosscutting themes such as education, social services, health services, circular economy, and the development of rural areas. With regard to performance targets that may promote co-ordination, target values of specific indicators are outlined in some strategic documents at national and/or sectoral level. However, performance management to ensure policy co-ordination between ministries and the CoG is only used on a very limited scale and significant shortcomings are reported with the related implementation and monitoring process.

Following the aforementioned advice, co-ordination could be incorporated in value or competency frameworks and be used in officials' job descriptions/terms of references. The ability to maintain effective and efficient co-ordination with other units, ministries or agencies could also be one of the officials' performance evaluation criteria, notably on the part of senior employees.

Figure 3.3. Main challenges for effective co-ordination with the CoG from line ministry perspective



Note: n=7; Line ministries were asked “From the point of view of your ministry, what are the main challenges for effective co-ordination with the CoG? Please rate the relevance of the challenges below by selecting (i) major challenge, (ii) somewhat of a challenge or (iii) not a challenge.”
Source: (OECD, 2021^[16])

3.2 Support to decision-making and challenge function vis-a-vis line ministries

The CoG plays a review role of items submitted to the CoM, but to a limited extent

As set out in the first section of this scan, the CoG in Bulgaria is responsible for reviewing items submitted to the Council of Ministers on form, content and alignment with the overall government strategy. According to Art. 32 of the RPCMA (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[4]), the institution submitting a draft act to the CoM shall not only consult with other ministers in specific cases with the Presidency or regional governors, but also co-ordinate with the Legal Directorate and the other directorates of the specialised administration of the Council of Ministers in accordance with their functional competence. The Secretary General of the CoM decides about the consultation of relevant directorates for each draft act. Sometimes CoMA directorates also receive the same draft act for comments from one of the Deputy Prime Ministers. The preparatory process of the Council of Ministers does not involve a systematic, formal preparatory meeting with Secretary Generals or representatives of the line ministries and CoMA units.

In the vast majority of OECD countries (91%) the centre of government is responsible for reviewing items submitted to cabinet (OECD, 2018^[11]). This review role often involves assessing whether proper processes and procedures as well as presentational requirements have been followed, ensuring that the item is aligned with the overall government programme, that the item conforms to legal, regulatory, and financial criteria, and that adequate consultation has occurred. Not all consulted CoMA directorates agree that the CoG in Bulgaria plays a challenge role vis-à-vis line ministries when it comes to quality assurance of proposed legislation and policy advice, thus underlining that the CoMA itself is not fully clear about its role and mandate. While CoMA Directorates can provide their formal opinion on items submitted by line ministries during the consultation process (Art. 31-37 of the Structural Regulations of the Council of Ministers and its administration), their opinion is non-binding only, since they do not enjoy veto power.

Even in cases where comments are not incorporated, draft acts can thus still be adopted by the CoM. In practice, it was however reported that items submitted to the Council of Ministers are not always reviewed or challenged by CoMA Directorates.

Several CoG bodies and units are involved in assessing the quality of draft legislation in Bulgaria. The CoMA's Legal Directorate provides opinions on legal conformity (e.g., constitutionality, plain language drafting, coherence with the existing body of law) of draft acts and the conduct of legally required consultations before discussion at the CoM. However, the Legal Directorate's opinion is non-binding and draft acts cannot be vetoed or sent back to the submitting institution based on the legal quality check. The Economic and Social Policy Directorate reviews the appropriateness of the draft strategies, programs and acts submitted for consideration by the Council of Ministers (Art. 72 of (Government of Bulgaria, 2009^[4])). Consequently, the Directorate reviews the objectives set by the proposed act and their compliance with the priorities and objectives in the government management programme and/or other strategic documents (Art. 35 of RPCMA, 2009). Regarding regulatory conformity, the Modernisation of the Administration Directorate is responsible for quality control of regulatory impact assessments (RIA) conducted for all proposals (for additional information see forthcoming OECD Regulatory Policy Scan of Bulgaria (OECD, 2022^[12])), while the Regulatory Board verify the adherence to regulatory quality standards. In terms of assessing fiscal conformity, the CoM shares this audit role with the Ministry of Finance that reviews draft acts' financial impact and verifies relevant information presented in the financial justification statement that accompanies all draft legislation. For the management of EU funds, this role is taken over by the Central Co-ordination Unit. Across the OECD, the overall responsibility for regulatory quality and consistency is a shared one in more than half (57%) of countries surveyed, usually with ministries of justice, economy or finance (OECD, 2018^[1]). Testing fiscal implications of draft acts is typically the responsibility of ministries of finance (OECD, 2018^[1]).

In Bulgaria, the CoG plays the challenge function in the preparation of the CoM, though to a limited extent. In their response to the OECD questionnaire, the various CoG bodies involved in the quality check reported to only provide opinions and do not have the mandate to return items to line ministries. In many OECD countries, the CoG has the authority to return proposals to the generating ministry or agency for additional work if certain criteria are not satisfied (OECD, 2018^[1]). This is the case for more than two-thirds (68%) of CoGs for the verification that procedures for preparation and presentation are respected. In a majority of the countries, the CoG has a check and reject role regarding the quality of legal drafting and legal conformity (57%) and the conduct of adequate consultation processes (51%). The CoG can return proposals on grounds of regulatory quality standards in 49% of the surveyed countries, while adequate costing assessments and the draft legislation's alignment with the Government Programme are reasons for rejection in 38% of the CoGs respectively (OECD, 2018^[1]).

The directorates of the CoM involved in the quality check of draft policies and legislation identify a number of limitations related to their capacity to exercise the CoG's challenge function. The most frequently reported limitation is a lack of expertise within the CoMA. Good quality reviews require sufficient expertise and expert knowledge of technical issues. The provision of adequately trained staff for the conduct of the quality check of all items submitted to the CoM should thus be an imperative for Bulgaria's reform efforts. The aforementioned lack of clear priorities also affects the quality check. Draft legislation's alignment with government priorities can only be verified, if they are sufficiently clear, precise and communicated to civil servants. Due to the lack of a mandate to return items to line ministries, the CoMA units' most important challenge is to convince the authoring institution to respect their opinion and accept the included recommendations. Nevertheless, they report being confronted with lack of buy-in from key stakeholders, which directly relates to a perceived lack of political support for undertaking a quality check.

Another challenge for the quality review of draft acts is line ministries' adherence to the legally defined term for preliminary co-ordination with the CoMA Directorates, prior to submission to the CoM. This applies in particular to the verification of the legal quality of draft acts by the Legal Directorate. According to the regulating act, all material for consideration by the CoM shall be submitted to the CoMA no later than 3

working days before the regular meeting. Despite the short amount of time reserved for legal review, respondents to the OECD survey pointed out that the timeframe is not always respected, with draft acts being submitted to the Legal Directorate immediately before or on the day of the CoM's meeting. The reduced time for legal review significantly undermines the Directorate's ability to effectively ensure a review of legal quality.

Conflict resolution and arbitration both between line ministries and between the CoM and line ministries do not follow clear institutional paths and responsibilities

Across the OECD, the CoG not only has a central role in providing policy co-ordination, analysis, and advice, but also ensures that the majority of conflicts between line ministries and between the centre and line ministries, especially technical conflicts, are resolved before items reach the CoM or cabinet. In many countries, including France, Germany, and Westminster systems, there is an expectation that conflicts should be resolved at the level of ministerial committee or below, and that differences of opinion should be reported and noted rather than having to be arbitrated by the head of government (OECD, 2018^[1]). Mechanisms to anticipate, detect and resolve policy conflicts early in the process can help identify inconsistencies, reduce incoherence and ensure efficient policy-making.

In Bulgaria, conflict resolution and arbitration both between line ministries and between the CoM and line ministries does not follow clear institutional paths. In most cases, mere differences of opinions on certain issues are tackled by the preparation of informed discussions, expert opinions and consultations with stakeholders, but line ministries understand the resolution of full-fledged conflicts over policy issues to lie within the area of competence of the CoM.

On the other hand, all but one CoM directorate reported that no dedicated conflict resolution functions with line ministries are exercised, calling into question whether all parties involved in the policy process find enough room to raise their concerns and inform the process (OECD, 2021^[16]). And also within the CoMA different understandings prevail of the arbitration capacities of the CoG, with only one directorate and one line ministry indicating arbitration activity between CoMA directorates. In that regard, the Council on EU affairs is highlighted as an important forum for resolving conflicts over policy issues among the ministries as well as disagreements on competences as regards EU legislation or documents. The Ministry of Finance plays an important role to make decisions in case of technical conflicts over policy issues, both among line ministries and in collaboration with the CoM.

Until 2009 a formalised arbitration mechanisms existed, where the secretary general of the respective line ministry met with the secretary general of the Council of Ministers to resolve inter-ministerial conflicts over policy issues in advance of the discussion by the Council of Ministers. While the Secretary General of the CoM still has the competence to return the draft act if specific criteria are not met, no formal mechanism and processes led by the CoG appear to exist to resolve inter-ministerial conflicts over policy issues in advance of final decision by the Council of Ministers.

The CoG plays a limited role in fostering the quality of advice

Well-informed discussion and effective decisions taken by the Head of Government and Council of Ministers depend on the quality of advice tendered to ministers as well as the co-ordination of processes and organisations that generate it. Across the OECD, a few countries have thus gone beyond ensuring regulatory quality to take a broad whole-of-government approach to improving the quality of policy advice generally. In comparison, responses to the OECD questionnaire and interviews held during the fact-finding mission show that line ministries in Bulgaria mostly regard the CoMA as an administrative body instead of one with the competency and task to shape policies, for instance through the improvement of policy advice.

Good practice examples of the role of the centre of government in ensuring the quality of policy advice includes New Zealand through its Policy Project to professionalise policy-making (see Box 3.1). New

Zealand's Policy Quality Framework codifies the characteristics of quality policy advice as well as the 'enablers' of this advice, by considering multiple perspectives, good commissioning and quality assurance processes (OECD, 2018^[1]). It provides a range of ex-ante and ex-post tools (such as quality control and peer review templates) to support policy advisors to deliver high-quality advice to ministers. Departments are required to report policy quality scores annually and encouraged to set policy quality improvement targets.

Box 3.1. Building Policy Development Capacity in New Zealand: The Policy Project

The Policy Project in New Zealand aims to build a high performing policy system that supports and enables good government decision making and policy development. The Policy Project is a platform that equips policy practitioners with access to relevant instruments and tools, best practices, advice and information to develop their skills and capability for more effective and better government decision-making. The platform includes links to policy improvement frameworks, a policy methods toolbox, case studies, links to policy communities, insights briefings, and development pathways. It provides a dedicated policy community which regularly interacts to provide common standards to support change at a systemic and not only individual level. The long-term insights briefings have been put in place to ensure that the policies go beyond the urgent to tackle longer-term challenges.

The Policy Project is anchored in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. It is co-developed with policy practitioners from across government and championed by a network across ministries of deputy chief executives with policy responsibilities, who serve as ambassadors of the Policy Project within their institution or agency.

As part of the Policy Project, three improvement frameworks have been co-designed with the policy community to help government agencies improve their policy quality and capability: the Policy Quality Framework, the Policy Skills Framework, and the Policy Capability Framework.

Policy Quality Framework

The Policy Quality Framework provides the policy community with a set of standards that specify what good quality advice means. Government agencies can use the Policy Quality Framework's standards to hold themselves accountable for the quality of their advice, and to support better government decision making. Policy advisors and managers can use the framework to help them develop quality policy advice and to peer review the advice of others.

Policy Skills Framework

The Policy Skills Framework sets out the knowledge, applied skills and behaviours that policy practitioners require to deliver quality policy advice. The framework recognises different levels of capability - from new professionals developing their policy craft to seasoned experts at the top of their game. If you are a policy practitioner, you can use the framework to help you map your skills. If you are a policy manager, you can use the framework to help you evaluate your team's skills. Tools based on the framework support individual performance development and building high performing policy teams.

Policy Capability Framework

The Policy Capability Framework is an organisational improvement tool. It describes the key components of policy capability needed by a government agency or team to produce quality policy advice. The Framework provides a common language for government agencies to reflect on policy performance and identify areas for improvement, while being flexible enough to apply in different

operating contexts. Senior leaders and policy managers use the Framework to improve the policy performance of their teams and agencies.

Note: The Policy Project can be found here: <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project>.

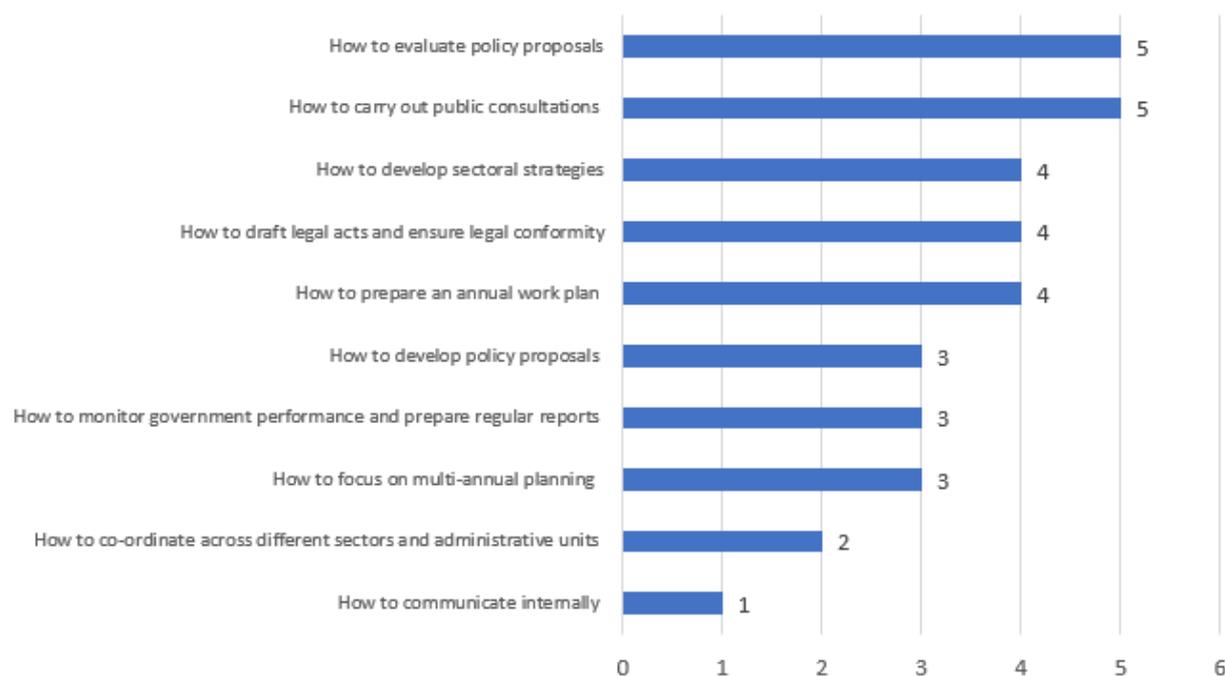
Source: Government of New Zealand, The Policy Project, <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/about-policy-project> (Government of New Zealand, n.d.^[18])

In Bulgaria, half of the surveyed CoM directorates report providing guidance such as templates, guidelines, checklists, or training to line ministries and other government bodies to enhance the quality of policy advice. Most guidelines and manuals are made available on the central government website www.strategy.bg. The material elaborated by the CoG spans a broad thematic scope, but includes *inter alia* guidance in the following areas:

- Conducting public consultations: the CoM has developed standards for conducting public consultations, drafted a civic participation guide as well as a manual for attracting civic engagement.
- Conducting functional reviews: the CoMA developed a methodology for conducting functional analysis and created a manual for applying the methodology to carry out reforms aimed at restructuring administrative structures; improve the distribution of functions and responsibilities; enhance internal communication; improve co-ordination between units and advisory councils; improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation.
- Ex-post impact assessment: the CoG provides guidance for ex-post impact assessment.
- Sectoral strategies: CoM units developed guidelines and manuals on how to develop sectoral strategies.
- Strategic planning: a methodology for strategic planning was adopted in 2010 and guidelines for strategic planning and development of policies in Bulgaria were developed in 2004, but never formally adopted.
- Co-ordination: The CoG published a handbook on *Procedures for Co-ordination of Development Policies*.
- Administrative services: The Institute of Public Administration designed a methodology for all central and territorial administrations to improve the quality of administrative services.

While line ministries receive guidance from the CoG, the degree of line ministries' awareness and the promotion of existing guidance material across government seems to vary. A majority of the surveyed line ministries reported receiving guidance on evaluating policy proposals, carrying out public consultations, developing sectoral strategies, drafting legal acts and ensuring legal conformity, and preparing an annual work plan (OECD, 2021^[16]). However, few of them reported receiving CoG guidance on monitoring government performance, multi-annual planning, policy co-ordination and internal communication (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Line ministry guidance received from the CoG to enhance the quality of policy advice



Note: n=6; Line ministries were asked about guidance (templates, guidelines, checklists, training, etc.) received from the CoG to enhance the quality of policy advice on a number of areas.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[16])

3.3 Effective management of information and monitoring

The CoMA Directorates encounter challenges related to the management and exchange of digital information

The CoMA Directorates follow a harmonised approach when it comes to the handling and exchange of information. However, the CoG does not use a single (online) document and information management system, but instead relies on four different systems that support effective document and information workflow processes:

- First, an information system for management and monitoring of EU funds in Bulgaria 2020 (UMIS) is designed to collect and process data for the operational programmes, executed in Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020. The main purpose of UMIS2020 is to collect and process electronically all data regarding the execution of the operational programmes from the moment it is entered in the system, thus ensuring the data is effectively managed, accurately reported and verified. The system provides a means to exchange information with European Union institutions; guarantees programmes, procedures, projects and contracts traceability; provides the opportunity for monitoring the performance by different criteria and indicators.
- Second, the legal information system of the Council of Ministers is a publicly available system that contains information about the activities of the Council of Ministers. This information covers the CoM's meetings, transcripts, protocols, decisions, orders, decrees.
- Third, the integrated information system of the state administration contains information on administrative services, administrative structures and executive bodies and competitions for civil servants.

- Fourth, the electronic exchange system allows for the transfer of electronic documents between different government institutions. The administrative authorities are obliged to exchange documents with each other only electronically since 1 November 2018.

While Bulgaria has made progress in digitalising its administration, the existence of several different information and document management systems, which are not equally used by all directorates makes it difficult to centralise data management throughout the CoMA and with line ministries. Moreover, the use of different information systems makes exchanges more challenging, including with the CoG. All but one line ministry report the use of a (online) document and information management system that supports effective document and information workflow processes (e.g., through easy and secure access and sharing of documents) (OECD, 2021^[16]).

Asked about the challenges with regard to the CoG's current document and information management system, CoMA Directorates point to three issues (OECD, 2021^[11]). First, the slow pace of adaption to digitalisation is considered a challenge. Currently the CoG is not only lacking as leader in the digitalisation of processes and workflow within the CoMA, but, on the contrary, also imposes the need to have a paper trail of all written communication with other bodies and institutions in order to save paper files of every act proceeded by the government. The reasons are related to the evidence requirements in judicial challenges before administrative courts and a prevailing preference for documents signed and stamped on paper instead of the electronic copies with e-signatures. As considerable amount of paper documents is still the norm and considered mandatory, the daily exchanges between directorates and line ministries can be negatively impacted since procedures are complicated and efficiency hindered. Second, the introduction of a centralised workflow system managed by the CoMA or another institution is raised as a means to overcome the current fragmentation of systems. There is at least one system (EUnet) that serves for the organisation of the weekly meetings of the Council for European Affairs. As long as different units continue to use various (sometimes incompatible) systems, the effective document and information workflow may be hampered. Third, CoMA directorates report inadequate level of digital skills of staff in the CoG. Staff skills in the CoG for digitalisation need improvement. Capacity should thus be increased through adequate training opportunities.

Many OECD countries have taken advantage of technological innovations to facilitate the management of information and document exchange. While some countries have introduced integrated government-wide systems, others focus on particular processes or areas. For instance, Estonia makes use of an information system to facilitate the preparation of Cabinet meetings to render them more strategic (Box 3.2).

Box 3.2. The “e-cabinet” information system in Estonia

The Information System for Government Councils in Estonia, known as e-Cabinet, is a tool that the Estonian government uses to streamline the decision-making process of Cabinet meetings. It is essentially a database and scheduler that helps organize and update relevant information in real time, giving Ministers and their teams a clear overview of every item that needs to be discussed with Cabinet.

Well before the start of the weekly Cabinet session, Ministers access the system to review each agenda item and determine their position. They can indicate if they have any objections or if they wish to speak on the subject. In this way, the position of the Ministers is known in advance. Decisions that do not raise any objections are adopted without debate, which saves considerable time.

Since the adoption of a paperless e-Cabinet system, the average length of weekly Cabinet meetings in Estonia has gone from 4 or 5 hours to between 30 and 90 minutes. The government has also eliminated the need to print and deliver thousands of pages of documents each week.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The CoMA has limited capabilities and instruments to monitor whole-of government policies

The quality of policy advice is heavily influenced by the monitoring and evaluation practices, which inform the process. Monitoring is one of the most important tools for policy co-ordination and should be developed by the CoMA in terms of both regular monitoring tailored to the government policy cycle and more comprehensive monitoring exercises.

In the case of the CoMA, monitoring of government policies and strategic plans, as well as the use of impact assessments, are still underdeveloped. No clear procedures and rules exist for monitoring. The CoG does not possess a dedicated unit or central M&E platform. There is a general lack of precise targets and indicators in most strategies and programmes. The monitoring of programmes is usually performed by the different Directorates in their own areas. As of today, very few evaluations of strategies take place, however, mostly at line ministry level. Some line ministries have started impact evaluation processes of several social and education policies. On the CoG's strategic documents, only annual reports exist (for instance for Bulgaria 2030).

The aforementioned circumstance hinders the CoMA from drawing conclusions on actual results and impacts of implemented policies. The government should thus consider making the promotion and establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems and practices one of its priorities for reform of the CoMA. Through a partnership, the National Statistics Institute may provide indicators and data on individual projects for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

The establishment of a robust monitoring system requires a solid institutional framework that provides: (a) the legal basis to undertake monitoring; (b) macro-level guidance on when and how to carry out monitoring and (c) clearly mandated institutional actors with allocated resources to oversee or carry out monitoring (OECD, 2021^[19]). Some OECD countries have adopted clear legal frameworks for performance monitoring. Bulgaria could draw from the example of the 2010 Governance Performance and Results Modernisation Act that mandates the government to define government-wide performance goals, as well as each agency to define sectoral goals (see Box 3.3). In Canada, the Management Accountability Framework was implemented in 2003 to hold heads of departments and agencies accountable for performance management, and to continuously improve performance management (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.3. The United States Government Performance and Results Modernization Act

The United States undertook reforms to improve the central government's performance management system, to foster a dialogue on performance across government, and to deliver targeted improvements on high-priority cross-government initiatives. In 2010, the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRAMA) was adopted to strengthen the efficiency of the system for government agencies to report their progress. The GPRAMA provides enhanced performance planning, management and reporting tools that can help decision makers to address current challenges.

A main objective of this act is to demonstrate the value of performance information and its usefulness in management decisions. A key element to drive such an effort has been to establish leadership roles and performance improvement responsibilities for senior management, making it their job to engage the workforce in a performance-based discussion as well as assuming accountability for agency performance and results.

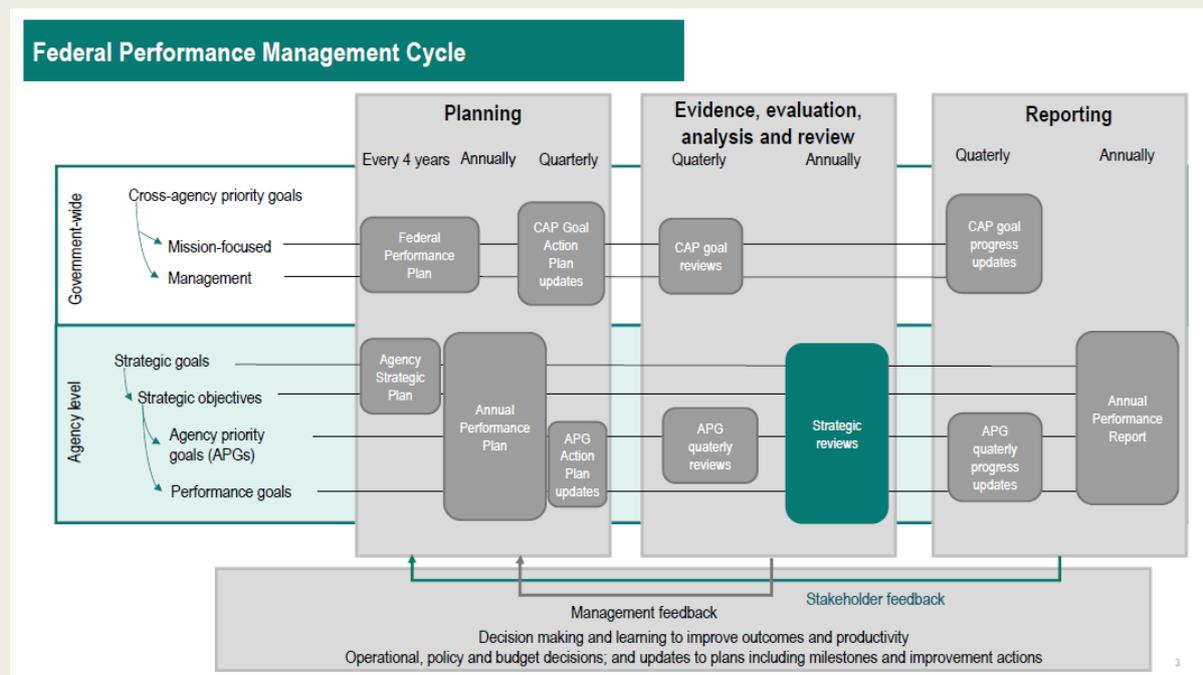
The Modernisation Act requires every agency to identify two to eight (usually about five) Agency Priority Goals (APGs), which inform the setting of the APG Action Plan. The APGs are set every two years and

are subject to quarterly performance reviews by the chief operating officer (COO) (usually deputy) and the performance improvement officer (PIO).

In addition to agency-level priority goals, federal cross-agency priority goals are set every four years, with performance assessed via quarterly reviews by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director and a Performance Improvement Council. Finally, agency-level strategic goals and objectives, which inform the setting of the AGPs, are subject to annual strategic reviews by agencies and the OMB (see figure below).

Strategic reviews are annual assessments that synthesise the available performance information and evidence to inform budget, legislative and management decisions. Initial results of the first round of reviews are promising. Many agencies were able to identify strategic objectives with relatively weak evidence and thus identify areas for improving metrics. Moreover, agencies reported that the strategic reviews reduced inconsistencies by bringing programmes together to discuss cross-cutting, strategic issues. Agencies also reported new initiatives to begin directly aligning activities with strategic goals and objectives. Furthermore, according to the agencies, the majority of agencies' performance staff were interested and engaged in finding value from strategic reviews.

Figure 3.5. Federal Performance Management Cycle



Note: Based on information from the United States Office of Management and Budget; Implementing Strategic Reviews: A component of the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, Mark Bussow, Performance Team Lead at U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), presented at the 10th Annual meeting of the OECD Senior Budget Officials Performance and Results Network
 Source: (OECD, 2021^[19])

Box 3.4. The Canadian Management Accountability Framework

The Management Accountability Framework (MAF) is an annual assessment of management practices and performances of most Government of Canada organisations. It was introduced in 2003 to clarify management expectations and strengthen deputy heads of departments and agencies' accountability.

The MAF sets out expectations for sound public sector management, and in doing so aims to support management accountability of deputy heads and improve management practices across government departments and agencies. The MAF is accompanied by an annual assessment of management practices and performance in most departments and agencies of the Government of Canada against the criteria of the framework. Since, 2014, the assessments use a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence, and results are presented within a comparative context to allow benchmarking across federal organisations.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[19])

4 Strategic planning and visioning

The last section will assess the CoG's ability to translate the government's priorities and commitments into measurable objectives supported by action plans and buy-in from stakeholders as well as its ability for monitoring the implementation of the adopted measures. It will explore how strategic planning processes are carried out in Bulgaria and what evolutions could be considered, looking at existing and needed strategic planning capacities. The analysis will review the methodologies used to define priorities, the institutional structure underpinning strategic planning, and capacity for strategic foresight.

4.1 Bulgaria's policy framework for strategic planning

This section provides an overview of how the Government of Bulgaria can develop more effective institutional structures, management tools and mechanisms for strategic planning and prioritisation. Strategic planning can be defined as a “deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why” (Bryson, 2011^[20]). Strategic planning should also be linked with implementation and outcomes (Bryson, Edwards and Van Slyke, 2018^[21]). For this to happen, governments must make choices between policies and reforms and prioritise some of them due to limited financial resources, political capital, or time. The prioritisation process can be understood as a structured way of assessing the relative merits of policy proposals.

Strategic planning can help governments to define, align and achieve their long and mid-term goals, to match resources with expected outcomes as well as provide a framework for prioritisation. The CoG has been routinely tasked with translating election manifestos into national plans that inform policy priorities and work programmes and has consequently played an increasingly relevant role in whole-of-government strategic planning (OECD, 2018^[1]). In addition, strategic planning can help improve stakeholders participation, communication, and the responsiveness of public administrations (Bryson, Edwards and Van Slyke, 2018^[21]).

The CoG can play a crucial role in the prioritisation process leveraging its location, its horizontal and cross-governmental activities and its proximity to the highest level of the executive power. According to 56% of the respondents to the 2017 Survey on the Organisations and Functions of the Centre of Government, strategic planning is a key responsibility of the CoG, with almost 50% of countries listing it as one of the four top priorities of the CoG (OECD, 2018^[1]). The CoG can play different roles in strategic planning and prioritisation. In most cases (68%), the CoG plays more of a co-ordination and oversight role than identifying and defining priorities (54%). In many cases (38%), this means ensuring or mandating line ministries to develop long-term plans (OECD, 2018^[1]). The CoG also played a relevant role in planning COVID-19 recovery (OECD, 2020^[22]). The nature of strategic planning requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders and therefore calls for a strong institutional framework that clarifies the roles and functions of all actors. In addition, an effective policy framework is needed to align the great number of strategies, programmes and activities of individuals and organisations and provide clarity for all actors in terms of goals and objectives.

Sectoral strategic documents are not sufficiently aligned with whole-of-government high-level strategies

More than three-quarters (78%) of CoGs responding to the OECD survey reported the existence of a document outlining a strategic vision for their country (OECD, 2018_[1]). This is also the case in Bulgaria with the main documents outlining a long-term or medium-term strategic vision and/or priorities for the country as follows:

- The National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 (Government of Bulgaria, 2020_[23]) has been adopted with Protocol n. 67 of the Council of Ministers, dated 2 December 2020. Bulgaria 2030 is a framework strategic document, which outlines the vision and the general objectives of the policies for development in all sectors, including their territorial dimensions. It was developed based on the vision, targets and priorities of the Council of Ministers and approved with Decision n. 33 of 20 January 2020. Three strategic objectives have been formulated in the document – accelerated economic development, demographic revival and a decrease of inequalities, which are to be achieved through 5 development axes and 13 national priorities. Bulgaria 2030 includes detailed strategies for each of the priorities, an indicative financial framework, ex-ante impact evaluation for basic macroeconomic indicators as well mechanism to monitor the implementation.
- The Coalition Agreement for the period 2021-2025 describes the government's strategic priorities for a time span of four years.
- The Partnership Agreement Bulgaria is the main strategic document outlining the intended use of EU funds in Bulgaria. The elaboration process of the Partnership Agreement starts when an agreement on the next programming period at EU level is found. The timeline of its elaboration is stated in the European regulations and usually needs to be finalised within 4 to 6 months after the adoption of the regulations. The main institution responsible for implementation is a dedicated working group, which ensures that each programme is developed through a collective process involving authorities at European, regional and local level, social partners and organisations from civil society. Its work is supported by the CoMA's Central Co-ordination Unit.

In addition to the above-mentioned strategies, the existence of a large number of individual strategies for sectoral and/or horizontal policies increases the need for alignment and co-ordinated implementation and reporting and poses co-ordination challenges with Bulgaria 2030. Bulgaria 2030 identifies 13 sectoral priorities focus on the following areas: education and skills; science and scientific infrastructure; intelligent industry; circular and low-carbon economy; clean air and biodiversity; sustainable agriculture; transport connectivity; digital connectivity; regional development; institutional framework; social inclusion; health and sports; culture, heritage as well as tourism. For each of these priorities there already exists one or more sectoral strategies or new ones to be adopted, with a total of over 100 strategic documents.

The sectoral strategies should also be in line with the respective general and sectoral strategies at EU level as well as with other the horizontal strategies such as the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and the Bulgarian Operational Programme "Good Governance" (OPGG) for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in the period 2014-2020, which just came to an end, outlines the priorities and objectives to invest nearly €336 million to help modernise the public administration and transparency of the judiciary in Bulgaria.

Ensuring the alignment of each sectoral strategy with the aforementioned horizontal and national strategies is a crucial challenge that falls within the scope of responsibilities of the institution tasked with the development of the strategy. Through inter-ministerial co-ordination, any ministry may point out inconsistencies between sectoral strategies and horizontal documents during the institutional consultation procedure, before the adoption of the strategic document (Article 32 of the RPCMA), as previously mentioned.

During interviews held as part of the OECD's fact-finding missions, participants reported a lack of clear alignment between the existing strategic documents and only limited linkage between the different goals and priorities included therein. As a result, a significant number of strategies overlap in content and the number of strategies is extremely high, different interlocutors reporting more than 100 strategies. In particular, in the case of the government programme, the misalignment with other national strategic documents has led to a limited implementation of the different activities and measures included in the programme for the realisation of long-term national priorities.

The proliferation of sectoral and national strategic documents can significantly limit the possibility of ensuring coherence between them. According to respondents to the questionnaire, Bulgaria has a significant number of individual strategic documents (OECD, 2021^[16]). The Public Consultation Portal lists a total of 112 strategic documents that are currently in force (Government of Bulgaria, n.d.^[24]). A large number of laws and regulations lay down an obligation for various public authorities to adopt a strategy, often including a time limit to its duration. In practice, however, documents with different timeframes are produced in the same sector. Some of these strategies are required by the legislation while a number of others have been developed without any legislative acts. This leads to a mismatch of objectives and makes it impossible to define an overall vision for development in Bulgaria. During interviews, it was further underscored that several outdated strategies have not been repealed and continue to exist in parallel. This creates an unclear situation that may undermine implementation.

There are currently no procedures for the Bulgarian CoG to reduce misalignment of sectoral strategies with whole-of-government strategies, but there are incentive mechanisms. Once whole-of-government strategies have been defined, performance and financial targets are usually set and can later be used as an incentive mechanism to keep sectoral policies on track. Sectoral strategies are linked to the financial parameters of the national strategic objectives through the country's financial plan adopted by the annual State Budget Law. In addition, ministries are expected to report annually on the implementation of their part of the government programme under the report format.

Further aligning strategic documents and creating a clear framework for policy development

All strategic documents should be complementary and coherent so to have a clear understanding of long-term objectives and how to achieve them. It is crucial to re-establish links between Bulgaria 2030, the government programme and sectoral strategies. An important whole-of-government effort, possibly led by the CoMA and the Ministry of Finance, should be done to review and link high-level political priorities and commitments (e.g., those included in the government programme) and medium-term commitments included in broader strategic documents as well as short-term, delivery-oriented commitments enshrined in action plans. This can include grouping or cancelling overlapping sectoral strategies. Moreover, government programmes should contain objectives that are consistent with long-term strategies including Bulgaria 2030, thereby prioritising their implementation for particular time periods while revisions can be also made to Bulgaria 2030 in the implementation phase.

To streamline and align sectoral strategies, the government needs to create a clear framework for policy development, setting a process and clear criteria for the quality and co-ordination and alignment mechanisms. Some international good practices could provide some useful insight for the Bulgarian CoG (see Box 4.1). The Government of Bulgaria should particularly ensure that strategies that are not in line with the government programme or Bulgaria 2030 or that are outdated be amended or repealed. Each new strategy concept would need, as a rule, to be presented and adopted by the Council of Minister, including the review of its consistency with the government programme and existing strategies that can be carried out by the CoG. These efforts will also require strengthening the monitoring system when developing and implementing strategies. As a matter of fact, monitoring of the Government policies and strategic plans is underdeveloped in Bulgaria and so is the use of impact assessment. That leaves

the CoMA in the dark on actual results and impacts of the policies. Monitoring of policies, one of the most important tools of the policy co-ordination and development should be development and exploited by the CoMA in what concerns both regular monitoring that fits into the government policy cycle and more comprehensive policy monitoring exercises.

Box 4.1. Streamlining and aligning sectoral strategies in Ireland

Ireland Civil Service Renewal plan 2014:

Action 4: Strengthen strategic planning and business planning processes

- Streamline the Statement of Strategy (*sectoral strategies*) planning cycle with [the Programme for Government](#) so that planning processes are aligned.
- Mandate the Civil Service Management Board to review and challenge each Statement of Strategy prior to finalisation to ensure that these integrate cross-cutting initiatives and link effectively to Programme for Government commitments.
- Develop a single Statement of Strategy for the Civil Service that focuses exclusively on the strategy for delivering cross-cutting initiatives involving multiple Departments, Offices and Agencies.
- Establish the expectation that each Secretary General meets annually with the relevant parliament (*Oireachtas*) Committee to discuss progress in delivery of the objectives published in each Department's Statement of Strategy.
- Initiate regular strategic horizon scans to identify long-term risks, challenges and opportunities for Ireland over the longer term (e.g., 10, 20, 30 years into the future).

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2014^[25])

Complicated amendment procedures for action plans may reduce planning flexibility

Most strategic documents in Bulgaria are accompanied by action plans (e.g., road maps, three-year action plans, and annual plans) that detail their implementation following the adoption by the Council of Ministers. The procedure for the development and adoption of an action plan differs depending on the respective action plan's time span. Usually, action plans are elaborated for the short term (1-3 years). When the action plan has almost the same time span as the strategy, it is usually developed within a year through intensive consultations with various government institutions, social partners, businesses and NGOs.

In Bulgaria, action plans are very difficult to amend at later stages due to an obligation to renegotiate all measures and funding once an action plan or roadmap is reopened for discussion. Moreover, since stakeholders need to be consulted on all decisions and decrees of the Council of Ministers, amendment processes are further complicated. The Government of Bulgaria should consider making the amendment procedure for action plans easier and more flexible.

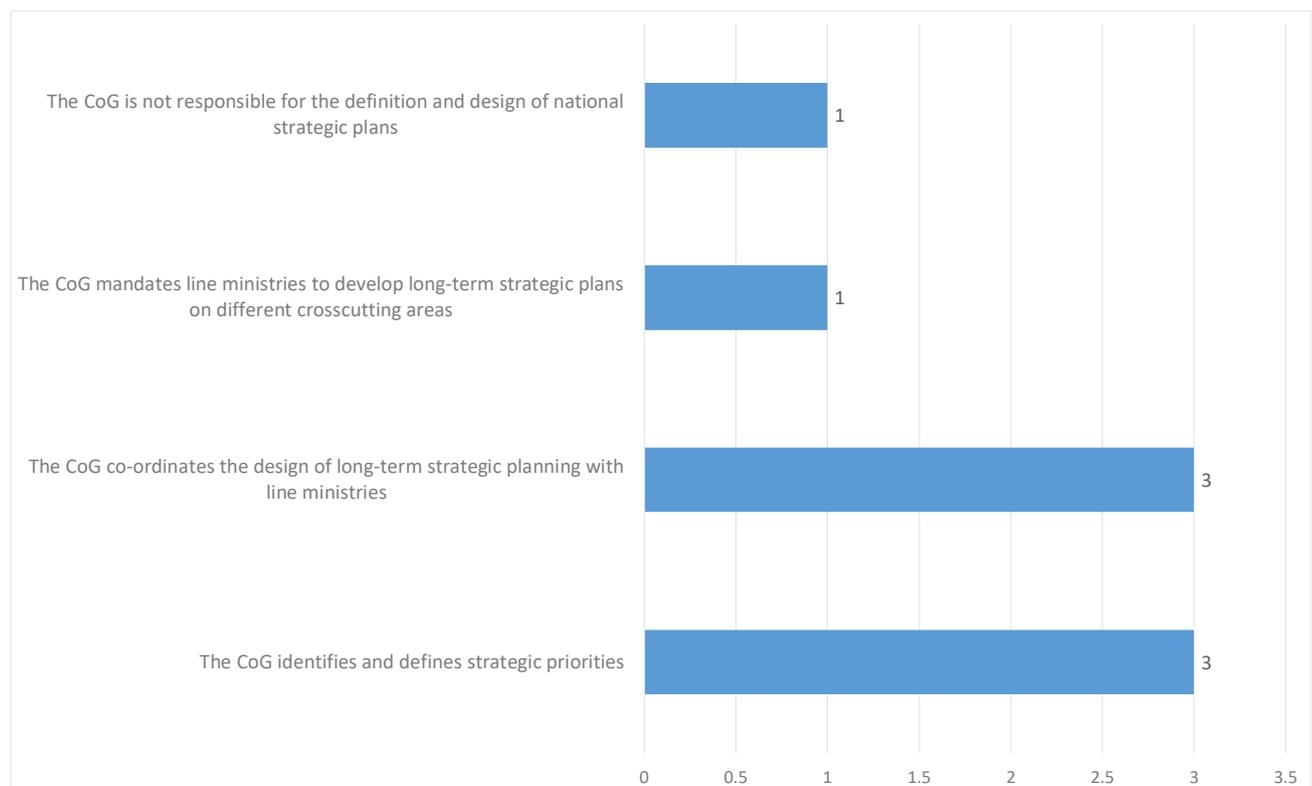
4.2 The institutional framework for strategic planning in Bulgaria

Strategic planning lacks a clear institutional framework, leading to limited whole-of-government alignment

The CoG is tasked with co-ordinating the development and implementation of strategic priorities in Bulgaria as in OECD member countries. Across the OECD, the CoG has the responsibility to co-ordinate and to assist the government in establishing priorities among competing demands on fiscal and other resources. As previously mentioned, strategic planning for the whole of government is considered a key responsibility of the centre of government. Generally, the role of the CoG with respect to strategic planning includes the following tasks (OECD, 2018^[1]):

- Ensuring that the government's deliberations on its strategic priorities take place with the benefit of a broad assessment of the overall economic, political and social situation;
- Ensuring that strategic priorities are harmonised with other strategic documents of the government, such as EU accession, economic and fiscal strategies, and other key policy and reform strategies;
- Ensuring that the budget preparation process takes account of, and reflects, strategic priorities;
- Ensuring that the ministry's work plans reflect the Government's strategic priorities;
- Ensuring that the Prime Minister is regularly briefed on new developments affecting the strategic priorities and annual work plan, and on possible responses or adjustments where relevant.

Figure 4.1. Responsibilities of the Bulgarian CoG in the definition and design of national strategic plans



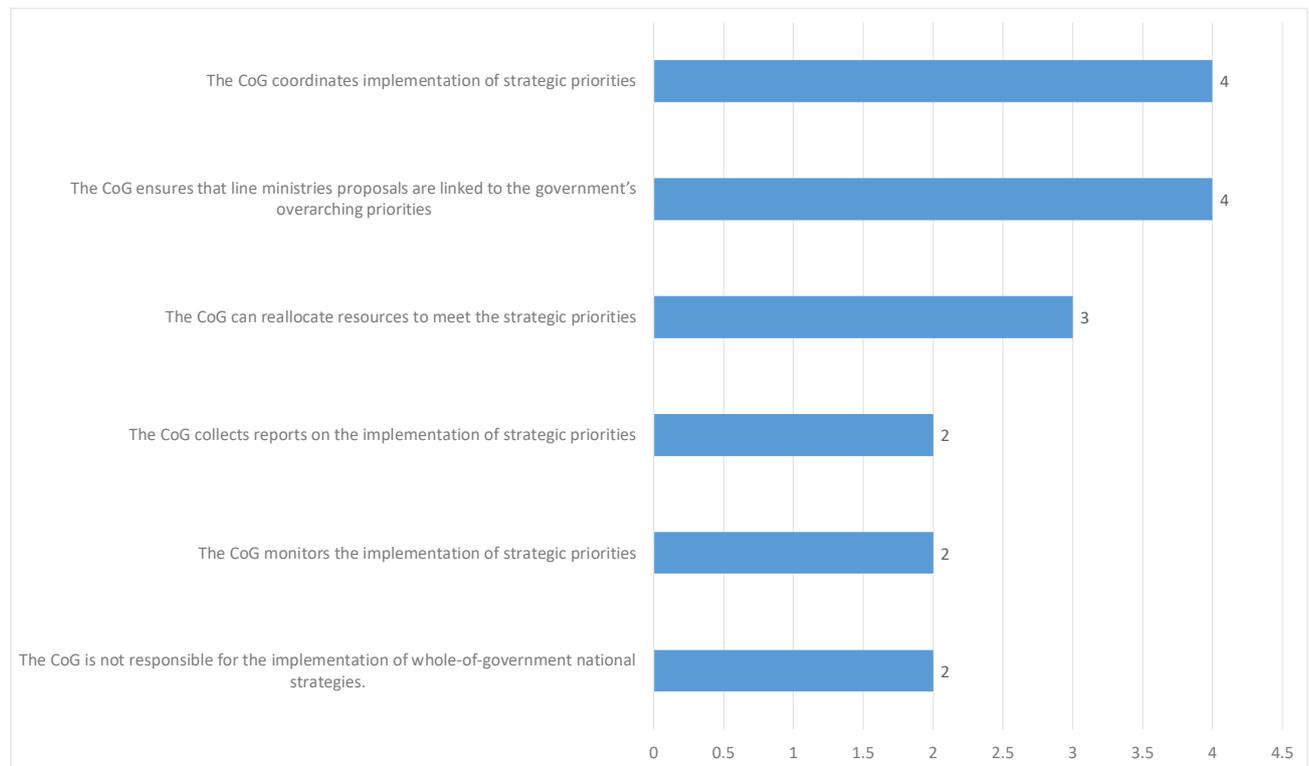
Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked: "Regarding the definition and design of the national strategic plan which of the following are the responsibility of the centre of government?"

Source: Based on responses to the OECD Centre of Government Questionnaire, (OECD, 2021^[11])

As shown in Figure 4.1, the CoG in Bulgaria is tasked with co-ordinating the design of long-term strategic planning with various ministries. This is in line with practice in many OECD countries, and often means that the CoG ensures that line ministries have longer-term plans in place. In over a third of OECD countries, the CoG mandates line ministries to develop strategic plans (OECD, 2018^[1]). In Bulgaria, the body responsible for the development of the draft National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and submission for adoption by the Council of Ministers is the Development Council, but in practice Bulgaria 2030 was elaborated under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, as it heads the respective Co-ordination Committee in the Council of Ministers' Development Council. The Development Council is also in charge of monitoring, controlling and reporting on the implementation of the programme. In terms of implementation, Decree 110/2010 establishes that the CoG co-ordinates the implementation of strategic priorities, ensures that line ministry proposals are linked to the government's overarching priorities, and can reallocate resources to meet the strategic priorities.

In addition, 54% of OECD countries, the CoG is tasked with identifying and defining strategic priorities. In Bulgaria, the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers approves strategic priorities involving the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate, the Modernization of Administration Directorate, and the Economic and Social Policy Directorate within the Administration of the Council of Ministers.

A closer look at the role played by CoGs in priority-setting and strategic alignment shows that a majority of CoGs across the OECD assume also a co-ordination and oversight role (OECD, 2018^[1]). As shown in Figure 4.2, the CoG in Bulgaria is responsible for coordinating the implementation of strategic priorities, ensuring that line ministries proposals are linked to the government's overarching priorities, and reallocating resources to meet the strategic priorities. Due to the reported limited alignment of the plethora of strategic documents in Bulgaria, this responsibility of the CoG is key to ensuring coherence across policies in Bulgaria. In addition, as mentioned by questionnaire respondents, in Bulgaria the CoG is also in charge of collecting reports on the implementation of strategic priorities and monitoring the implementation of those strategic priorities (OECD, 2021^[11]).

Figure 4.2. Responsibilities of the CoG in the implementation of national strategic priorities

Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked: "Regarding the implementation of national strategic priorities, which of the following are the responsibility of the CoG?"

Source: Based on responses to the OECD Centre of Government Questionnaire, (OECD, 2021^[11])

Despite the CoG's role in coordinating the implementation of strategic priorities, the responsibilities for strategic planning are split between different bodies and institutions and lack clarity, particularly for Bulgaria 2030. The responses to the OECD questionnaire and interviews held during the fact-finding missions suggest that Bulgaria's strategic planning process remains fragmented. Unlike the majority of OECD countries (61%), Bulgaria does not have a special dedicated unit in charge of strategic planning or monitoring overall strategic direction (OECD, 2018^[11]). With the exception of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030, which was adopted by Protocol No. 67 of the Council of Ministers of 2 December 2020, all national strategies are initiated and implemented by line ministries and agencies for their respective sectoral areas. Ministries are responsible, within their assigned competencies and relevant policy areas, for the development and implementation of the Programme of Government, for the development of national strategies, strategic plans and budget programmes that most effectively implement the priorities of the government. Nevertheless, the CoMA internal co-ordination for strategic planning is hampered by the allocation of the responsibility to different deputy Prime Ministers from different political parties leading to internal silos in the CoMA. Fragmentation is also caused by very different functions gathered under the CoG.

According to Decree No 110 of the Council of Ministers of 2010, the **Development Council** is an inter-ministerial body composed of ministers from all line ministries. The Development Council co-ordinates, monitors and controls the development, implementation and reporting of the Government Management Programme and its updates. The Development Council ensures compliance of the national and sectoral strategies, plans and programmes, as well as the programming documents prepared in connection with the membership of the Republic of Bulgaria in the European Union with the goals and priorities of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030. It is also tasked with organising and coordinating the

development of a draft National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 and proposing it for adoption by the Council of Ministers. The Development Council also approves the three-year action plans related to Bulgaria 2030 and ensures the link between national funding and the policies and measures enshrined in the plans. Moreover, it organises and co-ordinates the management, monitoring, control and reporting of the implementation of the National Development Programme; including issuing its management, monitoring, and implementation report at the level of the Council of Ministers.

The **Ministry of Finance** assumes an important role in Bulgaria's strategic planning process as it co-ordinates financial resource planning and plays a key role in the drafting and co-ordination process, as it heads the respective Co-ordination Committee in the Council of Ministers' Development Council. Led by the Ministry of Finance, the Co-ordination Committee for management, monitoring, control and reporting on the implementation of the National Development Programme is tasked with drafting, carrying out and annual reporting on the implementation of the three-year action plans of Bulgaria 2030. The Committee drafted the National Development Plan, while line ministries, within their competence, worked on detailing the strategy with a well-established procedure for inter-agency discussion of the document and stakeholder consultation meetings. The Committee oversees the progress in achieving the targets and priorities of Bulgaria 2030 and issues recommendations for corrective measures in cases of non-implementation or poor implementation. The Committee's prominent role for Bulgaria 2030 highlights the relevance of the Ministry of Finance in the strategic planning process, as it chairs the Committee, whose members are the deputy ministers of the line ministries. The secretariat of the Committee is the Economic and Financial Policy Directorate of the Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Finance also develops the annual Convergence Programme (CP) in accordance with the requirements of the EU fiscal governance framework. The Programme serves as the medium-term fiscal plan of the government and has a three-year horizon. The Ministry of Finance is also in charge of developing the Medium-term Budgetary Forecast (MTBF), which presents the main macro and fiscal perspectives as well as key aspects of the development of the sectoral/expenditure policies in the medium-term. According to Art.16 (1) of the Government Debt Act, the Minister of Finance shall also develop a government debt management strategy for the period of the respective medium-term budgetary forecast, which will then be approved by the Council of Ministers.

Another area of strategic planning where the Ministry of Finance plays a prominent role is the recovery from COVID-19. While the Council of Ministers is responsible for the preparation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan in response to COVID-19, the Ministry of Finance is tasked with the monitoring of the progress of the different milestones and targets and for the effective distribution of payments. Every six months progress on the milestones and targets is reported to the European Commission. After the satisfactory fulfilment of the agreed milestones and/or targets, the Ministry of Finance proceeds with distributing the payments stipulated in the plan to the different beneficiaries.

Overall, Bulgaria 2030 is not operationalised and linked with sector policy planning. There is no framework for strategic planning and clear responsibility over the area leading to more than 100 (112) sectoral strategies that makes it impossible to set coherent policy objectives. The CoMA has some connection with co-ordinating the strategic planning through secretariat role of the Development Council and functions fulfilled by the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, though this is far from having sufficient leverage and capacity to coordinate strategic planning in Bulgaria.

Clarifying the strategic planning process is an imperative in Bulgaria

Responses to the OECD's questionnaire and interviews held during fact-finding missions showed that the demarcation of functional responsibilities for strategic planning of the Ministry of Finance and the CoMA's Directorates are sometimes unclear. Such an unclear division of roles and responsibilities might lead to an overlap or duplication of certain tasks and processes between the two bodies and create a lack of clarity for line ministries regarding the processes and the alignment with other strategic priorities and documents.

Participants also pointed out limited or confusing institutional leadership during Bulgaria 2030's development. Bulgaria 2030 has been adopted, but no dedicated unit oversees the development, alignment and adoption of other strategies. The Council of Ministers plays a role in co-ordinating Bulgaria 2030's strategic planning through the secretariat role of the Development Council and functions fulfilled by the Economic and Social Policy Directorate. The Ministry of Finance also played a leading role in developing Bulgaria 2030, pointing out to an overall unclear institutional framework with limited leadership. As identified above, intra-CoMA co-ordination is additionally confronted with internal silos due to the allocation of responsibilities to different deputy Prime Ministers from different political parties.

In order to clarify institutional responsibility and provide clear legal bases, Bulgaria may consider adopting a Strategic Planning Act that clearly sets out individual mandates for the strategic planning process. Stronger strategic capacities would be needed in the CoMA to steer the strategic planning process, for example by re-establishing a strategic unit. The government needs to clarify the institutional setting surrounding Bulgaria 2030 and its implementation, particularly the roles and responsibilities of the Development Council and of the Ministry of Finance. In the majority of OECD countries (21 out of 37), strategic planning comes under the responsibility of the CoG, in 14 of OECD countries the CoG shares this responsibility with another body, and in 2 OECD countries it comes under the responsibility of another body (OECD, 2018^[26]). However, CoGs can take an active role in this process by, for instance, defining priorities (e.g. following the government programme). In other cases, they take a more support role by ensuring line ministries develop strategic plans and co-ordinating their design. In the OECD's centre stage survey, a total of 61% of countries report the existence of a special unit dedicated to strategic planning or monitoring overall strategic direction, while only few countries have a high-level cluster of staff reporting directly on longer-term direction or any institutionalised systems of strategy meetings co-ordinated by the centre. The exceptions were Finland and Estonia. Since line ministries have already adopted new strategic plans until 2030, such a reform would have to be implemented in the short-term.

In Bulgaria, there is a well-established role of the European Union in promoting whole-of-government planning and co-ordination

The country's membership in the European Union implies a number of commitments to implement community legislation and policies to achieve objectives and priorities at European level. Bulgaria uses EU adopted indicators and benchmarks in its national and sectoral strategic documents. It also takes into account EU recommendations such as the European Semester when formulating strategic objectives for sectoral policies.

There is a coherent pattern of programming cycles for the country's development and relevant EU policies. The government annually updates and implements the National Reform Programme (NRP) and the Convergence Programme under the framework for better co-ordination of the EU's economic policies - the European semester. The NRP outlines the government's key reforms efforts in a wide range of policy areas, such as fiscal and macroeconomic policies, employment and labour market policies, education, and health care. The NRP also shapes the national policy reforms, with a view to contributing to the achievement of the goals outlined in the European Green Deal. The Convergence Programme serves as the medium-term fiscal plan of the government and has a three-year horizon.

The strategic planning process in Bulgaria is closely following the timeline of the EU strategic planning cycle. The development of the cohesion policy legislative package started in 2018 and is published in July 2021. Bulgaria 2030 was adopted at the end of 2020, and some of the thematic strategies have entered into force in the beginning of 2021, while some are still under development, but are expected to be adopted by early 2022. All strategies will have a time span until 2030. The Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate within the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Finance and all line ministries are usually involved in the development of the thematic strategies.

Bulgaria has established a clear and efficient mechanism for planning and co-ordination on EU affairs. The Council on EU Affairs was created to bring together representatives of all national bodies and structures involved in EU decision-making processes. Under Ordinance 85 on co-ordination of EU affairs, the Council prepares an annual programme on Bulgaria's participation in these decision-making processes as well as an annual action plan with the measures arising from the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union. It adopts six-month programmes with priority topics and dossiers for Bulgaria during each Presidency of the Council of the EU, as well as reports on the participation of Bulgaria in the decision-making process of the EU for each six-month period. Overall, the EU driven structures have proper capacities and co-ordination mandate. Though, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still chairs the EU Co-ordination Committee, the EU Co-ordination Directorate co-ordination role and capacity has grown over time and the directorate has established itself as a main co-ordination body in its policy area. The reportedly well-functioning co-ordination processes and working practices for strategic planning related to the European Union could be gradually transferred to other spheres of national strategic planning, such as introducing inter-ministerial co-ordination body and practices with weekly meeting of the ministries Secretary Generals. The meetings can be used both policy weekly and medium term co-ordination that would give strong tool for the CoMA not only to react, but also take part in guiding the activities of the ministries.

4.3 The strategic planning process in Bulgaria

Several challenges undermine strategic planning in Bulgaria

As in many OECD countries, transforming high-level political commitments into strategic documents and eventually into concrete action plans is a difficult task for Bulgaria. A plethora of different economic, political, regional, social, external interests that are likely to go into different directions need to be balanced. Secondly, taking unpopular decisions that have long-term effect can be an issue, especially during election years. Lastly, some administrations encounter difficulties with taking charge of certain measures even if they are indicated as responsible for their implementation in the relevant strategic documents. The COVID-19 crisis did not make this task easier as the main priority of the state shifted to supporting the health system's ability to fight infection.

In Bulgaria, beyond these inherent difficulties to all strategic planning processes, respondents to the OECD questionnaire indicated an array of challenges they are confronted with when setting and prioritising national strategic objectives, as shown in (OECD, 2021_[11]). Among these, key challenges reported in Bulgaria include first the lack of evaluation of existing programmes and second the lack of stability of the legislative framework. The lack of evaluation weakens the implementation of existing programmes with new strategic documents being developed without systematic analysis of the impact of the implementation of previous strategies that could input into feedback loops. With the strategic framework, respondents noted that the adopted strategic documents still significantly vary in terms of quality and often lack mandatory elements (OECD, 2021_[11]). According to stakeholders interviewed during the fact-finding mission, there is also a lack of standards in the preparation, monitoring and reporting of strategic documents. Thirdly, according to the questionnaire, there is a lack of leadership from senior management, lack of ownership among relevant stakeholders, and a lack of necessary skills among CoG employees. These results echo the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities in the process and the dismantling of the strategic planning unit in the CoG that resulted in a loss of capacities. Fourthly, the emphasis on the territorial dimension of strategic documents could be strengthened. Strategic planning and management at subnational level should be more closely linked to the priorities at the national level to ensure their effective and efficient implementation in the interest of citizens and businesses.

Responses to the OECD questionnaire also suggest that strategic documents lack adequate financial coverage which decreases their actual relevance and implementability. Although the relationship between budgeting and planning contains an inherent logic, it can be difficult to implement in a government where

the functions are not coordinated closely. The Bulgarian Government should consider developing a clear framework to link strategic planning with the budget and ensure coherence with the budgetary framework to make sure all strategic goals are underpinned by sufficient financial allocations. While a co-ordinated approach is more important than the focus on a single body, the centre of government often has a role in identifying the initiatives that matter most across government. A country example where such processes are operated from the CoG is the United Kingdom, where the cabinet office focuses principally on strategy, prioritisation and accountability in relation to the budget (Box 4.2).

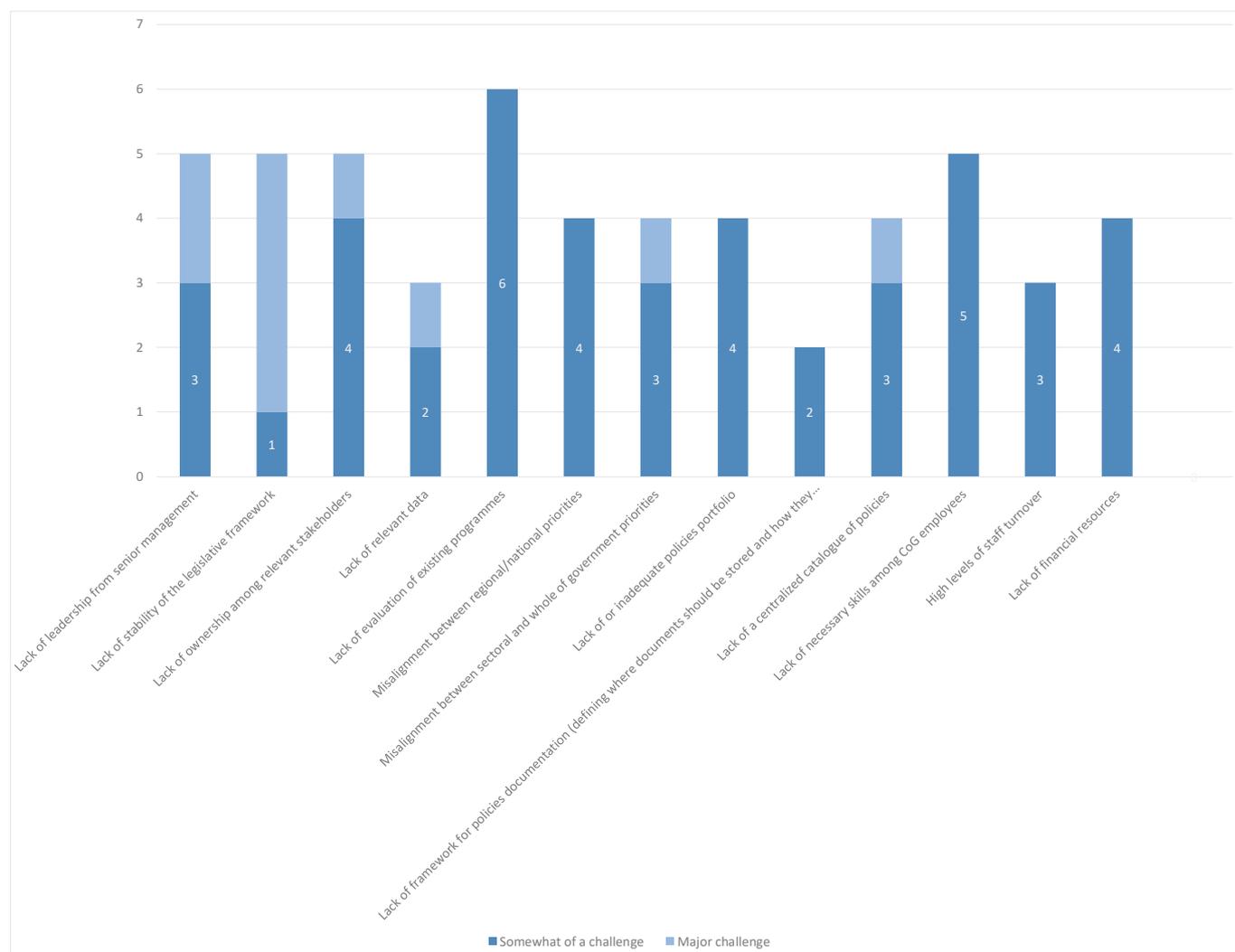
Box 4.2. Budget-related functions in the centre of government in the United Kingdom

The centre of government in the United Kingdom is principally the Prime Minister's office and the cabinet office. Many of the functions performed by the HM Treasury are also relevant to the centre of government. On budgeting, the Treasury focuses on budget strategy, prioritisation and accountability. These functions are also of key interest to the Prime Minister's office and the cabinet office. Budget strategy includes the prime minister's involvement in the early stages of the budget process. Prioritisation is largely on the flagship initiatives that help define the government's policy agenda, and the accountability functions can refer to transparency, delivery, and guidance on standards and methodologies.

The emphasis applied to budget strategy, prioritisation and accountability can vary depending on the priorities of the prime minister of the day and the needs of the government. As an example, in 2002, the then prime minister, Tony Blair, established a delivery unit to strengthen the centre of government's accountability role by monitoring the progress of the government's flagship priorities. Subsequent prime ministers have changed the focus of the unit. The enduring aspects of each function were the ones that were complementary and not duplicative of the functions performed by other ministries.

Source: OECD Centre of Government Review of Brazil (forthcoming)

Figure 4.3. Main challenges in setting/prioritising national strategic objectives



Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked: "In your opinion what are the main challenges with respect to setting/prioritising national strategic objectives?"

Source: Based on responses to the OECD Centre of Government Questionnaire (OECD, 2021^[11])

Strategic priorities are selected based on needs and trends analysis

The Government of Bulgaria aims to set priorities according to the country's socio-economic needs, and in line with the government's policy agenda - translating general objectives into more specific ones at policy level. EU agreements and international commitments are also taken into account in the prioritisation process.

The National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 is based on a deliberate analysis of the socio-economic development of the country. This aims to identify the key problem areas and gaps in the country's development policies, which has been discussed with the socio-economic partners within the Economic and Social Council and the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation. The strategic priorities were selected based on a thorough analysis of a plethora of socio-economic indicators, including their evolution and performance relative to other countries in the EU. This analysis is used as a starting point for selecting the national strategic goals and priorities, which are then refined after consultations with the relevant

stakeholders, including line ministries, social partners, the academia and the general public. The resulting vision, priorities and goals for the NDP Bulgaria 2030 were then approved by the Council of Ministers.

The Management Programme of the government for the period 2017-2021 was drawn up in implementation of the signed coalition agreement between the political parties. The Development Council coordinates the development of the government management programme and its updates. The chair of the council shall invite for participation the heads of the parliamentary groups of the National Assembly, engaged in the implementation of the management program of the government. The Chairman of the Council, depending on the subject of the issues under discussion, may invite to participate in the sittings representatives of the standing committees of the National Assembly, representatives of other state institutions, of the economic and social partners, as well as of non-governmental organizations, relevant to the issues. The strategic priorities to be financed with EU funds were selected on the basis of the relevant national sectoral strategic documents taking into account the EU priorities and eligibility criteria.

Evidence is routinely used in the planning process, but there are no well-defined rules and standards

As shown in Figure 4.4, evidence is routinely used in the planning process in Bulgaria. Three surveyed entities reported the use of both ex-ante and ex-post regulatory impact assessments. On top of these, evaluation reports and recommendations of control agencies were both indicated as popular sources that inform the planning process in the Government of Bulgaria by three questionnaire respondents. National statistics and administrative data are the most used sources among the ones reported in response to the OECD questionnaire (five respondents).

Figure 4.4. Types of evidence routinely used in the strategic planning process in Bulgaria



Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked: "What type of evidence is routinely used in the planning process?"

Source: Based on responses to the OECD Centre of Government Questionnaire (OECD, 2021^[11])

Reliable and meaningful evidence is necessary for the strategic planning process. While the use of data in the process of strategic planning is regulated in the Methodology for Strategic Planning (Government of Bulgaria, 2010^[27]), participants in the interviews during the OECD's fact-finding mission shared that rules and standards for the use of evidence in strategic planning still have to be developed in Bulgaria. Bulgaria could, for example, consider creating evaluation portals to promote the use of evidence, as illustrated by examples in Box 4.3, or by involving knowledge brokers, an example of which can be found in Box 4.4.

Box 4.3. Evaluation portals to promote the use of evidence

Poland's national evaluation database for the evaluation of cohesion policy

All evaluations commissioned in Poland, including those concerning the implementation of EU funds, must be made accessible to the public. Concerning the evaluations related to Cohesion Policy, a national database has been created: all evaluations are published on the website www.ewaluacja.gov.pl. This platform shares the results of more than a thousand studies conducted since 2004, as well as methodological tools aimed at evaluators.

Norway's evaluation portal

Norway's evaluation portal (<https://evalueringsportalen.no/>) is a publicly accessible web service that gathers all the findings of evaluations carried out by the central government. This database is operated by the Directorate for Financial Management and the National Library of Norway. It contains evaluations carried out on behalf of government agencies from 2005 until today, as well as a selection of central evaluations from 1994 to 2004. Evaluation reports are registered in the database as soon as they are made available to the public. Moreover, the portal provides evaluation guidelines, a calendar of the key activities in the evaluation area, news and professional papers. By increasing accessibility to evaluation results, the portal allows the use and reuse of the knowledge and findings from evaluations in all state policy areas, in future evaluations and in society as a whole. It ultimately allows increased legitimacy and transparency regarding government activities.

Source: OECD Survey on Policy Evaluation (2018), in (OECD, 2020^[28])

Box 4.4. Facilitated engagement between knowledge producers and users: Policy Roundtables in Australia

- The Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) is a nationally funded knowledge brokerage organisation.
- Since 2008 the Institute has organised ‘APHCRI conversations’ which is a regular programme of roundtable presentations held at the Department of Health to facilitate exchange between APHCRI Network researchers and Department policy-makers. The Roundtables typically involve 10-20 people made up of senior executive officers with the Department of Health and the departments of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet the Treasury and Finance.
- A knowledge broker facilitates the sessions by identifying subject areas and researchers, determining issues of interest to the Department of Health, and suggesting individuals and areas to receive invitations.
- The roundtables typically comprise of 30 minutes of presentation and 1 hour of discussion. This is designed to facilitate knowledge translation and exchange by enabling substantive discussion between the knowledge producers and users.
- Evaluation of the roundtables suggested that they were highly effective in conveying information and in stimulating policy-makers’ thinking around a relevant issue. The content of the roundtables was directly relevant to the policy-makers’ work and the roundtables established a regular forum for dissemination to a receptive audience of knowledge users.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[29])

Stakeholder engagement is embedded in the planning process.

OECD evidence and academic literature highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in the planning process (OECD, 2020^[30]). As shown by recent experiences in OECD member countries, when the planning process is open and engages relevant societal stakeholders, strategic planning can enhance the legitimacy of policy-making and increase the sustainability of policies beyond the electoral cycle, (OECD, 2020^[30]). Academic studies have demonstrated that the quality of problem analysis, and eventually the implementation of strategic plans, can be improved with the inclusion of diverse perspectives during the planning process (Burby, 2003^[31]) (Bryson, 2011^[20]). Stakeholder engagement can also be a way to inform civil servants about policy issues and challenges and can ultimately propose solutions (Blair, 2004^[32]). Stakeholders' engagement in the form of engagement of staff at all levels of government can also benefit the link between strategic planning and outcomes, given their knowledge about their respective areas of the organisation (Donald, Lyons and Tribbey, 2001^[33]). In addition, public consultations help reinforce the government’s transparency and accountability.

All ministries involve stakeholders such as representatives of NGOs, academia, businesses in the preparation of strategic and planning documents. A legal obligation under the Law for Normative Acts exists for the government to carry out public consultations in the procedure for adopting a new draft act. There are different levels of engagement with stakeholders. Firstly, stakeholders can be involved at the Council of Ministers level. Each of the consultation councils can invite external stakeholders to their meetings. NGOs, academia, and other stakeholders are often included in the working groups created for the development of strategic documents or they can be part of focus groups. Individual interviews, questionnaires and other tools for consultation and involvement are also used. Secondly, at the level of

the Council of European Affairs, which is the institutional body for political and expert representation for matters of European affairs. Lastly, the Development Council may invite external experts and representatives of public institutions and non-governmental organizations. It can also establish expert working groups on specific issues related to its functions, defining their tasks and mechanisms of work. For example, a permanent mechanism for the conduct of scientific consultations is carried out by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and established Decree № 3 of January 10, 2020. The mechanism provides high-quality and independent scientific expertise for the government on issues of significant importance for the formation of sectoral policies and instruments for implementation of policy as well as for the transposition of European directives and the alignment of Bulgarian strategic documents with other European recommendations or documents.

Bulgaria's Public Consultation Portal aims to promote cooperation between citizens, business and non-governmental organizations and experts in public institutions for policy formulation and the development of legislation. The portal is the main entry point for access to public information about planned policy changes. In accordance with the Statutory Instruments Act (Government of Bulgaria, 1973^[34]), all draft statutory instruments shall be posted on the website of the relevant institution together with the rationale, or report respectively, and the ex-ante impact assessment. In case the draft originates from a local government, the draft shall be posted for public consultations on the website of the relevant municipality and/or municipal council. The Public Consultation Portal aims to promote cooperation between citizens, business and non-governmental organizations and experts in public institutions in policy formulation and legislation development.

In the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation, business institutions' representatives meet on a regular basis with line ministries. The Council discusses and gives opinions on draft regulations; carries out consultations and cooperation at national level on employment and directly related relations, security relations, as well as on the standard of living; coordinates the work of national programmes relating to issues of social dialogue, national and international financing.

The overall institutionalization of stakeholder engagement and public consultation processes appear to be structured, but their implementation varies considerably. On the one hand, some of these information channels were reported to bring meaningful contributions particularly in the transportation and communication sectors, while others such as the one in the agriculture sector still need further improvement. The Bulgarian Government should consider creating detailed guidelines and toolkits to better integrate stakeholder engagement and citizen participation within the planning cycle (see Box 4.5).

Box 4.5. Examples of strategies shaped by stakeholder engagement

Lithuania

The government of Lithuania has engaged in an in-depth process to define its national strategy “Lithuania 2030”. The State Progress Council, led by the centre of government, was responsible for the drafting process of the strategy; government authorities, business leaders, community groups and prominent public figures participated in its development. Three working groups were set up on smart economy, smart governance and smart society. The consultation involved the national level and Lithuanians living abroad. The Council also travelled to meet with mayors, municipality representatives, young people and non-governmental organisations. Innovative approaches were developed to involve harder-to-reach groups, including the youth and the elderly. The outcome is a national strategy which is guiding the policies of the whole country and whose implementation is monitored in an inclusive process.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Health Strategy “Investing for Health” (2002) was the outcome of a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process and a partnership among different departments, public bodies and district councils. The engagement process included consultations, a debate in the Assembly, involvement of the Community Development and Health Network, and innovative approaches such as an arts project and a photo competition. The resulting strategy took a broader approach to health than originally planned, focusing on improving well-being and reducing health inequalities.

Source: (OECD, 2016^[35])

A Strategic Planning Act was drafted in response to deficiencies in the strategic planning process but was not adopted

In 2019, the Government of Bulgaria had planned to adopt a Strategic Planning Act in response to the deficiencies of the strategic planning process identified in the Public Administration Development Strategy 2014-2020 (Government of Bulgaria, 2014^[36]). While the government consulted the public, the draft was eventually not approved by the Council of Ministers.

This draft law aimed to improve the quality and sustainability of strategic planning and ultimately public policies, and the following objectives:

- Consolidating the National Strategic Framework and ensuring its internal coherence the co-ordination between them;
- Reducing the total number of national strategies by explicitly enumeration in law;
- Improving co-ordination between national sectoral and regional development strategies;
- Ensuring coherence with the budgetary framework;
- Improving accountability and monitoring of implementation of strategic documents;
- Developing administrative and institutional capacity to policy development;
- Providing a strategic basis for the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU with a view to its preparation and approval of the strategic documents for the European Structural and investment Funds for the next programming period;
- Improving the country's image in the context of accession the euro area, the Schengen area and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

4.4 Strategic foresight and visioning

The CoG plays a limited role in strategic foresight and visioning, but dedicated units exist in most line ministries in Bulgaria.

Strategic foresight is an essential tool for governing in the face of uncertainty. It can strengthen policy quality by identifying new opportunities that could emerge under different scenarios and test how current policy trajectories will fare against future scenarios so that they can be adjusted if necessary. Nevertheless, only a few OECD countries (11%) consider risk management and strategic foresight for the whole of government to be key responsibilities of the centre (OECD, 2018^[11]).

The Bulgarian CoG has developed a Strategy for Risk Management for the Council of Ministers Administration. All units in the CoMA are involved in risk management, they maintain risk registers, despite not providing added value to the process, and make annual reports with risk assessments and action taken. The Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate, the Modernization of Administration Directorate, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, and the Co-ordination on European Union issues Directorate within the Council of Ministers Administration all develop and use strategic foresight approaches for instance on horizon scanning. In addition, according to the questionnaire, in all line ministries which responded to the OECD questionnaire, there is one or more dedicated unit(s) in charge of strategic foresight and risk anticipation.

The CoG uses a few strategic foresight instruments such as roadmapping and horizon scanning.

According to questionnaire responses the main instruments used by the Bulgarian CoG for strategic foresight are roadmapping and horizon scanning (OECD, 2021^[11]). Roadmapping shows how a range of inputs – research, trends, policy interventions for example- will combine over time to shape future development of the policy or strategy area of interest. It often is presented under a visual format that identifies when and how key exogenous events and decision points might shape the policy area under consideration. It combines known (certain) developments with speculative developments. An example of roadmapping is the approach undertaken in relation to technical assistance under the programmes for the next programming period. The activities under the different programmes are summarised in an overarching road map in order to ensure a more strategic approach. Horizon scanning is seeking and researching signals of change in the present and their potential future impacts. Visioning is used to create a set of common aims and objectives for a policy and to describe what the future will be like if it is delivered; backcasting is a planning method that starts with defining a desirable (or undesirable) future and then works backwards to identify policies and programmes to achieve it.

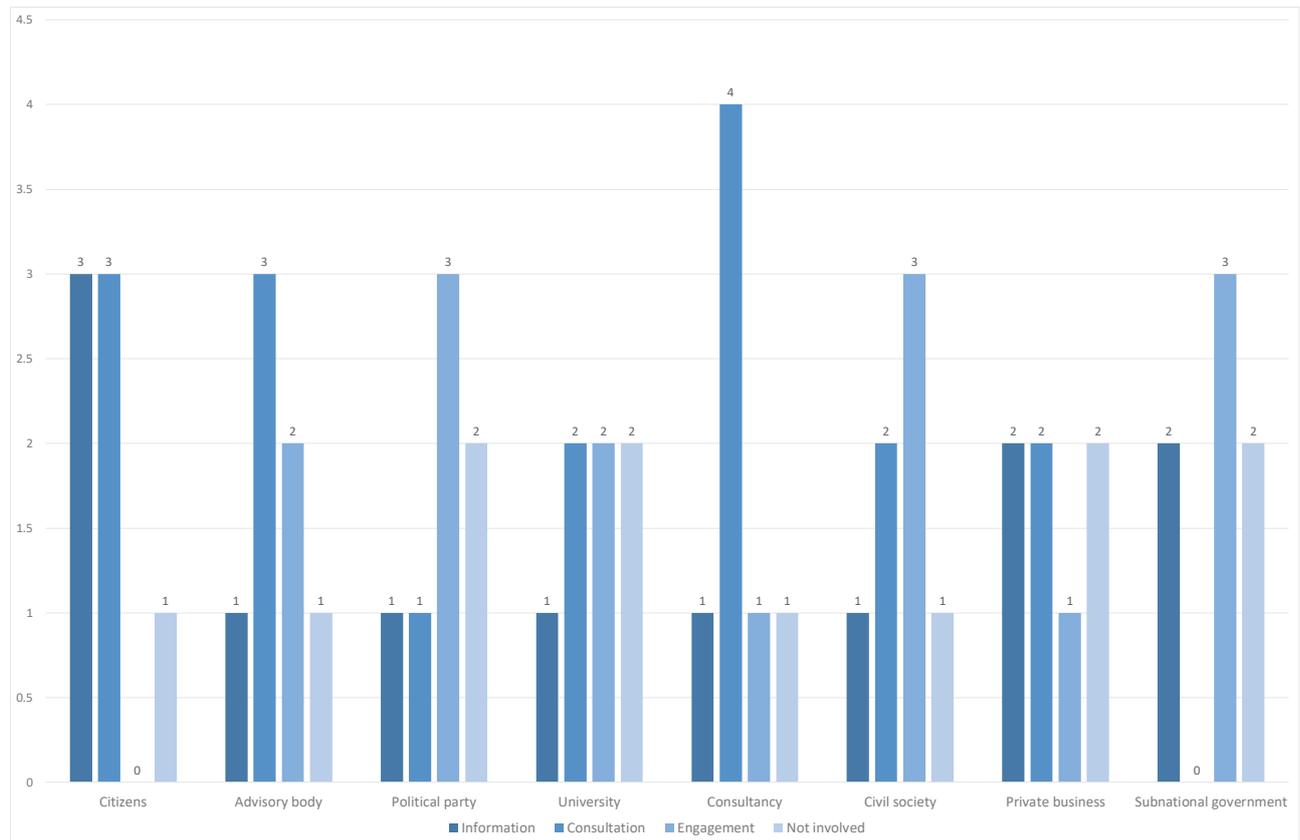
The key actors involved in horizon scanning are the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate, the Modernization of Administration Directorate, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, and the Co-ordination on European Union issues Directorate within the Council of Ministers Administration. The methodology used relies on desk research, expert surveys and review of existing literature. In addition, according to questionnaire responses, line ministries also use visioning and backcasting when preparing long-term strategic and planning documents (OECD, 2021^[11]).

The Bulgarian administration adopts a passive approach to the consultation process in strategic foresight activities

As can be seen in Figure 4.5, a large variety of stakeholders are involved in the CoG's strategic foresight and risk anticipation activities through different modalities in Bulgaria. Political parties, sub-national governments and civil society go even up to the stage of engagement in the strategic foresight activities according to responses to the OECD questionnaire.

The consultation process can be passive and/or active: this depends on whether the administration that initiates it will actively reach out to stakeholders to involve them in the process or will simply carry out mandatory consultation by publishing draft documents on the government portal. Usually, most Bulgarian institutions opt for a passive consultation model, where they simply publish documents for public consultation on their website. In addition, could consider consulting stakeholders more actively.

Figure 4.5. Institutions' involvement in the CoG's strategic foresight and risk anticipation activities



Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked: "Which institutions are involved in the CoG's strategic foresight and risk anticipation activities and how do they participate?"

Source: Based on responses to the OECD Centre of Government Questionnaire (OECD, 2021^[11])

In terms of strategic foresight and risk anticipation activities, most stakeholders are involved in the consultation stage, insofar as the administrative bodies are obliged by law to consult them. For example, civil society organizations (CSOs) participate in thematic working groups, advisory councils, monitoring committees (e.g., the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation, the Council for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for Continuing Judicial Reform, the Advisory Board on the European Green Deal, thematic working group for operational programmes development).

To further increase the engagement, the Council of Ministers Administration is implementing the project "Administration and Civil Society – Partnership in Governance under OPGG", aimed at improving the partnership between the administration and civil society. The projects Civic Participation Guide and Manual for Attracting Civic Engagement (crowdsourcing) and Civic IT Support (civic hacking) were developed in support of the administration.

Further developing strategic foresight

Moving forward, the Government of Bulgaria should consider further institutionalizing strategic foresight practices within the Bulgarian planning system by establishing a strong leading and coordinating unit in the CoG or in one line ministry to align strategic foresight approaches, share results and define a common vision on risks and anticipations.

The different entities in Bulgaria's CoG do engage in strategic visioning and anticipation activities. However, fact-finding interviews and responses to the OECD questionnaire showed that they do so in a limited way. As shown in Figure 4.6, the CoG does not engage more frequently in strategic foresight and risk anticipation activities due to a self-reported lack of awareness and institutional culture, limited political support and a lack of expertise in the different institutional entities. Box 4.6 provides a range of examples from OECD countries on possible institutional arrangements to embed strategic foresight in the planning and decision-making process.

Box 4.6. Institutional arrangements and practices to embed strategic foresight in the planning process

Singapore

The Centre for Strategic Futures is a longstanding unit delivering and coordinating foresight work across government and with partners. The Strategic Futures Network (SFN) brings together senior policy-makers to introduce new vocabulary and build awareness of emerging ministries.

France

The prospective unit of the Prime Minister created an interdepartmental network for horizon-scanning and foresight in 2001 called the RIVP (*Réseau Interministériel de Veille et de Prospective*), which brought together foresight specialists from different ministries. Its aim was to ensure consistency in the foresight work of the different ministries involved. While the RIVP disappeared around 2009, thematic foresight networks took over or were created gradually: the Prosper network and AllEnvi (National Alliance for Environmental Research) for research foresight, the PIPAME (interdepartmental unit for foresight and the anticipation of economic change) for industrial sectors foresight and the CIP (interdepartmental committee for foresight) for defence and security foresight.

New-Zealand

The Public Service Act 2020 requires long-term insight briefings be produced by the chief executive of each government department every three years. The briefing, which is unclassified, is to address medium- and long-term trends, risks and opportunities. Foresight capability exists in a number of public service departments including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Ministry of Defence. The Ministry of Defence is staffed mainly by civilians and co-leads long-term defence thinking with the non-public service New Zealand Defence Force.

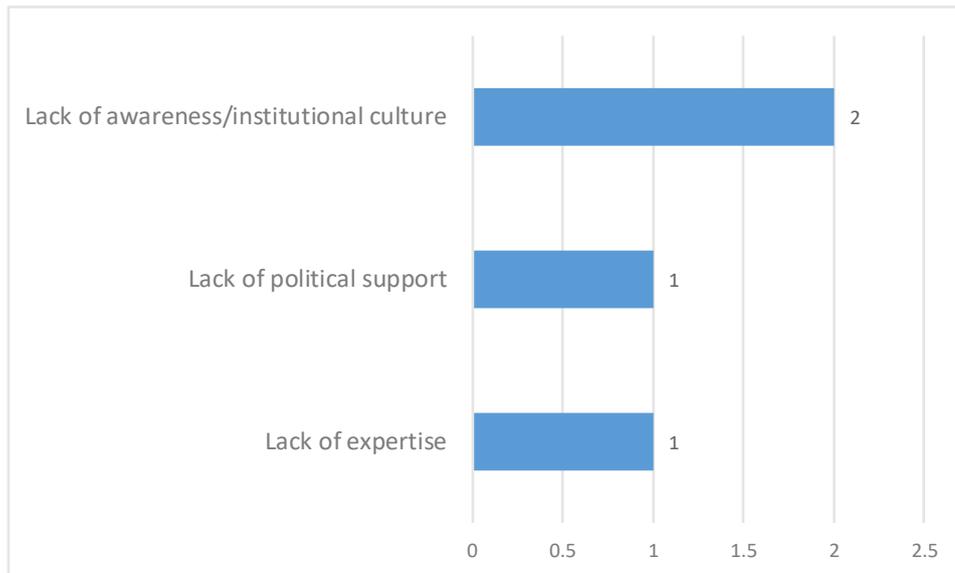
United States of America

Decentralised foresight capacity exists across federal government including Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Forest Service, Office of Public Management, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Many departments have developed in-house programmes, including through partnerships with futures studies programmes such as those at the University of Hawaii and University of Houston.

Source: (Roëls, 2020^[37]) (School of International Futures, 2021^[38])

The Bulgarian Government should consider establishing an institutional culture for strategic visioning and anticipation activities. A first step towards this medium to long-term goal would be the creation of greater expertise in line ministries. Therefore, the CoMA may consider establishing guidance documents on strategic foresight that can be streamlined in all public institutions. Moreover, dedicated training courses on foresight exercises (such as roadmapping, backcasting, etc.) have help build capacity for future thinking.

Figure 4.6. Reasons for the CoG not to engage in strategic foresight and risk anticipation



Note: n=7; CoMA Directorates were asked: "Why does the CoG not engage in strategic foresight and risk anticipation?"

Source: Based on responses to the OECD Centre of Government Questionnaire (OECD, 2021^[11])

Recommendations

1. Functions and mandates of the CoG

Foster regular assessments and functional reviews of the CoG

Based on the conclusions of the scan, foster regular assessments and reviews of the Administration of the Council of Ministers (and of bodies responsible for CoG functions) to assess the scope of activities to be carried out within the centre to further improve the performance and co-ordination within the CoG. With adequate political backing and support, a single unit in the CoMA should be tasked with these regular assessments and functional reviews to:

- Clarify and revise the mandates and responsibilities between CoMA units to remove overlaps and align activities and practices.
- Update the Organisational Rules of the Council of Ministers to reflect changes to units' mandates and enshrine their competencies in legislation.
- Ensure that the functional responsibilities of the MoF and the CoMA are clear and use the regular assessments as a basis for the discussion whether all functions exercised by the CoG today should indeed be anchored at the centre or could be transferred to line ministries focusing the CoG more on strategic policy co-ordination.
- Conduct an assessment of overall institutional capability of the CoG's bodies and units.
- Actively communicate on the CoG's structure, responsibilities, mechanisms, and activities across the government to raise awareness of the strategic role of the CoG in designing and delivering on government priorities.
- Raise the awareness of the political level of the potential role of the CoMA in policy development, whole-of-government co-ordination and planning.

Close existing gaps in the mandates and functions of CoG units

Reconsider the institutional set-up for regulatory oversight and strengthen the quality control of regulatory management tools in line with the forthcoming OECD Regulatory Policy Scan of Bulgaria.

- Consolidate functions supporting a whole-of-government approach to regulatory policy through co-ordination, the provision of guidance and training or the overall systematic improvement and advocacy for regulatory policy in a single unit close to or in the CoG specifically in charge of regulatory management. Bulgaria may consider placing these functions with one of the CoMA's Directorates.
- Centralise regulatory oversight functions in a single body close to the CoM. This can help to provide the centre with more influence over regulatory policy and normative quality within government.
- Consider placing the responsibility for quality control of regulatory management tools in independent bodies external to government by establishing an "independent watchdog" or in a unit in the CoMA responsible for quality control. Such a body should be given stronger powers to be able to ensure RIA quality, like being able to stop legislation from going forward if the RIA quality is deemed insufficient.

Consolidate the responsibility for regulatory burden reduction that is currently shared between the Modernisation of the Administration Directorate, the Economic and Social Policy Directorate, the Administrative Reform Council, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Finance within a single body.

- Move the shared responsibility for developing and implementing measures for reducing administrative burden and regulating business activity to a dedicated unit within the Ministry of the Economy or another CoMA Directorate.

Clarify institutional responsibility for the co-ordination of the process of preparing and approving Bulgaria's draft framework positions on issues addressed by the European Council, the Council of the European Union and its auxiliary bodies.

- Reduce overlaps in the mandates of the EU Co-ordination Directorate and the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate in relation to the co-ordination of EU affairs.

Consolidate the responsibility for the implementation of investment programmes and projects within one unit in the CoMA.

- Reduce the overlap in the mandates of the Central Co-ordination Unit Directorate and the Economic and Social Policy Directorate in relation to co-ordination and support of the administration for the implementation of programmes and projects for investments.

Creating vision and institutional leadership in the CoG

Establish a CoG performance framework oriented towards results that describes a set of joint goals and outcomes the CoG is working to accomplish. Besides a shared vision and narrative, this policy document should present how the government seeks to accomplish the objectives and what CoG functions are needed. It should be more operational than a strategy and could include more detailed tasks and guidance as well as performance indicators and targets. The Modernisation of the Administration Directorate may take the lead in developing such a framework due to its long-standing experience with state modernisation and public administration reform.

- Ensure that all CoG bodies have clearly defined responsibilities and set up ambitious, results-focused performance goals over the short and medium-term.
- Publish an integrated overview of CoG bodies' strategic goals and objectives online and make regular information available regarding the progress in achieving these priorities.
- Allow for progressive change by piloting the performance framework with a smaller sample of bodies and units first, could help to find the right approach and generate the necessary support across the CoG.
- Set up structured working routines and management processes inter alia, on goal definition, goal clarification and regular data-driven reviews in the CoG's constituent bodies and units to assess progress on the CoG's goals to ensure a focus on managing for results.
- Clarify the role and responsibilities of the Deputy Prime Ministers (from different political parties) for intra-CoMA co-ordination to overcome internal administrative silos.

2. The CoG's supportive role in decision- and policy-making systems

Horizontal co-ordination

Facilitate the functioning and efficiency of existing permanent councils, committees and working groups by aligning their functioning and by equipping them with adequate resources, personnel, expertise and technical support to co-ordinate policy-making.

- Enhance the role of the Development Council as a high-level policy co-ordination and coherence body to align all priorities and measures, and task one CoMA Directorate with the role of its secretariat (see recommendation 19).

- Define the role of CoMA units in these bodies aiming to position their role as secretariats, with the view to best prepare the meetings of the CoM.
- Grant them access to all relevant information and provide them with key information necessary for the fulfilment of their mandate.

Encourage more frequent use of formal co-ordination mechanisms in the CoG.

- Develop formal councils/committees to co-ordinate the CoMA's work and improve the use of existing permanent co-ordination bodies.
- Showcase successful co-ordination mechanisms, for instance between the Central Co-ordination Unit and the Good Governance Directorate.
- Strengthen the co-ordination role of the CoMA by tasking a directorate with co-ordinating with state agencies in the policy process.

Make more frequent use of human resources management tools to promote intra-CoG co-ordination

- Incorporate explicit references to co-ordination across administrative boundaries in additional managerial and teamwork competency frameworks of CoMA Directorates.
- Highlight the need to work across different sectors and organisational units in job descriptions/terms of references and recruitment criteria.
- Introduce the ability to maintain effective and efficient co-ordination across CoMA units in performance management notably on the part of senior public officials.
- Introduce specific performance-linked incentives to further motivate public officials to co-ordinate across the CoG's institutional silos.

Explore the creation of trainings together with the Institute of Public Administration to build co-ordination capacity for increased policy coherence.

- Include training focused on internal communication, document management, information sharing, project management as well as on the necessary IT skills in the curriculum of the introductory course for new civil servants.
- Amend existing training programmes for senior public officials to raise awareness of the importance of co-ordination and contribute to capacity building.
- Develop policy documents such as guides, toolkits and handbooks to provide public servants with guidance for the use of information and document sharing and the functioning of formal co-ordination mechanisms.

Support to decision-making and challenge function vis-a-vis line ministries

Strengthen the role of CoMA units in the preparations of the weekly CoM meeting.

- Establish a formal, systematic preparatory meeting involving the line ministries and the CoMA units at the secretary general level to review and prepare decisions to be approved in the CoM meeting.
- Review and extend the current deadline of 3 working days for the submission of items to the CoM to provide sufficient time for quality review and preparation of the CoM meeting.
- Clarify the role of CoMA units with regard to the management and systematic examination of documents submitted to the CoM in their functional area.
- Amend the Structural Regulations of the CoM to reflect all changes to process, roles and different responsibilities.

- Consider enshrining the process, roles and different responsibilities in a publicly available compendium of the CoM and its administration organisation and functioning.

Consider revising the framework for quality checks at the CoMA.

- Provide the CoMA with the mandate to prevent the adoption of draft acts that do not meet minimum legal requirements and the authority to return items to line ministries in case of insufficient legal quality.
- Expand the CoMA's mandate to enable its involvement already in the early stages of the development process of draft acts with line Ministries to point to issues relating to constitutionality and conflict with existing laws.
- Provide an internal body involved in the quality check of items submitted to the CoM with the authority to return them to the generating ministry or agency for additional work if certain criteria are not satisfied.
- Establish quality criteria and process requirements for strategies and other policy documents.
- Ensure line ministries' adherence to the legally defined term for preliminary co-ordination with the CoMA of 3 days by preventing the inclusion of all non-adhering items in the CoM's agenda.
- Communicate the CoMA Directorates' responsibility for the quality assurance of proposed legislation and policy advice widely across government.

Ensure sufficient levels of expertise and expert knowledge in CoG bodies involved in the quality check of all items submitted to the CoM.

- Provide staff with adequate training and with the appropriate level of expertise for the conduct of the quality check to be able to assess that processes and procedures as well as presentational requirements have been followed, ensuring that items are aligned with the overall government programme, that items conform to legal, regulatory, and financial criteria, and that adequate stakeholder consultation has occurred.

Effective management of information and monitoring

Conduct an assessment of existing challenges with the availability of information and data for decision-making at the CoG and promote the open and regular exchange of relevant information and key documents across the CoMA's units and with line ministries.

- Ensure the proper functioning of online information and document management systems (e.g. with joint document storage, inter-unit tracking system, etc.) that support effective, transparent, accountable document workflow processes (e.g. through easy and secure access and sharing of documents) and facilitates the digital co-creation of joint policy and planning documents across CoMA units.
- Where possible, replace written communication with digital exchanges between CoMA directorates and line ministries.
- Introduce a centralised workflow system managed by the CoMA or another institution as a means to overcome the current fragmentation of document and information sharing systems.
- Identify gaps with information and data in line ministries together with the National Statistical Institute and promote the use of the Integrated State Administration Information System.
- Increase civil servants' digital skills through adequate training opportunities, potentially with the Institute of Public Administration.

Create a clear monitoring and evaluation system of all government policies.

- Monitor each strategy against its objectives and then develop it into a more comprehensive monitoring system.
- Establish institutional responsibility for monitoring and evaluation in the CoMA by setting up a monitoring unit in the CoMA or tasking an existing unit with the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of whole-of-government strategic documents.
- Set up clear procedures and rules for monitoring the implementation of policies.
- Clarify, for example through guidelines, the different monitoring set-ups – including the actors involved, the timeline, the methodology and tools for monitoring, for each type of policy. The first comprehensive monitoring exercise could be conducted within the medium-term review process.
- Develop capacities for planning and impact assessments by strengthening the CoG's ability to translate political commitments into measurable strategic objectives and plans and its capacity to link these objectives and plans to outcomes through prioritisation, problem identification and stakeholder engagement.
- Create a central M&E platform and promote the use of evaluation for example through evaluation portals.

3. Strategic planning and visioning

Policy framework

Improve the alignment of existing strategic documents.

- Map all existing strategic documents from the CoG and line ministries, including institutional responsibility of involved actors, timeframe, and scope.
- Align sectoral strategies, the Government Programme, the medium-term financial framework, EU funds planning and Bulgaria 2030 and create clear links between them. This alignment could be done by the Ministry of Finance and the CoMA.
- Make the amendment procedure for action plans easier and more flexible by lightening the obligation to renegotiate all measures and funding once an action plan or roadmap is reopened for discussion and the obligation to consult stakeholders.

Institutional framework

Clarify the institutional responsibility for strategic planning in the CoG and rationalise, streamline and simplify Bulgaria's strategic planning architecture.

- Consider re-establishing a strategic unit in the CoG with a clear mandate and high-level political backing to steer and co-ordinate whole-of-government strategic planning.
- Ensure a clear allocation of functions at the CoG. Consider adopting a Strategic Planning Act to clarify institutional responsibilities and provide clear legal bases for the strategic planning process.

Strengthen horizontal co-ordination practices and mechanisms for strategic planning.

- Strengthen the Development Council's role and scope and use it as the main vision, priority setting and policy co-ordination body on strategic planning. Establish a separate unit in charge of strategic planning to fulfill the role of secretariat of the Development Council.
- Introduce a dedicated inter-ministerial horizontal co-ordination body with meetings of the ministries' Secretary Generals and the CoMA to coordinate and follow up the implementation of

the government management programme, where necessary adjustments can be discussed at least on a quarterly basis both in political and top administrative level.

- Transfer and apply well-functioning processes and working practices for strategic planning related to the European Union gradually to other spheres of national strategic planning.

Ensure institutional responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of strategic plans across government and levels of government.

- Task a CoMA unit with the implementation of strategic priorities.

Strategic planning process

Establish a clear strategic planning framework that sets the process of developing strategies as well as quality criteria.

- Develop sound planning processes to ensure that strategy concepts and draft versions of any new strategic document are reviewed and approved at the CoM before being developed according to defined quality criteria.
- Consider developing new strategies by the line ministries and the CoMA only in case their development has been initiated with the CoM's adoption of a letter of intent explaining the problem(s) to be solved as well as potential aims, measures and financial scope of the strategy to foster better alignment and avoid duplication of strategies.
- Develop a clear framework to link strategic planning with the budget and ensure coherence with the budgetary framework to make sure all strategic goals are underpinned by sufficient financial allocations.
- Programme a medium-term review of all newly adopted strategies as part of the consolidation of the planning framework. A formal review could take place after 2 years and form the basis for merging and consolidating sectoral strategies and developing a coherent set of policy documents.

Create detailed guidelines and toolkits to integrate stakeholder engagement and citizen participation within the planning cycle.

- Provide detailed guidance to help public bodies clarify the objectives of the stakeholder engagement and citizen participation activities they carry out, which can range from information to co-creation.
- Facilitate a supportive administrative culture, for instance by promoting existing guidance and templates and providing regular updates on how to design stakeholder engagement strategies or hold public consultations and hearings at the sectoral or agency level.
- Reinforce the institutional framework for stakeholder engagement by building effective feedback loops by ensuring stakeholder and citizen engagement activities (national conferences, consultations, hearings) are carried out at a time which enables their outputs to be included in the process.

Bolster the quality of strategic planning across the civil service and draw on the breadth of expertise from across the administration.

- Invest in the development of knowledge brokers to support strategic planning by facilitating the transfer and exchange of knowledge by providing a link between the producers and users of knowledge and of evaluation portals to promote the use of evidence.
- Place strategic policy development skills in terms of quantitative skills, strategic foresight capabilities, and evidence-informed approaches at the core of civil service strategies.

Strategic foresight and visioning

Further institutionalise strategic foresight practices within Bulgaria's planning system.

- Consolidate the responsibility for risk management and strategic foresight for the whole-of-government in a single body, by either creating a new CoG unit or mandating an already existing body as a central dedicated foresight unit to advocate for, carry out, conduct and co-ordinate risk management foresight work across government.
- Promote the creation of a community of practice around anticipatory governance and strategic foresight, for instance through the launch of a cross-government strategic foresight network.
- Define guidelines for the scope and role of a future strategic foresight unit across the government.

Create greater expertise for strategic foresight in line ministries.

- Establish guidance documents on strategic foresight that can be streamlined across all public institutions.
- Mainstream foresight capacity across the government through the creation of a dedicated curricula for various stakeholders (foresight practitioners, decision-makers, broader network, etc.) including training, for instance on roadmapping and backcasting.

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Note

¹ Regulatory oversight is defined as is defined as the “variety of functions and tasks carried out by bodies / entities in the executive or at arm's length from the government in order to promote high-quality evidence-based regulatory decision making” (OECD, 2018^[50]).