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COHERENCE AND CO-ORDINATION AT THE CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT IN **ROMANIA**

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Coherence and Co-ordination at the Centre of Government in Romania



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Abstract

Governments operate in an increasingly volatile environment, marked by disruptive crises and cross-cutting policy challenges. This context has highlighted the importance centres of government (CoG) in setting up effective co-ordination systems, capable of developing and implementing coherent, whole-of-government responses to immediate threats, while steering the country towards a sustainable and resilient future. This policy paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the current legal, organisational and policy framework and practices in Romania as they relate to policy co-ordination, within the CoG and between the CoG and ministries. It also provides recommendations for consolidating the General Secretariat of the Government's capacity and role in policy development and co-ordination, to improve the coherence of government action and, ultimately, achieve government priorities and commitments.

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1 Introduction

Governments operate in an increasingly volatile environment, marked by disruptive crises and cross-cutting policy challenges. This context has highlighted the importance centres of government in setting up effective co-ordination systems, capable of developing and implementing coherent, whole-of-government responses to immediate threats, while steering the country towards a sustainable and resilient future. In Romania, ensuring smooth co-ordination has been identified as a political imperative following the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Addressing transversal issues and maintaining coherence in government action requires an integrated and co-ordinated governance approach that overcomes traditional administrative barriers and government silos. To this end, centres of government may rely on a robust blend of formal and ad hoc instruments and mechanisms that can lead to coherent government action.

Co-ordination has always been a challenge for the public sector, exacerbated in recent decades by the increase in the size of governments and the atomisation of administrative structures. These trends are accompanied by an increase in the number of stakeholders and, accordingly, divergent interests in the decision-making process. Co-ordination is not an end in itself; it is a necessary condition for better policy design, priority-setting and better outcomes for citizens. Centres of government are particularly well suited to carry out co-ordination functions, due to their proximity to the head of government, which grants both legitimacy and gravitas; their perceived "neutrality" with regards to sectoral interests; and their historical role supporting the organisation of cabinet meetings.

The OECD defines the centre of government (CoG) as a key institution of the executive branch that is mandated to ensure elected politicians make decisions informed by coherent evidence and expert analysis, and that facilitates co-ordination across government siloes (OECD, 2020^[1]). In Romania, the CoG primarily refers to the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) and the Prime Minister Chancellery (PMC).

Taking into account the 2022 European Semester Country Report, the Council Recommendation on the 2022 National Reform Programme of Romania, and the 2022 Convergence Programme of Romania, Romania aims to improve its strategic and budgetary planning frameworks, its policy co-ordination capacity, and coherence in its cross-sectoral strategic process. Robust co-ordination mechanisms and tools, as well as diverse and specialised skillsets across the administration, are needed to overcome technical, administrative and structural barriers to improving the way the government makes decisions and addresses reforms, in line with the domestic strategic priorities set by Romania Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (ROSDS 2030), the Government Programme, and the National Resilience and Recovery Plan (NRRP).

Effective co-ordination within the public sector also requires the appropriate infrastructure for information sharing. To this end, digitalisation and the modernisation of the public policy management system have both been identified as key policy priorities in Romania, in line with the Country Specific Recommendations in the framework of the European Semester (EU Commission, 2022^[2]). With this in mind, the significant financial support from EU structural funds and the Recovery and Resilience Plan grants (20% of GDP until 2026) presents an unprecedented opportunity for Romania to boost and pursue its high-level ambitions.

This policy paper provides an analysis of the current legal, organisational and policy framework and practices in Romania as they relate to policy co-ordination, within the CoG and between the CoG and ministries. It also provides recommendations for consolidating the GSG's capacity and role in policy

development and co-ordination, to improve the coherence of government action and, ultimately, achieve government priorities and commitments. The OECD's analysis was based on responses to a detailed questionnaire administered to the centre of government, supplemented by interviews with key stakeholders from the Romanian government (20 stakeholder interviews during 2 fact-finding missions) with the involvement of expert peers from Finland, Iceland, and Latvia. Preliminary findings and recommendations were shared with stakeholders from across the Romanian administration in October 2022.

This policy paper provides an assessment of the centre of government's co-ordination capacity structured along five core axes, and some recommendations to build on areas of opportunity:

- The 2021 decision to add legal personality and increased political gravitas towards the Prime Minister's Chancellery generates new opportunities, needs, and risks with regards to co-ordination.
- The strategic planning framework in Romania remains somewhat fragmented and biased towards short-term action but has been strengthened by recent efforts to bolster line ministry capacity and reform the budgetary process.
- Interministerial co-ordination mechanisms on cross-cutting issues could be diversified and supported by appropriate tools to increase their effectiveness in promoting policy coherence.
- Effective policy coherence is hindered by constraints within the administrative process of policy development across the Romanian administration and the centre of government.
- Increased levels of co-ordination and policy coherence will require more robust monitoring bolstered by more effective information and data sharing.

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2 Centre of government set-up in Romania

2.1. The new role of the Prime Minister's Chancellery: the latest evolution in a CoG characterised by institutional change

The centre of government (CoG) in Romania is organised around two core bodies – the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) and the Prime Minister's Chancellery (PMC). The current CoG set up, follows a series of changes in institutional arrangements and mandates for these two institutions. Until January 2017, both bodies were engaged in interministerial co-ordination. Whereas the GSG focused on the formal co-ordination, the PMC, consisting of about 15 state councillors with different backgrounds, provided the policy expertise. In January 2017, the PMC was dismantled and its responsibilities transferred to the GSG. The PMC was then re-established as a structure *without* legal personality, limiting its capabilities, under successive administrations notably that of Prime Minister Tudose and Dăncilă, and composed primarily of scientific advisors and sectoral experts. From then, the PMC was progressively reduced, reaching six members in total under the Orban administration.

In 2021 however, the Prime Minister's Chancellery was established as structure *with* legal personality by Emergency Ordinance No 121/2021, amended and completed by Emergency Ordinance No. 1 of January 2021, and financed by the budget of the General Secretariat of the Government. Most recently, Government Decision No. 832 of 27 June 2022 enshrined the new tasks, organisation and functioning of the Prime Minister's Chancellery.

Frequent reorganisations in the Romanian public administration can hinder institutional stability, with adverse consequences on administrative capacity, the continuity in reform implementation as well as the consolidation and sustainability of reform outcomes (European Commission, 2022^[3]). Between 2017 and 2022, Romania has been led by 8 different Prime Ministers (including one “acting” Prime Minister) during a period marked by frequent changes in political and technical staff position. In the context of a coalition government, the chancellery can provide a stabilising force through recognised and accepted processes to channel decision-making.

Consistency and continuity in the CoG were also highlighted by Romanian social partners as important drivers for the success of the sustainability agenda in Romania. These dimensions are key for the recovery and resilience of the economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to effectively manage other cross-sectoral challenges in the areas of climate transition, digitalisation, and sustainable development. In particular, the ambitious strategic objectives and public administration reforms embedded in the National Sustainable Development Strategy and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) demand a substantial degree of political and institutional stability. The OECD Civic Space Scan (OECD, Forthcoming^[4]) also notes that this institutional instability has adverse effects on the relationship between the government and CSO's/citizens, impacting the effectiveness of public consultations on policies/services.

The latest reorganisation of the Romanian centre of government into a bicephalic structure was formalised by Government Decision No. 832 of 27 June 2022, which outlined the modification of the organisational structure and the extension of the competences of the Prime Minister's Chancellery. In addition to the two pre-existing departments, namely the Protocol and International Relations Department and the Communication and Press Relations Department, three new departments were created: the Resource Assurance Department, the Legal Department and the Strategic Evaluation, Analysis and Coordination Department. The Government Decision also tasks the Chancellery with co-ordinating several departments and public agencies, notably the Department for Sustainable Development, the National Agency for Roma, the Department for Relations with the Republic of Moldova, and many others. The Chancellery is also associated with a dedicated consultative council tasked with issuing proposals, opinions, and analyses in the areas under the Prime Minister's purview.

The reorganization of the centre of government is not in itself unique to Romania. Between 2012 and 2017, 70% of surveyed countries experienced a change in the number and 64% in the type of units within the CoG (OECD, 2018^[5]). Bicephalic or even multi-institutional centres of government can also be found in numerous OECD countries, with various divisions of power and allocation of responsibilities. In Australia, aside from a few departmental liaison officers, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is wholly partisan, based in the Australian parliament building (Rhodes and Tiernan, 2014^[6]). The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) is a separate, much larger public service department which exists to provide policy advice to the prime minister and the cabinet on domestic and international affairs and plays a strong role in cross-government co-ordination, policy implementation, commonwealth-state relationships, and a whole range of administrative services (Government of Australia, 2022^[7]). A similar division exists in Canada, with a partisan PMO headed by a chief of staff and a separate non-partisan Privy Council Office (PCO). The PCO is the Canadian government's central policy advice and co-ordination body (Government of Canada, 2022^[8]). In other instances, the boundaries between political and civil service advice are more blurred. In the United-Kingdom the Cabinet Office ensures the effective running of government and acts as the corporate headquarters for the government, in partnership with the Treasury. It also acts as a policy lead on certain critical areas (Government of the United-Kingdom, 2022^[9]). The Prime Minister's Office on the other hand is administratively part of the Cabinet Office but is largely perceived as a distinct entity, and helps the Prime Minister establish and deliver the government's overall strategy and policy priorities, and to communicate the government's policies to Parliament, the public and international audiences.

Stakeholders engaged in the context of this project frequently reported their understanding of the division of responsibilities between the PMC and the GSG could be explained by a broad "political v. technical" delineation, in which the PMC would be the "political" arm of the centre of government, and the GSG would be the "technical arm". In practice, this distinction is less obvious in practice, as the start and end of "the political" can be difficult to discern and can be subject to interpretation by the structures themselves and their interlocutors and stakeholders, unless clearly outlined.

Nevertheless, having political weight and gravitas at the Romanian Chancellery could present an opportunity to support line ministries effectively in ensuring that they are in line with priority areas as defined by the Prime Minister, especially when it comes to cross-cutting issues. Recent plans to create a dedicated climate change department or a Coordination Committee for the Circular Economy of Romania by Government Decision No. 553 of 9 December 2022, chaired by the Chief of the Chancellery and with the Department of Sustainable Development as its secretariat, to oversee the implementation of the Romanian Circular Economy Action Plan and Strategy could function as a clear political signal on the importance of these issues. Identifying and focusing the Chancellery's efforts on a limited number of cross-cutting priorities for which political leadership would represent a turning point for delivery. To do so effectively, staff within the Chancellery will need to be able to build good networks across government, ideally both at official and political level and be an effective interlocutor. This dual quality of proximity to the head of government, coupled with deep networks across the administration could enable the Chancellery to

function as a political “lighthouse” unit, a broadcaster of prime ministerial views, ensuring ministries and agencies align their activities within a broader government narrative.

In addition to the political weight emanating from the Chancellery, its establishment as an entity with legal personality represents an opportunity to strengthen its legitimacy to co-ordinate and deliver on its strategic objectives. The Government Decisions also sets the maximum number of positions within the Prime Minister's Chancellery at 103, composed of a mixture of civil servants and contract staff, and thus represents a substantial increase in staff. To capitalise on this opportunity, recruitment should focus on cross-cutting and organisational skill sets required in light of the Chancellery's whole-of-government steering tasks and the government's priority areas. Additionally, recruitment of staff working on priority policy areas will require particular attention to ensure individuals have the necessary skills and the credibility to engage with target line ministries and external stakeholders. Stakeholders interviewed in the context of this project flagged this as a challenge, with regards to certain policy areas such as climate change, or skills such as data analysis.

Beyond the issues and challenges generated by frequent reorganisations in the CoG and high turnover, many interlocutors interviewed in the context of this project also expressed some concerns over the lack of clarity of this reorganisation of the centre of government, and how the PMC and GSG would collaborate in practice. The following sections will thus highlight how Romania can capitalise on the opportunities this arrangement represents, and how it can mitigate some of its risks.

2.2. Mitigating the risks generated by institutional changes at the centre of government

Changes to the machinery of government, in particular to the centre of government can also lead to a number of potential pitfalls. This is particularly true when institutional changes generate a degree of fragmentation in the government decision-making process, as is the case in Romania.

2.2.1. Clarifying mandates and responsibilities to reduce duplication of efforts

Without sufficient safeguards, the establishment of a second CoG body can lead to duplication, overlaps or gaps in responsibilities, generating a misuse or waste of resources. Indeed Article 2 of the Government Decision outlines the PMC's responsibilities as follows:

The Chancellery of the Prime Minister performs the following functions:

- a) of strategy, by which it contributes to the elaboration and substantiation of the strategic vision of the Government regarding the implementation of the public policies included in the Government Programme;*
- b) of inter-institutional co-ordination, to ensure an integrated and coherent approach to the governing act, co-ordinating the councils, commissions and inter-ministerial committees established by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister and participating in other such bodies, established according to Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, with subsequent amendments and additions.*
- c) of representation, which ensures on behalf of the prime minister internal and external representation in his field of activity.*

While Government Decision No. 832 outlines the competences of the PMC, the division of responsibilities between the GSG and the PMC on certain Centre of Government functions remains unclear - especially on co-ordination and strategic planning. Government Decision No.137 of February 13, 2020 notably outlines the General Secretariat of the Government's core functions as follows:

The General Secretariat of the Government performs the following functions:

a) [...]

b) of strategy, through which it contributes, based on analyses, to the substantiation of strategies, strategic planning and to the establishment of the directions of action at the governmental level, as well as through which the system of relations is created for the substantiation and elaboration of the legislative program of the Government;

c) inter-institutional co-ordination, to increase the capacity of central authorities in the field of elaboration, implementation and monitoring of strategies, public policies and normative acts;

d) [...]

e) [...]

f) of representation, which ensures the internal and external representation of the state or the Government, in accordance with the law, in its field of activity, respectively ensures the representation of the Government, including the Prime Minister, before the courts, as well as participation in the activities of the European Union institutions;

g) [...]

A comparison of the two institutions' legal mandates does not reveal a particularly clear-cut distinction of functions. Moreover, interviews with governmental stakeholders highlighted that there was limited understanding among line ministries and agencies of the new distribution of responsibilities between the PMC and the GSG. While staff in each body might have a clear understanding of the ways in which their role differs from that of the other, additional steps could be taken to preclude any duplication of efforts and to guarantee the best use of available financial and human resources.

To mitigate this risk, the government of Romania could work to better define and communicate the mandate of the two institutions in more practical terms. This could notably be addressed by establishing clear "statements of purpose" for each institution and mapping out "who does what" in practical terms to improve efficiency at the centre of government. The two bodies will also need the capacity, skillsets and resources to communicate their respective roles and tasks across the public administration and beyond. This should be taken into account in the working arrangements, staffing policies and decisions on resource-allocation for the PMC and the GSG.

2.2.2. Working routines and practical tools to facilitate co-ordination and cooperation between CoG bodies

As highlighted above, stakeholders emphasised the division of responsibilities between the PMC and the GSG could be understood as a system in which "political" co-ordination falls within the PMC's purview, and "technical" co-ordination remaining at the GSG. Yet, the two notions are broad in nature: "political" may or may not include policy choices and decision-making, or co-ordination with political figures; and "technical" may or may not include aspects such as elaboration of policy options prior to decision-making, and co-ordination with non-political actors. In this sense, while this distinction is helpful in avoiding the politicisation of evidence/technical work, and a purely technocratic view of government, these two spheres cannot be construed as distinct and independent.

Where an institutional division of responsibilities exists within the centre of government between "political" and "technical" co-ordination, cooperation between the two bodies should be frequent and institutionalised, to ensure the two systems "feed" into each other. This would guarantee that the bicephalic structure of the centre of government in Romania does not exacerbate gaps in terms of information-sharing, prioritisation, and avoid an increase in administrative workload arising from those. Such risk may be mitigated by explicit working arrangements which do not depend solely on the personal relations between officials in the two respective entities. Co-ordination and cooperation between the PMC and the GSG need to be close,

regular, and formalised in working arrangements which are agreed by the parties and jointly communicated across the public sector, and could for instance cover:

1. *Working routines*: such as the format and frequency for exchange of information and feedback, consultation, and decision-making on common issues.
2. *Practical tools* such as office co-location and shared digital tools for information/data sharing and communication, as this may significantly facilitate daily interaction, co-ordination, and coherence between the two structures.

Working routines could also serve as guidance for line ministries and agencies in terms of the lines of command, feedback channels and information exchange. Practices should streamline rather than increase the burden of data gathering, monitoring, and reporting tasks of the line ministries and agencies, by mapping and aligning existing practices and requirements, and possibly defining a single shared entry point for both the PMC and the GSG. Clarity would also be useful for social and civic partners, media and other stakeholders, this for increased transparency, citizen and stakeholder participation and public accountability purposes.

This process would also benefit from embedding good practices of change management to accompany the new *modus operandi*. This could comprise outlining a change management plan and designating a point of contact for its implementation, as well as ensuring proactive communication of the changes and their practical implications across public administration. It may also be useful to foresee feedback opportunities and channels, which would allow gathering proposals for improvement and lessons learned from putting in place the new set-up, in view of adapting it to ensure that the objectives of strengthened policy leadership, co-ordination and coherence are indeed achieved.

2.2.3. Ensuring resilience in the face of future institutional changes

As Romania's past experiences show, and as is the case in other countries (see Box 2.1) centres of government undergo frequent institutional reforms, and bodies can be dissolved or restructured with the arrival of a new government or political context. These institutional changes may in the process generate a loss of skills and institutional memory in central government offices and stand as a major challenge when implementing long-term structural reforms.

Box 2.1. Reunification of the Chancellery and the cross-sectoral co-ordination centre in Latvia

In Latvia, the State Chancellery, and the Cross-sectoral Coordination centre (PKC) which were separate institutional structures at the Centre of Government since 2011, have established close functional links, support and co-ordinating procedures and share the same offices.

Nevertheless, as of 2023 the two structures were merged into one under the authority of the Prime Minister, in view of strengthening national development planning and co-ordination, improving oversight of government programme implementation, reducing fragmentation and overlaps in public administration, strengthening the centre of government and improving international cooperation, considering the lessons learned from managing the financial sector reforms, COVID-19 pandemic and other major policy challenges.

The merger aimed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency by delivering “professional, competent and compact public administration proofed for addressing today's and future challenges” with a strong lead from the centre of government. Essentially, a single structure at the centre of government was deemed to provide less fragmentation and better steer than two separate ones, even while functionally close.

Source: Government of Latvia (2022)

Romania should seek to ensure that its centre of government is agile and resilient enough to withstand administrative reforms in the future. In that sense, the government should identify the core skills and competences needed to perform centre of government functions, and ensure they recruit, train, and retain staff adequately *in both* entities, to ensure the system's resilience in the face of future changes. Additionally, informal practices which aim to build a collective *esprit de corps* among policy professionals (e.g., “groups of friends” for best practice exchange, training, and informal exchanges among policy planners, “digitalisation champions”, open government, etc. from line ministries and relevant agencies) on initiative of the centre of government could also play a stabilising role in a context of structural change. Lastly, digital innovations can be leveraged effectively to preserve institutional memory and mitigate some of the loss of knowledge inherent to institutional reform. The newly created “Government Cloud” could be an effective tool for this purpose.

Key recommendations on the centre of government set-up in Romania

Leverage the political weight of the Chancellery to advance and support cross-cutting priorities:

- Identify and focus the Chancellery's efforts on a limited number of cross-cutting priorities for which political leadership would represent a turning point for delivery.
- Encourage staff within the Chancellery to build good networks across government, ideally both at official and political level and be an effective interlocutor.
- Provide sufficient access to the prime minister to ensure his or her views are widely communicated.

Ensure clarity of mandates between the GSG and the PMC to mitigate the risks of duplication, gaps, and fragmentation:

- Building on the mandates outlined in recent Government Decision, identify shared responsibilities and further outline allocation of tasks, in particular as they pertain to co-ordination and strategic planning.
- Establish clear “statements of purpose” for each body.
- Develop a plan for change including a communication paper to communicate the revised mandates of the CoG structures to line ministries and to other stakeholders, with particular attention to CoG functions which require frequent engagement.

Formalise co-ordination between the PMC and the GSG at the senior management and technical level to facilitate the interface between “political” and “technical” co-ordination:

- In particular on key strategic focus areas such as sustainable development, the green and digital transitions, climate, and innovation.
- Identify working routines such as the format and frequency for exchange of information and feedback, consultation and decision-making on common issues.
- Identify practical arrangements such as office co-location and shared digital tools for information/data sharing and communication.

Mitigate the risks generated by potential institutional changes in the future:

- Promote common training schemes between the two bodies to facilitate knowledge-sharing, avoid the creation of a “siloesd” culture within the centre.
- Leverage digital tools and databases to retain institutional memory within the GSG and the PMC and limit the risks of information and knowledge loss in case of further institutional instability.

3 A strategic framework for coherent government action

3.1. Strategic planning as a framework for prioritising government action

Centres of government in OECD member countries have sought to play a strategic and forward-looking role, by positioning themselves as the steering and leading body of whole-of-government planning activities. A clearer and more explicit articulation of strategic planning instruments in Romania's CoG would allow limited government resources to be focused on key policy priorities while clarifying how these efforts contribute more broadly to long-term ambitions. While a challenging endeavor, articulating strategic objectives across different timeframes and sectors is crucial to ensure that strategic documents promote synergies, preclude counterproductive efforts, and provide a coherent vision for the country.

3.1.1. *Creating a cohesive narrative around strategic priorities*

Strategic priorities can be defined as statements of intention set by the government as a whole. These priorities are typically outlined and reflected in the government's "strategic framework" understood as the set of strategic documents and statements setting the course for government action.

The strategic planning apparatus in Romania struggles to provide a cohesive narrative around strategic priorities due to a fragmented strategic framework. Indeed, multiple whole-of-government and cross-cutting strategies, all led by different government institutions, strive to become the overarching binding framework for the government (see Table 3.1). The medium-term government programme (Decision No.42 of 25 November 2021) is co-ordinated by the PMC based on inputs from line ministries, while the annual government work-plan (Decision No.414 of 2013) is co-ordinated by the GSG and supported by a dedicated interministerial committee. The National Recovery and Resilience plan (NRRP) is co-ordinated by the Ministry of EU Projects and Investment with input from across the administration. Lastly the Romania Sustainable Development Strategy (ROSDS) 2030 is led and monitored by the Department for Sustainable Development within the PMC and the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development which is led by the Prime minister. Crucially, apart from the government programme, the status of these key government planning documents is not established within the legal framework, and neither is the hierarchy among them. Recent signs nevertheless point to successful efforts to mitigate the negative effects of fragmentation and increase alignment, for instance the current government programme has been updated in line with the NRRP.

Table 3.1. Documents forming Romania's whole-of-government strategic framework

Timeframe	Strategic Framework Documents	Scope
Long-term (longer than an electoral mandate)	Romania Sustainable Development Strategy 2030	Whole-of-Government
	Recovery and Resilience Plan	Whole-of-government – EU driven
Medium-term (multi-annual, length of the electoral mandate)	Medium-term government programme (Decision No.42 of November 25, 2021)	Whole-of-government – Driven by electoral platform
	National Reform Programme	Whole-of-government – EU driven
	Fiscal-budgetary strategy for the period 2022-2024 and related Framework Letters	Whole-of-government – Driven by Ministry of Finance
	Nationally Determined Contributions	Whole-of-Government – Related to International Commitment
Short-term (one to two years)	Annual government work-plan (Decision No.414 of 2013)	Whole-of-government
	Annual state budget law (Law No.317/2021 of 28 December 2021)	Whole-of-government – Driven by Ministry of Finance

Source: Author's own work.

Taken together, these various documents establish the strategic framework for the work of the government. In practice, it is rare to find cases in which government strategy documents are fully hierarchised and aligned. However, clarity on the hierarchy of whole-of-government strategic documents can support more effective delivery, enabling governments to focus their limited resources and capacities on a clear set of priorities, and to communicate these clearly to citizens. In addition, the blurry hierarchy between documents obscures genuine policy trade-offs needed to achieve high-level goals. For these reasons, the OECD/SIGMA Principles of Public Administration suggest establishing a hierarchy of key government planning documents in the legal framework (OECD / SIGMA, 2023^[10]). OECD countries such as Latvia have found success in formally hierarchising government planning documents, and formalising the relationship between them, in an effort to streamline the planning process, clarify government priorities, and better deliver on them (see Box 3.1). Romania could use the planning process to identify and provide clarity on the rank of various documents.

Box 3.1. Hierarchy of planning documents in Latvia

The Latvian Law on the Development Planning System was adopted on January 1st, 2009. The law outlines development planning principles, types of planning documents, their hierarchy, and relations, as well as allocates responsibilities to institutions in the planning process. According to the Law on the Development Planning System, national development planning documents are prepared for a long-term (up to 25 years), medium-term (up to seven years) and short-term (up to three years). The law also outlines specific requirements for development planning documents: strategic objectives and results (outcomes and outputs), a description of existing problems and their solutions, an impact assessment, as well as further action for the implementation and evaluation of the planned policy. The necessary financial resources and responsible institutions are also identified.

The Government Action Plan is prepared based on the Declaration of the Intended Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers. The document defines the main results to be delivered and tasks to be accomplished by the responsible institutions to implement political priorities set by the current government. Compliance of Government's Declaration and Action Plan with development priorities set in the hierarchically highest long/medium term development planning documents is required by law.

The resulting planning system can be schematised as follows:

Figure 3.1. The Latvian Planning System



Source : <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/en/national-development-planning>.

3.1.2. The influence of external drivers in the strategic planning process

It is important to note that government prioritisation is the result of multiple driving forces, some of which also occur outside of the strategic framework (Figure 3.2). In Romania, political opportunity and demands

for urgency in the prioritisation process is at times quite important, thereby diminishing the ability of the formal planning process to steer government action. Thus, in conjunction with a clear hierarchy of strategic documents, a more transparent and systematic mechanism for prioritisation of government action could enable the Romanian centre of government to steer government action coherently, effectively, and respond to citizen expectations.

Figure 3.2. Sources of prioritisation



Source: Author's own work adapted from (Institute for Global Change, 2016^[11]).

As in other countries, Romania struggles with prioritising the formal strategic planning process, due to urgency and political opportunity. This leads to poor predictability of decision-making. As highlighted by stakeholders during the OECD's fact-finding missions, the Romanian government has faced challenges in completing the Annual Government Work Plan (AGWP) prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Difficulties in the predictability of decision-making in Romania is compounded by the frequent resort to emergency ordinances. This tendency or bias towards short-term action at the expense of predictability can also be felt in the absence of a dedicated long-term vision for the country. The Romania Sustainable Development Strategy remains the only strategic document with a long-term focus (defined as over 5 years). More recent efforts to develop a long-term strategy entitled "Romania 2040" were blocked by the Constitutional Court despite the plan's adoption by parliament due to concerns that parliament had not been sufficiently involved in the process.

Despite the absence of effective prioritisation described above, there is evidence showing that the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) that goes until 2026 has had weight in steering government action in Romania. For instance, the government programme was adapted ex-post to match the NRRP. Additionally, multiple components of the NRRP have provisions aiming to reform and strengthen the strategic planning architecture of the government, most notably Component 14/Reform 1.1 calls for the creation and operationalisation of a new strategic management and strategic planning system in all ministries. This led to the successful adoption of Decision No.379 of 24 March 2022, which establishes the Methodology of development, implementation, evaluation and updating of government strategies. The new methodology mandates the General Secretariat of the Government to co-ordinate this process at the national level and evaluate the consistency of the proposals with each other and with the Government Programme. The GSG had been advocating for this Government Decision for several years through the support of the World Bank (World Bank, 2020^[12]). It appears the Recovery and Resilience Fund

disbursement mechanism associated to the NRRP, in a broader context of budgetary challenges, generated the necessary incentive structure to drive some key reforms which had been delayed for some time.

The significant weight given to external drivers in the Romanian planning process has the ambition and potential to strengthen its strategic planning architecture, but nevertheless poses several challenges. Firstly, and despite a series of consultations organised by the Ministry of European Investments and Projects, the NRRP is at times perceived by interlocutors as somewhat of a technocratic exercise with limited information on how proposals from public consultations were incorporated. Secondly, engagement of the center of government on the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of the plan - led by the Ministry of European Investment and Projects – could help in aligning the NRRP process and deliverables with the wider strategic policy framework would improve coherence and long-term sustainability of policies. In that regard, the newly created Department for Integrated Evaluation and Monitoring of Public and European Funded Programs within the PMC represents an interesting area of opportunity to ensure that the CoG retains a strong degree of oversight and input in the strategic process. Lastly, the Recovery and Resilience Fund being a temporary and exceptional EU instrument, the government must ensure that the national planning processes and structures continue to function effectively once it comes to an end.

The more limited weight of the Government Programme in steering government action can also be explained by the limited tools deployed for problem identification. Stakeholders engaged during the fact-finding missions pointed to a lack of review of the inputs proposed by line ministries, repurposing of sections in past government programmes and other methodological challenges. A lack of robust problem analysis and transparent methodology for the prioritisation of problems and objectives limits the Government Programme's ability to hold up against other imperatives, whether political or financial. Finland's use of a systems approach, underpinned by a solid problem identification phase, as well as sustained stakeholder engagement to prioritising the Government Agenda could provide an interesting example (Box 3.2).

Box 3.2 Prioritisation approach of the Finnish Government Programme

Conceptually, the Finnish Government Programme is not based on ministerial structure, but on societal phenomena or systems changes, focussing on systemic opportunities and challenges in society. This concept emphasizes and applies sustainability approach and coherence from ecological, social, and economic points of view (in short term and especially in long-term perspective).

The Government assigned Prime Minister Office's Strategy Department to facilitate and co-ordinate the preparation of the programme in Spring 2019. The process included (i) defining a situational picture on key themes, (ii) future (4 year) projection exercise; (iii) setting out goals and objectives (complementing rhetoric-based and actions-based objectives with output-based and impact-based targets, as a basis for further elaboration of indicators and measures for each of the strategic themes).

The process was managed in thematic groups of political actors, supported by overall approximately 200 experts, under the co-ordination of the Strategic Department of PMO. A dedicated tech platform allowed the stakeholders to follow progress made on the different negotiation strands.

Source: Government of Finland (2022).

3.2. Strategic planning as a framework for coherent government action

The OECD's fact-finding mission revealed that 110 sectoral or cross-sectoral strategies are currently under implementation in Romania. This proliferation of strategic documents is quite widespread across OECD member and non-member states and can be explained by a few factors. Indeed, strategies are often perceived as a low effort means to demonstrate political will on an issue. Moreover, stakeholders highlighted the fact that external drivers (such as external funding) often encourage the production of strategies.

Government Decision No. 379 of 23 March 2022, provides an opportunity in formalising and standardising the alignment of sectoral strategies with whole-of-government priorities. Building on multiple World Bank projects to enhance line ministry capacity for strategic planning, the Government Decision formalises the role of the Directorate for Coordinating Policies and Implementing Projects within the GSG in overseeing and reviewing sectoral strategies. It also links to an inventory of existing sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies.

The taxonomy of strategic documents outlined in the Government Decision, identifies, and defines government strategies (understood as sectoral), intersectoral strategies, and action plans. A more complete taxonomy could also define whole-of-government strategic documents which constitute the country's strategic framework and help define the relationship and hierarchy between these sets of documents.

Article 3 of the new methodology for the elaboration and implementation of Government Strategy tasks the Directorate for Coordinating Policies and Implementing Projects with ensuring consistency with national priorities as outlined in the Government Programme, as well as with any priorities imposed by the exceptional situations that may arise. While efforts to streamline sectoral and cross-sectoral objectives towards whole-of-government priorities, represents a positive evolution, progress might be stymied by some of the shortfalls identified in the Government Programme's elaboration process (see previous sections). The ability of the GSG to carry the type of analysis required of them from the Government Decision requires a certain level of clarity on the government's priorities.

Moreover, while Article 12 of the Government Decision tasks the Directorate for Coordinating Policies and Implementing Projects with "providing specialised assistance to ensure complementarity and an integrated approach with other initiatives or strategies in the same field or in related fields"; the department has limited capacity and tools at its disposal to do so. The new methodology does highlight the possibility of creating interministerial working groups for the elaboration of strategies, which could help preclude overlaps/contradictory efforts, but this mechanism alone will not be sufficient. Systematising the consultation of relevant institutions upstream during the elaboration of sectoral and intersectoral strategies will be crucial to strengthen the effective implementation of the new methodology and generate more coherent government action. In particular, the government could leverage the new "Government Cloud" to digitalise this process and promote better alignment.

One tool at the centre of government's disposal to enhance the quality of planning across the administration is to provide detailed guidance or templates for the elaboration of sectoral or cross-sectoral strategies. At present, the guidance available to line ministries related to the planning process is limited to the following manuals (Government of Romania, 2022^[13]):

- Mechanism for the operationalisation of the Government's Annual Work Plan
- Manual of methods used in public policy planning and impact assessment
- Strategic Planning Manual
- Methodology for developing Institutional Strategic Plans

Developing additional guidance upstream could help lessen the burden of review placed upon DCIP and strengthen ownership over the planning process across the administration. In the Czech Republic for instance, guidance includes manuals, but also detailed templates, methodological resources, etc. Box 3.3. Developing and disseminating quality criteria, guidelines and resources on strategic planning is critical to enhance the quality and overall robustness of strategic planning across the administration. This will be part of OECD's support in the EEA Norway project titled "Capacity building in the field of public governance - a co-ordinated approach of the Centre of the Government of Romania". Seeking out leaders who can work within the system in new, and constructive ways, and harnessing their leadership to build a community of practice around planning can also be a very effective lever to enhance peer learning and decrease asymmetries in capacity between line ministries. For these mechanisms to be effective, they need to be clearly communicated with line ministries, and pertinent stakeholders need to be intimately aware of where those resources can be found and how to call on the GSG for additional support if needed.

Box 3.3 Examples of guidance provided to line ministries for the elaboration of sectoral or cross-sectoral strategies in the Czech Republic

The original version of the Methodology for the Preparation of Public Strategies (Methodology) in the Czech Republic was approved by the government on May 2, 2013 (Resolution No. 318/2013). The update of the Methodology was discussed by the Ministry for Regional Development in 2018 and approved by the government on January 28, 2019 (Resolution No. 71/2019).

The methodology streamlines and articulates the procedure for creating strategic documents with the aim of increasing their quality and interconnectedness. It describes the process of strategy preparation and implementation, from identifying the need for strategy creation, its preparation for approval and actual implementation. The methodology also includes resources on the typology of strategic and implementation documents, the use of knowledge in strategic work, the evaluation of strategies and their impacts, and summarizes all this graphically in individual figures.

At the centre of this methodology is a detailed description of the individual phases of the strategic planning process, listed as follows:

- Identifying the need for strategy creation.
- Setting up the strategy (project) preparation.
- Analytical and forecasting phase.
- Setting the strategic direction.
- Elaborating the strategy.
- Setting up the implementation, financing, and evaluation of the strategy and.
- Approving the strategy.

A separate section is devoted to strategy implementation.

Guidance available to line ministries can be found on the [Government Portal for Strategic Planning](#) and includes the following resources :

- Typology of strategic documents
- The process of creating a strategic document
- Templates and tools (model for determining the type of strategic document needed, organisational structure of strategy creation, strategy structure, strategy creation plan, matrix of

measures and activities, strategy creation budget, strategy creation schedule, cooperation and communication plan, risk management plan, etc.)

- Comparative analysis of methodological approaches to planning
- Creation of a systematic overview of findings

Source : <https://www.mmr.cz/cs/microsites/portal-strategicke-prace-v-ceske-republice/nastroje-a-metodicka-podpora/vystupy-projektu/metodika>

Supporting line ministries' strategic planning capacity should also go beyond the elaboration of institutional strategic plans and compliance with the new methodology. As line ministries are called on to input directly into the Government Programme and other strategic documents such as the NRRP, guidance and training should support line ministries in this endeavour. Guidance and training could help ensure ministries have the analytical skills to identify their own priorities, and the institutional capacity to input and/or comment on whole-of-government strategic documents when needed. Conversely, and when the planning process is more top-down, ministries should also have the capacity to analyse whole-of-government strategies to identify priorities that apply to them and respond with appropriate policy proposals.

3.3. Operationalisation of strategic documents

Current institutional arrangements, co-ordination mechanisms and tools for planning in Romania remain oriented toward inputs and processes rather than outcomes and results. The centre of government, and more specifically the GSG, could increase co-ordination with the local level and with the ministry of Finance during the strategic planning process to better link strategic documents with outcomes for citizens.

3.3.1. *linking strategic planning with the local level*

National, sectoral, intersectoral and whole-of-government strategies rarely detail implementation mechanisms or strategic objectives at the local level. For instance, Institutional Strategic Plans that form comprehensive roadmaps outlining long-term goals and priorities to guide the development and operation of various public institutions in Romania must now be accompanied by an annex containing an action plan, but there are no required breakdowns or adjustments for the local level, even when achieving an objective might require action by local authorities. Stakeholders also highlighted that the elaboration of national level strategies could provide opportunities for local authorities to comment or provide input. Ensuring national-level planning accounts for realities at the subnational level will require a clear and well-defined interface to co-ordinate and interact with local authorities during problem identification, elaboration, and implementation of strategic plans.

3.3.2. *linking strategic planning with the budget*

The government is also operating within a tight fiscal space with public debt rising in recent years. In this context, and for several years the government has lacked an effective framework linking strategic and budgetary planning, with reverberating effects on the government's ability to deliver on stated priorities. A plan that is disconnected from the budget sets out a vision without the practical means to achieve it. Conversely, while budget processes are an opportunity for prioritisation, they do so primarily through the lens of cost-effectiveness.

Under the impetus of the NRRP, several Government Decisions are steering the government away from its historic cash budget approach towards program-based budgeting, tightening the links between the

budget and government priorities. Government Decision No. 427 of April 6, 2022, outlines a new methodology for the preparation and implementation of budgetary programmes which will be applied from the start of budget year 2023. Government Decision 379 of 24 March 2022 also states government strategies must include an estimation of the necessary financial resources and identification of the sources of financing necessary for the implementation of the actions of the strategy. Jointly, these Government Decisions aim to accomplish Component 14/Reform 1.1 of the NRRP which calls for all line ministries to have planned their budgets per programme and at least three ministries to have executed budgets per programme by 30 June 2025.

In addition to these changes to the regulatory framework, the CoG in Romania could tighten its cooperation with the Ministry of Finance in the context of Institutional Strategic Plans. Strategic planning, in the form of Institutional Strategic Plans, and medium-term budgeting operate under separate processes. An integrated approach co-ordinated between both institutions could help to further align spending to the strategic priorities of the government. While the budgetary component of the Institutional Strategic Plans must respect the expenditures ceilings transmitted by the Ministry of Finance, the elaboration and updating of the budget annex remains entirely under the responsibility of the ministries and the General Secretariat of the Government.

Key Recommendations on a strategic framework for coherent government action

A hierarchy should be established for existing whole-of-government strategies to clearly signal where government priorities lie and create a binding framework for sectoral and cross-sectoral government action

- Define and formalise the hierarchical relation between the documents which compose the government's strategic framework.
- Clarify the top-down *and* bottom-up linkages between sets of documents and identify what these linkages mean in practice at the different steps of the planning process for all stakeholders.

Address technical drivers of fragmentation to ensure coherence across whole-of- government strategies

- Systematise the identification of potential contradictions and synergies between whole-of-government strategies by enshrining this responsibility in the mandate of a unit at the centre of government.
- Systematise the alignment of indicators and monitoring systems for whole-of-government strategies.

Improve the predictability of government action to promote policy coherence and decrease the impact of policy uncertainty on private sector investment

- Formalise a long-term vision for Romania which goes beyond a single electoral cycle.
- Prioritise NRRP reforms linked to the Annual Government Work Plan completion rate to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability.

Ensure an active role of the centre of government in the EU driven strategic planning process to avoid developing two parallel planning systems

- Ensure sufficient engagement of either the PMC or GSG in future planning exercises comparable to the NRRP, to identify potential contradictions and to align those with the wider strategic framework for Romania.
- Identify the aspects of the NRRP which have been effective and successful in driving reforms that otherwise had been stalling and draw on those to strengthen the national level strategic planning incentive structure.

Review the process of elaboration of the Government Programme to strengthen the overall methodology deployed

- Strengthen the existing process for the collection and review of inputs from line ministries by making use of transparent methodology for the prioritisation of problems and objectives.
- Envisage structuring future Government Programmes around high-level cross-sectoral government priorities such as those outlined in the Romanian Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Ensure successful implementation of the new methodology for the development, implementation, evaluation and updating of government strategies by assessing emerging needs at the level of line ministries and within the GSG

- Beyond financial and human resources needs, the government could envisage supporting line ministries in this shift through the creation of a “network” of strategic planners with the aim of creating a community of practice within the government.
- Develop resources, guidelines, templates and dedicated trainings for the different planning processes which line ministries are called to participate in.

4 Centre of Government co-ordination mechanisms and information-sharing tools

4.1. Leveraging inter-ministerial co-ordination mechanisms in Romania to promote policy coherence

Governments can draw on a wide range of interministerial and intergovernmental co-ordination mechanisms to achieve policy coherence and deliver on horizontal priorities. This section discusses the co-ordination mechanisms and information-sharing tools available for Romania's centre of government, notably government meetings and inter-ministerial committees. It then proposes paths to streamline their operation to promote government co-ordination.

4.1.1. Enhancing information-sharing and co-ordination upstream for more efficient and effective government meetings

As it is the case in other OECD countries, Romania primarily relies on a permanent, institutionalised government meeting to ensure high-level coherence of government action. In Romania, the government meeting (or cabinet meeting) represents the core decision-making and co-ordination mechanism and gathers line ministries under the presidency of the Prime Minister's Chancellery (PMC). As per Government Decision No. 137/2020, the organisation of high-level cabinet meetings is under the legal responsibility of the GSG, where a dedicated Department is tasked with co-ordinating the preparation of the government meeting and providing the necessary technical support to line ministries.

Despite recent efforts to digitalise this preparation process, as well as upstream technical work provided by the Department for Government Meetings of the GSG (OECD, 2016^[14]) additional adjustments could be made to facilitate information-sharing ahead of the meetings. A dedicated information system or web-portal could enhance the preparation process of the government meeting by centralising information flows and streamlining the decision-making process. Some OECD countries such as Estonia have built upon their digital expertise and tools to optimize the preparation of Cabinet meetings (Box 4.1). Other OECD countries have also enhanced "check-in" points ahead of the government meeting, in the form of formal and/or informal preparation meetings upstream of the government meeting. They can be at ministerial level as in Finland, where they are called "evening sessions" and take place once a week on Wednesdays, or at the level of administrative directors as is the case in New Zealand.

Box 4.1. The e-cabinet information system in Estonia

The information system for government councils in Estonia, known as the 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 planner to organise and update relevant information in real time, giving Ministers and their teams a clear overview of each item that needs to be discussed with Cabinet.

Ministers have access to the system to discuss each agenda item and determine their position long ahead of the weekly Cabinet session. They can indicate whether they have any objections or if they wish to express their views 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 increased from 4 to 5 hours to between 30 and 90 minutes. The government has also eliminated the need to print and deliver thousands of pages of documents every week.

Source: (Government of Estonia, 2020^[15]).

While government meetings are the primary decision-making arena, the increase in cross-cutting policy areas has intensified the need for a broader range of arenas for co-ordination, most notably Interministerial committees.

4.1.2. Interministerial committees appear as the most frequently deployed co-ordination mechanism on cross-cutting policy issues

In addition to the weekly government meeting, the most frequently deployed mechanism for co-ordination in Romania appears to be interministerial committees which can be deployed at ministerial, senior, or technical level. Government Decision No. 676 of July 2005 sets out a list of permanent interministerial committees. In addition to these permanent bodies, co-ordination is carried out through a network of ad hoc Interministerial committees. Typically, these bodies tend to be composed exclusively of government actors. Interministerial committees are generally permanent or created *ad hoc* – such as for more important strategic issues (i.e., COVID-19 or Migration flows from Ukraine) or for specific tasks/plans (i.e., co-ordination in elaboration of National Recovery and Resilience Plan), in support of centralised permanent structures. Inter-ministerial committees can embody the multidimensional nature and resulting importance of for cross-government co-ordination of the issue at hand, and often seem to be an ideal forum to align policies, facilitate cross-sectoral arbitration and exchange of good practices. The creation of these entities can also signal high level leadership and political will if they are chaired by the Head of Government, or if participation at ministerial level is mandatory.

The proliferation of interministerial committees is in part due to an increase in cross-cutting policy challenges but has in part been driven by the co-ordination needs generated by the country's fragmented strategic landscape. At present, and as noted in previous sections, Romania's strategic agenda is largely shaped by two strategic documents: Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (ROSDS2030), Romania's Recovery and Resilience Plan. The implementation of strategic documents and objectives often rely on the existence of dedicated co-ordination fora, including the establishment of ad-hoc inter-ministerial committees. First, a newly SDGs-dedicated co-ordination framework was recently introduced at all levels of decision-making, which includes the establishment of the Interdepartmental Committee on Sustainable Development (ICSD) and the Sustainable Development Hubs agents in all SDG-related sectoral ministries. The implementation and co-ordination of Romania's RRP has also taken the form of a dedicated

committee, led by the Ministry of EU Affairs. Finally, in an effort to respect its “green” commitments enshrined in the RRP and in other international agreement, Romania has also recently created an inter-ministerial committee on climate change (CISC) chaired by the Prime Minister, supplemented by the work of newly established co-ordination arenas on climate such as the presidential Working group on climate change, governance arrangements for the Circular Economy Strategy and governance arrangements for the National Energy and Climate Plan and Decarbonisation Strategy.

Inter-ministerial committees often widely overlap in scope. Their composition, frequency and functions can also vary widely. In these conditions, their role in decision-making processes is unclear and can easily be influenced by short-term political variables and external pressures/events. Exchanges with stakeholders in the context of this project have also highlighted that the proliferation of interministerial committees places a burden upon line ministry staff, some of whom are tasked with attending over a dozen interministerial committees. The heterogeneity in committees’ functions and characteristics also tend to be a barrier to their effective integration within the broader decision-making process.

The technical/operational role of the GSG and political commitment of the PMC in the organisation of inter-ministerial committees varies frequently and rather unexpectedly. Moreover, the weight of all these committees in the decision-making processes led by the CoG is not clearly defined nor legally established to ensure their consistent integration in the policymaking process. To date, it seems that there are no explicit regulatory linkages between decisions taken in committees with the CoG’s political decision-making processes. To conclude, the lack of political proactivity and institutional steering capacity from the centre of government to deal with cross-sectoral initiatives thus creates policy tensions and impedes on CoG’s leadership co-ordination capacities. In recent years, the new emphasis on cross-cutting strategies is testing traditional methods of co-ordination, becoming increasingly interlinked with strategic priorities.

4.1.3. Streamlining and standardising interministerial committees could significantly enhance the centre of government’s co-ordination capacity

Given the proliferation of Interministerial committees as the primary tool for co-ordination within the Romanian government, the centre of government could envisage streamlining and standardising these committees. This exercise would support the centre of government’s co-ordination capacity in three main ways:

- Ensuring that line ministries have the capacity to meaningfully engage in committee meetings.
- Avoiding overlaps between interministerial committees covering similar issue areas.
- Facilitating the integration of Interministerial committee findings, opinions and decisions within the broader decision-making process and the government meeting.

In order to successfully achieve the process of streamlining committees, Romania could draw on practices from OECD countries such as Australia and France where working arrangements, criteria and guidelines established for the creation, functioning, and dissolution of Interministerial committees (see Box 4.2 and Box 4.3). As shown by the French example, rationalising inter-ministerial co-ordination mechanisms often constitutes a long-term effort, and will thus require regular overview by the centre of government and constant institutional dialogue with line ministries.

The Government of Romania could take steps to better leverage Interministerial committees and ensure they do not become a hindrance to effective co-ordination:

- Build a CoG led taxonomy of intragovernmental co-ordination groups (committees, commissions, task force, working group).
- Draw up an inventory of existing interministerial committees and working groups to identify any potential overlaps, duplication, defunct committees, and possibilities to merge and dissolve some of these bodies.

- Clarify and systematise the role of interministerial committees in the decision-making and policy development process.
- Better define and frame the mandate and inner workings of interministerial committees to reduce their numbers, harmonising their practices, and identifying clear criteria for their creation and dissolution.

Box 4.2. Streamlining inter-ministerial committees in France

Since 2003, the French government has initiated a process for streamlining of commissions with the objective of rationalising the number of commissions across the government. The decree of 8 June 2006 clarifies that new commissions can be created for a maximum period of five years, and that the creation of each new commission must be justified by a rationale already carried out by an already existing structure.

This initiative was followed by the launch of a government-wide program called “Public Action 2022” programme which focuses on simplifying the French administrative ecosystem. This reform notably resulted in the drastic reduction of the number of existing commissions, through the suppression of advisory administrative commissions which had not held a meeting in the last two years. To avoid multiplication, French authorities also decided that the creation of a new inter-ministerial commission should be followed by the subsequent removal of another existing commission.

Thanks to sustained efforts to streamline commissions, nearly 90 advisory commissions, were deemed to have outlived their initial mandate and therefore abolished by 2019.

Source: (Government of France, 2020^[16]).

Box 4.3. The system of inter-ministerial co-ordination structures in Australia

In 2020, the Prime Minister of Australia announced that National Cabinet agreed to a review of ministerial councils and forums with a view to rationalise and reset their structure and work programs.

The review report to the Cabinet set out recommendations concerning the following key themes: (i) a streamlined Intergovernmental Structure; (ii) other National Bodies; (iii) interactions with the National Cabinet Infrastructure; (iv) Mirroring and Building on the National Cabinet Model; (v) Encouraging Delivery and Good Process; (vi) Reducing Bureaucracy; (vii) Maintaining a Streamlined and Fit-for-Purpose Structure.

For the streamlining exercise, it was recommended that a concerted effort be carried out to minimise the number of ministers’ meetings, while ensuring these bodies continue to deliver strategic outcomes, and remain lean and relevant.

Criteria and objectives for Bodies were outlined to assess the roles of existing ministerial forums and the need for their continued operation. A requirement to meet at least two of the three defined objectives was used to differentiate between forums which demonstrate a rationale for continued operation and those which could be disbanded. These objectives would also be used in the future to assess whether

new ministers' meetings needed to be established. Proposed new forums should meet a minimum of two objectives:

1. To enable national cooperation and consistency on enduring strategic issues: Focus on shared, complex, and long-term policy areas, where there are vertical interrelated roles between the different levels of government requiring sustained cooperation for effective implementation and service delivery. For example, health is a technically complex issue with defined jurisdictional roles, funding, and functions. The seamless provision of health services to the community requires a cross-jurisdictional mechanism to resolve policy issues and encourage equity in service delivery, innovation, and reform.
2. To address issues requiring cross-border collaboration: Focus on policy areas and issues where the horizontal alignment and complementarity of government policy or service provision improves delivery of and access to services, or employment opportunities. A recent example was the co-ordination required to facilitate efficient movement of freight across otherwise closed intrastate borders during the COVID-19 crisis.
3. To perform regulatory policy and standard setting functions: Focus on issues related to shared legislative and regulatory requirements where a cross-jurisdictional mechanism must approve and create or update requirements for policies, standards, or codes. For example, national energy policy requires the co-ordination of legislation, agreements, and statutory bodies to co-ordinate operation of the national energy market, and ensure the secure provision of an affordable, reliable, and secure energy grid.

Source: Government of Australia (2020).

4.2. Promoting the use of alternative government co-ordination mechanisms in Romania

In conjunction with efforts to rationalise and streamline the use of Interministerial committees the centre of government's co-ordination capacity could be enhanced by the development of alternative co-ordination mechanism, including governmental networks, informal co-ordination practices, and information-sharing tools.

4.2.1. Deploying networks and peer-learning opportunities to better mainstream cross-cutting priorities

The recent deployment of Sustainable Development Hubs across the government, acting as experts in the field of activity specific to their institution, constitutes a successful deployment a new co-ordination mechanism which could be replicated by the GSG in other cross-cutting policy areas. These Hubs aim to promote co-ordination to ensure all institutions are actively involved in the implementation of the 2030 National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) and that other policies do not work at cross-purposes with the NSDS., Experts from Romania's Sustainable Development Hubs have nevertheless pointed out constant challenges related to SDG co-ordination including the lack of inter-institutional co-ordination, insufficient expertise of the staff involved to the limited awareness across government, among other (OECD, 2020^[17]).

The government could build on the institutional innovation which the 'SDG hubs' represents to develop other communities of practices as also recommended in the OECD Open Government Review of Romania (OECD, Forthcoming^[18]). The GSG could focus on identifying policy areas or government functions which could benefit from the creation of a "community of practice" drawn from across the government and

envisage developing networks of “hubs” mirroring the SDG hub experience or build upon those especially in areas closely related to the sustainable development agenda. In doing so, the GSG could also initiate frequent knowledge transfers through the development intragovernmental mobility schemes to accelerate this process. Increasing the effectiveness of alternative co-ordination forums will rely on structural and sustained efforts of the CoG in order to ensure the complementarity and coherence of Romania’s inter-ministerial co-ordination framework as a whole, where alternative co-ordination mechanisms have intrinsic added value compared to already existing co-ordination arrangements such as inter-ministerial committees.

4.2.2. Developing bilateral co-ordination between line ministries

An alternative instrument to enhance co-ordination is the deployment of interministerial agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). Interministerial Agreements are instruments for cooperation between two or more national institutions, also eventually involving cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders, to undertake activities defined either by law or policy. Depending on the administrative system of the country in question, such agreements can complement the inter-institutional functional structure where clear lines of hierarchy or horizontal cooperation are not established by the law. Interministerial Agreements Box 4.4 can have many different forms such as legal prescriptions, strategic documents and action plans, executive orders, etc. (Stefanov and Mineva, 2017^[19]). Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) tend to be less formal entail general principles of cooperation describing broad concepts of mutual understanding, goals and plans shared by the parties (Stefanov and Mineva, 2017^[19]).

In Romania, this type of bilateral co-ordination mechanism can primarily be seen in the process for budget formulation. The Fiscal and Budgetary Strategy outlines the government’s fiscal strategy for the next three years. Based on this framework, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) develops a budget circular – the Framework Letter – outlining guidance on budget preparation and spending limits with 3-year estimates to line ministries. Line ministries, in turn, submit spending proposals where they are negotiated with the MoF.

Box 4.4. Interministerial agreements in the United-States and Costa Rica

United-States

MoUs are commonly used as a co-ordination mechanism in the United States, especially in the environmental sector. The United States Environmental Protection Agency notably has MoUs with key relevant central government bodies, including the Department of Agriculture and the Marine, Health, and Safety Authority; National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management; Sustainable Energy Authority; Office of Public Works; Planning and Appeal Board (PAB); National Parks and Wildlife Service; and Central Statistics Office.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a prime example of the way in which bilateral agreements can enhance coherence of government action on environmental and climate commitments. Costa Rica's Sectoral Agreements for the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are a response of the sectors to meet national and international commitments, such as the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement.

Source: (United States Environmental Protection Agency^[20]), (OECD, 2019^[21]).

The existence of an agreement alone does not guarantee increased levels of co-ordination or coherence. They can serve as a political signal of collaboration but suffer from remaining quite general in content and lacking a true roadmap for action. The Romanian centre of government could help develop this co-ordination mechanism where relevant by identifying the policy areas which could benefit from bilateral co-ordination between line ministries and outlining some basic guidelines for their creation and effectiveness.

4.3. Improving tools for information-sharing as a key input for better co-ordination

The success of the “mix” of co-ordination mechanisms deployed by the government for policy coherence will also depend on the ability of the CoG to identify tools to support these mechanisms. Inter-ministerial committees and networks need to be complemented by effective tools to share and communicate information. Despite some breakthroughs in digitalising the policymaking and legislative processes during Covid-19, stakeholders interviewed in the context of this project noted that most co-ordination efforts, policy development and information-sharing mechanisms remain largely paper-based, lengthy, and dispersed across institutions.

The 2022 EU Country Report on Romania also emphasises the problematic lack of interoperability between e-government services (European Commission, 2022^[3]). Line ministries in the Romanian government notably encounter difficulties in being informed of programmes and policies carried out by other line ministries, which are nevertheless relevant to their own portfolio.

Romania’s NRRP is in part attempting to remedy this issue by leveraging digitalisation. Within the framework of the NRRP, Romania was notably required to adopt the government cloud and a data interoperability law by June 2022. Romania has also made substantial efforts in developing open data and data sharing practices, with the transposition of the EU Directive on open data and the re-use of public sector information (EU Commission, 2022^[22]). In this context, Romania could draw on the Latvian experience by developing a platform for the elaboration of government policies which could act as an “early warning system” between line ministries to promote co-ordination and coherence (Box 4.5). The creation of a single digital platform combining relevant data and workflow functions for early warning, inter-institutional co-ordination and stakeholder engagement would be particularly relevant to address cross-cutting policy issues.

Box 4.5 Creation of the Single Portal for Development and Harmonisation of Draft Legal Acts (the TAP portal) to improve information-sharing in Latvia

Since December 2011, Latvia has established a central government planning unit, the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre (Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, PKC). The PKC's mandate is to develop a long-term strategic approach to public policymaking, while also monitoring and co-ordinating decision-making to ensure that public policies are coherent and effective. As of Spring 2023, this function will be transferred to the State Chancellery.

Information-sharing and transparency

PKC stresses the importance of early and transparent information sharing to facilitate consensus-building. To this effect, a new multi-functional platform has been elaborated through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process and launched in 2022.

The objective of the creation of the Single Portal for Development and Harmonisation of Draft Legal Acts (the TAP portal) is to modernise the process of decision-making at the Cabinet of Ministers, by providing more accessible public participation and a more efficient and rapid process for developing and harmonisation of draft legal acts, as well as the improved conduct of sittings (development and approval of draft agendas, drafting and signing of the minutes, preparation of resolutions, management of documents adopted at the sitting of the Cabinet of Ministers), incl. improvement of the functionality of the information system for organizing and conduct of sittings of the Cabinet of Ministers and Cabinet Committee, the State Secretaries' meetings (the e-portfolio).

The TAP portal includes the working environment and a public section. The working environment of draft legal acts includes simplified functionalities for the development, harmonisation, approval, and control of draft legal acts. The templates for the development of draft legal acts, assistance tools are offered by synchronising the information input in different information environments (draft legal act, annotation, statement, opinion). The TAP portal also allows to accumulate and analyse structured data from the initial impact reports (annotations) of legal acts.

Positive consequences on policy alignment and co-ordination

By upgrading the e-portfolio, the process of organising the sittings of the Cabinet of Ministers and decision-making of the Cabinet of Ministers is improved, incl. the members of the Cabinet of Ministers and other participants of the meetings have the opportunity to familiarise themselves conveniently and on the same site with the history of preparing the matters to be considered at the sitting, to record the individual vote, if any, and to add individual opinions on the matter under consideration.

Source: (Republic of Latvia, 2021^[23]) Single Portal for Development and Harmonisation of Draft Legal Acts (TAP Portal).

Key recommendations on CoG co-ordination mechanisms and information-sharing tools

Streamline and rationalise the use of Interministerial committees to co-ordinate cross-cutting issues

- Deploy a CoG led classification of intragovernmental co-ordination groups (committees, commissions, task force, working group)
- Draw up an inventory of existing interministerial committees and working groups to identify any potential overlaps, duplication, defunct committees, and possibilities to merge and dissolve some of these bodies
- Clarify and systematise the role of interministerial committees in the decision-making and policy development process
- Better define and frame the mandate and inner workings of interministerial committees with the aim of reducing their numbers, harmonising their practices, and identifying clear criteria for their creation and dissolution

Diversify co-ordination mechanisms deployed to deliver on government priorities

- Identify policy areas or government functions which could benefit from the creation of a “community of practice” drawn from across the government and envisage developing networks of “hubs” mirroring or building upon the SDG hub experience
- Identify policy areas or government functions which could benefit from frequent knowledge transfers and develop intragovernmental mobility schemes to accelerate this process
- Identify policy areas which require recurring bilateral cooperation and define some basic guidelines for the elaboration of Interministerial agreements or Memoranda of Understanding
- Reflect on potential incentives (such as a recognition award) to promote ad hoc co-ordination between line ministries, in line with government priorities outlined in the Government Programme
- Build in space for informal discussions which are distinct from the decision-making process as a potential enabler for consensus-building around government priorities

Promote stronger information-sharing practices across the whole of government by leveraging the digital transition

- Strive and continue to develop e-government services and tools to provide a long-term framework guiding digitalisation measures, including projects covered in the EU National Recovery and Resilience Plan
- Support further digitalisation of the government meeting preparation process
- Envisage the creation (or adaptation of an existing platform) of a single digital platform for the development and harmonisation of Draft Legal Acts containing information relevant to all stages of its life cycle
- Envisage the creation (or adaptation of an existing platform) of a digital platform for the streamlined interministerial committees that offers administrative support and guidance.

5 Supporting policy coherence from the centre of government

5.1. Centre of government's capacity to ensure alignment and coherence with whole-of-government priorities

Centres of government play a crucial role in ensuring alignment and coherence of policies with whole-of-government priorities. There are several ways in which they can effectively fulfil this role:

- **Establishing regulatory criteria:** CoGs can develop clear regulatory criteria to guide the formulation and approval of public policies. These criteria serve as a framework to ensure consistency and quality in policy development processes, helping to align policies with overarching government priorities.
- **Leading cross-cutting policy issues:** CoGs can assume a leadership role in addressing cross-cutting policy challenges. By coordinating efforts across different ministries and agencies, they can facilitate collaboration and integration, ensuring that policies effectively address complex issues that span multiple sectors.
- **Mediating Disagreements:** In cases where disagreements arise between line ministries or sectoral agendas, CoGs can act as a mediator. Through dialogue and negotiation, they can help resolve conflicts and find common ground, promoting policy coherence and avoiding fragmentation.

By enhancing these functions, centres of government can significantly contribute to the effective implementation of whole-of-government approaches, fostering a cohesive and coordinated policy environment.

5.1.1. The GSG's review function as a tool to ensure policy coherence upstream

Over the past twenty years, the criteria for the elaboration and approval of public policies and normative acts in Romania have become increasingly detailed, with the aim of improving the quality of policy design. The core Government Decisions outlining this process include:

- GOVERNMENT DECISION No. 775 of 14.07.2005 for the approval of the Regulation on the procedures for the development, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies at the central level
- GOVERNMENT DECISION No. 561/2009 for the approval of the Regulation on the procedures, at the Government level, for the elaboration, approval and presentation of draft public policy documents, draft normative acts, as well as other documents, with a view to adoption/approval
- GOVERNMENT DECISION No. 523/2016 for the amendment and completion of the Regulation on the procedures for the development, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies at the central level
- GOVERNMENT DECISION No. 443/2022 for the approval of the content of the presentation and motivation tool, the structure of the report on the implementation of normative acts, the

methodological instructions for carrying out the impact assessment, as well as for the establishment of the Advisory Council for the assessment of the impact of normative acts

Taken together, these government decisions, and the regulations and laws they refer to, outline a process in which policy development largely takes place at the line ministry level. The General Secretariat of the Government provides administrative and legal support for policymaking but has a limited role in the quality control of policy design. The GSG's primary role is to verify the fulfilment of the formal requirements of each draft normative act or public policy proposal. In this sense, the CoG's review role is largely limited to the legal merits of proposals and does not fully enable strategic alignment and coherence of policies. If, following the examination of draft public policy documents and draft normative acts, non-compliance with the formal requirements is found, the GSG prepares a note containing observations and proposals, which it submits to the attention of the initiator.

To enhance policy coherence and to support cross-sectoral policy development, the GSG's review function could be extended to the merit of policy or regulatory initiatives. Beyond technical and administrative checks, it is key that the centre of government ensures that proposals are in line with the Government Programme and aligned with its strategic priorities. This requires that the GSG be able to review the proposals with respect to how well they are aligned with strategic priorities, the overall Government Programme, and other strategic documents and plans. Having this overview of how policy proposals fit into the broader policy context can be seen as one of the unique features of the centre's role in the policy development process: the strategic "fit" rather than the merits of the individual policies. The format of the accompanying documents such as substantiation notes may also need to be reviewed in line with the broadened scope of evaluation, to guide the preparatory work carried out by line ministries as of early stages.

Across the OECD (OECD, 2015^[24]), given the volume of material that needs to be processed for the cabinet, the ability of most centres of government to undertake rigorous analysis is limited. Exceptions to this include Lithuania and Austria, which both have strong capacity within the centre to undertake policy analysis, and Japan whose Cabinet Office intelligence and research department accounts for three-quarters of the budget. Finland has also attributed considerable resources and set up centre-led co-ordinated research, foresight, assessment, and monitoring capacities to underpin policy decision-making and steer towards Government priority areas (see Box 5.4).

In theory, legislative proposals cannot enter the legislative process without RIA approval from the GSG. In practice, stakeholders engaged throughout this project have highlighted the use and the quality of Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) is highly uneven, and many RIAs remain somewhat superficial. This has emerged as a clear priority for the Romanian government, through the adoption of Government Decision No. 443 of 30 March 2022, with a clear potential in improving the quality and coherence of regulations. This Government Decisions has notably updated the ex-ante evaluation methodology for draft regulations, with a clear focus on innovation and "digital by default". The establishment of an independent regulatory scrutiny board for evaluating impact assessment of regulation in Romania is also welcome step which can contribute to improving RIA application in Romania. OECD best practice suggests that robust and autonomous supervision, independent from political influence, is important for improving the quality of RIA analysis. The regulatory scrutiny board can help ensure that RIA is seen as whole-of-government rather than being owned by any ministry (OECD, 2020^[25]).

5.1.2. Taking the lead on complex and wicked cross-sectoral issues

The policy coherence stewardship of the centre of government can also be assessed against its capabilities to initiate and manage cross-cutting policy processes, such as crisis management exercises or policy formulation on complex and/or politically sensitive policy files and the need for policy coherence over time, e.g., crisis responses vs. long-term sustainability commitments.

In Romania, the potential added value of the GSG for cross-sectoral policy coherence was acknowledged by a range of interlocutors interviewed by the OECD in the context of this project. For instance, the Ministry of Energy has proactively sought the GSG lead on the revision of the National Energy and Climate Plan, based on lessons learned from its initial elaboration. Also, the Ministry of Finance has delegated the lead role to the GSG for a NRRP deliverable on developing the green component in budgeting; this was due to the complexity and novelty of the issue, which shows a potential entry point for the GSG on other policy development files which require a whole-of-government view and innovation. The GSG's co-ordinating role has also been recently tested in supporting the PMC-led humanitarian response exercise to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing flux of refugees.

The GSG's credibility for a stronger role and heightened demand from lead ministries in such cross-sectoral processes will depend in part on the success of exercises such as those mentioned above. It requires the right skills and profiles of staff for better guidance and steer of policy development. The GSG may also benefit from support in design and implementation of such exercises, i.e., by engaging experienced peers or experts in an advisory role to the GSG. In this vein, for example, European Commission's DG Reform is aiding Romania on implementation modelling for the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) revision and elaboration of a long-term strategy, which foresees setting up a dedicated structure under GSG composed of seconded experts from line ministries and agencies. It would be useful to draw lessons learned from such exercises, to integrate those in the modus operandi of the GSG and multiply the best practices at the centre of government and across the administration. A good example at the CoG includes Romania's processes to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in line with the OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development [[OECD/LEGAL/0381](#)] (OECD, 2019^[26]).

5.1.3. Arbitration and mediation when incoherence arises

Another means for the centre of government to promote policy coherence depends on its ability to play an arbiter or a mediator role when disagreements arise and sectoral agendas are incoherence between line ministries (OECD, 2020^[27]). Across the OECD, different models exist in this respect, mainly based on the constitutional/political role and set-up of the government and on the human resource capacities of the centre of government structures.

In Romania, the GSG resorts to procedural dialogue or a "soft" mediation role, referring disagreements between line ministries to arbitration at the political level. The strengthened centre of government, with the PMC carrying more political clout and more expert staff, may, however, warrant reviewing the current practice towards a more assertive mediation for policy coherence at the centre of government. High levels of expertise can help the centre of government obtain acceptance from the line ministries when arbitrating their actions. This can be described as the centre of government dilemma of "making" policy or "buying" it from a certain department, and brokerage for policy coherence is a key element of the former (Inter-American Development Bank, 2013^[28]). This mediation or arbitration role can take place in various arenas from preparatory sessions of the government meeting to the steps of the budgetary process (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1. Centre of government's involvement in the budgetary process for better policy coherence in Latvia

In Latvia, the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre (PKC) has an official role in the budgetary process, scrutinising new budgetary initiatives alongside the Ministry of Finance. The PKC evaluates such proposals according to a pre-established set of criteria (incl. on substantive conformity with national development planning documents and government programme) to determine their order of precedence, which is then submitted to the government for further deliberations on the annual budget and the multi-annual budgetary framework.

Source: Interview with representatives of Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs/Cross-sectoral Coordination Centre of Latvia, 16 May 2022.

5.2. Reinforcing line ministry capacity for policy development

The centre of government's ability to increase policy coherence and the quality of policy development in Romania needs to be supported by enhanced capacity at line ministry level with regards to policy development, programme management and strategic planning skills. The GSG, through the DCIP, provides methodological support to line ministries on ensuring policy proposals and draft normative acts follow the requirements outlined in previous sections, with regards to interinstitutional consultation and citizen consultation. However, the significant variance in the quality of submitted substantiation notes reflects a need for strengthening this support from the centre of government.

At present, line ministries have three primary resources at their disposal when elaborating policy proposals and draft normative acts:

- A wide range of templates in annex of Government Decisions, notably for the “presentation and motivation tool “(or substantiation notes, as well as for the submission of a draft to public consultation, preliminary inter-institutional consultation or at the end of the drafting process for inclusion in the preparatory meeting agenda. A template for a policy proposal form can also be found on the GSG’s website alongside methodological guidance.
- A list of guidelines and methodological manuals on the [GSG's website](#), most notably the Instructions for completion of policy proposal (2016).
- Regular trainings organised by the GSG as outlined in the various pertinent Government Decisions.

The GSG could envisage providing a single access point for line ministry staff to access all relevant resources for the elaboration of policy proposals and normative acts. Moreover, given the recent changes generated by Government Decision No. 443/2022, the GSG could also revise the existing instructions for completion of policy proposals. New-Zealand’s experience in developing a “Policy Methods Toolbox” is a particularly relevant example of how to centralise pertinent resources and populate it with a variety of support tools (see Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. The New-Zealand “Policy project” led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

In New Zealand, the Department of the Prime Minister and the Government is implementing a “Policy Project” for building a high performing policy system that supports and enables good government decision-making. This is done by building and maintaining an active policy planning community, developing, and promoting common standards, and working collectively with policy agencies in government to produce change at the system level.

The project provides a set of methodological support tools:

1. Policy improvement frameworks to help government agencies deliver policy advice. They promote a more joined-up and consistent approach to improving individual’s policy skills, organisational capability, and the quality of advice.
2. The Policy Methods Toolbox is a repository of policy development methods that helps policy practitioners identify and select the right approach for their policy initiative.
3. Case studies on the application of the above tools.

The project is also available to run workshops for teams and agencies on applying its tools and frameworks, the characteristics of good policy advice, and how to build policy capability and skills.

Source: (2021^[29]) “Policy Project”, The Department of the Prime Minister, and the Government of New Zealand.

Other proactive ways for the GSG to support line ministries upstream could be explored in Romania in the interest of coherence and quality in policy development. This could, for instance, build on the network of Public Policy Units (PPU) in line ministries to revitalise and further develop the RIA Community of Practice and facilitating exchange of best practices and lessons-learned processes on concrete initiatives. It has been noted that PPU practices have varied between ministries, and diverged in terms of resources, location, roles, and responsibilities. Their interaction with other units in line ministries, such as the specialized departments or the legal departments, has been characterised as irregular and contextual from one ministry to another. DCIP could contribute to enhancing the PPU’s capacities, access to common resources and data repositories, knowledge sharing and joint trainings. Various types of exchanges and networking contexts could be created, encouraged, and nurtured from the centre of government.

Public service capability across government is crucial for ensuring coherence in the way the government designs, implements, and improves policy processes in Romania. This capability is defined by enablers such as human resources, working procedures and practices, and communication – where further efforts are required. In defining the needs of the line ministries, establishing a meaningful dialogue to identify the most pressing needs is crucial (see Box 5.3).

Box 5.3. Centre of government support to enhance line ministries capabilities in Finland

The Prime Minister's Office of Finland has conducted workshops with line ministries to identify the needs across the public service and the potential support functions that could be provided by the Centre of Government to address those. Considering the findings of the workshops, the Prime Minister's Office of Finland has taken a more prominent role about line ministries, offering "key competence of seeing the big picture" and "challenging the line ministries to step out of siloes", in line with a T-shape model. Managing the Covid19 crisis in Finland was an example of such cooperation with a steer from the centre of government in leading systems-based change.

Source: Interview with a representative of the Prime Minister's Office of Finland, 2 May 2022.

5.3. Ensuring evidence-based and inclusive policymaking

5.3.1. Articulating the knowledge eco-system within and outside the government for a common and coherent evidence-base for policymakers

There is an extensive ecosystem of knowledge in Romania, including private sector and academic institutions. However, stakeholders interviewed throughout this project noted that an additional effort to invest in lasting and meaningful partnerships across sectors would allow the public sector to better leverage a diversity of knowledge and perspectives to develop impactful innovative solutions. There is a need for a shared knowledge base for policy development, and a role for the centre of government in establishing and facilitating it across the government. To this effect, planning and outsourcing of research and analysis for policy development should be better co-ordinated by the GSG, and the research and data obtained made freely available across public administration for synergies in their use for policy development. Participation and the government's relationship with civil society stakeholders is also discussed in greater detail in the forthcoming OECD Open Government Review and Civic Space Scan of Romania.

To develop evidence-informed policy development, further steps are needed in Romania to support researchers and policymakers to build and establish better connections between scientific knowledge and policymaking, in particular as regards developing cross-sectoral coherent systems-based policy solutions. This includes design and practical use of engagement frameworks and formats throughout the policy cycle, building capacity in researchers and policymakers in knowledge management for policy, and integrating the science-for-policy approach in public administration development vision and reforms. Romania's experiences with the Consultative Council on Sustainable Development, composed of a group of specialists from academia, research institutes, and civil society, can act as a basis to work on. There is also a significant role for the centre of government in driving this effort, as demonstrated by Finland's success in co-ordinating and driving the research agenda (see Box 5.4).

Box 5.4 Co-ordination of the research agenda driven by the centre of government in Finland

The Government working group for the co-ordination of research, foresight, and assessment activities (TEA Working Group) enables the Finnish ministries to cooperate and exchange information smoothly. It serves to strengthen horizontal oversight of research, foresight, and assessment activities, improve the information base for decision-making and develop new ways of disseminating information on research, foresight and assessment activities to decision-makers and society at large.

The term of the working group, appointed by the Prime Minister's Office, is for an indefinite period and includes representatives from all ministries. It is subject to an annual assessment by the Prime Minister's Office. It serves as the collective contracting body for the co-ordination of the analysis, assessment and research activities of the Government and its ministries.

The responsibilities of the Government working group for the co-ordination of research, foresight and assessment activities are to:

- give a proposal to the Prime Minister's Office, on an annual basis and through horizontal cooperation between the ministries, for [an analysis, assessment and research plan in support of the Government's decision-making procedures](#).
- guide the analysis, assessment, and research process of the Government in the respective ministries.
- co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the analysis, assessment and research plan and achievement of its objectives.
- take part in the dissemination of information and knowledge created in the respective ministries and administrative branches.
- prepare a joint proposal for the Government for a decision on the thematic areas and priorities for [strategic research](#) on an annual basis, after consultation with the Research and Innovation Council and based on an initiative of the Strategic Research Council;
- co-ordinate the drafting of a description of the context of operations and other foresight work as a basis for the futures reports of the ministries; and
- Facilitate the utilisation of analysis, foresight, assessment and research knowledge and public information repositories in political decision-making procedures.

The working group for the co-ordination of research, foresight and assessment activities liaises with other bodies that use, finance, and produce research, foresight, and assessment data.

Source : <https://tietokayttoon.fi/en/government-working-group-for-the-co-ordination-of-research-foresight-and-assessment-activities>.

In addition to the centre of government playing a more active role in co-ordinating with experts and defining a research agenda, the Strategy and Prognosis Commission of the GSG, that makes macro-economic projections, is by nature of its special status and resources also well placed to better contribute to policy coherence. The commission could build on its role by elaborating longer term foresight, approaching its studies from a multi-disciplinary and systems-based perspective, developing data-driven policy recommendations including on own initiative, providing impact assessment beyond traditional macroeconomic indicators. The commission may have taken a restrictive, technical interpretation of its mandate due to the complex political environment and strengthening the commission's independence in real terms may be key to unleashing its strategic potential. Creating partnerships with similar structures in

OECD countries for best practice exchange and knowledge transfer could assist the commission in upgrading its contribution to strategic planning and policy development.

The role of the Romanian Court of Accounts, Romania's supreme audit institution, has not yet fully been mobilised towards greater policy coherence, within its constitutional mandate. OECD experience identifies three opportunities for engagement of supreme audit institutions with the centre of government: (i) they can provide valuable information at a whole-of-government level for the centre's oversight and co-ordination functions, to enable quality policy formulation, policy co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation; (ii) with respect to budgeting issues, they can provide the centre of government with useful information about risks, implementation challenges and performance, which can feed into the budgeting process, thereby allowing the centre to guide budgeting decisions with helpful, objective information; (iii) the centre of government can itself become the subject of assessment by the supreme audit institution to ensure that it is well-positioned to guide governments in achieving strategic objectives and responding effectively to government-wide challenges. To this end, the supreme audit institution can examine the institution(s) at the centre to determine whether they are well structured, have effective processes and are contributing to overall good governance across the whole-of-government (OECD, 2016^[30]).

While the Romanian Court of Accounts is theoretically positioned to provide such assessments, currently it does not have a systematic approach to supporting or assessing the centre of government as it falls outside of its traditional remit. It also lacks the tools required for assessing policy coherence. However, an ongoing technical assistance project funded by the Netherlands currently aims to strengthen the performance audit capacity of the Court. When the Court of Accounts introduces performance auditing, its own-initiative performance audits of cross-sectoral policy areas can also help identify and evaluate fragmentation, overlap and duplication among programs and initiatives, as well as identify options to reduce or better manage the negative effects of such incoherence in support of the GSG and PMC.

Tools and reference frameworks for cross-sectoral auditing, in particular in the area of SDGs, have been developed and put in practice by the supreme audit institutions and specialised think-tanks in countries such as Brazil, Canada, Finland, UK and the USA (INTOSAI Working Group on Environmental Audit, 2021^[31]). These can serve as reference material for the Court of Accounts of Romania, enabling it to contribute to improved policy coherence and strategic focus of government programming. Extending the current working practices of the Court of Accounts in this way would, however, also require internal changes in its set-up and working practices (so far sector-specific only, without collegial consultations), as well as reskilling of its personnel.

Key recommendations on the role of the CoG in supporting policy coherence

Broaden the scope and capacity for the review of policy proposals to promote the quality and coherence of government action:

- Mandate the GSG to take on a broader and more assertive review function which goes beyond the legal merit of proposals such as coherence between policies, linkages to government priorities, and overall quality control.
- Expand the scope of reviews to ensure proposals are aligned with government priorities.
- Consider that the required analytical skills, sectoral profiles, and methodological sources are available within the PMC and GSG to implement the new tasks effectively, with clear distribution of tasks between the two structures.

- Envisage reviewing the format of accompanying documents such as substantiation notes in line with the broadened scope of assessment to guide the preparatory work carried out by line ministries.

Leverage Regulatory impact assessments (RIA) for coherent policy development:

- Reduce the number and complexity of legislative acts, the design and implementation of the RIA process may work to incentivise line ministries to consider alternative ways of addressing potential solutions to the identified problem, including non-regulatory alternatives, or a mix of instruments.
- Explore how to integrate impact assessments within the government programme and coalition agreement process e.g., through establishing goals or objectives where possible, instead of specific policy instruments, then utilising the RIA to choose the most appropriate instrument.

Strengthen the centre of government's arbitration function in the policy development process to promote policy coherence and alignment with government priorities:

- Build on the PMC's strong convening powers to review current practices and implement a stronger mediation role at the centre of government.
- Develop specific skills within the PMC to support arbitration for better coherence across and buy-in from line ministries.

Support Public Policy Units skills and capacity:

- Envisage providing a single access point for line ministry staff to access all relevant resources for the elaboration of policy proposals and normative acts.
- Revise the existing instructions for completion of policy proposals considering recent evolutions in the framework for policy development.
- Build on the network of Public Policy Units (PPU) in line ministries to revitalise and further develop the RIA Community of Practice and facilitating exchange of best practices and lessons-learned processes on concrete initiatives.
- Establish a meaningful dialogue with line ministries to identify their needs with regards to policy development capabilities.

Engage independent government structures and non-governmental stakeholders to develop a common knowledge-base and promote policy coherence:

- Let the centre of government take a more active role in the planning and outsourcing of research and analysis for policy development.
- Develop the role of the strategy and prognosis commission by elaborating longer term foresight, approaching its studies from a multi-disciplinary and systems-based perspective, developing data-driven policy recommendations.
- Encourage the Court of Accounts of Romania to learn from reference frameworks for cross-sectoral auditing developed in countries such as the US, Finland, and Canada.
- Guide and monitor the quality of stakeholder engagement as a driver of policy coherence at the level of the CoG.

6 Monitoring and information-sharing

6.1. Building on recent efforts for a more coherent monitoring framework

In OECD countries, the centre of government is increasingly focused on monitoring the implementation, impact, and alignment of government policies to ensure that strategic objectives are reached in an effective and co-ordinated manner (OECD, 2020^[27]). In Romania, more robust monitoring bolstered by more effective information and data sharing could provide a critical tool to further enhance co-ordination and policy coherence at the CoG.

Efforts to further engage in the monitoring of government policies and priorities are currently underway in Romania. A first example of this being the government decision No.427 adopted on 23 March 2022 that could serve as an important tool for improving the development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and overall effectiveness of government strategies as it approves the methodology for monitoring Romania's strategic planning. A second example would be the decision No. 319 of 16 May 2022, which has as its primary objective establishing the duties of the recently created Department for Integrated Evaluation and Monitoring of Public and European Funded Programs located within the PMC.

However, there is further room for improvement. The subsequent fact-finding missions indicate the need to foster an overall culture of data and monitoring that strengthens the impacts of the earlier identified areas of improvement and recommendations of this assessment. This is also recognised in the European Commission's most recent Romania Country Report that accompanies the Country Specific Recommendations of the European Semester (European Commission, 2022^[31]).

6.1.1. A monitoring framework characterised by duplication and fragmentation

Romania's monitoring framework is fragmented and characterised by a risk of duplication. There are several overlapping monitoring systems within the CoG with the involvement of different institutional actors:

- The Annual Working Plan of the Government (AWPG) is the primary mechanism used by the Department for Coordinating Policies and Implementing Projects (DCIP) located within the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) to ensure that policies are implemented by line ministries. It forms an electronic database established in 2014 where line ministries register their planned legislative initiatives and their foreseen adoption date. While the AWPG contributes towards predictability, the monitoring is mainly administrative with no attention towards policy outcomes. Although it continues to be applied and a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Committee for co-ordination of elaboration and implementation of the AWPG was created, the yearly assessment reports show that about one third of initiatives have been implemented by the ministries, showing a lack of compliance with the monitoring tool.
- Government decision No. 832 of 27 June 2022 on the establishment of the tasks, organisation and functioning of the Prime Minister's Chancellery (PMC) allocates the monitoring of the

implementation of public policies in relation to the Programme of Government and the Prime Minister's priorities to the PMC. While this includes a role for the PMC in the Annual Working Plan of the Government, interlocutors shared that a new monitoring framework will be created as well as part of this mandate.

- While the GSG has assisted in the creation of milestones and targets for Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) they are not involved in its monitoring process. Neither is the PMC, although the current government program is very much aligned with the RRP. The Ministry of Investments and European Projects, as the national co-ordinator on the RRP, does not have a dedicated framework but monitors the progress by making use of the European Commission's dashboard.
- Institutional Strategic Plans (ISPs) are supported by technical assistance from the World Bank. They aim to better link priorities with budgets and indicators. As such, they outline comprehensive frameworks for monitoring and evaluation, including specific indicators and targets, outputs, and impacts. However, practical experience in the implementation of these monitoring frameworks need to be further enhanced in the public administration.
- The Department for Sustainable Development located within the Prime Minister's Chancellery has created an innovative governance framework for sustainable development as exemplified by Romania receiving the 2021 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) prize for innovation and excellence in public service (United Nations, 2021^[32]). This area of work includes a monitoring framework that was co-designed with the National Institute of Statistics to report on the progress of dedicated sustainable development indicators and to monitor the overall implementation of the Romanian Sustainable Development Strategy (ROSDS). While promising, this framework needs to feed better into the overall policy development process and into the monitoring of government's priorities.

6.1.2. Streamlining the existing monitoring mechanism

This overview shows that monitoring efforts are underway and form an area of attention for the Romanian government. However, an overarching and adequate monitoring framework of Romania's policies and priorities is currently missing within the CoG. While a set of separate mechanisms - often with unclear institutional mandates - gives some indication on how the government is progressing along the path to achieve the stated policy goals - there appears to be ample room for improving its robustness to enhance coherence and co-ordination at the CoG.

Streamlining the existing monitoring efforts would have several concrete benefits:

- Avoid the costly (both in human and financial resources) duplication of efforts.
- Ease the reporting burden on the administration.
- Add value to data that is currently unexploited or undervalued.
- Enhance institutional clarity on which organisation is leading the reporting on what.

The momentum created by recent reforms updating the role of the Prime Minister's Chancellery (PMC) with the Government Decision No. 832 of 27 June 2022 can be used by feeding the PMC the various data streams that are currently in existence. This is specifically recognised in articles 3 and 6 of the government decision, that give the PMC a clear mandate for monitoring. Doing so would strengthen the political-technical interface by giving political attention to the often-technical information that is currently gathered. These efforts should be matched with a mechanism that sets up priorities and links these with the necessary financial investments. Finally, findings should feedback into the decision-making process to strengthen policy development.

A clear example of this need for streamlining are the current monitoring efforts of the NRRP and the government program – which are conducted separately. Furthermore, the monitoring tools for the NRRP are not systematically linked with the monitoring of national strategies by the GSG. Romanian interlocutors shared during the OECD fact-finding missions that line ministries encounter reporting fatigue as they report to either the inter-ministerial co-ordination committee of the NRRP or to the GSG, but not always towards both. Aligning these monitoring frameworks would therefore ensure proper tracking and verify the conformity of the NRRP measures and investments with the overall national priorities set by the government. This would in turn strongly contribute towards improving co-ordination and coherence at the CoG in Romania.

6.2. Enhancing the quality and use of monitoring information to enhance policy coherence

Bringing together the different information streams would be a first step towards the creation of a better performing monitoring framework. The overall quality of monitoring efforts in Romania would be further strengthened with increased capacities, targeted monitoring and performance indicators, areas for which the centre of government is well placed to take the lead.

6.2.1. Capacities to improve monitoring efforts

If the PMC wants to play its role vis-à-vis monitoring, they will need the necessary capacities, expertise, and resources. However, interlocutors during the OECD's fact-finding missions also identified that capacities for monitoring are lacking and uneven throughout the entire public administration due to an absence of resources, clear guidelines, and trainings.

The OECD identifies several interconnected skills that build capacities to engage with monitoring (OECD, 2020^[33]). A first step is for policymakers to recognise the place of evidence in the policymaking cycle while also keeping into account its limitations. Policymakers should also ensure critical thinking to assess the provenance, reliability, and appropriateness of evidence. A range of techniques can be used to challenge assumptions and biases. Familiarity with innovative techniques like behavioural insights, design thinking, policy labs, and foresight can further support the use of evidence in the policy cycle.

Furthermore, evidence-informed policymaking will also require strong engagement and communication skills from policymakers, including the ability to tailor the messages depending on the audience to engage and inspire a variety of stakeholders. As further discussed in the forthcoming OECD Open Government Review of Romania (OECD, Forthcoming^[18]) good knowledge of co-creation, co-production, and participatory methodologies will also have a positive impact. Finally evaluating the success of evidence-informed policymaking builds on the understanding that evaluation should be built into the policy cycle and should serve to inform and improve the use of evidence.

Apart from these interconnected skills at the individual level, building institutional capacities is also important. This requires a strategy for knowledge management, but also includes reflections on where evidence can enter the policy system and how strong or well-integrated evidence structures should be through the earlier discussed elements such as institutionalisation and routines.

6.2.2. Creating purposeful monitoring

The PMC and the leading monitoring units will have to give further thought on the elements and policies that should be monitored and how to track them. The OECD and the European Union have defined specific Public Administration Principles (OECD / SIGMA, 2023^[10]) that include dedicated advice on purposeful monitoring (OECD, 2017^[34]) (OECD, 2020^[27]) Romania could therefore:

- Set concrete objectives and targets in planning documents.

- Define a set of performance indicators (aligned with objectives) that monitor progress on the implementation of policies in planning documents.
- Ensure that performance indicators are measurable and relevant to the objectives and support accountability arrangements between institutions and responsible managers.
- Establish a data-collection system for all identified indicators that provides ministers and officials with timely and accurate data.
- Conduct progress reports at least every two years and ensure that they are publicly available and form a basis for discussion of implementation at political and top administrative levels.
- Put in place functioning central steering and strategy review processes. Involving civil society and the business community in the monitoring and review process by ensuring transparency and access to information and enable them to provide input on implementation performance and challenges.

6.2.3. Building clear indicators

Institutional interlocutors during OECD's fact-finding missions specifically indicated the unavailability of clear indicators among the major monitoring challenges in Romania. The questionnaire administered in the context of this project also revealed that Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are currently not used to monitor government priorities, the PMC will want to consider creating these based on the monitoring results and in accordance with Box 6.1.

Box 6.1 Defining and presenting indicators

Indicators can be categorised into three general categories according to what is measured: input indicators, output indicators, and outcome indicators. The three different indicators can all be part of a framework to monitor the effectiveness of policies, but it is important that each type of indicator is used to monitor only the aspects of a policy it is designed to monitor.

- **Input:** these indicators measure the resources spent on policies (money, staff, and time). Thus, they are measures of efforts.
- **Output:** these indicators measure how efficiently policies are executed. They are produced because policymakers expect them to contribute to desirable outcomes.
- **Outcome/Impact:** these indicators measure what results are achieved by the outputs. Outcome indicators are used to monitor the effectiveness of policies in achieving their objectives.

Indicators need to be accompanied by information that helps interpret their significance. That is why, regardless of their typology, all indicators should be presented in a way that provides enough information:

- **Description** of the indicator: name, unit of measurement, data source and formula.
- **Responsibility** for the indicator: institution, department, or authority responsible for gathering the data.
- **Frequency** of data collection and update of the indicator.
- **Baseline** that serves as a starting point to measure progress.
- **Target** or expected result.

Source: ((OECD, 2016_[35])).

6.3. High-quality data and digitalisation as integral elements of an effective monitoring strategy

Another distinct challenge in advancing Romania's policy implementation monitoring efforts is the lack of comprehensive quality data across the public administration. This qualitative data is highlighted as a foundational enabler for a data-driven public sector in the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies [[OECD/LEGAL/0406](#)] (OCDE, 2014^[36]). A high-quality national statistics system that allows disaggregation of data further is also identified as integral for any monitoring strategy, this with up-to-date databases and registers that allow for data-interoperability.

Interlocutors during the OECD's fact-finding missions identified the lack of data interoperability as also hindering effective monitoring efforts. The national interoperability framework and, more specifically, the adoption of the Government Cloud Platform with the Emergency Ordinance no.89 of 27 June 2022 offer the Romanian government opportunities to further engage in this regard. This will however require more awareness from decision-makers regarding the strategic possibilities and a bottom-up approach with institutions actively contributing to the interoperability framework.

According to the OECD Report the Path to Becoming a Data-Driven Public Sector (OECD, 2019^[37]) and the upcoming OECD Compendium of Practices: Steering from the Centre of Government (OECD, Forthcoming^[38]), data can be more easily collected, shared, and analysed through digitalisation. Smart and real time data offers decision-makers the opportunity of instant analysis and continuous feedback to verify the delivery and effectiveness of policies. The United Kingdom provides an example of this using digital platforms to group monitoring efforts in real time (see Box 6.2). By embracing further digitalisation, Romania can significantly alleviate the burdens associated with gathering and entering necessary monitoring information. Consequently, decision-makers and monitoring units can acquire enhanced insights into the policy process, enabling them to swiftly implement policy adjustments in the short term. This, in turn, will yield tangible benefits in the medium and long term.

Box 6.2 Next generation platforms for monitoring

The United Kingdom

In 2019, the CoG in the United Kingdom started moving towards real-time monitoring and performance tracking. Triggered by the preparation of Brexit and sped-up by the Covid-19 pandemic, the new internal delivery dashboard, called "Government Performance App" was extended to the top 200 and top 35 government priorities (Government Major Project Portfolio – GMPP). It provides an up-to-date situational picture and allows for early identification of performance risks.

The Government Performance App (GPA) is managed by the Cabinet Office and the HM Treasury and fed by the different departments leading the government priority projects. Consistently with standard operational procedures, at least each four weeks lead departments are requested to co-ordinate with "contributing" departments and agencies and regularly provide the CoG with information on progress against milestones and deliverables, and related schedules, on expenditures, and on major concerns. In relation to the whole project, each milestone, and expenditures, the [Senior Responsible Owners](#) (SROs) of projects in the GMPP also provide their own assessment (on track/off track/pending) and qualitative commentaries in relation to actions planned or taken, deviation from planned schedule, and budget/forecast variance.

The GPA ensures up-to-date information, which is used for drafting monthly delivery notes presenting the situation to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit has full access to information;

though focusing on a limited number of key policies, it can get a structured situational overview of progress on the overall Government Major Project Portfolio and draw general conclusions.

Source: Government of the United Kingdom, government Strategic Management Office

Key recommendations on monitoring and information-sharing

Streamline the existing set of monitoring efforts to create an adequate and overarching monitoring framework.

- Feed the various existing streams of monitoring data into the Prime Minister's Chancellery by making use of the momentum created by the updated role of the Chancellery.
- In doing so support a more effective political-technical interface by ensuring the Prime Minister's Chancellery uses the technical evidence base to support political priorities as outlined in the government programme.
- Create a mechanism that sets up priorities and links these with agreed financial investments.
- Using the evidence base offered by monitoring data to strengthen the decision-making process.

Strengthen the overall quality of the monitoring efforts to create a performing monitoring framework.

- Build the required capacities, skills, and resources for monitoring key policy priorities within the Prime Minister's Chancellery and throughout the wider public administration both at individual and institutional level.
- Reflect on the entry-points for evidence within the policy system (problem identification, policy formulation and design, implementation, evaluation) to ensure evidence-based policy development and decision-making.
- Strengthen evidence structures through institutionalisation and data routines.
- Review the elements and policies that should be monitored and how to track them by making use of the Public Administration Principles developed by SIGMA.
- Build clear and effective Key Performance Indicators in line with OECD guidance and recommendations.

Foster information-sharing by making use of digital tools to create smart and interoperable data.

- Raise awareness from decision-makers and technical experts regarding the work and possibilities of the national interoperability framework.
- Further the creation of the Government Cloud Platform.
- Invest in the development of smart and real time data to allow instant analysis and continuous feedback at the centre of government.
- Lower the burden of gathering and entering monitoring information by continuing digitalisation efforts.

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