# Government at a Glance 2023
Country Notes

Australia

Trust and satisfaction with public services

Trust in public institutions and satisfaction with public services are important yardsticks of the quality of public governance. They reflect people's perceptions of government competence in designing and delivering policies and services, and expectations on the behaviour of public institutions and their representatives. Although high trust in public institutions is not a necessary outcome of democratic governance, trust and satisfaction with public services facilitate effective governance, as they correlate with high rates of compliance with policies, participation in public life and social cohesion.

Satisfaction with public services in Australia is close to OECD averages. More than two-thirds of Australians reported being satisfied with the health care system (71%) and the education system (67%). A majority is satisfied with the judiciary system (55%) and with administrative services (53%). The latter is 10 percentage points below the OECD average (63%).

Figure 1. Satisfaction with public services, 2022

% of population, 2022 or latest available year
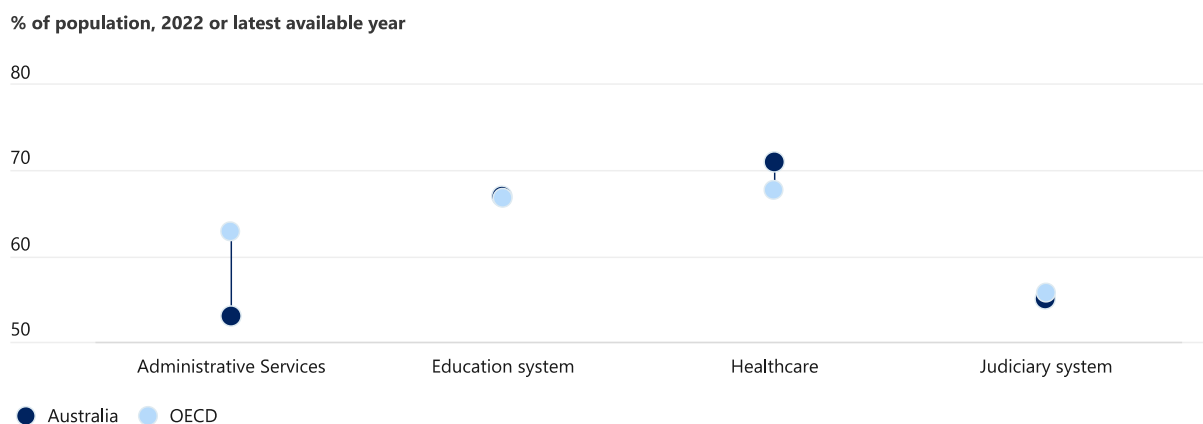
Trust in public institutions in Australia was slightly below the OECD averages in 2021. The share of Australians indicating high or moderately high trust in national government was 38%, 43% in local government, 46% in the civil service, and 38% in the parliament. These are all slightly lower than the corresponding average values across 22 OECD countries.

Figure 2. Trust in public institutions, 2021

% of population reporting high or moderately high trust in various public institutions, Australia, 2021
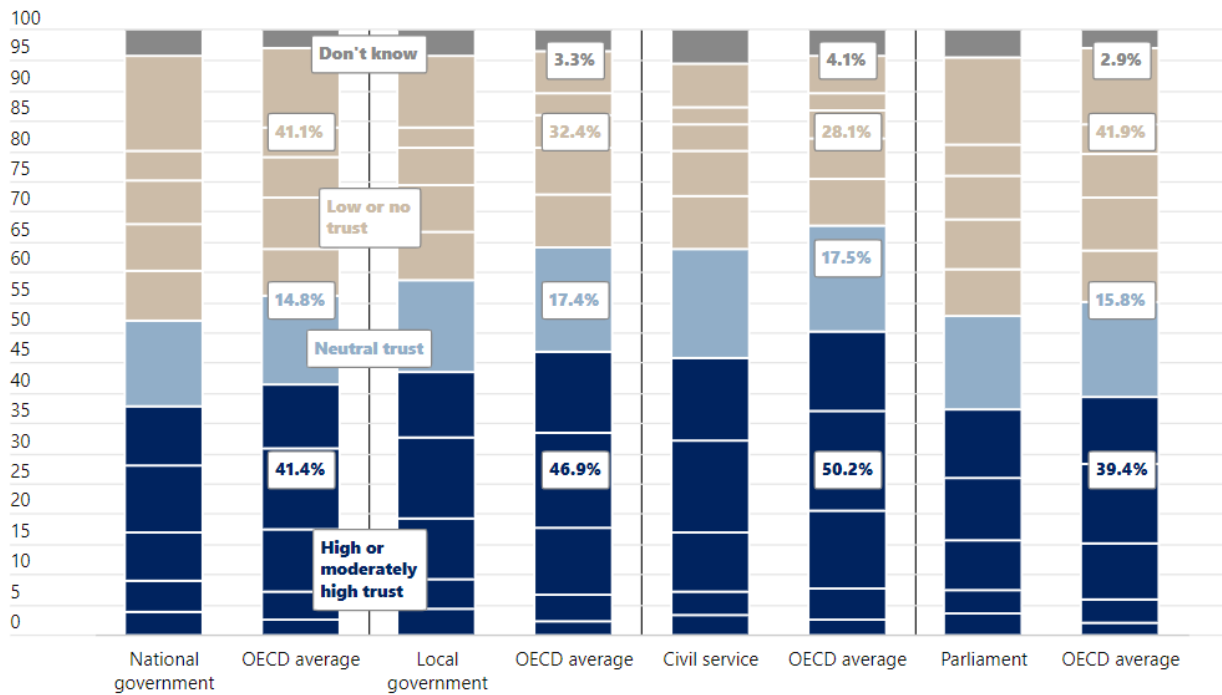

Achieving results with good governance practices

In an age of multiple crises, governments need to adopt more advanced practices to build trust in public institutions and enhance democratic resilience. Actions include building on democratic strengths, such as enhancing citizen and stakeholder engagement in decision making; reinforcing key competences to handle crises, such as budgeting and public financial management processes to address the green and digital transitions; and protecting against threats to democratic values, such as maintaining effective public integrity rules and promoting ethical use of artificial intelligence.

Financial contributions allow individuals and entities to support political candidates and parties. However, political finance needs to be adequately regulated to reduce risks of undue influence and policy capture.

Australia does not impose any type of bans or registering obligations on financial contributions to political campaign from domestic or foreign enterprises, foreign states, or anonymous donors.

Figure 3. Regulation to ban financing political parties and election campaigns, 2022

Inner ring: Ban on anonymous donations, and all contributions made to political parties and/or candidates must be registered and reported.
Middle ring: Ban on contributions from publicly owned enterprises.
Outer ring: Ban on contributions from foreign states or foreign enterprises.

Strengthening information integrity has become particularly complex in the digital age. While digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) provide enormous opportunities, including in expanding and protecting the exercise of some democratic rights and freedoms, their use also brings challenges for governments such as ensuring that they enhance people's willingness and ability to engage constructively in democratic life and that they benefit society as a whole.

Australia has policy initiatives - such as guidelines, standards, or principles - in place to ensure the ethical use of AI.

Figure 4. Mechanisms used to ensure the ethical use of artificial intelligence in government, 2022

No mechanisms in place: 7%
Guidelines/principles: 40%
Formal requirements: 53%
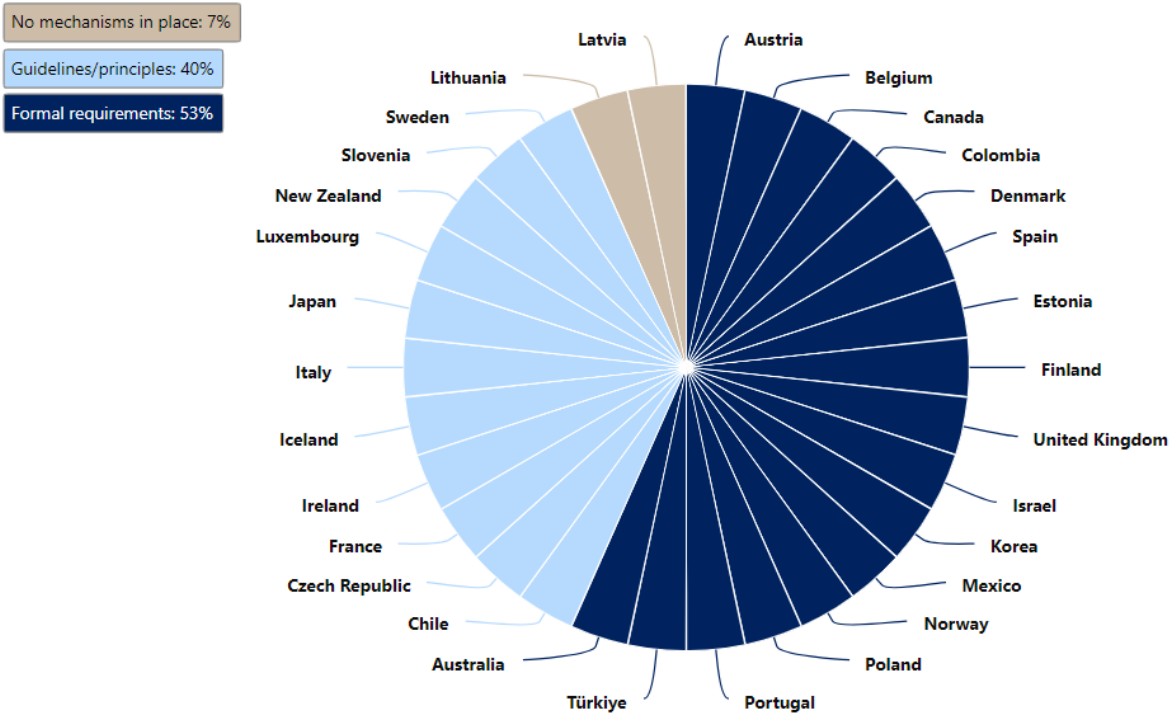
What resources public institutions use and how they are managed

After stark deterioration due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which required emergency measures and direct support mechanisms to business and people, public finances show positive signs, but the recovery remains fragile. The fiscal balance is the difference between a government's revenues and its expenditures in a year. When the government spends more than it collects, it has a fiscal deficit. When it spends less, it has a fiscal surplus.

In 2021, Australia had a fiscal deficit of -4.3% of GDP, which was lower than the average across OECD countries (-7.5%). It also had a smaller debt than the OECD average (60.7% of GDP against 120.8%). Following a general trend in OECD countries, the debt rate diminished to 53.8% in 2022.

Figure 5. General government fiscal balance as a percentage of GDP

in %

■ Australia   ■ OECD
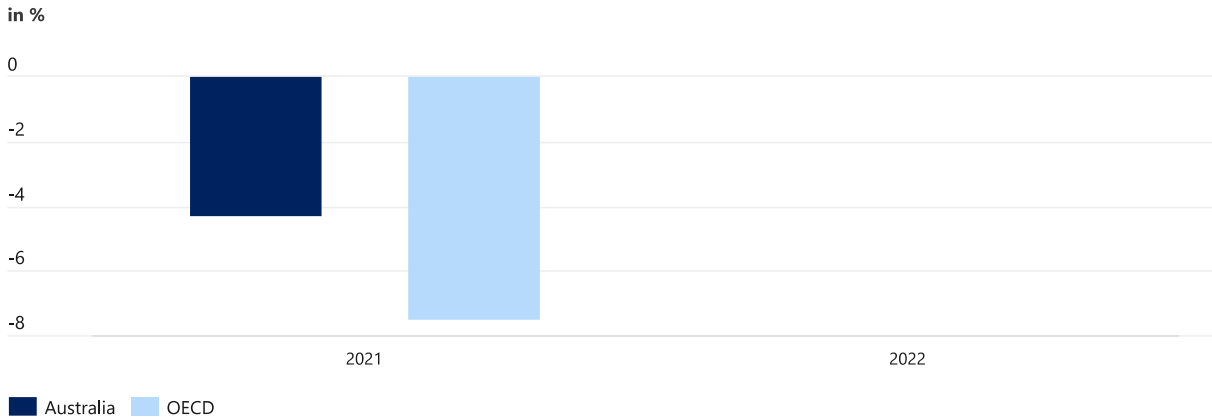
Public investment can enhance productivity and economic growth and help implement long-term policies, such as green energy infrastructure to support action on climate change. In turn, governments procure large amounts of goods, services and works to help them implement policies and deliver public services.

Australia spent 17.9% of its GDP on procurement in 2021, which is larger than the average across OECD countries (12.9%). In 2021, Australia's public investment as share of GDP (4.0%) was slightly higher than the OECD average (3.4%).
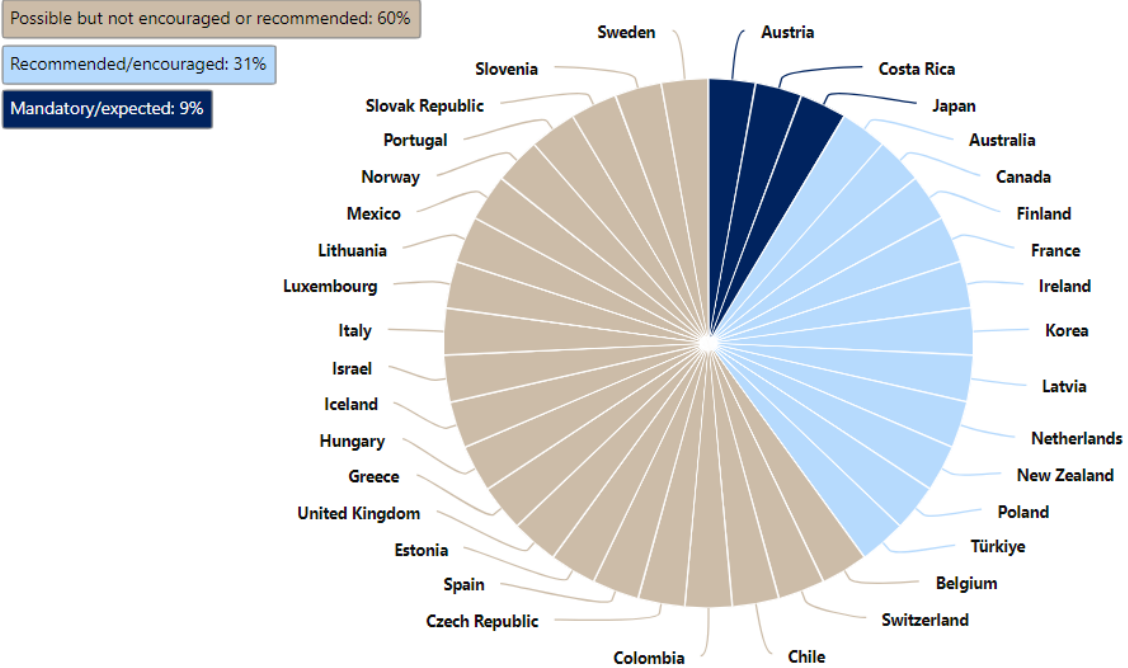
Figure 6. Government procurement spending as a share of GDP
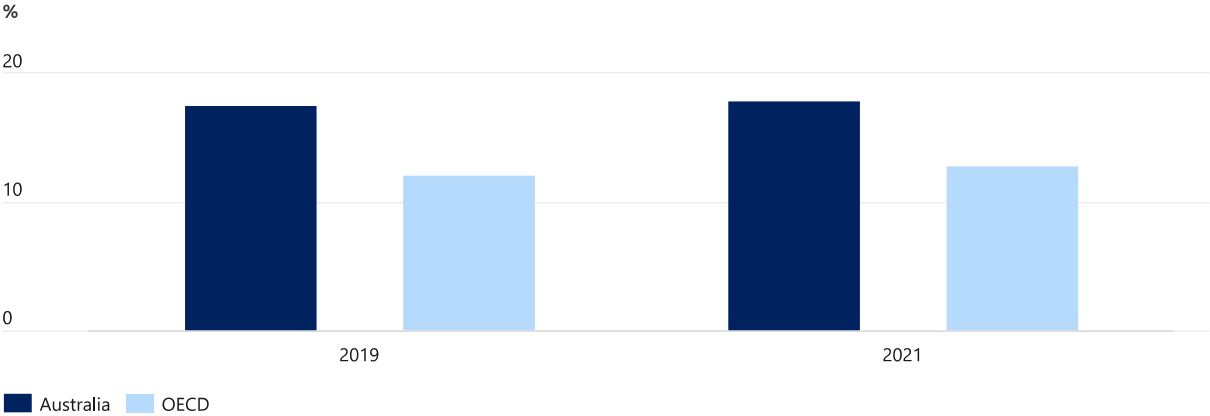
Governments use different mechanisms to harness and develop the capacity of their workforce. For example, internal mobility in public administrations helps to pool human resources across government and attract and retain civil servants.

In Australia, internal mobility of civil servant is recommended and encouraged. In addition, internal mobility is also recommended and encouraged for senior-level civil servants. Australia has implemented the practice of developing learning plans for public employees.

Figure 7. Mobility of civil servants across public administrations in central government, 2022

Possible but not encouraged or recommended: 60%

Recommended/encouraged: 31%

Mandatory/expected: 9%

Sweden, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Portugal, Norway, Mexico, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Italy, Israel, Iceland, Hungary, Greece, United Kingdom, Estonia, Spain, Czech Republic, Colombia, Chile, Switzerland, Belgium, Türkiye, Poland, New Zealand, Netherlands, Latvia, Korea, Ireland, France, Finland, Canada, Australia, Japan, Costa Rica, Austria

Equal representation of women and men in the public sector is a key indicator of progress towards gender equality, diversity and better representation. In 2020, a majority of employees in the public sector in OECD countries were women (58.9%), with large differences among countries. However, women are often under-represented in managerial positions.

With 44% of ministerial positions held by women, Australia performs better than the OECD average (36%), albeit still below gender parity.

Young people are under-represented in public and political life across the OECD, with the risk that their voice and interests are not sufficiently taken in consideration in policymaking.

The average age of cabinet members in Australia is 54 years, 1 year older than the OECD average (53 years).

Figure 8. Average age of cabinet members, 2018 and 2022

In years

- Australia
- OECD
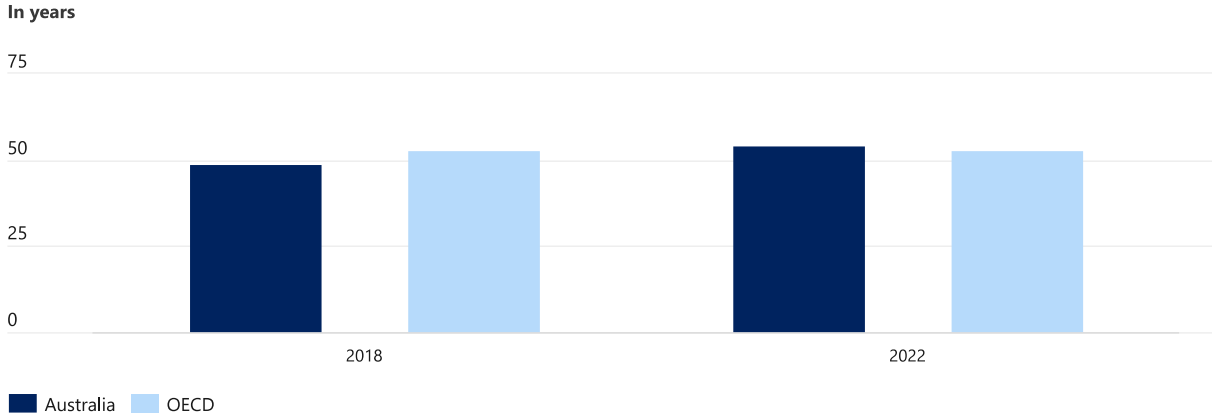
About the report

Government at a Glance presents the most up-to-date internationally comparable data on how public administrations function and perform in OECD countries, accession countries, and other major economies. Country factsheets highlight key indicators against the OECD average. Data included in the factsheets are derived from the new Government at a Glance data portal, which allows for a more user-friendly and interactive way of comparing countries with each other and the OECD average. The factsheets do not provide a comprehensive picture of public governance performance, but rather a snapshot of key indicators in the three sections of the publication: a) trust and satisfaction with public services; b) achieving results with good governance practices and c) what resources public institutions use and how they are managed.

Figure notes

People who express satisfaction with public services: for the judiciary and the courts the data reflect the proportion of citizens who express having confidence in the institution. Data on satisfaction with administrative services come from the OECD 2021 Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. Data on satisfaction with the education and health systems and confidence in the judiciary are from the Gallup World Poll.

Data on public finance and economics are derived from the System of National Accounts (SNA) and were extracted on 5 May 2023.

Fiscal balance as reported in SNA framework, also referred to as net lending (+) or net borrowing (-) of government, is calculated as total government revenues minus total government expenditures.

Government gross debt is reported according to the SNA definition, which differs from the definition applied under the Maastricht Treaty. It is defined as all liabilities that require payment or payments of interest or principal by the debtor to the creditor at a date or dates in the future. All debt instruments are liabilities, but some liabilities such as shares, equity and financial derivatives are not debt.

Public employment refers to employment in the general government as defined in the System of National Accounts (SNA). Data on employment in general government were extracted on 17 April 2023.

Data on employment in general government for Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Türkiye and the United States are from the International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT.

Data show women as a share of cabinet members who head ministries as of 1 January 2023 (excluding ministers without portfolios).

The data on age of cabinet members reflects the situation as of 20 December 2022.

OECD average refers to the unweighted average with the exception of public finance indicators.

For more information see
www.oecd.org/governance/government-at-a-glance.htm