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ENSURING POLICY COHERENCE
THROUGH BETTER POLICY
DEVELOPMENT, CO-ORDINATION
AND STAKEHOLDER
PARTICIPATION IN **ROMANIA**

OECD PUBLIC GOVERNANCE
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Ensuring policy coherence through better policy development, co-ordination and stakeholder participation in Romania

OECD Public Governance Policy Papers

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Abstract

Policy coherence relies on the development of strategic plans, the availability and use of relevant evidence and data, the right set of skills across the public administration, political commitment, and leadership. Effective policy coherence cannot be achieved without good co-ordination, which relies on sound co-ordination mechanisms, such as interministerial committees or councils, as well as information-sharing tools. The legitimacy and coherence of public policy is also grounded in the support that a government has from stakeholders and citizens. This policy paper offers a tailored policy framework for Romania that builds further on the other outputs of the TSI project “Enhancing Policy Coherence, Transparency, and Co-ordination at the Centre of Government in Romania”. It includes tailored and actionable tools for improving policy coherence across government by strengthening policy development, co-ordination, and stakeholder participation.

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Executive Summary Table: pillars, challenges, and tools for policy coherence in Romania

Pillars	Challenges	Tools
Policy development	Absence of clear hierarchy and alignment between strategic documents	Provide detailed guidance, templates, or manuals for the elaboration of strategies from the centre of government (CoG)
		Streamline the taxonomy of strategic documents
	External factors and urgency frequently take place over the formal strategic planning process	Improve the link between strategic planning and budgeting
		Up-skill civil servants across the public administration
	Lack of vertical co-ordination mechanisms	Create a dedicated and permanent vertical co-ordination structure
	Lack of partnerships between the public sector and academia in producing evidence	Strengthen the CoG's leading role in the co-ordination, planning and outsourcing of research and analysis
		Develop policy advisory bodies such as Climate Change and Sustainable Development Councils
	Low data quality and data-interoperability	Disaggregate further data and update databases to enhance interoperability
	Current monitoring framework is fragmented	Clearly define the policies that should be monitored, the lead actor for monitoring and the tools for tracking them
		Higher engagement of the Romanian Court of Accounts with the CoG in policy development
Build capacities to enhance monitoring by developing interconnected skills across government		
Employment and quality of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is uneven, and many RIAs remain superficial	Develop green and budgeting for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	
General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) plays a "soft" mediation role in case of disagreements between line ministries	Up-skill staff at the CoG to obtain acceptance from line ministries and move towards a more assertive role	
Co-ordination	Interministerial committees overlap in scope, and their composition, frequency and functions vary widely across bodies	Standardise and streamline committees
	Alternative government co-ordination	Deploy networks and peer-learning opportunities, such as Sustainable

Pillars	Challenges	Tools
	mechanisms are not sufficiently used	Development Hubs Improve bilateral co-ordination between line ministries with Interministerial Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) Link the budget to strategic plans by making use of performance-oriented budgeting
	Lack of effective information-sharing tools	Develop a dedicated information-sharing system, web-portal or online platform for strategic planning
Citizen and stakeholder engagement	Citizen and stakeholder participation score lower on average than across OECD countries	Promote e-democracy through the development of online consultations
	Civic participation appears to be uneven, with a strong focus on organised stakeholders	Reinforce the enabling environment with citizens' assemblies, juries, panels, and other deliberative processes
	Little co-operation and cross-learning across government	Strengthen further open government efforts
	Low engagement with subnational actors	Strengthen vertical co-ordination

1 Introduction: towards improved policy development, co-ordination, and public engagement in support of policy coherence

Governments operate in an increasingly volatile environment, characterised by disruptive crises and cross-cutting policy challenges, such as climate change and the COVID-19 crisis. This requires better policy development, co-ordination, implementation, and evaluation to address crises more effectively. Government action must be coherent and agile, based on evidence and effective policy development processes, and supported by a highly skilled public administration. In this context, the centre of government (CoG) is a key actor for dealing with trade-offs, both across policy areas and policy responses to short-term needs and long-term priorities.

Policy coherence is therefore a key enabler for effective policymaking. Policy coherence, understood as the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives, allows governments to reach whole-of-government goals. In particular, it allows the design, implementation and monitoring of horizontal priorities, such as sustainable development. Achieving policy coherence entails fostering synergies across economic, social, and environmental policy areas; identifying trade-offs and reconciling domestic and international objectives; and addressing the spillover effects on other countries and on future generations [[OECD/LEGAL/0381](#)] (OECD, 2021^[1]).

This policy framework focuses on strengthening the pillars of policy coherence in Romania: policy development, co-ordination, transboundary impacts, and stakeholder participation. Policy coherence relies on the development of strategic plans, the availability and use of relevant evidence and data, the right set of skills across the public administration, political commitment, and leadership. However, effective policy coherence cannot be achieved without good co-ordination, which relies on sound co-ordination mechanisms, such as interministerial committees or councils, as well as information-sharing tools. The legitimacy and coherence of public policy is also grounded in the support that a government has from stakeholders and citizens. The OECD's analysis relied on responses to a detailed questionnaire by the centre of government, as well as interviews held with key stakeholders and governmental interlocutors with the involvement of expert peers from Finland, Iceland, Latvia, and Lithuania. This report embeds the main challenges, findings, and country practices gathered across the TSI project "Enhancing Policy Coherence, Transparency, and Co-ordination at the Centre of Government in Romania" by building on the main findings and challenges identified in outputs 1 (civic space scan of Romania (OECD, 2023^[2])), 2 (coherence and co-ordination at the CoG in Romania (OECD, 2023^[3])) and 3 (co-ordination of green policies at the CoG in Romania (OECD, 2023^[4])) and includes tailored and actionable tools for improving policy coherence across government in Romania.

The main findings show that Romania has taken the right steps towards greater policy coherence in policymaking to respond to contemporary challenges. At the time of the analysis, the country has developed several whole-of-government and cross-cutting strategies setting up a well-developed strategic framework for policy development, it has relied on the implementation of interministerial committees to deal with growing cross-sectoral issues and has protected civic freedoms in its legal framework. However, there is no overarching binding framework for government action and the strategic planning apparatus would benefit from providing a more cohesive narrative around strategic priorities due to a fragmented strategic framework; inter-ministerial committees often overlap in scope, and their composition, frequency and functions vary widely across bodies; and citizen and stakeholder participation is lower than across OECD countries on average and civic participation appears to be uneven. To respond to these challenges, the government has implemented several initiatives since 2022 under the impetus of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): Government Decision No. 379 establishing the Methodology of development, implementation, evaluation and updating of government strategies; Government Decision No.427 outlining a new methodology for the preparation and implementation of budgetary programmes; and efforts have been taken to improve government cloud and data interoperability within the framework of the NRRP, as well as on developing open data with the transposition of the EU Directive on open data and re-use of public sector information.

However, recent changes in Romania's institutional landscape and regulations are partly driven by external factors such as the NRRP. While these regulations have strengthened its strategic planning architecture, several challenges persist. First, the NRRP is at times perceived by project interlocutors as somewhat of a technocratic exercise with limited information on how proposals from public consultations were incorporated. Second, with the Recovery and Resilience Fund being a temporary and exceptional EU instrument, the government should ensure that the national planning processes and structures continue to function effectively once it comes to an end.

This policy framework builds further on the separate outputs delivered in the TSI project "Enhancing Policy Coherence, Transparency, and Co-ordination at the Centre of Government in Romania" and is structured in the following way: Chapter 2 discusses good policy development as a cornerstone of policy coherence looking at the role of strategic planning, evidence, and skills. Chapter 3 covers the role of co-ordination in policy coherence. Chapter 4 looks at the role of citizen and stakeholder participation in policy coherence.

The evidence and data collected for this Review contributes to the OECD's broader programme of work on effective, innovative, fit-for-the-future and digitally enabled government and citizen-centred services, and on reinforcing trust in government.

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2 Good policy development as a cornerstone of policy coherence

A clear vision is central for policy coherence across government. It allows governments to develop strategic priorities under a strategic framework to deal both with short-term needs and long-term priorities. A strategic framework can be understood as the set of strategic documents and statements setting the course for government action. 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.

Across OECD countries, the centre of government (CoG) plays a key role in ensuring the alignment of policies both across sectors and timeframes. In this regard, the CoG is key for enhancing policy coherence by steering strategic goals, avoiding overlaps across bodies, collecting and sharing evidence across government or identifying tools to support co-ordination mechanisms. In Romania, the main institutions at the CoG are the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) and the Prime Minister's Chancellery (PMC) (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. The centre of government (CoG) in Romania

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. While 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 were transferred to the GSG. The PMC was then re-established as a structure without legal personality, limiting its capabilities, and composed primarily of scientific advisors and sectoral experts.

In 2021 however, the Prime Minister's Chancellery was established as a 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. The latest reorganisation of the Romanian CoG 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.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[3]).

Romania has pursued policy development through various strategies and governmental programs but at the time of the analysis lacked an overarching binding framework. Policy development relies on the availability and use of relevant evidence and data, legitimacy from the public, and the right set of skills and capabilities in the public administration including technical skills as well as expertise in project management and political achievability (OECD, 2023^[5]). The government has implemented multiple whole-of-government and cross-cutting strategies, each led by different entities. However, these strategies are not hierarchised or fully aligned. The strategic planning apparatus operates on different time horizons. In the long term, it is guided by the Romania Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) 2030 and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The medium-term planning is shaped by the Medium-term Government Programme (Decision No. 42 of November 25, 2021), the National Reform Programme, the Fiscal-budgetary strategy for the period 2022-2024, and Nationally Determined Contributions. The short-term planning is influenced by the Annual Government Work-Plan (Decision No. 414 of 2013) and the Annual State Budget Law (Law No. 317/2021 of 28 December 2021). Different bodies are responsible for coordinating these strategies, such as the Prime Minister Chancellery, the General Secretariat of Government, the Ministry of EU Projects and Investment, and the Department for Sustainable Development within the Prime Minister Chancellery.

Collectively, these documents provide a strategic framework for policy direction in Romania. However, there is currently no unified vision for policy development in the country. Despite the implementation of various whole-of-government and cross-cutting strategies, they are generally not hierarchised or aligned. Decision-making in Romania often prioritises urgency and political opportunities over the formal strategic planning process, resulting in a lack of predictability. The Romania Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted in 2018, is the only document that focuses on long-term goals, defined as a period exceeding five years. Linking policy planning and development to the NSDS could strengthen the alignment of policies toward commonly agreed objectives.

Nonetheless, despite the absence of effective prioritisation in policymaking, the NRRP that goes until 2026 has had weight in steering government action in Romania. 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^[6]).

Transboundary impacts refer to the effects of policies that cross national borders, either intentionally or unintentionally. According to the OECD, transboundary impacts are important for policy coherence because they can have significant economic, social, and environmental consequences that affect other countries and regions. Policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) requires governments to consider the transboundary dimension of their policies and work together with other countries to address common challenges. This involves identifying potential spill over effects and trade-offs across different dimensions of sustainable development and taking steps to mitigate negative impacts while maximising positive ones.

Strengthening strategic planning for enhanced policy coherence

Challenges

In Romania, at the time of the analysis, the strategic planning apparatus struggled to provide a cohesive narrative around strategic priorities due to a fragmented and muddled strategic framework. Indeed, multiple whole-of-government and cross-cutting strategies, all led by different government institutions, have strived to become the overarching binding framework for the government apparatus. The absence of a clear hierarchy between strategic documents, and their low alignment, compromised the understanding of policy trade-offs needed to achieve high-level policy goals.

Despite these challenges, the strategic framework has been significantly improved in recent years strengthening the link between the budget and government priorities. 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. This Government Decision 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. Under the impetus of the NRRP, Government Decision No. 427 of April 6, 2022, outlines a well a new methodology for the preparation and implementation of budgetary programmes which will have been applied from the start of budget year 2023. 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. However, external factors, urgency, and political opportunities frequently take precedence over the formal strategic planning process, leading to less predictable decision-making. Recent evidence suggests that the Romanian government has had difficulty completing the Annual Government Work Plan (AGWP) both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. 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.

The government faces several challenges in ensuring vertical coherence, particularly in steering climate action. The effectiveness of climate action hinges in part on the government's ability to involve and mobilise the local government, as municipalities and subnational authorities are at the forefront of implementation to mitigate and adapt to climate change. However, they are often left to act alone, with their full potential remaining underused. Co-ordination arrangements with the local government are sub-optimal, with the existing co-ordination mechanisms not systematically including representatives of local governments. As such, the government faces 3 challenges in involving the local government: a lack of vertical co-ordination mechanisms, limited guidance to design and implement local initiatives, and insufficient fiscal incentives.

Additionally, policy development in Romania takes place largely at the ministry level, while the General Secretariat of the Government is centred on administrative and legal support for policymaking. This translates to a limited role of the CoG in the quality control of policy design. To support cross-sectoral policy development and policy coherence across government, the GSG's review function could be extended to policy or regulatory matters. Beyond technical oversight, for coherent government action it is key that the CoG guarantees that policy initiatives are aligned with the Government Programme and in line with its priorities as well as the budget. Across OECD countries, centres of government play a key role in guaranteeing coherence and alignment of policies with whole-of-government priorities. Institutions at the CoG can establish regulatory criteria, lead cross-cutting policy issues and mediate disagreements between line ministries to contribute to the effective development of whole-of-government approaches across government.

Moreover, in theory policy initiatives cannot enter the legislative process without regulatory impact assessments (RIA) approval from the GSG. However, in practice stakeholders interviewed for this project stated that the employment and quality of RIA is uneven, and many RIAs remain superficial. Currently, the GSG is developing new methodologies for conducting RIAs aiming to improve the quality and coherence of regulations. 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 Decision has notably updated the ex-ante evaluation methodology for draft regulations, with a clear focus on innovation and “digital by default”.

Finally, the GSG currently plays a “soft” mediation role in case of disagreements between line ministries. It does not play a clear arbiter or mediator role when disagreements arise between sectoral agendas of line ministries.

Tools

At the time of the analysis, the Centre of Government (CoG) was not **providing detailed guidance or templates** for the elaboration of sectoral or cross-sectoral strategies to enhance the quality of strategic planning across the administration. This has been partly considered by GC 379/2022 which established the Methodology of development, implementation, evaluation and updating of government strategies. Currently, the guidance to line ministries is framed around few manuals: 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; and methodology for developing Institutional Strategic Plans. Further developing additional guidance could strengthen ownership over the planning process across the administration. Specifically, guidance could include manuals, but also detailed templates and methodological resources to streamline and articulate the procedure for creating strategic documents with the aim of increasing their quality and interconnectedness.

Ongoing work by the Department for Sustainable Development to develop *Action Fiches* templates for the implementation of Romania’s National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of its NSDS aims at guiding line ministries to map and align sectoral policies towards 2030. A second phase will explore how the new set of National Sustainable Development Indicators (NSDIs) can support the tracking of correlation between sectoral strategies with a view to optimise synergies and avoid negative trade-offs in policymaking. These indicators have been used as well by line ministries in the elaborations of their Institutional Strategic Plans (ISPs). Italy has developed a series of tools that could support this exercise (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2. Innovative tools help strengthening policy coherence in Italy

The *Coherence Matrix* is a living document compiling the linkages across existing policies' objectives, targets and indicators relevant for Italy's long-term sustainability objectives, as outlined in its NSDS. The matrix is intended as a tool for analysing how different sectoral policies are contributing to Italy's Strategic Choices for sustainable development and for highlighting common key policy indicators for each Strategic Choice. The matrix is applied during policy formulation, whereby each ministry, region, or local authority will use it as a basis of information for filling in the *Coherence Fiche* for new investments and policies; and during ex ante and ex post assessments.

The *Coherence Fiche* is a qualitative evaluation tool, which shows the contribution of a specific policy proposal in relation to the indicators of the NSDS objectives and targets. It is used to identify potential trade-offs, synergies and transboundary impacts of the proposed policy with other policies identified in the Coherence Matrix. The estimated costs associated to implementing the policy proposal are tagged against their positive or negative contributions to the NSDS. This initiates a process to sketch potential mitigation strategies or cross-sectoral actions to balance interactions with existing policies.

The foreseen *Sustainability Dashboard* will generate and constantly update an integrated picture of how Italy is progressing towards the implementation of the NSDS. The Sustainability Dashboard indicators will derive from the Coherence Matrices. It will improve the government's capacity to look across indicator frameworks and to assess positive and negative interactions of sectoral policies.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[7]).

Guidance from the CoG could be complemented by trainings for line ministries to ensure they have the analytical skills to implement effectively whole-of-government strategies. In the context of NRRP, yearly training sessions on strategic planning, budgeting and performance indicators are provided as well by the World Bank.

The government could also focus on **up-skilling civil servants** across the public administration. Skills and capabilities across the civil service are key for effective policy development. Effective policy development cannot be achieved without the right set of skills and capabilities across the civil service. These include technical skills in the use of evidence and data or the specific issue at hand but also know-how to bring in project management experience and political achievability.

In addition, the unclear hierarchy between strategic documents, and their low alignment, could be addressed by streamlining the **taxonomy of strategic documents**. Currently, the taxonomy of strategic documents outlined in the Government Decision identifies sectoral strategies, intersectoral strategies, and action plans. A more complete taxonomy could also integrate whole-of-government strategic plans that constitute the country's strategic framework helping to clarify the hierarchy and relationship between strategic documents. The OECD/SIGMA Principles of Public Administration suggest establishing a hierarchy of key government planning documents in the legal framework and enshrining strategic plans in the legal framework to improve policy coherence (OECD / SIGMA, 2023^[8]). For example, Latvia has released a law on *The Development Planning System* that outlines development planning principles and the hierarchy among strategic plans (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. Hierarchy and handbook of strategic documents in Latvia

The State Chancellery of Latvia performs the functions of long-term development planning, development of public administration and cross-sectoral co-ordination to support strategic decision making and alignment in the country.

Latvia released a law on *The Development Planning System* in 2009 that outlines development planning principles, types of planning documents, their hierarchy, and relations, as well as allocates responsibilities to institutions in the planning process. A policy making handbook was prepared as well with guidelines, principles and examples for strategic units and contributors of strategies across the government. In addition, all documents are published in the policy planning database Polsis.mk.

The strategic framework is composed by a long-term plan up to 25 years (Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia 2030); medium-term plans up to 7 years (National Development Plan 2027; Sectoral Policy Guidelines; and Action Plans); and short-term ones up to 3 years (Plans) (Figure 2.1).

The Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia 2030 is hierarchically the highest national-level, long-term planning document. It enumerates the main tasks of the state and society to achieve balanced and sustainable development. It outlines 7 development priorities (development of culture space, investment in human capital, change of paradigm in education, innovative and eco-efficient economy, nature as future capital, perspective of spatial development, innovative government and public participation), 7 strategic indicators (population growth, GINI coefficient, GDP per capita, ecological footprint, Human Development Index, Global Competitiveness Index, and dispersion of regional GDP per capita), 11 objectives, 11 development directions, 42 areas of action and 27 performance indicators.

Figure 2.1. The Latvian Planning System



Source: (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre of the Republic of Latvia, 2020^[9]).

Moreover, when strategies are disconnected from the budget, they set out a vision without the practical means for achieving them. Hence, the **budgetary framework** plays a key role for feasible priorities. In Romania, at the time of the analysis, the government lacked an effective framework linking strategic and budgetary planning, with reverberating effects on the government's ability to deliver on stated priorities. Recently, with the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), the government has strengthened program-based budgeting, tightening the link between the budget and government priorities. In the context of Institutional Strategic Plans, the CoG could tighten its co-operation with the Ministry of Finance to further align spending to the government's strategic priorities. To effectively steer climate action with the local level, Romania could envisage the creation of a dedicated and permanent **vertical co-ordination** structure, similar to the Unified State-Regions Committee in Italy, or the Local Net Zero Forum in the United Kingdom (see Box 2.4). Vertical coherence refers to the alignment of policies across different levels of government, from local to national to international. The role of vertical coherence in policy development is to ensure that policies at different levels are mutually reinforcing and consistent with each other. This can help to avoid conflicts or contradictions between policies and ensure that they work together effectively towards achieving sustainable and whole-of-government goals. This vertical co-ordination structure could be formally linked to the Inter-institutional Committee on Climate (CISC). Moreover, the country could envisage a cooperative agreement between the national government and local authorities, where local authorities would commit to implement certain environment- and climate-related measures, as is the case in Luxembourg (see Box 2.5). Also, a network of climate champions at the municipal level could be supported by the government to promote knowledge-sharing, peer exchange, and ownership at the local level (see Box 2.6).

Alternatively, Romania could, to a greater extent, use the 2030 Agenda as a framework for aligning policy priorities, incentives, and objectives across national, regional and local governments. The foreseen 'One-stop-shop', a digital platform developed in the context of Romania's NRRP, could help to ensure effective processes for engaging sub-national levels of government and promoting co-ordinated sub-national, national and international actions. Similarly, extending the network of Sustainable Development Hubs to local authorities offer additional opportunities for strengthened vertical coherence.

Box 2.4. Permanent vertical co-ordination structure in Italy and the UK

Italy

In Italy, a new forum including all regional authorities has been established under the umbrella of the Unified State-Regions Committee, to co-ordinate climate resilience policy actions at the regional and sub-regional levels.

United Kingdom

In the Net Zero Strategy of 2021, the UK Government also outlined its commitment to enable local areas to deliver net zero and set clearer expectations on how central and local government interact in its delivery. To this effect, a decision was taken in 2022 to establish a Local Net Zero Forum, bringing together senior officials from national and local government on a regular basis to discuss policy and delivery options.

In addition, a Local Net Zero Programme has been set up to support local authorities and communities across England in building capability and capacity to meet net zero. Almost £22 million has been invested in the programme to date, including funding for the creation and continuing support of five Local Net Zero Hubs. The Hubs promote best practice and support local authorities to develop net zero projects that can attract commercial investment.

Source: (Russel, 2020^[10]); (Climate Change Committee, 2020^[11]).

Box 2.5. Multi-level agreement: the Climate Pact in Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, the Climate Pact has helped improve co-ordination between the central and local governments and encouraged municipalities to take actions in line with national climate mitigation commitments.

The Climate Pact is a co-operative agreement through which local governments commit to implement certain environment- and climate-related measures. In return, they receive government financial and technical assistance, as well as an environmental certification.

Launched in 2012, the Climate Pact aims to strengthen the exemplary role of municipalities in climate policy, to reduce GHG emissions and energy use, and to stimulate investment at local level. In 2021, the government renewed the design of the pact to reward more quantitative results (*Pacte Climat 2.0*).

The Climate Pact is a co-operative agreement. Each participating municipality commits to hire a climate advisor; it also commits to implement an energy management system and a number of the 64 measures in a catalogue. There are six categories of measures: spatial planning and development; municipal buildings; resource management; mobility; internal organisation; and co-operation. Municipalities can be awarded a certification within the framework of the European Energy Award based on the number of implemented measures. There are four levels of certification: 40%, 50%, 65% and 75% of the maximum score. The 65% level was added with the new version of the pact.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[12]).

Box 2.6. Partners of Climate Protection in Canada

Managed by the association of Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and supported through federal funding, the Partners of Climate Protection (PCP) is a group of over 500 Canadian municipalities that make use of the program's five-step Milestone Framework in order to take direct action against climate change.

The PCP programme helps provide funding resources, which it received from the Government of Canada and ICLEI Canada to member municipalities that are developing climate change actions plans, and therefore has driven a significant amount of climate change planning at the municipal level throughout Canadian cities.

Source: (Partners for Climate Protection, 2023^[13]).

Additionally, the role of the CoG is limited when disagreements arise between line ministries. However, the strengthened CoG with the PMC having more political weight and high levels of expertise, may be an opportunity for reviewing the current practice towards a more assertive mediation for policy coherence. High-skilled staff can help the CoG to obtain acceptance from line ministries when arbitrating their actions. In this fashion, the CoG could promote further policy coherence when disagreements arise, and sectoral agendas are incoherent between line ministries, playing a clear mediator role.

Green budgeting can support Romania to reach government priorities on climate. Green budgeting refers to the tools of budgetary policymaking to help achieve environmental and climate goals. It includes evaluating environmental impacts of budgetary and fiscal policies and assessing their coherence towards the delivery of national and international commitments. In this way, green budgeting contributes to an informed and evidence-based sustainable growth. An effective approach to green budgeting is underpinned by four key building blocks that are mutually reinforcing: a strong strategic framework (building block 1); tools for evidence generation and policy coherence (building block 2); reporting to facilitate accountability and transparency (building block 3); and an enabling budgetary governance framework (building block 4) (OECD, 2017^[14]).

Similarly, budgeting for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can help the government to reach climate objectives. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has developed guidance notes to help countries in linking and integrating SDGs into processes, systems and decisions that are part of government's budget cycle. The framework is called "Budgeting for the SDGs" (B4SDGs) and the main rationale is that SDG objectives can be reached at a higher rate through the budget by improved integration, better management of resources, transparency, and participation, and by focusing on improved financing strategies. In this sense, the framework encompasses both a "systems approach" as well as "policy approach" to reforms, meaning that guidance does not only refer to strengthening systems and processes, but also implementing SDG aligned budget policies (UNDP, 2022^[15]).

The role of evidence in support of policy coherence in the policy development process

Policy development relies also on the availability of the right sorts of evidence and data and their use for policy purposes. A substantive evidence base, as well as mechanisms to ensure that information is generated from a variety of sources is crucial to inform policy design and development, particularly the

availability of data, evaluation, and insights from stakeholders and citizens. In this regard, empirical evidence is central for effective decision-making to assess both opportunity costs and policy trade-offs across sectors and timeframes (short term vs long term).

Similarly, monitoring and evaluation are key elements for effective policy development. In OECD countries, monitoring and evaluating the implementation, impact, and alignment of government policies is a key role increasingly undertaken by the centre of government to ensure that priorities are reached in an effective and co-ordinated manner (OECD, 2020^[16]). In Romania, more robust monitoring supported by more effective information and data sharing could provide a critical tool to further enhance co-ordination and policy coherence at the CoG. While efforts are currently underway to develop monitoring practices, there is still a need to further promote an overall culture of monitoring across government.

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.

Challenges

In Romania, there is an extensive ecosystem of knowledge, including private sector and academic institutions. However, stakeholders interviewed throughout this project noted a reluctance from the part of the public sector to invest in lasting and meaningful partnerships across sectors that would allow the public sector to leverage a diversity of knowledge and perspectives to develop impactful innovative solutions. The current monitoring framework is fragmented and characterised by a risk of duplication. Within the CoG, there is an overlap of monitoring systems with the involvement of several institutional actors (see Box 2.7).

Another distinct challenge is the lack of comprehensive quality data across the public administration. This is highlighted as a foundational enabler for a data-driven public sector in the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies [[OECD/LEGAL/0406](#)] (OECD, 2014^[17]). Interlocutors during the OECD's fact-finding missions identified the lack of interoperable data as also hindering effective monitoring efforts.

Box 2.7. Monitoring systems in Romania

- The Annual Working Plan of the Government (AWPG) is the main mechanism employed by the Department for Coordinating Policies and Priorities (DCPP) placed within the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) to ensure policy implementation by line ministries. The monitoring system forms an electronic database developed in 2014 where line ministries register their planned legislative initiatives and their foreseen adoption date. The tool contributes towards predictability in policymaking, but the monitoring is mainly administrative without a focus on policy outcomes. In addition, the low implementation of initiatives by ministries reflects 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. This includes a role for the PMC in the Annual Working Plan of the Government, but interlocutors advanced that a new monitoring framework will be created as well as part of this mandate.
- The GSG has contributed to the creation of milestones and objectives for Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), but it is not involved in its monitoring. The Ministry of Investments and European Projects, as the national co-ordinator on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), does not have a dedicated framework but monitors the progress by making use of the European Commission's dashboard.
- The Institutional Strategic Plans (ISPs) are supported by technical assistance from the World Bank. Their main objective is to link more effectively priorities with budgets and indicators to enhance policymaking. Prior evidence shows that the implementation of these monitoring frameworks needs to be further enhanced in the public administration. In Romania, it is being enhanced as part of the Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) with the World Bank in the context of the NRRP.
- The Department for Sustainable Development located within the Prime Minister's Chancellery has developed an innovative governance framework for sustainable development. It includes monitoring efforts to report on the progress of dedicated sustainable development indicators and the overall implementation of the Romanian Sustainable Development Strategy (ROSDS). It is a promising initiative, which could be further leveraged to feed better into the overall policy development process and into the monitoring of government's priorities.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[3]).

Tools

To promote a shared knowledge base for policy development, **institutions at the CoG, such as the GSG, should play a leading role in the co-ordination, planning and outsourcing of research and analysis**, as-well as making **data available** across the public administration. Further efforts are needed to support scholars and decision-makers to construct and implement better links between academic knowledge and policymaking, particularly in developing cross-sectoral coherent systems-based policy solutions. This refers to the development of engagement frameworks and formats throughout the policy cycle, up-skilling scholars and decision-makers in knowledge management for policy and integrating the science-for-policy approach in public administration. For example, in France, to improve evidence-based policymaking, the French Prime Minister, with *France Stratégie* acting as secretariat, entrusted leading scholars to evaluate

the impacts of the transition to a greener society on the economy in the country (see Box 2.8). Similarly, in New Zealand the government launched the Policy Project to investigate current practice in policy design to improve the quality of policy advice across whole-of-government (see Box 2.9).

Box 2.8. Evaluating the economic impact of climate action in France

In France, the prime Minister entrusted scholars with the task of evaluating the macroeconomic impacts of the ecological transition. *France Stratégie*, which belongs to the Office of the French Prime Minister, is acting as the secretariat for this taskforce, supported by the Inspectorate General of Finance. The report aims to improve the understanding of the macroeconomic impacts of the climate transition to improve decision-making and base policy decisions on evidence.

Source: (France Stratégie, 2023^[18]).

Box 2.9. Improving the quality of policy advice across government in New Zealand

In the last decades, New Zealand has developed several strategic plans for improving the quality and value of policy advice, but there was consensus that these strategies did not produce the expected effects. The main challenges were policy advice of variable quality; shortage of skilled senior policy advisors; policy advice short on evidence, user needs, and evaluation of “what works”; focus on the immediate – lack of policy stewardship; and weak cross-government systems for collaboration, alignment, and prioritisation.

In 2014, prompted by evidence of widespread inconsistency in the quality of policy advice being produced across agencies, the New Zealand Government launched the Policy Project. It deployed policy analytic tools and frameworks to investigate current practice in policy design to improve the quality of policy advice across the whole of government. Through collaborative methods, the Policy Project identified and codified what quality policy advice looks like and the skills and processes needed to produce it.

In particular, the project engaged the policy community to co-design a work programme and products based on 3 foundation frameworks: policy capability framework; policy skills framework; and policy quality framework. The first one was centred around stewardship, policy quality systems, customer-centric engagement, and people capabilities. The second one focused on building prototypes of policy people capability and understanding/developing the right set of skills for enhancing policymaking. The third one was centred on the quality enablers for great policy advice and the development of a menu of tools to assure and assess the quality of policy advice.

The project also proposed the essential ingredients for an effective policy capability infrastructure: agree a vision and powerful narrative; bring together guidance, methods, tools and capabilities to support policy professionals in their day-to-day work; encourage and support leaders and departments to assess their policy capability and kick start an improvement trajectory; spell out the skills required for policy professionals and take a system-wide view of people capability; and present the programme as a whole-of-government change process.

Source: (Washington and Mintrom, 2017^[19]).

To improve national statistic and any effective monitoring strategy, Romania could further disaggregate relevant data, as well as update databases and registers for enhancing data-interoperability to ease the flow of data across ministries and facilitate evidence-based policymaking.

Similarly, developing mechanisms to enhance organisation and individual capacities at government to promote, collect and analyse high-quality evidence is a key enabling condition for climate resilient development. This includes mainstreaming the right set of skills to carry out an informed judgment in decision-making. An effective mechanism adopted across OECD countries to foster evidence on climate action are policy advisory bodies. These bodies aim to act as knowledge brokers, providing neutral and independent findings and policy advice and operate at various degrees of independence. So far, over 40 countries have implemented climate advisory bodies, with the UK being a pioneer in this approach (see Box 2.10) (OECD, 2017^[20]).

Box 2.10 Policy advisory bodies in the United Kingdom and Denmark

UK Climate Change Committee (CCC)

Set up by the Climate Change Act 2008, the United Kingdom's Committee on Climate Change (CCC) is an independent and public expert Committee tasked with advising climate national action and evaluating UK's progress towards its commitment to net zero emissions by 2050. The purpose of the CCC consists in conducting and providing solid scientific policy analysis for national authorities (government and the parliament) to develop effective and long-term climate mitigation and adaptation trajectories in line with international emission budgets set by the Paris Agreement. CCC's recent publications include "2021 Progress Report to Parliament" with policy recommendations on climate mitigation and adaptation to the Government, "Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk" reporting UK's primary climate-related risks and opportunities, as well as the "Sixth Carbon Budget" tracing the required pathway to Net Zero as set up by the Climate Change Act.

Danish Council on Climate Change

As a means of facilitating Denmark's climate objective to reduce CO₂ emissions by 80-95% by 2050 set up by the Climate Law of 2020, the Danish Council on Climate Change assists the Minister for Climate, Energy and Utilities in setting national and international climate targets and evaluation their progress and implementation on an annual basis. The Danish Council on Climate Change is also charged with drawing up climate policy recommendations to promote an impartial perspective to Denmark's climate trajectory and give robust expertise on the potential cost-effective means of achieving the transition to a low-carbon society by 2050. In addition to this 'watchdog' and 'advisor' role, the Danish Council can also be considered as a contributor to the public debate through its wide-ranging expertise and mandate to consult and involve concerned relevant parties such as the private sector, civil society and social partners to work on all climate-related topics (energy, buildings, transport, agriculture, environment, nature and the economy).

Source: (Climate Change Committee, 2020^[11]) (Danish Council on Climate Change, 2023^[21]).

Policy development could also be enhanced through **a higher engagement of the Romanian Court of Accounts**, the country's supreme audit institution, with the centre of government. OECD country practices show three effective arrangements for engaging supreme audit institutions with the CoG:

- Providing relevant information at a whole-of-government level for the centre's oversight and co-ordination functions to enhance policy formulation, policy co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation.
- Sharing with the CoG relevant information about risks, implementation challenges and performance, which can feed into the budgeting process, enhancing the link between budgetary decisions and strategic planning.
- Examining the institutions at the CoG to determine whether they are fit for purpose to steer government action in achieving strategic objectives and responding to current challenges.

The development of a better performing monitoring framework could be supported by **bringing together the different information streams, increasing capacities and streamlining performance indicators**. The CoG can play a key leading role in all these areas. While monitoring efforts have been strengthened recently, further work is needed to avoid the costly duplication of efforts, reduce the reporting burden on the public administration, exploit the value of data currently undervalued and improve institutional clarity on which organisation takes the lead on each area. In particular, the government could consider the following actions:

- Build capacities to enhance monitoring by developing interconnected skills across government. Policymakers should value the relevance of empirical evidence in the policy cycle, as-well as be aware of its limitations, and ensure critical thinking to assess the provenance, reliability, and appropriateness of evidence (OECD, 2020^[22]). Methodologies such as behavioural insights, design thinking, policy labs, and foresight can support policymakers in integrating evidence in policy development. Similarly, evidence-based policymaking also demands advanced communication skills from policymakers.
- Clearly define the policies that should be monitored, the lead actor responsible for monitoring and the tools for tracking them. The OECD and the European Union have defined specific Public Administration Principles (OECD / SIGMA, 2023^[8]) that include dedicated advice on purposeful monitoring such as setting concrete objectives in planning documents; defining clearly performance indicators in line with strategic objectives that monitor progress of policies in strategic documents; ensuring that indicators are measurable and relevant; establishing a data-collection system for indicators; conducting progress reports at least every two years ensuring they are available to the public; and putting in place functioning central steering and strategy review processes (OECD, 2017^[23]) (OECD, 2020^[16]).

3 Effective co-ordination enables policy coherence across government

Enhancing co-ordination and information-sharing for more effective policy coherence

Governments rely on co-ordination mechanisms to enhance policy coherence and deliver on priorities. The success of co-ordination mechanisms depends also on the ability of the CoG to identify and implement tools to support these mechanisms. In this regard, interministerial and intergovernmental co-ordination need to be complemented by effective tools to share and communicate information across government to achieve policy coherence.

In Romania, as in many OECD countries, high-level decisions are taken at government meetings (i.e., cabinet meeting) to ensure coherence of government action. This permanent, institutionalised government meeting is the core decision-making and co-ordination mechanism in the country, gathering line ministries under the presidency of the PMC. GSG is legally responsible for the organisation of high-level cabinet meetings (Government Decision No. 137/2020), where a dedicated department provides the technical support to line ministries and helps in the preparation of government meetings. The country has recently shown efforts to digitalise this preparation process, but additional progress could be made to ease information-sharing ahead of cabinet meetings.

The growing relevance of cross-cutting issues in policy development and implementation has intensified the need for a broader range of mechanisms for co-ordination, notably interministerial committees. Beyond cabinet meetings, committees are the most frequently deployed mechanism for co-ordination at ministerial, senior, or technical level. They can be both permanent, established by Government Decision No. 676 of July 2005, or created *ad hoc*, for strategic issues (i.e., COVID-19 or Migration flows from Ukraine) or for specific tasks (i.e., NRRP), to support centralised permanent structures. The establishment of these bodies can also signal high level leadership and political will when participation of ministries is mandatory or chaired by the Head of Government, as is the case for the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development. For example, Finland has established several co-ordination mechanisms and the Government Strategy Department (GSD) under the PM Office is in charge of co-ordination and strategic planning (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Governance arrangements and mechanisms for interministerial co-ordination in Finland

Finland has established several co-ordination mechanisms to support strategy and decision-making that are supported by the centre of government, and particularly the GSD. They bring together different line Ministries and are usually shared by one or two lead Ministries depending on the topic. It has created:

- Four permanent Ministerial Committees on Finance, Economic Policy, EU Affairs, and Foreign and Security Policy, that play a key role in coordinating government policies on these issues and in preparing the government plenary sessions.
- Thematic working groups focusing on few government priorities (e.g., the *Ministerial Working Group on Developing the Digital Transformation, the Data Economy and Public Administration*) that help steer, monitor and implement those priorities.
- Functional working groups on research and foresight.

The GSD is also using informal channels and communication with line Ministries to align, discuss and monitor the implementation progress on strategic reform priorities.

Source: (Government of Finland, 2021^[24]; Government of Finland, 2022^[25]).

Challenges

In Romania, interministerial committees often overlap in scope, and their composition, frequency and functions vary widely across bodies. In this set-up, their role in decision-making is unclear and can be influenced by short term events and external pressures. The large variation in their functions and characteristics can be a barrier to their integration within the broader decision-making process. In this regard, the role of interministerial committees in decision-making processes led by the CoG is not clearly defined nor enshrined by law. There are no clear regulatory linkages between decisions taken in interministerial committees with the CoG's decision-making processes. In addition, their proliferation places a burden upon staff from ministries, that are tasked to attend several committees weekly.

Information-sharing tools could be streamlined as-well to enhance policy coherence. During COVID-19 the government advanced in digitalising policymaking and legislative processes, however stakeholders interviewed in the context of this project assessed that most co-ordination efforts and information-sharing tools remain largely paper-based and dispersed across institutions. Similarly, the 2022 EU Country Report on Romania has shown the absence of interoperability between e-government services (European Commission, 2022^[26]).

Tools

Standardising and streamlining committees could significantly enhance the centre of government's co-ordination capacity. Given the rise in recent years of interministerial committees as a key tool for co-ordination within government, the centre of government could ensure that line ministries have the capacity to meaningfully engage in committee meetings, avoid overlaps between interministerial committees covering similar issue areas and facilitate the integration of Interministerial committee findings and decisions within the broader decision-making process and the cabinet's meeting. Romania could draw on practices from OECD countries, like France, where the government since 2003 has started a process for

streamlining commissions with the aim of rationalising the number of commissions across government (see Box 3.2) (Government of France, 2020^[27]).

Box 3.2. Streamlining inter-ministerial committees in France

Since 2003, the French government has initiated a process for streamlining 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 interministerial 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^[27]).

The country could **deploy networks and peer-learning opportunities** to better mainstream cross-cutting priorities, like Sustainable Development Hubs. The recent deployment of these hubs across government, acting as experts in their specific field, represents an effective new co-ordination mechanism that could be replicated by the GSG in other cross-cutting policy areas. These hubs promote co-ordination to ensure all institutions are involved in the implementation of the 2030 National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) and promote policy coherence. The government could build upon the “SDGs hub” practice to implement other communities of practices as also recommended in the OECD Open Government Review of Romania (OECD, 2023^[28]).

Improving bilateral co-ordination between line ministries could also enhance co-ordination and policy coherence with Interministerial Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (see Box 3.3). Interministerial Agreements are tools for co-operation between two or more national institutions to undertake activities defined by law or policy. They can have many different forms like legal prescriptions, strategic documents and actions plans or executive orders. Memoranda of Understanding tend to be less formal, describing broad concepts of mutual understanding, objectives and plans shared by the institutions (Stefanov and Mineva, 2017^[29]). However, the establishment of these agreements does not guarantee per se higher levels of co-ordination or coherence. The CoG should establish clear guidelines for their creation and effectiveness as-well as develop dedicated action plans to effectively enhance policy coherence.

Box 3.3. 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^[30]), (OECD, 2019^[31]).

Sufficient resources and feasible arrangements are necessary conditions for good co-ordination. The budgetary framework plays a key role in the success of co-ordination mechanisms, such as committees or hubs. These mechanisms only deliver effectively on their planned objectives if sufficient resources are mobilised for their work. In this sense, the budgetary planning framework should be strengthened to allocate sufficient resources to key priorities of the government, particularly horizontal ones.

To facilitate information-sharing ahead of the cabinet meetings a dedicated information-sharing system or web-portal could support the preparatory work of the government meetings by centralising information flows in one platform. Estonia has developed an e-cabinet information system (see Box 3.4) and the Czech Republic an online platform for strategic planning (see Box 3.5), while countries like Finland and New Zealand have developed formal and/or informal preparation meetings to streamline decision-making process of cabinet meetings (see Box 3.6).

Box 3.4. 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^[32]).

Box 3.5. Online platforms for strategic planning in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has developed a digital platform for submitting and reviewing documents in preparations to Cabinet meetings, including strategic documents, named *eKlep*. This procedure includes the review of draft strategic plans and supports the provision and discussions of comments by all government institutions.

All strategic documents go through this online interministerial commenting procedure managed by the Office of the Government (CoG). The Ministry of Regional Development is tasked with ensuring consistency and providing guidance and support to line Ministries on strategic planning. In addition, strategic documents are added to the registry of strategies which includes all strategic and conceptual documents and is accessible online. It enables a clear display of documents, their goals and measures, responsibilities for fulfilment, and indicators of success. All line ministries and regions add their strategic documents to this registry.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[33]).

Box 3.6. Preparatory meetings prior to Cabinet meetings in New Zealand and Finland

New Zealand

In New Zealand, Cabinet meetings are preceded by interministerial cabinet committees and by an informal weekly meeting:

- Cabinet Committees provide a space for discussion of proposals before they are submitted to Cabinet for decision.
- Informal weekly meetings on Friday evenings allow cabinet members and Secretaries General or Heads of Department to monitor policy priorities, identify potential issues, organise briefings and discuss items to be presented to Cabinet.

Finland

Finland has developed institutional mechanisms to promote the coherence of public policies through interministerial committees headed by the Prime Minister's Office which chairs the following committees: Finance; Foreign Affairs and Security; European Affairs; and Economic Policy.

Co-ordination is also ensured effectively through informal mechanisms. The committees are complemented by "evening sessions" and informal meetings between the Prime Minister and ministers. The Iltakoulu (evening session) is an informal meeting between ministers, with the purpose of discussing and preparing the key issues to deal at the government plenary session the following day.

Sometimes, ad hoc committees on specific issues are set up, such as the National Commission on Sustainable Development (NCSD) on alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is led by the Prime Minister's Office, and an inter-ministerial network supports horizontal co-ordination between the ministries concerned. The aim of this network is to integrate the strategic objectives of sustainable development in all sectoral policies, and to support decision-making in favor of sustainable development at national and international level.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[34]).

4 Strengthened policy coherence through citizen and stakeholder participation

Mainstreaming citizen and stakeholder participation in public decision-making

Promoting and protecting civic space, understood as the set of legal, policy, institutional, and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise, and participate in public life, is a precondition for good governance and inclusive growth, as well as for effective open government policies and stakeholder participation initiatives (OECD, 2022^[35]). The protection of fundamental civic freedoms – such as freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and non-discrimination – provides an essential foundation in this regard.

Mainstreaming citizen and stakeholder participation in the public decision-making process can cultivate a better understanding among non-governmental actors of government priorities and challenges, contribute to the perceived legitimacy of policies and services, and support policy coherence more broadly by considering the perspective of a diverse range of actors. Coherent policymaking thus requires mechanisms for consistent dialogue and exchange whereby governments and stakeholders can come together to set priorities, identify barriers and bottlenecks, contribute to the development of laws and regulations, align existing and planned policies and services, and mobilise resources for reaching shared objectives. In this regard, engaging proactively with stakeholders in all stages of the policy cycle, including through the exchange of knowledge and expertise, helps to ensure a holistic perspective on the matter, gives voice to diverse interests, identifies potential trade-offs, raises public awareness, and creates ownership (OECD, 2021^[11]).

In Romania, civic freedoms are protected in the constitution, and their implementation is overseen by publicly funded independent institutions, including, for example, the People's Advocate and the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD). Additional legislation regulating the exercise of these freedoms, while in parts outdated, forms a solid foundation largely in line with international human rights standards. Generally, legislation in the country covers many different forms of citizen and stakeholder participation, ranging from participation in elections and referenda to citizen petitions and the involvement of citizens and CSOs in public decision-making processes. There are thus numerous related mechanisms, and bodies in place as laid out in (OECD, 2023^[21]) and the Open Government Review of Romania (OECD, forthcoming^[36]).

In particular, law 52/2003 on decisional transparency in public administration and law 367/2022 on social dialogue are among the central acts concerning the participation of stakeholders and citizens in policy- and law-making processes. The law on social dialogue regulates communication and the conclusion of agreements with social partners (meaning trade unions or trade union organisations, employers, or employers' organisations, as well as representatives of public administration authorities) on matters of

common interest. Ministries and other public bodies also involve CSOs via social dialogue bodies and commissions on a regular basis.

Challenges

While Romania has made significant progress in establishing a favourable environment for citizen and stakeholder participation – defined as “all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery” (OECD, 2017^[37]), challenges remain. The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Civil Society Participation Index, which measures the extent to which civil society organisations (CSOs) are routinely consulted by policymakers – as well as other indicators such as how widely citizens are involved in CSOs – finds that over the last decade, Romania has had slightly lower scores than OECD countries and European Union (EU) member states on average (V-Dem Institute, 2022^[38]).

In addition, civic participation appears to be uneven. Efforts to involve stakeholders tend to focus on organised stakeholders, such as CSOs, trade unions and other formalised actors, rather than ordinary citizens, and outreach is limited. In general, involving citizens in policy- and law-making processes is not a prevalent practice and is not part of the administrative culture. The focus on involving stakeholders is often legalistic and formal, with few innovative participatory practices, and little experimentation and understanding of the potential benefits. Overall, there is a need for a more inclusive approach to opportunities to participate, with targeted outreach among vulnerable, and underrepresented groups, such as the Roma minority. Levels of trust between civil society and public officials are low.

There is a related need to engage further with civil society organisations at the subnational level. Enhancing vertical coherence can improve policy coherence by aligning the work of public bodies across all levels of government in the country. Most CSOs operating in Romania are currently concentrated in cities, with fewer and smaller organisations active locally. As in many OECD countries, local organisations appear more likely to encounter organisational and funding challenges, given smaller resources, less access to funds and weaker bureaucratic experience.

There is little co-operation and cross-learning across government on citizen and stakeholder participation and there is a need to further recognise, exploit and communicate the benefits of collaboration across the public sector. Romania’s upcoming Open Government Strategy (OGS), which will have a dedicated component on civil society involvement in decision making, will lay the groundwork for strengthened co-operation, and partnership with CSOs. The process of designing, developing, implementing and monitoring this strategy has the potential to forge a renewed relationship with citizens based on shared goals and mutual trust and respect.

Tools

Firstly, the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (OECD, 2017^[39]) could support Romania in promoting its open government agenda. The Recommendation frames how governments could promote transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation and defines a set of criteria for Adherents to design and implement their own country-owned open government agendas.

Over the past few years, Romania has established multiple portals and websites to support citizen and stakeholder participation. Progress towards a one-stop-shop for all public consultations is also currently underway due to an ongoing update of the E-Consultare platform (<https://e-consultare.gov.ro>). In fact, an expanded version of this platform could serve as an Open Government Portal, which would gather all current websites on topics of open government – semantically and structurally – under a coherent open government narrative that is aligned with the OGS. Such a tool could contribute to better understanding and awareness of CSOs regarding all ongoing participatory processes across the government.

In general, Romania could benefit from diversifying methods of participation to effectively adapt these processes to the policy question and different target audiences. For example, officials could consider

whether feedback should be sought from organised groups, from individual citizens or, where relevant, from certain groups in society that are particularly affected by a policy or service, while maintain a strong focus on inclusion. In this regard, Romania could also consider the practical guidance outlined in the *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes* (OECD, 2022^[40]) when planning and implementing participatory processes.

Moreover, there are good practices at the local level that could serve as inspiration for all levels of government. For example, the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca led the development of participatory budgeting at the local level in Romania, a practice that has since spread to more than 20 municipalities across the country. In addition, the municipality of Timișoara has pioneered the use of digital platforms to increase transparency and participation.

Similarly, the country could reinforce the enabling environment by strengthening innovative practices such as citizens' assemblies, juries, panels and other representative, deliberative processes. Romania could mainstream existing mechanisms, such as the use of councils with citizens, and develop innovative methods such as representative deliberative processes. For example, Finland has organised Citizen Juries to involve citizens in policymaking (see Box 4.1), which can be instrumental in fostering dialogue among public officials and citizens on challenges that require an all-of-society approach to identifying solutions.

Box 4.1. Citizen Juries in Finland

Finland has organised Citizen Juries to involve citizens in climate or transport policies, meaning conveying randomly selected citizens to weigh evidence, deliberate to find common ground, and develop detailed recommendations on policy issues for public authorities.

Representative deliberative processes focus on the depth of deliberation and all parts of society being represented within a smaller group of participants, whereas the majority of other methods of citizen participation place the focus on the breadth of participation – aiming to ideally directly involve everyone affected by a specific issue.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[41]).

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