

## **Governments Seen as Reliable Post-Pandemic, Says OECD**

People generally trust the reliability of government, but levels of trust vary significantly across institutions and few people feel they have a say in what government does according to a new OECD report.

As countries work to address the ongoing impacts of the largest health, economic and social crisis in decades, there is a need for governments to boost trust. Levels of trust in government remain slightly higher than in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, but do remain under strain.

According to the report based on a survey of 50,000 people across 22 OECD countries, trust and distrust are evenly split. The survey found that on average across countries 41.4% of respondents say they trust their national government, and 41.1% say they do not.

*Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings of the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions* is the first cross-national gauge of what drives public trust in open democratic governments. The survey is aimed at helping governments better understand where citizen confidence is wavering, where it remains solid and what needs to be done to close the gap. The survey took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and for most countries before Russia embarked on its war of aggression against Ukraine. Most countries were surveyed in the period November 2021 to February 2022, with Finland and Norway surveyed in 2020 and Portugal and the United Kingdom surveyed in March 2022.

Other participating countries were Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden.

Key takeaways from the report include:

**Most people feel that government is reliable:** On average across countries, most people feel that, even during times of crisis, their government is reliably delivering crucial public services such as education (57.6%) and health (61.7%), that it enables easy access to information on administrative procedures (65.1%) and protects personal data (51.1%). Only a third (32.6%) are concerned that governments would not be prepared for a future pandemic.

**Public trust varies across institutions:** The police (67.1%), courts (56.9%), the civil service (50.2%) and local government (46.9%) garner higher levels of public trust than national governments (41.4%) and parliaments (39.4%).

**Governments could do better in responding to citizens' concerns and tackling issues that are important to them, like climate change:** While 50.4% think governments should be doing more to reduce climate change, only 35.5% are confident that countries will succeed in reducing their country's contribution to climate change. Less than a third of citizens feel they have a say in what government does (30.2%).

**Generational, educational, income, gender and regional gaps in trust indicate that progress can be made in enhancing participation and representation for all:** Disadvantaged groups with less real or perceived access to opportunity and voice have lower levels of trust in government. Women and people with less education and lower incomes tend to trust the government less. Younger people also have lower trust in government than older ones, with an almost ten percentage point trust gap in surveyed

OECD countries. These gaps may reflect the negative impact that wider societal inequalities are having on public trust and their role in fueling partisanship and polarization. The report shows, for example, that people who did not vote for their country's incumbent government are far less likely to trust it.

**Public perception of government integrity is an issue:** Slightly less than half of citizens (47.8%), on average across countries, think a high-level political official would grant a political favor in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job. Around a third (35.7%) think that a public employee would accept money in exchange for speeding up access to a public service.

The OECD Trust survey will be repeated every two years to follow progress in countries and gather evidence of what works and what does not as countries work to further strengthen public trust.