The Covid-19 Crisis: A catalyst for government transformation?

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This OECD COVID-19 policy brief examines how and to what extent the crisis has served as a catalyst for government transformation. It draws these observations and analysis from over 400 cases and initiatives captured in the OECD's COVID-19 Innovative Responses Tracker.

Overview of the policy brief

This OECD COVID-19 policy brief, a product of the Open and Innovative Government Division (OIG) of the Public Governance Directorate of the OECD, examines how and to what extent the crisis has served as a catalyst for government transformation. It draws these observations and analysis from over 400 cases and initiatives captured in the OECD's COVID-19 Innovative Responses Tracker, and will support the discussions of the "Government after Shock" event and the 2020 Public Governance Committee week. In this sense, it will contribute to shaping the broader conversation on how governments must rethink the way they govern to deliver continuous value to our economies and societies.

The brief explores the effect on governments of the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, through a number of steps, drawing on several international examples of how governments have responded in innovative ways by using digital technologies, open data and citizen engagement. It takes a three-fold approach:

- ***Observations of the crisis and how governments have responded.*** This section explores what has been observed and seen through the crisis in terms of how governments and their partners have responded. What have they done? What does the evidence show us? It explores nine threads of activity seen across government responses, including: i) infection control or tracking measures; ii) strengthening public communication and data sharing; iii) adjusting service delivery to the crisis context; iv) social solidarity and "caremongering"; v) leveraging and redeploying existing resources and solutions; vi) crowdsourcing ideas and solution through open calls, hackathons and other challenge mechanisms; vii) adaptive responses by legislatures; viii) collective learning and sensemaking; and ix) structural responses and possible longer-term shifts.

- ***What do these developments signify or suggest?*** Digging down a level deeper, this section explores what those responses might mean or suggest. What do they highlight or indicate? What do they imply in regards to the workings of government in a crisis? The observations suggest attention to a number of things including: the role of the state; the importance of novel responses; that novel responses do not come out of nowhere; the relevance of digital and data readiness to enable public responses; the additional prominence of the open government, digital and innovation agendas; a shared experience across the system that may shift default expectations; the digital divide and differing manifestations of the same experience; that there were differing governments, different contexts, but common threads; the importance of data as a strategic asset; greater attention to information (and disinformation); the tensions of democratic compromises and digital surveillance; the emergence of short-term responses with an eye turning to the longer term; and recognition that the long-term effects are not yet known.

- ***Potential implications for government transformation.*** Finally, this section explores the implications of the preceding analysis. What do these developments mean for the longer-term journey of government transformation and what needs to be given attention if that journey is going to succeed? These implications include a reminder that what is good for a crisis might not be good for all conditions; the importance of communicating through an open government lens; the emergence of new ways of engaging with citizens; the way the crisis can act as both a "living lab" and a booster for government reforms; a need for public sector entities to reassess or rethink existing courses of action; questions around austerity, investment and experimentation; what crises and the innovation determinants reveal about the need for an ongoing engine for questioning and challenging; the contribution of innovation portfolio approaches; and the need for active stewardship.
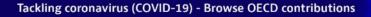
In short, the crisis can be seen as unlocking significant activity within governments but there are important questions around the sustainability of this and what governments need to do to build a deeper and more entrenched capability to allow for transformation not only in response to a crisis, but a transformation that meets longer-term needs and that fits with the values that governments aspire to. This brief provides some reflections built upon what has been seen so far in order to aid next steps.

This brief is by no means definitive or comprehensive. Much has happened during the pandemic and the associated economic and social crisis and there is much yet still to occur, let alone to be understood. This should be seen as an aid to learning and reflection.

Given the human and financial costs of the crisis, and its repercussions on the functioning of our democracies, it is vital that governments seek to learn from the experience. The OECD provides a forum for such collective learning by drawing upon the experiences of its member countries and allowing governments to reflect upon the implications, both positive and negative, of such change.

It is hoped that this brief can help governments consider the potential of the crisis as a catalyst, if a cruel one, for transformation, so that they can come out of the crisis better than before and continue implementing public sector reforms to shape a more citizen-centred, sustainable future. This brief suggests

a needed role for the OECD in accompanying its members in continuously adapting their policy responses to the new circumstances posed by the crisis, and bringing forward their expressed commitment to enable change within the public sector.[1]

The brief has been drafted by Alex Roberts from the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation and is the result of the joint work and collaboration of many individuals in OIG.

COVID-19: Crisis and catalyst

The coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has heralded huge disruptions to daily life for citizens, businesses and governments, which have had to react in unprecedented ways, with the crisis necessitating novel responses at breakneck speed. The status quo has been upset, with many countries seeing weeks of "lockdown" and confinement that have forced a break in the regular rhythms of normal operations and allowed space for new ways of thinking about what is normal and what should be normal. The crisis has re-emphasised the role of the state as an enabler of economic and social robustness, and highlighted the necessity of governments being able to respond quickly, transparently and effectively, while also guaranteeing accountability, maintaining trust in public policies and actions, often using new tools and technologies, and engaging and working with citizens and stakeholders in different ways.

The COVID19 pandemic has also had a shocking impact, with many human losses and huge economic and social disruption. The full accounting and fallout of the crisis will take considerable time to reveal itself, with consequences playing out over an extended period, beyond the immediate health and economic dimensions. The implications of the crisis will require continued adjustments, responses and policy reforms from governments. Existing patterns of engagement, collaboration and service delivery may continue to shift as the role of government evolves along with the crisis.

The crisis has consequently also raised more general questions about government performance, the agility to adjust to rapidly changing circumstances and the oversight of decision-making. Most governments have proven that they can consider, act and collaborate quickly, navigating difficult decisions and making resources available at great speed. Bureaucratic and administrative processes have been streamlined and changed – even where there were long-standing impediments – almost (or sometimes literally) overnight. Sometimes new laws or regulations were needed for these changes to happen, along with willpower and intent from leadership; in other times change was self-sustaining because of the contextual needs.

At the same time, in many countries, emergency measures have been accompanied by a restriction of civic freedoms and rights, leading to lower levels of in-person civic participation, and restrictions on access to information and freedom of expression[2]. Institutional accountability by parliaments and independent institutions have at times been bypassed[3]. Decisions on the uptake of existing digital enablers, which had been delayed or overlooked by public sector organisations, were prioritised to secure the continuous delivery of public services.

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[1] See the OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation (OECD, 2019[17]), the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (OECD, 2014[18]) and the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (OECD, 2017[19]).

[2] See Covid 19 Civic Freedom Tracker: https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/ and Civicus: https://monitor.civicus.org/COVID19/

[3] E.g. see See https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gpn-governance-Transparency_Accountability_and_Anti-Corruption_Service_Offer_for_COVID-19.pdf

All of these factors suggest that governments need to reflect upon their performance not only in the light of the crisis, but also in the light of what the crisis has revealed about how governments were performing before the crisis. The crisis provides a terrible but significant opportunity so the question is: will governments take the chance to act in new ways on an ongoing basis or will they limit this dramatic responsiveness to the exceptional circumstances of this crisis (at least until the next one)?

Observations of the crisis and how governments have responded

In order to understand the significance of the crisis for government institutions, it is worth examining how individual governments have responded, as the extent of these responses can give insights into the magnitude of the crisis in terms of decision-making processes, service delivery or public sector operations.[4] Through the OECD's open call as well as the specific call for evidence on the role of open data in tackling COVID-19,[5] the OECD's COVID-19 Innovative Response Tracker[6] has identified over 400 initiatives and captured how governments have responded in novel ways, though varying in scope and the degree of novelty and the extent to which they drew upon previous initiatives. Experiences shared by countries during "COVID-19 Co-operation" calls with the OECD Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials (E-Leaders) and those submitted to the COVID-19 Innovative Response Tracker have informed an analytical framework to guide countries in strengthening the transformation of the public sector in response to the pandemic. While not all of these have been led by the public sector, they all have an intended public value component.

Nine broad categories of government activity have been identified from these initiatives:

1. Infection control or tracking measures
2. Strengthening public communication and data sharing
3. Adjusting service delivery to the crisis context
4. Social solidarity and "caremongering"
5. Leveraging and redeploying existing resources and solutions
6. Crowdsourcing ideas and solutions through open calls, hackathons and other challenge mechanisms
7. Adaptive responses by legislatures
8. Collective learning and sense-making
9. Structural responses and possible longer-term shifts.

The examples captured are certainly not exhaustive, but do provide a sense of the range of the measures taken and the differing ways that governments have had to adjust, adapt and act. Given the newness of many of these initiatives, this brief note cannot provide commentary on their effectiveness or appropriateness at this stage. The crisis has been unprecedented, and it will take time to fully assess which measures were the best, most relevant or effective, necessary, or appropriate, and even then it will be important to consider the broader context. Of particular importance are the emergency measures that many

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[4] Further exploration of trends and in-depth case studies of innovative government responses are provided in OPSI's report (OECD, 2020[20]) and digital story, Embracing Innovation in Government: Global Trends 2020 – Innovative Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis, https://trends.oecd-opsi.org.

[5] http://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/use-of-open-government-data-to-address-covid19-outbreak.htm.

[6] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/.

governments – currently a total of 88 across the globe, of which 25 are OECD member countries[7] -- have introduced as an immediate response to the pandemic, many of which have had some detrimental impact on individual rights. There are valid concerns, expressed by national and international civil society actors, about the short-term impact of these restrictions on government decision making during the crisis, as well as the possible longer-term implications for recovery planning.

The initiatives captured reflect an emergent picture rather than the full reality. The most obvious initiatives, which are therefore most likely to be recorded, will not be the only ones that have taken place or been set in motion. There are likely to be additional, less obvious or less discernible changes that have been put in place that may take time to be recognised or recorded. In addition, it will only be possible to assess the success (or failure), appropriateness and impact on long-term reforms of many of these initiatives as the results are seen and assessed and/or as the crisis evolves.

Infection control or tracking measures

One of the first examples of governments responding to the pandemic with infection control and/or tracking measures was the Ministry of Health in Singapore, which rapidly activated a large-scale contact-tracing scheme after confirming the country's first case of COVID-19.[8] The systemic application of contact tracing has been widely adopted by other countries (as the virus has spread), and is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an important component in controlling the spread of COVID-19 infections.[9] With growing access to digital technology, contact tracing has been complemented in some jurisdictions (with varying degree of success) by the development of specialised apps that when downloaded to a smartphone can be used to inform people whether they might have been exposed to someone with the infection. In Singapore the app is called TraceTogether,[10] but similar approaches have been pursued by other countries, including Australia (COVIDSafe[11]), Denmark,[12] France,[13] Italy[14] and Qatar (Ehteraz[15]). Specialised apps have also been developed to monitor and support those in quarantine via digital monitoring (e.g. India's Quarantine Watch[16]). Not all have come from government – an external provider developed an app in the Czech Republic,[17][18] and the Red Cross developed one in Austria. Other complementary measures have included apps or services to help patients identify whether they might have

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[7] The Covid-19 Civic Freedom Tracker from ICNL/ECNL/UN provides the latest global figures: www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=63&issue=&date=&type=.

[8] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/singapore-is-using-contact-trackers-to-work-out-who-coronavirus-patients-have-come-into-contact-with/.

[9] https://www.who.int/publications-detail/contact-tracing-in-the-context-of-covid-19, (WHO, 2020[21]).

[10] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/tracetogether/.

[11] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/australias-contact-tracing-app-covidsafe/.

[12] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/danish-covid-19-infection-tracing-app-name-currently-undecided/.

[13] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/open-data-on-the-covid-19-health-related-situation-in-france/.

[14] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/open-data-on-covid-19-health-situation-and-containment-measures-in-italy/.

[15] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/a-high-tech-mobile-app-that-tracks-the-covid-19-infected-cases-through-gps-and-bluetooth-features/.

[16] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/indian-state-app-requires-users-to-send-gps-tracked-selfies-every-hour-to-the-government/.

[17] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/gps-tracking-with-mapy-cz-application/.

[18] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/stopp-corona-app/.

the disease (e.g. the UK's COVID-19 Symptom Tracker[19]). The City of Vienna's Homecare app[20] supports patients and those who are potentially infected through digital monitoring in their homes. The delivery of track and tracing solutions has brought up important policy issues related to data management and uptake, among others, that governments are trying to deal with as they deal with new waves of the pandemic.

There are also a multitude of open data initiatives and data platforms to communicate the status and progress of the pandemic to communities in the form of dedicated open health data dashboards and trackers. For example, Austria's Epidemiological Reporting System[21] consolidates testing result data from across the country and provides real-time and comprehensive information about the extent of the pandemic within the country. In Serbia, the government has introduced a National COVID-19 Integrated Information System[22] to aggregate and report on data regarding infections in the country, and in Italy, official data (national, regional, provincial) are released daily by the Italian Health Ministry, then elaborated and published by the Civil Protection Department.[23]

It is likely that there have been numerous other initiatives undertaken within hospital and primary care contexts that may not yet have been captured or formally recorded, given the necessary focus on delivering urgent medical care. For example, Macabi Healthcare Services[24] in Israel has used artificial intelligence (AI) to help identify which of their 2.4 million clients would be most at risk of severe COVID-19 complications.

Beyond innovative uses of mobile technology, there are rich opportunities to take advantage of the massive amounts of data that are collected every day in health systems. Countries with standardised national electronic health records can extract high quality routine data from these systems for real-time surveillance (Colombo, Oderkirk and Slawomirski 2020).

Strengthening public communication and data sharing

Another major category of activity has been governments trying to communicate better with citizens and stakeholder groups about the virus and the policy measures being taken. Governments have often employed digital tools and open data to communicate in a reliable and consistent manner and to reach different parts of society. Countries have also communicated through innovative means on how to limit the spread of the disease, such as a superhero character, Susana Distancia, created by the Mexican government to emphasise and encourage social distancing.[25] The use of social media has been prominent, such as in Korea, where the Thanks Challenge, hosted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare through its official Instagram account, urged people to share a picture of themselves with a gesture and message expressing their thanks to frontline healthcare workers. Many celebrities have taken part in this initiative, and efforts quickly evolved to providing citizens with specific information about the disease and symptoms to help them self-assess whether they might be infected. A number of governments have developed chatbots for this purpose. Ireland's COVIDMedBot, an online free personalised risk assessment and

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[19] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/covid-symptom-tracker/.

[20] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/homecare-app/.

[21] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/epidemiological-reporting-system-ems-a-register-according-to-the-epidemic-law-%c2%a74/.

[22] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/national-covid-19-integrated-information-system/.

[23] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/open-data-on-covid-19-health-situation-and-containment-measures-in-italy/.

[24] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/israel-is-using-ai-to-flag-high-risk-covid-19-patients/.

[25] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/susana-distancia-a-superhero-cartoon-character-created-to-remind-people-to-keep-apart-to-prevent-the-spread-of-the-new-coronavirus/.

guideline tool for use during the COVID-19 pandemic, was launched by a start-up,[26] demonstrating that governments have not been the only sources of information and that other actors have been keen to help.

In countries with lockdown or social distancing measures, governments also experimented with more technological approaches to ensuring that members of the public were aware of their obligations. Singapore has trialled the use of a roaming robotic dog to wander round a central park speaking set phrases to encourage people to socially distance.[27]

The evidence collected demonstrates that many governments have sought to open up and reuse public data about the spread or extent of the pandemic in their country[28] to improve communication with the public. For instance, a local government in Indonesia has created an open data COVID-19 Dashboard that displays an updated status of the spread of the virus in the district, including data on people at risk of becoming infected, infected people in medical care, and visitors from outside the district.[29]

The COVID-19 crisis has meant that many governments have not only had to provide information about the pandemic through general portals (e.g. Slovenia[30] and the Czech Republic[31]), but also target information at different audiences. For instance, Portugal's National Portal of Citizenship for Counties and Parishes has created a COVID-19 dossier automation tool for delivering real-time regional-specific information about the crisis to citizens according to where they live.[32] Portugal has also developed a site for children called CoronaKids that has tailored information about the pandemic as well as games and resources to help with the sudden adjustment to a new normality.[33] Other countries have tailored their messages to audiences such as citizens abroad (Romania[34]) or helping people understand the financial support they might be entitled to (such as in Colombia[35] or Canada[36]). The Belgian government translated COVID-19 communication material to 32 languages and focused on simplifying the language used in official messages.

Although the use of communications for behaviour change is already an established practice, the crisis has demonstrated its potential for policy implementation and service delivery at an unprecedented scale. The measures introduced to curb the spread of the virus have required citizens to adopt and comply with new behaviours (hand washing, wearing face masks, social distancing) that have been largely decreed and reinforced through online and offline public communication, and amplified by a vast pool of influential

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[26] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/covid-medbot/.

[27] http://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/use-of-open-government-data-to-address-covid19-outbreak.htm.

[28] http://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/use-of-open-government-data-to-address-covid19-outbreak.htm.

[29] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/covid-19-dashboard-at-district-level/.

[30] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/slovenias-webpage-hub-for-national-and-eu-official-materials-on-coronavirus/.

[31] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/czech-ministry-of-health-provides-a-daily-updated-official-covid-19-epidemic-information/.

[32] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/realtime-news-and-informations-about-covid-19-measures-taken-from-local-authorities-and-counties/.

[33] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/coronakids/.

[34] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/diaspora-hub-platform-effective-and-immediate-support-for-romanians-abroad/.

[35] https://www.colombiacompra.gov.co/content/covid-19.

[36] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/open-source-code-for-the-government-of-canadas-find-financial-help-during-covid-19-tool/.

stakeholders (e.g. employers/private sector, civil society organisations [CSOs], media, social media influencers) echoing these key messages. For example, the UK's Government Communications Service (GCS) has benefited from the country's established network of behavioural scientists working across government departments to design several campaigns encouraging hand washing and maintaining safe distance from others.

Adjusting service delivery to the crisis context

A considerable amount of government activity has involved responding to a very different context and ensuring that service delivery still occurs despite fundamental changes in the operating conditions. Much of this activity has involved digitalising public services and challenging digital government teams to deliver tools and standards to help public sector organisations act in agile and cohesive ways. Access to and sharing of data, digital identity or notification systems have been a part of this (as drawn from the E-Leaders Working Party). Some of these have been an extension of activities that may have already been in place, whereas others have been a more significant shift from the status quo.

The shifting of services to online platforms has been both general (e.g. Uruguay emphasising and encouraging the digital delivery of services[37]) and specific, such as a move to telehealth/online medical consultations (Ireland[38]) and supporting public sector employees with remote working practices and digital tools in switching to working from home (Austria[39]). Some measures have related specifically to the crisis and the pandemic, such as online helpdesks to respond to the needs triggered by the lockdown, including on mental health and emotional support, or to queries from the population (Portugal[40]). Examples of such measures also include fast-tracking processes for approving testing kits for coronavirus (Korea[41]) or changing regulations to help increase the supply of testing kits (Australia[42]). Other examples point to more dramatic changes, for example the holding of court trials through videoconferencing in Malaysia,[43] or the use of online authorisation certificates for marriage in Morocco.[44]

Given the importance of continued education for children during lockdown and social distancing requirements, a number of countries have put in place support for the switch to online learning. This has included providing schools with online resources and guidance to undertake distance learning (e.g. Portugal[45]) or working with a range of actors to provide smartphones, tablets and Internet access to

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[37] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/app-for-attention-to-the-health-emergency-during-covd-19-home-schooling-during-covid-19/.

[38] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/online-portal-for-gp-consultations/.

[39] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/eleaders-teleworking-and-reduction-of-the-risk-of-infection-by-installing-teleworking-accesses/.

[40] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/helpdesk-population-support/

[41] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/fast-track-approval-for-coronavirus-test-kits/.

[42] https://www.tga.gov.au/legal-supply-covid-19-test-kits.

[43] https://govinsider.asia/data/malaysian-bar-malaysia-moves-to-virtual-court-hearings-covid-19/.

[44] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/online-authorization-certificat-for-marriage/.

[45] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/portugal-create-an-online-resource-for-schools-with-distance-learning-methodologies/.

disadvantaged students (Serbia[46]). This has gone beyond schools in some countries – for instance in Austria there has also been support for vocational apprentices to participate in distance learning. [47]

In some cases, core work has been rethought in light of the crisis, such as the National Statistical Institute of Romania, which has developed real-time data collection and sharing to better understand economic activity during the pandemic.[48] Other examples have involved helping others adjust to the changed context, such as supporting small businesses in switching to e-commerce (Austria[49]), or city governments providing bar and restaurant owners with access to public spaces to help them continue operate while complying with social distancing requirements.[50]

Social solidarity and "caremongering"

The crisis has seen a range of initiatives with varying degrees of formality that have sought to help foster community spirit and solidarity, including encouraging and making it easier for people to help others who might be at higher risk or need during the pandemic. For instance, in Canada a range of "caremongering" informal initiatives sprung up through social media.[51] More formally, the Italian government put out a "digital solidarity call" to companies, associations, or any other entity that wished to provide digital services or products for free, even if only for a limited period of time, to the Italian population to ease the lockdown period.[52] In France, a civic reserve platform was established to allow people to volunteer for particular tasks, such as distributing food and emergency aid to those in need or connecting with isolated people (through phone or video).[53] A similar initiative was launched in Serbia through its Be a Volunteer platform.[54] The Spanish city of Madrid sought ideas and actions from its residents through its citizen participation platform.[55] While not always entirely new, such initiatives emphasise the role that different parts of society can play in mobilising community action to aid social aims facilitated by the increasing availability of digital tools.

Leveraging and redeploying existing resources and solutions

Governments have sought to take advantage of existing capabilities and to leverage or redeploy existing resources and solutions. Some of these responses have focused on leveraging human resources, such as giving medical training to furloughed airline workers so that they could aid in stretched health systems (Sweden[56]), bringing medically trained individuals back into the health service to increase clinical capacity

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[46] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/digital-education-leave-no-one-behind/.

[47] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/eleaders-distance-learning-for-apprentices/.

[48] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/real-time-data-collection-sharing-and-analysis/.

[49] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/online-marketplace-for-local-products-and-companies/.

[50] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/vilnius-opens-up-public-spaces-for-restaurants-and-cafes/.

[51] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/canadians-launch-caremonging-social-groups-to-look-after-at-risk-people-in-their-communities/.

[52] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/digital-solidarity-italy/.

[53] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/reserve-civique-french-civic-reserve/.

[54] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/be-a-volunteer/.

[55] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/madrid-sale-al-balcon/.

[56] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/out-of-work-swedish-airline-workers-are-offered-medical-training-by-university/.

(Ireland[57]), or helping prioritise and match digital and technology skills needs with capability across government (Canada[58]). Final year medical students and inactive or recently retired health workers have also been mobilised[59]. Others have been about connecting people with existing or possible solutions, such as the Coronavirus Tech Handbook,[60] or creating a shared database resource of open source software, websites and platforms that are useful for public administrations, businesses and citizens.[61] By providing central co-ordination and data tracking these initiatives enable the flow of talent from areas of low priority to areas where help is needed most. Recent research has pointed to the innovative use of non-medical space, converted into temporary field hospitals, has helped create surge capacity (notwithstanding bottlenecks of staffing in some cases)[62].

Crowdsourcing ideas and solutions open calls, hackathons and other challenge mechanisms

The speed of the pandemic and the array of problems it has brought has meant that there has been a quick need to come up with new solutions, in addition to leveraging existing ones. A number of countries ran hackathons in the early stage of the crisis, many under the banner of "Hack the Crisis", and there was a collaborative Global Hack[63] involving thousands of participants from around the world. Some of these hackathons demonstrated quick results, including in Latvia where one of the winners was quickly producing face shields at scale to supply Latvian hospitals.[64] In Estonia, the MASC platform, a digital solution for monitoring personal protective equipment (PPE) stock and demand in hospitals and other public sector institutions, was built on a pilot version created during the Global Hack.[65]

Governments have also relied upon other challenge mechanisms, including open calls or dedicated programmes seeking solutions in response to identified problems raised by the pandemic. For example in Italy, Innova per l'Italia was a call to companies, universities, public and private research centres, associations, co-operatives, consortia, foundations, and institutes to increase the production of PPE.[66] In Austria, a research funding package was created to develop solutions to various COVID-19 related problems using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.[67] In the United States, the National Institute of Health issued a substantial challenge to develop rapid testing technology.[68] All of these practices exemplify

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[57] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/increasing-medical-and-clinical-capacity/.

[58] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/gc-talent-reserve-exceptional-people-working-where-theyre-needed-most/.

[59] http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-the-aviation-industry-impact-and-policy-responses-26d521c1/

[60] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/coronavirus-tech-handbook/.

[61] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/the-eus-digital-response-to-covid-19/.

[62] http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-the-aviation-industry-impact-and-policy-responses-26d521c1/

[63] https://oecd-opsi.org/globalhack/.

[64] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/shield48/.

[65] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/estonia-adopts-ppe-tracking-platform-masc/.

[66] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/innova-per-litalia/.

[67] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/corona-research-funding-package-and-usage-of-artificial-intelligence-ai/.

[68] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/us-national-institutes-of-health-launches-500-million-challenge-to-develop-rapid-testing-technology/.

the attempt made by governments to leverage the crisis to foster collaborations with non-governmental actors. This was all done in addition to the use of more traditional procurement arrangements which were also used, even under extraordinary circumstances[69].

Adaptive responses by legislatures

A number of legislatures have responded to the crisis by allowing for different means of voting and participation in legislative/parliamentary processes. To enable the continuity of parliamentary work, Brazil has implemented the Remote Deliberation System (SDR), a platform that allows Brazilian MPs to debate and vote on draft bills during a state of emergency. The Senate developed guidelines to foster its adoption and implementation at state and local levels, with 23 legislative assemblies at the state and 169 at the municipal level now using the platform. The European Parliament allowed remote voting by Members of the European Parliament,[70] and the UK Parliament enabled its select committees to meet remotely through digital conferences.[71] The Latvian Parliament created processes to allow the Cabinet sittings to take place remotely and then subsequently added the technological capability for parliamentarians to hold plenary meetings and adopt legislation remotely. Many of these changes are, or will likely be, only temporary; however, for many legislatures this is one of the few times that they have considered or confronted whether their basic operating procedures are appropriate in a digital context.

Collective learning and sense-making

While less commonly identified, some initiatives have aimed to help make sense of the crisis and its effects. For instance, in Finland the Lockdown Dialogues[72] has offered citizens and communities the chance to undertake constructive dialogue during the lockdown and help to build an understanding of what it is like to live in a world under these unusual circumstances. There has also been an effort in Kansas[73] to establish a rapid feedback loop for citizens to share their experiences with COVID-19 and the impact it has had on their families. Brazil's Virus-MCTIC Network[74] is a collaborative effort between science and technology institutes, universities, agencies and laboratories to work together in the development of diagnostics, treatment and production of knowledge about the virus. Such examples highlight not only the importance of helping people and organisations make sense of the unprecedented events, but how new forms of collaborative learning have been made possible, with the crisis providing an impetus for breaking down silos.

Structural responses and possible longer-term shifts

While many of the responses by governments have been dealing with the immediate aspects of the crisis, some have also taken the form of structural responses and possible longer-term shifts from the previous status quo that could last beyond the crisis.

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[69] http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/public-procurement-and-infrastructure-governance-initial-policy-responses-to-the-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-c0ab0a96/

[70] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/remote-voting-in-the-european-parliament/.

[71] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/the-uk-parliament-introduces-new-digital-procedures/.

[72] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/lockdown-dialogues/.

[73] https://kschildrenscabinet.org/our-tomorrows/.

[74] http://www.mctic.gov.br/mctic/opencms/salaImprensa/noticias/arquivos/2020/03/MCTIC_investe_no_combate_ao_Covid19.html.

Some structural responses have included a "war-room" approach by one province in India[75] to ensure a cohesive and comprehensive response to the crisis, with centralised decision making and connecting all core dimensions together. In Singapore, one of the hospitals created a dedicated emergency response healthcare centre to act as a point of co-ordination, using AI and big data to predict demand for services.[76] Portugal created an Office for Digital Response to COVID-19 to assess and implement digital-based measures, ensuring a co-ordinated response involving public and private players.[77] While these relate to the crisis, structural responses can have a lasting impact as they rewire organisational processes and practices, allowing for new ways of working and collaborating to emerge, some of which may last longer than the crisis itself.

Other initiatives point to potential longer-term shifts that have been enabled or perhaps accelerated or magnified by the crisis. These include initiatives by cities such as Bristol in the United Kingdom, which decided to transform parts of its Old City into fully pedestrianised zones, not only for the crisis, but perhaps for the longer term.[78] The Italian City of Milan hopes to do something similar and maintain the reduction in the city's air pollution that accompanied lockdown measures by expanding cycling and walking spaces for pedestrians over roads for cars.[79] With COVID-19 now accelerating the speed of digitalisation, Singapore has stepped up efforts to engage and equip citizens with the relevant skills and mindsets to utilise technology to overcome COVID-19 disruptions to lives and jobs through a #SmartNationTogether initiative[80].

Others have suggested that the "temporary" nature of the crisis may still result in longer-term shifts in the thinking of and considerations by government as to what should be normal. For instance, the City of Hangzhou in China has announced plans to use its health code app from the coronavirus response in future public health plans, including using it to develop individual health rankings that score citizens based on indicators such as medical records, physical test results and other lifestyle choices.[81]

What do these developments signify or suggest?

Each of these responses show *what* governments did in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. The following section discusses what those responses might signify or mean, so as to help put those responses in context with the broader theme of government transformation. This discussion also draws on the experiences of governments gathered through the OECD Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials (E-Leaders), the Network of the National Contact Points of the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, the OECD Working Party on Open Government, and the OECD Expert Group on Open Government Data. Given that the crisis has occurred in close succession around the world, this cannot be comprehensive of the experiences of every jurisdiction; however, it does provide an overview of some of the main issues.

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[75]   https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/public-service-process-technology-and-administration-innovation-covid-19-war-room/.

[76] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/singapore-implement-a-covid-control-centre/.

[77] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/portugals-collaborative-office-for-digital-response-to-covid-19/.

[78] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/bristol-pedestrianises-historic-city-centre/.

[79] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/milans-scheme-to-reduce-car-use-after-lockdown/.

[80] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/smartnationtogether/

[81] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-19-innovative-responses-update-7/.

Role of the state

Governments have clearly been a fundamental part of the response to the crisis, highlighting the essential role of the public sector in providing a safety net for citizens and ensuring the continued running of basic services. This also relates to the central position of state with its varied roles as rule maker, signaller, convenor and facilitator in regards to mobilising or unlocking the contributions of other parts of society, especially in difficult times.

The crisis has stressed the contribution of digital and open data tools to strengthening governments' agility and responsiveness in times of uncertainty; to providing fair and equitable access to basic services for all; and to protecting emerging digital rights of citizens and businesses.

The importance of novel solutions

The crisis has amply illustrated that innovation, in this instance drawing on digital technologies and thinking, and on open and collaborative approaches with other parts of the economy and society, is an essential component of the public sector's response to the unexpected. Innovation, investing in technology, and relationships and partnerships with non-government actors are fundamental to a government's ability to adjust to a changing context, whether it be one as abrupt as the COVID-19 pandemic, or a more "slow-burning" issue.

Novel responses do not come out of nowhere

Many of the responses have built on or leveraged previous or existing investments and measures, such as the considerable work that had already been put into digital transformation in many countries. While the crisis compelled the dramatic acceleration of these efforts, in many cases it merely provided the final impetus necessary to accept and embrace what had already been underway for some time (e.g. telemedicine, uptake of digital identity solutions). Responses to the crisis have drawn upon previous investments, learning, commitments and relationships, rather than the public sector being able to manifest an effective response out of nowhere.

The relevance of digital and data readiness to enable public responses

The crisis has demonstrated that sound digital government and data policies have been fundamental in enabling agile reactions and responsive solutions, and that public sector organisations which embrace digital technologies and data have acted fast in digitalising services to enable digital innovation and implement teleworking. Digital strategies have channelled impetus for deploying quick solutions by using digital identity and notification systems, data trackers and tracing apps. In this context, data transparency and ownership – as well as open algorithms – have become fundamental conditions for a fair and ethical use by governments of emerging technologies and data. Government as a platform approaches have been proven to effectively equip public sector organisations with the building blocks that enable open and innovative solutions. Increased collaboration and co-creation mechanisms with private and third-sector organisations have opened the way to innovative digital solutions.

Additional prominence of the open government, digital and innovation agendas

The crisis has given additional attention and prominence to the existing agendas of digital transformation, data, open government and public sector innovation. As postponed projects resume and begin to move forward rapidly, governments should use this political momentum to make progress on the priorities for these agendas. This will be particularly important in helping countries rebuild their economy and society in the medium term, and improve readiness and resilience in the long term, while also reinforcing public trust.

The crisis has underscored more than ever before the convergence of the open government, digital and innovation agendas to ensure alternative fast and inclusive responses. Furthermore, it has highlighted how these agendas work best when they are aligned with other national agendas covering, for example, health, employment, education and welfare, so that systemic challenges can be comprehensively addressed, and economic and social outcomes can be achieved holistically.

A shared experience across the system that may shift default expectations

The pandemic has provided an unusual circumstance in which all parts of the system – citizens and service users, employees and leaders – have shared in the practical experience of a large shock to the basic workings of the state and delivery of service by the public sector. This is different to many other shifts in service delivery or core practices, which are usually phased in or piloted before being scaled-up or rolled-out system wide. For those countries with extended lockdown periods or sustained teleworking and prioritisation of digital service delivery, this is likely to change the default expectations of what is "normal" and how things should or could be.

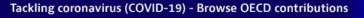### Digital divide and differing manifestations of the same experience

The crisis has highlighted the varying capacity and resources of different governments and social groups (e.g. rural/urban areas, socio-economic class) to shift to a starkly more digital world. Whether it is support for public sector officials adjusting to teleworking, students and teachers to online learning, users of physical public services to digital channels, small businesses to e-commerce, or even politicians to engaging online with remote voting and processes, the shared experience of the crisis has played out differently within and among groups. If not addressed correctly, the shift towards a digital world can exacerbate rather than reduce existing inequalities. For instance, across OECD countries, more than one-in-ten 15-year olds from socio-economically disadvantaged schools do not have a quiet space to study at home nor an Internet connection (OECD, 2020[1]).

Efforts to address the digital divide in the public sector and society at large has required governments to focus on digital skills training and development in parallel with digital connectivity and accessibility, as they are both crucial for the smooth provision of government services. There has been a considerable learning curve for various countries, although the ability of some countries has been limited due to resource or capacity constraints (e.g. student access to technology, the ability for some to effectively telework from homes, home lives that may not be suitable, access to and time for training). However, digital capabilities are not fixed, and the crisis may have allowed new groups to gain confidence in digital engagement (e.g. becoming more comfortable with the use of new approaches, such as videoconferencing).

Putting digital skills at the heart of public sector means to equip governments with a flexible workforce that has the capabilities needed to work in changing contexts. Long-term investments in infrastructure, accessibility and education that target the general population while prioritising vulnerable groups are equally important to ensure access to public services. The less digitally savvy public sector organisations and the more vulnerable segments of the population which lack digital skills should be prioritised to receive greater government support.

Differing governments, different contexts, common threads

No country's experience of the pandemic was the same, with every context being different. Nonetheless, over time there has been a growing number of similarities in how many governments have responded, suggesting parallel innovation as governments came to the same conclusions, but also mutual learning as different countries looked to and learnt from each other in real time in a way that has not often been seen before.

Data as a strategic asset

The access to, sharing of and use of data play a significant role in addressing the pandemic in multiple ways: whether as input to inform citizens, or as part of developing innovative solutions and guiding critical decision making (e.g. lockdowns, travel bans, tax relief, social benefit allocation). Data governance, public–private data sharing and open government data have in this sense taken a high-profile role in emergency policies. In several countries, governments have proactively published open data on testing, infection rates and deaths, as well as indicators on the economic, social and environmental impacts of the pandemic. Given the magnitude of governments' economic interventions, data have become fundamental to enable transparency and accountability in public financial management, public procurement and social benefits. Multiple forms of collaboration between governments (national and sub-national), businesses and civil society have also been formed to collect, consolidate, share and release such data to optimise and magnify the value that can be extracted from data as a strategic asset.

Greater attention to information (and disinformation)

Throughout the crisis, some governments have undertaken considerable outreach and information provision to ensure that citizens and residents are aware of the need to change their behaviour, comply with lockdown and social distancing requirements, and understand the controls put in place to deal with the changing nature of the pandemic. Governments with pre-existing consolidated websites for accessing government information and government as a platform service tools have been able to build on these enabling infrastructures to quickly react to the increasing demand for prompt provision of official information and data. The COVID-19 pandemic has pressured governments to develop a range of platforms to meet expectations from different audiences and for different purposes. There has also been considerable effort to ensure that governments provide an easily available and commonly reliable source of information – as facilitated by access to timely, comprehensive and high-quality open government data – about all elements of the pandemic and associated impacts. This has also aimed to limit the effects of dis- and misinformation that have circulated about the pandemic (OECD, 2020[2]). Indeed, a surge in disinformation around COVID-19 has been threatening the efficacy of and compliance with the emergency measures being enacted against the coronavirus, and has put people's health at risk. This "infodemic" (WHO, 2020[3]) has been undermining trust, amplifying fears and sometimes leading to harmful behaviours. It also poses challenges to the socio-economic recovery, as the resulting polarisation and distrust have long-lasting negative implications for democracy and inclusive growth. The surge in disinformation also leads to an information overload that can crowd out key information (City University of London, 2020[4]). In an effort to respond to this "infodemic", governments have been working to provide factual, transparent and clear information that is separate from political communication to citizens through various channels and based on audience insights. It is important to note, however, that public communication is only one of a wide range of responses that can be deployed against disinformation, other methods include regulatory and legal measures, civic and media literacy initiatives, and debunking disinformation, as per the OECD working paper, "Governance Responses To Disinformation: How open government principles can inform policy options" (Matasick, 2020[5]). It is also important to note that in some countries, responding to disinformation has served as an excuse to stifle freedom of speech.

Furthermore, in many countries, efforts to separate political from public communication are particularly important in a context of high political polarisation and fragmentation, where some groups may be more likely to turn away from official information if they perceive it to be politicised. Many governments (such as those of Belgium and Portugal) have involved the medical and scientific communities during press conferences.

Democratic compromises and digital surveillance

International law recognises that in the context of an emergency, democratic compromises may be necessary, and that some restrictions on individual rights are permissible. However, as United Nations experts warned at the beginning of the pandemic, measures must be "proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory."[82] Analysis of data from V-Dem's Pandemic Backsliding Project to assess the extent to which state responses to the pandemic "undermine democratic standards" acknowledges that a full picture is not yet available, but concludes that "European responses show that robust liberal democracies can effectively deal with crises like the coronavirus without jeopardising democratic standards".[83] It finds that European countries, where the most serious violations have been observed, were already on an undemocratic trajectory. Globally, however, there are increasing calls for the removal of restrictions to access to information and civic freedoms – many of which are not deemed proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory – and heightened concerns about censorship, the use of emergency laws to delay the enactment of data protection laws, and other government abuses of power in their responses to the pandemic.[84] At the heart of these debates, in OECD member countries and beyond, there are concerns about privacy and surveillance.

The crisis has raised important questions about how much digital surveillance is appropriate, the circumstances in which it should be used, and the balance between effectiveness, informed consent and respect for individual privacy and rights. Recent OECD research pointed to the risk of "mission creep", and that once new powers of surveillance are introduced, they are difficult to reverse, even when the crisis has passed (OECD, 2020[6]). Other concerns relate to the risk of relevant data being sold or misused, in addition to the powerful role of the big tech companies developing related technology.[85] Indeed, COVID-19 has reinforced the case for placing digital rights and data protection at the core of responses to the pandemic, in particular on the role of the state and the extent to which fundamental rights can and should be restricted with the purpose of controlling or mitigating a crisis.

Short-term responses with an eye turning to the longer term

Many responses to COVID-19 have been focused on providing an immediate reaction to the pandemic, whether seeking to control its spread, ensuring people were informed and engaged with social distancing and hygiene measures, and continuing the provision of essential services under difficult circumstances. Nonetheless, it is clear that governments are starting to turn their attention to the medium term (recovery and/or adapting as the crisis evolves) and longer-term reform (focusing on building capacity to anticipate and manage new crises such as other pandemics or climate shocks). Some governments are seeking to find responses that can aid with both (such as those with a focus on city traffic or using bailout payments to support and advance climate goals). In this context, governments might consider what worked well during the immediate response phase and what could help now in preparing a long-term response.

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[82] United Nations (2020), COVID-19: States should not abuse emergency measures to suppress human rights – UN experts.

[83] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2020), Does the Coronavirus Endanger Democracy in Europe?

[84] See CIVICUS (2020[22]), *Civic Freedoms and the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Snapshot of Restrictions and Attacks*; RSF (2020[23]), *Tracker_19*; Council of Europe (2020[24]), *Statement on Freedom of expression and information in times of crisis by the Council of Europe's Committee of experts on media environment and reform*; OHCHR (2020[25]), *COVID-19: Governments must promote and protect access to and free flow of information during pandemic*: *International experts.*

[85] Ieva Ilves (2020[26]), "Why are Google and Apple Dictating how European Democracies fight Coronavirus?" *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/16/google-apple-dictating-european-democracies-coronavirus.

Leveraging previous investment and innovations may not be possible or not enough to prepare the long-term reform needed to deal with the next crisis.

Long-term effects not yet known

There are still a lot of unknowns, whether it be about the disease that has sparked this crisis, the economic impacts, or the long-term implications of the lockdowns that has occurred in many countries. The crisis has been sudden, as have been many of the responses. The capacity of many governments to effectively make sense of and track the impacts may be limited given the relative scarcity of sense-making and collective learning initiatives that have thus far been tracked. However, such initiatives can often seem less noteworthy and may not have been given as much attention as the more discernible immediate responses, so there may be more initiatives than have initially been discussed or put forward as examples. There is also likely to be a need to track the effects for different population groups (e.g. such as by gender and age), as the impacts are likely to be uneven, and may lead to or exacerbate existing inequalities and issues.

Summary

The responses from governments suggest a range of insights that can help when considering what has happened and also what might still need to happen. These insights also provide a basis for considering longer-term implications, with the proviso that in a situation of high uncertainty there is still much to be learned, and assumptions and conclusions should continue to be tested and challenged as the situation further evolves.

Table 1. What government responses might signify

Role of the state	Government is an essential actor and needs to be agile and responsive.
Role of the state	
The importance of novel solutions	Innovation, investing in technology and relationships and partnerships with non-government actors are fundamental to a government's ability to adjust to a changing context.
Novel responses do not come out of nowhere	The ability to do new things depends upon past decisions, experiments, investments and capabilities.
The relevance of digital and data readiness to enable public responses	Digital government and data are foundational to enabling agile and effective responses.
Additional prominence of the open government, digital and innovation agendas	The crisis has given additional attention and prominence to the existing agendas of digital transformation, open government and public sector innovation.
A shared experience across the system that may shift default expectations	For those countries with extended lockdown periods or shifts to sustained teleworking and prioritisation of digital service delivery, this crisis is likely to shift default expectations of what is "normal" and how things should or could be.
Digital divide and differing manifestations of the same experience	The crisis has highlighted the varying capacity and resources of different groups to shift to a suddenly more digital world.
Differing government, different contexts, common threads	No country's experience of the pandemic has been the same, but there have been a growing number of similarities in how many governments responded over time, and mutual learning as different countries looked to and learnt from each other in real time.
Data as a strategic asset	Data play a vital role in addressing the pandemic and its impact in multiple ways. Data governance has therefore become central.
Greater attention to information (and disinformation)	There have been considerable efforts to ensure that governments provide clear, targeted and easily available information through official channels and established media outlets. Governments have also relied more heavily on actors such as social media influencers and scientists to amplify the reach of their communication efforts and their likelihood to be positively perceived by citizens. This is helping to limit the effects of dis- and misinformation.
Democratic compromises and digital surveillance	The crisis has raised fundamental questions about the proportionality and necessity of restrictions to civic freedoms that have been introduced as a response to the pandemic, including in relation to the level of digital surveillance that is appropriate and respectful of individual freedoms, and the right to privacy.

Short-term responses with an eye turning to the longer term	Governments are starting to turn their attention to the medium term (recovery and/or adapting as the crisis evolves) and longer term (focusing on bigger government priorities and commitments), with some governments seeking to find responses that can aid with both.
Long-term effects are not yet known	There are a lot of unknowns that remain. The crisis has been sudden, as have been many of the responses, and there is a likely to be a need for sensemaking over time.

Potential implications for government transformation

The previous section contextualised the government responses and provided some analysis of their relation to the broader issues of government transformation. This section now explores the implications of those observations and reflections, and considers what they might mean for governments as they take their next steps on their ongoing journey of transformation.

The COVID-19 crisis is far from over: the immediate problem of the pandemic is still underway, and the longer-term effects (economic, social, administrative, paradigmatic) are likely to both manifest and last for some considerable time. It would be unwise to provide a firm or definitive set of implications from the crisis at what is still a relatively early stage. However, it is important to start reflecting on what the crisis, the responses and the associated insights might mean in the longer term as governments begin to make decisions about the medium and long term.

This section draws on the previous set of signifiers as a basis for some potential implications that could be tested as the situation continues to unfold. These are intended to help governments reflect upon how the crisis can be used to aid government transformation.

What is good for a crisis might not be good for all conditions

During an emergency period such as a pandemic it may be necessary to put in place certain measures, such as limits to physical freedoms in the form of lockdowns once the spread of infection is widespread. However, all other things being equal, such exceptional measures should be short term, non-discriminatory, and not place vulnerable groups at risk of harm. These measures require ethical frameworks to operate and ensure that trust and confidence in governments is fostered, while effectively controlling the spread and consequences of COVID-19. Access to COVID-19 data should be limited to those who need the information to offer treatment, research or otherwise address the crisis. The potential use of digital surveillance technology beyond the crisis presents a profound challenge to democratic norms and reinforces the need of data ethics frameworks that both equip governments and protect citizens. Careful consideration also needs to be given to emerging digital rights.

Immediacy and urgency are also not always good companions to transparency/inclusiveness and effective, considered and transparent decision making. The crisis has demanded quick action from governments, and while governments are increasingly using open government data and digital tools to provide information and to communicate more effectively and provide specific services, there has often been little time to follow good governance principles in the process, such as involving citizens in making critical decisions that affect their lives. Similarly, the independent oversight of public decision-making has been restricted at a time when it has never been more important. A recent policy paper from the OECD warns of a heightened risk of corruption during and after the crisis, including in the areas of public procurement and as a response to national economic stimulus packages (OECD, 2020[7]). Citing examples from past crises (notably Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Ebola crisis in 2014-16) and the economic stimulus packages introduced as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, it notes the elevated risk associated with governments mass purchasing emergency goods (such as hospital equipment, ventilators and face masks) and services, and the "high risk of corruption, fraud, waste and abuse" as governments relax their controls and procedures (OECD, 2020[7]). Equally, many governments have put in place additional mechanisms to

ensure that the main principles of public procurement remained in place during the crisis and saw that emergency procurement was well established in the existing framework (OECD, 2020[7]).

In addition to the crucial role played by oversight mechanisms such as supreme audit institutions and parliamentary oversight committees, which may be unable to perform the necessary checks during the crisis, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the public have a role to play in holding governments to account. As part of planning for the medium and long-term recovery from the pandemic it is essential that governments fully reinstate legal frameworks governing civic freedoms to allow citizens and CSOs to fully participate in the recovery. Civil society – comprising a full range of non-profit actors such as charities, volunteers, foundations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), associations, informal groups, clubs, trade unions, youth organisations and social enterprises – has filled the gaps left by many governments and been at the vanguard of the global response to the pandemic; however, their ability to operate has been dramatically restricted as a result of the pandemic. Moving forward, to ensure healthy collaboration between governments, public officials, CSOs, citizens, media, independent oversight mechanisms, and other non-governmental partners, governments should ensure that the many emergency measures necessarily restricting in-person civic participation are lifted as a priority, as soon as the health situation allows. In the meantime, governments must strive for inclusive participation in decision making to include the voices of minorities and marginalised people who may be worst affected by the crisis, and innovate to create and maintain meaningful civic space, both online and offline. This will also need to be matched with effective public communication to underpin efforts to ensure trust, transparency and, ultimately, accountability.

In order to ensure support for ongoing and sustained changes, governments should demonstrate that the purpose of the changes being introduced goes beyond just responding to the pandemic, and is rooted in the core values of transparency, accountability, integrity and good governance.

Communicating through an open government lens

The crisis has shown that communication based on the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation can go a long way in achieving results:

- First of all, communicating uncertainty in a transparent manner has been essential in retaining and increasing citizen trust during the pandemic. There have been many "grey zones" surrounding the virus itself, and several of the measures enacted by the government have had to be changed or reversed. Throughout this process, maintaining transparent communication has been essential to ensure that citizens continue to abide by the measures taken and refer to their governments as a key source of accurate information.

- Secondly, effective public communication around integrity related commitments (including anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures) throughout the crisis has been essential to help ensure that they are upheld. They must also be widely known and understood not only by public authorities, but also by partners in the private sector, scientific or technical advisory bodies and individuals. Furthermore, clearly and openly communicating integrity safeguards for recovery packages will be a key step going forward. Whether during the outbreak or in the recovery phase, effective public communications involve communicating with integrity and ensuring that information and measures taken are not only clear to targeted audiences, but also factual and evidence based to ensure their trustworthiness and reliability.

- Thirdly, the statements and commitments made as part of public communication are what citizens and CSOs can hold their governments accountable for in the aftermath of the pandemic. As such, ensuring that they are made public and communicated through various channels is paramount. Additionally, communicating on resource management procedures and emergency funds that were unlocked during the crisis is crucial to ensure that citizens and media are able to play a watchdog role.

- Finally, framing communications in a way to empower and engage citizens in the fight against the virus, either by sharing relevant open datasets or by working with CSOs or social media influencers or local celebrities to amplify messages, has yielded positive results. Engaging communication efforts has required governments to adapt their messages to reach specific segments of the population (such as children and young people, the elderly) and make greater use of audience insights, which is an area that will need to be further strengthened in the long term. When it comes to communicating effectively, being informative is not enough: the growing fragmentation and diversity of audiences calls for the tailoring of communication messages and the selection of the most appropriate channels for engagement.

New ways of engaging with citizens

The COVID-19 crisis has had a strong impact on the relationship between governments and their citizens. Since the beginning of the crisis, local and national elections were postponed in more than 67 countries and territories due to the pandemic, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2020[8]), and public authorities across the world were abruptly forced to stop or postpone most physical forms of citizen participation in policy making. However, the crisis has also prompted some authorities to consider new forms of online engagement, notably when it comes to deliberation. For instance, the UK Climate Assembly and the French Citizens' Convention moved some of their planned in-person sessions online using videoconferencing and collaborative writing software to continue their work. The Ada Lovelace Institute ran a rapid online deliberation about the use of technology for contact tracing. Such experiments have prompted a myriad of reflections about the possibility of hybrid digital-in-person models for what were traditionally in-person processes before the COVID-19 crisis, as covered in the OECD's Participo series on Digital for Deliberation.[86] These examples of hybrid digital-in-person models have been also explored by parliaments as a way of continuing their functions of representation, legislation and oversight during the crisis. In Brazil, Chile and Ecuador (Parlamericas, 2020[9]), legislators are meeting virtually and experimenting with new ways of remote deliberation and voting.

In many cases, however, it is not possible to simply move participation online. Accessibility issues remain. Many people do not have computers or smartphones, stable Internet connection, or the skills to be able to connect to videoconferencing and other platforms. For instance, following a survey of members of the Scottish Citizens' Assembly, which discusses Scotland's future, it was decided that due to a lack of adequate Internet connection amongst them the process would be postponed. It is therefore essential when it comes to the use of digital tools for citizen participation to also consider the limitations of technology (digital divide, accessibility, literacy, misuse of technology, etc.) to prevent unequal access to decision making. All processes, even those more digital, must be designed to be as inclusive as possible, and sometimes it is not as simple as transferring an in-person meeting into the digital realm.

Digital participation is an exciting avenue to explore new participatory opportunities after the crisis. However, technology should be a means to an end, not an end in itself. Even before COVID-19, citizens around the world have been expressing their will to influence government actions beyond elections. This can be seen, for example, through massive protests in Chile, Lebanon, Hong Kong (China) and France. A recent study shows that in democratic countries, 31% of respondents say that they do not have enough democratic opportunities. (Dalia Research, 2020[10]) In parallel, trust is deteriorating worldwide, with an average of 43% of citizens trusting their government in OECD countries. (OECD, 2017[11]) Trust in government is essential to ensure compliance during the emergency phase and to build enough confidence for the recovery. The crisis should invite governments to strengthen and institutionalise participatory opportunities for citizens at all levels of government as a way to fight citizen mistrust, increase compliance and advance inclusion.

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[86] https://medium.com/participo

As the emergency phase starts to fade and the lockdown measures become less restrictive, governments will have to plan for the recovery. Citizen participation in this planning exercise can ensure that recovery strategies are inclusive and respond to citizens' needs and expectations. Everyone's views are equally important, and governments must make dedicated efforts to ensure that all parts of society have their voices heard. It is therefore imperative when involving citizens in recovery strategies for governments to consider how they design their citizen participation processes in a way that is fully transparent, inclusive and fair. For example, the crowdsourcing experiment of Mexico City's Constitution included in-person, digital and targeted processes to have a representative participation of all residents. As a result, the final document is considered to be the most progressive constitution in Latin America, and it has been recognised by the United Nations as a "historical document that addresses the central challenges of development, peace and the 2030 Agenda." (The Governance Lab, n.a[12]) Beyond recovery planning, citizen participation should become the new normal in public policy and decision making. Fully involving citizens in all public decisions that matter to them will help to build the trust and cohesion that societies need to face this and future global crises. Governments can also bring youth, adults and the elderly together in intergenerational dialogues to enhance more inclusive and longer timeframes in decision-making.

The crisis as both a "living lab" and a booster for government reforms

The crisis has acted to boost a range of transformation activities within government, including the uptake of digital technologies, tools and services. A number of government officials have remarked how the crisis has provided a significant amount of interest in the related agendas of public sector innovation, digital government and open government.

The crisis has also acted in some ways as a "living lab", whereby many areas of the public sector have had "hands-on" experience with new tools, applications, processes and working methods. Agendas that may have seemed abstract or disconnected to day-to-day "business-as-usual" work have suddenly became very pertinent and tangible. Given the extent of initiatives captured in the OECD's Innovative Response Tracker,[87] it is likely that a range of small experiments have been occurring across the public sector in many countries.

In many ways, the crisis will have provided real-life experience that some of the hurdles and restrictions in government, which previously might have limited and slowed change efforts within the public sector, are somewhat arbitrary or not absolute. While many processes will rightfully seek to return to some sort of normalcy, a large number of public sector employees and private and non-government delivery partners now have very real examples of how fast government can move and how certain barriers and processes are a lot more permeable and fluid than they were led to believe. Combined with the practical experience of working differently, there may be parts of the public sector that now expect things to change and continue as was shown throughout the crisis.

For those governments seeking to invigorate or support their transformation agendas, now may be an opportune time to reflect and build upon the lessons of the crisis, and to send a message to public sector employees that the crisis has indeed provided a break with some past processes that have been shown to be obsolete or unsuited to the times.

A need to reassess or rethink existing courses of action

For some of the public sector, the crisis has interrupted or disrupted the usual flow of processes, commitments and deadlines. Many projects commenced prior to the crisis will likely need to be reassessed or rethought in light of the changed circumstances and context (e.g. financial, political).

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[87] https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/.

This may be an ideal time for governments to consider their priorities through different lenses or against longer-term priorities, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. The crisis has changed or challenged many default assumptions about what the future might bring and provided an opportunity to reprioritise and reshape existing agendas in a way more suited to the new context.

Austerity, investment and experimentation

Governments have had to make significant investments and considerable spending commitments during the crisis to provide support for citizens, businesses and the economy. As the crisis evolves or resolves it is conceivable that there will be a push to return to an approach of austerity or financial constraint for the public sector in the context of deprived economies and increased social demands, in addition to there being less funding available for CSOs and other non-governmental actors. While the economic implications of such a course of action are beyond the scope or remit of this brief, consideration should be given to what this might mean for the ability of state institutions to respond to future crises and shocks in an innovative, responsive and accountable manner. Experimentation requires a degree of "slack" or resources that can be used without guarantee of success, and involves investing in learning and the testing of differing approaches. The pandemic has illustrated the challenge for governments of knowing exactly what they should be experimenting (and learning) for, given that external shocks can take a range of unexpected forms. This is not to say that governments can or should attempt to prepare for all eventualities, but it does suggest that governments need to ensure that their strategies and commitments should include a capacity for ongoing innovation, investment in technology and supporting open approaches that foster relationships with different parts of society. The sustained provision of financial and other support to civil society – which is conspicuously absent from the social and economic recovery packages of most countries (AGNA/CAF/CIVICUS, 2020[13]) – will be essential. Strengthening these capacities and practices can help governments react not only faster but more efficiently and transparently in contexts of uncertainty.

Crises, innovation determinants, and the need for an ongoing engine for questioning and challenging

The crisis has provided a brutal shock to the system. Many assumptions have been blasted apart and convictions about how government works or must work have been stressed or broken. External shocks and crises can clearly be a powerful driver for change and innovation within government; however, this can come at great cost. While some of the interventions resulting from the crisis are hard to imagine happening under any "normal" circumstances (e.g. lockdown measures), others were simply an extension or an expansion of things already in place (digital service delivery). This then raises a question as to why it had to take a crisis to make governments to transform when the necessary ingredients were already in place and changes were likely to happen anyway.

The Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) through its work with countries[88] has identified four core determinants that shape whether and to what extent innovation is likely to occur. The crisis has highlighted these determinants graphically, demonstrating that when these conditions are met, considerable innovation can be unlocked and unleased.

In order for governments to be able to call upon innovative responses on an ongoing basis there needs to be:

- **Clarity**: An overriding message that change is necessary. The pandemic has provided a strong message from the centres of government that new solutions are needed.
- **Parity**: An ability for new options to be given equal consideration as existing solutions. The crisis has revealed the deficiencies or inadequacies of a number of existing practices.

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[88] https://oecd-opsi.org/projects/country-studies/.

- **Suitability**: Investment in or support for new ways of working and thinking when different approaches are required. In response to the crisis governments have rapidly made resources available across sectors to support new methods and approaches
- **Normality**: A tolerance and openness to the government trying new things, and an acceptance that not all of them will work. During the height of the pandemic, doing something unusual often became perfectly normal.

The question for governments becomes – how might these determinants be manifested in ways other than through a crisis? Transformation can clearly be expedited through an external shock; however, it is a cruel and brutal way of achieving change. How governments might seek to ensure an ongoing engine of change must be considered, an engine of less ferocity, that provides a more constant and less severe means of challenging existing practices, and testing whether there are new and better ways of doing things.

The crisis has highlighted that dramatic change is possible. The public sector may soon face demands to demonstrate its ability to provide fast and dramatic changes in direction on a more ongoing basis. Now is the time for governments to consider what this might mean.

Innovation portfolio approaches

The crisis has highlighted that change can and will come from unexpected directions. The ability to respond effectively requires a mix of strategies and interventions, some responding to the context as it unfolds and others engaging with a very uncertain future.
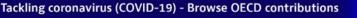
Figure 1. Innovation facts

In the OECD's Innovation Facets Model, innovative activity can be seen as addressing different types of purposes, each with differing strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult for one organisation to address all types of innovation; therefore it is important to take an ecosystem-wide perspective and ensure that the government has strong relationships with other parts of society and the economy so that it can draw on them when needed – as has been the case during the crisis. Now might be the time for government agencies to consider the status of their current innovation portfolio, and whether they would be able to meaningfully draw upon diverse innovation capabilities in the face of another crisis (or even as this crisis continues to unfold).

Need for stewardship

In a crisis, government has to move rapidly, often with different arms of government responding to different urgent needs at the same time, making it difficult to have due regard for the bigger picture. Centres of government are often preoccupied by co-ordination and ensuring immediate priorities are carried out, therefore may not always have the capacity or even the ability to take a system-wide view. This can be problematic when many new initiatives are being undertaken at the same time. These differing activities may not cohere at a system level, for instance, a health ministry may not have the environmental consequences in mind when trying to secure personal protection equipment at scale. Long-lasting decisions and investments can be made at great speed without due consideration of the potential conflicts or complications they might cause elsewhere in the system, the trade-offs that might be involved, or the flow-on effects. This is exacerbated when the system is moving at great speed and different functional silos are going to be tightly focussed on their specific domains and priorities.

This suggests that governments should reflect on where system-wide stewardship might come from at such times, whether it be a "war-room" model with a centralised approach to bring all the parts together, or a more agile structure that has a vision of the whole and makes connections between the relevant parts in nimble ways. Each model will have its own trade-offs; however, there may be more advantages to any models that allow for longer-term learning over and between crises.

Summary

The coronavirus crisis has significantly disrupted the status quo. It has necessitated significant changes and interventions from governments, actions that would have been unimaginable only months before. It is likely that many things have been set in motion; however, it will take time to see the true impact of these changes.

The crisis may have accelerated and entrenched some types of government transformation, particularly as governments sped up decisions on digital technologies. Acceleration, however, should not be taken as a recipe for meaningful and sustainable change. Similarly, the potential for sustained transformation in other areas, such as embedding public sector innovation or open government, while positive, is less certain.

In short, there is potential for ongoing transformation, and governments have an opportunity to seize this potential if they are willing, but they should not assume that it will be automatic. Change will come, but deliberate, strategic and coherent transformation across government will depend on the decisions and investments made in the weeks and months ahead.

Ongoing research and activity by the Open and Innovative Government Division

The OECD's Open and Innovative Government Division is undertaking a range of measures to further its research and to inform and guide countries in their ongoing response to the crisis and its after effects. These include:

- Supporting the Innovative Response Tracker,[89] which is a database that records innovative responses from governments and their partners to the crisis. Governments are encouraged to add their responses, both past and present, to better aid understanding of how governments have responded, and to help identify patterns and trends.

- Further engagement and dissemination activities with the E-Leaders Working Party on the relevance of digital government and open data maturity to enable agile and effective government operations and service design and delivery, including webinars and policy briefs.

- Launch of an open call for evidence on the use of open government data to address the COVID-19 crisis together with the GovLab at the NYU Tandon School of Engineering.[90]

- Co-leading an international collaboration with the International Open Data Charter to identify high-value open data in a pandemic. Partners of the collaboration include the governments of New Zealand, Mexico and Canada, as well as organisations such as Open North, GIFT, CAF GovLab, the Open Data Institute and the Open Data for Development Network.[91] As part of the collaboration, a call for action on hosting local open data meetups has been launched.

- A series of insights on digital government and open data implications in COVID-19 through Towards Digital States[92] (such as data governance, OGD-enabled solutions, role of digital government tools and practices).

- Launching a sense-making platform,[93] which is an open resource to help identify, track and consider emerging signals and narratives that have been prompted or instigated by the crisis, and which point to new understandings or perspectives about the role of government.

- Helping governments develop better responses to disinformation through collaboration with the OECD's Open Government Unit and GovLab at the NYU Tandon School of Engineering on the 100 Questions Initiative. This initiative "seeks to map the world's 100 most pressing, high-impact questions that could be answered if relevant datasets were leveraged in a responsible manner" and focuses on ten priority challenges, including disinformation.[94]

- Editing the Digital for Deliberation series on Participo about how public authorities are adapting to citizen participation in times of physical distancing.

- Running *Government After Shock*, a multi-pronged initiative to help make sense of the crisis and its implications for government, which will culminate in a two-day networked series of events hosted

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[89] https://oecd-opsi.org/projects/covid-19innovation/.

[90] https://www.oecd.org/governance/digital-government/use-of-open-government-data-to-address-covid19-outbreak.htm.

[91] https://medium.com/opendatacharter/open-covid-19-data-461e1cbefbba.

[92] https://medium.com/digital-states.

[93] https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScbIeXj6HtKqcDxJg8_WkDLI7zjw5YGNmnHJ0eL6qrBId8Lmw/viewform.

[94] http://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/understanding-disinformation-to-develop-better-policy-responses.htm.

in locations around the world to distil lessons, identify actions and work with leaders to identify key lessons to guide governments going forward.[95]

- Undertaking anticipatory innovation governance work, which involves exploring through a network of government-led action research projects in 2020-21, examining how governance mechanisms can be leveraged to shape transformations in situations of deep uncertainty. The overall goal of the research is to identify key mechanisms that governments can use to develop a proactive versus reactive approach to future shocks and disruptions.

- Undertaking research on the protection and promotion of civic space in OECD member and partner countries, including the impact of restrictions on civic freedoms introduced as a response to the pandemic. This area of work, led by the OECD Observatory of Civic Space, includes country-based civic space scans and a global civic space report, in addition to a series of webinars and related information-sharing events.

- Developing the OECD's first international report on public communication, with sections on disinformation and crisis communication, based on a survey targeting centres of government and ministries of health.

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