

More resilient public administrations after COVID-19

LESSONS FROM USING THE COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF) 2020



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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	8
1 Introduction	10
Rationale and context of the project	10
Scope and methodology of the project	11
The Common Assessment Framework: A proven valuable tool for crisis preparedness and response	14
2 The impact and adaptation of CAF users during the COVID-19 crisis	15
Defining resilience	15
Leveraging the CAF and implementation plans to strengthen the pandemic response	16
Leadership: Putting “people first” was proven essential	20
Strategy and planning: Uncertainty led to a high need for adaptability	23
People: Keeping employees safe, engaged and productive	26
Partnerships and resources: A limited capacity to reach partners	28
Processes: Digitalisation as a key trend for internal processes and service delivery	30
Results: Measurement is key for learning and adaptation	32
Consequences on the CAF model	34
3 Policy implications for public administrations on strengthening resilience	36
Leadership	36
Strategy and planning	42
People	49
Partnerships and resources	55
Processes	59
Results	63
4 Conclusion: Further mainstreaming resilience into the CAF	66
References	68

FIGURES

Figure 1. Overview of the CAF model, 2020	12
Figure 2. Stages of resilience	15
Figure 3. Overview of impact on public sector organisations by CAF criteria	16
Figure 4. Level of preparedness perceived by public sector organisations by economic sector	17
Figure 5. Average level of adaptation performed by public sector organisations on the different CAF criteria	18
Figure 6. Average adaptation level for smaller organisation (less than 50 employees)	19
Figure 7. Most organisations found CAF useful or very useful during the crisis	20
Figure 8. Main challenges for leadership during the crisis	21
Figure 9. Measures taken to adapt leadership and managerial structures during the COVID crisis	22
Figure 10. Main challenges in achieving strategic priorities during the crisis	23
Figure 11. Strategic priorities for public sector organisations before and after the crisis	25
Figure 12. Office-based vs remote working before, during and after the pandemic	26
Figure 13. Main HRM challenges	27
Figure 14. HRM adaptations during the crisis	28
Figure 15. Main challenges in terms of partnerships and resources faced by public sector organisations during the crisis	29
Figure 16. Average impact on internal processes of surveyed public sector organisations	30
Figure 17. Service delivery model adaptations reported by public sector organisations	32
Figure 18. Impact of the crisis on perception results according to public sector organisations	33
Figure 19. Dimensions that could be reflected more prominently in the CAF model	35
Figure 20. Four leadership capabilities	37

BOXES

Box 1. Overview of the Common Assessment Framework	11
Box 2. How the city of Vienna's Department of Women's Affairs leveraged not-so-new forms of leadership and collaboration	39
Box 3. Italian Space Agency's transition to collaborative leadership	40
Box 4. Design of a contingency plan for distance learning in the case study organisation in Portugal	44
Box 5. The case study organisation Croatian Pension Institute created the "Magnificent Eight" working group to ensure effective co-ordination	45
Box 6. Case study practices on crisis plans and protocols	47
Box 7. The use of e-learning methods to upskill critical competencies in Poland	50
Box 8. Madrid Salud: Re-defining essential workers and protecting their health and well-being during the pandemic and in the future	51
Box 9. Reallocating staff in Bulgaria and Greece	53
Box 10. New modes of engagement with stakeholders in the Municipality of Thessaloniki	55
Box 11. Designing a dedicated strategy on partnerships in the Slovak Ministry of Environment	56
Box 12. Accelerating the digital transformation of Slovenia's Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development.	60
Box 13. Collaborative workshop on innovating in the face of the crisis	61
Box 14. Measuring performance and effectiveness through a monitoring dashboard the Belgian National Employment Organisation	64

Executive summary

The COVID-19 crisis has subjected public sector organisations across EU Member States to a stress test of unprecedented scale, testing their capacity to craft innovative solutions to external shocks and ensure the continuity of service delivery for citizens and firms. The crisis has also provided an opportunity for public sector organisations to test and reflect upon their resilience, that is, their abilities to absorb, adapt and learn from shocks to be better prepared for future crises. In what is increasingly being described as the era of polycrises and growing uncertainty, strengthening public sector resilience is a central priority for governments looking to achieve continued growth and well-being for citizens.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the responses and adaptations of public sector organisations to the COVID-19 crisis in EU Member States. It assesses the resilience of public sector organisations through the lens of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model, a quality management tool developed to self-evaluate organisational operations and performance. In addition to a survey of over 170 CAF user organisations, 11 in-depth case studies were conducted of organisations ranging in size, level of government and sector. The results, experiences and lessons learned of these organisations were invaluable inputs to the understanding the strengths and challenges those public administrations face to strengthening their resilience.

Results showed that, in general, public sectors were able to maintain critical functions and service continuity during the pandemic, saving lives and livelihoods and allowing for a quicker post-pandemic recovery. Quality management tools, in particular the CAF, have helped public sector organisations better understand and continuously improve the functioning of their organisations, prepare and adapt to unexpected events, and become more resilient. Public sector organisations that used the CAF reported that resulted in a more efficient response to the COVID-19 crisis. These organisations have demonstrated a strong capacity to adapt institutional arrangements and service delivery models, and introduced novel ways of working, communicating and interacting with citizens and partners.

A number of important lessons and policy implications can be drawn from the experiences of case study organisations to increase resilience across public sectors organisations:

- The high commitment demonstrated by the **people** who make up public organisations - including front-line service providers - throughout the crisis has made it clear that their well-being and personal engagement lies at the heart of organisational resilience. However, public organisations struggled to move people to the places they were needed and to ensure employees had the working environment and tools required to maintain health and productivity throughout a fast-changing crisis. Coming out of the crisis, investments in workforce flexibility, including surge capacity, and employee well-being are likely to contribute to ongoing resilience.
- Effective **leadership** is central to any crisis response and to building a culture of trust, teamwork and responsibility that values and involves staff. The most effective leaders during the crisis were those who possessed a deep understanding of the business and operations of their organisation and were able provide thoughtful and coherent direction, but who also had enough trust in their managers' abilities to delegate the change and innovation required. They were also able to draw upon well-established professional networks to co-ordinate with external stakeholders and

collaborators as the crisis unfolded. Recruiting and developing leaders with these leadership skills- including in foresight and crisis management- is essential to the resilience of public organisations.

- Agile and robust **strategic planning** processes have allowed organisations to adjust their strategies in volatile environments and achieve expected benefits for citizens and other stakeholders. Public organisations could consider developing strategic planning capabilities to adapt strategic plans and objectives to the post-COVID-19 context and to connect contingency plans and protocols with longer-term strategic frameworks. Improving co-ordination mechanisms is also essential for responding to crises and key challenges both within an organisation and with other entities. Such mechanisms could include new consultative and advisory bodies involving civil society, the private sector, local actors and subnational entities.
- As much of the world moved online because of the pandemic, it became crucial to accelerate the digitalisation of **processes** within public sector organisations while addressing obstacles related to infrastructure, regulation, security, digital skills and resources. Organisations should also extend their innovation efforts beyond digitalisation, especially as it is impossible to know how the next crisis will affect digital capabilities. Establishing an innovation ecosystem, with tools, processes and incentives, can help organisations adapt continuously and foster resilience.
- The pandemic more than ever demonstrated the value of **partnerships** to respond to new challenges and circumstances. Without partnerships- both new and old- public sector organisations would not have been able to have access to critical information on the impact of the pandemic on citizens and firms, including vulnerable and marginalised populations. The pandemic showed the untapped value that can be exploited in normal times as well, and how a strategic approach should be taken to building and facilitating strong partnerships and networks to improve the quality of policies and services. Moreover, new communication and digital channels can be used to proactively inform, engage and communicate with partners.
- A focus on **results** and a strong evidence base, including accurate and timely data, information and indicators, have helped public sector organisations make informed decisions and remain effective and responsive during the crisis. Developing such a base requires establishing performance frameworks and evidence-informed policymaking across the organisation and adjusting regularly to new priorities and context.

The CAF proved valuable in crisis preparedness and response, notably serving as a framework for continuous organisational improvement. Public sector organisations that engage in regular and cyclical use of the CAF bring together employees from across the organisation for reflection and self-assessment, helping identify strengths and areas for improvement to make the organisation more effective and better prepared to anticipate and address future risks. During the crisis, CAF users could often draw on performance improvement initiatives already underway, for instance on digitalisation and remote working, which helped them weather the most disruptive shocks. Implementing the CAF with a wide group of employees also allowed staff to develop networks and learn about one another's work.

Future developments of the CAF model could help organisations identify new priorities and streamline the development and implementation of new practices to achieve greater resilience. Public sector organisations, including CAF users, faced significant obstacles in providing services effectively during the COVID-19 crisis, exposing vulnerabilities in stakeholder and multi-level co-ordination. Better integrating resilience into the CAF could bolster public sector organisations' capacity to recover from disruptions and adapt to changing conditions. The model could also encourage organisations to look both forward and outward, bringing in external ideas to support innovation and develop strategic foresight. Bolstering organisational resilience in an era of disruption requires honest reflection and learning at all levels of an organisation. Organisations can use CAF to reflect on lessons from the crisis and identify opportunities for organisational changes to embed resilience today and in the future, helping to expand a community of best practice and the network of CAF users.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for public sector organisations to increase their capacity to adapt to external shocks and strengthen their resilience. The project, *Strengthening the Resilience of the Public Administration after the COVID-19 crisis with the Common Assessment Framework*, was led by the OECD with the financial support of the European Union (DG REFORM) and implemented in collaboration with the European CAF Resource Centre, hosted by the European Institute for Public Administration (EIPA) and the Centre for Public Administration Research (KDZ). Drawing from 11 case studies from different sectors and levels of government, it studied the response and adaptation of public sector organisations to the COVID-19 crisis in EU Member States, to draw lessons to build resilience for future crises. The analytical framework used for analysing strengths and weaknesses in the COVID-19 response has been the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model, a quality management tool developed to self-assess organisational operations and performance.

While the project was designed and implemented in the COVID-19 context, several dimensions of the work and lessons on resilience resonate in the current context of the new crisis induced by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, rising inflation, climate change, or new technological advancements which promise disruptive impacts to the public sector. Strengthening resilience therefore remains, more than ever, a priority for public sector organisations, which must adapt to an era of multiple and overlapping crises.

Rationale and context of the project

Public sector organisations need to draw lessons from the crisis to strengthen their resilience to future shocks

The resilience of governments and public sector administrations, that is to say their ability to face a wide range of shocks while continuing to deliver services and outcomes for citizens, has been severely tested by the COVID-19 crisis (OECD, 2021^[1]). In many countries, the resilience of public sector organisations, particularly those in the health sector, has helped save lives during the pandemic and delivered critical essential services to users.

The pandemic assessed public sector organisations' capacity and resilience to find innovative ways to weather the crisis and to ensure continuity of services and operations for users (OECD, 2020^[2]). Overall, public administrations maintained the continuity of essential services in the face of a large-magnitude shock (OECD, 2021^[1]). They have adapted their institutional arrangements and their service delivery models and introduced new ways of working, communicating and interacting with citizens and partners, using new digital channels and multichannel strategies (OECD, 2021^[1]). Throughout the crisis, the personal engagement of civil servants has been crucial to ensure that citizens could have access to critical public services, and the high commitment of front-line service providers - especially in health and emergency services - has been on full display. Back-office digitalisation was crucial not only to the continuity of services but also the large-scale transition to remote and hybrid working. Leveraging and

developing stronger partnerships with civil society and the private sector has been some of the additional measures successfully implemented to strengthen the response to the pandemic (OECD, 2021^[1]).

Local administrations were also in the frontline and had to demonstrate their capacity to implement containment and support measures to the benefit of citizens and of civil servants. Multi-level co-ordination appeared as a crucial priority for most local governments and municipalities (KDZ, 2020^[3]). The crisis has also challenged the financial sustainability of local governments, resulting in important financial transfers from the central government to local levels (CEMR, 2021^[4]).

Public sectors' responses, however, could have been improved in speed, scale and transparency (OECD, 2021^[1]). Issues of co-ordination among government and non-government stakeholders remained in many countries, and the fast transition to digital public services has also resulted in service delays, saturation and inconsistencies and in worsening of digital divides. Analysing key challenges faced by the public sector, gathering effective and scalable practices, and identifying supportive public governance instruments are essential to draw lessons from the crisis and help public sector organisations be fit for the future.

The quality and consistency of the response of public administrations to the COVID-19 pandemic and their capacity to be resilient have proven critical for citizen trust in national institutions. While trust levels in governments in EU MS slightly increased to 40% in 2020 at the peak of the pandemic, trust went back to pre-crisis level at 34% of citizens trusting their national governments at the end of 2021 (EU, 2022^[5]). This calls for strengthening the resilience of public institutions but also for “building back better” by ensuring that key drivers of trust, such as citizen engagement, openness and effective and citizen-centred service delivery, are further embedded in new, more resilient governance models (OECD, 2022^[6]).

Scope and methodology of the project

The project aims to strengthen the resilience of public sector organisations in European Member States, through the lens of the CAF 2020 and CAF community

In this challenging context, this project was designed to strengthen the resilience of public sector organisations, with a focus on CAF users (Box 1). It analyses the responses of public sector organisations to the crisis, gathers innovative practices and themes, and supports the identification and development of critical institutional, organisational, human and digital capacities across public sector organisations to address future shocks and to strengthen resilience.

Box 1. Overview of the Common Assessment Framework

The CAF is a quality management and organisational development tool that aims to reinforce the operational performance, organisational excellence and positive societal outcomes of public sector organisations as well as their resilience. Despite not being designed from the perspective of resilience, the CAF can nonetheless help assess the preparedness and the adaptation of public organisations to the crisis and prepare them to be more resilient by looking at measures needed across its various criteria.

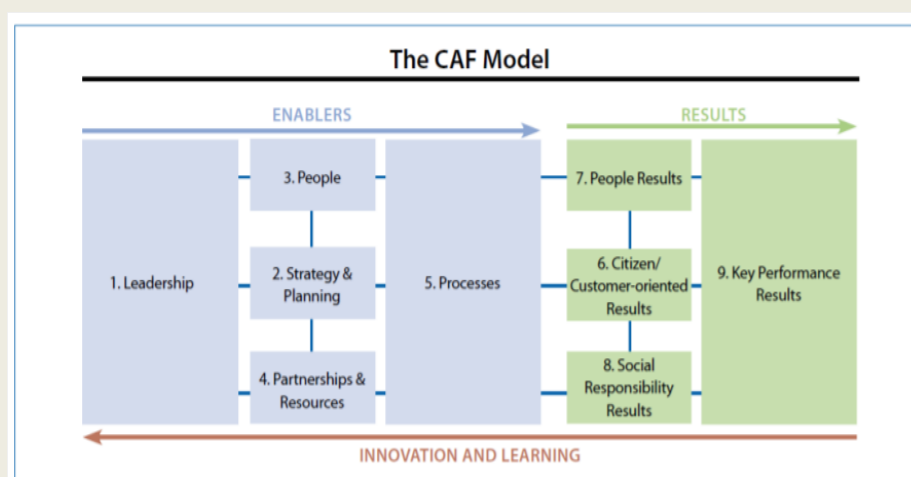
The CAF has been embedded in public administrations in EU Member States for more than 20 years and is a model applicable to all types of public sector organisations. More than 2 000 CAF users are registered in the EIPA database, representing a wide range of diverse public sector organisations.

The model, aimed to facilitate self-assessment as an initial step to trigger a process of continuous improvement, includes nine overall criteria that are split between enablers and results (Figure 1). Each

of this criterion is split in sub-criterion to make the assessment more precise and comprehensive. Eight horizontal principles of excellence are also defined and mainstreamed across the different criteria, for instance on results orientation, citizen/customer focus and on continuous learning, innovation and improvement. The model was last updated in 2020, right before the COVID-19 crisis, and included focuses on resilience, agility and digitalisation.

The CAF framework serves as a comprehensive lens through which one can assess an organisation's response to COVID-19. Given its longstanding experience with self-evaluation, the CAF community thus proved to be a highly appropriate focus for this project.

Figure 1. Overview of the CAF model, 2020



Note: For more details about the CAF model, please consult: <https://www.eipa.eu/caf-resource-centre/> and <https://www.eupan.eu/caf/>. Sources: (EUPAN, 2020^[7]; KDZ, 2023^[8]).

More specifically, the project aimed to support more resilient public sector administrations and organisations in European Member States by:

- Assessing the responses of public sector organisations, particularly CAF users, in managing the COVID-19 crisis and sharing case studies and practices.
- Promoting innovative and key public governance themes to make public administrations more resilient to future shocks and challenges.
- Helping the CAF network strengthen the use of CAF in the post-COVID-19 period and to reflect lessons learned and leverage it as a tool to build resilience.

11 EU Member States agreed to join the project and share their experiences: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Spain.

The project assessed the impact and adaptation of CAF users through a survey and case studies

The project combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the impact and adaptations made by CAF users during the COVID-19 crisis through a survey and a series of case studies.

A survey was administered to the entire base of CAF users in EU MS that is hosted and maintained by EIPA (the "OECD-EIPA Survey"). The survey aimed to capture the experience of CAF users of the COVID-19 crisis and how the CAF contributed to organisational readiness and resilience. It enabled the project to collect quantitative information and identify key trends, adaptation measures and challenges for

CAF users during the crisis. It was carried out by EIPA based on an online questionnaire covering the impact, adaptation and preparedness of public sector organisations in general and on each CAF criterion and also assessing the use of CAF during the crisis. The survey was carried out for a month in October–November 2021 and registered 174 responses of public sector organisations from 23 countries, with Bulgaria, Italy and Poland provided the most responses. The sample of responding organisations had a good balance of levels (local/municipal, state/regional, central/national) and size (small defined as 1–49 employees, medium as 50 to 249 employees and large as 250 employees and over). Most respondents were active CAF users with 55% of them having used CAF more than once. Results were presented at a virtual webinar in February 2022 and during different national events organised by CAF national correspondents.

To dig deeper into specific practices and experiences, the project selected, with the support of CAF national correspondents, one case study organisation per participating country. This intense, on-the-ground exercise involved the following eleven organisations spanning across sectors and levels of governments:

- the *Women Service of the City of Vienna* in Austria
- the *National Employment Office* of Belgium
- the *Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate* in Bulgaria
- the *Pension Insurance Institute* in Croatia
- the *Municipality of Thessaloniki* in Greece
- the *Agenzia Spaziale Italiana* (Italian Space Agency) in Italy
- the *Lubuski Urząd Wojewódzki w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim* (Lubuskie Voivodship Office) in Poland
- the *Agrupamento Escolar de Vouzela e Campia* (Vouzela and Campia School Grouping) in Portugal
- the *Ministry of Environment* of the Slovak Republic
- the *Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development* in Slovenia
- and *Madrid Salud* in Spain.

These case studies helped further analyse the response and lessons learnt from the crisis and identify good and scalable practices and key aspects for resilience. The case studies thus reflect the experiences of the organisation in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, particularly highlighting how this response was innovative and relevant for other public sector organisations and discussing the benefits and usefulness of CAF in this process. Each case study was prepared following a defined template and approach and drafted by KDZ and the beneficiary organisation, with the support of the CAF national correspondent and, all of them being assembled into the second part of this paper.

The project reflected on new practices and lessons learnt from resilience through deep dive workshops

The key trends, findings and practices identified through the survey and the case studies were further grouped by theme and discussed during several deep dive workshops in Brussels hosted by the Belgian Federal Public Service Policy and Support (BOSA) in June 2022 and in Vienna hosted by the City of Vienna in November 2022. These workshops helped to delve deeper into survey findings, case studies and discuss implications for strengthening resilience, public sector reforms and the CAF model. They allowed to further explore the themes of “Preparing and adapting strategies, priorities and practices for crisis”, “Innovating in the face of the crisis”, “Leadership and people management in times of crisis”, and “Serving society: staying connected and delivering value” and allow to share experiences and discuss lessons learnt between participants through interactive formats. They gathered the CAF national correspondents of the participating countries, representatives of the selected cases studies, the European Commission, the OECD, the European CAF Resource Centre at EIPA, KDZ and other experts and partner organisations.

From these different project activities, adaptations, lessons learnt and policy implications for public sector organisations, particularly CAF users, are summarised and further explored in this paper. They are illustrated by a number of examples stemming from the case study organisations and are connected with key OECD instruments and research in the different fields.

The Common Assessment Framework: A proven valuable tool for crisis preparedness and response

Quality and performance management tools, such as the CAF, have helped public sector organisations better understand and continuously enhance the functioning of their organisations (Staes, Thijs and Claessen, 2016^[9]), prepare and adapt to unexpected events, and achieve stronger resilience. In particular, the CAF is a resourceful and widespread key public management tool that EU public administrations have at their disposal.

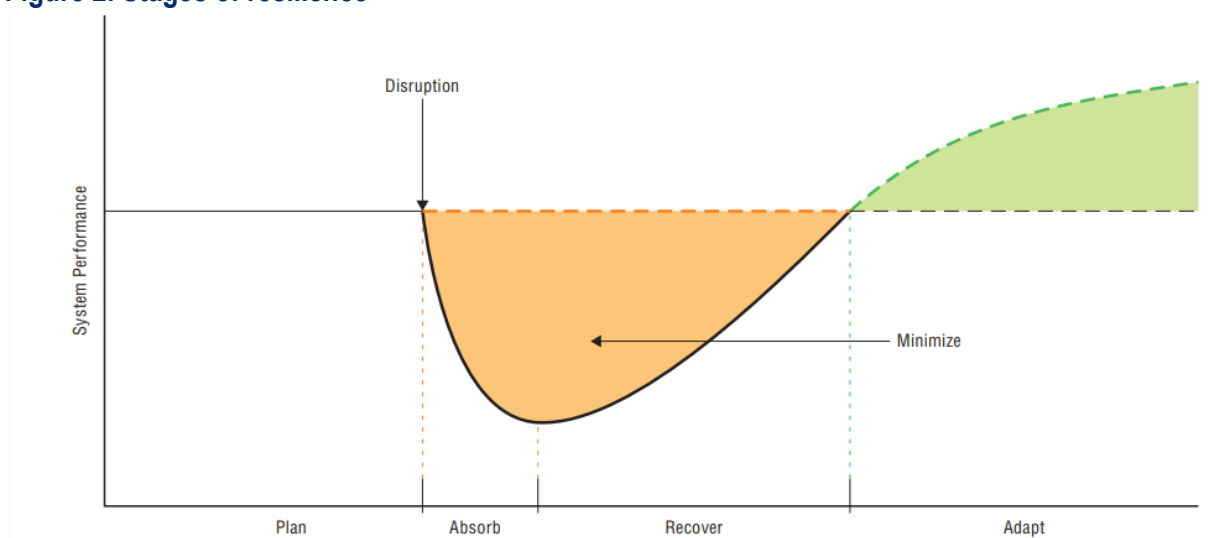
The CAF has been widely used by public sector organisations of all sizes and sectors during the COVID-19 crisis and helped them cushion the impact and adapt to the crisis. As a continuous improvement framework, the CAF provided users with a better knowledge of the organisation acquired during past CAF exercises, a higher capacity to mobilise the organisation, and tools to identify and address specific issues and challenges in relations to CAF criteria. CAF users benefited from performance improvement initiatives already started or implemented before the crisis based on CAF implementation plans, for instance on digitalisation or remote working. The regular practice of CAF has participated to creating a process of continuous learning and improvement for users, which has helped them react and adapt in a context of an external shock. These findings will be further elaborated in the next sections of this paper.

2 The impact and adaptation of CAF users during the COVID-19 crisis

Defining resilience

While there are many available definitions for resilience, the definition of resilience this OECD project relied on is “the capacity of systems to absorb a disturbance, recover from disruptions and adapt to changing conditions while retaining essentially the same function as prior to the disruptive shock” (Linkov, Trump and Hynes, 2019^[10]). This definition covers four important stages that organisations have to go through when facing unexpected, adverse events: planning and preparation, absorption, recovery and adaptation (Figure 2). It also considers the need to continue the delivery of the key functions of organisations and the objective of enhancing performance over time.

Figure 2. Stages of resilience



Source: (Linkov, Trump and Hynes, 2019^[10]).

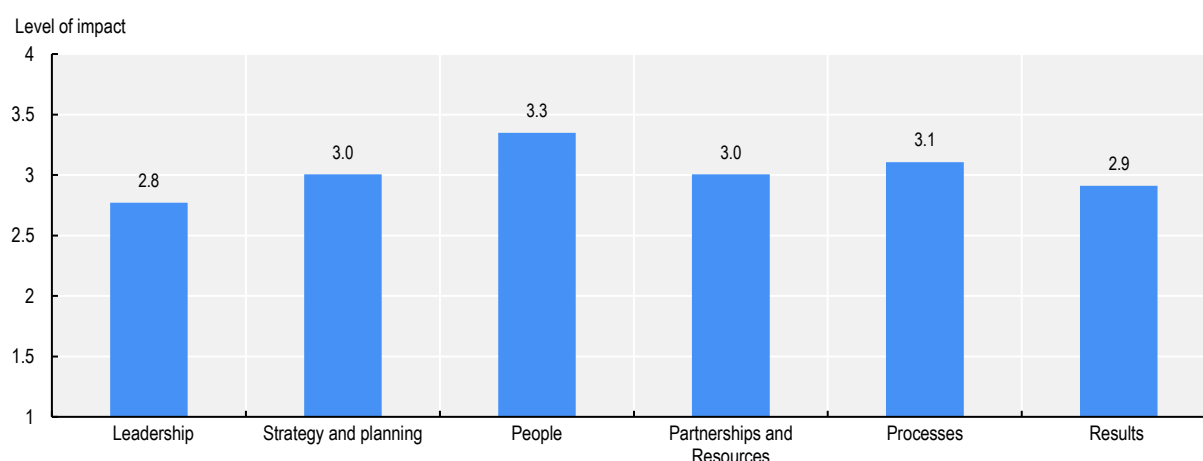
The OECD has also pointed out to a number of important drivers of resilience in the COVID-19 context, drawing lessons from the experiences of governments. These drivers include notably the need to respond at scale and speed to shocks, by building the appropriate innovation capabilities, supporting the development of relevant leadership and skill sets, developing the appropriate infrastructure (digital for instance) and addressing crosscutting priorities, and to enhance transparency and trust, particularly in developing inclusive decision-making and strategic-making processes, engaging citizens, partnering with non-government stakeholders, maintaining high levels of public integrity and communicating (OECD, 2021^[11]).

Leveraging the CAF and implementation plans to strengthen the pandemic response

The project analysed the preparedness, impact and adaptation of many public sector organisations in EU Member States using the criteria of the CAF model as key axes of analysis (leadership, strategy and planning, people, partnerships and resources, processes and results). These criteria helped ensure a comprehensive organisational analysis of resilience and are therefore used to structure the paper. Organisations were impacted on all dimensions of their organisations, especially people

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a multidimensional crisis with wide-ranging effects on economies, and societies, generating strong pressure and impacts on the activities and functioning of all public sector organisations. The OECD-EIPA Survey highlighted that CAF users were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis on all criteria of the CAF, especially on people (staff) and processes (Figure 3). The lockdown and containment measures forced organisations to shut down parts of their physical, in-person offices and activities, implement remote work and move a larger number of interactions and public services delivered to citizens as well as internal activities and communications to digital means.

Figure 3. Overview of impact on public sector organisations by CAF criteria



Note: On a scale from 1 to 4, with 1: no impact; 2: limited impact; 3: moderate impact; 4: significant impact for the organisation.
Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

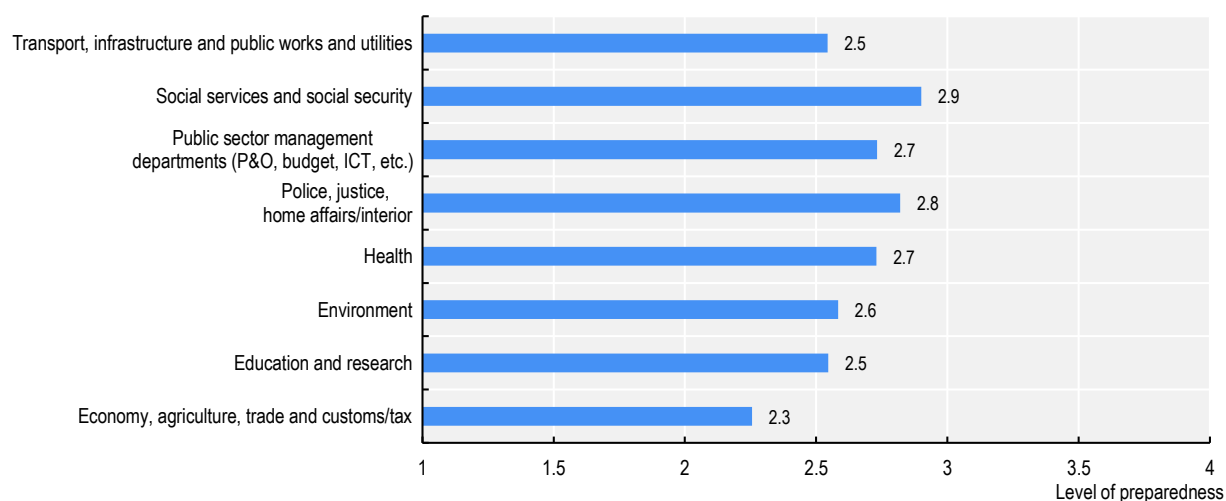
The impact has been rather homogenous across levels of government, each level (central/federal, region/state and local/municipal) overall reporting a strong average impact, even though the nature of impacts has been quite different, with local administrations having generally lower capacities and proportionally more front desk activities with citizens in the delivery of public services.

Most organisations were moderately prepared across levels of governments with limited specific plans or protocols

The magnitude and multidimensional nature of the COVID-19 crisis made it difficult for public sector organisations globally to anticipate and prepare. Most organisations were moderately prepared to face the crisis across the different criteria of the CAF. This stands for all levels of governments. Organisations at the local/municipal level were found to have been the least prepared in the survey; in contrast, organisations at the regional/state level had the highest average level of preparedness.

Concerning size, larger organisations were found to have been slightly better prepared for the crisis, reflecting more capacity to anticipate and have crisis procedures in place. There is not one sector where organisations reported feeling much better prepared than others. The economic, trade and agriculture sector were the least prepared, followed by education and transport; this is most likely linked to the level of impact of the crisis on their activities and of restrictions applied to them (Figure 4). The immediate and unforeseen closure of shops, schools and borders and the restrictions in the freedom of circulation, that were impossible to anticipate, are key drivers behind these results.

Figure 4. Level of preparedness perceived by public sector organisations by economic sector



Note: On a scale from 1 to 4, with 1: no preparation at all; 2: limited preparation; 3: moderate preparation; to 4: well-prepared.

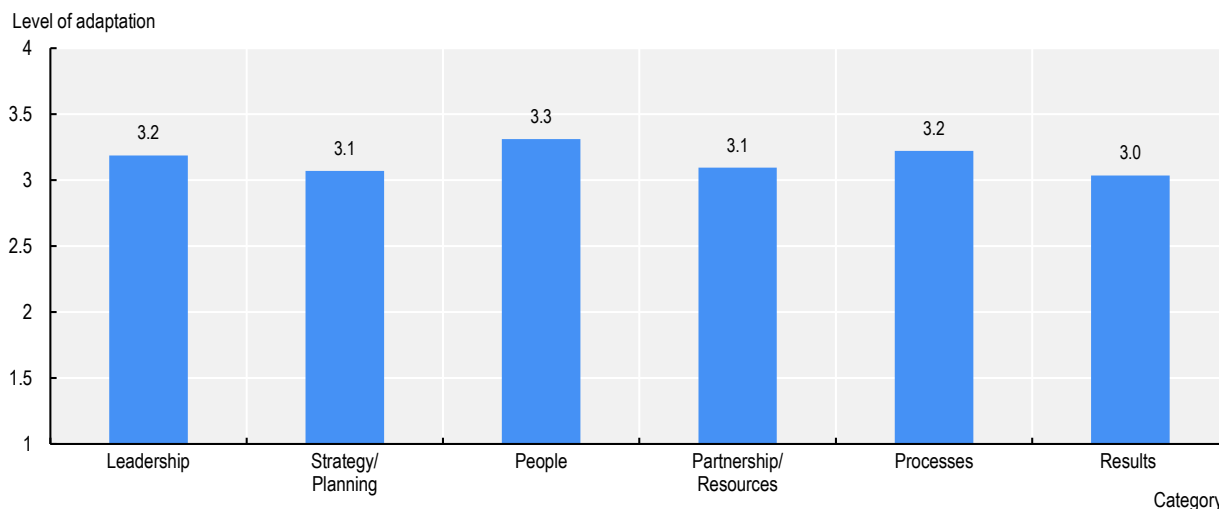
Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

The lack of preparedness by public sector organisations is reflected in the lack of crisis management plans and protocols established before the crisis. Overall, 53% of responding organisations reported having had a crisis management plan or some relevant protocols in place. Close to 40% of organisations reported having no specific crisis procedure in place. Crisis management systems were in place in some organisations, particularly central administrations, that helped organise the co-ordination and implementation of measures.

All organisations reported a high level of adaptation on all CAF criteria

Public sector organisations had to adapt fast to the immediate effects of COVID-19 on their interactions and public service delivery to citizens as well as on their ways of functioning both internally and in co-ordination with other organisations. In the face of the wide impacts of COVID-19, all organisations reported a high level of adaptation on all CAF criteria. The survey found a higher adaptation level regarding people, but there is overall little variation among criteria, with the lowest adaptation level measured in results, demonstrating a whole-of-organisation needed adaptation to the crisis (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Average level of adaptation performed by public sector organisations on the different CAF criteria

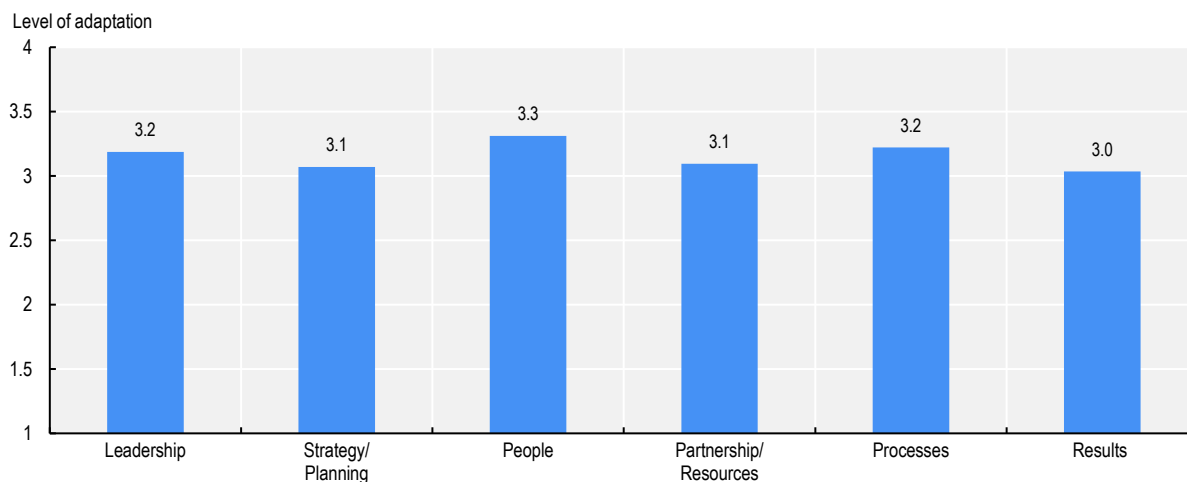


Note: On a scale from 1 to 4, with 1: no adaptation required; 2: limited adaptation; 3: moderate adaptation; and 4: major adaptation.

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Smaller organisations were found overall to have had a disproportionately lower level of adaptation than larger counterparts in the survey. While these differences remain small on the overall adaptation level, the variation is more important when looking at criteria. Among larger organisations, the highest level of adaptation was recorded for people as these organisations had to implement and develop mobility measures across services for staff. Smaller organisations saw the highest adaptation on leadership and the lowest on people, pointing out that laws and internal regulations on human resources might provide less flexibility for new measures compared to leadership where methods can change based on the personality and the establishment of new management and decision-making structures (Figure 6). A number of case studies reported the creation of new managerial structures to guide and co-ordinate action during the COVID-19, such as daily briefing meetings and weekly horizontal meetings with top management, including Belgium and Croatia.

Figure 6. Average adaptation level for smaller organisation (less than 50 employees)



Note: On a scale from 1 to 4, with 1: no adaptation required; 2: limited adaptation; 3: moderate adaptation; and 4: major adaptation.

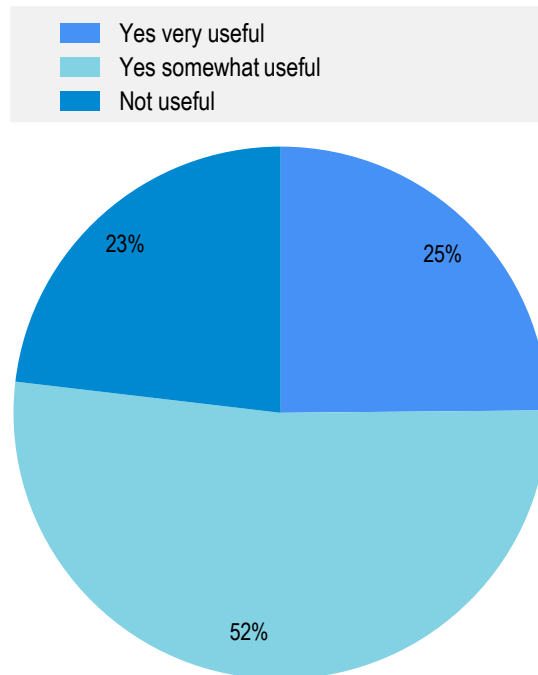
Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

CAF proved a useful tool for organisations to prepare and respond to the pandemic

Among CAF users, the CAF model has been significantly used during the COVID-19 crisis to help them absorb, adapt and recover from the shock. 77 % of respondents confirmed that their experience with CAF helped during the crisis (Figure 7). The EIPA-OECD Survey revealed that more than half of the respondents reported having recently conducted a new CAF exercise or having referred to the CAF criteria during the crisis. CAF users that ran the CAF model during the crisis also adapted better across all criteria, than CAF users that did not.

These results are consistent across the levels of governments. Looking at the size of organisations, the smaller organisations are those that found the model most useful for over 80% of them (including close to 30% finding it very useful).

Figure 7. Most organisations found CAF useful or very useful during the crisis



Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

The context and sense of urgency during the crisis sometimes made the use of existing management and quality tools and models challenging for organisations. Among the respondents who did not use CAF during the crisis, 40% of respondents mentioned that they had other priorities during the crisis or reported a lack of time and resources. Only 2% of respondents that did not use CAF explained it by a lack of usefulness of the model in the context of the crisis.

When comparing with non-CAF users, which represented 10% of the respondents spanning across the different sectors and level of governments, CAF users felt slightly more prepared and able to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis, particularly on people and partnerships and resources. Non-CAF users also felt more impacted by the pandemic, especially on partnerships and resources. Few of the non-CAF users reported using the ISO standards instead of CAF.¹

Leadership: Putting “people first” was proven essential

The biggest challenges reported were keeping employees safe while adapting organisational processes to meet the new needs of the moment

Leadership is the first criteria in the CAF model and was the central element of any organisations' COVID response. Public leaders were called upon to protect their employees from an unknown threat while at the same time finding new ways to deliver the essential services that citizens depend upon. In many cases, these needs were changing from hour to hour and leaders needed to keep a pulse on these changing needs through imperfect data and established communication networks. Leaders also needed to keep their

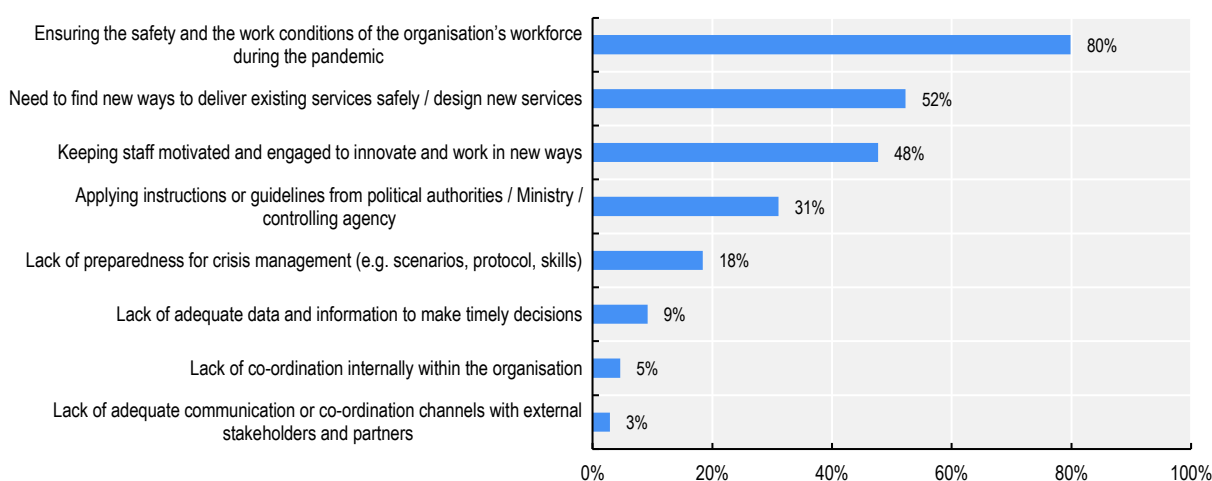
¹ While these results tend to indicate that the use of CAF helped increase the responsiveness of the organisations to shocks, the relatively small size of the sample for non-CAF users would require to interpret these elements of comparison with caution.

workforces engaged and motivated despite the profoundly challenging working environment. Often this meant rethinking internal procedures to accommodate for overnight changes related to leading a remote workforce. To summarise, leaders were on the frontlines of the COVID crisis response. Without leadership, no change would have been possible.

The survey shows that ensuring the safety and work conditions of the organisations' workforce during the pandemic was the number one challenge leaders faced, selected by 84% of organisational respondents. Around half of the organisational respondents also highlighted the need to find new ways to deliver existing services safely and/or design new services, and keep staff motivated and engaged to innovate and work in new ways. These findings underline the importance of people-centric leadership in moments of crisis and transformation, whether those people are employees or users of services.

Only a very small minority of respondents identified challenges related to leadership preparedness during the crisis. For example, only 3% of respondents suggested that leaders lacked adequate communication or co-ordination channels with external stakeholders and partners, while only 5% pointed to a lack of co-ordination internally. This suggests that these channels and relationships were already in place before the crisis, so that leaders knew who to reach and how to reach them when the moment became urgent.

Figure 8. Main challenges for leadership during the crisis



Note: percentage of responding organisations selecting each challenge.

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Leaders who put people first (both citizens/users and their employees) fared better

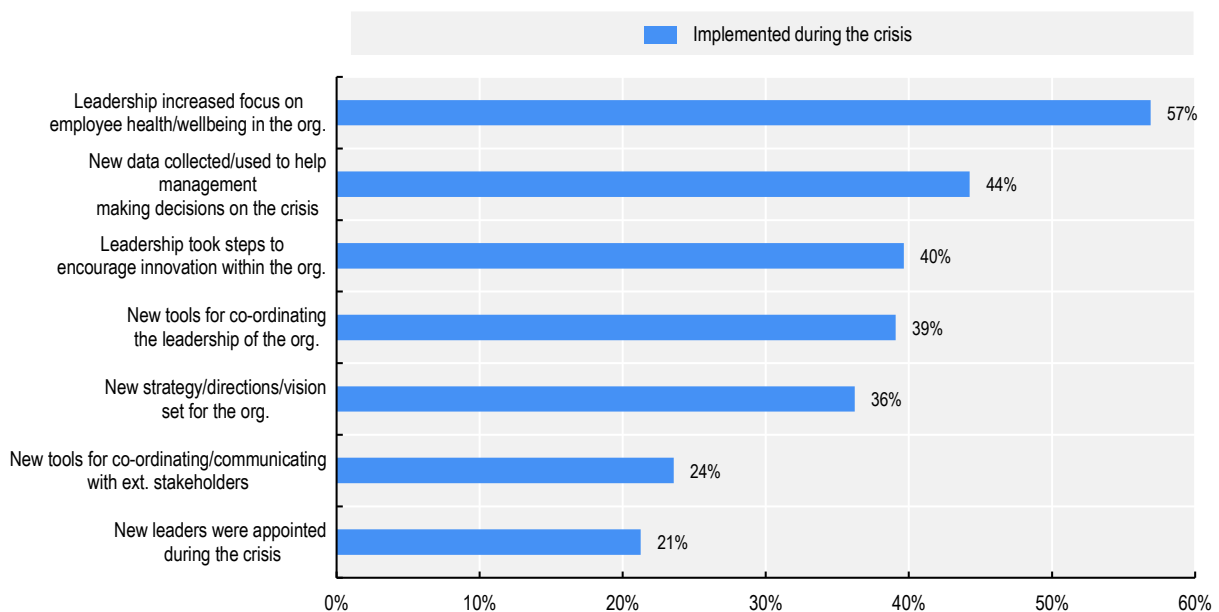
One of the most striking findings from the leadership question is the focus on employee health and well-being in the organisation, which took on a new importance according to most respondents. Leaders were called to renew a focus on, not only, the need to keep employees safe from the virus, but to find new ways to monitor and manage mental health and potential burnout related to the crisis. Working remotely in a context of alarm and uncertainty created a new world of health risks that leaders were required to navigate, and many did so by ensuring that employees had the information and flexibility they needed to make the right choices that suited their needs.

Several leaders in the case study organisations put in place pulse surveys to assess the overall experience of their workforce and get a feel for their levels of engagement and stress. In larger organisations, these have been particularly useful to also track trends around the experience of different groups of employees, and to identify any particular management gaps. Leaders also implemented new ways of communicating with employees, and did so more often, not only to communicate changes but also keep a pulse on their

impact on employees. In Madrid Salud, for example, periodic virtual Town Halls were instituted, along with regular meetings with senior managers. Many leaders also developed special training and support for their managers who had to learn how to manage a remote workforce. Many managers have indicated that one of the positive outcomes of this has been an increase in trust between managers and their employees.

In many cases, remote working was not an option, and here leaders were required to face real challenges of potential burnout – particularly among workers on the frontlines of the health emergency, such as those delivering health services. In these cases, taking care of workers meant taking steps to adapt leadership and managerial structures to an increasingly strenuous work environment.

Figure 9. Measures taken to adapt leadership and managerial structures during the COVID crisis



Note: Percentage of responding organisations selecting this measure.

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Some of the other changes that are expected to last from the crisis including the use of new tools to drive innovation, and tools for co-ordinating the leadership of the organisation. Many leaders experimented with different formations of skills and competencies to address emerging needs and spark innovation. For example, more frequent use of leadership co-ordination committees ensured a more fluid sharing of information across departments than before. And emergency task teams were often formed with employees from various areas to work together on innovating responses.

Only around a third of organisational respondents had leaders who set a new strategy, direction or vision for the organisation, while only a quarter implemented new tools for co-ordination and communication with external stakeholders. Finally, around 20% of organisations appointed new leaders during the time of crisis. It would be interesting to further study this phenomenon to understand whether these changes were related to the crisis, and how this would compare to a regular year.

Strategy and planning: Uncertainty led to a high need for adaptability

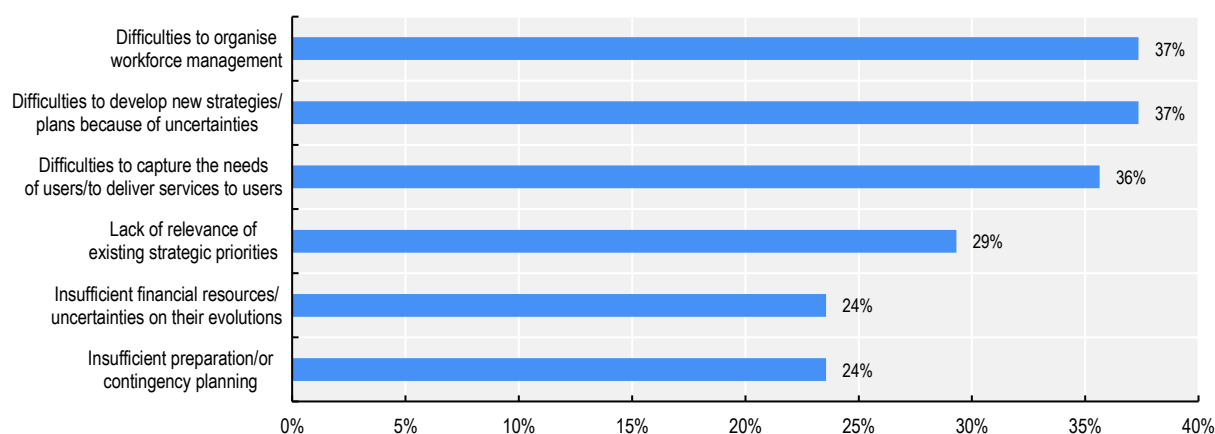
Public sector organisations experienced an important impact on strategy and planning with new challenges emerging

Strategic planning can help public sector organisations identify and define priorities, translate them into strategic and action plans, and ensure that they are implemented in a co-ordinated and efficient manner. Such strategies might exist at the national/sector level, at the regional level or at the level of the organisation depending on the size and the sector. Public sector organisations identified a high impact and adaptation on strategy and planning, like on other CAF criteria. The COVID-19 crisis has entailed important changes in the needs and expectations of citizens and in the strategic priorities of organisations, with a stronger focus on immediate, operational priorities to maintain the delivery and functioning of public organisations, such as digitalisation and workforce management.

The COVID-19 crisis brought about several novel challenges for public sector organisations to deliver on their strategic priorities, many of which found themselves ill prepared for adaptation (Figure 10). The most common challenges faced by organisations during the crisis were in organising workforce management, developing new strategies and user interaction, each having been reported by more than one third of the respondents. Not all organisations had existing crisis plans or strategies; in addition, organisations that did have such strategies largely failed to implement them beforehand. 29% of respondents reported a lack of relevance in their existing strategic priorities, and 24% of respondents reported insufficient preparation or contingency planning within their organisations.

Figure 10. Main challenges in achieving strategic priorities during the crisis

Share of respondents



Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Existing strategic plans were seldom used or revised during the crisis by public sector organisations, when they had one. The lack of capacities for strategic planning and the focus on the delivery are some of the reasons behind this limited use and adaptation of strategic plans. One exception is the Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate in Bulgaria that had a strategy in place with a mission, values and goals (*the strategic concept for the development of the Inspectorate*), that helped the organisation navigate and manage its employees through the crisis.

In terms of planning, it should be noted that 40% of surveyed public sector organisations pointed out that their existing CAF implementation plan helped them prepare for and respond to the COVID-19-crisis, thus demonstrating the usefulness of operational plans particularly in the absence of strategic ones.

Priorities have shifted with digitalisation and workforce management at the top after the crisis

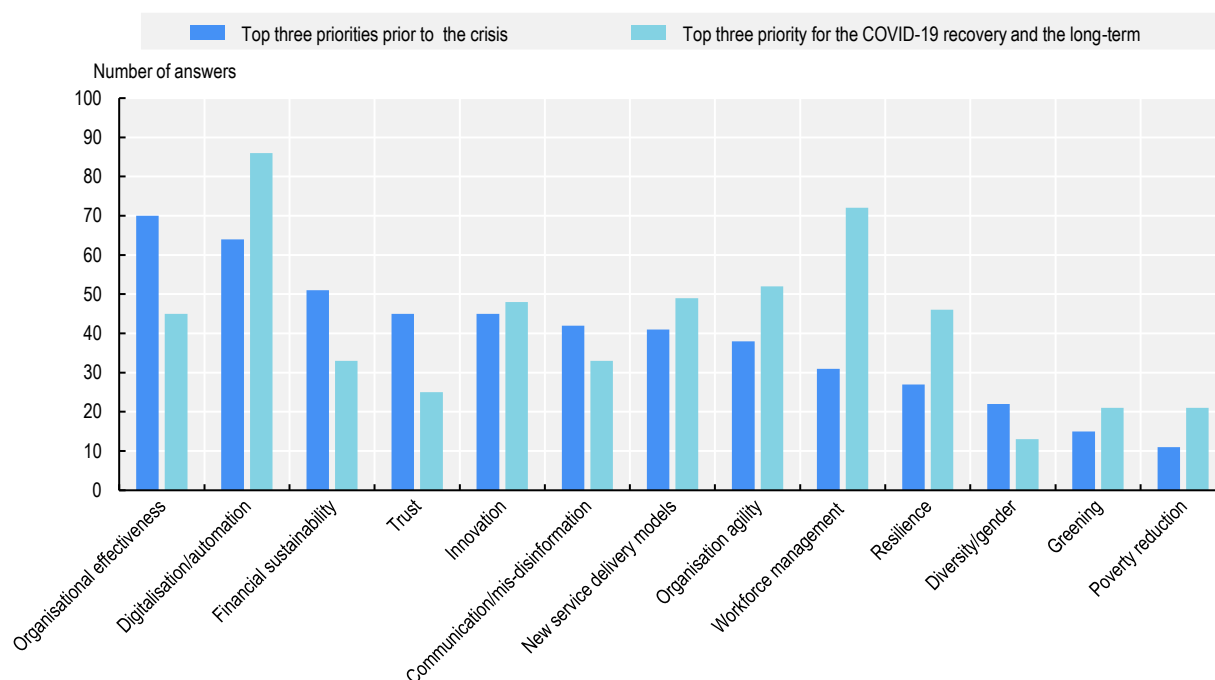
The COVID-19 crisis has deeply influenced the priorities identified by public sector organisations prior to the crisis. While organisational effectiveness and financial sustainability were considered key priorities before the crisis, priorities have shifted with over 70% of responding organisations identifying digitalisation and workforce management as top priorities after the crisis. Digitalisation has remained a key priority throughout the crisis yet is now considered the foremost priority by more than 80% of respondents, surpassing organisational effectiveness. In addition, workforce management has emerged as a top priority after the crisis with an increase from 31% to 72% of respondents, particularly in relation to the challenges of remote working. Organisational-related priorities are still present after the crisis, including agility and effectiveness, as organisations need to continuously adapt and increase their effectiveness to deliver in a post-crisis context (Figure 11).

Innovation and resilience have both experienced an increase throughout the crisis and are ranked among the top three post-crisis priorities by a third of respondents. These two priorities relate to the capacity of organisations to adapt to the crisis, find new solutions and models and be ready for future shocks.

While governments are increasingly faced with horizontal, crosscutting priorities such as reinforcing trust, green governance and gender equality, these priorities are ranked lower for individual public sector organisations, particularly for smaller ones. This shows the need for smaller organisations to focus on immediate priorities and needs of citizens compared to essential longer-term governance challenges. They also reflect the need for systemic answers to these issues using a whole-of-government approach and carried out by larger, central organisations, including Ministries and agencies. Nevertheless, two thirds of respondents expect that the new practices developed in response to the crisis, such as digitalisation, can have a positive impact on the sustainability and climate footprint of the organisation.

Figure 11. Strategic priorities for public sector organisations before and after the crisis

Participants had to select top 3 priorities before and after the crisis



Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Priorities however differ across sizes of public sector organisations, beyond digitalisation and workforce management. Smaller organisations have identified digitalisation, workforce management and organisational agility and effectiveness as key priorities, all concrete, operational priorities. Digitalisation has experienced the sharpest increase from 18% to 32% of respondents as a priority among smaller organisations. Among larger ones, resilience and innovation also appeared as important priorities, including through the development of new delivery models, showing more capacity to address systemic issues and find new ideas and solutions beyond immediate adaptation.

While some priorities differ across levels of government, priorities on digitalisation and workforce management are consistently observed, particularly at the central/federal level and the regional/state level. Digitalisation at the regional/state level has experienced an increase from 11% to 21% of respondents identifying it as a priority since the COVID-19 crisis. At the local/municipal level, digitalisation remains a constant priority now at 33% of respondents, followed by agility, workforce management and resilience.

Not all organisations had crisis plans or strategies in place before the pandemic, those who did were still not prepared mainly because these plans were not actionable in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

Only 25% of public sector organisations had existing crisis plans or strategies in place prior to the onset of the crisis. In addition, organisations that did have such strategies rarely used them during the COVID-19 crisis, largely because they were not readily actionable or designed to respond to a pandemic of this magnitude. Overall, 24% of respondents reported insufficient preparation or contingency planning within their organisations. The responses collected by the survey reveal that CAF users suffer from a lack of necessary tools to address urgent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, some public

sector organisations have adopted crisis contingency plan during the COVID-19 crisis, such as Business Continuity Plan in the National Employment Agency of Belgium.

Few organisations were part of a strong national crisis management system that helped them establish plans before the crisis and use and adapt them during the pandemic. An exception was the case for the SIRH in Bulgaria that was a key player in the national system. Being part of a well-established and adaptive national crisis management system has been perceived as a key success factor for an efficient and co-ordinated COVID-19 response.

People: Keeping employees safe, engaged and productive

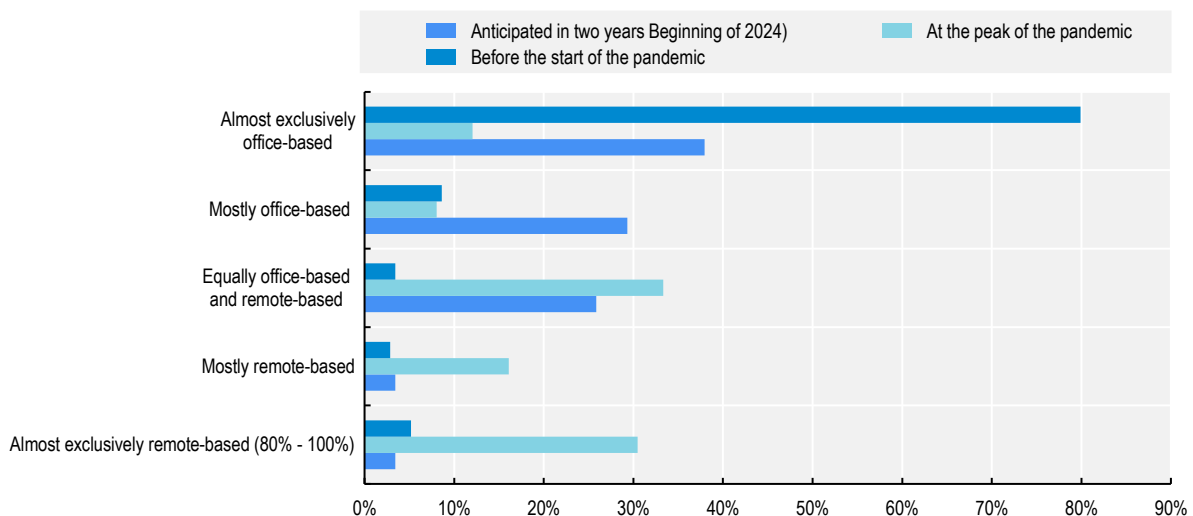
In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic was a people centred crisis, as such the people dimension of the CAF model is the one that saw the highest level of impact and adaptations (Figure 3, Figure 5). It is also the area that saw the biggest leap in priority, with above 70% of respondents identifying workforce management among their top three priorities for both the recovery and the long term, compared to only 30% prior to the crisis (Figure 11).

An overnight shift to remote working for many, but not all

For most organisations, the pandemic was a stress test for the flexibility of both employees and their employers. This flexibility took many shapes and forms. On the one hand, almost overnight, many public service organisations transformed from office-based working patterns before the pandemic to remote offices (Figure 12). Employers had to ensure infrastructure and equipment to enable business continuity, and rethink work processes to accommodate huge spikes in demand. This required, in many cases, large shifts of personnel from areas that were deemed lower priority (e.g. face to face service delivery) to areas of new demand (e.g. online delivery). Not only did organisations require agile employee mobility processes to move people and accommodate this demand, but also the means to quickly train new employees at a distance. From an employees' perspective, flexibility took the form of day to day uncertainty, balancing new work demands, locations (e.g. home office) and work/life balance, particularly when schools were closed.

Figure 12. Office-based vs remote working before, during and after the pandemic

Share of respondents

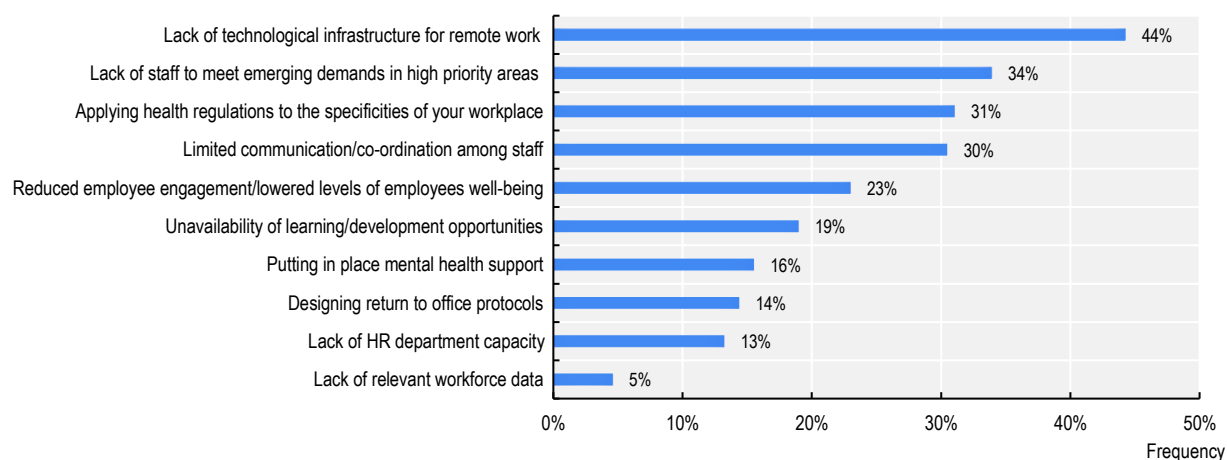


Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

The survey points to some common HRM challenges, despite a huge variety of respondents (Figure 13). The most common was a lack of technological infrastructure to support remote work. This required not only laptops with appropriate connectivity, but also document storage systems and communication tools that met the needs of workers while ensuring appropriate levels of security. Overall, the pandemic broke down many of the boundaries of traditional internal services such as HR, IT and facilities management – as the workspace became increasingly digital. It is not surprising that the most common adaptations during the crisis in this area concerned the implementation of new technological tools to support remote working and learning, reflecting a lack of digital skills among staff.

Figure 13. Main HRM challenges

Share of responding organisations

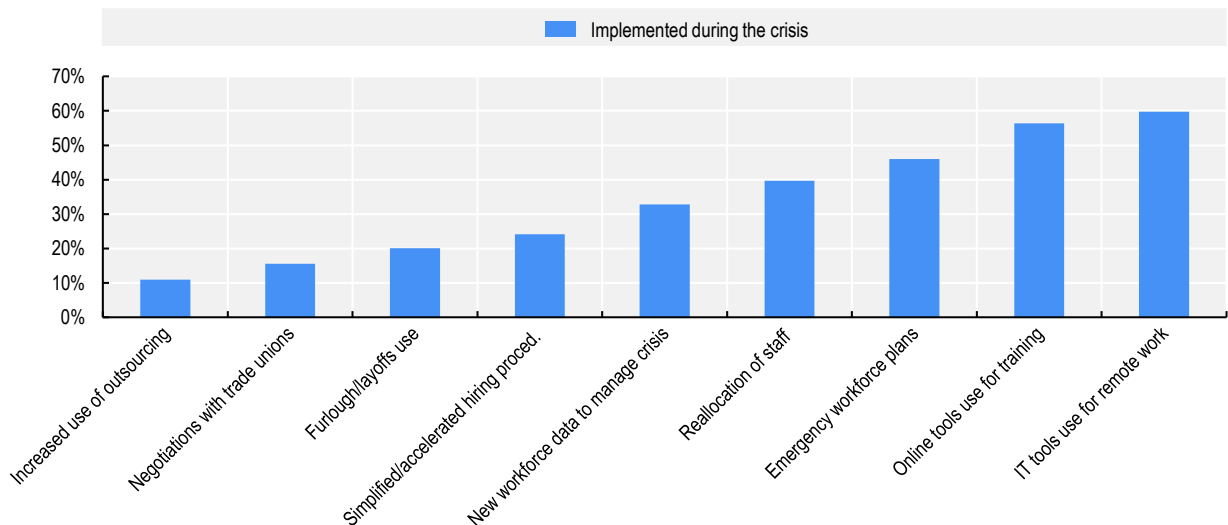


Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Getting the right staff in the right place to ensure an appropriate response was a key challenge for many

The second most common challenge identified by a third of respondent was the lack of staff to meet emerging demands (Figure 14). This points to a challenge regarding surge capacity, which was not in place for many of the organisations. Some organisations worked to put in place new tools to reallocate existing staff from lower to higher priority areas, although the speed with which it took to get these systems in place was not always ideal. Other organisations were required to look outside for short term hires to support their work, but this also often proved challenging given recruitment systems that were not well adapted to meet the needs of the moment. To meet this challenge, 25% of respondents accelerated and/or streamlined their recruitment processes.

Figure 14. HRM adaptations during the crisis



Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Partnerships and resources: A limited capacity to reach partners

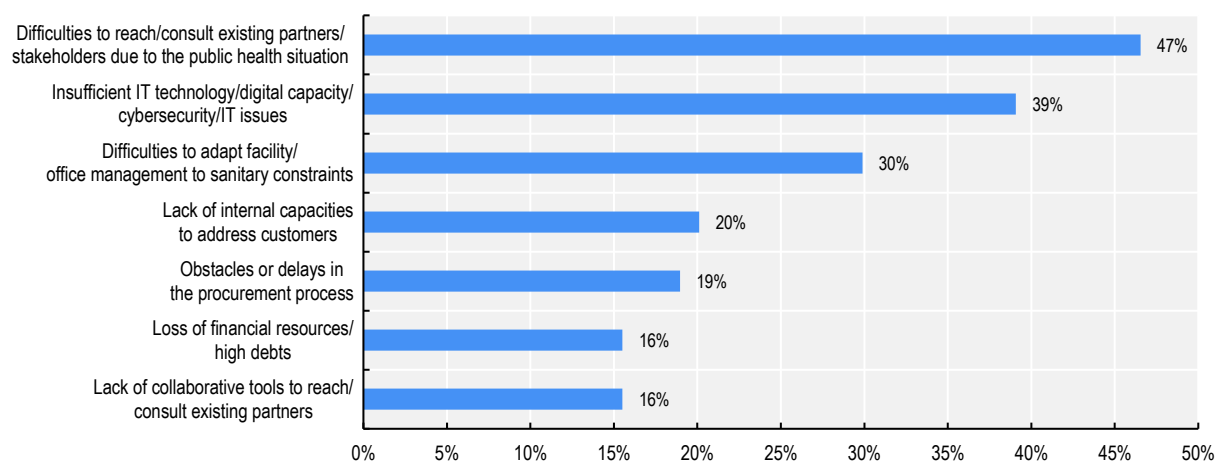
Difficulties to reach partners was a key constraint for public sector organisations during the crisis, and the lack of digital capacity was an obstacle

The collaboration with external stakeholders through the development of partnerships with citizens and civil society organisations can help increase the quality and relevance of public services and policies to the needs of users and expand its capacities to implement its activities and deliver on its priorities (EUPAN, 2020^[7]). The COVID-19 context has challenged the capacity of public sector organisations to reach out to partners to a large extent due to lockdowns and containment measures, forcing organisations to reinvent and find new ways to collaborate, when possible.

Difficulties to reach partners was found to be the foremost constraint for public sector organisations, as reported by 47% of respondents in the survey. The lack of digital capabilities in the context of social distancing measures and shutdowns presented such organisations with significant obstacles to using existing partnerships or fostering new ones. 39% of respondents reported a lack or insufficiency of digital capacity to have been a key obstacle. Furthermore, 30% of respondents reported difficulties to adapt office management to sanitary constraints, highlighting both constraints on internal resources to work and collaborate with colleagues (back office), and externally to deliver services and engage in-person with citizens and civil society organisation (front office) (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Main challenges in terms of partnerships and resources faced by public sector organisations during the crisis

Share of responding organisations



Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

When they were faced with limited digital capabilities, public sector organisations strived for expanding and accelerating their digital transition through additional internal investment and resources for digital solutions, the mutualisation of digital tools with other public entities or the development of new partnerships with external IT firms.

New partnerships were established using different formats and settings and could be further mainstreamed

Despite this challenging context, close to one third of organisations managed to implement new partnerships with suppliers, civil society, or other types of external stakeholders; 32% of respondents reported having developed new partnerships during the crisis. These partnerships were forged with non-government stakeholders and public stakeholders, including NGOs, academia, private companies (IT, hotels, etc.), and public sector organisations at the same level or at different levels of government (e.g. Ministries, agencies, other regional bodies, etc.). For instance, the City of Thessaloniki has developed new partnerships with private hotel companies, the Greek National Tourism Organisation, and the Ministry of Tourism.

Organisations that succeeded in establishing new partnerships employed different formats and settings; for instance, relying on new partners like hotels to shelter vulnerable populations as was used in Thessaloniki, or finding new IT companies to deliver digital solutions. Depending on the needs and context, new partners were thus found to improve the internal processes of public sector organisations and expand their resources, or to better reach out and deliver services to end users.

Some of these formats could be further mainstreamed beyond the crisis as they provide sustainable and innovative solutions for service delivery and have helped organisations modernise and digitalise their internal processes. In some cases, they have also fostered better collaboration within the administration through new remote and digital co-ordination mechanisms that could be maintained after the crisis.

To strengthen the approach to partnerships, few public sector organisations have developed new strategies for partnerships. This has been the case of the Slovak Ministry of Environment that is elaborating a new partnership management strategy.

The further engagement of citizens and civil society in the design and implementation of policies and services has been accelerating during the crisis thanks to new digital channels, collaboration mechanisms and partnerships and is a key driver for modernising the public administration, increasing its responsiveness to citizen needs, and ultimately reinforcing trust in the public administration (OECD, 2022^[6]).

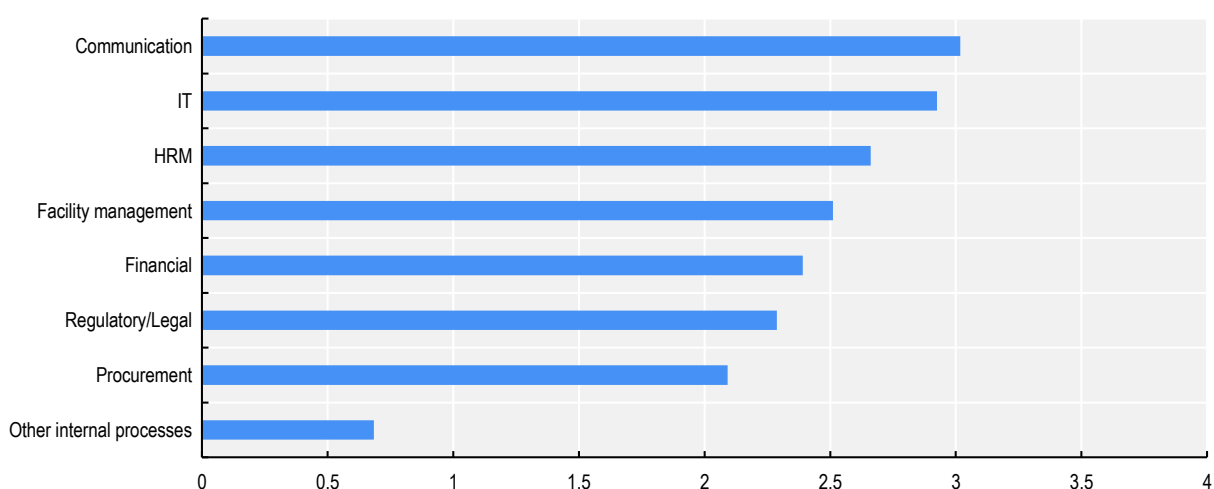
Processes: Digitalisation as a key trend for internal processes and service delivery

The crisis impacted most internal processes, particularly those in need of digitalisation

The COVID-19 has impacted the internal way of working of public administrations by developing remote work and closing or revisiting office spaces at least temporarily, increasing digital exchanges, and using new channels of communications. New laws and regulations have been issued by governments that created, modified or simplified existing procedures and rules in place in the administration, for instance regarding time, procedures and documents to be submitted for administrative applications.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis was significant on most internal processes, particularly those in need for digitalisation such as communication and HRM. Communication and IT felt the strongest average impact on internal processes, followed by human resource management (Figure 16). The development of remote working and of digital communications, using tools such as Ms Teams or Zoom, have led to considerable changes in internal work processes for public sector organisations. The practice of virtual meetings has become widespread across teams and organisations. Internal IT activities have expanded with increased, immediate needs of IT capacities, skills, and tools. Issues of cyber security have also been of growing concern as digital exchanges of information, data and documents have multiplied. Staff mobility and conditions for remote working have been important topics for HRM while training has become virtual. Less impacted were regulatory and legal services and procurement, certainly as the key decisions and procedures remain centralised in one or several organisations with relatively low discretionary power in most organisations on laws and procurement.

Figure 16. Average impact on internal processes of surveyed public sector organisations



Note: On a scale from 1 to 4, with 1: no adaptation required; 2: limited adaptation; 3: moderate adaptation; and 4: major adaptation.

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Organisations that were most advanced in digital transformation before the crisis were better prepared to adapt quickly. While some organisations had largely anticipated on the digitalisation of key internal processes before the COVID-19 crisis, for example the Italian Space Agency and the Agency Agricultural Markets and Rural Development in Slovenia, others were able to catch up during the crisis either by expanding their own internal capabilities or by partnering with external organisations.

Internal communications activities have also considerably evolved during the COVID-19 by accelerating the digital trend and the use of social media. Intense digital communication efforts towards users have been engaged and were underpinned by new internal practices and activities developed by public sector organisations. Public sector organisations have focused their communication efforts on the development of social media campaigns to reach out to users and communicate on new procedures and restrictions in the COVID-19 context to protect public health while continuing to deliver services.

Service delivery models incorporated new digital channels to collaborate, communicate and deliver, expanding opportunities for service delivery beyond the crisis

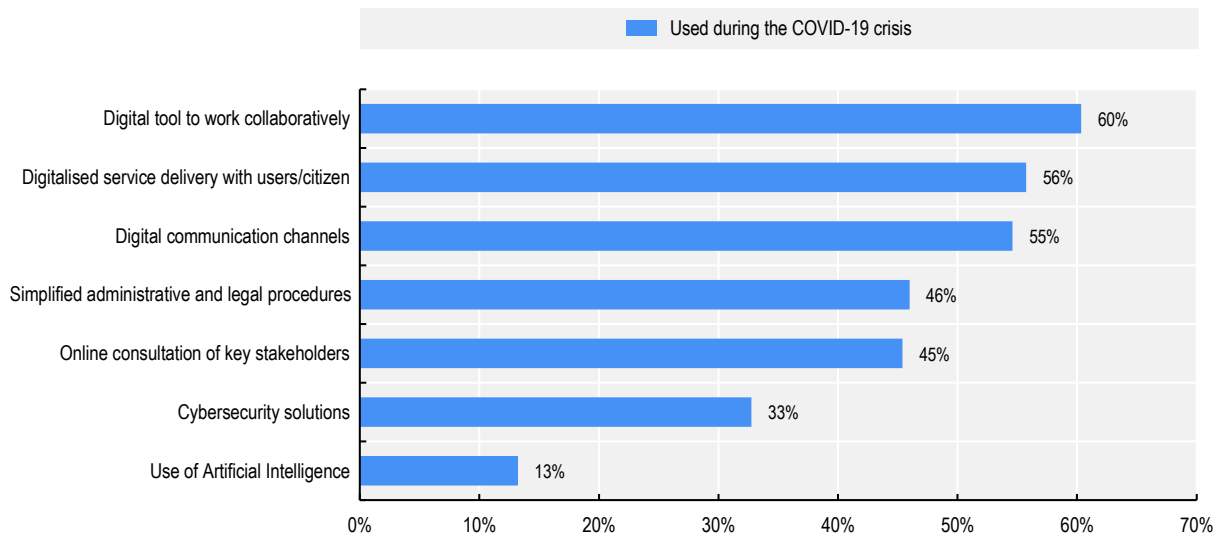
Physical restrictions faced during the COVID-19 crisis pressured service delivery models to transition to digital models to effectively collaborate, communicate and deliver. Digital tools to work collaboratively were the most widely adopted service delivery models among respondents and stand to remain in this position after the crisis, according to more than two thirds of respondents (Figure 17). Digital tools within and between public sector organisations have allowed to better work together in exchanging data and information and in communicating and responding to users' demand. A number of applications and procedures have turned online to make the interactions with users easier and faster and no return to previous in-person meetings in public buildings is expected for a number of procedures and services, in particular administrative ones. The digitalisation of services also happened for critical and core services. For instance, in the education sector, virtual classes have been widespread to allow students to continue their curriculum during the COVID-19 crisis, even though only a limited part of these activities has remained online after the crisis.

As previously underlined, communication channels with users have been moved digital by more than half of respondents through social media, the increase in electronic exchanges using virtual meetings, and online consultation mechanisms (Figure 17). Informative videos were produced and published by several organisations, often in different languages to reach out to migrants as well, as in the case of Madrid Salud. These models are also expected to remain in place after the crisis.

Overall, temporary closure of in-person services was replaced by multichannel approaches, using digital and phone channels. All organisations prioritised the need to remain accessible to citizens. Many services and information provision were moved on mobile phones or on internet and new phone lines were opened to replace counselling and advice on social services. Considering the criticality of its health services, Madrid Salud in Spain launched a 24-7 Emergency Telephone hotline for citizens. Very practical solutions were sometimes implemented to replace direct contact with civil servants. For instance, in the Lubuskie Voivodship Office in Poland, in addition to phone services, boxes were put in front of the office to allow citizens to leave paper applications while not having to queue or to be at risk with the social distancing rules. A computer was also available at the entrance to allow citizens to create their own electronic signature.

Figure 17. Service delivery model adaptations reported by public sector organisations

Share of respondents



Note: Adaptations reported by respondents.

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Emergency processes were put in place and worked, but a number of them were reversed

In many cases, emergency processes were put in place and worked, including simplified applications, online procedures and digital exchanges. These changes have resulted most of the time in accelerated procedures for users, fewer needs to go in person to public offices and have helped ensure the delivery of public and administrative services during the crisis. They have also generated efficiency gains by cutting unnecessary steps and documents and pushing public sector organisation to streamline procedures. However, a number of them have been reversed back to less efficient models originating before the COVID-19 crisis through the return to more cumbersome procedures and in-person meeting and queuing in public offices. The same trend has been observed for remote working for which a number of organisations request, or strongly encourage, employees to come back to the office full-time.

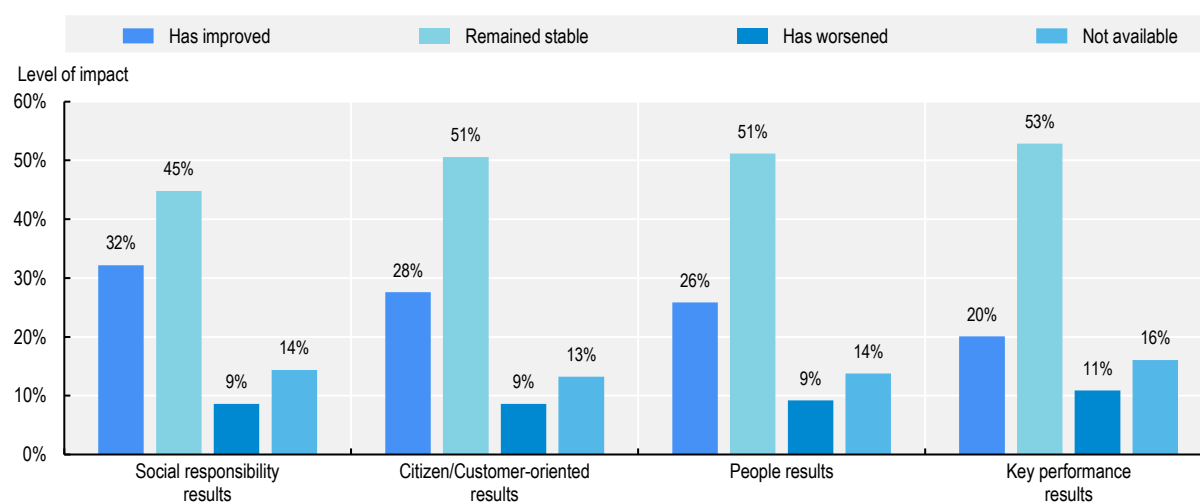
Results: Measurement is key for learning and adaptation

Public sector organisations lack real-time performance information to make decisions in times of crises

Measuring the results and impact of the organisation is crucial to ensure that the organisation delivers efficiently, responsibly, transparently and to the satisfaction of its users and employees. This requires having a robust performance management system in place including procedures, indicators and measurements. CAF looks at results on citizen-orientation, people, social responsibility and key performance from two lenses: perception and performance. Public sector organisation used a number of key performance indicators to monitor performance during the pandemic, and often collected data during the crisis (employee surveys, customer surveys) to inform decisions.

Overall, surveyed public sector organisations reported a limited impact, both on the perception and performance results due to data lag. Looking at the perception results, more than 50% of organisations pointed out that their results have remained stable, close to 40% that they have actually improved and only 10% that they have worsened (Figure 18). On performance, around 65% of organisations assessed that their results have remained stable, 25% that they have improved and only 10% that they have worsened. Within the different criteria, social responsibility results were reported to have experienced the largest overall improvement, with 40% of organisations reporting an improvement in terms of perception results and 28% of organisations reporting an improvement in terms of performance measurements. No specific data on these results were collected from public sector organisations.

Figure 18. Impact of the crisis on perception results according to public sector organisations



Note: This graph looks at the perception measurements of criteria 6 (citizen/customer-oriented results), 7 (people results) and 8 (social responsibility results) of the CAF model.

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

Considering the crisis context and the strong pressure exerted on public sector organisations, these results can be explained by the capacity and the overall good perception of citizens to governments and public administrations' responses in EU Member States. The EU Eurobarometer measured consistently the satisfaction of 56% of citizens on the response of their national governments and 61% for regional governments (EU, 2022^[5]; EU, 2021^[11]). In a context of an unprecedented crisis in terms of magnitude, and while there have been national and local difficulties and challenges, this also underlines the overall fast and seamless response of public administrations reported in a number of EU Member States (OECD, 2021^[11]).

Public sector organisations are not planning to revise their key indicators in the wake of the crisis, but new priorities and activities might require new metrics

The crisis has led to evolutions in the practices, processes and functioning of public sector organisations with high levels of adaptation on all CAF criteria. However, there is limited will among public sector organisations to update the current indicators and measurements in the wake of the crisis, with only 17% of responding organisations reporting a will to change performance or perception measurement indicators. Half of them do not know yet. To better adapt to the crises of tomorrow, new objectives, priorities and measures might require the adoption of new metrics and the need to further collect real-time information.

Consequences on the CAF model

The OECD-EIPA surveyed highlighted the usefulness of CAF to tackle and adapt to the effects of the crisis according to its users that have used the model on all CAF criteria.

The responses collected by the EIPA-OECD survey also illustrate that many public sector organisations are eager for the inclusion of certain thematic dimensions in the CAF model. While half of respondents felt that the model was already reflecting well dimensions such as SDGs, financial sustainability and ethics, three aspects were identified for further development in the CAF: innovation, digitalisation and resilience (Figure 19). These three dimensions are connected to the new long-term strategic priorities identified by organisations in the survey.

Innovation

Innovation is one of the principles of the CAF model (“Principle 6: Continuous learning, innovation and improvement”) and covered in a number of sub-criteria, particularly 2.4 (“Manage change and innovation to ensure the agility and resilience of the organisation”) from the Strategy and planning criterion (EUPAN, 2020^[7]). Nevertheless, 45% (70 organisations) of respondents indicated that the model could perhaps more prominently reflect innovation (Figure 19). A number of case studies organisations reported difficulties to innovate and the lack of appropriate systems, tools and culture for innovation. The CAF model could perhaps help better structure innovation systems and approaches.

Digitalisation

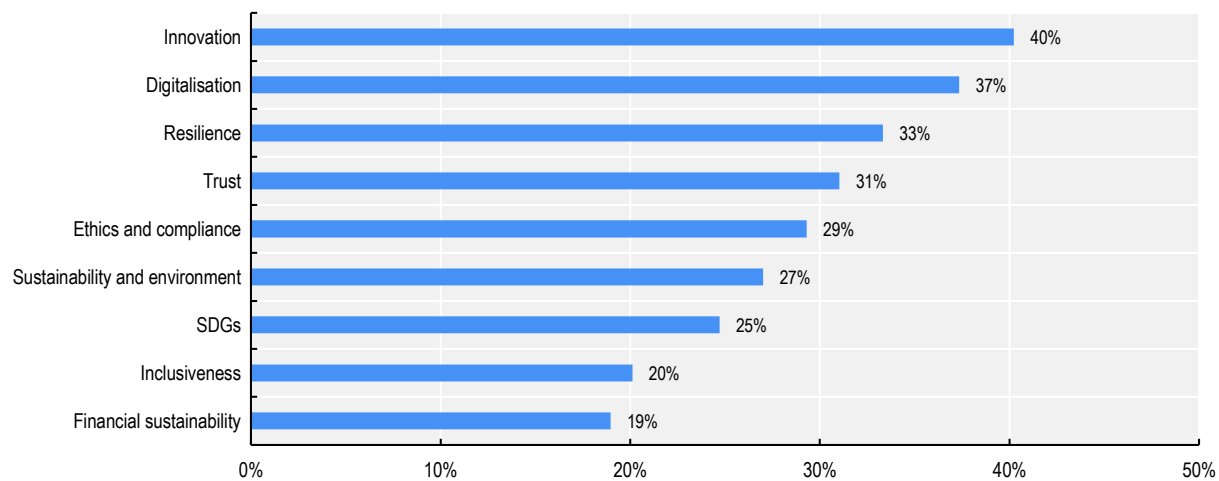
The CAF model 2020 revision aimed, *inter alia*, to better reflect digitalisation and mainstreamed the concept across the model (EUPAN, 2020^[7]). However, 42% of survey respondents (65 organisations) still believed that more could be done on digitalisation in the model (Figure 19). The survey has confirmed that digitalisation was one of the key transformations of public sector organisations accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis, if not initiated by it. While many dimensions of the concept are included in the model such as accessibility, skills and tools, it should be noted that no specific criterion or sub-criterion is dedicated to digitalisation in the model.

Resilience

38% (58 organisations) of respondents to the survey considered that resilience should be further developed in the CAF model (Figure 19). Resilience is defined in the CAF model as “the systemic resistance to disturbances and hazardous changes” (EUPAN, 2020^[7]). Like digitalisation, resilience has been mainstreamed across the CAF model. The COVID-19 has further underlined the importance of the resilience concept and the need to strengthen the resilience of public sector organisations. Looking at the OECD definition of resilience, the notions of adaptation and change particularly on the long-term as well as specific mechanisms linked to innovation, foresight and crisis management could be further explored.

Figure 19. Dimensions that could be reflected more prominently in the CAF model

Share of respondents



Note: Number of respondents answering: "the CAF should reflect this dimension prominently".

Source: OECD-EIPA Survey.

3 Policy implications for public administrations on strengthening resilience

Leadership

Crises amplify leadership capacities

Public sector leaders were put to the test throughout the COVID-19 crisis, as they looked for solutions to deliver needed services in fast-changing operational environments. In most public sector organisations, leaders are at the epicentre of any change and innovation process – without their buy-in, support and stewardship, nothing happens. The COVID-19 crisis was no different. Organisations succeeded or not, based on the actions of those at the top and how they engaged and delegated to those below them.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that any one leader alone made the difference. One of the key lessons from the crisis is that leadership is always a team sport. This was made very clear in the way that organisations often restructured and reorganised their leadership teams to share information and resources, rethink organisations processes, communicate with their staff and maintain a view on what was important.

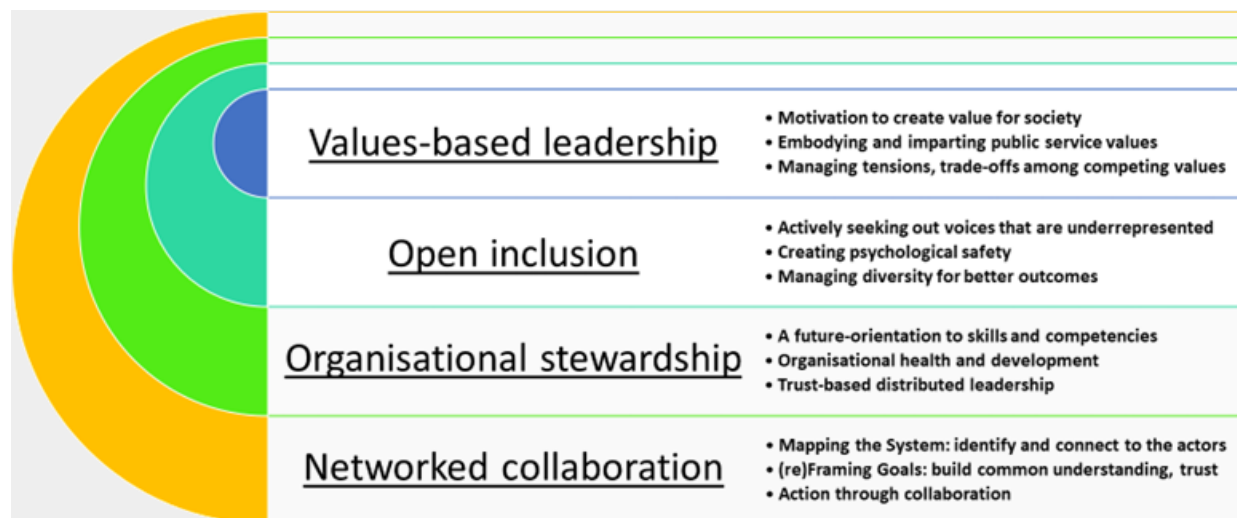
One of the debates that emerged during the crisis was whether a special kind of leadership was required, or whether a more generic form of good and modern leadership was enough. With hindsight today, most seem to feel that the latter is true. Leaders who demonstrated the highest levels of personal and organisational resilience during the crisis were those who were passionate about the mission of their organisation, compassionate for the people that worked within it, had a deep understanding of their business, and could lead with trust, delegating responsibility to those who knew best, while maintaining a coherent strategic direction that could be adapted in real time based on fast-changing circumstances and information. These kinds of competencies are also those that one would point to as desired in most public sector organisations that are working in complex policy and service delivery environments. Hence the pandemic provided an opportunity for good leaders to rise to the top and shine.

Four leadership capabilities for a resilient public organisation

Just before the crisis in 2019, the OECD published a paper (Gerson, 2020^[12]) establishing four leadership capabilities for a high performing public service (Figure 20). Starting at the core, **values-based leaders** negotiate multiple and often competing public service values that guide their decisions making, and work to impart these values throughout their organisation. Successful leaders challenge their own personal perceptions through **open inclusion** – by actively bringing in a diversity of voices and perspectives (open) and the right environment for these voices to be heard (inclusion). Leaders act as **organisational stewards** by reinforcing trust and equipping their workforce with needed skills, tools and working

environments. Finally, good leaders are adept at **collaborating through networks**, with other government actors, and beyond.

Figure 20. Four leadership capabilities



Source: Gerson (2020^[12]), "Leadership for a high performing civil service: Towards senior civil service systems in OECD countries", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 40, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ed8235c8-en>.

Although these four capabilities were identified and developed before the pandemic, they provide a useful way of considering the range of leadership capabilities deployed by resilient public sector leaders within the case studies for this project and in the public sector of EU countries more broadly. This section will consider the application of each of these to the COVID crisis and resilience in turn.

Values-based leadership

Values-based leaders do two very important things that contribute to resilience. First, they focus on the public value they are mandated to create in society – whether delivering health care, education or social care. This focus on value and outcomes, rather than tasks and regulation, is essential for resilience as this becomes the basis for rethinking the best way to achieve that value when everything else is changing. This was demonstrated in all of the case studies as the leaders of public sector organisations brought together their teams of managers, experts and stakeholders to rethink their work and adjust to the realities of the pandemic. This commitment to mission is at the heart of resilience.

The second important contribution of values-based leadership to resilience is by creating the basis for organisational trust. Values-based leaders do not just make their own values-driven decisions, but do so in an open and transparent way that imparts these common values throughout their workforce. By actively instilling common values in the workplace, through e.g. identifying these values and openly discussing them, they create an environment of trust, and the basis for care to emerge in leadership styles. Therefore, organisations that were led by effective values-based leaders likely had a strong sense of common purpose and healthy levels of personal and organisational trust heading into the crisis, which were important resources to draw upon.

Open inclusion

The pandemic emphasised a fact that has been challenging traditional notions of leadership as an individual activity - leadership is a team sport. This is especially so in the face of a pandemic, when any

one individual may fall sick and not be able to fulfil their duties. In almost all organisations observed for this project, leadership teams were brought closer together, meeting more regularly in expanded and restructured formats, bringing in voices from outside the usual management group to ensure clarity of information and coherence in the organisations' response. For example, Croatia's Pension Insurance Institute created a working group (the magnificent eight, Box 5) which brought together all of the internal management systems. This kind of open leadership was essential for resilience, to bring voices in and identify blind spots. It was an essential risk management strategy to get information and build as complete a picture as possible of what was happening in real time.

However, to contribute to resilience, this open style of leadership relied on a pre-existing culture of inclusion, based on psychological safety. Psychological safety is the level of comfort people have in taking risks within a group setting. It is considered essential for people to bring forward ideas and questions that challenge the status quo or the dominant way of thinking. Without psychological safety, open leadership cannot translate into resilience as new voices will not feel supported to raise important questions or bring forward information that challenges the dominant perspective. As with a values-based culture, psychological safety and inclusive cultures cannot be created on the spot once the crisis hits but need to be established well in advance.

Organisational stewardship

Organisational stewardship is a theory of management which positions the leader as someone who focuses on improving the health of the organisation they lead. Health in this sense is not only meant literally – it means a healthy trust-based working environment for employees as well as organisational tools and systems that are well aligned to the needs of those employees and their leadership. The linkages to resilience in this area are clear. Healthy organisations already had a certain level of IT infrastructure that enabled remote working (or had the means to put it in place quickly); they had flexible HR systems and tools that allowed them to move people from one area to another to meet changing needs of the crisis. They had good managers who were able to absorb the challenges of managing during a crisis, and they had information systems that helped to make real-time decisions. Organisations that were in good health at the start of the pandemic fared better than those that were not.

When the pandemic hit, leaders with good organisational stewardship were able to depend on all the effective systems of their organisation, but also on its people, who were likely in better health (physical and mental) with the energy needed to adapt. They also demonstrated two important factors that were emphasised often by participating organisations. The first is that these leaders had a very strong understanding of their organisations' different activities – strategic and operational. This deep understanding helped them to work on any necessary adjustments. This kind of understanding was often developed through earlier uses of tools like the CAF. However, it was emphasised that this deep understanding was not used to micro-manage in crisis situations, but rather to work collaboratively with trusted middle managers, and to build a comfortable level of trust that they knew best how to adjust their business line or function to meet the needs of the moment. Box 2 on the city of Vienna's Department of Women's Affairs illustrates the kind of leadership dexterity that was required to maintain the trust and engagement of its staff.

Box 2. How the city of Vienna's Department of Women's Affairs leveraged not-so-new forms of leadership and collaboration

Despite the gradual introduction of mobile work prior to the crisis, the switch to home office had a major impact on working practices and thus on both the management and the employees of the Vienna's Department of Women's Affairs, called MA 57. Especially at the beginning of the crisis, adapting leadership and management tasks and processes to the situation was an organisational challenge and required considerable effort. Employees were suddenly not "tangible", and supervisors were not yet familiar with how to monitor and control work schedules and distribution when working remotely. However, concerns subsided after some time as activities and services continued without interruption. The time recording program (SES) contributed to more transparency. SES has been implemented throughout the magistrate's office since 2013 and records both time and activities. Home office requests, including a list of activities to be completed, must be requested through the system and approved by the manager of the division. This high level of transparency eventually gave managers peace of mind, especially since mobile working had hardly been used before at MA 57.

In this situation, moreover, ensuring the well-being of employees also required new leadership strategies and approaches. For example, it proved difficult to recognise and understand how employees were doing when head of units would only see them in online meetings with several other people. Therefore, they maintained personal contact primarily through phone calls. Only based on this understanding, flexible responses to individual problems were possible such as redistribution of work, pointing to support offers from the city, or scheduling office hours for employees who were distressed by the long phase of isolation at home.

Beyond the supervisor-employee relationship, communication and contact at all levels and across all levels proved crucial in this context: Personal exchanges between managers were just as significant as those within and between teams. This led to new ways of working, leading and collaborating as well as an improved strategic approach to knowledge management. For example, ad hoc telephone communication between colleagues, supervisors or units at the beginning of the pandemic was gradually replaced or supplemented by regular online meetings as appropriate and as quickly as technically possible. Team meetings also included focused brainstorming for ideas and creative solutions to tackle emerging challenges. Furthermore, reports on the activities of other teams (that improvement measure had emerged from CAF in an earlier round) were valuable in providing an overview and better understanding of each team's activities and goals. Together, these measures provided increased transparency and thus a better overview of the activities of the individual teams, entirely in the spirit of beneficial knowledge management for managers and employees alike.

Source: Project case study on the City of Vienna's Department of Women's Affairs.

Networked collaboration

The fourth leadership capability was also essential in a context of resilience, as it emphasises that individual public leaders are rarely in control of the whole environment in which they operate. Rather they depend on engagement and collaboration across complex systems of actors, through networked relationships. This was clear during the pandemic, as e.g. local health care providers depended not only on the ministry of health, but on co-ordination with security forces and social actors in local communities. In many ways, the COVID pandemic reinforced the interrelation of so many different public services and the need for careful co-ordination across entities.

Resilient public leaders were again called upon to use pre-existing resources – in this case the networks and relationships they had already established with other actors in the system. It was essential to already have a good understanding of the broader systems within which their organisation worked, and to know who to call and how to reach them. Leaders with this network well developed, and who were seen as trusted partners to their stakeholders, were able to draw on these resources during the crisis to ensure resilience not only for their organisations, but in alignment with all the others working on the response on the ground.

Taken together, this section shows how the OECD's four leadership capabilities align to the needs for resilience in public organisations, and the experience of CAF users reinforces these findings. One of the essential points to underline is that it's not enough for leaders to use these skills when a crisis hits. Rather, they need to develop the right organisational environment and culture well before a crisis so that it can be activated when needed as was done in Italy (Box 3). They need to have already developed trusting cultures, based on common values, psychological safety, healthy organisational systems and effective external stakeholder networks so that they can draw on these resources when the crisis hits.

Box 3. Italian Space Agency's transition to collaborative leadership

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote workforce management by unit managers was one of the major critical issues for the Agency, accentuating a pre-existing area of organisational criticality.

In order to tackle the crisis, an “e-leadership” employee training was held in 2020 with the aim of helping managers to co-ordinate their teams remotely and to build relationships with the stakeholders. The course, which was dedicated to the Heads of Organizational Units, was divided into four days of virtual classroom or in-person training and was focused on the digital skills needed to manage employees in digital environments, in terms both of communication, sharing and collaboration, and of project implementation. The E in the term “e-leadership” refers not only to electronic but also to evolution and thus thematises a new concept of diffused leadership (everyone, in some respect, is a leader because he/she possesses skills and unique talents) that is more evolved than participative leadership.

In conclusion, strengthening the CAF criterion Leadership requires a multi-pronged approach, which includes:

- A significant investment in the enhancement of existing human resources, applying motivational levers in a meritocratic, selective and incentive-based way (training, career development, assignment of responsibilities to positions envisaged by the new organisational structure);
- The growth of the organisation to reach an adequate number of employees to meet the challenges entrusted to ASI by the new governance;
- A new organisational culture geared towards a new model of diffused leadership, thanks to the new management levers;
- Age management (for example competence management and knowledge management), among others, to ensure knowledge continuity within the organisation, making the ongoing generational change more effective.

Source: Project case study on the Italian space agency.

Resilient leaders need to be appointed and developed

Given the need to establish resilient leadership well before a crisis hits, as articulate above, what steps can public organisations take? The OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability (PSLC) is a starting point, emphasising the need to, “Build leadership capability in the public service, in particular through:

1. Clarifying the expectations incumbent upon senior-level public servants to be politically impartial leaders of public organisations, trusted to deliver on the priorities of the government, and uphold and embody the highest standards of integrity without fear of politically motivated retribution.
2. Considering merit-based criteria and transparent procedures in the appointment of senior-level public servants, and holding them accountable for performance.
3. Ensuring senior-level public servants have the mandate, competencies, and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power.
4. Developing the leadership capabilities of current and potential senior-level public servants (OECD, 2019^[13]).

To put these principles into action, the OECD recommends that countries develop systems that structure the management of public sector leaders to ensure that public leaders have the right skills and competencies to do their job (Gerson, 2020^[12]). To do this, organisations should first identify the leadership capabilities appropriate to their functions. These should be forward-looking and ambitious, and are often codified in a leadership competency framework. These competency frameworks should include the kinds of leadership capabilities described above.

Second, recruitment and selection tools and mechanisms should be appropriate to the position, in order to assess the capabilities required. The focus should be on getting the right people with the right capabilities into the right position, regardless of where they come from. For example, promoting people into leadership positions due to seniority will likely not be as effective as through merit-based assessment of skills and capabilities. Similarly, appointing people through political processes without the right assessment is also bound to be risky. The bottom line is that regardless of the system, whether political appointments or career-based, it is essential to put in place a robust mechanism to vet candidates based on capabilities such as those described above. This is challenging to do because these kinds of competencies are not easy to assess. Hence, assessment processes are often becoming more complex, supported by specific expertise (e.g. occupational psychologists and recruitment specialists).

Third, learning and development systems need to be appropriately aligned to these kinds of skill sets. Leaders need to be continuously learning and adapting to changing realities and require a tailored and time-sensitive set of interventions that include networking, peer support, mentoring, coaching, and opportunities for reflection with their peers, management team and employees. This was all the more true during the pandemic, when leaders were required to learn in real time. Having access to peer networks, mentors and coaches was essential for many as a way of reflecting day to day and learn from their experience.

But equally important, organisations need to invest in a pipeline of future leaders with the abilities and motivation required to take up these positions, so that they are ready before they are in place. This requires using a range of talent management practices to identify leadership potential and provide tailored career path support and learning opportunities for those employees. The experience has shown that middle managers were essential during the pandemic crisis, and that the most effective leadership styles depended on having strong middle managers that could be depended upon by the senior leadership, thus reinforcing the point of investing in the leadership skills of middle managers as much as those at the top.

Recommendations on leadership

- Reflect on the lessons learned for leadership and develop/revise a leadership competency framework that emphasises resilience related leadership competencies. These may contain the four leadership capabilities discussed above: values-based leadership, open inclusion, organisational stewardship and networked collaboration.
- Invest in developing and deploying these leadership capabilities early. Resilient leadership during a crisis depends on resilient leadership before the crisis. Leaders need to create trusting environments based on common values, inclusive cultures with the necessary psychological safety, healthy organisations and solid networks with their stakeholders before the crisis hits. These each create resources to draw upon during moments of emergency and crisis that strengthen the resilience of leaders and their organisations.
- Appoint leaders with a solid track record of demonstrating these capabilities. Whether coming from the inside or the outside, recruitment and appointment systems should be focused on assessing and identifying leadership competencies rather than rewarding seniority or political connections.
- Ensure that leaders intimately know their organisation, its operations, and the people that make it work, so that they can spearhead effective crisis responses. At the same time, leaders with this knowledge need to avoid the desire to micro-manage during moments of crisis, and rather trust their line managers to know their business and make the necessary adjustments. Leaders need to ensure this happens in coherent ways across the organisation and keep each line focused on the ultimate objective of public value. Using tools like the CAF can support this.
- Invest in tailored learning opportunity for current and future leaders. Do not only focus on those at the top – middle management is the essential link between the workforce and the strategy and needs to be highly skilled and valued in resilient organisations.
- Leaders need to take care of themselves, as much as with others. Leaders are also at risk of burnout.

Strategy and planning

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for public sector organisations to enhance their strategic planning, co-ordinated governance mechanisms, and crisis management if they wish to keep operating in a resilient manner throughout the crisis.

Strategic planning and foresight

Incentives to develop strategic planning activities and produce strategic planning documents at all levels of governance, including central/federal, region/state, local/municipal and institutional levels have increased in recent years to tackle the emergence and rapid growth of multidimensional policy issues and to strengthen resilience in an era of polycrisis (OECD, 2020^[14]). As most notably exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, public sector organisations are confronted with the need to plan and adjust their strategic priorities and plans in volatile environments due to a rising amount of crisis situations, and to ensure that they are achieved to the benefits of citizens and other stakeholders. In addition, individual public sector organisations are also part of complex governance systems with interrelated priorities and common objectives that are often set in co-ordination with institutions to which they report, for example a Ministry.

A well-embedded planning process is therefore instrumental for resilience as it helps translate high-level objectives and missions into long and medium-term strategies and operational action plans. It also participates to the alignment and consistency of strategic plans and priorities to ensure coherent and efficient activities across public sector organisations. Increasing resilience calls also for the development of such strategic documents, including a vision, a mission statement and key objectives for organisations that did not have them pre-crisis to help them identify and select the main goals and priorities of the organisation that should be pursued over the long term, including in crisis times.

Under the pressure of the crisis to deliver, a limited number of public sector organisations adapted their existing strategic plan and documents, when they had ones. Results from the project survey and the case study organisations show that the evolutions of the strategic planning processes and activities mainly focused on the development of new contingency plans as demonstrated by the Vouzela and Campia School Grouping in Portugal (Box 4), instead of revising existing high-level strategies. This priority given to contingency plans in strategic planning activities represented a test for the case study organisations to adapt deliver on immediate priorities and on their expected services. While the prioritisation of activities on the short term during the crisis might have helped respond to immediate needs, OECD (2022^[15]) practices show that strategic planning and prioritisation processes are not always accompanied by sufficient articulation mechanisms that ensure alignment between activities and goals over time.

Public sector organisations need to reflect on: first, how this contingency plan fits with their longer-term strategic plans and objectives; and second the usefulness of the contingency plan in the long run. This might lead them to further adapt their strategic plans and objectives to the new post-COVID-19 realities and evolutions, for instance by further embedding priorities and activities on digitalisation, on developing new partnerships with civil society or on reaching out to new groups of vulnerable populations (e.g. refugees in the context of the War). Public sector organisations can also consider how resilience is considered an important feature of their strategic plans and consider including a priority on resilience with appropriate actions and measures particularly on the preparedness for future crises. Public sector organisations can also keep the contingency plan as a template for a future crisis and consider which further adaptations need to be done to the preparation and implementation process of the document and to the document itself.

The crisis has also highlighted the sometimes the excessive complexity of strategic-planning systems as even streamlined, hierarchical, cascaded-down planning systems tend to be dense and complex as well as the contradictions or duplications in programs and actions due to the multiplicity and fragmentation of strategic and policy documents. Experiences in OECD Member countries also show that, to strengthen resilience in this area, further building strategic capabilities and units in public sector organisation and developing new collaboration mechanisms could be considered to revise and align the existing strategic plans across departments within organisations and with partner organisations. Opening the strategic planning processes for stakeholder engagement can strengthen trust and legitimacy, increasing the sustainability of policies in the long-term.

Organisations often struggle to transform their strategic plans into performance frameworks covering for example monitoring activities with indicators and the link with human and financial resources. The *OECD Policy Framework for Sound Public Governance* (OECD, 2020^[16]) therefore suggests aligning instruments such as budgeting, regulations, and workforce planning.

Box 4. Design of a contingency plan for distance learning in the case study organisation in Portugal

In the context of the pandemic, several strategies were designed to face the challenges in the management of the pandemic crisis in the Portuguese Vouzela and Campia School Grouping in Portugal (AGEVC), mainly the Distance Learning Plan and the Prevention and Action Plan for the Operation of the Nationwide Contingency Plan. The ability to respond effectively to the pandemic was influenced by the methodology of the CAF team which is used to prepare improvement plans and action protocols after self-assessment.

The distance learning plan recognised the weakness of the first responses given such that the change from face-to-face teaching to distance learning brought about many practical and operational challenges (access to internet and computers, stress and anxiety for both teachers and pupils, the overexposure to communication devices, etc.) and recognised the need to look beyond education. To fulfil its mission, the Grouping could not focus exclusively on teaching. One of the most significant challenges of the Grouping was the co-ordination of the response with Vouzela's Town Hall and the nine Parish Councils in the municipality of Vouzela to minimise crisis management failures. The Grouping could therefore not act alone, instead serving as the link in a chain in which the municipalities play an important role. The Grouping was able to respond quickly to the sudden changes in structures, with a revised set of pedagogical, cultural, administrative, financial and patrimonial management plans in short periods of time.

Source: Project case study on the Vouzela and Campia School Grouping in Portugal.

Finally, building foresight capacity within public sector organisations is a useful tool to strengthen resilience and crisis anticipation (OECD, 2020_[17]). Both in the context of dedicated crisis management, or during strategic planning, future scenarios can be explored. This work can be done either by existing foresight units housed within the public organisation or by working closely with foresight units in the public service when these capacities are not available in-house, which will often be the case due to their cost (OECD, 2020_[14]). In the context of resilience, foresight directly contributes to better policymaking and service delivery in the following ways:

- Stress testing and future proofing of policy advice and recommendations: strategies based on narrow assumptions about the future may prove ineffective or counterproductive if circumstances change.
- Identifying new challenges and opportunities: considering possible future developments in advance allows work to begin sooner on strategies to prevent or mitigate new challenges or seize new opportunities that could be generated by the COVID-19 crisis and its cascading impacts.
- Designing innovative and forward-looking policy actions and strategies: foresight can help to generate new thinking and directions on how best to advance societal goals and global well-being by challenging and expanding our perceptions of what is possible in the future.

Robust and co-ordinated governance

As illustrated in the *Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance* report (OECD, 2020_[16]), co-ordination has become particularly relevant for many OECD Members mainly due to the emergence of cross-cutting, multi-dimensional policy challenges such as – but not limited to - the COVID-19 pandemic and the exponential growth of agencies and other autonomous bodies. This applies to both vertical multi-level co-

ordination across various public sector governance levels as well as horizontal co-ordination among administrative entities.

The exceptional agility of systems used by countries and organisations to co-ordinate illustrate the complexity of the COVID-19 crisis. An OECD synthesis of first lessons from government evaluations of the COVID-19 responses (OECD, 2022^[15]) stresses the need for fit-for-purpose governance structures with clear mandates and responsibilities for agile and resilient co-ordination. Especially as the crisis responses mobilised resources in virtually all policy domains involving a wide range of actors on various levels of governance. Robust co-operation among and inside very diverse government institutions and agencies is thus vital for a coherent response as demonstrated by the Croatian Pension Institute that created the “Magnificent Eight” working group to ensure effective co-ordination (Box 5). Governments consequently developed protocols that clarified each actor’s responsibilities. Many countries also developed ad hoc institutions that served as co-ordination mechanisms for dedicated issues in addition to the crisis management plans already in place.

Engaging regional/state and local/municipal actors, the commercial sector, and members of civil society in these systems improves decision making, transparency, trust, making crisis measures easier to implement. Subnational actors (regional/state and local/municipal) were also exposed the most to COVID-19’s asymmetric impact on the health, economic, social, and fiscal domains, further underlining the importance of multi-level governance. A concrete example of this is the health of populations in some regions being more affected than in others, and deprived areas are being more strongly affected than less deprived ones. This regionally differentiated impact renders an additional call for strong multi-level co-ordination (OECD, 2021^[18]).

Box 5. The case study organisation Croatian Pension Institute created the “Magnificent Eight” working group to ensure effective co-ordination

In the context of the crisis, the Croatian Pension Institute (HZMO) formed a working group at the end of February 2020, aimed at ensuring effective co-ordination of processes within the HZMO concerning the measures provided by the competent authorities. The Working Group consisted of eight members across three offices and three departments:

- the Department of Maintenance, Occupational Safety and General Affairs
- the Department of Financial Affairs
- the Department of Legal Affairs
- the Office of Human Resources Management and Development
- the Public Relations Office, and
- the Office for Business Information Security, Control and Supervision.

The Working Group represented a link between the external influences caused by the crisis and the organisation’s internal factors, such as processes, employees, equipment and related risks. Communication on input information and output decisions was crucial to successful co-ordination. The Working Group’s activities included continuous monitoring of the announcements released by the competent bodies on decision making (such as teleworking, application of the COVID pass, etc.) in order to prepare for time-sensitive measures. The continuous resolution monitored information often to the minute, especially at the very beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 and during the spread of the Omicron virus variant in January 2022. The activities required extraordinary effort considering the amount of information that needed to be both collected and analysed in the very short term (within one to three days).

Source: Project case study on the Croatian Pension Institute.

Crisis management

Frameworks for crisis management to strengthen whole-of-government responses for various threats existed well before the pandemic in most OECD countries. These were often setup in the aftermath of major crises for which governments and risk management systems turned out to be ill prepared (OECD, 2022^[15]). However, very few OECD countries had faced a pandemic in recent decades (with the SARS epidemic being a notable exception in countries such as Canada or Korea). Because of the less severe than anticipated H1N1 pandemic in the early 2010s, many OECD countries and organisations struggled with recognising the threat at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak after years of reducing their attention and investments in preparedness efforts.

While these general crisis management frameworks nevertheless proved useful for the coronavirus crisis in some countries, as confirmed by the CAF survey findings, many governments moved away from the existing frameworks, preferring instead new structures or combining both for the management of the crisis (OECD, 2020^[14]). Some public sector organisations were part of the national crisis management framework and involved in multi-level crisis co-ordination mechanisms and in the design of specific plans and measures and in their implementation. These efforts required the involvement of several actors that can bring in their detailed expertise, as demonstrated by the Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate in Bulgaria's National Operational Plan for Dealing with the Pandemic (Box 6).

The capacity of individual public sector organisation to design and implement such plans, mechanisms and protocols has also been a key factor for adapting to the crisis and building resilience. A number of public sector organisations, such as the AGEVC (Box 4), have created their own crisis management and contingency plans and response mechanisms out of national frameworks, when existing. Further lessons learnt can be drawn at the individual level to revise these elements and processes in preparations to a future crisis, for instance by establishing dedicated resources or unit on crisis management and by maintaining these plans and protocols up to date.

The *OECD Recommendation on the Governance of Critical Risks* (OECD, 2014^[19]) [OECD/LEGAL/0405](#) proposes actions that governments and public sector organisations can take in collaboration with stakeholders to better assess, prevent, respond, and recover from the effects of extreme events, as well as measures to build resilience to rebound from unanticipated events:

- Identify and assess all risks of significance and use this analysis to inform decision making on risk management priorities.
- Put in place governance mechanisms to co-ordinate on risk and manage crises across government.
- Ensure transparency around and the communication of information on risks to the public before a risk occurs and during the crisis response.
- Work with the private sector and civil society, and across borders through international co-operation, to better assess, mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from critical risks.

Box 6. Case study practices on crisis plans and protocols

The Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate contributed actively to Bulgaria's National Operational Plan for Dealing with the Pandemic

In the Republic of Bulgaria, a National Operational Plan for Dealing with the Pandemic was approved by the government in 2020. The principal aim of the plan was to determine the capacity of the health system and to set up adequate organisational measures against COVID-19. The plan defined the functions of the institutions responsible for responding to the pandemic. SRHI took an active part as the largest Inspectorate in the country in developing the plan. The expertise of members of the Inspectorate proved particularly important for the development of the plan

border health control; monitoring the spread of the virus and the entry of test results into the national COVID-19 computer system; the hospitalisation of those infected; maintaining accurate information on bed occupancy rates in hospitals; vaccine distribution and inoculation; the distribution and delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectants.

Existing pandemic plans needed revision in the Belgian National Employment Office (NEO)

The Belgian Business Continuity Plan (BCP), an initiative intended to be in place in the event of a pandemic, dates from 2009 and was updated in early 2020 in consultation with process experts. Due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the far-reaching extent of the consequent lockdown, the phases envisaged in this plan, the roles/key functions described, the escalation procedures, the key tasks and the communication plan were in the end loosely followed, as they were not tailored to this exceptional situation. The original plan also assumed a significant increase in absenteeism among the NEO staff, which was not the case with COVID-19 as most tasks were to be performed by tele-working.

In addition, from the start of the pandemic, the process co-ordinators drew up a list of essential tasks for each process, which was regularly updated and published on RioDoc (a document management system). These inventories did not correspond entirely with the overview in the pandemic plan, due to continuous shifts in the work volume that took place during this period. This adjustment took place continuously and the Head Office and regional offices quickly responded to it, among other things, by organising the required information. These up-to-date inventories per process formed a practical guide for employees in the public entities.

An important lesson learned from the Belgian National Employment Office was that it was necessary to adapt the Business Continuity Plan into a practical crisis plan useable in different situations, as a well-developed Business Continuity Plan is necessary to manage a crisis of any kind.

Source: Project case studies on the Sofia Regional Health Institute and the Belgian National Employment Office.

Recommendations on strategy and planning

Strategic planning and foresight

- Develop or revise the existing strategic documents and objectives, including a vision and a mission statement, to take into account the new priorities and the evolution of activities following the COVID-19 pandemic and consider linking these objectives to resilience in the strategy.
- Expand internal capabilities on strategic planning to design and revise internal strategic plans and objectives and adapt them to the post-COVID-19 context, for instance by assigning responsibilities for strategic planning internally or establishing a dedicated unit.
- Translate mission statements and strategic objectives into operational action plans that help guide and monitor the work of public organisations and the achievements of strategic objectives.
- Connect the strategic planning process with crisis management systems and make use of the strategic planning processes to identify and adjust priorities in time of crisis and in normal times.
- Ensure alignment of policy instruments and levers such as budgeting, regulations and workforce planning in the strategic framework by identifying resources associated to strategic objectives.
- Enhance legitimacy and sustainability of strategic planning processes by allowing space for stakeholder engagement, for instance by establishing working groups or consultations with partners on strategic objectives and ways to reach them.
- Develop strategic foresight practices and capabilities to strengthen resilience by addressing uncertainty in policymaking and crisis anticipation:
 - Establish foresight capacities or activities internally or collaborate with public sector foresight units to bring foresight into the strategic decision making and planning processes.
 - Reflecting on the quick surge of the COVID-19 crisis, consider potential future developments and scenarios to anticipate challenges and enhance the resilience of strategies.
 - Make use of early warning systems and anticipation tools for effective risk management.

Co-ordination

- Improve co-ordination mechanisms to articulate responses to crises and key challenges both within the organisation and with other entities in line with the OECD Recommendation on the Governance of Critical Risks by:
 - Developing governance structures with clear mandates and responsibilities and protocols to clarify the responsibilities of all involved actors during crisis and in normal times.
 - Involving civil society, the private sector, and local actors to increase transparency and trust in co-ordination bodies by creating consultative mechanisms or associating them to decisions.
 - Fostering multi-level dialogue including with sub-national entities by developing co-ordination mechanisms such as multi-level committees and regular channels of communications.
 - Ensuring commitment from leadership for resilient interagency co-operation.

Crisis management

- Adapt crisis management structures, capabilities and protocols to the magnitude of the crisis:
 - Review existing procedures, protocols, and guidelines to follow in the event of an emergency to ensure they are functional and include the latest lessons learned from past crises.

- Ensure robust co-ordination within and between all involved stakeholders, planning for different options (e.g. digital).
- Clearly define or update responsibilities on leadership and risk management frameworks in light of the COVID-19 crisis, that might differ from those on normal times.
- Involve civil society, the private sector, and local actors to facilitate the implementation of the crisis management responses by establishing a working group on the matter.

People

The COVID-19 crisis was, for all organisations, one of the most significant human resources challenges faced in modern memory, and human resource departments were central to the response. The experience of public sector organisations participating in this project shows how organisational resilience depended on the resilience of individual employees, as well as on the resilience of HR systems.

Resilient public servants = resilient public organisations

A large part of the role of people management for resilience is in ensuring that individuals are themselves resilient. In most cases, individual employees were required to drastically change their working habits and environments, and in many cases also the specific work they conducted, all the while keeping healthy and out of harm's way. For many, this level of change is highly stressful in and of itself, added to by the uncertainty of the pandemic and the specific challenges brought on by the care of family and friends. Personal resilience is a complex construct that will be different for each person, but is intrinsically related to health and well-being, as well as motivation and engagement. A report (OECD, 2021^[20]) on the future of the public service suggests the following elements contribute to resilient public servants:

- **Wellness:** resilience takes energy and implies added stress when people are forced to work in new, often sub-optimal conditions, at a moment's notice. This puts a high premium on health – physical and mental – and organisational and management support for it.
- **Motivation and commitment to mission:** committed employees will be the first to find new ways of delivering the mission when the environment shifts around them.
- **Anticipation and foresight:** public servants who systematically take into account a variety of plausible future developments can design systems that are ready to withstand shocks.
- **Creative problem solving:** Even with foresight, not all problems will be foreseen. Regardless of an employee's technical expertise, creative problem solving can enable public servants to apply their skills to unpredictable challenges.
- **Learning agility:** learning to learn is at the heart of innovation, resilience and adapting to future change. Innovation is primarily a learning experience, and resilience is innovating in real time, managing through unforeseen crises, learning with imperfect data and information and learning from mistakes.
- **Systems thinking and collaboration:** resilience requires connections across organisational boundaries. This requires public servants who understand the machinery of government and complex service delivery systems, and already have the relationships needed to co-ordinate response with the different key actors.

Investing in the skills and capabilities above requires HR systems that are aligned and forward looking. For example, it requires workforce plans that identify future-oriented skill sets like anticipation and foresight, creative problems solving, systems thinking and collaboration. It requires recruitment processes that are capable of attracting and selecting employees for these capabilities and rewarding their use.

Resilience also requires organisations to develop learning cultures that promote the development of resilient employees and encourage employees to learn and grow throughout all the work they do in their career. Forthcoming work on learning cultures in the public service shows that many organisations do not intentionally target resilience in their learning strategies, and still take a rather formal approach to learning and development. The COVID pandemic helped create an impetus to move learning online which stands to further develop that channel for future learning cultures (see the example from Poland's case study in Box 7). But there is also a significantly untapped learning opportunities in less formal areas such as mobility assignments, teamwork, and networks. While many organisations have these kinds of elements in place, they don't make them explicitly focused on learning, which suggests a lost opportunity to get the most from these tools.

Box 7. The use of e-learning methods to upskill critical competencies in Poland

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lubuskie Voivodship Office (LUW) had an extensive training system in place for its employees. They were held either in LUW or by means of officials travelling to other cities where training centres were located. Each employee had the right to choose the training; the employee could also report the need to organise new training on a topic related to their scope of work in the office. The training concerned both legal procedures related to the performance of public tasks and new IT programs implemented at the office. The budget for the training was large; each of the LUW departments had sufficient funds to finance the training of all employees.

In the initial term of the pandemic, training was suspended during the periods when the office was closed, and employees were sent to work from home. However, the employees needed substantive training on the tasks performed. It was also essential for management those employees could continue to receive training and education. It was understandable to the management that, despite the pandemic, tasks had to be performed in the best possible way. The problem concerned cutting the officials off from the current rhythm of work. This lack of training deepened the feeling of a crisis. Therefore, it was important to counteract locking officials at home. Thus, by participating in the training, employees could feel "normal". During the COVID-19 pandemic, management decided to move to an online training system. It was important for LUW that the online training was flexible regarding dates and times, as well as offer a wide and interesting selection of training in the fields of both substantive and soft skills. Due to the pandemic, private training companies, which could not conduct training in-person, prepared an extensive and professional training initiative for public offices.

Currently, LUW declares that it will continue to keep a high number of online training initiatives beyond the pandemic's resolution, when officials return to work in the office. As such, COVID-19 contributed to an extensive implementation of high-level online training.

Source: Project case study on the Lubuskie Voivodship Office in Poland.

Health and well-being is another important element of resilient public servants that emerged as fundamental during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to be resilient, organisations need health and well-being policies that are adapted for the modern era. There cannot be any organisational resilience if most of the employees are away on sick leave. The modern understanding of occupational health and well-being is developing quickly, to encompass a broad view of an employee as a physical, emotional, and social being and good policies should be in place to address all of these aspects of health. This starts with prevention – e.g. ensuring the work environment is healthy, which today extends into the home, and that employees have access to those elements that input into healthy lifestyles – exercise, quality food, work-life balance, etc. It means that employees need access to medical help to address any problems early, including physical and mental health. And it means that employees should have access to the right kind of

leave and support when they face health issues, to minimise disruptions and return to work healthy as quickly as possible. Belgium's National Employment Office, for example, established a single point of contact for their wellbeing@work initiative in each division which co-ordinated information and measures. Madrid Salud had to implement a wide range of measures to protect the health of frontline workers who could not stay home (Box 8).

Leadership and management cultures are fundamental to workforce resilience. During the pandemic a key focus of employers was the mental health of their employees – and fears of potential burnout from added stress. Some good practices that were put into place in many organisations included pulse surveys to get a feel for employees' relative levels of stress and engagement, and more regular and deliberate check in sessions to give employees opportunities to support each other in their stress. These are likely important elements to continue when building a resilient workforce in the future. However, with the pandemic moving into the past, the most important driver of burnout is a toxic work environment, which is of fundamental importance to management and leadership, as only they can address this issue through healthy leadership practices (see leadership section and Box 2 for an example in Vienna).

Box 8. Madrid Salud: Re-defining essential workers and protecting their health and well-being during the pandemic and in the future

Madrid Salud is responsible for the occupational health and safety of all municipal workers. On the 30th of March 2020, the Mayor of Madrid issued a Regulation for Essential Services for Municipal Bodies, which prioritised the types of occupations (physicians, nurses, nursing home workers, emergency response workers, psychologists, front-line social workers, veterinarians, pharmacists and chemists, security and emergency forces like the police and firefighters, and other essential front-line workers, etc.) that needed to remain working in-person throughout the pandemic, including during quarantines. This had significant implications for Madrid Salud, which needed to reconsider, in light of the pandemic, the health and safety concerns of these essential occupations.

This was extremely challenging, especially in the early days of the pandemic, when less was known about how the virus was spread and how best to contain or treat it. Complicating this challenge was the fact that new tasks were also being taken on board by many municipal workers deemed as essential staff, including tasks that were outside their previous job duties. Therefore, new analyses had to be undertaken for each occupation to ascertain new risks in light of the current circumstances. For example, during the health crisis, police began providing security services at vaccination centres and emergency centres and were responsible for transporting vaccines to the centres; firefighters were transferring (presumed COVID-positive) deceased from nursing homes and adult residences to the morgues, and were also transporting meals to support Madrid Salud and social services, or even disinfecting municipal centres (through the Department of Infection Control of Madrid Salud); personnel working at homeless shelters, day centres, addiction centres (psychologists, emergency response teams such as SAMUR, medical staff) were now called upon to issue vaccinations at Madrid Salud tents or centres throughout the city. All of these new duties required updated health and safety protocols, equipment, and training to ensure workers' safety.

Madrid Salud staff had to firstly re-visit the occupations considered as essential workers as per the new regulation and revise occupational health and safety protocols for all these professions in light of information and protocols issued by the World Health Organisation and national and regional health authorities in Spain in the Community of Madrid. These included protocols not only for prevention, but also for how to treat and respond to COVID-positive cases in these professions. The Secretariat also responded by seconding doctors and nurses to the police and firefighters for their immediate and ongoing attention, and they issued a new Onboarding Procedures Guide to carry out their work, the

Secretariat worked through 19 different Committees of Health and Safety, collaborated closely with the trade unions. They also encountered a heavy workload in responding to queries and concerns from municipal staff on new risks and implementation of the new protocols.

Perhaps the most important initiative Madrid Salud undertook in this area, however, was overseeing and establishing the testing and vaccination of front-line municipal staff – police, firefighters, medical professionals, etc. They opened tents dedicated for testing these professions and conducted over 70 000 PCR COVID tests. These tents were later transformed into vaccination sites for the same personnel. Additionally, Madrid Salud extended its services to private enterprises working for the city at the time of the pandemic by providing tests and vaccines to reduce the transmission of the virus.

One major concern throughout the pandemic was staff's well-being, as they were under intense pressure, working long hours under difficult circumstances. In addition to work duties, family and carer duties remained. Sick leave due to contracting COVID, as well as burn-out, were legitimate issues which threatened not only the well-being of employees but the ability of the organisation to continue to respond to the impending crisis. Madrid Salud offered psychological and mental health support specifically for municipal staff, with psychologists from its own staff. The Director General of Madrid Salud made a concerted effort to keep communication with staff strong and ongoing, conducting virtual town halls to motivate staff and remain informed about employees' workplace challenges. The previous Employee Survey also provided valuable information concerning municipal staff and their well-being, which could be used as input to design policies and tackle the most urgent weaknesses. During the month of August, the organisation also conducted an Employee Survey on the impact of quarantine on internal communications and well-being.

Source: Project case study on Madrid Salud.

Resilient HR systems need to support mobility and flexible working arrangements

A second focus of resilience in the people dimension is the resilience of the HR management systems themselves. Human resource management systems are fundamentally about ensuring that the right people are working in the right place at the right time, and have the right working conditions to put their skills to use as productively as possible. This means that HR systems require agility to respond to crises which may change the status quo overnight. This was sometimes, but not always the case in public sector organisations during the COVID crisis.

First it was the responsibility of HR systems to ensure that people could continue working even if they could no longer be present in the office or work in the same configurations as before. For many this meant home working and all the technical and logistical challenges that came along with that. It also meant flexibility in working time, so that workers could adapt their schedules to the needs of their lives and families. Organisations that were equipped to provide both of these forms of flexibility were certainly more resilient and prepared. Most public sector organisations found ways to implement these kinds of flexibilities although some more quickly than others.

Going forward, the question is how best to use these flexibilities to prepare for the next shock? Is having the possibility to use them when needed enough, or do the need to become embedded in the post-COVID working culture, so that when the next shock happens, it is felt less and the adaptation process is more fluid? While specific studies have yet to be done on this, anecdotal evidence suggest that countries which already had high levels of experience with remote work and flexible working hours before the pandemic found the adaptation to be less challenging than those who were less used to this kind of working. A forthcoming (OECD_[21]) report also shows how a majority of OECD countries are providing additional guidance on the use of flexible working methods, including charters that clearly identify the expectations

of employees and their managers so as to clarify some of the grey areas around this kind of working. Embedding flexible working arrangements is also an important way of supporting employee health and well-being which also leads to organisational resilience as described in the section above.

The second way that HR systems themselves need to be resilient is in their ability to match employee skills with demand when that demand is changing significantly. This requires many elements to be in place – first a skills map of the employees to know who can be called upon in which kind of emergency, and second the conditions and systems in place to facilitate short-term movement. This also requires onboarding for the new employee – made more complicated in a newly reported environment of the pandemic – and support for the giving departments that are losing resources. In smaller organisations this happened more naturally, but many larger public sector organisations were slower to identify the need and put the right mechanisms in place. Good examples of organisations that managed to reallocate needed resources are found in the Bulgarian and Greek case studies (Box 9). Going forward, organisations may wish to establish surge-reserves – lists of employees with particular skills and a willingness to undertake short-term deployments to address emerging public issues.

Box 9. Reallocating staff in Bulgaria and Greece

Bulgaria's Unique synergy and interchangeability of the staff

In a special meeting of Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate's (SHRI) Board of Directors (in which the heads of all the directorates of SRHI were present), it was decided that all Inspectorate employees would take part in suitable activities aimed at overcoming the crisis.

The managers of the SHRI structures organised the work on the principle of interchangeability of employees, in order to ensure the continuity of all COVID-19-related activities. In this respect SRHI successfully implemented the interchangeability approach not only within directorates but also across the organisation. For this purpose, during the crisis the Inspectorate conducted internal training for staff in all directorates for their preparation for COVID-related functions. This allowed employees to acquire new knowledge and skills, to develop their digital literacy and to be ready for interchangeability. Here are some specific examples: employees from the food safety laboratory were trained to carry out laboratory studies of the virus; employees tasked with inspecting public premises were trained to inspect health premises.

Addressing resource shortages via flexible workforce management in Thessaloniki municipality

Thessaloniki Municipality employed a flexible system of internally reallocating staff to departments with increased workflow. This was mainly achieved through discussions between and within departments, based on needs assessment and relevant decisions by senior management rather than a concrete plan for each department. As such, employees who found themselves with no tasks during the crisis were quickly reassigned to Directorates and units that had increased needs. While facing a steep learning curve, the reallocated employees had the opportunity to further develop their transferable skills and diversify their existing skillset by contributing to different portfolios and operational tasks. It is important to note, however, that the reallocation of staff mainly took place in departments and units dealing with issues of administrative nature and/or public service delivery, rather than technical units, the personnel of which possessed specific skills and scientific background.

Source: Project case studies on Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate in Bulgaria and the Thessaloniki Municipality in Greece.

These two elements can, ideally be brought together in effective workforce planning. However, as pointed out in the (OECD, 2021^[20]) report on the future of work, the pandemic illustrates that workforce planning should not give a false sense of security over a future that is increasingly uncertain and difficult to predict. Rather strategic workforce planning can be used to plan for a resilient workforce and to build up better data on the workforce that can be leveraged in moments of crisis. Planning for an uncertain future could include:

- Planning in two time perspectives: In the longer-term, a strategic plan should be aligned to a vision of the kinds of public service needed in the future. It also requires shorter-term operational HR planning that is revised and recalibrated regularly to adjust to ensure responsiveness to unforeseen changes in the operating environment.
- Workforce data can help manage uncertainty, providing a better view of skills availability in times of crisis.
- Scenario planning is a well-developed tool to map various plausible futures and inform plans that take these into account.
- Workforce planning can also be used to identify potential flexibilities in the workforce, including talent pools for surge capacity when needed, mobility tools to link internal supply to demand in emergency situations, and the identification of essential functions and jobs that can be done at a distance, and the supports needed.
- Finally, workforce planning for uncertainty should include investments in resilience skills as discussed above.

Recommendations on people management

- Invest in **resilient workers** by:
 - Tracking and ensuring the health and well-being of employees – track employee health and well-being through workforce data and employee surveys, and ensure that workplace health and well-being policies focus on all aspects of employees including physical, mental, emotional and social. Ensure that leadership and management take employee health issues seriously and create healthy working environments where employees want to work and thrive.
 - Recruiting workers with the kinds of transversal skills, competencies and mindsets that contribute to resilience, such as commitment to mission, creative problem solving, foresight and systems thinking. This requires defining these skill sets, proactively recruiting for them, and assessing them effectively during selection procedures.
 - Developing a learning culture where employees are encouraged to learn on the job and build the kind those skills listed above that contribute to resilience. Bringing groups together to undertake reflection exercises to harvest lessons learned from the pandemic, and conduct new foresight exercises is a great way to build skills, generate new networks, and identify new directions for the organisation - all of which contribute to building resilience in the workforce and across the organisation.
- Ensure **resilient HR management systems** by:
 - Undertaking regular workforce planning exercises that incorporate uncertainty and help to plan for resilience. This can be done by mapping existing skills and identifying pools of resources that can be (re)deployed during emergencies, both inside the organisation and beyond.
 - Having access to, and experience with flexible ways of working stands to improve the resilience of public administrations and reduce the shock associated with moments of forced

flexibility. This should include both the infrastructure (technology, regulations) and the culture of using these arrangements.

- Putting in place mobility mechanisms and surge capacity plans and policies before a crisis hits help to ensure employees can be assigned to priorities during a crisis. Barriers to mobility, and its benefits, should be assessed and addressed so that mobility can be managed strategically. Organisations need to know what skills and capabilities employees have so that they can move them to the right places.

Partnerships and resources

Resilience requires that sector organisations need resources of different kinds in an efficient manner to support the implementation of their strategic priorities, and that they work more closely with both internal and external stakeholders in an open manner as was seen successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic by the creation of new partnerships with both non-government and public stakeholders. This was demonstrated for instance by the Municipality of Thessaloniki (Box 10).

Partnerships can also help develop and find resources that the organisation does not have internally, for instance on digital projects. Developing partnerships on digital resources with IT companies and with public entities that have similar digital needs can help increase capabilities, sharing of resources, information and data, and support interoperability. The financial support channelled from the central government has supported the financial sustainability of individual public sector organisations at the national and local level and contributed to their resilience during the crisis (CEMR, 2021^[4]).

Establishing robust partnerships has supported the resilience of organisations during the crisis. The OECD's *Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance* (OECD, 2020^[16]) and the *OECD Recommendation on Open Government* (OECD, 2017^[22]) [\[OECD/LEGAL/0438\]](#) both advise governments and public organisations to develop, adopt and implement partnerships that promote the Open Government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in designing and delivering public policies and services. While a third of public sector organisations surveyed by the project mentioned the establishment of new partnerships during the crisis, the development of robust partnerships and network in normal times is also more prone to sustained relations in crisis times as well as work routines have been established and the value of the partnerships tested.

Box 10. New modes of engagement with stakeholders in the Municipality of Thessaloniki

Leveraging partnerships to ensure continued service delivery

The Municipality of Thessaloniki made use of partnerships that were in place before the pandemic, such as with civil society organisations and NGOs, to ensure that homeless shelters, including the Homeless Day Centre hosting around 70 individuals, would remain open and operational in line with the sanitary measures.

Furthermore, the municipality applied new partnerships to ensure continued service delivery. As such it was granted permission by the Greek National Tourism Organisation and the Ministry of Tourism to rent a hotel to accommodate people in need. An emergency temporary structure with the capacity to accommodate 15 to 20 people was also established by the Thessaloniki Municipality and its partners at HELEXPO Fair Grounds. This structure, which operated for three months, helped to avoid serious

cases of COVID-19 and ensured the continued and well-functioning operation of all other relevant structures.

Leveraging partnerships for in-house development of digital tools

Thanks to additional partnerships that were developed during the pandemic, the Municipality of Thessaloniki developed a wide range of services that addressed the near entirety of its digital activities. This in-house development of tools allowed the municipality to limit its technology-related costs. At the same time, it allowed the development of tailor-made solutions that were an ideal fit for Thessaloniki's local environment. The municipality managed to expand its digital services from 20 to 47 - an increase of more than 100% without hiring new staff or additional budgetary resources. The range of services that was offered after this expansion covered the whole spectrum of the municipality's competencies, ranging from business-related certificates and urban planning to registry services. The municipality also created a dedicated website to gather all digital services and to facilitate access to them via common authentication services. The new products and services seem to be well-received by external users as the website is experiencing consistently high traffic and citizens' feedback is generally positive.

To structure the digital partnership, the relevant unit established an informal channel of communication with the Department of Informatics of the Athens Municipality. As the two municipalities faced similar challenges vis-à-vis the issue of digital services, this communication channel was established with an objective of exchanging best practices. Knowledge transfers occurred with respect to a variety of services, with the most important example being the development of a system of electronic payments. Thanks to external partners, the Thessaloniki Municipality also managed to draw funding from new financial partners, both private foundations and the European Union, to cover its additional software and hardware needs.

Source: Project case study on the Municipality of Thessaloniki in Greece.

As seen in the CAF case study organisations, the COVID-19 crisis not only offered an opportunity to adopt new forms of partnerships that were experimented on by several organisations, but it also offered the opportunity to review existing partnerships and rethink their overall strategic framework for. To maximise the usefulness of collaborations dedicated goals and priorities can be included in strategic documents to ensure a structured, uniform, and measurable approach across partners as demonstrated by the Slovak Ministry of Environment (Box 11).

Box 11. Designing a dedicated strategy on partnerships in the Slovak Ministry of Environment

The Slovak Ministry of Environment became aware that individual departments had contractual or informal partnerships but lacked an overall strategy on engaging and structuring these partnerships. By making use of CAF, the Ministry of Environment created a systematic approach. Central in this approach was the necessity to achieve added value when managing partnerships. Furthermore, new partnerships must be created intentionally and with mutual benefits for all partners. The ministry's partnership with the Pontis Foundation serves as an excellent example. In co-operation with the Pontis Foundation, the Ministry supports the Via Bona Award, a designation representing a unique achievement among companies for their inspiring examples in the field of responsible entrepreneurship and corporate philanthropy. The Ministry supports the award ceremony and ultimately became more visible to the public, managing to disseminate the idea of an environmentally sustainable society.

As not every partnership was deemed satisfactory, CAF helped the Ministry to identify the purpose of each partnership. The Ministry of Environment registered more than 280 partners of various types. CAF

allowed crisis management to launch a substantive mapping of partnerships using digitalisation tools. This goal was included in the Action Plan but intensified during the crisis when the maintenance of partnerships became more critical. Currently, the database of partnerships is a “live database” as the process of mapping is still in progress. The proposal of partnership management strategy includes central administration bodies, departmental organisations of the Ministry, relevant NGOs, private clusters and associations, partner states and their administrative bodies, higher education institutions, representations abroad, economic mobilisation actors, and local self-government units. The current mapping is focused on the purpose of each partnership, the beginning of the partnership, and on the responsible person. The Ministry will evaluate the importance of the partnerships as a next step towards future maintenance. The main ambition of the partnership management strategy proposal is to develop a more systematic approach to partnership management.

Source: Project case study on the Ministry of Environment in Slovak Republic.

Ensuring that public sector organisations proactively inform and communicate with stakeholders while safeguarding citizens against mis- and disinformation, is crucial for resilience as it contributes to establishing sustainable relations of trust and transparency with citizens, especially in times of crisis as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The *OECD Recommendation on Open Government* (OECD, 2017^[22]) [\[OECD/LEGAL/0438\]](#) supports building back better with open, resilient and inclusive public institutions. To move away from a traditional top-down approach, this can be done by implementing more collaborative forms of crisis communication, but also of regular communications in normal times to identify the most relevant channels and exchange on key messages. First lessons of government evaluations of the COVID-19 responses (OECD, 2022^[15]) include relevant insights in this matter such as establishing clear response strategies and processes for engaging with stakeholders on future crisis responses. Making information widely available to citizens can also enable and empower other public actors to reuse it for the overall benefit of citizens. The OECD has also proposed key actions to counter the issue of mis- and disinformation, such as supporting a multiplicity of independent fact-checking organisations, ensuring experts are in place to follow-up technological solutions, and improving users’ media, digital and health literacy skills (OECD, 2020^[23]).

Ensuring public sector integrity at all levels, including in internal processes, in procurement and in delivering services and partnering with citizens and non-government stakeholders, is a key pillar of resilience as it builds transparency and trust in the operational model and in the external interactions of the organisation. The *OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity* (OECD, 2017^[24]) [\[OECD/LEGAL/0435\]](#) further highlights the importance of levelling the playing field by granting all stakeholders access in the development of public policies and services and ensuring constructive stakeholder engagement (OECD, 2017^[24]). This Recommendation is particularly relevant for public sector organisation’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the crisis has created or exacerbated opportunities for fraud and corruption. For example, within the social benefits programs and the stimulus packages that have been implemented to assist citizens and organisations with the financial and social consequences of the pandemic. Additionally, the recommendation also includes guidance on safeguarding integrity and accountability in public procurements at a time where emergency contracting for essential goods and services is prevalent. Finally, the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems (MAPS) (OECD, 2021^[25]) is a tool that evaluates how well a country’s public procurement systems in their entirety works. The methodology rests on four pillars: the existing legal and policy framework, the institutional framework and management practices, the procurement operations, and the accountability mechanisms. The tool supports countries in more resilient public procurement systems that are modern, efficient, sustainable, more inclusive, and aligned with the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendations on partnerships and resources

- Build and facilitate strong partnerships and networks that can be leveraged for resilience in times of crisis and in normal times in line with the *OECD Recommendation on Open Government* (OECD, 2017^[22]) that promotes the Open Government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in designing and delivering public policies and services:
 - Review both existing and new forms of partnerships that were experimented during the COVID-19 pandemic, establishing clear strategies, expectations and processes for engaging with stakeholders in the future.
 - Create a strategic document to set goals, expectations and priorities on partnerships for the organisation (e.g. engaging with specific segments of vulnerable populations, expanding digital or physical resources) in a dedicated strategic document to ensure a structured, uniform, and measurable approach across partners that maximises added value.
 - Ensure leadership and strong commitment for stakeholder engagement at all levels from senior management to frontline workers by creating exchange channels at different levels (technical, managerial, project-based) and by valuing participation in civil servant's performance and work.
 - Ensure a level-playing field by granting all stakeholders – especially those with diverging interests – access to the development of public policies and services and by establishing appropriate mechanisms e.g. online consultations, ad hoc or permanent advisory bodies to the public sector organisation, working groups and dialogue bodies with civil society on specific matters.
- Design communication strategies, identify the relevant channels (e.g. social media for some targets and align internally on messages) to proactively inform and communicate with stakeholders to safeguard citizens against mis- and disinformation, which have been rife during the pandemic.
- Make use of digital tools to generate better access to information, to increase citizen participation in the formulation of public policies and services by reaching all demographics of society and guaranteeing the interests of marginalised communities and to design better services that will meet the needs of citizens and prove more resilient to shocks:
 - Develop dedicated partnerships on IT and digital resources to heighten capabilities, support the sharing of information and data, and foster interoperability.
 - Make information widely available online to citizens and civil society, the private sector, and other public actors to disseminate information facilitate the implementation of crisis management responses as well as compliance.
 - Use different formats to gather citizen needs and install feedback loops particularly in the design of public services.
- Enforce and communicate on high standards for integrity by developing codes of conduct, by displaying commitments to users and by developing capacities to control the integrity of key processes for instance disbursement and procurement including in times of emergency.

Processes

Each organisation is run by many processes covering strategic, internal and outreach activities and ranging from strategic planning, IT, human resources, procurement to innovation and communications, these form the fifth and final criterion of the so-called enablers of the CAF framework (EUPAN, 2020^[7]). As identified in the *Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance* report (OECD, 2020^[16]), the multidimensional policy challenges facing the public sector, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, require an integrated and innovative approach and processes for resilient public sector organisations. The COVID-19 crisis granted ample opportunities for fostering innovation, both internally and with users. Most often digitalisation has been at the heart of these efforts, serving as a key trend for internal processes and service-delivery.

As much of the world moved online because of the pandemic, accelerating the digitalisation of the public sector while addressing obstacles related to infrastructure, regulation, and resources (both financial and human) is crucial. Public sector organisations that were most advanced in digital transformation before the crisis hit proved more resilient as was the case in Slovenia's Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development (Box 12) or in the Italian space agency. This should encourage public sector organisations to move faster on digital transformation to keep pace but also to anticipate future shocks and have the right digital capabilities in place as this provided a clear advantage to organisations that had already advanced in the digital process. The OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (OECD, 2014^[26]) [\[OECD/LEGAL/0406\]](#) offers guidance on how to get the most out of technological change and digital opportunities in a long-term perspective. It highlights the importance of securing leadership and political commitment, effective organisational and governance frameworks, the need to develop a clear business case for sustained funding and focus, reinforced institutional capacities for monitoring, and procuring digital technologies based on an assessment of existing assets. In particular, it underlines the need for digital services to be user driven by awarding a central role to people's needs and convenience in the shaping of processes, services and policies, rather than digitalising analogue processes.

A real concern facing public sector organisations during the pandemic was the risk of merely digitising analogue processes, hereby creating path dependency and a struggle to move towards a citizen centred digitalisation that aims to improve the design and delivery of public services. The *OECD Good Practice Principles for Public Service Design and Delivery in the Digital Age* (OECD, 2022^[27]) are therefore most relevant as they provide a clear, actionable and comprehensive set of objectives for the high-quality digital transformation of public services:

- Build accessible, ethical and equitable public services that prioritise user needs, rather than government needs: It is crucial to understand users and their needs, make the design and delivery of public services a participatory and inclusive process, and ensure consistent, seamless and high-quality public services.
- Deliver with impact, at scale and with pace: create conditions that help teams to design and deliver high quality public services, develop a consistent delivery methodology for public services, curate an ecosystem of enabling tools, practices and resources.
- Be accountable and transparent in the design and delivery of public services to reinforce and strengthen public trust: be open and transparent in the design and delivery of public services, ensure the trustworthy and ethical use of digital tools and data, establish an enabling environment for a culture and practice of public service design and delivery.

Box 12. Accelerating the digital transformation of Slovenia's Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development.

Completing the digital transformation programme initiated before the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the onset of the pandemic, Slovenia's Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development (AAMRD) had digitalised core business processes (e.g. e-farm); these early initiatives proved essential in simplifying the transition to tele-working. The Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia agreed that AAMRD had already been digitised before the pandemic. All applications and enclosures have been mandated to be submitted electronically since 2009. This constituted a major leap forward in terms of applications and claims.

The pandemic has accelerated the abandonment of paperwork and the transition to online activities and procedures, therefore some legal bases had to be adopted. Significant attention from stakeholders and professional organisations necessitated the adoption of a legal framework by the Government Office for Legislation. In the event of exceptional circumstances (illness), employees were able to submit collective applications despite deadline delays, which greatly facilitated work and reduced pressure on employees. Furthermore, AAMRD prepared instructions on how to properly export physical documents and how to use the AAMRD tools. Employees were also alerted to the importance of cyber security and data protection, as well as the pitfalls that they could encounter.

Building capabilities for digitalisation through digital champions in Slovenia

A key, overarching challenge was the digitalisation of processes, activities and interactions which were normally carried out in the pre-crisis period in person, and as a rule, face-to-face. In the case of the Ministry of Environment in Slovenia and the execution of its competencies, it was necessary to ensure the proper functioning of the organisation even with the absence of employees at the workplace.

To implement digitalisation efforts that would ensure continuous service delivery, manuals and training sessions were created by the IT team of the Ministry. To accelerate these efforts, specific job positions were created within the individual departments of the Ministry, the so-called Champions, who had to deeply explore the online tools and then help other colleagues to work with them and resolve any ambiguities. Champions came from the existing employees of the Ministry. The selection process was based on the proactive approach of the employees, who believed that their IT skills could help other colleagues. The position of Champions was not restricted to any previous training focused on IT skills. However, the Ministry offered the Champions more hours of IT training to enrich their skills. On the other hand, there was more frequent communication between the Champions and the professional IT staff members than between the regular employees and IT employees.

Source: Project case study on Slovenia's Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development.

It is imperative that organisations also extend their innovation efforts beyond digitalisation, especially as it is impossible to know if the next crisis will allow the use of digital capabilities. As identified in the *Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance* report (OECD, 2020^[16]), public-sector innovation is about introducing and implementing new ideas whose impact help promote and improve sound public governance by reinforcing agility and a forward-looking nature. Moving back to business as usual might be tempting for public sector organisations, but further reflections on the new and innovative internal processes should be considered as the pandemic made them very receptive to innovation. New decision-making formats developed during the crisis, such as internal and external working groups and task forces have often simplified internal communication, expanded staff involvement, and encouraged employees to construct innovative paths to problem-solving. Involving citizens and civil servants in redesigning

processes could further strengthen the reflections. According to the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) (OECD, 2019^[28]), relevant examples of agile and innovative approaches to redesign processes and service delivery include project management tools such as results frameworks, communities of practice, innovation labs, toolkits, and implementation guidance documents.

Establishing an innovation ecosystem within the organisations and with partners, with tools, processes and incentives in place, can further root innovation in the organisation, help it innovate and adapt continuously and foster its resilience. The OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation (OECD, 2019^[29]) [\[OECD/LEGAL/0450\]](#) can help public organisations in strengthening their innovation on the long-term by addressing a variety of challenges and opportunities. The declaration establishes five principles and associated actions which can inform innovation and its management:

- Embrace and enhance innovation within the public sector.
- Encourage and equip all public sector servants to innovate.
- Cultivate new partnerships and involve different voices.
- Support exploration, iteration, and testing.
- Diffuse lessons and share practices.

The [OPSI Innovation Facets](#) model, that was used during the deep dive workshop of the project (Box 13), can provide an example of approach on how to conduct collaborative work on innovation, produce a panoramic vision on the portfolios of innovation and identify crucial innovation ideas to implement for the organisation. The [Innovation Playbook](#), associated to the OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation (OECD, 2019^[29]), can more specifically help organisations identify the most important innovation challenges and principles for their organisations, assess their capabilities, and select key actions to address them through interactive workshops mobilising civil servants and external stakeholders.

Box 13. Collaborative workshop on innovating in the face of the crisis

As part of the project, the OPSI designed an interactive workshop on innovation in the face of the crisis, gathering CAF National Correspondents, case study organisations, EIPA, KDZ, the OECD and experts.

- First, participants mapped 75 innovations on the innovative methods, practices, processes and systems that were adopted during the crisis. Using the [OPSI Innovation Facets](#) model, they constituted innovation portfolios along four main themes: the digitalisation of public services, the use of technologies for management purposes, decision-making processes and structures, and stakeholder engagement and user-centricity.
- On this basis, and using the [Innovation Playbook](#), OPSI asked participants to identify the most important innovation challenge their organisations are dealing with in the post-pandemic period.
- Next, participants were asked if their organisation had the capacity to deal with the innovation challenge they had selected and to identify gaps and opportunities to address it.
- Last, participants were asked to provide suggestions of potential solutions for the selected challenge. An idea generator was used a scale that go from Routine to Disruptive to create a list of proposals and to keeping only the most disruptive one.

Ideas such as establishing safe spaces for innovation in the organisation, including innovation in performance assessment for leaders and staff or defining innovation as a priority with budget, regulation, and organisational support were shared and could be implemented in the future.

Source: Proceedings from the OECD deep dive workshop in Brussels in June 2022.

Recommendations on processes

- Assess the key digital achievements and transformation made during the crisis, and identify areas where it needs to be consolidated or further accelerated e.g. digitalisation of certain processes and public services; get feedbacks and inputs from users and civil servants in this assessment.
- Consider developing an organisation-wide digitalisation programme or plan, or for larger organisations, a digital strategy in line with the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (OECD, 2014^[26]) that can help organise, prioritise and plan digitalisation efforts in the organisation and foster digital capabilities to make the organisation more resilient:
 - Secure leadership and organisation-wide commitment to the plan or strategy, including by involving civil servants and users.
 - Establish effective organisational and governance setting and mechanisms to co-ordinate the implementation of the digital plan in the organisation and with partners (IT companies, other public entities) for instance with a dedicated working group.
 - Develop clear business cases to sustain the funding and the implementation of digital technologies and measures.
 - Procure digital technologies based on assessment of existing assets including digital skills, job profiles, technologies, contracts, or agreements with other entities to increase efficiency.
- Increase the user-centricity of digital public services by further involving users in designing and testing new digital processes and services to ensure that they respond to their needs and that they will continue to be accessible and relevant in case of future crises.

Innovation

- Review the main innovative practices and changes made during the crisis, and do not move back to business as usual but reflect further on the new and innovative internal processes that were created during the COVID-19 pandemic and could be maintained, also collecting the feedback from civil servants and users.
- Create a conducive environment for innovation in the organisation that can help innovate continuously and be more ready in case of disruptive changes needed due to external shocks, for instance by promoting the generation of new ideas, encouraging employees to innovate, valuing the principle of experimentation for new ideas, or creating dedicated capabilities (units, spaces, networks).
- Consider running regularly collaborative innovation exercises using for instance the OPSI Innovation Facet Models and the Innovation Playbook to identify challenges associated to innovations, further build capabilities and generate new ideas.
- Encourage piloting and experimentation when thinking about new innovations and ideas to ensure that they are sustainable.

Results

Public sector organisations benefit from having a strong evidence-base, including accurate and timely data, information and indicators, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and can make informed decisions that will help them deliver on the short and on the long-term, making them more resilient in the face of crisis. The increasing complexity of policymaking and public service delivery and the sustained pressure on public sector organisations to deliver and to demonstrate impacts already led to a growing interest in the monitoring and managing of data and performance information well before the COVID-19 crisis, this to ensure that policies are implemented efficiently, and that operational and strategic government priorities are reached.

Result-orientation is critical for public sector organisations to increase their performance and reach their objectives for citizens, employees and society as a whole. Particularly in the context of crisis, the measurement of results and the evidence and data delivered by monitoring efforts can be used to take immediate adaptive measures, strengthen an organisation's ability to enhance efficiency and better use its capabilities and allocate its resources.

Having performance frameworks and monitoring tools and activities in place are essential to collect information and data in crisis and in normal times to continuously adjust the operations and services of the organisation and monitor its progress towards its objectives. The OECD and the European Union, through the joint SIGMA initiative have defined Public Administration Principles (SIGMA, 2017^[30]) that include concrete advice for purposeful monitoring. As public sector organisations need to decide what elements to monitor in a purposeful manner, this guidance is most relevant in the scope of this paper:

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

The crisis has led to the development of new services, activities and objectives for public sector organisations, a number of which are expected to remain in place after the crisis. This makes it an important time to reassess the current set of results measurement methods and indicators and consider establishing new ones or revising the existing ones. New priorities and approaches might call for new indicators, for instance on digital use of services by users or on the share of digitalised services when it comes to digitalisation, on the efficiency of new ways to reach vulnerable populations used during the crisis (number of people reached, costs, impact), or on the environmental performance of the organisation looking at energy consumption and down to the temperature in the office. When developing new indicators, criteria that are sufficiently specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound (SMART) are most used when public sector organisations. Based on the work carried out by the OECD, Malito, Umbach and Bhuta (2018^[31]) have proposed criteria to evaluate the relevance and robustness of these indicators:

- **Relevance** corresponds to the degree to which indicators serve a clear purpose and provide useful information that can guide public sector reforms. The target audience of these indicators are mainly decision makers. To be useful and relevant is fundamental that the indicators sets provided are:

- Action worthy: indicators should measure something that is important, and which is meaningful for policymakers and the society.
- Actionability: governments should know what actions they need to take in order to improve their performance. Indicators should provide useful and informative insights into the type of reform countries should engage.
- Behavioural: while measuring the existence of directives, laws, and other institutional documents, provided some information on the legal framework in place, what really matters is that they are implemented (output) and what their outcome/impact is. Therefore, to effectively inform public sector reforms, indicators should generally measure actual and observable facts, practices, and implementation (de facto).
- **Robustness** corresponds to the statistical soundness of indicators. In this regard, the authors outline two main characteristics:
 - Validity: a valid indicator measures the concept it is intended to measure.
 - Reliability: the measure should produce consistent results when repeated across populations and settings and event when assessed by different peoples and different times. In this regard, does the indicator provide stable results across various population and circumstances?

Thanks to ongoing digitalisation efforts public sector organisations can now more easily collect, share, and analyse data. Smart and real time data offers the opportunity of instant analysis and feedback to verify the delivery and effectiveness of policies, minimising data lag to a minimum. Modern web technologies further allow for the creation of one-stop-shops that bring together performance information. By digitalising processes for data collection, the burden of gathering and entering the required information within an organisation can be vastly reduced. These digital tools also allow to completely tailor the presented information based on the needs and position of the user. The project findings show that CAF organisations often collected data during the crisis to inform their decisions, mainly through the use of employee and customer surveys. However, different digital tools making use of real time information would have been useful as was the case in Belgium’s Employment Office that made use of KPI dashboards

Box 14. Measuring performance and effectiveness through a monitoring dashboard the Belgian National Employment Organisation

To measure organisational performance and effectiveness, the Belgian National Employment Organisation makes use of a dashboard consisting of about 500 indicators. The dashboard aims to objectivise facts and figures, see critical thresholds, detect trends, and meet the needs of government, customers and partners. MISUS (Management Information System for Unemployment Services) is the application that feeds data to the dashboard; the dashboard aims to be transparent, allowing its information to be available to everyone in the organisation. Confidential figures – containing personal data – are collected on a separate platform.

The cockpit in which the dashboard is monitored is also virtually available, making it possible to continue the monitoring of all key results during and after the crisis. The integrated management model and the dashboard are subject to a continuous system of monitoring. This structural approach was present before the crisis and was gradually optimised following the recommendations of the different CAF/EFQM assessments. There is also a system of internal control per process (Internal Control and Process Management Department) through which processes are analysed, conclusions are drawn, and actions are implemented.

Source: Project case study on Belgium’s National Employment Organisation.

Finally, sharing monitoring information also provides accountability to external stakeholders on issues such as the use of resources, internal processes, and outputs and outcomes leading to more robust and resilient public sector organisations (OECD, 2020^[16]). Results from the 2021 OECD survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD, 2022^[32]) indicate that this addresses a growing need to better disseminate the results of public action to citizens. By communicating results externally accountability is strengthened, which positively impacts transparency, reliability, and responsiveness.

Recommendations on results

- Systematise the use of evidence and data delivered by monitoring efforts in normal times and in times of crisis to make informed decisions, to design new strategies, policies and measures and to adjust services and activities as needed:
 - Set high-level indicators linked to the objectives and targets of the organisation.
 - Define a monitoring dashboard/platform gathering all key indicators for the organisation, connecting it with different activities and departments, preferably using an online platform.
 - Organise high level performance reviews and discussions with the leadership based on key indicators and measurement results, this could help adapt activities and services particularly in a frequently evolving environment like crisis' time.
- Ensure the ongoing and systemic collection and analysis of data (financial, perception, performance, delivery, etc.) to measure the progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the organisation and to strengthen service-responsiveness and organisational agility in all circumstances including crisis time:
 - Establish and document the data-collection system or procedure for all identified indicators that provides the leadership with timely and accurate data.
 - Design data collection systems and indicators that are user-oriented.
- Consider revising the existing set of indicators measuring the perception of citizens and employees and the performance of the organisation in light of the new activities, processes and objectives developed during the crisis.
- Foster resilience on result-orientation by building internal capacity for engaging with performance information and evidence-informed policymaking across the organisation:
 - Train employees on monitoring and the use of performance information.
 - Ensure critical thinking to assess the provenance, reliability, and appropriateness of evidence.
 - Build familiarity with innovative techniques like behavioural insights, design thinking, policy labs, and foresight to further support the use of evidence in the policy cycle.
 - Make use of knowledge management to build institutional capacity.
- Consider how to best publish and share monitoring information on issues such as the use of resources, internal processes, outputs, and outcomes to stakeholders, that can contribute to increasing accountability and trust and creating more resilient public sector organisations.

4 Conclusion: Further mainstreaming resilience into the CAF

This paper has presented a range of findings and reflections on lessons learnt about organisational resilience during the crisis. It has presented the results of a survey that established a number of common challenges and trends as well as insights from case studies using the CAF criteria as a structure to assess organisations' experience. By way of conclusion, this section looks at how the use of CAF as a tool prepared these organisations for the crisis – how it contributed to their organisational resilience.

The CAF contributes to organisational resilience in two key ways. The first is by identifying specific actions that make their way into CAF improvement plans, and these actions often create more resilient organisations. For example, some organisations' improvement plans included actions to level up leadership and management capabilities, which proved highly important during the COVID crisis. Others included actions around digitalisation of key processes and pilots on remote working. The fact that these had begun well before the crisis positioned the organisations to take advantage of these during crisis.

The second and most significant way that CAF contributed to resilience in the case study organisations was through the process of using the CAF. Undertaking regular CAF cycles requires organisations to bring together employees from across the organisation to undertake deep reflection and self-assessment, which helps to identify weaknesses, blind spots, and areas of potential future risk. This is a very important learning experience for those involved, including the senior management whose deeper understanding of their organisations' operations contributed to their own resilience and that of their organisation. This in turn contributes to a culture of continuous improvement within public sector organisations, as well as a culture of innovation.

Implementing the CAF with a wide group of employees also generates the development of networks so that employees learn about one another's work and know who to call when they need to reach out. This was also a key element of success in many organisations' resilience. Many of the case studies mentioned the need to draw on commitment and a sense of teamwork that was already created thanks to the experience of CAF. Furthermore, the process empowers employees to identify problems and come up with actions, which generates a sense of psychological safety that can be depended upon in moments of crisis.

Making regular use of the CAF also helps to improve the use of data and evidence for decision making which contributes to an organisational culture focused on measurement, learning and constant improvement. This awareness of data and practice with its use helps to build skills and confidence in this area while also improving the data available that can become essential during crisis situations.

The point of these previous paragraphs is to emphasise that the CAF, and other tools like it, are not only effective at producing their specific outputs, but also at creating a culture that contributes to organisational resilience if they are used in an effective way. In that sense, CAF users can likely get the most of our CAF for resilience by:

- Using the CAF regularly, in cyclical manner to ensure that the kinds of experiences described above become embedded in the organisations' DNA. That will not happen with one single use.

- Being inclusive – use CAF as an opportunity to bring actors from across the organisations together to learn about one another’s work and their strengths and challenges. Using this as an opportunity to build networks and common sense of purpose and drive.
- Focusing on honest reflection and learning, not compliance – bringing in a range of different input (data, indicators, insights from staff at all levels, external stakeholders and partners, etc.) to hold up a mirror to the organisation.
- Ensuring that CAF results support the delivery of better outcomes for the organisation and its beneficiaries - connecting the CAF assessment with the strategic objectives of the organisation, so that improvements will contribute to a better achievement of its mission and targets.
- Embedding its use in foresight – there’s a risk that CAF could become limiting if organisations use it to focus only inwards. Bringing in ideas and challenges from the outside and focused on future changes are essential to get the most out of the tool from a resilience perspective.

CAF demonstrates a high potential to bolster the resilience of public sector organisations during the COVID-19 crisis. However, further improvements in response to the crisis could have been achieved in speed, scale, and transparency. The CAF model needs to be resilient at all stages. Better integrating resilience, as well as factors such as digitalisation and innovation, into the CAF can bolster public sector organisations’ capacity to recover from disruptions and adapt to changing conditions. The digitalisation of public services is an essential step in strengthening the resilience of the public sector. However, it is imperative that organisations maintain multiple, diverse channels of access to public services to effectively mitigate disruptions. Fostering innovation is a fundamental endeavour to ensure organisational resilience as well and calls for building conducive environment, tools and processes for innovation in the organisation. New decision-making formats developed during the crisis, such as working groups, task forces and transversal boards have reduced barriers to internal communication, expanded staff involvement, and encouraged employees to construct innovative paths to complex problem-solving.

Future improvements to the CAF model would do well to further integrate resilience into its framework. Relabelling the CAF as a tool for organisational resilience and performance, in addition to quality management, could spark such improvements and support the promotion of the model to new organisations. CAF can aid organisations in identifying new priorities and streamlining the development and implementation of new practices. Mindful leadership can craft a culture of trust, teamwork and responsibility that appreciates and involves staff. Encouraging staff flexibility, self-organisation and well-being can in turn foster a culture of innovation that empowers employees to go the extra mile. Building more inclusive work approaches and processes internally and externally with new co-ordination and consultation mechanisms, involving users and external stakeholders and partners, can increase the collaboration at levels, enhance transparency and openness, and generate new ideas and practices closer to user needs. CAF should be viewed by organisations as a working model, expanding opportunities for teamwork by breaking silos. Mistakes in the use of the CAF model are in fact learning opportunities for organisations, helping to develop a community of best practices.

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