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Reinventing public sector workforce training and institutional learning towards changing mindsets in the public sector

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Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee members Alketa Peci and Sherifa Fouad Sherif in collaboration with Ronald U. Mendoza and Devon Rowe.

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Reinventing public sector workforce training and institutional learning towards changing mindsets

Summary

In the present paper, the authors elaborate on the need to reinvent public sector workforce training and institutional learning to change mindsets and advance the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Governments should focus more on investing in intellectual capital and human resources, including in the skills, competencies, resources, working conditions and values of public servants, which can support the building of strong institutions and the achievement of effective public service delivery.

The authors note that the public sector has faced many new and complex challenges in recent years and that governments need to be better prepared and more resilient in order to manage current and future crises. Going forward, public institutions will need to adapt more quickly to changes and ensure that service delivery to citizens becomes more seamless and efficient.

A main enabler in building strong institutions is capacity-building, including through adequate training that results in institutional learning. This capacity-building should focus on upskilling, reskilling and shifting the mindsets of the current and next generations of public servants. Comprehensive transformation of mindsets demands a set of behavioural and organizational changes, at all levels of government, involving public servants as well as elected officials and political appointees.

The authors elaborate on the opportunities and risks of digitalization and its potential impact on the public sector workforce, noting the need for new competencies and skills of public servants. The authors also draw attention to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which demands an active response from public servants involved in communication, including through the development of adequate public communication strategies.

Finally, the authors emphasize the value of engaging young people in policymaking and public institutions, as their involvement is key to not only increase their participation and trust in government but also to assure intergenerational equity, especially in view of the possible long-term consequences of ongoing crises.

I. Introduction

1. In the present paper, the authors build on previous work undertaken by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on public sector workforce matters.[1] In this previous work, among other topics, the Committee examined how to develop transformative leadership and build the capacities and enhance the relevant competencies and awareness of public servants at the local and national levels, including in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the context of the digital era. At its twentieth session, in 2021, the Committee examined issues in public sector workforce management in relation to the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. At its twenty-first session, in 2022, the Committee agreed that building responsive, robust and resilient institutions called for more creative, flexible and integrated ways of working that are focused on the needs of people, as well as an adequate stock of competencies and resources that can be activated in times of crisis. Governments were encouraged to further promote the professionalization of the public sector workforce, invest in digital skills, update competency frameworks for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and address inequalities within the public sector workforce as well as social inequities in the design and delivery of public services. The Committee noted that such efforts could help to address questions of legitimacy in the public sector and increase trust in institutions.

2. In Sustainable Development Goal 16, emphasis is placed on the need for effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, meaning that they should be people-centred, people-driven and guided by high ethical standards and the values of professionalism and competence. Public servants are the key drivers of change in the implementation of administrative reform strategies aimed at the modernization of government, delivery of the 17 Goals and the transformation of institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world.

3. Governments need to focus more on investing in intellectual capital and human resources, including in the skills, competencies, resources, working conditions and values of public servants, which can support the building of strong institutions and the achievement of effective public service delivery.

4. The public sector has faced many new and emerging challenges in recent years, including those caused by climate change, biodiversity loss and the COVID-19 pandemic. While inefficient management, delayed decision-making, a lack of innovation and the lack or underutilization of capacity were some of the traditional challenges faced by public service institutions worldwide, current challenges are more complex. Governments need to be better prepared to manage current and potential future economic, social and environmental shocks and become more resilient, especially with regard to achieving the Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

5. In view of digitalization, shifting demographics and multiple crises, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, the COVID-19 pandemic and budgetary restraints, it has become more important than ever to find new and creative ways to enhance public service delivery. Going forward, public institutions will need to adapt more quickly to changes and ensure that service delivery to citizens becomes more seamless and efficient. Current challenges offer opportunities to consolidate lessons learned and replicate them where possible, and to chart new paths for innovative public sector initiatives.

[1] See https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/Committee-of-Experts-on-Public-Administration/WG-public-sector-workforce.

6. The next generation of leaders and public servants needs an entirely new mindset that will allow them to thrive and ensure more efficient government management and public service delivery that is aimed at achieving a greener, more resilient and more inclusive society. Changing mindsets is therefore more crucial than ever, and public servants need creative mindsets in order to achieve results. Changing mindsets requires the adoption of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that encompasses behavioural changes at the individual, organizational, institutional and subnational levels.

7. Digitalization will most likely alter the size, shape and workforce composition of public sector entities. The number of individuals working in dedicated administrative roles might change as the use of big data and of new technologies, such as fourth industrial revolution technologies, including blockchain and artificial intelligence, proliferate. The digital age offers both opportunities and risks regarding trust in government institutions and democracy, particularly in the face of increasing political polarization. The digital age also demands new skills from the public sector workforce, including elected officials.

8. The spread of misinformation and disinformation is particularly challenging, since it may decrease the perceived legitimacy of public institutions, deepen political polarization and favour populist movements. Countering this challenge requires greater attention when crafting public communication strategies. Such strategies, based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, should also be inclusive.

9. Building and maintaining trust in public institutions and strengthening democracy and democratic institutions in the digital era have been identified as emerging key structural challenges which governance and public administration need to overcome in order to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. Embracing new technologies and changes and adopting agile approaches to deal with them, as well as developing new skills and competencies, contribute to an efficient public administration.

10. In line with the governance principle of intergenerational equity, there is a need to increase the involvement of young people in policymaking and public institutions, as they are particularly affected by and also take a strong interest in addressing ongoing global crises.

II. Improving public sector training and institutional learning to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal achievement

11. A main enabler in implementing the 2030 Agenda and building strong institutions is capacity-building, namely the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that public institutions and public servants need to address the complex economic, social and environmental challenges the world is facing today. The focus of such capacity-building should be on upskilling, reskilling and shifting the mindsets of the current and next generations of public servants in order to support the achievement of a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world.

12. Capacity-building can be achieved through adequate training that results in institutional learning and can lead to more effective and efficient delivery of goods and services. Effective and efficient delivery can, in turn, directly increase the satisfaction of people with public services and their trust in public institutions.

13. The *World Public Sector Report 2021* serves to elaborate on the capacities needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals as a “programme”, guided by the principles of effective governance for sustainable development put forward by

the Committee. The report also serves to highlight several shortcomings in capacity-building efforts for Sustainable Development Goal implementation, including shortages of human resources and leadership capacity and skills.[2]

Training

14. Ongoing crises, new technologies and changing public expectations and demands have a continuous impact on public service delivery, resulting in the need for revised approaches to public sector management, including human resources management. Public servants must quickly acquire new skills and credentials, as well as modify their public-facing behaviour. Talent management of public sector human resources should be a priority for governments and should include enhancing the supply of qualified managers and creating a cadre of capable public servants through enhanced training, better recruitment processes and improved systems of rewards and incentives.

15. Training is considered a key component of developing the competencies of public officials. In order to increase the professionalism of the public sector workforce, a comprehensive and evolving range of in-service training options should be made available across all levels of government.

16. It should be noted, however, that public servants often continue to experience a lack of empowerment, limited opportunities for professional development and fragmented approaches to training and education, which may undermine their ability to address contemporary challenges. The lack of strategies developed with needs, results and competencies in mind and that could have a direct impact on training and development requirements is one of the main challenges in many public sector workforces, especially in developing countries.

17. Training requirements are often based on perceived gaps in knowledge or skills. Training needs assessments are therefore an essential tool to identify actual gaps in knowledge and skills and to design training programmes that address them. In addition, the following tools can be used to enhance the skills and shift the mindsets of public servants: on-the-job-training, case-based training, simulations, online training using learning management systems, gamification, instructor-led training, interactive learning guides and project management, design thinking and systems thinking training. Training evaluation tools and impact assessment software can be used for evaluation purposes.

18. Countries that have been identified as being highly attuned and responsive to the training needs of their public institutions have taken a holistic approach to training that covers people, processes and technologies. Egypt, Estonia, India and the Netherlands provide good examples of how countries have been able to develop specialized training for public servants that has enhanced service delivery and changed mindsets.

19. Good practices include raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals among public servants using a diverse set of tools and incorporating the Goals into the initial and continuous training of public servants, as well as capacity-building for teachers in schools and universities.[3]

20. While the COVID-19 pandemic has made the crucial role of public servants and public service delivery more evident, it has also posed challenges to the delivery of training in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. Funding shortages have

[2] *World Public Sector Report 2021: National Institutional Arrangements for Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: a Five-Year Stocktaking* (United Nations publication, 2021).

[3] Ibid.

curtailed training activities and increased the use of online modalities instead of in-person training. In addition, the response to the pandemic reduced the time that public servants were able to devote to learning activities.

Institutional learning

21. Institutional learning in the public sector comprises the acquisition of knowledge and skills by public servants through experience, study or training. Creating opportunities for continuous improvement and a commitment to learning are key to enhancing public service delivery and efficiency. Institutional learning is also crucial to enable the use of more impactful and technologically advanced public service delivery solutions.

22. Institutions that are considered to be learning organizations excel in problem solving, experimenting with innovative ideas, learning from their own experiences and past performance, learning from the experiences of others and best practices and transferring knowledge swiftly and effectively within the organization.

III. Changing mindsets through public sector training and learning

23. Countries face new governance difficulties as they implement the Sustainable Development Goals and put the 11 principles of effective governance developed by the Committee into effect. It will take changes in values, beliefs, attitudes, competencies and behaviours to transform governance in support of the Goals.

24. Mindsets will need to change if public service delivery is to become more effective in supporting the realization of the 2030 Agenda. This mindset change will need to be accompanied by a comprehensive and holistic approach to capacity-building intended to modernize governments.

25. Mindsets are ingrained, presumptive ways of thinking. They consist of beliefs and attitudes that a person has assimilated throughout their lifetime about themselves and the world around them.[4] Mindsets, as understood in this sense, exist at several societal and cultural levels. Sometimes, mindsets transcend demographic and ideological boundaries and are shared by all groups within a society as part of the national culture. Recently, interest in changing the mindsets of public servants to better address sustainable development challenges has been growing in many countries.

26. Shifting mindsets is imperative for letting go of old beliefs and unproductive work habits and for creating new ones. These new beliefs and work habits will enable institutions to become more effective, accountable and inclusive.

27. Going forward, governments could helpfully direct resources to retooling public service delivery where needed and to providing public sector workers with new knowledge, technical and practical skills and with an enabling environment for action. Skills, attitudes and behaviours that can help build strong institutions include:

- Agility for systems thinking
- Collaboration for better coordination, integration and dialogue

[4] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Changing Mindsets to Realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: How to Promote New Mindsets and Behaviors in Public Institutions to Implement the Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations publication, 2021).

- Innovation to support transformation
- Use of an evidence-based approach in support of sound policymaking
- Use of a results-based approach for impact assessments
- Foresight skills for long-term planning and sound policymaking
- Ethical behaviour and sound moral principles
- Openness in support of integrity and transparency
- Personal accountability in support of an accountability culture
- Digital skills to support digitalization of the public sector
- Empathy, relational skills and emotional intelligence
- Socially conscious leadership to safeguard people, the planet and prosperity for all and leave no one behind
- Responsiveness to provide people-centric services, with a special focus on vulnerable groups
- Support the achievement of intergenerational equity
- Sensitivity to gender and racial inequalities and towards vulnerable citizens so as to be able to promote equal opportunities
- Risk awareness and risk acceptance to cope with the dynamics and unpredictability of the multiple and interlinked global crises
- Openness to innovation.

28. Many public servants today are asked to deliver more with less, often in uncertain policy environments. They are also asked to commit to doing their utmost and to having a strong sense of integrity and public service. Public servants therefore need to have the right resilient mindset to enable them to quickly adapt in response to changing circumstances. Resilience should not be confused with invincibility, however. Stress, burnout and other conditions that can have a negative impact on the well-being of public servants need to be prevented.

29. Ensuring that public servants are high-performing and have the highest ethical standards can often be a challenge. Leadership by example needs to be strongly emphasized as a technique to establish the right environment and to set standards of behaviour. The attitudes and actions of leaders can significantly influence the quality of public institutions and facilitate a change in the mindsets of public servants. Reformed institutions that are working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals must be supported by political and administrative leadership that upholds the core principles that underpin the 2030 Agenda.

30. It is important to leverage the mindsets and values of public servants in efforts to combat corruption. Corruption prevention efforts should be geared towards the creation and institutionalization of a responsive, proactive and self-correcting public administration.

IV. Changing mindsets of politicians

31. Owing to the challenges of dealing with current and future crises, the discussion around changing the mindsets of public servants should include political leaders. Leaders can, at times, be a key constraint to change, as their beliefs and actions can undermine even well-equipped bureaucracies that are armed with evidence and

expertise. At the same time, politicians have an important contribution to make regarding issues of trust and accountability, regardless of where their responsibilities lie. The skills of political leaders need to expand from a narrow political skill set to include a wider range of skills, such as leadership and collaboration. There is a need for governments to better prepare and train elected officials and political appointees.

32. The ever-changing global and regional circumstances require a different style of leadership than even a few years ago. Volatility, uncertainty and ambiguity call for new skill sets, but few capacity development opportunities exist for leaders. The "growth mindset" as defined by Carol Dweck[5] could be useful to consider when developing the skills of political leaders. Long-term plans and national development strategies should be designed and put into action so as to help to create political leaders of the future, especially in developing countries. Training budgets should be prioritized accordingly and new regulations should be put in place to protect these budgets against potential cuts, for example in the case of an unforeseen crisis.

33. Going forward, it is recommended to foster a culture of evidence-based policymaking that emphasizes the importance of data, research, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and involves more effective collaboration, including with bureaucratic and political leaders. Related capacity-building efforts could also involve young parliamentarians and young local officials, such as chief executives of local governments. There are several good practice examples of the involvement of young people that have been adopted in cities[6] and recognized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.[7]

V. Digitalization and its impact on public sector training and learning

34. Government operations are changing at a fast pace in response to the ongoing digital transformation in many countries. The way the public interacts with public sector entities and receives government services is being reimagined and huge efforts are under way to reform and improve public service delivery in ways that take advantage of emerging digital capabilities.

Building public trust and strengthening democracy in the digital age

35. Public trust is an indicator of how people perceive the quality of government institutions. It is both an input to and an outcome of governance. Public trust is critical for sustainable development, as the way institutions are set up and operate in practice influences the trust that people place in them and their ability to promote transformation at the societal level (such as through changing social norms or fostering whole-of-society approaches). This transformation is necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.[8] Building trust and connecting with people is therefore crucial in strengthening public institutions and enabling them to face ongoing challenges and to prepare for future ones.

36. A recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report identifies five drivers of trust in government: (a) responsiveness in delivering

[5] Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York City, Ballantine Books, 2007).

[6] African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Inter-American Development Bank, *Creating Livable Cities: Regional Perspectives* (Manila, Asian Development Bank, 2019).

[7] See United Nations Public Service Awards website: https://publicadministration.un.org/unpsa/database/Winners.

[8] *World Public Sector Report 2021*.

public services, (b) reliability in anticipating new needs and safeguarding people, (c) integrity, (d) openness and (e) fairness.[9] Countries display great variations along these dimensions, indicating where they need to increase efforts in order to build public trust through concrete policy actions.

37. Digitalization can expand the direct participation of citizens, particularly vulnerable citizens, in public institutions and activities, thus expanding the civic space. The number of countries offering online services for vulnerable groups, including the poor, persons with disabilities, the elderly, young people, immigrants and women, for example, has increased since 2020 in all regions.[10] E-government and e-democracy hold the promise of even more convenient and inclusive access to public life. The digital age, including social media, has been instrumental in promoting universal human rights across the globe, despite the spread of misinformation and disinformation and direct censorship in some countries.[11]

38. The digitalization of government nevertheless presents several challenges and risks. Some countries have used digital means to control citizen behaviour and impose more surveillance. Digitalization has also increased opportunities for undue influence in policymaking both domestically and from abroad, and new technologies provide an opportunity to amplify the spread of misinformation and disinformation. On social media platforms, some users are becoming more aggressive, so-called "echo chambers" are becoming more attractive to many users and the culture of fair debate is sometimes being replaced with insinuations, malice and polarization. The risks of privacy violation, reduced transparency regarding data usage and illegitimate use of data are considerable, as is the risk of an increase in the digital literacy gap. In the long term, these developments challenge social cohesion and deliberative democratic processes, although they also can contribute to the resilience of democracies by making hidden conflicts public.[12]

39. There is a growing consensus that the lack of trust in public institutions and political leaders can reduce the perceived legitimacy of public institutions, deepen political polarization and favour populist movements. The COVID-19 pandemic further challenged public trust in government in some countries owing to corruption scandals and restrictions such as curfews.

40. Governments are implementing important measures to adapt to ongoing digitalization, including by adopting or revising regulatory frameworks (such as to ensure respect for human rights and democratic principles in online forums), using digital tools to increase participation and collaboration (such as "Civic Tech" and "GovTech" technologies, with regard to data mining) and creating new types of regulatory bodies to address digital issues in a more holistic way.

Digitalization and public service delivery

41. Government innovation and access to emerging technologies can assist public entities in significantly enhancing the provision of public services, including by offering direct access to information and increasing participation. Building government capacities to develop innovations and the use of information and

[9] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Government at a Glance* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021).

[10] *United Nations E-Government Survey 2022: The Future of Digital Government* (United Nations publication, 2022).

[11] OECD, *Government at a Glance*.

[12] Ortwin Renn, Grischa Beier and Pia-Johanna Schweizer, "The opportunities and risks of digitalisation for sustainable development: a systemic perspective", *GAIA – Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2021).

communications technologies, including frontier technologies where available, are essential to promoting government effectiveness and resilience.

42. Enhancing the skills and qualifications of public sector workers to adapt to and use evolving technology, through significant training and capacity-building efforts, is key to improving their performance and to fostering the effectiveness of the public sector.

43. Public servants need to develop the fundamental skills needed to succeed in the digital era. A group of university academics and practitioner-instructors developed the following competencies to attempt to define the new baseline skills required of all public sector leaders:[13]

- Value the experience of service users; can collaborate with specialists to understand user needs and will design, test, and adopt effective solutions accordingly
- Can anticipate and mitigate privacy, security and ethical risks that are inherent to governing in a digital era
- Understand the need to blend traditional public service skills with modern, digital skills, and can effectively work within and lead multidisciplinary teams
- Understand importance of iteration and rapid feedback loops and can create a working environment of continuous learning and improved outcomes
- Can identify opportunities to improve government operations, service delivery or policymaking, and can overcome structural and institutional obstacles to change
- Can use a range of techniques and tools to make the government more open, collaborative and accountable
- Understand how to use data to inform decisions, design and run services, and create public value inside and outside government
- Understand current and evolving opportunities of digital technologies and can assess how they can be used to improve public outcomes

44. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, training programmes for public servants have shifted towards virtual trainings that use online training platforms, gamification, case-based learning and a variety of digital training assessment tools. Training is now often delivered using a blend of online, classroom and hybrid instruction.

Strengthen public communication strategies and skills

45. The increasing number of digital platforms; the spread of misinformation and disinformation and the growing political polarization demonstrate the challenge of ensuring that people are only exposed to information of good quality. One solution for achieving this is by identifying and filtering out unreliable information. Quality information enhances the participation of citizens, including in deliberations on policies, and can strengthen trust in government and support democracy. Public servants involved in communication need to play an active role in public communication strategies that are aimed at informing and inspiring people to take action towards more democratic, sustainable, resilient and green societies. The role of public servants involved in communication should be legitimized by expertise and professionalism.

[13] Adapted from https://www.teachingpublicservice.digital/en/competencies.

46. The COVID-19 pandemic has further revealed the central role of effective communication with the public. Instructing the public about the importance of curfews and reducing vaccine hesitancy, while mitigating for misinformation or disinformation on the virus, became a crucial role of public leaders. Innovative practices[14] emerging in some countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, reinforced the crucial role of inclusive communication in combating the virus. These innovative practices skilfully bridged ethnically and linguistically diverse groups or the digital literacy gaps between generations and urban and rural populations. In these practices, behavioural insights were used to inform communication content that was effective in encouraging compliance with public health policies. These insights also helped communicators account for the cognitive factors that shape how people navigate complex information ecosystems.

47. Public communication also becomes more responsive when it relies on datafication, namely the transformation of social action into quantified data, as this allows governments to identify and analyse the interests and needs of people. Good practices in datafication-enabled communication use different sources of feedback and replace top-down dissemination of information with interactions with the public and two-way communication strategies.

48. A key to amplifying the reach and perceived trustworthiness of official information is the capacity to collaborate with third-party messengers (such as online influencers and popular public figures) to reach particular social groups expressing low levels of public trust. At the same time, the use of emerging technologies and communication on social media or other online channels carry risks of misuse, making their ethical use an imperative for public sector communicators. These communicators should be oriented by the principles of transparent and ethical information and debate.

49. These challenges call for capacity-building across public institutions, including by equipping them with the necessary expertise, skills, capacity mandates and guidance. Agile, data-driven and insight-driven institutions demand new skills and specializations and a democratic and citizen-centred mindset among public leaders and public servants. According to a recent OECD report, [15] communication departments remain underskilled in terms of the digital technologies, big data and automation that drive innovation and efficiencies in public communication. In addition, training on new data gathering and analysis skills, behavioural communication skills and ethics guidance, as a prerequisite for the adoption of new technologies and data and behavioural insights, remains scarce. Further, the use of these new tools and insights by untrained staff who are unfamiliar with the potential implications for the public interest is risky. Communication skills need to be developed among public leaders and the public sector workforce more broadly in order to implement public communication as a core government function. This public communication would enable governments that are more open and connected, which is necessary during times of “infodemics”, political polarization and potential economic, social and climate crises.[16]

[14] Carlotta Alfonsi and others, “Public communication trends after COVID-19: Innovative practices across the OECD and in four Southeast Asian countries”, OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 55 (OECD, 2022).

[15] OECD, *Government at a Glance* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021).

[16] OECD, *Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021).

VI. Training and learning for government resilience

50. The COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises and conflicts reinforce the need for government resilience. The public sector workforce skills and competencies needed to foster such resilience include those set out below:

(a) Strategic foresight skills among policymakers that allow them to create functional and operational views of the future for better anticipation and advance planning. In line with anticipatory innovation governance, policymakers may establish different scenarios, outlining the parameters of the future they would like to see or the future they would like to avoid, and then experiment in a real world environment to determine effective policies to move towards their preferred scenarios. The Netherlands, for example, organizes regular dialogues in which policymakers and stakeholders examine future environmental scenarios, identify their ambitions and explore how to realize them;[17]

(b) Bureaucratic hacking skills are required to solve complex problems, foster innovation among public servants and lead to innovation even when the public organization is overly bureaucratized and rigid. Bureaucratic hackers are leaders and public servants willing to challenge the system and innovate from within, by redefining the rules and making them strategically better;[18]

(c) Skills to build innovative policymaking tools that go beyond top-down approaches. During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments explored ways to leverage behavioural insights and experimentation in their pandemic response measures.[19] In addition, the global nature of contemporary challenges, such as climate change and disinformation and misinformation, demands transnational responsiveness. Enhancing cross-border experimentation and the adoption of a collective approach that is inclusive of government representatives, experts, researchers and other non-governmental actors is key to a coordinated and successful response to global policy challenges.

VII. Increasing involvement of young people

51. In line with the governance principle of intergenerational equity, there is a need to increase the involvement of young people in policymaking and public institutions, as they are particularly affected by and also take a strong interest in addressing ongoing global crises, for example, by spearheading climate movements worldwide.

52. Together with other vulnerable groups, such as the poor, persons with disabilities, refugees and women, young people have been hit particularly hard by the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has had a negative impact on their trust in government and democratic processes. Exposure to epidemics between the ages of 18 and 25 can have a persistent negative effect on the confidence of a young adult in political institutions and leaders.[20] That experience, especially in countries with weaker institutions with less capacity to act against them, can leave a long-lasting political impression on young adults.

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[17] OECD, *Government at a Glance* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021).

[18] Andrew Wagner, “The role of ‘bureaucracy hackers’ in government”, Government Matters, 13 June 2018.

[19] OECD, “Misinformation and disinformation: an international effort using behavioural science to tackle the spread of misinformation”, Public Governance Policy Paper (OECD Publishing. 2022).

[20] Cevat Aksoy, Barry Eichengreen and Orkun Saka, “COVID-19 and trust among the young”, International Monetary Fund, June 2022.

53. Digitalization, including artificial intelligence and automation, brings new opportunities for young people, but also exposes the existing challenges, such as a polarized labour market, stressed social protection systems and declining labour rights. In 2021, in two out of three OECD countries, highly educated young people were more likely to be in low-paying jobs than in high-paying jobs. Employment informality rates among young people continue to be high in developing countries where they also have less access to vocational and training opportunities.[21]

54. While young people demonstrate strong awareness of and motivation to address pressing global challenges, such as the climate crisis, inequality and threats to democratic institutions, they remain underrepresented in the public sector workforce. They display variation in their trust in government and public institutions, and express higher satisfaction with policy outcomes when they are more systematically involved in policymaking. The involvement of young people in policy processes is key to enhancing their participation and trust in government, and to fostering intergenerational equity, as it is the current young generation that will endure most of the costs of the current crises if no or insufficient action is taken.

55. Consequently, governments need to support the transition of young people into the labour market, including the public sector, by promoting job creation, enforcing labour rights and protections, removing labour market protections or barriers and stimulating dialogue and effective collective bargaining to ensure fair labour market outcomes for young people.

56. More importantly, governments need to strengthen the relationship they have with young people and reduce the barriers to their engagement in democratic processes and increase their representation in governmental institutions. This representation could also enhance intergenerational learning between older and younger employees. In order to attract more young people, the public sector and governmental institutions should be transformed so they are seen as spaces of innovation and entrepreneurship.

57. Governments also need to recognize the potential of using the opinions and the more inclusive, digital and green mindsets of young people to improve public service delivery. Most of the youth organizations surveyed by OECD in 2021 were engaged in addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but only eight OECD Governments included in their recovery plans how young people should be engaged in the implementation of commitments relevant to them.

58. However, some relevant examples of engagement with young people are emerging.[22] Belgium and Latvia, for example, are involving young people in driving digital reforms. Belgium promoted partnerships between youth and senior associations for the delivery of projects aimed at making digital infrastructure and cyberspace more accessible to vulnerable groups. In Latvia, the Government included the Latvian student union in a national plan to improve the digital literacy of the population. In Canada, the 2021 budget includes several civil society organizations as grant recipients and implementation partners. For example, the Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund relies on the involvement of Black youth in projects to combat racism and improve social and economic outcomes in Black communities.

59. Going forward, there is a need to reinforce the administrative capacities of the public sector to deliver youth-centred services, collect evidence on the needs of young people and the inequalities affecting them so as to inform decision-making and embed

[21] OECD, “The updated OECD youth action plan: building blocks for future action” (OECD, 2021).

[22] OECD, *Delivering for Youth: How Governments Can Put Young People at the Centre of the Recovery* (OECD, 2022).

the principle of intergenerational equity in rule-making, public spending decision-making and stakeholder consultations.

VIII. Conclusion and recommendations

60. **Agile, data-driven and insight-driven public institutions are required. Such institutions rely on a new set of skills and a democratic and citizen-centred mindset among public servants, including elected officials and political appointees.**

61. **A holistic approach to change the mindsets of public servants to align them with the principles and values of the 2030 Agenda and the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development should be made a priority.**

62. **Shortages of capacity and skills among public servants, including elected officials and political appointees, are among the key shortcomings hampering public sector capacity-building efforts in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, a systematic and comprehensive review of public sector capacity-building efforts, including the training provided, is required, especially in countries where public service delivery remains ineffective. In the review, particular attention needs to be paid to technology adaptation, access and entitlement to training, prescribed courses, course accreditation, the relation of the provided training and education to policies, and the procedures for job grading, remuneration, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal and promotion. Training programmes must be designed to be gender sensitive and inclusive.**

63. **Building strong institutions through training should be based on the detailed assessment, analysis and prioritization of individual and institutional needs. The analysis of institutional needs should focus on service delivery improvements, the need for rationalized and cost-effective structures and institution-building, and the promotion of greater internal and external accountability. The assessment of individual needs (personal and performance- and career-related) should facilitate a system of personal development plans for all employees and identify appropriate forms of staff development, such as training and education.**

64. **Long-term outcomes of effective training should include a change in behaviour and improved work performance of public servants, which in turn could result in a mindset change.**

65. **Public sector training and education may incur high costs, and the resources used must be justified and monitored, including by improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The use of specific criteria and key performance indicators is recommended.**

66. **Building or maintaining public trust and strengthening democracy is particularly relevant in view of the ongoing process of digitalization. While it offers many opportunities, such as expanded civic space, it also presents many challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and disinformation, illegitimate use of data and surveillance. There is a need to adopt digital tools to increase citizen participation, create new types of regulatory bodies that focus on digital issues in a more holistic way and craft new regulations to ensure human rights and democratic principles, including in online forums. Public servants, including elected officials and political appointees, will need to develop new skills and competencies to succeed in the digital era.**

67. **The spread of misinformation and disinformation, the proliferation of digital platforms and the growing political polarization demand an active response from the public servants involved in drafting public communication strategies aimed at informing and inspiring citizens to take positive actions in the pursuit of more democratic, sustainable and green societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the crucial role of inclusive communication that bridges ethnically and linguistically diverse groups and digital literacy gaps between generations and urban and rural populations. The pandemic also showed that the strategic use of behavioural insights can be effective in encouraging compliance and policy uptake.**

68. **In the face of multiple crises, the urgent transformation of public institutions for a greener, more inclusive and more resilient world demands a public sector workforce capable of fostering resilience. This workforce can be created through policymakers developing strategic foresight skills, giving a more prominent role to leaders and public servants willing to challenge the system and innovate from within by redefining the rules and making them strategically better (referred to above as bureaucratic hackers) and increasing the use of more innovative policy-making tools that go beyond top-down approaches.**

69. **Governments need to consider the challenges and needs of young people, who have been particularly affected by the economic and social consequences of multiple crises, and increase their involvement in policymaking and public institutions. There is a need to reinforce the administrative capacities of the public sector to deliver youth-centred services, collect evidence to track the inequalities faced by young people and to inform decision-making, and embed the principle of intergenerational equity in rule-making, public spending decision-making, stakeholder consultations and the public sector workforce.**