Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

GOV/SBO(2024)12

Unclassified English text only

19 May 2024

PUBLIC GOVERNANCE DIRECTORATE
COMMITTEE OF SENIOR BUDGET OFFICIALS

How we communicate the public finances

46th Annual Meeting of Senior Budget Officials

Paris, 3-4 June 2024

This paper was prepared by Eddie Casey.

To generate the political support needed to address major fiscal challenges, the public will need to understand these challenges. That means communicating better and explaining the consequences of inaction. This paper delves into some of the difficulties involved in communicating the public finances clearly. It looks at best practices and sets out ways to build on these.

It is one of three papers on **Empowering Public Understanding**.

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Executive summary

1. Explaining the budgetary challenges facing a country is not easy. But if we are to expect governments to act on these challenges, the trade-offs involved will have to be clear to the public. The public finances already face some fundamental communications challenges: the problem of large numbers and a lack of salience in our everyday lives.

2. At the same time, how we communicate is changing. The media landscape continues to shift towards more digital environments, and away from traditional sources (Newman et al., 2023[1]). The rising spread of disinformation sows doubt and undermines people's trust (OECD, 2024[2]). Many are turning away from news entirely amid an often-depressing news agenda. As well as spelling trouble for well-informed democracies, this spells trouble for how citizens engage with the public finances.

3. This paper calls for a rethink of how we communicate the public finances. It explores the key role played by independent fiscal institutions (IFIs). These bodies have a good understanding of public finances, are non-partisan, and have a natural communications role. Many continue to reinforce their communications how public understanding is essential to building momentum for action. This makes them ideal to help strengthen the public's understanding of budgetary challenges.

4. There is no single magic ingredient for boosting IFI communications. Instead, analysis explored here suggests that the impact of an IFI's communications practices are higher where it is backed up with robust and independent analysis of key issues. To successfully influence the public debate, there needs to be a sense that the institution communicating is non-partisan and focused on major issues. Put another way, an IFI's impact is likely to be about the whole institution rather than the sum of its parts.

5. A consistent feature of those institutions with the greatest impact is that they have embedded good communications throughout their organisation. This includes championing plain language, empowering people with a better understanding of complex ideas, layering communications for different audiences, opening up to journalists, tracking and refining impact, and using social media creatively and effectively.

6. Building on these best practices, the paper draws on wider insights. It assesses recent initiatives to revitalise communications internationally and the rich cognitive science literature on language use.

7. In exploring these areas, this paper intends to revitalise how public officials and independent fiscal institutions communicate budgetary matters. Only with clearer discussions will OECD countries be able to build support for sound budgetary policies.

1 Why communicating the public finances clearly matters

8. To tackle budgetary challenges, OECD countries need to communicate these challenges clearly. Unless it is clear why difficult decisions are required, there is a good chance those decisions will not be taken.

9. However, if OECD countries can tell their citizens plainly about the budgetary challenges they face, they can bring people on board. In other words, they can help generate greater political will for action. In turn, this can help reinforce citizens trust that their democracies are being well run.

10. Communicating the public finances has never been easy, but a new media landscape also poses challenges. How we consume information continues to shift towards more digital environments, and away from traditional sources.

11. Traditional media may have made the digital transition. Yet new generations are eschewing conventional ways of receiving their information. Instead, they are embracing more engaging platforms such as video-led networks. This shift is playing out as generations age, with one-in-five 18–24s using TikTok for news, for example. Moreover, mainstream journalists struggle to get attention on networks such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, where personalities, influencers, and ordinary people are more prominent even for news (Newman et al., 2023[1]).

12. Rising disinformation sows doubt and undermines people's trust in basic features of democracies (OECD, 2024[2]). A foundation of democratic debate and society is having well-informed citizens. Yet the accelerated spread of false or misleading information can create confusion and further polarise views. Almost nine-in-ten people have recently expressed concerns about disinformation ahead of upcoming elections in their countries (IPSOS, UNESCO, 2023[3]). This environment can distort debates on public policy, and budgetary choices, further damaging trust in democracy.

13. At the same time, an often-depressing news agenda adds to people’s disinterest. Citizens report dismay at the lack of solutions-oriented analysis from sources they can trust (Newman et al., 2023[1]).

14. Ensuring that people can trust and understand information on the public finances will be difficult. It will require ongoing efforts to make this information clearer. It will take a concerted and widespread effort to improve how we speak about the public finances. It may also require OECD countries to reinforce the very institutions that are key to communicating fiscal developments in an objective and transparent manner: independent fiscal institutions (IFIs).

15. Why is it worth focusing on IFIs? IFIs are independent. They are tasked with analysing the public finances. And their role in bringing fiscal issues into the light is an important and evolving one. Ensuring that these institutions are well-founded, and adequately resourced will play a key role in immunising the public finances from the risks of highly polarised debates and misleading information.

16. The rest of this paper looks at ways to improve how bodies, particularly IFIs, can foster well-informed public discussion about the public finances, where it is being done well, and how to build on best practices.

2 Fundamental challenges to communicating budgetary issues

Key findings

The public finances come with fundamental challenges as regards communications. They involve big numbers, lack salience in terms of our everyday lives, and experts seldom bridge the gap between their knowledge and the public's. This section calls for communications to focus on plain-speaking, creating a better sense of perspective, and making things more relatable. Overcoming these challenges will help generate the political will for action.

17. Raising people's understanding of the public finances is not easy. The area is often complex, opaque, and marked by ideological bias. Yet only by enhancing fiscal literacy in the general public can we hope to have a population that is well-equipped to lend its support to difficult budgetary decisions.

18. Nevertheless, when it comes to communicating the public finances, there are some fundamental challenges. Here we consider three major hurdles: big numbers, a lack of salience, and the persistent knowledge gap between experts and the public.

2.1. Big numbers

19. A key feature of discussions around the public finances is the role of big numbers. There is seldom a budgetary discussion that avoids the mention of hundreds of millions, if not billions or trillions. These amounts go beyond most people's conventional understanding of quantities.

20. The ability to conceive of scales far removed from the "human scale" we experience every day is a unifying challenge. When it comes to distances, tests suggest that people's conception of scale fails quickly as units go beyond 10s into 100s and 1,000s (Tretter, Jones and Minogue, 2006[4]).

21. Furthermore, numeracy skills are often limited to begin with. This is borne out by the OECD's large scale surveys PISA and PIAAC, which provide measures of numeracy among 15-year-olds and the adult population. As well as that, gaps between high and low performers in terms of numeracy not only persist as people age, but often widen (OECD, 2023[5]).

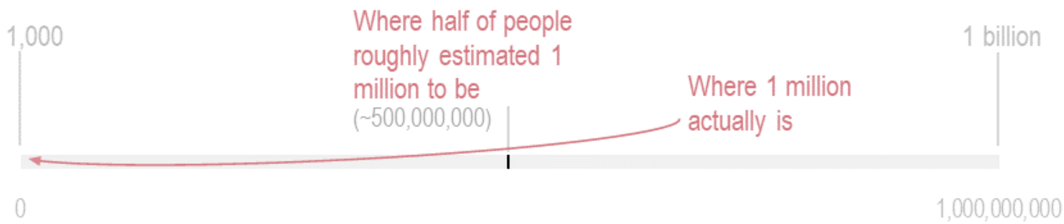
22. With the public finances, people's difficulty with big numbers is often exploited. To make figures sound larger, they are expressed in cash terms. As fiscal measures are often repeated over multiple years, the amounts are frequently cumulated to make them sound bigger. These tactics may be used to make debt levels sound scarier, for instance, or to make a multi-year investment plan sound more ambitious.

23. What is lacking in these discussions is a sense of context or scaling. Without adequate scaling, the public can be bemused by exceptionally large fiscal numbers. The Financial Times describes the phenomenon as "number numbness". Without adequate context or scaling, "the only thing most people hear on such occasions is "big number, big number, big number, big number"" (O'Connor, 2023[6]).

24. In writing on number numbness, Hofstadter (1982) raises the concern that relatively few people really know the difference between a million and a billion. As an example, he mentions an Associated Press article on the U.S. federal debt ceiling going up to 1.143 trillion dollars — this was 1982 — which then erroneously cites the latest debt figure as being a far less troubling $1,070,241,000. Given that tests show even gifted students and experts routinely failing to identify distances in billions of meters accurately to within one-tenth or ten times the correct distance, this suspicion is probably justified.[1] Indeed, one study (Landy et al) testing a small number of people on their understanding found that roughly half of participants put 1 million as halfway on a line to 1 billion rather than 1/1000th of the way.

25. One prominent study tested a small number of people on their understanding of large numbers with striking results (Landy, Silbert and Goldin, 2013[7]). The study found that roughly half of participants put 1 million as halfway along a line running from 1,000 to 1 billion rather than 1/1,000th of the way (see illustration in Figure 2.1). The problem seems to be that those failing the task tend to think of "thousands", "millions" and "billions" as having a uniform spacing in magnitude. This misconception may be due to how we write numbers as words, but it seems to also influence how they interpret numbers more generally, including when written as numerals.

Figure 2.1. Asking adults where one million is can produce striking results



Source: Adapted from Landy, Silbert, and Goldin (2013[7]).
Notes: The study investigates how adults estimate the magnitude of big numbers using a number line estimation task. Participants were asked to place numbers ranging from 1 thousand to 1 billion on a line marked with the endpoints labelled accordingly.

26. Big numbers are in and of themselves a problem. They can imbue a lack of comprehension of what exactly is involved. In turn, this can cause people to disengage from the information being relayed. It can produce numbness, apathy, and a resistance to information.

What is needed is a clear strategy to illuminate the figures in a meaningful way.

2.2. A lack of salience

27. A second fundamental communications challenge facing the public finances is a lack of salience. That is, budgets frequently relate to areas that people are unfamiliar with. They have little sense of the context involved and find it difficult to parse meaningful developments.

[1] Less than 30% of for experts and gifted senior student responses were considered acceptably accurate. For all other categories of elementary, middle and high school students, less than 5% of responses fell within one order of magnitude of being accurate.

28. Take the example of military spending. Few would know off-hand what the annual budget is for this area, let alone what the marginal impact another billion if allocated might entail. This is a case in point for how the public finances often refer to large areas that span entire populations. For example, rather than relating things to a person's own tax circumstances, we often discuss a tax system. Instead of focusing on an individual's benefits, we might frame the discussion in terms of overall social security spending.

29. The danger here is that discussions become intractable. We are left with inanimate, remote, and lifeless talk of systems and allocations that bear little relevance to people's own lives.

30. This lack of salience also arises in terms of how the public finances are evolving. An important example is how we understand the costs of "standing still". New spending is often presented as being additional. It implies more services or supports being provided. Yet, the reality is that some increase in spending is typically needed just to stand still. That is, the increase in cash terms might sound big. But if it fails to keep pace with price and wage increases, not to mention the demands of a larger population, it might in fact mean that public services are being wound down in real terms rather than expanded.

31. There is a temptation for policymakers to play on this lack of salience. For instance, rather than presenting things as genuine real cuts in spending, it can be tempting to pretend that a nominal increase is a signal of support for a certain area. This can add to the problem of lack of trust in conversations around the public finances as well as the lack of understanding.

32. The lack of salience is also relevant where there are big inter-generational challenges at stake. Assessing what today's policies will mean in 50 years time is a complex analytical challenge. Communicating what it means is a further complication. Many people will struggle to see the relevance to their own lives. This matters when it comes to the major challenges facing OECD countries in terms of the public finances. The pressures of ageing populations, the climate transition, and multi-year public spending initiatives all fall prey to this lack of salience.

2.3. The curse of knowledge

33. As with many things, the gap in competence between experts and the public they are seeking to inform can be worsened by bad communications.

34. This brings us to a third fundamental challenge with how the public finances are communicated: the "curse of knowledge". That is our tendency to assume others have already attained some mastery over subjects we find easy to understand. As Pinker (2014, p. 61[8]) explains:

> *"it simply doesn't occur to the writer that her readers don't know what she knows—that they haven't mastered the patois of her guild, can't divine the missing steps that seem too obvious to mention, have no way to visualize a scene that to her is as clear as day. And so she doesn't bother to explain the jargon, or spell out the logic, or supply the necessary detail."*

35. The curse of knowledge is a pervasive problem. It makes mountains of text impenetrable. It wastes countless hours for those having to navigate needlessly difficult language. And because it is usually unintentional, it can be difficult for those communicating to override. Indeed, Pinker describes it as the single best explanation of "why good people write bad prose".

36. If we are to empower citizens with an understanding of the public finances, we need to recognise the limitations with how we communicate these issues. We then need to make concerted efforts to break down the walls built between experts and non-experts. This will help ensure communications are more accessible to a broader audience. Only then can we seriously hope to generate the political will for action.

3 Insights from good practice

Key findings

This section looks at existing best practices for communicating the public finances. In particular, it draws on evidence from IFIs that have had substantial impact. It emphasises that strong communications practices are ineffective without sufficient independence and a well-defined analytical focus. Case studies from the Netherlands, Canada, Ireland and Portugal highlight the importance of a having a communications culture that is deeply embedded throughout the institution.

37. This section looks at some leading examples of independent fiscal institutions. These bodies have a natural role. They are independent, non-partisan institutions with a budgetary focus that have continued to evolve their communications skills recognising how important persuasion is to their success.

3.1. Some IFIs provide leading examples

38. When it comes to communications, we can think of IFIs as falling into three categories.

39. First, there are IFIs with limited professional communications and very limited impact.

40. Second, there are IFIs that have developed a solid platform for communications, yet that still have relatively limited communications impact.

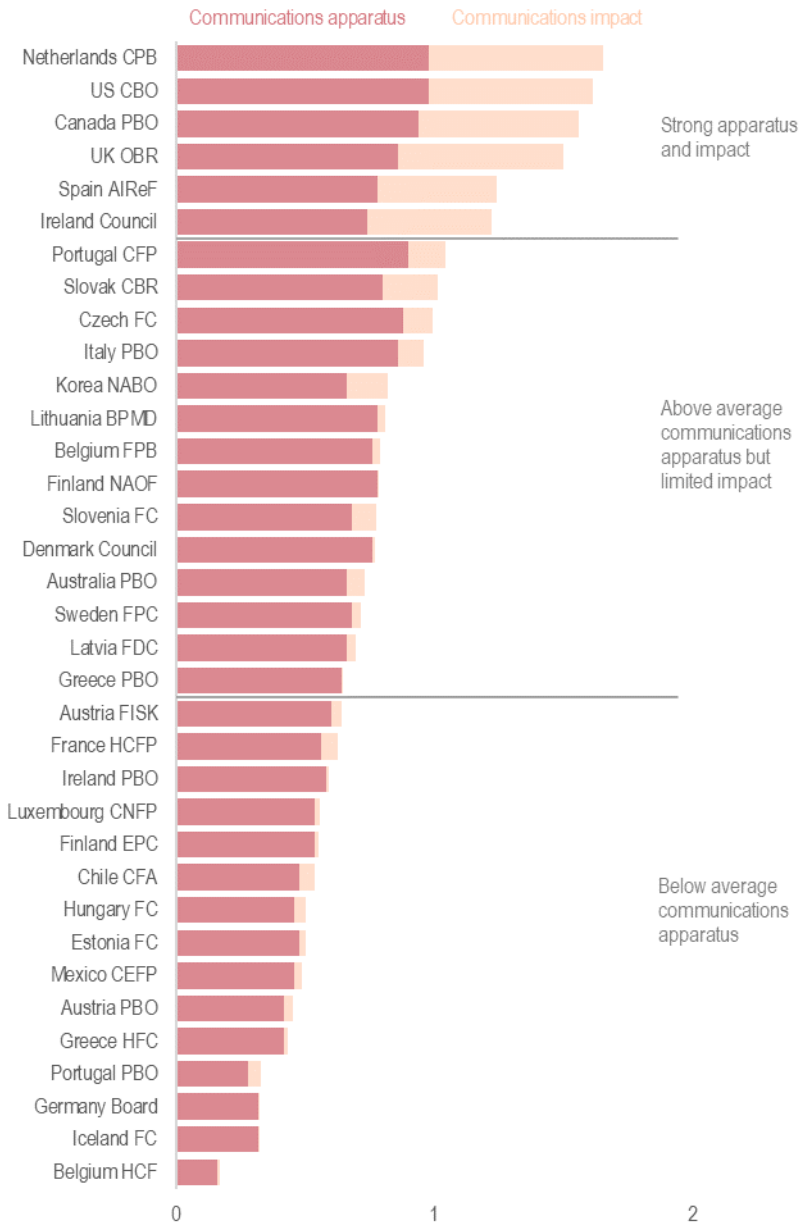
41. Third, there are IFIs that go the distance. That is, as well as having built their capacity to spread, promote, and track their work, they also appear to have generated substantial media impact.

42. It should be noted at this point that communications impact is not everything. It will not guarantee good fiscal outcomes. For instance, some pre-conditions are necessary. A strong media sector, for example, provides an important bedrock. Weaknesses in the broader environment can hamper an IFIs' ability to promote sound budgetary policy.

43. To assess the differences between IFIs further, we start by considering the Fiscal Advocacy Index presented in a separate paper. The third dimension of the index measures the communications apparatus each IFI has built up. It considers whether they have dedicated communications experts, their use of press releases, briefings, embargoed reports and so on. The fourth dimension assesses communications impact. It looks at the extent to which respective IFIs feature in the national media debate. It also considers how much they have entered public thinking in terms of their online activity.

Figure 3.1. Communications efforts and impact varies among IFIs

Fiscal Advocacy Index communications dimensions (maximum = 2)



Source: OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index.
Notes: The figure shows the results for the communications apparatus and communications impact dimensions.

44. Drawing on the results of the index, we can see a number of institutions generating substantial communications impact. Six IFIs stand out as generating substantial communications impact as well as having a robust communications apparatus (Figure 3.1). These include the Netherlands' Central Planning Bureau, the US Congressional Budget Office, the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office, the UK Office for Budget Responsibility, the Spanish Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility (AIReF) and the Irish Fiscal Council. These six IFIs alone generate a communications impact that is at least twice — and up to three times — the impact of each of the next 14 IFIs individually.

45. The top six have strikingly similar tools to help communicate their work. They all have communications policies, strategies, press releases and briefings. Most issue embargoed reports (five out of the six IFIs) as well as publishing blogs and in academic journals (four). All of them use social media to promote their work. As well as that, all see their leadership regularly appearing on TV, radio, and at conferences. Aside from Ireland, they all have access to at least one communications expert. To track impact, they all keep sight of media mentions and web traffic though the smaller IFIs near the top tend not to track parliamentary mentions or regularly survey their stakeholders.

46. And yet differences in communications apparatus are unlikely to explain the differences in impact alone. Take the next 14 IFIs in Figure 3.1. These have many, if not all, of the features present in the six IFIs that generating the highest impact. This leads us to an important realisation.

3.2. Communications: a whole greater than the sum of its parts

47. Taking a deeper look, we can see that an IFI's communications impact is unlikely to be down to any single communications tool. Instead, it would appear to depend on the interaction between several crucial facets.

48. To explain IFIs' communications impact, we consider a regression analysis based on several key features. First, this assesses an IFI's communications impact based on specific features of their communications apparatus: the presence of dedicated communications staff, communication strategies, the use of press releases, and so on. Second, it looks to explain impact in terms of an IFIs overall communications apparatus as well as their independence and analytical focus.[2] Third it considers the joint effect of these three dimensions: that is the combined influence of independence, analytical focus, and communications apparatus (Annex A).

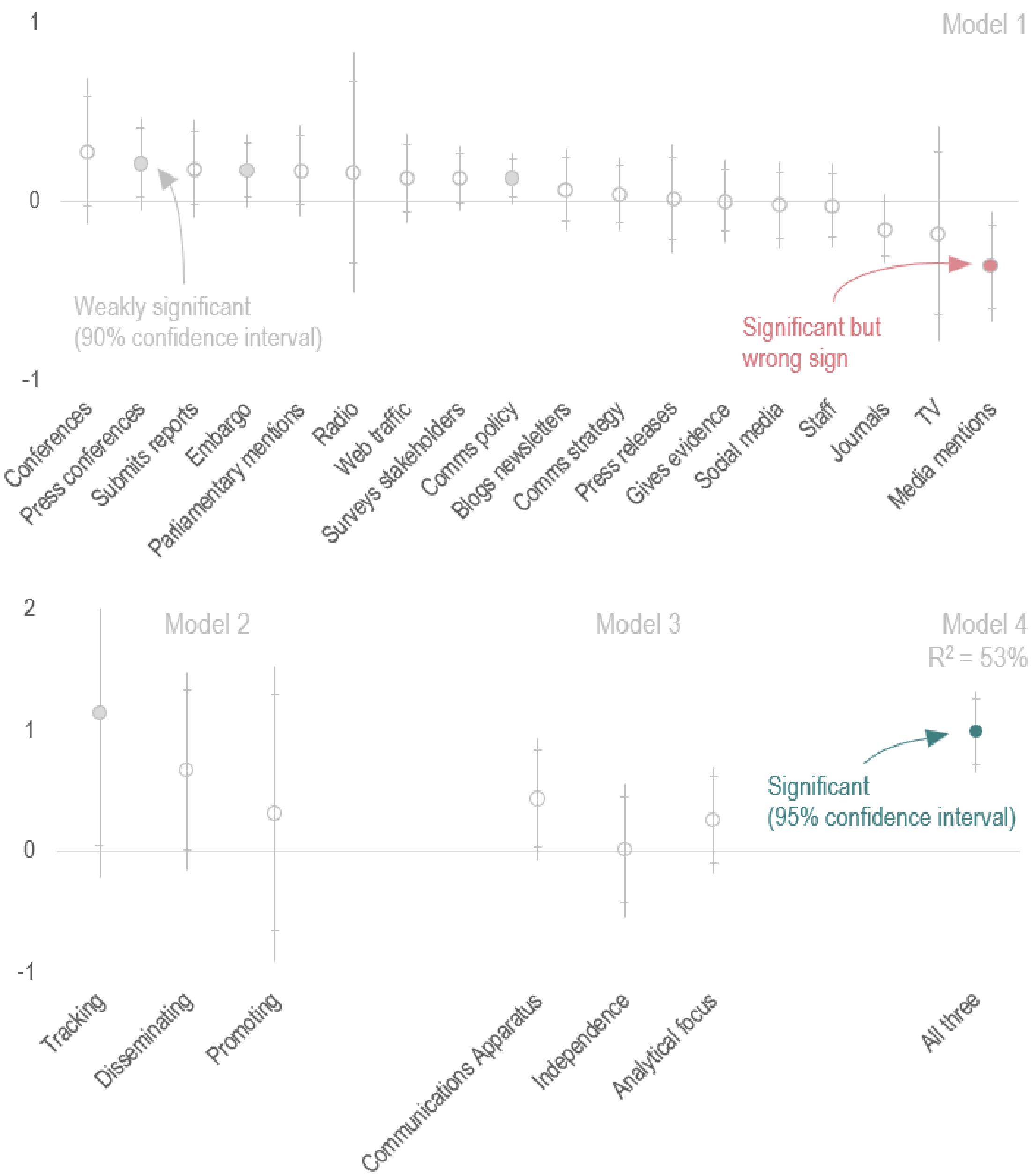
49. The findings suggest that it is indeed the joint effect of all three dimensions that best explains an IFI's communications impact (Figure 3.2). That is, IFIs need to be independent, analytically focused, and armed with tools to communicate their work effectively if they are to succeed in influencing the national debate. Put another way, an IFI's impact is likely to be about the whole institution rather than the sum of its parts.

50. This has some profound implications. It suggests that rather than focusing on developing some magic communications tool, bodies such as IFIs need to have a holistic approach to achieving their communications aims. Weak independence or a lack of focus on areas of major importance will hamper any communications effort no matter how well designed it is. IFIs need to be equipped to produce analysis either on their own initiative or by mandate with a focus on key areas. Depending on the institution, this analytical focus may include things such as long-term fiscal sustainability analysis, a focus on key risks, or producing costings of major government programmes and election platforms.

[2] These are all scored based on the Fiscal Advocacy Index weightings.

Figure 3.2. Unlikely any one tool improves communications on its own

Coefficients and confidence intervals



Sources: Own workings based on the OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index and other data (Annex A).
Notes: The graphs show the estimated coefficients and confidence intervals for various predictors of an independent fiscal institutions communications impact.

3.3. An embedded communications culture

51. With independence and a robust analytical focus in place, good communications tools can deliver a substantial impact. In this respect, there are examples of best practices among IFIs that we can learn from.

3.3.1. Netherlands Central Planning Bureau (CPB)

52. The Netherlands CPB has seen its approach to communications undergo important reforms in recent years. It has taken big steps towards developing a broader communications culture within the organisation as a whole. As well as that it has adopted a more forward-looking approach to communications.

53. The CPB takes a holistic approach to its communications. It instils in its staff an understanding of how central communications are to its work from day one rather than having communications experts liaise with analytical staff at the end of projects. This starts at the recruitment stage. A core competency expected of new staff is that their communications are highly accessible. On starting, new analysts receive communications training one day per week over eight to ten weeks. In this time, the communications team covers what outputs have produced more impact and positive outcomes in the past. Staff look at how to structure research to communicate it effectively. They also go through basics like formulating clear sentences and ways to visualise material more effectively. Part of its aim is to have material with easy-to-find takeaways, clear visuals, and a strong narrative.

Figure 3.3. Netherlands public debt off the charts

Source: CPB (2022[9]) infographic on economic developments, 2022-2025.

54. There are several examples of how this approach has yielded benefits. Work on charting public debt adopted a creative approach. To highlight the extent to which debt had risen, staff charted the national debt as extending outside the margins of a page containing other visuals (Figure 3.3). This generated amusement and substantial media discussion. Elsewhere, work on VAT on fruit and vegetables saw a relatively junior researcher involved in the project communicating the content so clearly that they were invited to speak at parliament. Part of the success of this project was its ability to show a more human side to public finance issues. These examples show just some of the ways that embedding communications has helped foster more creativity and clarity in the CPB's communications.

55. In evolving its communications approach, the CPB has also switched from a "reactive" to a "proactive" approach. This has seen the CPB move away from an approach that involves waiting for researchers to develop outputs and responding to the latest fiscal events as they arise. Instead, its communications team get involved in report production at early and middle stages. It also looks ahead and tries to anticipate key emerging themes or areas of focus. As part of this shift in mindset, the CPB assesses

the sensitivities and potential timing considerations that might require it to calibrate its approach to ensure better impact.

56. Another aspect of the CPB's embedded communications culture is that it is remarkably open. All of its staff are free to talk to journalists on background, off the record. It makes all staff contact details available online to support this. It sees this approach as essential to fostering and maintaining healthy relationships with the media.

57. All this effort has paid off. The CPB has the strongest communications impact measured out of all of the IFIs considered in the Fiscal Advocacy Index. It was cited in one-in-five articles on fiscal topics by the top-three Dutch news sites in 2023. In the context of domestic searches, it is also the most-Googled of all IFIs. Indeed, there is hardly a week goes by where it does not feature in people's search activity in some significant volume.

3.3.2. Canada Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)

58. The Canadian PBO is another example of an IFI with highly evolved communications practices embedded throughout the institution. Like the CPB, the PBO views its ability to communicate material clearly as crucial to its work. Its leadership cites the need for "sound, thorough, and credible analysis" as an essential condition. However, they note that "if we can't explain something, we're doing it wrong".

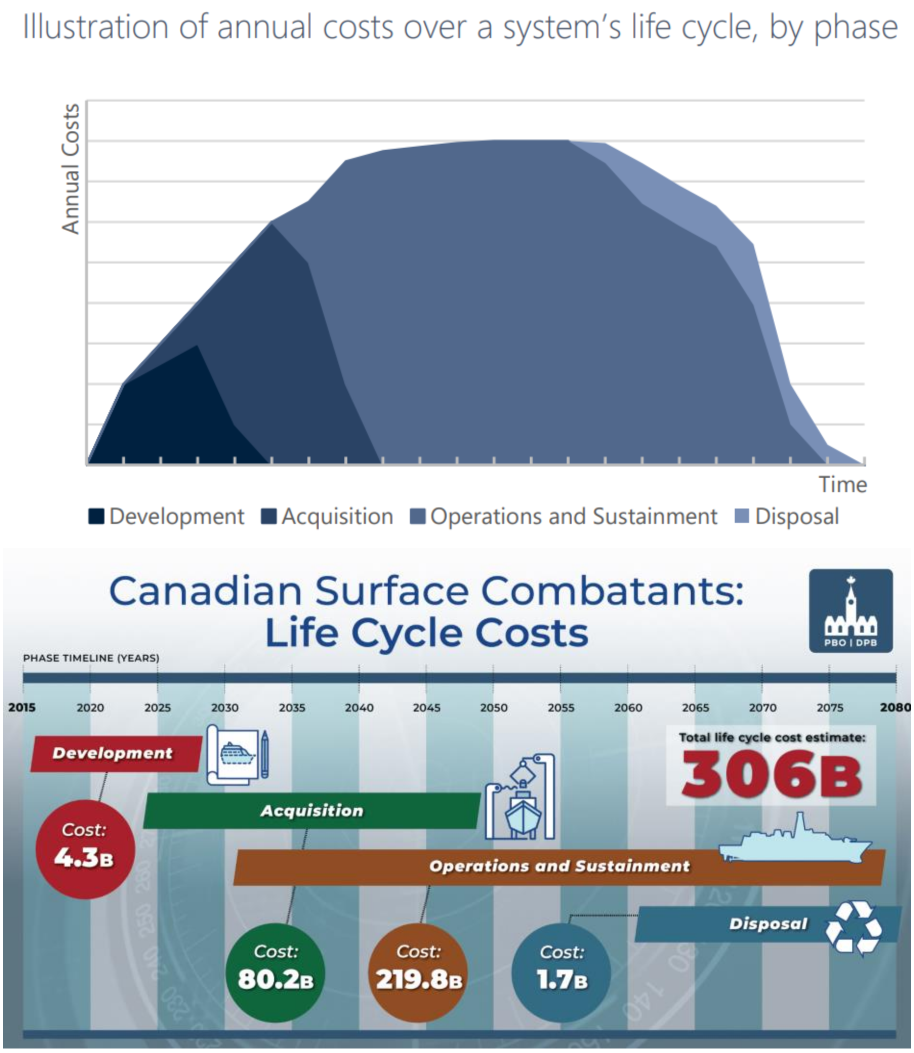
59. The PBO has embraced openness in similar ways to the CPB. It has an "open-by-default" policy. Staff are allowed to speak on background with journalists and receive careful media training in support of this. Its leadership is active in cultivating relationships with the press. Often this means coaxing many analysts out of a tendency towards introversion.

60. The PBO is active in coaching staff on plain speaking. To help with this, the PBO uses software tools like "Antidote" which highlight redundancies, repetition, dull verbs, and other stylistic features of writing as well as more conventional errors. This is used, not just for publications, but for internal communications as well.

61. The PBO layers its communications to make work accessible to different audiences. Each report has an executive summary and is accompanied by a "highlights" document. This summarises the report in two to four paragraphs. The highlights document is seldom published but is used to help design press releases and as a refresher tool when speaking to parliament or media.

62. Infographics are regularly used to summarise the PBO's reports. One example of this in recent times relates to spending by the Navy. The PBO analysed potential costs over the fleet's full life cycle from developing the ships to acquiring them, operating them and disposing of them. It illustrated the stages of development in a useful illustrative chart in the main report (Figure 3.4). It expanded on this with an infographic showing the time spent at each stage and associated costs. The reporting generated substantial media reaction and led to renewed debate about procurement outcomes.

Figure 3.4. Canada's ongoing navy commitments



Source: Busby, Kho and Penney (2022[10]).

3.3.3. Ireland Fiscal Advisory Council

63. Similar to the Netherlands CPB and the Canadian PBO, albeit with smaller resources, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council embeds strong communications throughout its activities.

64. The Council emphasizes communications as a key priority for its staff. This starts early. Clear communications are weighted heavily when grading potential recruits. The Council conducts annual internal training sessions on effective writing and presenting. This draws on its own past experiences with publications. As well as that, all its staff undertake professional media training with a focus on media engagements.

65. The Council has cultivated ongoing relationships with the media. It regularly engages with journalists on background. It sees this as important for building and maintaining relationships vital to its success.

66. The Council also uses social media strategically. As well as using it to promote its work, it uses it to intervene on topical issues at key junctures. When areas covered by its past analysis feature in the national debate, it posts content on its past work to help inform the discussion.

One standout example of the Council's ability to capture the public's attention is its coverage of ageing pressures. The Council condensed some of the analysis in its Long-term Sustainability Report to a more human level by showing the implications for individual taxpayers. It estimated that workers on average wages would have to pay an extra €1,000 social contributions annually just to finance the larger number of people reaching retirement age. It estimated an additional €800 would be required if pension age increases did not go ahead (This analysis generated substantial and sustained media debate on the implications for different generations of taxpayers.

67. Another notable activity is the way in which the Council reviews its work. It assesses its main reports based on multiple readability metrics, tracks media impact carefully, and records examples of text that produced a desirable or undesirable impact. The goal is to continuously learn from its work and improve its communications efforts.

Despite its smaller resources, the Council has managed to have a prominent influence on the national debate. It enjoys a strong media presence shaping public opinion and features in almost one-third of articles covering fiscal issues.

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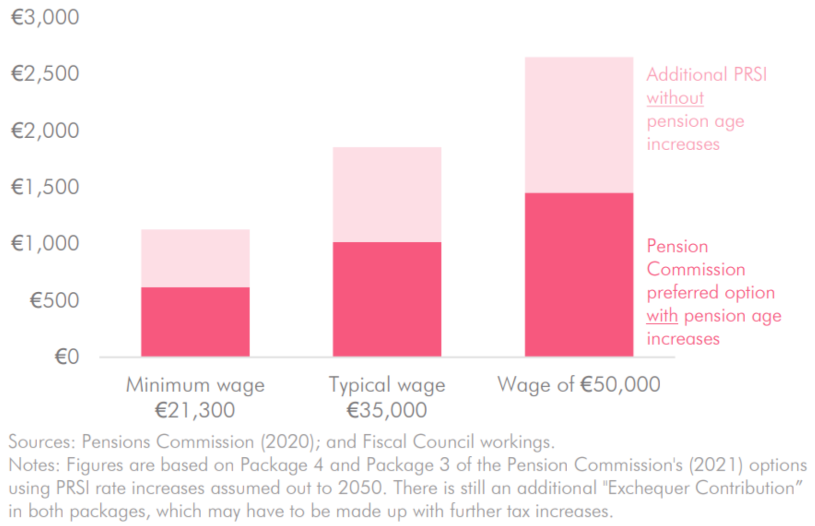
Figure 3.5. Ireland's pension pressures

€ increase in social contributions in today's terms based on policy options



Source: Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (2022[12]).

3.3.4. Insights from the case studies

69. It is important to note that both the Netherlands CPB and the Canadian PBO are mature communications actors. Take the CPB: as part of its change in approach, its communications function expanded to six people. This is the size of many IFIs entire staff complement. This level of resourcing allows it delegate tasks substantially. For instance, one person focuses on outward engagements, another on monitoring communications and impact, another on more strategic issues, another on the CPB’s website. The Canadian PBO is also able to call on a dedicated communications team comprising two full-time communications experts.

70. Many IFIs will not be able to match the resources of the Netherlands CPB and Canadian PBO. However, they can learn from their experiences in terms of what has worked. They can also draw on the experiences of smaller IFIs with advanced communications practices. One example of this is the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, which despite its more limited resources has had a substantial impact on the national debate. Part of its success can be tied to its efforts to establish its independence, focus its analysis on key areas, and embed a strong communications culture.

71. As well as embedding a culture that promotes clear communications within their organisations, these case studies reveal some patterns.

72. **Learning continuously**: These institutions tend to put an emphasis on learning from past publications. This is with a view to improving how they communicate, building on things that worked, and avoiding past mistakes.

73. **Being open:** These institutions tend to be remarkably open. That is, they engage actively with the press on background. Indeed, they often view this as a core part of their role.

74. **Making content accessible and more human:** Third, there is often a conscious effort to put a more human face on budgetary themes. This is useful as many budgetary subjects can be complex and difficult to parse. However, these institutions find ways to identify clear areas of focus that people can engage with visually, and in a way that is familiar to their own personal circumstances. This often takes some creativity.

4 How to build on these best practices

Key findings

Building on the experiences of what has worked elsewhere, this section looks at some of the cognitive science. It stresses that we should be aware of the curse of knowledge — knowing more than our audience necessarily does. We should avoid excessive precision with numbers, switching between modifiers like millions and billions, we should give some perspective and make things relatable. The European Central Bank's (ECB)revitalisation of its own communications gives a useful roadmap to implementing many such approaches.

75. The experiences of fiscal institutions with strong communications is helpful. But we can look further afield to gain insights into how communicating the public finances might be sharpened further.

76. This section looks at the experience of the ECB, which has recently revitalised its communications. It also reflects on the developing literature in the field of cognitive science focusing on how people understand concepts relevant to the public finances.

4.1. Simplify

77. In communicating the public finances, we should be considerate. More than anything, we should be mindful of the curse of knowledge. Being considerate to readers is important, but it is also difficult. It can be hard to identify the gap between our own knowledge and that of others. Remember, fiscal literacy may be weaker than we realise. And, as we discovered earlier, there are some fundamental challenges when it comes to understanding the public finances. What can be done?

78. First, it is worth noting that bad communications can wreak havoc internally as well as externally. This is why embedding good communications throughout an organisation helps. It keeps us honest, improves debate, allows us to refine our thoughts, while dispelling unhelpful fog.

79. Second, a focus on *why* issues matter is helpful. This is something often overlooked in budgetary reporting. It may be taken for granted that readers understand why rising debt or already high debt is a concern. This could be a dangerous assumption. Low levels of financial literacy are commonplace and there is evidence that a weak understanding of the basics extends to public finance issues too, even among key stakeholders. Reinforcing why these things matter is a useful practice, and one that is unlikely to prove redundant.

80. The US CBO addresses this well in its work. It frequently revisits some of the fundamental risks associated with debt sustainability rather than taking it for granted that people know this intuitively. It also makes a point of directing readers to its well-written primer on federal debt when relevant (CBO, 2020[13]).

81. Third, cognitive science provides some insights as to how we can further overcome the hurdles of simplifying the public finances. Revisiting the problems of large numbers, and a lack of salience, we can look at various aspects of cognition that might help us communicate the public finances more clearly.

82. There is a developing literature on language use relevant to how we discuss the public finances. Table 4.1 draws together some insights from the cognitive science literature that considers how people understand large quantities, one of the fundamental challenges highlighted earlier on.

Table 4.1. Communicating the public finances should follow the science

Use liberal rounding and use millions and billions carefully	
Invalid source specified. (Landy, Silbert and Goldin, 2013[7])	Recall with round numbers is typically better than with precise numbers (68% vs 47%). People also tend to better approximate precise values after reading round numbers than after reading precise numbers. More rounding is preferred with modifier terms such as $1 million or $1 billion than when precise units are used, such as $1,120,000. People also do better when comparing the relative sizes of numbers with the same modifier. For instance, they find 2 million easier to compare with 800 million than with 2 billion. This struggle to relate different modifiers, such as millions and billions, is important. *Examples:* *Use "$1,120,000" rather than "$1,123,790" — For money, 3-4 digits are preferred for 7- to 10-digit figures.* *Use "$1.1 billion" rather than "$1.124 billion". When modifiers such as millions or billions are used, people's ability to tolerate precision falls. The nearest 100 million is typically preferred for 10-digit figures with modifiers.* *Use "$10 billion, with $1 billion on debt interest" rather than "$10 billion, with $980 million on debt interest"*
Give some perspective	
Invalid source specified. Invalid source specified. (Chaganty and Liang, 2016[14]) (Jones and Taylor, 2009[15])	Anchor points — useful conceptual benchmarks or points of reference — are helpful when understanding unfamiliar and large measurements. One way to substantially improve people's ability to interact with new measurements and large numbers is to use what are called "perspective clauses". These can help with recall, estimating other related measurements, and detecting errors. Perspective clauses entail using simple sentences with percentages, ratios, rankings or other comparisons to provide context around numerical measurements. *Examples:* *"To put this into perspective, this is around 1.2 times the equivalent spend in the United Kingdom".* *"To put this into perspective, 7.9 billion dollars annual revenue is about 25 dollars for every person in the U.S."* *"$5 million is about how much the average person makes over their lifetime".*
Make it personal	
(Hullman et al., 2018[16]) (Chevalier, Vuillemot and Gali, 2013[17])	Using concrete examples from people's own personal lives is a key way to make difficult measurements relatable. Study participants report this form of re-expression as far more helpful than changes to units and proportional analogies when it comes to weight, volume and length. The studies present measurements alongside objects with similar measurements. For instance, 28 pounds is described as "the weight of a microwave". A key requirement is that the object is as relatable as possible to everyday experiences. Potential examples applied to the public finance literature could be: *"For an average taxpayer on $60,000, this would mean…"* *"This spending increase is equivalent to doubling monthly child benefit payments from £100 to £200 a month."*

Sources: various (see column 1).

4.2. Make things readable

83. One way to improve how we communicate is to focus on readability. Readability refers to how easy it is to understand a piece of writing. Assessing readability is important because it helps us communicate clearly.

84. Readability is about more than just using short words and sentences. While readability formulas can be a helpful starting point, they do not always account for factors like confusing vocabulary or how well a text is structured. Newer methods assess things like vocabulary variety, sentence structure, and use of concrete language to give a more complete picture of readability.

85. Even with these advancements, human judgment is still crucial to consider elements like layout and whether the message is clear (Box 1).

Box 4.1. Readability tools help, but they cannot do all the work

Making the public finances easier to understand requires us to communicate them more clearly. We might take this to mean making things more readable. But readability, as it is usually measured, only takes us so far. Developing people's understanding requires us to know the audience and what people will consider both useful and desirable.

Measuring readability

There are several websites that provide tools to measure readability. These rely on a variety of measures to assess how readable some text is. Examples include readability.io, webfx.com and readabilityformulas.com. These offer an objective way to refine text and make it more readable.

Traditional measures tend to have a narrow focus

A lot of the traditional measures employed by readability websites focus on how dense a text is. That is, they consider things like words per sentence, letters or syllables per word, and so on. Examples of these measures include the automated readability index, the Gunning-Fog index, the SMOG index, the Coleman–Liau index, and the Flesch–Kincaid grade level. They push in the direction of smaller words and smaller sentences to make things more readable.

However, focusing on density alone can be misguided. It ignores the intended meaning of a text, how confusing the words are, how coherent the text is and so on. A passage of text might be short and use small words. But it can still be difficult to follow. This might be because it has abstract ideas, words with ambiguous meaning, words from lots of different fields, or awkward sentence structures.

Newer measures go deeper but are less straightforward

Broader readability measures have emerged over time. These look beyond density. Measures such as the New Dale-Chall Readability formula rely on lists of familiar words to help gauge how easy it will be to read a text. Some newer measures go further again to develop a more comprehensive framework. For example, the Common European Framework of Reference for languages includes the usual density variables alongside newer measures. It includes variables such as pronouns per sentence, prepositions per sentence, and the number of names and terms included. All these measures can then be mapped onto an overall measure of how easy it is to understand a text.

Modern natural language processing tools have taken things a step further again. They use far more sophisticated techniques for understanding readability. Examples include CAREC, Coh-Metrix, TAACO, the Educational Testing Service's TextEvaluator, and the Pearson Reading Maturity Metric. Generally, these tools involve a few steps. First, researchers identify a large number of texts. Second, they model how readers understand text based on relevant features. Third, they develop a summary score of these features, for example using principal components analysis or regression models. Finally, human ratings of text complexity are modelled as a function of the estimated scores. The idea is to predict the human ratings based on the features modelled. Many of these newer methods have outperformed traditional readability formulas.

A limitation is that these newer natural language processing tools tend not to be as straightforward to assess and use. They are also less readily available compared to other methods.[3]

Nonetheless, it can be instructive to look at the specific features these models focus. Especially those that they find important to successfully predict human ratings of text readability. For instance, they consider how varied the vocabulary is and how cohesive the text is. As in, does it use the same words over and over, or does it use a wide variety of different words from different contexts? Is the text structured well so that it does not overly rely on the reader having prior knowledge of content outside of the text? They look at syntactic complexity: the burden put on people's short-term memory by how complex the connecting branches in a text are. They consider how frequently ambiguous words with more than one meaning are used. They consider how "concrete" words are — their likelihood of evoking meaningful mental images. In addition, they may consider conversational style and the presence of a narrative. These are complex to assess, but they can be important to consider when trying to enhance readability.

There are still gaps

As tools like these advance, they have the potential to improve how we communicate complex subjects such as the public finances. But there are still limits. Features such as whether the key messages are upfront, whether headings help make content manageable, how helpful charts, tables, and pictures are, and how inviting the page layout is should also be considered. Artificial intelligence will be able to help us write in ways that satisfy readability measures. Ultimately, however, we cannot rely on artificial intelligence to do all the hard work for us. Instead, style guides can help get the balance right and provide a good guide to covering areas not considered by readability tools. Moreover, there is still some value to interviewing stakeholders to better understand whether they find material useful, convincing, enjoyable, and easy to follow.

4.3. Take the example of the ECB's plain-language renaissance

86. Another path to learn from is that charted by the ECB. The ECB has successfully overhauled its communications in recent years. The overhaul saw it make its communications more accessible and relatable. Box 4.2 explores how the ECB did it.

[3] The Coh-Metrix program is available as a web tool on registration at: https://soletlab.asu.edu/coh-metrix/. TAACO is available for download at: https://www.linguisticanalysistools.org/taaco.html. A useful summary tool is ARTE, which assesses a range of new and old readability formulas: https://nlp.gsu.edu/.

Box 4.2. How the ECB revitalised its communications

The ECB has prioritised revitalising its communications. After a comprehensive review, the ECB published its findings (Assenmacher et al., 2021[18]) and reformed many of its practices. It put an emphasis on plain-speaking, favouring narratives over precision, and layering its communications for different readers.

Building trust

Before its communications overhaul, there was a view that stakeholders had no choice but to read the ECB's pronouncements. This was true. It didn't necessarily matter how badly written ECB communications were, the content was unavoidable reading for those that needed to understand its policies. However, this approach catered to a pool of experts but non-experts were largely sidelined.

By overhauling its communications, the ECB aimed to instil wider trust and confidence in its decisions. Building trust means helping people understand its policy decisions and its efforts to maintain steady price rises across the Euro Area. This is seen as vital to safeguarding its credibility and the wider trust in the financial system.

How was it done?

A key feature of the overhaul was to make its communications punchier, more relatable, more accessible, and to imbue them with a clearer narrative. It went about this by putting more emphasis on several areas:

Readability: the ECB encouraged staff to produce grade-level measures of readability. These measurements are readily available in standard packages such as Microsoft Word. The measures offered a quick and reasonably insightful way to assess readability across documents and between institutions, while satisfying economists' thirst for data. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level measure they rely on is also easy to communicate as it is expressed in terms of the "years of schooling required to understand a given passage of text".[4] Language previously used in the monetary policy accounts describing ECB monetary policy deliberations and decisions entailed an average of 16 to 18 years of education being needed to understand them.

Narratives over precision: another decision was to prioritise clear narratives over precise statistical data points. Rather than saying "staff projections indicate that real GDP growth will rise from 1 per cent to 2 per cent", a less torturous "growth is expected to pick up" was favoured. Following this, instead of "unemployment rates are expected to fall to 5 per cent", a simpler "many more people will have jobs" was preferred when developing the narrative. This was a big shift. It met some initial internal resistance. Understandably, many felt it would threaten the accuracy of the ECB's statements and risked promoting widespread misunderstandings. These risks were overstated. The changes went ahead and there is no sense any of these problems have since materialised.

Accessible language: as well as focusing on clearer narratives, the ECB has developed a clear glossary that eschews jargon. Its communications staff has developed internal glossaries to identify clearer phrases to replace much of the technical language it frequently used in the past. This covers everything from references to banks, descriptions of economic activity, and discussions of risks.

Layering communications: The ECB has also introduced efforts to distil its analysis in ways that targets different audiences. This layering of its communications is a useful way to broaden the intended audience. It entails creating more ways to access the same content, be it in-depth papers or executive summaries, blogs, or social media posts.

An example of how this layering is implemented is the "at a glance" Monetary Policy Statements. These are visual statements that explain monetary policy decisions taken every six weeks. In keeping with other aims, they are short, easy-to-understand, and focused on the narrative rather than precise data. As well as that, the statements are highly visual, leaning on graphics and simple charts alongside short bits of text. They are available in 24 EU languages. One aspect of this work that has been emphasised by some central banks is the importance of developing multiple style guides — tools to ensure that formatting, style, and content has a consistent format and voice.

Stressing the benefits of both traditional and new media: Following the review, the ECB stressed how traditional media, such as television, remains important and a relatively untapped means for reaching the wider public.

It might be in decline, but television remains a crucial medium through which people hear their news. It connects to audiences wider beyond the usual pool of experts. Connecting more broadly like this helps build trust, accountability, and credibility.

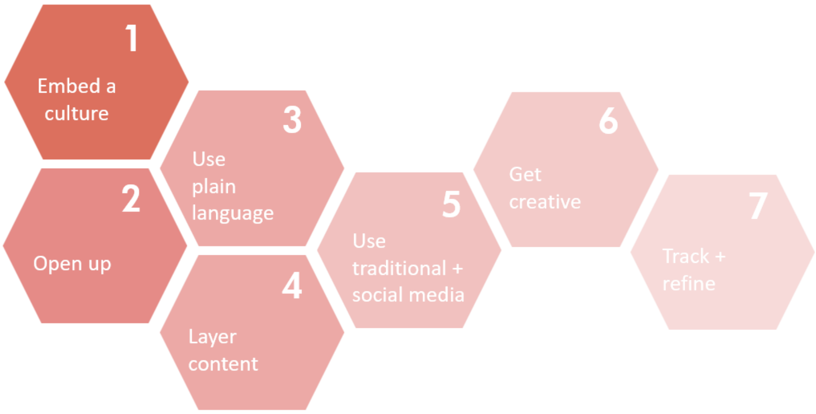
Nevertheless, social media offers unprecedented opportunities for direct communication. As such, the ECB has also increased the number of channels through which it communicates, including through Instagram, X and LinkedIn. The experiences with social media are viewed as a success, though they have tended to involve an *ad hoc* approach and central bank follower numbers remain modest relative to population sizes. To be more effective, the view is that these will need to evolve to be more targeted and to better understand people's attitudes, needs, and interests.

Listening: One of the takeaways from the ECB's strategy review that had a lot of traction was the benefit of its listening activities. During the review, the Eurosystem held numerous events with the academic community, civil society organisations and the public at large, as well as exchanges with national and European parliaments. One view coming out of these interactions was that central banks needed to explain their role better and use understandable language and relatable examples to engage with the public. As a result, the Governing Council plans to make outreach events an ongoing feature of the Eurosystem's interaction with the public, with events having both a "listening" and an "explaining" dimension, to help the public understand the ECB's strategy and its implications.

[4] See the Microsoft support page on https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2

5 Conclusion: Seven steps to improving how to communicate the public finances

87. This section reflects on the key insights drawn from best practices and offers seven steps to improve how IFIs communicate public finance issues.



1. Embed a communications culture

88. Embedding a strong communications culture throughout an organization leads to better communications and a greater impact. It is not enough to have one or two communications experts, with peripheral roles. The value of having an embedded approach is evidenced by independent fiscal institutions like the Netherlands CPB, the Canadian PBO, and the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. It can be achieved by focusing on training staff to communicate clearly from day one and throughout their working lives.

2. Open up

89. Opening up is a key part of communicating successfully. One of the ways that organisations like the Netherlands CPB and Canadian PBO achieved greater impact was by allowing staff to talk openly with journalists and proactively engaging with the press, even if it means staff stepping outside their comfort zones. This openness is seen as essential to building strong media relationships, trust, and ultimately boosting the organization's impact.

3. Use accessible language

90. Accessible language is crucial. The curse of knowledge means we tend to wrongly assume others understand complex topics we understand well. A few things can help to make language more accessible:

- Improve readability with a focus on clear communication, not just short words and sentences.
- Replace technical jargon with easy-to-understand phrases that are still reasonably precise in their intent.
- Use perspective clauses: simple sentences with percentages, ratios, rankings or other comparisons that provide context on the large figures being discussed.
- Emphasise clear narratives rather than precise details and numbers.

91. These tactics can help make communications more accessible to a broader audience.

4. Layer your communications

92. A common feature of those with best practices for communications is that they layer their content. That is, they develop many ways of delivering the same message, while being mindful of different audiences. This includes everything from in-depth papers to executive summaries, to shorter explainers, to blogs, social media posts, short videos, infographics and so on. Important to this is the development of multiple style guides — tools to ensure that formatting, style, and content has a consistent format and voice across each of the different layers being developed.

5. Use both social media and traditional media effectively

93. If we are to reach a broad audience effectively, it requires a two-pronged approach. This means leveraging both traditional media and social media. Traditional media, like television, maintains a strong reach even if it is in decline and marked by older users. It connects with a wider public beyond the usual pool of experts that consumes its work. This is vital for building trust and accountability. Social media, on the other hand, offers a chance for direct communication with the public. It should be targeted and consider audience needs and interests. Looking at the experience of IFIs, we can see that those with the greatest communications impact have been those that use a combination of both traditional and social media channels, ensuring their message reaches a wide range of audiences. This ensures their message reaches a wide range of audiences.

6. Get creative

94. A number of organisations have developed creative ways to engage their audience. This can be through innovative data visualizations, catchy graphics, neater explainers, or short videos. Examples include the Netherlands' CPB's "off the charts" debt chart, the Irish Fiscal Council's social contributions impact charts, and the Canadian PBO's Navy commitments chart. A unifying theme is that these approaches convey complex ideas in a way that is simple, striking or that connects to its audience in a more tangible way.

7. Track and refine your impact

95. To ensure their message resonates, successful institutions prioritise tracking and refining their communications impact. This goes beyond simply spreading information. They monitor media mentions, web traffic, and even, in the case of larger institutions, parliamentary mentions to understand how their message is being received. This data allows them to refine their approach, tailor content, and identify new communications approaches. Ultimately, this helps ensure their efforts are not wasted and they achieve the desired impact.

96. Implementing these seven steps will strengthen how we communicate the public finances.

97. Communications are an important part of developing people's understanding of the public finances. But, as the evidence from IFIs shows, good communications alone are not enough. There needs to be a strong foundation for robust, independent analysis that is focused on major areas of substance. Only then will the benefits of strong communications really bear fruit.

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Annex A. What drives an IFI's communications impact?

98. This annex seeks to explain IFIs' communications impact. First, it assesses their impact based on specific features of their communications apparatus: the presence of dedicated communications staff, communication strategies, the use of press releases, and so on. Second, it looks at it in terms of their overall apparatus as well as their level of independence and their analytical focus.[5] Third it considers the joint effect of these three dimensions: that is, independence, analytical focus, and the communications apparatus.

99. The findings suggest that it is indeed the joint effect of all three dimensions that best explains an IFI's communications impact. That is, IFIs need to be independent, analytically focused, and armed with tools to communicate their work effectively if they are to succeed in influencing the national debate.

Data

100. Our data is based on 35 IFIs from 29 countries. The OECD's Fiscal Advocacy Index is built primarily on survey data from 2021. This captures the information relevant to IFI's independence, analytical focus, and communications apparatus. The communications impact data is based on latest available information for the period 2021–2023.[6]

The data are set out in Table A.1.

Table A.1. Data used for estimating communications impact among IFIs

Variable heading	Variables	Definition	Source
Dependent variable			
Impact	Communications impact	This is a continuous variable that can take any value between 0 and 1. It is based on the weighted results for four different variables measuring an IFI's communications impact and draws on Google News as well as Google Trends data.	OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index
Independent variables			
$Index_j$	Submits reports	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "key analytical reports officially submitted to the legislative record"	OECD IFI database (2021)

[5] These are all scored based on the Fiscal Advocacy Index weightings.

[6] Note that search data are available for 2021–2023, but the media variables: "total coverage" and "media share" are only available for 2023. This time difference is perhaps not ideal. However, there are two reasons we think this may be reasonable. First, it helps ensure greater quality of coverage. Older data are harder to guarantee in terms of accuracy, given that media articles can in some cases disappear from websites over time or simply be harder to find due to indexing changes. Second, it makes some logical sense to focus on communications impact data with a lag seeing as an IFI's analytical work and communications apparatus may take time to bear fruit.

Variable heading	Variables	Definition	Source
	Gives evidence	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "leaders or staff participate in legislative hearings to discuss the institution's economic and fiscal research".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Communications policy	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "has a communications policy".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Communications strategy	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "has a communications strategy".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Staff	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "has a dedicated communications staff or agency".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Press releases	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "publications accompanied by press release".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Press conferences	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "holds press conferences for key reports".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Embargo	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "holds early access briefings or releases reports under embargo before they are officially published"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	TV	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "leadership appears on TV"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Radio	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "leadership appears on Radio"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Conferences	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "leadership or staff present at conferences"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Journals	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "staff publish in academic journals".	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Social media	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "distributes research with social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter)"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Blogs newsletters	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "has a blog or newsletter"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Web traffic	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "tracks IFI website activity"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Media mentions	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "tracks IFI media mentions"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Parliamentary mentions	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "tracks IFI parliamentary mentions"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Surveys stakeholders	Binary 0 or 1 variable. Takes value of 1 if the IFI reports "has conducted a survey on stakeholder perceptions"	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Apparatus	Overall dimension measuring IFI's ability to communicate directly with the public and engage with the media based on assigning scores and weights to survey questions underpinning the variables above.	OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index
	Analytical focus	Overall dimension measuring IFI's analytical focus drawing on scores and weights applied to responses to survey questions in relation to work stream and analytical capacity.	OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index
	Independence	Overall dimension measuring IFI's independence drawing on scores and weights applied to responses to survey questions in relation to leadership, operations, resources and access to information.	OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index
Controls (X_j)	Established	Year the institution was established	OECD IFI database (2021)
	Debt ratio	General government consolidated gross debt % GDP	Own workings based on
	Unemployment rate	Total unemployment rate, % labour force, 15-64	Own workings based on

Variable heading	Variables	Definition	Source
	Election	Dummy variable which takes the value of 1 if an election took place during the period 2021-2023	Own workings based on

Method

101. We regress models communications impact as a function of IFI characteristics and control variables with country fixed effects. The models are broadly of the form:

$$Impact_j = \alpha + \beta_1 Index_j + \beta_2 X_j + \delta_j + \varepsilon_j$$

102. where $Impact_j$ is our communications impact measure for IFI j, and $Index_j$ is the relevant set of index measures assessed as predictors of communications impact. Depending on the model, this may be the individual features of an IFI's communications apparatus. Alternatively, it may be the index dimensions with weights assigned to these and other indicators. These dimensions fall under the headings of communications apparatus, analytical focus, and independence. The variable X_j is the vector of country-specific control variables frequently used in the literature, δ_j represents the country fixed effects, and ε_j is the idiosyncratic error term.

Results

103. The estimation results are shown in Table A.2. In the case of Model 1, the tracking of media mentions is significant at the 5% level, but with the wrong sign. Having a communications policy also appears statistically significant, but only barely, at the 10% level.

104. Some multicollinearity is evident in these variables and so we consider the role of various sub-dimensions within the communications apparatus dimension in Model 2. These are essentially weighted aggregates of the responses underpinning the indicators assessed in Model 1. Here, IFIs tracking of media impact appears weakly significant, at the 10% level, and positive as expected. This could be assumed to mean that tracking impact allows IFIs to refine and improve their communications, hence boosting impact. But, again, it is only weakly significant.

105. Model 3 zooms out further to include all of the three dimensions in the Fiscal Advocacy Index. That is, it includes the Communications Apparatus as a whole, with previous models having assessed parts of it, and it also considers the role of institutional Independence and the Analytical Focus of IFIs. Here, only a weak statistically significant effect is found, with this being present for the communications apparatus dimension, at the 10% level. This is surprising. However, the next model considers the possibility of these variables interacting.

106. Model 4 interacts the three dimensions considered in Model 3: Independence, Analytical Focus, and Communications Apparatus. In this case, the interacted dimensions have strong statistical significance, at the 1% level. The overall explanatory power of the model, the adjusted R-squared, is also quite high at 53%.

107. These findings suggest that it is likely to be the joint effect of all three dimensions that best explains an IFI's communications impact. That is, an IFIs ability to be independent, analytically focused, and armed with tools to communicate their work effectively will be important when working in harmony rather than in isolation. This harmonious aspect is essential if they are to succeed in influencing the national debate.

Table A.2. Regression results to predict communications impact

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	2.54	1.89	0.72	0.91
	(3.47)	(2.89)	(3.16)	(2.44)
Submits_reports	0.18			
	(0.13)			
Gives_evidence	0.00			
	(0.11)			
Comms_policy	0.12 *			
	(0.07)			
Comms_strategy	0.04			
	(0.1)			
Staff	-0.03			
	(0.11)			
Press_releases	0.01			
	(0.14)			
Press_conferences	0.21 *			
	(0.12)			
Embargo	0.17			
	(0.09)			
TV	-0.18			
	(0.28)			
Radio	0.16			
	(0.31)			
Conferences	0.28			
	(0.19)			
Journals	-0.15			
	(0.09)			
Social_media	-0.02			
	(0.11)			
Blogs_newsletters	0.06			
	(0.11)			
Web_traffic	0.13			
	(0.11)			
Media_mentions	-0.37 **			
	(0.14)			
Parliamentary_mentions	0.17			
	(0.12)			
Surveys_stakeholders	0.13			
	(0.08)			
Disseminating		0.66		
		(0.4)		
Promoting		0.31		
		(0.59)		
Tracking		1.14 *		
		(0.67)		
Apparatus			0.43 *	
			(0.25)	
Independence			0.00	
			(0.27)	
Analytical			0.26	
			(0.21)	

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
Apparatus.Independence.Analytical				0.98	***
				(0.16)	
Established	0.00	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	
Debt	0.00	0.001	0.001	-0.0002	
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	
Unemp	0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.002	
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	
Election	-0.12	-0.001	0.02	0.01	
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	
Adjusted R-Squared	0.46	0.36	0.37	0.53	
Observations	35	35	35	35	

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: *** 1 per cent; **5 per cent; *10 per cent.