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What is OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has been called a think tank, monitoring agency, rich man's club, an unacademic university. It has elements of all, but none of these characterisations captures the essence of the OECD.

The OECD groups **29 member countries** in an organisation that, most importantly, provides governments a setting in which to discuss, develop and perfect economic and social policy. They compare experiences, seek answers to common problems and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies that increasingly in today's globalised world must form a web of even practice across nations. Their exchanges may lead to agreements to act in a formal way - for example, by establishing legally-binding codes for free flow of capital and services, agreements to crack down on bribery or to end subsidies for shipbuilding. But more often, their discussion makes for better informed work within their own governments on the spectrum of public policy and clarifies the impact of national policies on the international community. And it offers a chance to reflect and exchange perspectives with other countries similar to their own.

The OECD is a club of like-minded countries. It is rich, in that OECD countries produce two thirds of the world's goods and services, but it is not an exclusive club. Essentially, membership is limited only by a country's commitment to a market economy and a pluralistic democracy. The core of original members has expanded from Europe and North America to include Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Korea. And there are many more contacts with the rest of the world through programmes with countries in the former Soviet bloc, Asia, Latin America - contacts which, in some cases, may lead to membership.

Exchanges between OECD governments flow from information and analysis provided by a Secretariat in Paris. Parts of the OECD Secretariat collect data, monitor trends, analyse and forecast economic developments, while others research social changes or evolving patterns in trade, environment, agriculture, technology, taxation and more. This work, in areas that mirror the policy-making structures in ministries of governments, is done in close consultation with policy-makers who will use the analysis, and it underpins discussion by member countries when they meet in specialised committees of the OECD. Much of the research and analysis is published.

How the Organisation is organised

- **Committees** ▶
 - Member countries meet and exchange information in committees. Committees bring together representatives of member countries, either from national administrations or from their permanent delegations to the OECD, co-located with the Secretariat in Paris. The overriding committee is the Council, which has the decision-making power. It is composed of one representative for each member country (as well as a representative of the European Commission). The Council meets regularly at the level of **Ambassadors** [Pdf 15kb] to the OECD to

- Ageing Society
- Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
- Biotechnology
- Competition and Regulatory Reform
 - Competition
 - Regulatory Reform
- Corporate Sector Issues
- Economics
- Education and Skills
- Electronic Commerce
- Emerging and Transition economies
- Employment
- Energy
- Enterprise, Industry and Services
- Environment
- Fighting Bribery and Corruption
- Finance and Investment
- Food Safety
- Future Studies
- Governance
 - Public Management
 - Governance in Transition Countries
- Growth
- Health
- Information Society
- Insurance and Pensions

International Development

Development Assistance Committee

Development Centre

Club du Sahel

Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members

International Migration

Money Laundering

Science and Innovation

Social Issues

Statistics

Sustainable Development

Taxation

Territorial Economy

Trade

Transport

give general guidance to the Organisation and its work. **The Council meets at ministerial level** once a year, when foreign, finance and other ministers from member countries raise - and give public prominence to - important issues and set priorities for OECD work over the coming year.

- Specialised committees meet to advance ideas and review progress in more tightly defined areas of policy - such as trade, public management, development assistance or financial markets. There are about 200 committees, working groups and expert groups. Some 40 000 officials senior from national administrations, come to OECD committee meetings each year to request, review and contribute to work that is undertaken by the OECD Secretariat. And even from home, they have electronic access to OECD documents and can exchange information through the OECD data network.
- **Secretariat**
 - The 1 850 staff of the OECD Secretariat in Paris work directly or indirectly to support the activities of committees. Some 700 economists, scientists, lawyers and other professional staff, mainly based in a dozen substantive directorates, provide research and analysis.
 - The Secretariat is directed by a **Secretary-General**, assisted by four deputy Secretaries-General. The Secretary-General also chairs the Council, providing the crucial link between national delegations and the Secretariat.
 - The OECD works in two official languages: English and French. Staff members are citizens of OECD member countries but serve as international civil servants with no national affiliation during their OECD posting. There is no quota system for national representation; there is simply a policy of employing highly-qualified men and women with a cross-section of experience and nationalities.
- **Dissecting the Secretariat**
 - The work of the Secretariat parallels the work of committees, with each **directorate** servicing one or more committees, as well as committees' working parties and sub groups. But increasingly, OECD work is cutting across sector lines and in cross-disciplinary or horizontal studies. The **OECD International Futures Programme**, for example, which aims at identifying emerging policy issues at early stages, is thoroughly multidisciplinary. Work on employment and unemployment has brought together macroeconomic specialists, experts on tax and enterprises, on technology as well as labour market and social policy analysts. Environment and economic analysis can no longer be examined in isolation. Trade and investment are inextricably linked. Biotechnology concerns policy for agriculture, industry, science, environment and development. Gauging the effects of globalisation will draw in virtually every field of policy analysis.
 - **OECD Committee Structure, Mandates & Bureaux**
 - **Simplified structure of OECD** [PDF - 35kb]
- **The OECD Budget**
 - The work of the OECD Secretariat is financed by the Member countries. The annual contribution of each Member country is calculated according to the weight of its economy. The United States is the biggest contributor followed by Japan. Countries can also elect to finance specific programmes or projects. It is the **Member countries** assembled in the Council who determine both the size of the annual budget, which at the present time is around US\$200 million, and the programme of work.

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Updated 29-05-2000