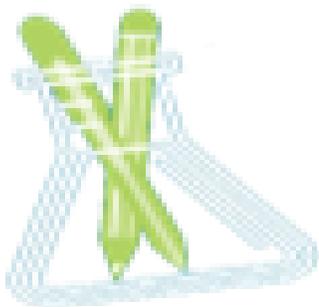


Ghana Survey on Public Service Response to COVID-19

Preliminary findings | July 2020



Contents

- Executive Summary..... 3**
- Overview..... 5**
 - Background..... 5**
 - Sample Breakdown..... 5**
 - Table 4: Sample breakdown, by gender and age..... 6*
- Home Based-Work and Flexible Hours 7**
 - Where are Civil Servants working during the COVID-19 crisis? 7**
 - Are Civil Servants working productively under alternative working arrangements? 8**
 - Are Civil Servants communicating and interacting effectively during alternative working arrangements? 9**
 - What technology are Civil Servants using during alternative working arrangements? 10**
- Challenges and constraints..... 11**
 - What are the main challenges faced by Civil Servants during the COVID-19 crisis? 11**
- Performance management during COVID-19..... 13**
 - Has the workload increased since the start of the COVID-19 crisis? 13**
 - Have organizations developed new strategies to adapt to the new situation and deliver on its work goals? 15**
 - Are organizations tracking performance? 16**
- Policy and intervention implications..... 18**
- Appendix 1 – Table 1: Sample breakdown, by Ministry/Agency 19**

Executive Summary

Overview

The Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS) in Ghana, in partnership with the World Bank Group, implemented an online survey of public officials between 22nd May 2020 and the 3rd July 2020. The survey objective was to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Civil Servants' ability to undertake their core and COVID-related tasks and capture the specific challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Although the survey was distributed across 36 organizations in the Service and distributed to mid-senior public officials sitting in central MDs, most of the responses came from the OHCS.

Home Based-Work and Flexible Hours

Throughout the duration of the survey data collection period, most of the organizations in the Service had instituted flexible working hours. However most Civil Servants were spending most of their working time in the office. During the height of the crisis, 50% of respondents belonged to teams that regularly interacted virtually. In the OHCS, 70% of managers were able to engage virtually with their teams. The most common used technologies during home-based work are telephone, email, and group messaging systems. Collaborative tools such as Google Doc or Drobox paper were not widely used in the Service.

A significant majority of survey respondents believe they have been able to undertake their work effectively away from the regular office during the COVID-19 crisis. This pattern has been confirmed by most surveyed managers.

Challenges and constraints

The three most common technical challenges faced by Civil Servants in implementing their work tasks under flexible working schedules resulting from the COVID-19 crisis are poor access to internet, lack of proper equipment, and managing work that requires in-person interactions. Poor access to internet is a particular concern for OHCS staff.

Resources and transportation constraints have impacted Civil Servants' ability to work effectively during the crisis, with 76% of managers saying that these constraints are impacting the implementation of core tasks. This is especially high among OHCS staff, with 88% reporting constraints as major impediments.

Performance management during COVID-19

42% of all managers surveyed report an increase in the current workload, this is true for only 30% of OHCS managers. In fact, 50% of OHCS managers say the workload has remained the same. According to the survey findings, strategic plans have been implemented in most of the organizations to better respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and employees appear to have demonstrated the ability to rapidly learn the required skills to effectively respond to the crisis. In fact, 78% of managers do not expect the need to bring in external expertise to support their work responding to the crisis.

Policy and intervention implications

The survey findings point towards two types of interventions, both with short and long-term implications. The first is increased access to technology to better support home-based working and virtual in-person activities. This will include the promotion of collaborative work systems where possible and the provision of training on the use of technology, such as videoconferencing tools to enhance remote team-based work. Where provision or access to technology is most difficult, consultation between teams and managers to develop flexible working schedules that maximize in-person collaboration opportunities could be a good short-term measure. The second is the strengthening of internal communication to better support remote working. Improve feedback mechanisms between managers and their teams will ensure that the challenges, needs, and suggestions of staff are heard. This will allow managers to develop concrete actions based on real feedback and help individuals feel heard at times of crisis and uncertainty. Lastly, designing further diagnostic tools will help to identify specific constraints and bottlenecks to task completion and Service delivery.

Overview

Background

The World Bank Group, in partnership with the Ghanaian Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS), fielded an online survey to understand how Civil Servants are coping with the new tasks and operational changes introduced in light of the COVID-19 crisis. Between the 22nd May 2020 and the 3rd July 2020, Ghanaian Civil Servants were invited to participate in an online survey on how they were faring during the COVID-19 crisis and the challenges they faced in undertaking their core and COVID-19 related work. The survey was distributed to central-level Civil Servants through an online link distributed via WhatsApp chat groups.

The survey was split into two tracks: an employee track and a manager track. The employee track focused on respondents' ability to work remotely from home, and the challenges faced during the crisis period. In addition, the survey asked questions on how the COVID-19 outbreak has changed Civil Servants' daily work and how they have responded to it. The managers track explored how managers and organizations were monitoring employees working from home in order to guarantee appropriate level of productivity and the type of actions the various team have been tacking to respond to the new challenges created by the crisis.

Sample Breakdown

By the end of the data collection period, 191 Civil Servants had responded to the online survey, coming from 36 various Ministries, Departments (MDs) in Accra, as shown in Table 1 in the Appendix. The largest response rate was among OHCS Civil Servants, who make up almost 30% of the final sample, showing that the surveys was not consistently distributed across the Service. Therefore, the present report presents the wide Service findings with a focus on the status of Civil Servants working at the OHCS.

Of the 191 surveyed Civil Servants, 28% of them are in managerial positions. In OHCS, this is 18%. Looking at basic demographics reported in Table 3 and Table 4, 92% of surveyed officials are working full-time, and only 5% of officials are currently working part-time. 48% of respondents are women, and the average age of surveyed officials is between 30 and 39 years old.

Table 2: Sample breakdown, by occupation and level of government

Position In The Service	All MDs (Full Sample)		OHCS	
	N. of Observations	% of Sample	N. of Observations	% of Sample
Director	54	28.27%	10	18%
Non-Director	137	71.73%	46	82%
Total	191	100.00%	56	100.00%

Table 3: Sample breakdown, by type of contract

	All MDs (Full Sample)	OHCS
Full-time (%)	90%	91%
Part-time (%)	5%	7%
Other (%)	2%	4%

Table 4: Sample breakdown, by gender and age

	All MDs (Full Sample)	OHCS
Female (%)	48%	50%
Mean age	30-39	30-39

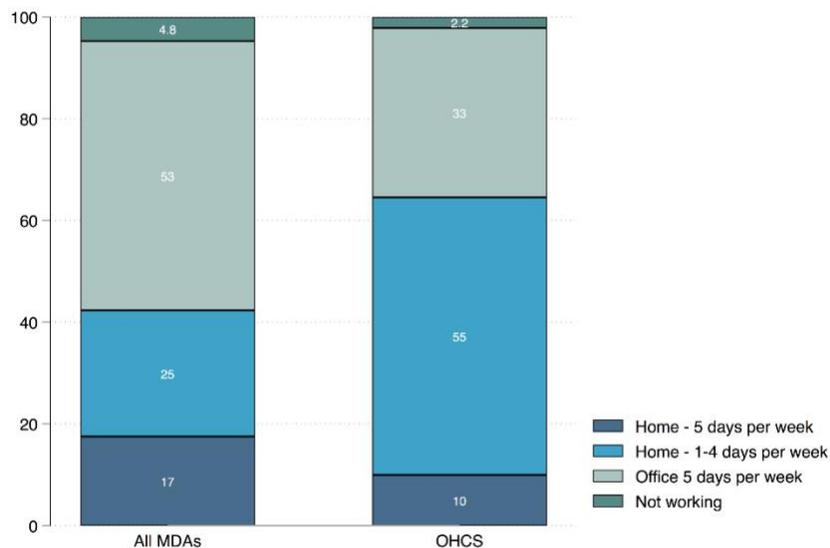
Home Based-Work and Flexible Hours

→ Where are Civil Servants working during the COVID-19 crisis?

60% of managers surveyed stated that their organization had instituted flexible working hours, while 27% of managers said that their organization adopted mandatory home-based working. Only 13% of managers said that Civil Servants in their organization are working exclusively from the office.

With an average team size of 44 full-time employees, managers reported that the majority of Civil Servants in their team are currently working from office five days per week; 25% report that their teams are working in the office between 1 and 4 days a week, and 18% report that their teams are working exclusively from the office. Less than 5% of managers' report that their individuals in their team are not working as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 1 – Proportion of employees working (i) exclusively from home, (ii) from both home and office, (iii) from office exclusively, and (iv) not working

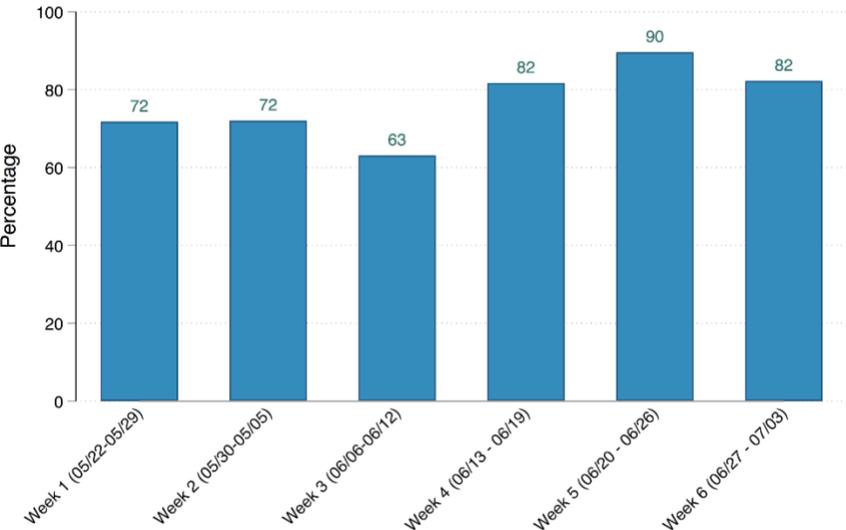


Focusing the attention on the OHCS, most Civil Servants have adopted flexible working schedules, working from home between 1 and 4 days per week. 33% of OHCS staff are currently working exclusively from the office, and only 10% are working exclusively from home (Figure 1).

According to survey findings, Civil Servants have spent 75% of their working time in the office in the last six weeks, working from home only 25% of their time, confirming

the adoption of a more flexible working schedule as the most common working modality in the Service. It is interesting to notice that Civil Servants are, on average, spending an increasing proportion of their working time in the office over the last weeks¹ (Figure 2), suggesting that the Service is slowly going back to “normal.”

Figure 2 – Proportion of working time spent in the office over the last 5 weeks



→ Are Civil Servants working productively under alternative working arrangements?

When looking at self-reported individual performance, 74% of surveyed Civil Servants agreed or strongly agreed that they can perform their duties remotely just as well as they do in normal circumstances. A slightly higher proportion of officials from OHCS (79%) confirmed their ability to do so relative to the average Civil Servants’ belief. However, 19% of Civil Servants disagreed that they are able to do their job as well from home as from office. Overall, Civil Servants from OHCS were slightly less pessimistic than their Service-wide colleagues, as shown in Figure 3a.

A majority of managers agreed that their teams were able to continue performing during the crisis, but a significant minority actually disagreed that their teams were able to perform (23%).

¹ The considered time period refers to the six weeks of data collection.

Figure 3a - "While working away from the regular office, I have been able to perform my job and duties as well as I do normally."
(Employees)

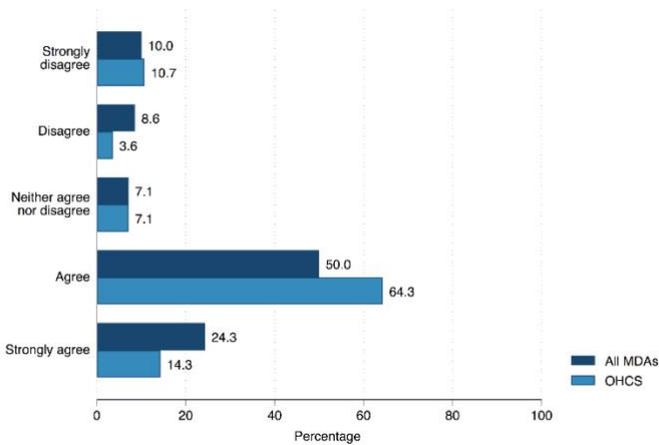
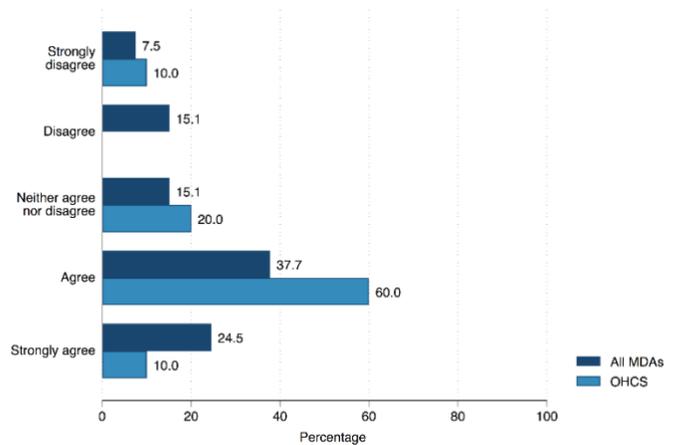


Figure 3b - "Overall, during this period my Directorate/Unit or Organization has been able to deliver on its tasks as well as they have in the pre-crisis period."
(Managers)

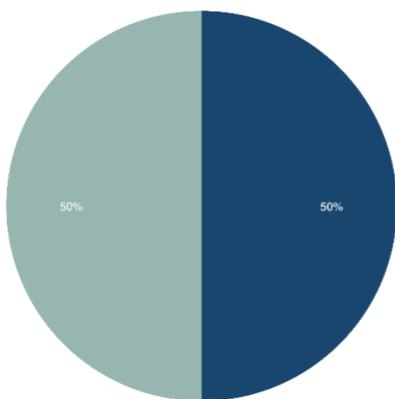


→ Are Civil Servants communicating and interacting effectively during alternative working arrangements?

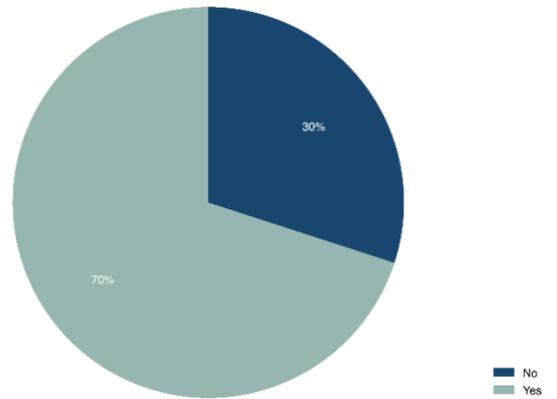
According to 50% of managers surveyed, teams have been engaging with their staff virtually during the last eight weeks. Since a higher proportion of OHCS Civil Servants are currently working with a more flexible schedule, a slightly higher proportion of staff in this MD (70%) have been engaging with their colleagues virtually (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - "During the past eight weeks, has your Directorate/Unit or Organization been engaging with its staff virtually?"

Panel A – All the MDs



Panel B – OHCS



uring th
d a sati
ower pr
level of
a their s

could join and fully participate in such activities.

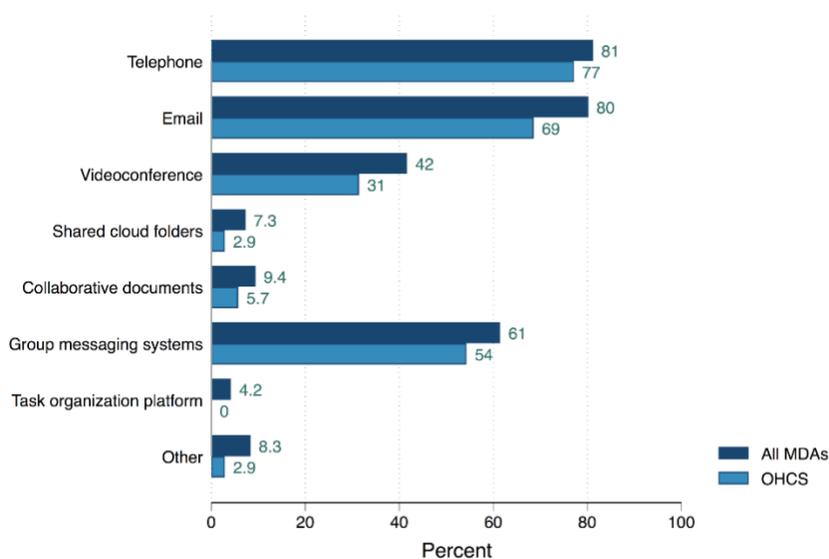
→ What technology are Civil Servants using during alternative working arrangements?

While working from home, telephone and emails are the most commonly used technologies by Civil Servants, followed by group messaging systems (such as WhatsApp) and videoconference platforms (such as Zoom or Skype).

Team-based working tools such as collaborative documents (e.g., GoogleDocs or Dropbox Paper) or shared cloud folders (e.g., OneDrive or DropBox) are not used by Civil Servants, and are used least by OHCS staff, as shown in Figure 5.

In general, the use of tasks organization platform is low in the Service and null among OHCS staff. However, when comparing managers and employees, managers are slightly more inclined to use such tools. This slight technology gap between managers and employees could be indicative of two things: that managers are overly optimistic about what tools their staff have the access and skills to use (suggesting there is an information gap of sorts), and that staff do not have sufficient training on how to use these tools effectively.

Figure 5 - Technologies used by team for remote work



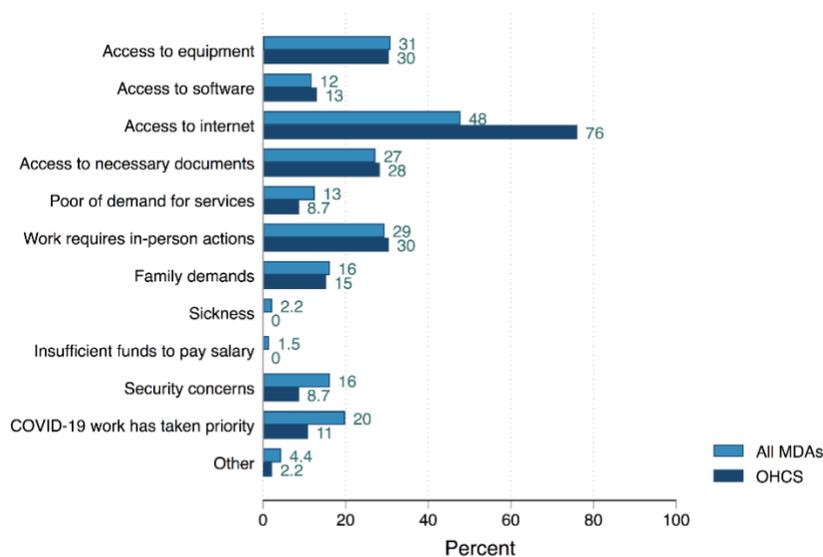
Challenges and constraints

→ What are the main challenges faced by Civil Servants during the COVID-19 crisis?

Although Civil Servants and managers are optimistic in their ability to deliver as well as they do before the crisis, the most common technical challenges faced by Civil Servants in implementing their core tasks are i) poor access to internet, ii) lack of proper equipment, iii) managing work that requires in-person interaction, and iv) a lack of access to the necessary documents.

Figure 6 shows that poor access to internet is a key challenge among OHCS staff compared to their colleagues working in other MDs. This would explain the lower proportion of OHCS staff engaging in virtual activities compared to their wide-Service colleagues.

Figure 6 – Challenges faced in implementing non-COVID-19 related core tasks



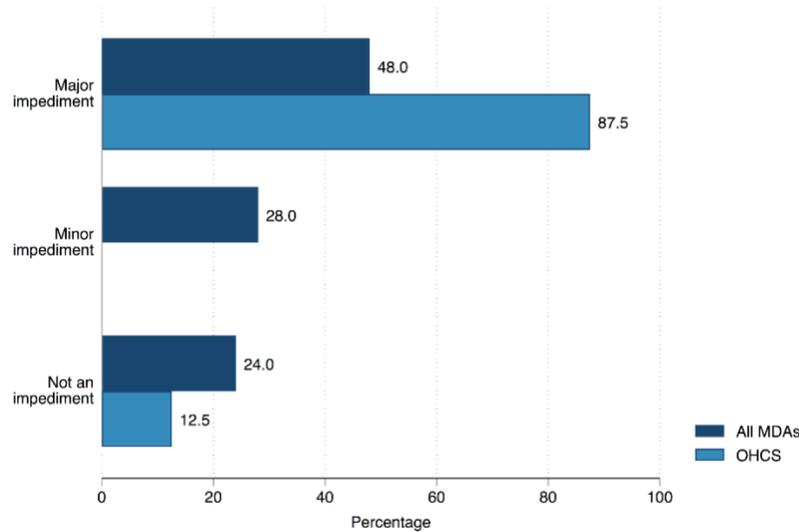
In addition to technical difficulties, Civil Servants are also facing personal constraints, such as increased family demands, childcare, and health concerns.

→ How much of a problem are resource and transport constraints?

Resource and transportation constraints are impacting Civil Servants' ability to work effectively during the crisis. In fact, 76% of managers say these constraints are impacting the implementation of core tasks, with 48% saying resource constraints are

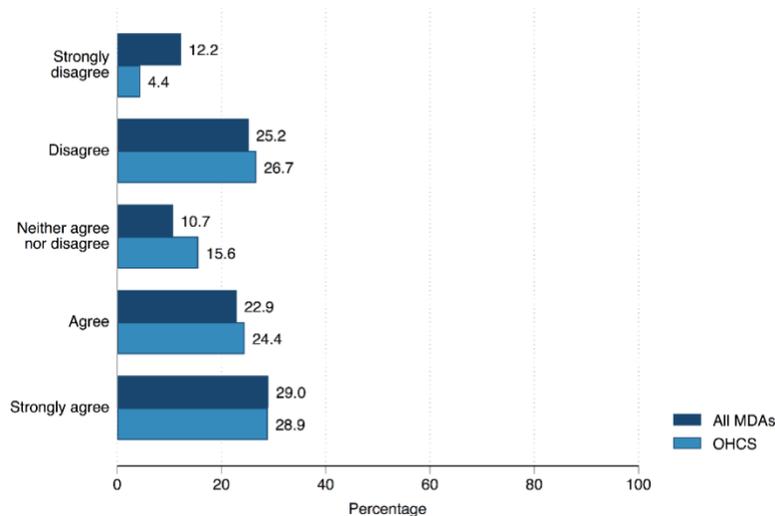
pose a major impediment (Figure 7). This is higher in OHCS, where 88% of managers say resource and transportation constraints are a major impediment.

Figure 7 – “To what extent do resource/transportation constraints impede your organization’s ability to undertake its core tasks during the COVID-19 crisis?”



This is confirmed by employee responses, with 50% saying that access to transportation affects their ability to work during the COVID-19 crisis (Figure 8). The transportation challenge has become less significant as the COVID-19 situation has improved; 45% of Civil Servants now commute to work via public transport (Trotro), while 32% use their personal vehicles.

Figure 8 - “Access to transportation to work affects my ability to work during the coronavirus crisis.”

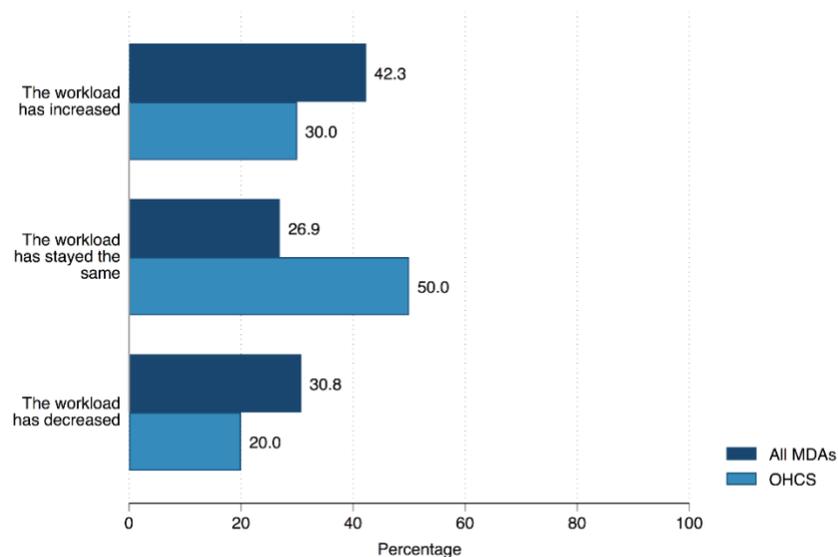


Performance management during COVID-19

→ Has the workload increased since the start of the COVID-19 crisis?

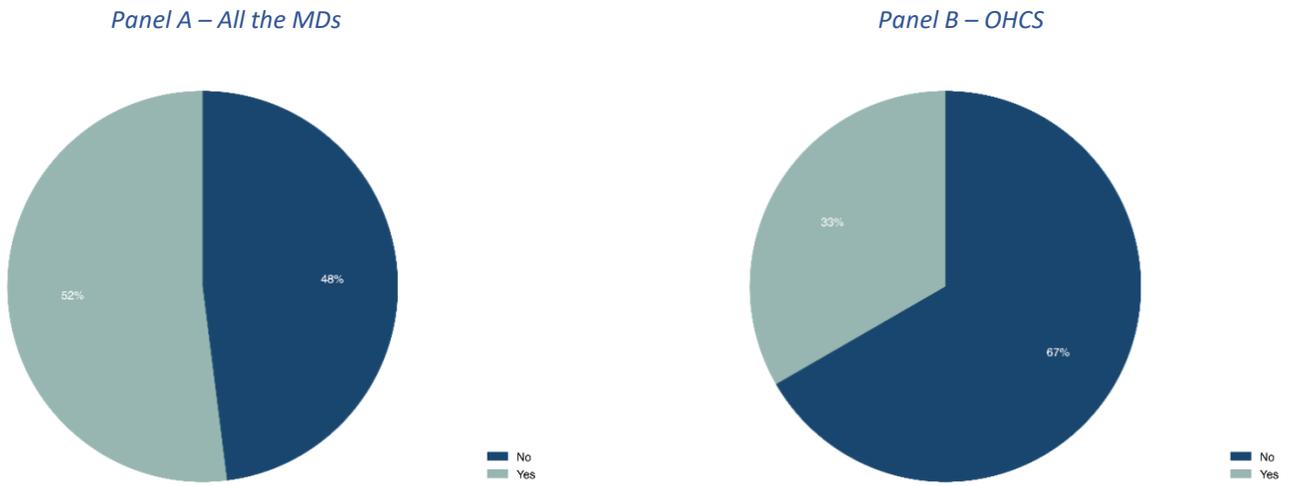
73% of organizations surveyed have experienced a change in their workload, with 42% of managers surveyed reporting an increase, and 31% reporting a decrease. Only 27% of them said that the workload has remained the same. At OHCS, 50% of managers feel that their workload had stayed the same. The other half reported an overall change in the workload, with 30% of them reporting an increase, and 20% a decrease.

Figure 9 - "In your Directorate/Unit or Organization, has the overall volume of work and number of tasks changed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak or remained about the same?"



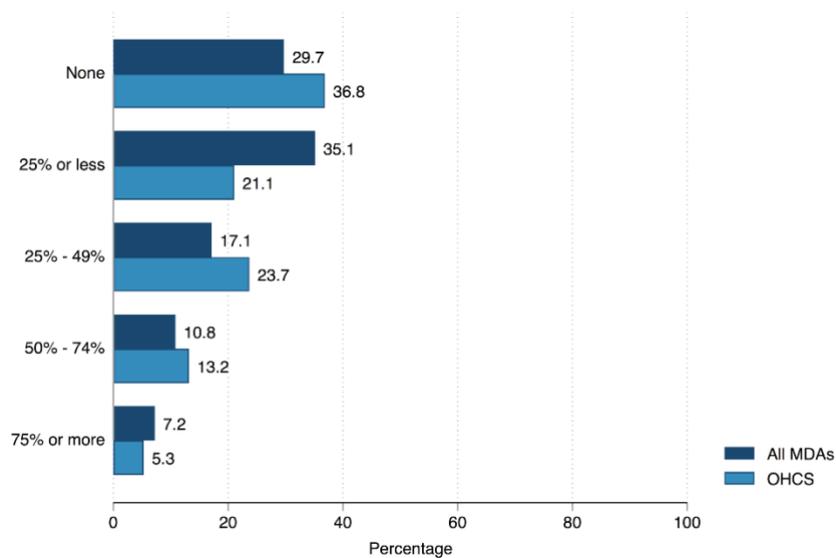
The fact that only a third of OHCS respondents has seen an increase in their workload is not surprising if we look at the COVID-19 related tasks undertaken since the beginning of the crisis. While 52% of surveyed managers say their teams are currently undertaking COVID-19 related work, only 33% of managers in OHCS report that their team are working on COVID-19 related tasks. This, combined with social distancing guidelines, would explain the reduced workload.

Figure 10 - “Does your Directorate/Unit or organization perform any work directly related to dealing with COVID-19 or its implications?”



This is partially confirmed by employee responses. On average, about 30% of Civil Servants in the Service said that they were not working on COVID-19 related tasks, and 35% said that they were spending less than 25% of their time on new tasks raised from the crisis. On the other hand, 37% of Civil Servants from the OHCS said that they are not performing any emergency related tasks, and 21% of them are spending less than 25% of their time on them (Figure 11).

Figure 11 - “What percentage of your time is spent on COVID-19-related work?”

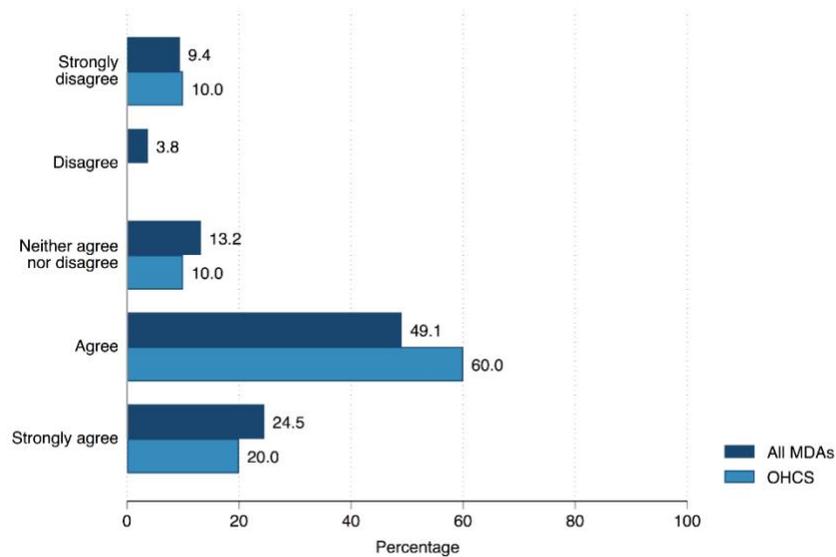


→ Have organizations developed new strategies to adapt to the new situation and deliver on its work goals?

While survey data on this is very limited, most managers in the Service feel positive that their organizations have developed adaptive strategies to ensure they continue delivering Services. This is 69% Service-wide, and 80% of managers in the OHCS specifically (Figure 12).

An obvious next step will be to understand what those strategies are, their impact they are having, and how organizations across the Service can learn from each other.

Figure 12 - “My Directorate/Unit or Organization has been able to develop an effective strategy for core tasks (e.g. as indicated in the Action Plan) during the COVID-19 crisis”



Similarly, according to managers, staff have the ability to rapidly learn the required skills to effectively respond to the COVID-19 crisis and 78% of manager do not expect to bring in external expertise to support their work. Overall, Civil Servants were optimistic about their ability to effectively undertake non-COVID-19-related and COVID-19 related tasks during the crisis.

While this optimism could be reflective of those new strategies, it will be important to understand what those ‘new skills’ are to ensure that Civil Servants receive targeted training where necessary.

Figure 13a – “I have been able to effectively undertake my non-COVID-19-related tasks during the COVID-19 crisis.”

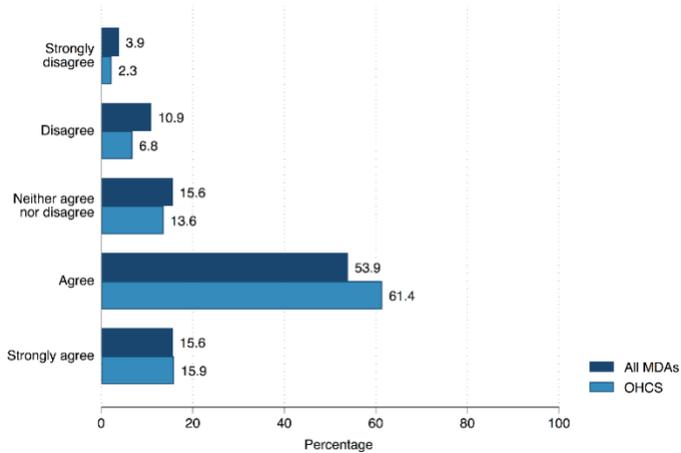
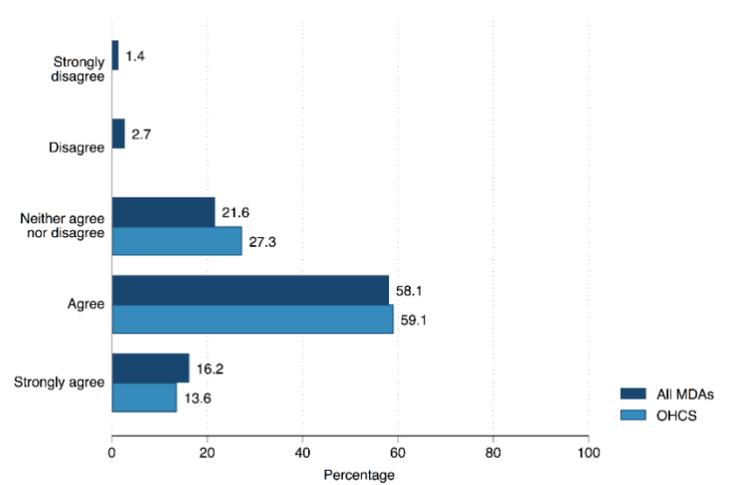


Figure 13b – “I have been able to effectively undertake the COVID-19-related work that I have been assigned.”



Although Civil Servants feel that they are able to deliver as well as they did before the crisis and that they have quickly adapted to the new working environment, only 52% of them feel supported by their managers. This is an important finding, and one which calls for a more in-depth exploration of the obstacles to adequate support provision, as well as how this could be impacting teams’ ability to perform effectively.

→ Are organizations tracking performance?

71% of surveyed managers stated that their organizations are tracking individual and team performance of core tasks not related to COVID-19, primarily through the use of formal metrics and data. Among those organizations who are tracking performance, 71% of them are also tracking performance of new activities related to the emergency (this is 100% of managers surveyed at OHCS).

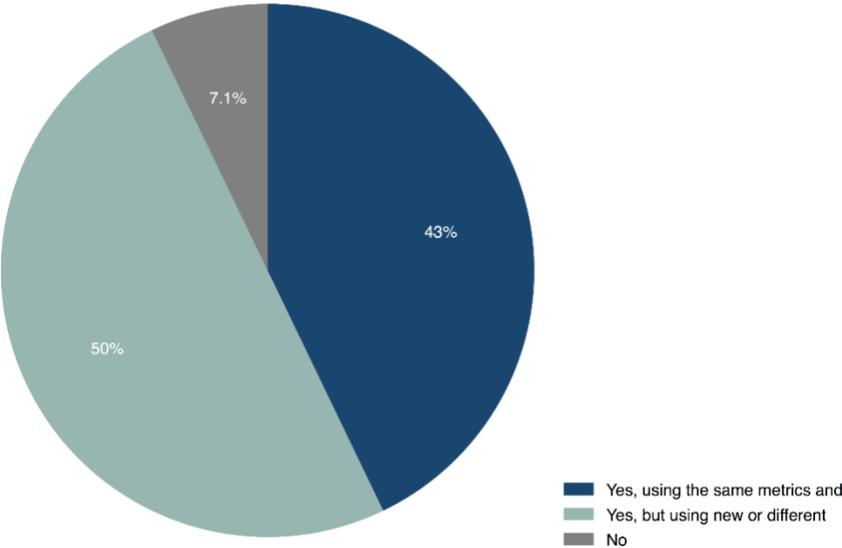
Figure 14 – Tracking performance



When asked about the performance of Civil Servants working from home during the crisis on core tasks unrelated to COVID-19, roughly half of the surveyed managers say they will continue to track performance using the same tracking systems as always, and half of them said that they will do so using new metrics, to account for the different circumstances of home-based work.

Once again, the next step here will be to understand how performance is being measured, particularly for those employees working from home, and how organizations can learn from each other on how to do this effectively.

Figure 15 - Continuing tracking home-working performance



Policy and intervention implications

Ghana's Civil Service has shown a notable capacity to adapt and respond to the ongoing global crisis. Like most countries, the Service has successfully switched to a flexible working modality during the crisis. This process has been supported by Civil Servants' ability to adapt to the new working environment.

However, the current crisis is opening to the possibility of boosting public officials' productivity during periods of remote work and into the future. The survey findings point towards two types of interventions, both with short and long-term implications.

Short-term interventions relate to (i) increasing the access and use of technology, (ii) strengthening internal communication approaches to better support remote working and virtual in-person activities, and (iii) designing further diagnostic tools to identify specific constraints and bottlenecks.

1) Increase the access and use of technology

- **Guarantee Civil Servants adequate access to technology** while putting in place a system to support staff getting access to internet, hardware, and software to boost Civil Servants' productivity when working away from their offices. When provision or access to technology is most difficult, consultation between teams and managers to develop flexible working schedules that maximize in-person collaboration opportunities could be a good short-term measure.
- **Improve the use of collaborative technology** through the promotion of collaborative working systems and the provision of targeted training on the use of advanced working tools such as videoconferencing tools.

2) Strengthen internal communication approaches

- **Improve feedback mechanisms** between managers and their teams to ensure that the challenges, needs, and suggestions of staff are heard. This will allow managers to develop concrete actions based on real feedback and will help individuals feel heard at a time of crisis and uncertainty.

3) Design diagnostic tools

- **Implementing further survey diagnostics** can provide Ghana's Civil Service with the tools and the data necessary to make evidence-based decisions. Designing further diagnostic tools will support the identification of specific

constraints and bottlenecks to survey delivery and task completion. On the long-term perspective, the current crisis has also underlined the importance of embracing a digital transformation to support a more productive remote work and, consequently, streamline bureaucratic procedures while adopting innovative administrative processes.