Co-Creating the Flow of Change

2-3 May 2024
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About Business at OECD (BIAC)

Established in 1962, Business at OECD (BIAC) is the officially recognized institutional business stakeholder at the OECD. We stand for policies that enable businesses of all sizes to contribute to economic growth, sustainable development, and societal prosperity. Through Business at OECD, national business and employers’ federations representing over 10 million companies provide perspectives to cutting-edge OECD policy debates that shape market-based economies and impact global governance. Our expertise is enriched by the contributions of a wide range of international sector organizations.
STATEMENT TO MINISTERS

Charting the Course for Competitiveness

The leading business federations in OECD countries and beyond, represented by Business at OECD (BIAC), jointly call on Ministers to strengthen the competitiveness of OECD economies.

Business leaders in OECD countries and beyond are navigating a polarized world. Seemingly seismic shifts in the world economic order cause uncertainty; risks of increasing volatility paralyze investments into the future; and severe economic headwinds inhibit companies’ growth trajectories in 2024:

- **Global economic growth** is set to slow to a moderate 2.9%. The bulk of it is expected in Asia, outside of OECD countries.
- **Inflation** is still above many central banks’ long-term targets, while easing slowly. Severely elevated costs-of-doing-business depress private investment.
- **Trade growth** is weak, with volumes recently only up by 0.1%, and global FDI has recently been tumbling. Much of this is structural, with restrictive policies leading to falling market openness.
- **Government interventions** in the name of economic security need to balance legitimate concerns and the efficiency cost of ‘friendshoring’.
- **Labor markets** remain tight, with employers struggling to fill vacancies. New job profiles and skills mismatches particularly challenge aging societies.

As the private sector faces an overcast outlook, a clear consensus unites Business at OECD: The primary need for the OECD to urgently reinforce the competitiveness of our market-based economies. This is the only way to deliver high, long-term, and truly sustainable growth:

- Growth that is driven by performance, progress and productivity, not government planning;
- Growth that pays for itself through real returns, not unsustainable state support;
- Growth that benefits all through active participation and healthy populations, not just redistribution, regulation and red-tape;
- Growth that diffuses through rules-based multilateralism, not unilateral actions that unlevel the playing field;
- Growth that advances innovative, practical business solutions to global challenges, not just at home but also abroad.

In our market economies, the competitive environment should be a top priority for the OECD to address the cost-of-living crisis. This is also the greatest contribution the OECD can make to our common security, which critically depends on our economic strength. On the contrary, economic weakness fuels populism, state interventionism and protectionism, with more inward-looking government agendas fragmenting the ties between regions, and undermining the benefits of rules-based multilateralism.

It must be clear that the pace of progress towards shared challenges also depends on our competitiveness. Therefore, the OECD’s added value lies in evidence-based policies and trusted collaboration:

- To progress on pressing environmental issues, guidance is needed on policies that are effective and rational, and not ideologically driven – leading to realistic, updated and competitive pathways for the climate and energy transition.
- As innovation is the most powerful tool to respond to global challenges, coherent, interoperable frameworks are needed for technological development, deployment and diffusion – including for trusted digitalization, data flows and AI. Effective implementation of intellectual property standards is crucial to strengthen a pro-innovation and competitive environment.
- And in the face of demographic change, strategies are needed to foster health resilience and enhance participation, reduce inactivity and tackle the “double skills gap” – ensuring the quantitative availability of employees with the qualitative skills needed by employers.

As we look forward to contributing to the 2024 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, we call on Ministers to reinforce the Organization’s competitiveness agenda drawing upon the OECD’s unique strength, its structured and institutional relationship with the private sector.
HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR ANNUAL ECONOMIC SURVEY

Improving the Business Climate in 2024

Conducted annually among the leading national business and employer organizations in OECD member countries, the 2024 Business at OECD (BIAC) Economic Policy Survey depicts a regionally diverging business climate for 2024. While our survey signals the resilience of businesses to recent economic shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, it also underlines continuing challenges for business, including geopolitical uncertainties, risks of volatilities in several markets and specific concerns about the lack of effective policies to enhance competitiveness.

Key findings include:

➢ 73% of our members identify geopolitical tensions as the main risk to the global economy in 2024. This is a 13% increase compared to the previous year, reflecting concerns about persistent and new conflicts. Sectors with the highest geopolitical risk exposure include energy, shipping, and transport.

➢ 59% of our members maintain moderate economic growth expectations, despite a notable increase in those perceiving the business climate as "very weak". While our survey demonstrates a 23% increase in those anticipating a 'moderate increase' in business investment, there is also a 7% rise in members expecting a 'moderate decrease', underlining a diverging outlook among OECD member economies.

➢ Over 80% of members expect some improvements in the competitive environment, reflecting easing supply chain bottlenecks and inflation levels. Positive developments that could further enhance business competitiveness include access to finance (72%), the adoption of digital technologies (70%), and infrastructure investments (65%). However, only 10% of respondents see positive developments in better regulation and 18% in workforce and skills developments, signalling that greater efforts should be placed in these areas.

➢ The need for structural government reforms is evident in key areas such as the digital transition, human capital, and public infrastructure. Over 90% of our members are either 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about labor shortages. At the same time, businesses note a lack of political leadership and insufficient public support to promote reforms that decisively address underlying challenges, which will increasingly constrain the economic growth potential in the coming years.

In this context, Business at OECD looks to the OECD to provide evidence-based policy advice, foster trusted international cooperation, and encourage political leadership to enable businesses to promote sustainable economic growth in 2024 and beyond. In the following, this document presents key business priorities and recommendations for the OECD Ministerial Agenda.
KEY MESSAGES IN RESPONSE TO THE MINISTERIAL AGENDA

Co-Creating the Flow of Change

1. Achieving a Sustainable Inclusive Economy

As business competitiveness lies at the heart of sustainable inclusive economies, the OECD should re-focus in 2024 on what it does best: Comparing economic country performance, putting a spotlight on the cost and ease of doing business, and encouraging relevant structural reforms.

As business is facing ever increasing regulatory burdens in many OECD countries, the efficacy of regulatory policies should be reviewed and refined. The OECD should promote good regulatory practices by mainstreaming impact assessments, ex-post evaluations and international regulatory coherence.

The substantial tightening of global financial conditions and a lack of access to credit significantly constrain the growth of many OECD companies, especially SMEs. Paired with the end of COVID-19 aids, rising borrowing costs have led to soaring corporate bankruptcies in many OECD countries. The OECD should step up efforts to create a more supportive financial environment.

The recent energy crisis has been a game changer, with energy-intensive industries feeling the heat from high prices, market instability and volatility. Working with the International Energy Agency, the OECD should mainstream energy discussions across the house to ensure secure, affordable, low-carbon energy.

While the green and digital transition requires significant investments in new infrastructure, many OECD economies have been facing chronic underinvestment for decades, including for transport, logistics, and IT. More OECD work is needed to better entice private investment in infrastructure, safeguard investor rights, advance more streamlined procedures, and ensure clarity on the pipeline of upcoming projects.

Skills and labor shortages prevent the expansion of business operations. The OECD should continue to provide governments with recommendations to enhance employability, reduce inactivity, and mobilize all parts of society. Diversity, inclusion, and gender equality contribute to productivity and business success. Targeted labor migration should promote a skills-based approach and facilitate qualifications’ recognition.

Education policies should adapt to better reflect labor market realities. School curricula urgently need to be modernized, strengthen foundational knowledge and STEM skills, and foster a capable and adaptable workforce. The OECD should also help raise the visibility, attractiveness and quality of Vocational Education and Training.

The development and adoption of new technologies provides essential tools for greater productivity. Based on multistakeholder engagement, the OECD should foster technologically-neutral, internationally coherent and interoperable policy frameworks that encourage innovation while minimizing related risks.

Aging societies and system shocks challenge our health and long-term care systems, particularly as non-communicable diseases are on the rise. The OECD should guide governments to treat health as an investment, move to patient-centric systems rewarding prevention, and take a horizontal approach to health resilience.

In many OECD countries, public debt is at excessive levels, presents systemic risks and requires focused attention. Spending efficiency should be the focal point rather than fiscal policies that weigh down private sector-led growth. Tax policy is an important part of a competitive investment framework, and there is a need to reduce redundant taxes in the compliance space.

A corruption-free business environment is a critical enabling factor for competitiveness. As the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention marks its 25th anniversary, Business at OECD calls for stepping up public-private collaboration in the fight against corruption, in line with its Zero-Corruption Manifesto.
2. Promoting Free Trade and Investment for Accelerating Sound Economic Growth

As a successor of the Marshall Plan and the OEEC, the history of the OECD leaves no doubt that economic integration is an essential pillar of our societal progress, prosperity and security.

The OECD business community is deeply concerned about the state of multilateralism. Businesses face significant uncertainty globally, as the rules impacting global trade and investment need to adapt to multiple and new challenges.

Business at OECD highly values the OECD's evidence-based work on trade policy. But more needs to be done to focus on the immediate priorities of those that trade and operate global supply chains. When market openness is going down, the open markets share of the OECD budget needs to go up.

Above all, we call on the OECD and governments to walk-the-talk as a 'like-minded' community. This means that free trade principles and international trade and investment agreements - crucial tools to foster economic resilience through supply chain diversification - should be negotiated, agreed, ratified, and fully implemented in a timely manner - especially among OECD countries, and with those that are candidates.

The OECD should continue its strongest efforts to encourage progress on WTO reform, efficient rule-making, stricter monitoring and notification processes, and reform of dispute settlement. Since the voice of those that trade and invest are the best guide for the WTO, a more formal role for business in the organization's work is needed.

The OECD must remain instrumental for eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers. Underlining societal benefits of goods and services trade, such as in the areas of health, sustainability, food security, and others, governments should continue to invest in OECD monitoring, tools and analysis on trade liberalization and facilitation.

On digital trade, the OECD should promote digital market openness principles, secure a permanent moratorium on the application of customs duties on electronic transmissions, and avoid the application of customs processes and procedures to electronic transmissions. The OECD digital trade agenda should provide strong impetus to related WTO initiatives.

Liberalizing trade provides an essential opportunity to foster the development, deployment and diffusion of environmental goods and services. To facilitate circular economy trade among like-minded countries, we urge strong consideration of practical and forward thinking business models, and more action to ensure effective implementation of the legally binding OECD Decision on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Wastes Destined for Recovery Operations.

As governments are providing extraordinary amounts of support, such measures must not unlevel the playing field. More OECD dialogue is needed to ensure that national industrial strategies are mutually aligned and do not result in overcapacities, unsustainable practices and protectionism. The OECD should continue to underline that any support measures should be targeted, transparent, non-discriminatory, proportionate and have clear “exit strategies.”

This must be complemented by investment policy advice that helps mobilize the enormous amounts of investment required for more sustainable, secure, digital, and resilient economies. For this, the balance in OECD countries needs to shift from imposing requirements on investors to addressing the needs of investors and providing them with sufficient legal certainty, safeguards, transparency and stability to fill the increasing investment gap.

OECD business is strongly committed to responsible business conduct (RBC). In the face of a growing number of RBC standards, the OECD should help ensure that company operations are not burdened with overly complex or duplicative due diligence and reporting requirements. Inclusive discussions should foster coherent ESG approaches, a consistent measurement of their economic and sustainability impact, as well as accompanying measures that create an enabling environment for RBC.
3. Enabling Economic Resilience and Security

It must be a top priority for the OECD and governments to foster a stable, predictable, and transparent policy environment for trade and investment. International cooperation and diplomacy must remain instrumental to reduce geopolitical risks and alleviate uncertainty about the framework conditions in which global supply chains operate.

In the current scenario, it is a priority for business to better anticipate, earlier prepare and faster adapt operations and supply chains to strengthen economic resilience. However, the needs and risk profiles for each sector and even individual companies are different. Thus, it must be clear that building supply chain resilience cannot take a uniform, top-down and politically-driven approach.

Business at OECD stands ready to help define, identify, and reduce excessive unilateral dependencies in selected sectors. OECD discussions on the security of supply - including those with a focus on critical minerals and materials, the car industry, semiconductors, food and agriculture, as well as medical - must be evidence-based and rooted in the on-the-ground insights and realities of those that operate global supply chains.

More transparency, including through early availability of and access to reliable public information and contingency plans, can be instrumental for business and governments to forecast developments. Digital technologies can be critical enablers in this regard. As exemplified by the OECD Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) more forward-looking, informed and timely decisionmaking are critical for international preparedness and effective crisis responses.

More regional diversification - and not less - increases the scope for businesses to cushion supply chain shocks, especially those that originate domestically. More OECD analytical work should foster investment in alternative trade infrastructures, reduce the heterogeneity of technical standards, eliminate unnecessary non-tariff measures, and facilitate procedures at the border. The OECD and governments should prioritize timely negotiation and ratification of trade agreements with different regions of the world - particularly among the OECD’s “like-minded” membership.

Some "non-likeminded" regimes increasingly present their economic models as systemic alternatives and counterweights to OECD countries. State-led models may adopt stringent government controls over their private sector, prevent market access on an equal footing, distort the global economy through support measures, and in some cases also resort to economic coercion. In this regard, we count on the OECD and its governments to jointly identify effective ways to counter such practices that severely unlevel the playing field. For this, trusted dialogue with business is key.

The simplified assumption that "economic security is national security" can have a chilling effect on competition. When national security is invoked as the reason for government action, the private sector often has little to no voice in government deliberations. In this regard, cross-cutting, coordinated and evidence-based OECD policy recommendations are needed more than ever, and must be effectively conveyed, including to the security community.

In particular, the OECD should ensure that government initiatives to address legitimate national security concerns related to international trade and investment are designed according to the principle "small yard, high fence", and that such initiatives are not misused for protectionist purposes. In this regard, we call on the OECD to work with business to ensure that government initiatives to protect legitimate national security are carefully designed, narrowly drawn, and minimize anti-competitive impacts.

Where policymakers consider and apply economic sanctions, close dialogue with the private sector also remains indispensable to ensure that such security measures are effective, well-targeted, transparent, and minimize unintended consequences.
4. Promoting Global Outreach and Credible Standards

Business looks to the OECD and governments for meaningful international cooperation, pragmatic diplomacy, and effective multilateralism that seeks mutual benefits based on enlightened self-interest. More than anything, the desire for a better future and wellbeing through economic prosperity unites people across the world. In this regard, we strongly support the OECD to spread established best practices and credible standards for the governance of markets.

OECD enlargement provides a critical opportunity for business, and we support a robust accession process with indispensable on-the-ground insights. As the case for each accession candidate is different, we underline that a thorough assessment of the current economic and legal environment – and particularly the commitment to open markets and rules-based economies – is indispensable. This includes support for a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions. Trusted long-term alignment with OECD standards must take priority over short-term political considerations. The ability, capacity, willingness and responsibility of accession candidates to fully implement all OECD instruments and principles must be ensured. For this, all technical accession reviews must be adequately resourced.

Going forward, Ukraine will greatly benefit from increased participation in OECD discussions as a platform for knowledge sharing, peer learning, and capacity building. This continued OECD-Ukraine dialogue will eventually help the country move closer to OECD standards through reform. The OECD and its member countries should actively continue to support Ukraine’s recovery and reconstruction.

We further actively support OECD outreach to selected partner countries. Notably, the OECD’s Regional Ministerials in Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean provide valued opportunities to encourage reform that fosters private sector competitiveness, market openness and ease-of-doing business.

In this regard, Business at OECD recently concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, and we look forward to working with countries in the region to prioritize reforms towards OECD standards, including the context of OECD accession discussions.

In an increasingly multipolar geo economic setting, the OECD should ensure effective liaison with all key partner countries. We especially value our continued dialogue with the Ambassador-led Informal Reflection Group on China, and underline the need to scale up the OECD’s strategically important Beijing office.

International coordination should also be supported through the OECD’s continued, active and strong engagement with the G7 and G20, considering that the center of gravity of the world economy is shifting further towards the ‘Global South’. In this regard, we highlight the role of Business at OECD as a network partner to both, the Italian B7 and the Brazilian B20 presidency, and we offer our partnership to the OECD and its member governments to foster a successful exchange and collaboration in these formats.

As we support the OECD to broaden its global reach in an increasingly geopolitical setting, we underline that the OECD acquis critically depends on the credible development and implementation of the Organization’s “like-minded” membership. Therefore, it must be a strategic top priority that OECD Committees and Directorates step up their efforts to ensure that the Organization’s Decisions and Recommendations remain up-to-date, supportive of private sector-led growth, and are not watered down. The merits of compliance should be emphasized.
5. Shaping Credible Pathways Towards Sustainable Growth under the Interlinked Global Crises

A cooling of international relations must not put at risk urgently needed progress on climate change, or other pressing environmental, economic and social sustainability issues. Global progress on SDGs is off-track - with only 12% of the targets on track - at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, the sustainable investment gap has increased from USD 2.5 trillion in 2015 to more than USD 4 trillion per year today.

As significant ‘implementation and enforcement gaps’ between government commitments and actions persist - and especially on the environment - the key to success lies in addressing such challenges as a market opportunity. More than anything, this requires policies that establish fair and attractive market conditions, based on coherent, reliable, technology-neutral policy frameworks for all sectors.

For OECD companies, the net-zero transition is not a question of if, but how and when. In this regard, we commend the OECD’s increasing focus to help foster realistic, updated and practical pathways for hydrogen, hard-to-abate emissions sectors, and transformational change to tackle the climate mitigation challenge.

As highlighted by our Peace for Food campaign, we also need a swift transition towards more sustainable food systems, especially as agriculture faces significant climate change impacts and consumer behavior shifts today. Engagement from all actors, public and private, across the food supply chain and beyond is crucial for this transition.

Predictable incentives, tax and fiscal policies can be a key factor in driving the necessary levels of infrastructure and technology development and deployment. Carbon pricing and related policies harbor risks as well as opportunities, and a comprehensive analysis of the effects of carbon prices on our economies and societies must be carried out before considering any steps under the right economic conditions.

However, carbon pricing and markets in isolation will not be sufficient to mobilize all investments needed to support low-emissions pathways. It’s equally critical to ensure that fiscal support measures do not unlevel the playing field. Any support measures should be targeted, transparent, non-discriminatory, proportionate and with clear “exit strategies”.

Towards the common goal of carbon neutrality, it is essential to proceed with concrete actions, considering diverse pathways and each country’s different circumstances. Providing private sector input and on-the-ground insights from relevant disciplines - an indispensable basis for robust and evidence-based analysis - Business at OECD stands ready to further support the flagship Inclusive Forum on Carbon Mitigation Approaches (IFCMA).

Moreover, the OECD should promote the mobilization of sustainable finance and investment by ensuring that any taxonomies are well-designed, improve transparency, reduce market fragmentation, and minimize administrative burdens. In this regard, we caution however that funding efforts should not merely be labelled ‘green’ or ‘sustainable’, but they must be environmentally effective, give due consideration to transition pathways and generate virtuous circles.
6. Fostering Solution-Oriented Approaches to Emerging Challenges

The rapid development and adoption of new technologies - including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, machine learning, advanced robotics, biotechnology and genetic engineering, renewable energy and storage, and many others - provide groundbreaking opportunities to foster productivity, advance our societies and address emerging challenges. At the same time, related risks must be addressed.

Based on multistakeholder engagement, business looks to the OECD to foster international coherent and interoperable policy frameworks, promote and secure sustainable innovation and communications infrastructure, and address related risks through policy leadership and standard-setting.

We applaud the ongoing efforts to develop evidence-based policy frameworks for trustworthy AI that put into practice the OECD AI Principles, enable innovation, and facilitate efficient processes at the workplace. We support the establishment of more guardrails on AI and encourage the OECD to continue its effort in supporting the G7 Hiroshima Process, addressing generative AI and advanced AI systems, building upon the G7 Guiding Principles and Code of Conduct for AI developed last year, and monitoring the G7 Hiroshima Code of Conduct and Process, including by swiftly launching a pilot monitoring mechanism.

As AI will be developed and used across borders, we applaud the re-affirmation of the need to advance and reinforce interoperability between AI governance frameworks, and we believe urgent action is needed to ensure global reference points continue to be relevant for domestic regulatory action advancing toward implementation.

As cross-border data flows are essential for business of all sizes to innovate, we welcome the establishment of the new OECD multistakeholder community in response to the G7 call for Institutional Arrangement Partnership (IAP) to operationalize the advancement of Data Free Flow with Trust. We hope this new initiative will advance effective implementation of the OECD Declaration on Government Access to Personal Data Held by Private Sector Entities, and showcase the critical importance of trusted cross-border data flows for consumers, workers, businesses and governments alike.

Trusted cross-border data flows coincide with a pressing need for cyber security and protection of users’ privacy. A risk based approach to online and digital security that leverages international standards and aligns with the OECD Recommendation on Digital Security Risk Management for Economic and Social Prosperity, is essential to ensuring a secure, stable and resilient Internet ecosystem.

In a year of important elections taking place all around the world, combatting misinformation and disinformation is of the utmost importance for the integrity of our democratic societies. We encourage the OECD to use its expertise in evidence-based policy research to advise governments on enhancing their governance systems to uphold the integrity of information while protecting the freedom of expression and human rights of all, including consumers and businesses, in the digital age.

For business, enhancing trusted innovation also depends on effective implementation of intellectual property (IP) standards, their non-discriminatory implementation, and respect of fair value for returns. As business remains concerned about erosion of IP protections, the OECD should initiate new work on the economic effects of weak IP rights enforcement, with a view to strengthen a pro-innovation and competitive environment.

Public-private partnerships and a whole-of-government approach are needed to build modern high-performing patient-centric health systems which promote and reward prevention, harness the power of health data and incentivize innovation to increase health resilience and achieve global health goals. We urge the OECD, following their 2024 Declaration of Health Ministers, to define clear goals and foster cross-government cooperation including among employment, finance, innovation, and health ministries, in close partnership with business.
## OUR GLOBAL NETWORK

**Business at OECD (BIAC) National Members**

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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Australia</td>
<td>Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>Federation of Belgian Enterprises (VBO FEB)</td>
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