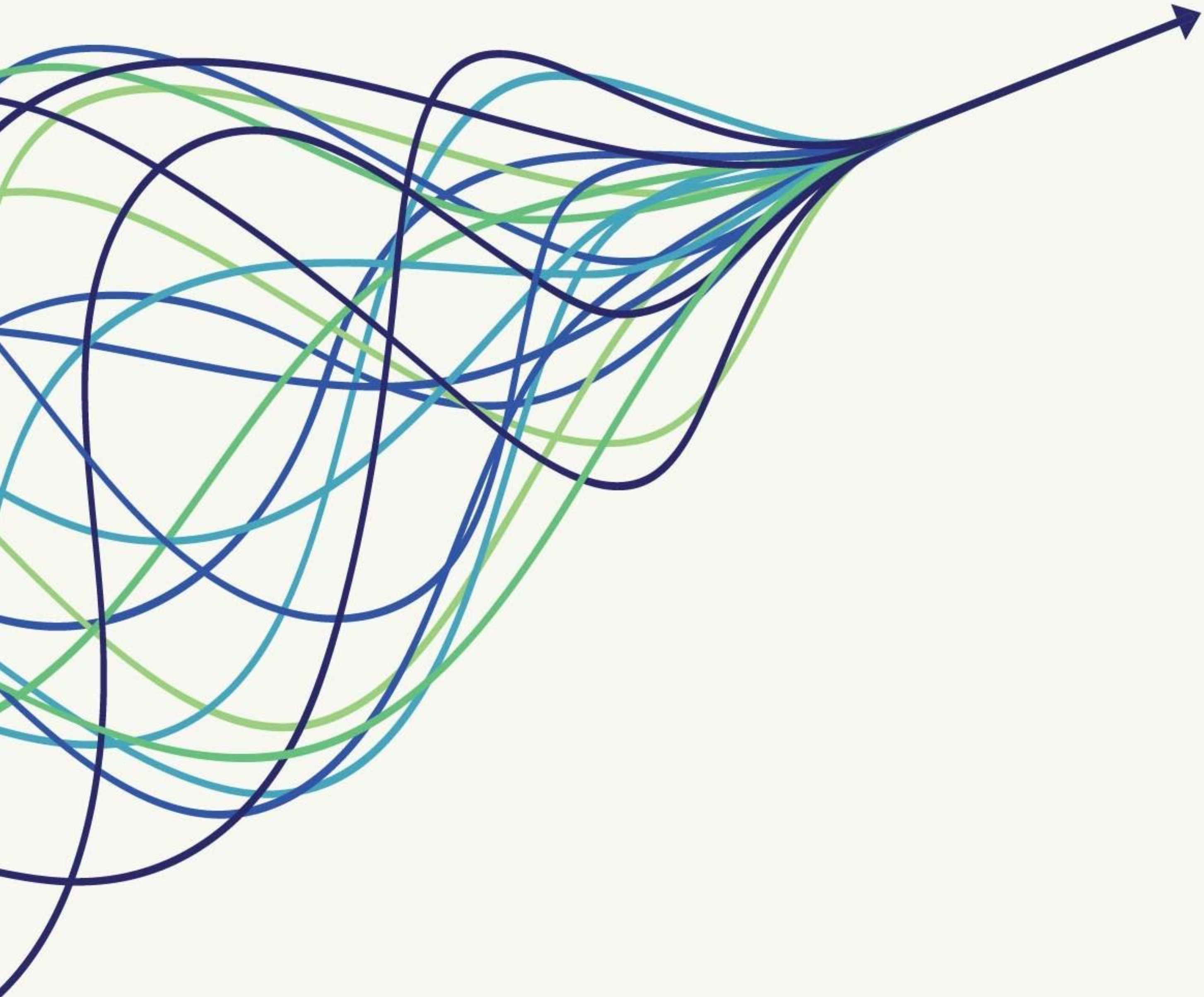
Business at OECD | Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD

Cutting Complexity

A Simplification Agenda for
Growth, Productivity, and Competitiveness



Annual Consultation with OECD Leadership and Ambassadors
Priorities Paper
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Contents

Key Recommendations

Business at OECD calls on the OECD and its member governments to drive an ambitious, comprehensive ***Simplification Agenda for Growth, Productivity and Competitiveness***. This should build on – but not be limited to – the following key recommendations:

Cutting Red Tape: Simplifying the Way of Doing Business

- **Launch an *OECD Horizontal Project on Regulatory Simplification***
  Mobilize all relevant Committees to deliver a cross-cutting "Simplifying for Success" initiative that rigorously reviews burdensome regulation and advances smarter, more coherent, evidence-based and proportionate rule-making.
- **Use the *Foundations for Growth & Competitiveness* initiative to drive reform action**
  Leverage this flagship OECD initiative to catalyze concrete government actions for pro-growth structural reforms across member countries, with a focus on practical implementation and measurable results.
- **Reduce complexity in international tax rules, including for the *Global Minimum Tax***
  Accelerate OECD initiatives to embark on a "decluttering" agenda to simplify international tax rules and compliance in light of the advent of the *Global Minimum Tax*, including through cutting administrative burdens, and eliminating duplicative reporting.

Clearing the Path: Unlocking Innovation and Economic Participation

- **Operationalise the *OECD AI Principles* building on the *Thriving with AI* project**
  Advance practical guidance and mechanisms for the adoption of trustworthy AI for competitiveness, convening policymakers, industry leaders, and standards bodies to promote interoperability, trust, security and innovation across sectors and borders.
- **Launch an *Initiative on Aligning Financial Systems with Innovation and Productivity***
  Support new initiatives that strengthen the financial systems' ability to drive innovation, boost productivity, and encourage long-term private investment in innovation.
- **Focus on mobilising all available workforce potential to safeguard competitiveness**
  Scale up OECD work to encourage greater labour market participation and boost employment rates, which is essential to economic competitiveness and the long-term sustainability of social security systems.

Dealing with Distortions: Addressing Government Intervention in Global Markets

- **Chart a clear, actionable and truly shared *OECD Vision for Market Openness***
  Reinforce OECD leadership to defend the rules-based trading system, modernize trade and investment rules, and address distortive measures. Regular OECD reviews of emerging industrial policy measures should prevent unintended market distortions.
- **Launch an *OECD Critical Minerals Action Plan* at the High-Level Meeting in Istanbul**
  Prioritize the security of supply, promote investment incentives, and ensure alignment across relevant OECD activities. On secondary sourcing, emergency action is needed to improve the implementation of the *Decision on Transboundary Movements of Wastes for Recovery*.
- **Ensure the *2009 OECD Guidelines on National Security* are fit for purpose**
  Ensure economic security policies are narrowly crafted, preserve open markets, maintain strong investor protections, including effective investor–state dispute settlement, and provide coordinated guidance on supply-chain resilience without undermining predictability for investors.

Introduction

In 2026, the *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)* must reaffirm market-driven prosperity to bolster economic stability. The OECD's figures show:

- **Declining growth rates:** Global GDP growth is projected to decrease from 3.3% in 2024, to 3.2% in 2025 and 2.9% in 2026.[i]
- **Persisting fiscal deficits**: Fiscal balances across the OECD recently averaged -4.6% of GDP, with historic levels of public debt, and rising debt service costs.[ii]
- **Looming downside risks:** Gold spot prices, traditionally an indicator of uncertainty, have risen in 2025 by around 40%.[i]

Regrettably, the fragility of OECD economies has been worsening, as excessive policy complexities undermine the very stability governments seek to restore. Over recent years, many governments have been expanding their reach with more rules, more spending, and more obligations on business. At the same time, global economic governance has been marked by less convergence, less clarity and less certainty for the private sector.

Going forward, the OECD must champion a Simplification Agenda for Growth, Productivity and Competitiveness.

For *Business at OECD* (BIAC) – representing the leading business federations in OECD countries and beyond – business success and the prosperity of citizens and communities go hand in hand. Business relies on smart policies to provide the foundation for trusted markets, dynamic competition, and economic participation.

However, when policy interventions become overly complex, they shift from enabling markets to constraining them. When policy complexity or misalignment leads to inefficiency and creates unintended consequences, it ultimately runs counter to the social, environmental and governmental objectives it often seeks to achieve. This constrains governments and businesses alike.

Recent on-the-ground business surveys consistently underline policy complexity as a key concern:

- **Policy complexity is excessively high, and it keeps on growing.** Business organisations from 90% of the countries surveyed consider the level of regulation and bureaucracy in their country to be excessive, and 77% report an increase over the last three years.[iii]
- **Policy complexity is not just about content, but also about processes:** Business organisations identify several sources of regulatory and administrative burden – such as reporting obligations, detailed content requirements, regulatory volatility, coordination gaps, and unclear compliance expectations.
- **Policy complexity is not just a domestic issue, but also an international one:** *Business at OECD* members name geopolitical uncertainty (85%) and trade and investment barriers (75%) among the most significant constraints on business and underline the need for international co-operation at OECD level.[iv]

In the year ahead, cutting complexities must become a top priority for the OECD and its member governments. As *Business at OECD* meets with OECD Ambassadors and Leadership at its Annual Consultation in February 2026, this paper highlights our joint recommendations for the OECD agenda going forward.

A Simplification Agenda for Growth, Productivity and Competitiveness

Business at OECD calls for a bold OECD agenda to cut complexity and boost competitiveness. This agenda should include, but not be limited to, three core elements:

1. **Cutting Red Tape**: Simplifying the Way of Doing Business
2. **Clearing the Path:** Unlocking Innovation and Economic Participation
3. **Dealing with Distortions**: Addressing Government Intervention in Global Markets

The following sections outline key business issues and priorities under each heading.

Cutting Red Tape: Simplifying the Way of Doing Business

Regulatory and administrative complexity has become one of the most significant deterrents to investment, innovation, and entrepreneurship across OECD economies. For businesses – especially SMEs – the accumulation of fragmented, conflicting, duplicative, disproportionate or outdated rules has turned compliance into a resource-draining endeavor, and not always a tool for market confidence.

This underscores the relevance of the OECD's longstanding leadership on *Better Regulation* – and the need for sustained focus, effective outreach and further progress by both the OECD and its member states. Better regulatory management is needed on both the current stock of regulation and the flow of new regulation. Yet, the OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook shows that key elements of the 12 *OECD Principles of Regulatory Policy and Governance* – especially Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and systematic ex-post evaluation – are still not being applied diligently.[1]

Fewer than 1 in 3 OECD countries have systematic processes to evaluate if rules actually achieve their intended objectives.[v]

The *Simplifying for Success* initiative is very timely as practical outcomes are needed. While simplification must aim to reduce complexity, it should also ensure that regulation is smart, evidence-based and focused on coherent, implementable outcomes and accountability, rather than prescriptive compliance that fails to reflect market realities. This means having agile, risk-based frameworks, using ex-post evaluation to cut disproportionate and outdated rules, and ensuring proportionate enforcement, and meaningful business engagement. *Business at OECD* urges the OECD to make *Simplifying for Success* an overarching priority, and launch a horizontal project across committees to drive reform and apply best practice principles at sector level.

Fragmented and divergent international regulations impose significant costs on business. Governments should strengthen cooperation in designing and implementing frameworks, in line with the *OECD*

[1] Even where RIAs occur, they often miss long-term enforcement costs, administrative burdens, public-sector expenses, and secondary effects, such as reduced entrepreneurship or unethical actors exploiting uneven enforcement. This highlights the need to better assess the full life-cycle impacts of regulation, including unintended consequences like risk-risk trade-offs, oversight burdens, and the diversion of resources away from investment and innovation.

Recommendation on International Regulatory Co-operation. The OECD should lead efforts to promote global coherence, support mutual recognition of standards as appropriate, and encourage common guidance or benchmarks. Incoherent standards, conflicting definitions, and duplicative reporting – in areas such as digital services, finance, sustainability, and tax – create friction and deter investment. Standards should remain proportionate and risk-based, with requirements calibrated to the materiality of risks rather than size alone. Greater cooperation among regulators at all levels is essential to build trust and ensure regulation is clear, proportionate, and predictable.

Clear, administrable tax rules are essential to support investment, trade, and competitiveness. Complex and fragmented tax systems raise compliance costs and uncertainty, particularly for cross-border business. Overlapping obligations, shifting interpretations, and time-consuming reporting remain major burdens. The OECD's "decluttering" agenda and its work on tax certainty and digitalisation – including through the *G20/OECD Inclusive Framework*, the *Forum on Tax Administration* (FTA) and the *FTA Amsterdam Dialogue* – are key to ensuring that international tax rules and associated tax compliance are consistent, coordinated, and not overly burdensome. *Business at OECD* welcomes acceleration of the OECD's decluttering agenda including progress on safe harbours and calls for simplified reporting for *Pillar Two*, and updated guidance on the taxation of an increasingly mobile workforce **that provides greater legal tax certainty to** reflect new ways of working.

Taxpayers contact their tax administrations about 450 million times via telephone, in-person, e-mail or paper, and more than 2.3 billion times online per year.[vi]

Excessive bureaucracy – from cumbersome procedures to duplicative reporting – slows both government and business efficiency. Reforms to improve government services delivery have fallen short, leaving businesses, especially SMEs, struggling with unclear forms, inconsistent requirements, and fragmented systems. The OECD should use its *Government Unstuck* initiative to champion efforts that streamline public administration, cut unnecessary red tape, and leverage digital technologies and AI to modernize processes. *Business at OECD* calls on the OECD to help governments assess current practices and build the capacity needed to simplify administrative procedures and deliver faster, more effective public services.

SMEs represent around 99% of firms in OECD countries and generate 50–60% of value added – yet face disproportionately high regulatory and administrative burdens.[vii]

Simplification only works when governments engage early on with those being regulated. Without timely business input rules can be misaligned with operational realities. Structured, transparent consultation from design through review helps avoid unintended costs, improve implementation, and foster accountability. The OECD should support members in making business engagement central to good governance – including in areas related to economic security to avoid negative spillover effects.

Engaging with the private sector is critical to drive credible and effective responsible business conduct frameworks. Following the adoption of the revised *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct*, *Business at OECD* will continue to advocate for **stronger policy coherence, ensure OECD initiatives stay**

grounded in business realities, and focus on practical application. We underline that due diligence guidance must avoid overwhelming companies with excessive or duplicative requirements. In this context, the *OECD Inclusive Platform on Due Diligence Policy Cooperation* can be a vehicle to foster coherence across jurisdictions.

Nearly 1 in 2 companies dedicate at least 25% of their total sustainability-related spending to prepare ESG disclosures for diverging frameworks.[viii]

We also underline that not all policy goals require formal government intervention. In many cases, voluntary standards, codes of conduct, and market-based tools can achieve outcomes efficiently and flexibly. These approaches are often better suited to fast-moving or highly innovative sectors, where rigid rules risk becoming outdated quickly. The OECD should promote the smart use of non-regulatory tools as part of its simplification agenda.

Clearing the Path: Unlocking Innovation and Economic Participation

Barriers to innovation and economic participation are holding back growth and resilience across OECD economies. Regulatory bottlenecks, skills gaps, and infrastructure shortfalls limit the ability of businesses and individuals to seize opportunities across sectors. Unlocking innovation and expanding economic participation go beyond the development of cutting-edge technologies; they require a comprehensive policy response to address these challenges.

Since the late 1990s, growth in potential output per capita has declined by about one percentage point across the OECD.[ix]

Fostering innovation requires a mix of targeted R&D investment and streamlined regulation. Governments should adopt pro-innovation principles such as technology neutrality and outcome-based policy design, and allow for policy experimentation – for example through regulatory sandboxes. Existing rules often remain a burden and create uncertainty, deterring private investment in emerging sectors and slowing experimentation. The OECD should support open and rules-based innovation ecosystems by advancing policy and economic research, promoting interoperable regulations, and encouraging open markets. It should also provide guidance on balancing openness and security in research while safeguarding scientific collaboration.

Digital transformation is an engine of productivity, but inconsistent rules, especially on data flows and cybersecurity requirements, increase costs and legal

uncertainty for business. Governments should streamline digital regulations, reduce barriers to data flows, and promote cooperation between data protection authorities to build trust and coherence. The OECD should support these efforts by promoting clarity and simplicity in digital rules, and championing the trusted, cross-border flow of data. Addressing cybersecurity fragmentation must also be a priority, with interoperable policies that reduce compliance complexity while strengthening resilience.

AI adoption remains uneven. The OECD should encourage AI adoption across sectors, support the development of enabling infrastructure, and promote private R&D and innovation diffusion by analysing the drivers of productivity and firm-level uptake. Governments should adopt a coordinated and risk-based approach to AI regulation that fosters trust. The *OECD AI* principles should guide developments and implementation, helping members align governance while enabling responsible innovation and global interoperability.

As an example, innovative approaches such as precision farming and the use of AI are central to the development of more competitive and resilient agri-food systems. However, wide adoption is lagging, held back by regulatory fragmentation, insufficient connectivity infrastructures, and red tape. Governments should invest in rural digital infrastructure and incentivise adoption by all players, including smallholders, by adopting smart, interoperable regulation. The OECD should continue analysing the economic impact of digital farming and provide guidance to accelerate uptake across agri-food value chains.

Reliable, affordable energy is not just essential as AI drives rising demand, but as the backbone of our economies at large. Yet permitting delays, infrastructure gaps, and regulatory fragmentation are slowing energy investments. Governments must urgently speed up approvals, invest in grids and storage, and align energy policy with innovation needs. The OECD should support reforms to scale energy systems – as high energy prices are fueling real concerns about deindustrialization in several OECD economies.

Mobilising investment for the clean-energy transition also requires coordinated, country-led public-private funding platforms. These mechanisms can consolidate fragmented funding, strengthen digital and institutional infrastructure, and direct capital toward scalable transition projects. *Business at OECD*, together with the B20 and IOE, has underlined how such approaches can accelerate deployment and support long-term productivity.[x]

2 800 GW of solar and wind projects are waiting for a future connection.[xi] This is more than 2/3 of the total renewable capacity installed worldwide.[xii]

Health should be recognized as a strategic economic investment, not just a cost. Strong and resilient health systems improve productivity, increase workforce participation, and support long-term fiscal stability – but these gains are often underestimated. Governments should focus on prevention, early intervention, and value-based care. The OECD should assess the economic returns on health spending and develop practical tools to help Finance and Health Ministries treat health investment as a driver of growth.

Skills gaps continue to constrain innovation and participation across OECD economies. Education and training systems are often slow to adapt, with mismatches growing in fast-changing sectors. Governments must better align curricula with labour market needs, expand vocational and dual training pathways, and foster targeted reskilling and upskilling systems to support smooth workforce transitions. Early career guidance and skills-based hiring should be promoted.

Lack of participation in labour markets remains a serious concern and needs to be addressed by tackling skills mismatches and strengthening incentives to "make work pay," including through modernised tax and social benefit systems. Inflexible employment rules, fragmented benefits, and outdated policy models can discourage participation and limit mobility. Governments should update labour regulations to support higher participation and easier transitions between jobs domestically and across borders, including through international portability of qualifications. The OECD should help guide reforms that reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, respect diverse national systems, and promote the efficient and well-targeted use of public resources.

To shape the future of work, OECD economies must harness innovation and the potential of technologies to enhance productivity and job quality. The OECD should lead on responsible deployment of workplace technologies — ensuring tools are used transparently, ethically, and to support better decision-making. At the same time, greater labour mobility and legal labour migration pathways will be needed to respond to demographic shifts. A comprehensive approach should also remove employment barriers and close participation gaps, where they arise.

Market openness may affect workers – both through opportunity and adjustment. But closing markets also carries costs: lower competitiveness, fewer jobs, and weaker resilience. The OECD should help governments keep markets open while supporting workers through transition.

What Role for Industrial Policy in Market-Based OECD Economies?

For the OECD's market-based economies, governments have a primary role to ensure the efficient functioning of markets. To this end, improving general conditions for global business – including through a comprehensive simplification and competitiveness agenda – should be the first priority.

When markets cannot deal with important economic, social or environmental challenges on their own, industrial policies may play a role. However, it is essential to avoid excessive costs to the economy as a whole: budget deficits; reduced competition; market-distortions; mistrust in the rules-based trading system; and others.

To ensure industrial policies are beneficial, they must be designed narrowly, with clear objectives, transparency, and broad-based private sector input to prevent capture by short-term political agendas, which may prioritize visibility over effective long-term benefits.

When developed, industrial policies should in principle be designed in a proportionate, targeted and transparent manner – with sunset clauses and clear "exit strategies". Industrial policies should respect competitive neutrality and uphold non-discrimination. The expanded use of industrial policy to advantage domestic champions has deleterious impacts for the global level playing field. In this regard, *Business at OECD* looks forward to discussing industrial policy, economic security and market distortions at the *2026 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting*.

Dealing with Distortions: Addressing Government Intervention in Global Markets

A surge in government intervention in international markets – including subsidies, tariffs, non-tariff measures and investment screening – is adding complexity and uncertainty for business. While some measures aim to address national security risks, they often lack transparency or coordination, distorting competition and deterring investment. The OECD must lead in restoring openness, predictability, and trust in global economic rules. For this, ***Business at OECD*** **calls for a clear actionable and shared OECD vision for the future of trade policy.**

823 new trade measures by G20 economies were recorded between mid-October 2024 and mid-October 2025 – the highest number since monitoring began in 2009. [xiii]

Fair competition is the foundation of open markets. Yet, distortive subsidies, industrial policies, and non-transparent government interventions are tilting the playing field – both domestically and globally. Strategic sectors are increasingly shaped by state preferences, while businesses face market access restrictions and growing compliance burdens. Against this background, the OECD must lead efforts to map and benchmark distortive government support and enhance transparency and accountability across global value chains.

In this context, **transparent and predictable export credit frameworks are essential to fair competition in global trade**. *Business at OECD* supports the *OECD Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits* and welcomes its recent modernization. However, implementation has lagged, with rising administrative burdens undermining its effectiveness. The *Arrangement* and *Common Approaches for Officially Supported Export Credits and Environmental and Social Due Diligence* must remain practical, accessible, and focused on enabling cross-border deals. The OECD should maintain close dialogue with business to ensure the *Arrangement* supports a level playing field and adapts to evolving market needs.

Recent crises have underscored the resilience of supply chains, and government interventions must not undermine openness. Calls for reshoring and broad decoupling risk introducing inefficiencies, distorting markets, and undermining international cooperation. Governments should continue to support diversified and connected supply chains, underpinned by ambitious rules-based trade and investment agreements. The OECD can help by facilitating public-private dialogue, and providing guidance on how to design economic security measures narrowly, with the lowest adversarial impact and thereby discouraging unilateral responses disguised as resilience strategies.

Re-localisation could decrease global trade by more than 18%, and global real GDP by more than 5% – with no consistent improvements in resilience. [xiv]

Digital trade is a key driver of resilience, yet policy fragmentation is rising. Diverging approaches to data localisation, privacy, platform regulation, and cross-border services are increasing uncertainty and compliance costs. The OECD should reinforce its role as a platform for convergence on digital trade rules – including for trusted free data flows, interoperability of standards, and non-discrimination in digital markets – and promote a permanent moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions.

Efficient trade procedures are another key element for resilience. Border delays, inconsistent customs rules, and excessive paperwork disrupt supply chains and raise costs. As governments pursue resilience, they must not neglect facilitation. The OECD should reinforce digitalisation, risk-based border management, and implementation of the *WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement*.

A 10% improvement in automating border procedures, streamlined documentation and stronger co-operation at the border can boost goods exports by up to 18%. [xv]

Securing critical minerals is essential, as trade restrictions, limited processing capacity, and reliance on a few economies have exposed strategic vulnerabilities. *Business at OECD* supports OECD outreach to non-member economies, and looks forward to participating in the upcoming *High-Level Meeting on Critical Minerals* in Istanbul. At the same time, the OECD must take stronger downstream action to advance the circular economy. Its legally binding instrument – the *OECD Decision on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Wastes for Recovery Operations* – plays a critical role in enabling secondary inputs. Governments must take emergency action to ensure this is effectively implemented.

National security has become central to economic policy – but if not carefully calibrated, risk-based approaches can lead to fragmentation and overreach. The proliferation of inward and outward investment screening regimes, often based on vague or evolving criteria, creates uncertainty and administrative burden. The OECD should promote clarity and consistency in security-related measures, building on its existing 2009 *OECD Guidelines for Recipient Country Investment Policies relating to National Security* to help governments safeguard legitimate interests without undermining openness and investor confidence.

At the same time, the global investment environment has become increasingly uncertain, marked by geopolitical tensions, high capital costs, and legal fragmentation. This undermines cross-border investment – a vital driver of innovation, productivity, and sustainable development. *Business at OECD* calls on the OECD to focus on creating sound enabling conditions: improving legal certainty, streamlining permits, addressing fragmentation in e.g. ESG-related regulations, and ensuring efficient administrative procedures.

Access to financing is increasingly hindered by fragmented cross-border regulatory frameworks. Divergent disclosure rules, inconsistent sustainable finance taxonomies, and shifting supervisory expectations raise costs and deter investment. The OECD should promote clearer and more interoperable regulatory frameworks to give firms the certainty needed to transition and mobilise capital at scale.

A predictable legal environment is essential for mobilising private investment. Yet the erosion of investor protections and politicised debate over international investment agreements and investment protection have stalled progress. The OECD should reaffirm the positive value of investment treaties and investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms – as tools that enable FDI by ensuring fair treatment, reducing risk, and upholding the rule of law.

A major challenge for our economies is illicit trade, which distorts markets, weakens competitiveness, and undermines consumer trust – especially as supply chains reorganize and digital platforms are misused. The OECD should address this issue as a priority and further expand analysis beyond counterfeits to include other illicit goods. This requires strengthening public-private cooperation and promoting voluntary frameworks to counter illicit trade in online marketplaces. Building on its partnership with *Business at OECD*, the OECD must help close regulatory gaps and support governments in designing trade policies that safeguard market integrity.

Around the globe, corruption remains a significant problem, which erodes trust, distorts markets, and jeopardises development. The OECD should prioritise additional adherence to the *Anti-Bribery Convention* and support national anti-corruption strategies. Efforts must also focus on demand-side enforcement, the uptake of digital tools such as AI, integrity training, and practical support for SMEs. *Business at OECD's Zero Corruption Manifesto* outlines clear recommendations to advance this agenda.

Conclusion

As OECD economies face mounting headwinds – from slowing productivity and skills shortages to rising trade tensions and policy fragmentation – the need for coordinated, pro-growth action has become more urgent than ever. *Business at OECD* calls on the Organisation to launch a comprehensive simplification agenda to foster growth, productivity and overall competitiveness.

The OECD plays a central role in rebuilding confidence in open markets, competitive economies, and rules-based international cooperation. This requires moving beyond diagnostics to bold, implementable reforms that cut complexity, foster innovation, and restore trust in market-driven solutions. Embedding these efforts in strong principles for the governance of markets – including on better regulation and a shared commitment to integrity – and embracing cutting-edge technologies and digital tools will further strengthen their impact.

The OECD's comparative strength lies in its convening power, evidence-based analysis, and ability to drive policy coherence across disciplines and borders. In 2026, the Organization must apply these capabilities to support members in delivering smarter regulation, better conditions for doing business, and a level global playing field. This requires advancing bilateral and plurilateral cooperation, and enabling domestic structural reform across labour, energy, digital, and investment policy.

To remain effective and relevant, the OECD must ensure its work drives real-world outcomes. That means translating analysis into actionable guidance, supporting implementation at the national level, and focusing on reforms that directly enhance productivity, investment, and participation.

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Ukraine	**Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry**
Ukraine	**Ukrainian League of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs**
Ukraine	**Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs (SUP)**

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