

Employment conditions of civil servants and other public employees

Governments employ people in a variety of ways through different types of employment contract, or “contractual modality”. One of the most common distinctions is between people hired as statutory civil servants (usually governed by a distinct legal framework) and other employees hired under a different type of legal framework, such as the private sector labour law, with different employment conditions. Employment modalities can affect pay, job security, performance evaluation and access to training, among others. They also have a clear impact on the effectiveness of public employment systems in attracting and retaining skilled employees, and motivating them to contribute at the best of their potential to the production of good governance outcomes. If used well, different employment modalities can give public services the flexibility they need to develop and manage a workforce with the appropriate range of skills. However, without a clear understanding of the ideal mix of modalities and employment contracts for various occupational functions, public administrations risk fragmentation of their internal labour market.

A common trend in most OECD countries is for central government administrations to be staffed mainly by civil servants. The average share of civil servants in central administration across OECD countries where data were available was 68% in 2018. In Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland, people who work in central government administrations apart from external consultants and temporary workers are all civil servants. On the other end of the spectrum, Sweden does not distinguish between civil servants and “other employees”. Similarly, Denmark, Mexico and Ireland, too, count relatively few statutory civil servants in their central public administration. The importance of this distinction derives from the fact that the roles and responsibilities of civil servants and other public employees vary greatly from country to country.

In 67% of OECD countries, civil servants are reported to have more job security compared to other public employees. Civil servants also undergo a more rigorous recruitment process in 58% of the cases, have greater access to career advancement opportunities and have a different pay scale. Slightly less than half of OECD countries have a specific performance management regime for civil servants and, in 39% of countries, specific values and ethical standards apply to civil servants. When it comes to health insurance and pension rights, there appears to be less difference between civil servants and other public employees.

The policy challenges of the future will require a continuous reassessment of the mix of skills and competences in the civil service (OECD, 2017). Clear and transparent employment modalities, aligned to the job and labour

market, are key to prospective candidates and retain in-house talent in the public sector, particularly in areas where there could be skills shortages.

Methodology and definitions

Data were initially collected through the 2016 OECD Survey on Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM) and updated in 2019. Most respondents were senior officials in central government human resources management (HRM) departments, and data refer to HRM practices in central government. The survey was completed by all OECD countries, as well as the OECD accession countries Colombia and Costa Rica. Considerable variation in definitions of the civil service, as well as the organisations governed at the central level of government, exists. In this survey, civil servants are only those public employees covered under a specific public legal framework or other specific provisions, whereas the category of other employees covers the persons hired under a different type of legal framework, such as the private sector labour law, with different employment conditions. The data do not capture consultants contracted under a different employment framework in the public sector.

Further reading

OECD (2019), *Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability*, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.

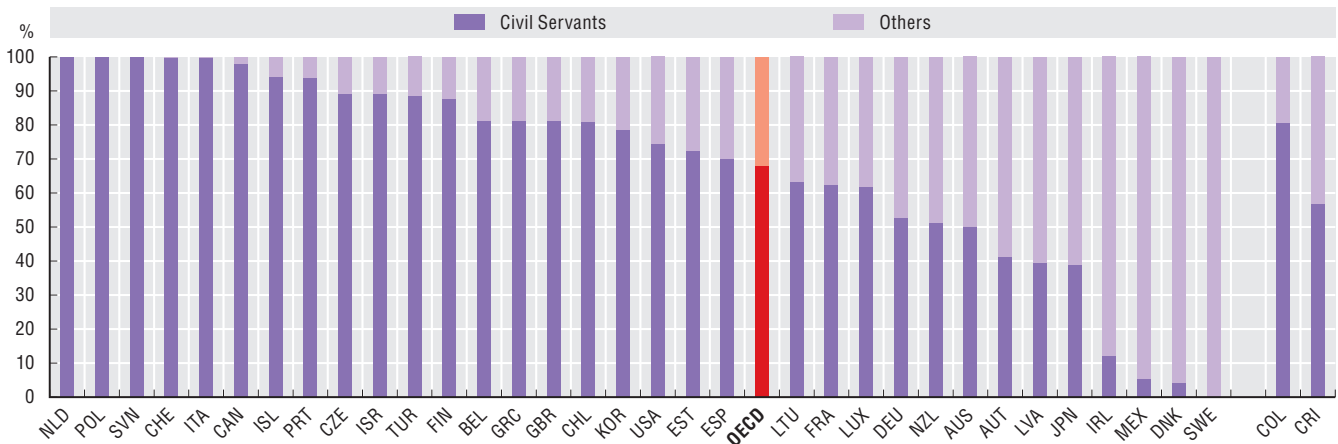
OECD (2017), *Skills for a High Performing Civil Service*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264280724-en>

Figure notes

Data for, Iceland, Turkey and Colombia refer to 2016. On data for Israel, see <http://doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

6.1. Data for Denmark, Israel, Japan, Mexico and New Zealand refer to 2019. Data for France, Germany, Korea and Poland refer to 2017. Data for Italy, Latvia, and the United States refer to 2016. Data for Slovenia refer to 2015. Data on other public employees were not available for Hungary, Norway and the Slovak Republic. For Korea, data for civil servants were compiled by the Ministry of Personnel Management and data for ‘other public employees’ were compiled by the Ministry of Employment and Labour. For Portugal, ‘other public employees’ includes executive limited-term managers. Civil servants defined as civil public employees covered under a specific public legal framework or other specific provisions refers in Denmark to “tjenstemænd”.

6.1. Civil servants and other employees in central administrations, 2018



Source: OECD (2019), OECD Survey on Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM).

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032529>

6.2. Differences in employment frameworks for civil servants compared to other employees in central administrations, 2019

	Civil servants have									
	More...				Better...		Specific...		Different...	
	job security	health insurance	training opportunities	career advancement opportunities	vigorous recruitment process	retirement pensions	values and ethical standards	performance management	pay scales	
Australia	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Austria	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	■
Belgium	■	■	□	■	■	■	□	□	□	□
Canada	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Chile	■	□	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	■
Czech Republic	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	■	■	■
Denmark	■	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	□
Estonia	□	□	□	□	■	□	■	□	□	□
Finland	■	□	□	□	□	□	■	□	□	□
France	■	□	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	■
Germany	■	■	□	■	■	■	■	□	□	■
Greece	□	□	□	■	■	□	□	■	□	□
Hungary	■	□	■	■	□	□	■	■	■	■
Iceland	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Ireland	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	■	■	■
Israel	■	□	■	■	□	■	□	□	□	■
Italy	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	■	■
Japan	□	x	x	■	x	x	■	■	■	■
Korea	■	□	■	■	■	x	■	■	■	■
Latvia	■	□	□	■	■	□	□	□	□	□
Lithuania	■	□	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	■
Luxembourg	■	□	□	■	■	■	■	□	□	■
Mexico	■	□	□	■	■	□	□	■	□	□
Netherlands	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
New Zealand	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Norway	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	□	□
Poland	■	□	■	□	■	□	■	■	■	■
Portugal	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Slovak Republic	■	□	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	■
Slovenia	□	□	□	■	■	□	□	□	□	□
Spain	■	□	□	■	■	□	□	□	□	■
Sweden	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Switzerland	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Turkey	■	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	■	■
United Kingdom	□	□	□	□	□	□	■	■	■	■
United States	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	■	■	■
OECD Total										
Yes ■	24	6	11	20	20	8	14	17	21	
No □	12	29	24	16	15	27	22	19	15	
Not applicable x		1	1		1	2				
Colombia	■	□	■	□	□	□	□	■	■	■
Costa Rica	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

Source: OECD (2019), OECD Survey on Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM).

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032548>



From:
Government at a Glance 2019

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccf5c38-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2019), “Employment conditions of civil servants and other public employees”, in *Government at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b697075d-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.