

Gender equality in public sector employment

The OECD Recommendations on Public Service Leadership and Capability and on Gender Equality in Public Life underscore the need to build diverse workforces and ensure equal opportunities for under-represented groups. Equal representation of women and men in the public sector is a key indicator of progress towards diversity and gender equality, and is needed if public policies and services are to adequately reflect the interests of all members of the society.

In 2020, women made up a larger share of public sector employees in OECD countries on average (58.9%) than of total employment (45.4%) and this was the case in all OECD countries except Austria and Luxembourg. The difference is more than 20 percentage points in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark (Figure 12.3). One reason for this phenomenon is that some public sector occupations, such as teachers or nurses, are female dominated as they are often traditionally considered “women’s jobs”. Although the share of women in the public sector workforce increased between 2011 and 2020 by +1.8 p.p. across OECD countries, many countries are taking steps to eliminate this occupational segregation and tackle gender stereotypes (OECD, 2019).

Only 8 out of 26 OECD-EU countries, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia achieved gender parity in senior management positions in central administrations in 2021 (Figure 12.4). On average across OECD-EU countries, 40.8% of senior positions were held by women in 2021. Since 2011, the share of women in senior positions grew in most countries, except Hungary and the Slovak Republic, where it fell slightly. The increase was greatest in Finland, where the share of women in senior management more than doubled between 2011 and 2021, from 24.4% to 56.3%. However, in almost all OECD-EU countries, the share of women in senior management positions is lower than for public sector employment as a whole, possibly indicating difficulties in climbing the leadership ladder in the public sector. Policies that could contribute to achieving gender balance in the most senior levels of administration include developing a diversity strategy or setting hiring and promotion targets for women.

Methodology and definitions

Data on public sector employment are from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) ILOSTAT (database). Data are based on the Labour Force Survey unless otherwise indicated. Public sector employment covers employment in general government plus employment in publicly owned resident enterprises and companies. Data represent the total number of people employed directly by those institutions,

without regard to the particular type of employment and working hours.

Data on senior management positions by gender in national administrations are from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Gender Statistics (database). National administrations cover central administrations, also referred to as ministries and/or departments of a national government led by a minister. Data on women and men in decision-making (WMID) authorities refer to senior positions as the sum of level 1 and level 2 administrators: level 1 administrators include all administrative (non-political) positions from the head of the ministry down to the level of head of directorate or similar, where a directorate is a major section within the ministry; level 2 administrators include all positions below the head of directorate down to the level of head of division/department, where a division/department is the first level of organisation below the directorate (i.e. the second level of functional organisation). This classification differs from the classification and definition of occupations as described in Annex F.

Further reading

- OECD (2023), *Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5b378e11-en>.
- OECD (2021), *Public Employment and Management 2021: The Future of the Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/938f0d65-en>.
- OECD (2019), “Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability”, *OECD Legal Instruments*, OECD, Paris, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.
- Nolan-Flecha, N. (2019), “Next generation diversity and inclusion policies in the public service: Ensuring public services reflect the societies they serve”, *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 34, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/51691451-en>.

Figure notes

- 12.3. Data for the Czech Republic, Ireland, New Zealand and Slovenia are not available. Data for Germany and Brazil are based on administrative records or continuous national household surveys. Data for Iceland, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are not included in the average. Data for Belgium, Germany, Korea, Japan, Poland, Spain and Indonesia are for 2019 rather than 2020. Data for Hungary and Luxembourg are for 2018 rather than 2020.
- 12.4. Data refer to the OECD-EU countries plus Iceland, Norway the United Kingdom and Türkiye.

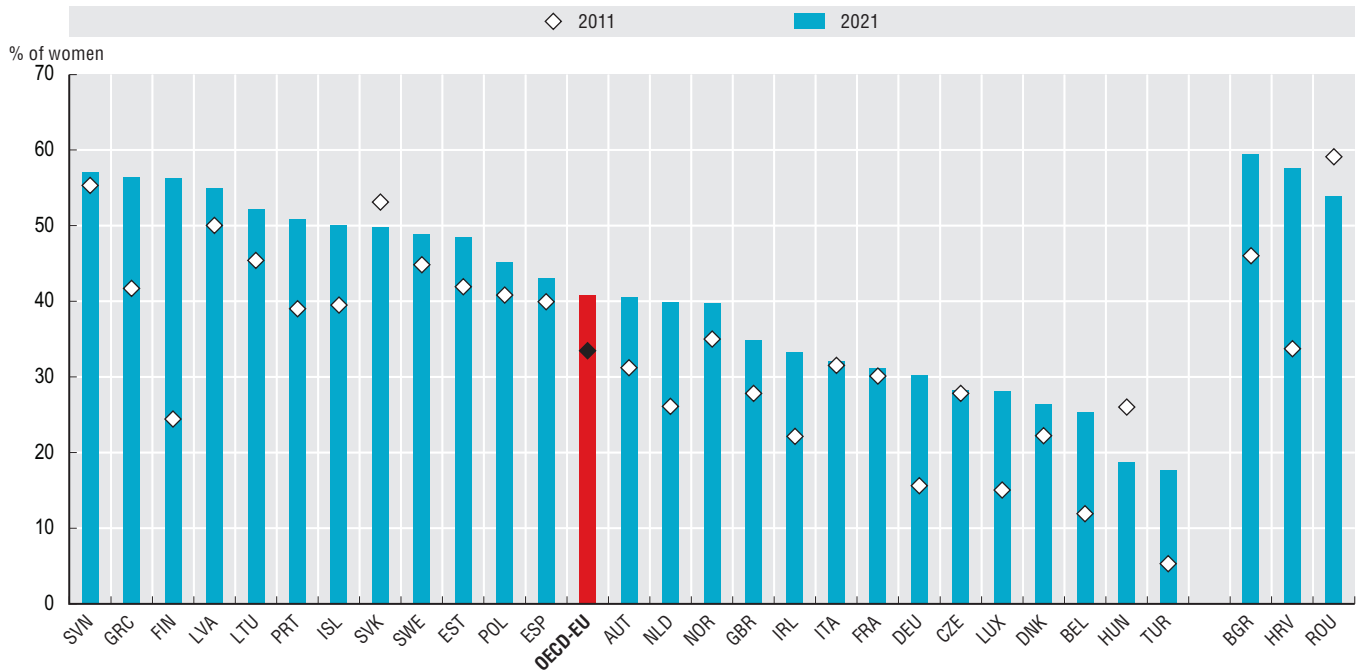
12.3. Gender equality in public sector employment and in total employment, 2011 and 2020



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO) ILOSTAT (database), *Employment by sex and institutional sector*. Data for Italy, Iceland and Portugal were provided by national authorities.

StatLink <https://stat.link/xb0mk9>

12.4. Gender equality in senior management positions in national administrations, 2011 and 2021



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Gender Statistics (database); *Women and men in decision-making (WMID) authorities*.

StatLink <https://stat.link/98kdun>



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