

Gender equality in public sector employment

A diverse and inclusive workforce can help to strengthen government performance by boosting innovation and enhancing core public service values (Nolan-Flecha, 2019). It can increase public service quality by providing services that reflect and meet the needs of the community, improving social dialogue and communication. The OECD Recommendations on Public Service Leadership and Capability and on Gender Equality in Public Life underscore the need to build diverse – including gender-diverse – workplaces and ensure equal access to under-represented groups. Equal representation of women and men in the public sector is a key indicator of progress towards gender equality and diversity.

In 2019, women made up a larger share of public sector employees in OECD countries on average (58%) than of total employment (45%) and this was the case in all OECD countries except Japan, Luxembourg and Turkey. The difference is more than 20 p.p. in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark (Figure 3.7). 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”. Many OECD countries are taking steps to eliminate this occupational segregation and tackle gender stereotypes (OECD, 2019b).

Few OECD countries achieve gender parity in senior central government positions (Figures 3.8 and 3.9). On average, 37% of senior positions are held by women. Latvia, Sweden, and Greece have the largest share of women in senior positions (53-56%) while Japan (4%) and Korea (9%) have the smallest. In almost all OECD countries, the share of women in middle and senior management is lower than for other central government positions, possibly indicating difficulties in climbing the leadership ladder. Only in Sweden do women make up a larger share of middle and senior management positions than for other central government positions, although in Colombia, Greece and Latvia, the share in middle management positions is larger than for other positions (Figure 3.8).

Since 2015, the share of women in senior positions grew in most countries, except France, Mexico, Poland and Lithuania, where it fell slightly. The increase was the greatest in the Slovak Republic (15 p.p.), Spain (14 p.p.) and Sweden (11 p.p.) (Figure 3.9). Policies that aim at gender balance in the most senior levels of administration, such as developing a diversity strategy or setting hiring targets for women, can attract more women into these roles. This will also contribute to more gender-responsive policy making.

Methodology and definitions

Data on public sector employment are from the 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 central government by position and gender were collected through the 2020 Composition of the Workforce in Central/Federal Governments survey and refer to the situation on 1 January 2020. Most respondents were senior officials in central government HRM departments, and data refer to HRM practices in central government. The survey was completed by all OECD countries except Iceland, one OECD accession country (Costa Rica), Brazil and Romania. Data are missing for Chile and Turkey. Definitions of public service as well as the organisations governed at the central level of government vary widely, which should be considered when making comparisons. For definitions of the occupation levels please refer to Annex D. Data for other positions in Figure 3.8 refer to all central administration positions, excluding senior and middle managers.

Further reading

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>.

OECD (2019a), *Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability*, OECD, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/%20en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.

OECD (2019b), *Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/g2g9faa5-en>.

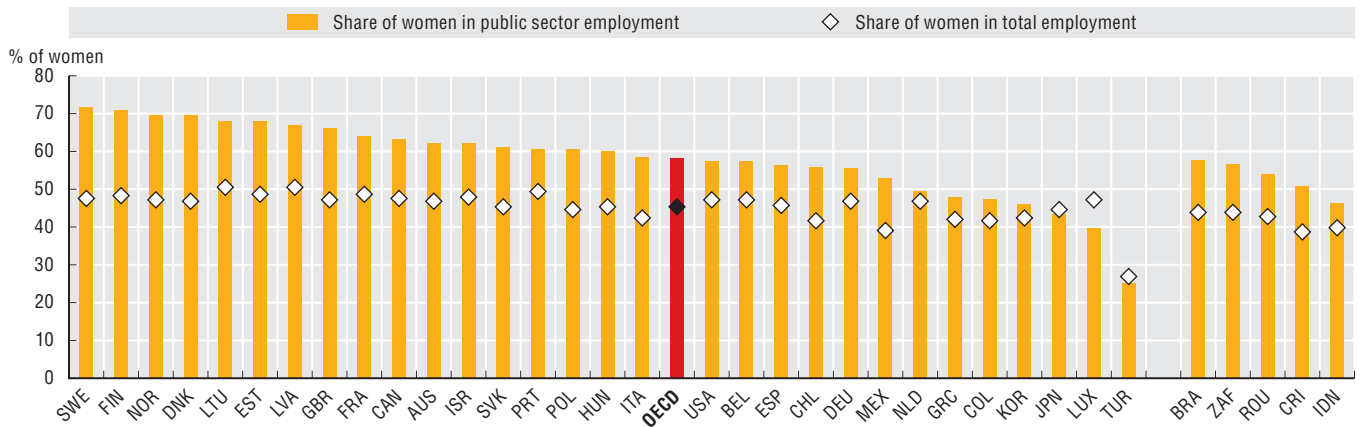
Figure notes

3.7. Data for Austria, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Slovenia and Switzerland are not available. Data for Denmark, Germany and Latvia are based on administrative records or establishment survey. Data for Hungary, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom are for 2018. Data for Australia and Turkey are for 2017.

3.8. Data for middle management are not available for Austria and Luxembourg, so other positions refer to all central positions excluding senior managers. Data on middle management in Hungary reflect all management positions.

3.8 and 3.9. Data for Hungary are for 2018. Data for France refer to 31 December 2018. Data for Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Poland refer to December 2019. Data for Denmark and Finland refer to February 2020. Data for Colombia refer to March 2020. Data for Korea refer to December 31 2020. Data for Chile, Iceland and Turkey are not available. Senior management data for Austria refer only to D1.

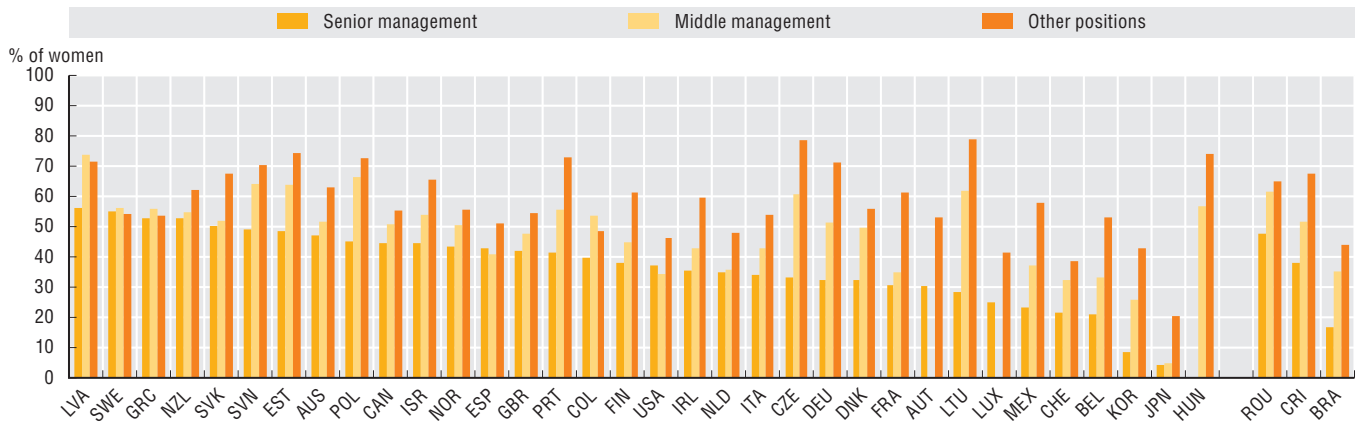
3.7. Gender equality in public sector employment and in total employment, 2019



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

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257451>

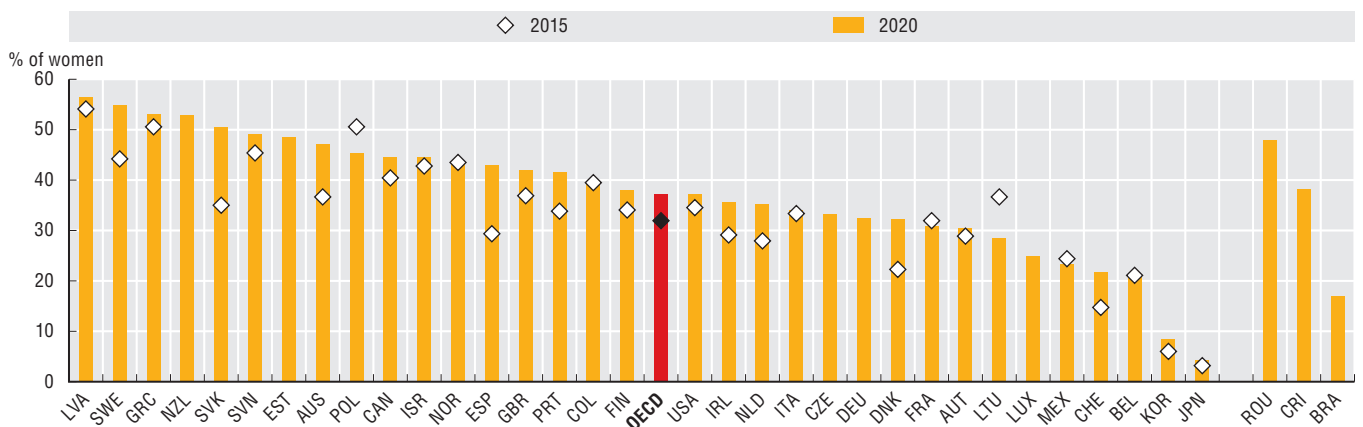
3.8. Gender equality by positions in central governments, 2020



Source: OECD (2020), *Survey on the Composition of the Workforce in Central/Federal Governments*.

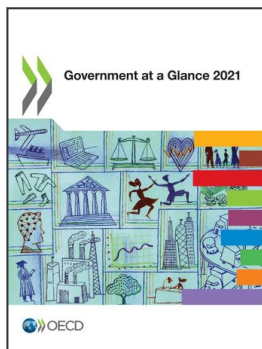
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257470>

3.9. Gender equality in senior management positions in central governments, 2015 and 2020



Source: OECD (2020) *Survey on the Composition of the Workforce in Central/Federal Governments*; OECD (2016), *Survey on the Composition of the Workforce in Central/Federal Governments*.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257489>



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