

Learning and development in the civil service

Historically, the recruitment and development model of the public sector in many countries has been to recruit at entry-level and develop civil servants through specific training. However, cuts to training budgets implemented during recent periods of austerity have reduced access to traditional classroom training in many OECD countries (OECD, 2016). Nevertheless, strategic and targeted learning and development investments are essential for public services to keep up with fast-changing demands of citizens and technological advancements. Furthermore, access to learning opportunities can be an important attractor and motivator for high-performing civil servants. The 2019 OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability recommends that adherents create a learning culture and environment in the public service that extends well beyond traditional classroom training.

In 2019, around 61% of OECD countries (22 out of 36) have civil-service-wide training strategies or action plans – an increase from slightly less than half in 2016. In 2016, Portugal revised its approach to skills development in the civil service: the current civil service-wide training strategy includes initial training (compulsory for most staff), continuous training and self-training. Even more, about 70% of countries develop organisational learning plans within the central public administration. However, only half of the countries (18) require civil servants themselves to develop individual learning plans. The data suggest a focus on executive leadership training and coaching as a training priority, and that mixed learning models are increasingly sought after. Coaching and mentoring for non-executives is a training priority in eleven OECD countries, such as Germany and Korea.

Used strategically, mobility programmes can be a part of learning and development initiatives, and a valuable development tool for staff and organisations. However, less than half of OECD countries have specific programmes to encourage mobility in the civil service. In turn, less than one-third of OECD countries reported civil servants having the right to a minimum amount of time to pursue training initiatives each year.

These data suggest a wide recognition of the importance of learning and development in OECD countries, as seen, for example, in the number of civil services that now have civil-service-wide training strategies. The prioritisation of training for executive leadership in two-thirds of OECD countries demonstrates the important role of this group

as catalysts for strategic reforms across the civil service. For example, Germany has established a coaching pool for executive leaders, while the United States uses its Centre for Leadership Development. The relatively low investments in coaching and mentoring initiatives indicates scope for enhancing learning and development by drawing on institutional knowledge.

Methodology and definitions

Data were initially collected through the 2016 OECD Survey on Strategic Human Resources Management and updated in 2019. 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, as well as by 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. For more information on the classification of senior managers, please refer to Annex D.

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>.
- OECD (2016), *Engaging Public Employees for a High-Performing Civil Service*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267190-en>.

Figure notes

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

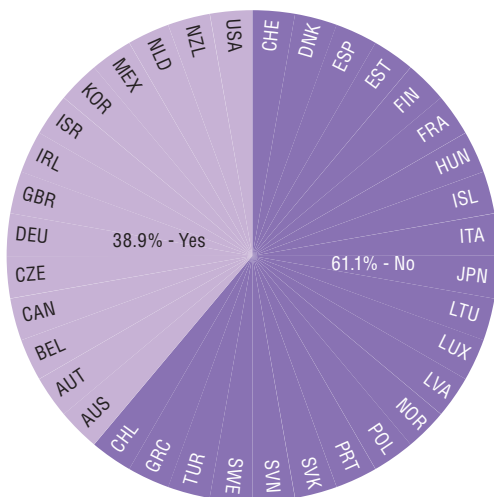
6.3. Learning and development initiatives and training priorities in central administrations, 2019

	Planning learning and training			Training priorities			
	Civil service-wide training strategy and/or action plan	Organizational learning plans in each organisation within the central public administration	Civil servants required to develop individual learning plans	Online course development (e-learning, m-learning, blended learning)	Executive leadership training and coaching	IT / digital skills training	Coaching and mentoring
Australia	■	■	■	□	■	■	□
Austria	□	■	□	■	□	■	□
Belgium	■	□	■	■	■	□	■
Canada	■	□	■	■	■	□	□
Chile	□	■	□	■	■	□	□
Czech Republic	■	■	■	□	□	□	□
Denmark	□	□	■	■	■	■	□
Estonia	■	■	□	■	■	□	■
Finland	□	■	■	■	■	■	□
France	■	■	□	■	■	■	■
Germany	□	■	□	□	■	■	■
Greece	■	□	□	□	□	■	□
Hungary	■	■	■	■	□	■	□
Iceland	□	■	■	□	□	□	□
Ireland	■	□	■	□	■	□	■
Israel	■	■	□	■	■	□	□
Italy	■	□	□	■	□	■	□
Japan	■	■	□	□	□	□	■
Korea	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Latvia	□	■	□	■	■	□	□
Lithuania	■	■	□	□	□	□	□
Luxembourg	■	□	■	■	■	■	■
Mexico	■	□	□	■	■	□	□
Netherlands	□	□	□	■	□	■	□
New Zealand	□	■	■	□	■	□	□
Norway	□	□	■	■	□	■	□
Poland	■	■	■	■	□	□	□
Portugal	■	■	■	□	■	■	□
Slovak Republic	■	■	■	□	■	□	■
Slovenia	□	■	□	■	■	□	□
Spain	■	■	□	■	■	■	□
Sweden	□	■	■	■	■	■	□
Switzerland	■	□	□	■	■	■	□
Turkey	□	■	□	■	■	■	■
United Kingdom	■	■	■	□	■	□	□
United States	□	■	□	□	■	□	■
OECD Total							
Yes ■	22	25	18	23	25	18	11
No □	14	11	18	13	11	18	25
Colombia	■	■	■	■	□	□	□
Costa Rica	■	■	□	■	■	■	□

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

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032567>

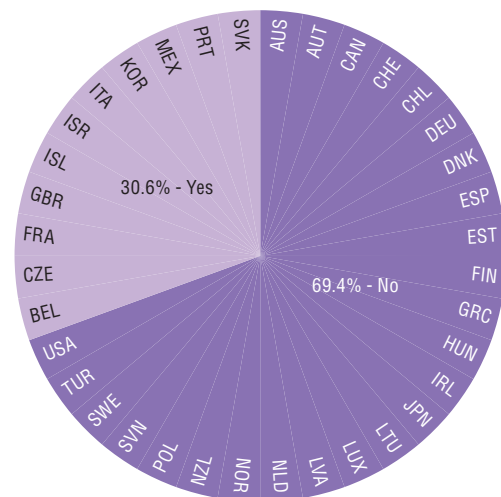
6.4. Existence of specific programmes to encourage mobility in the civil service, 2016



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

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032586>

6.5. Right for civil servants to a certain amount of training days per year, 2019



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

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032605>



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