

12. Ageing workforce

While the government must respond to the changing demands made by an ageing society (such as declining demand for primary education and increasing demand for health and elderly care services), government workers are themselves ageing. A very large proportion of the central government workforce will be retiring over a relatively short period of time. Maintaining the government's capacity to deliver the same level and quality of services remains a complex issue. Significant staff departures create an opportunity to bring staff with new skills into government, downsize the workforce where needed, decrease staff costs (as entry-level salaries are lower) and re-allocate human resources across sectors. However, this can lead to loss of capacity and the need to postpone the retirement of some key staff. In addition, given the large share of government employment in many OECD member countries, these high replacement needs could risk pre-empting the private sector's access to new labour market entrants.

With the exception of Korea, the central government workforce is getting older in OECD member countries. The roots of this demographic profile lie in the rapid expansion of public services from the 1970s until the mid-1980s and the massive hiring that took place at that time. This was followed by a period of hiring freezes in the 1980s and 1990s, as the numbers in the workforce were stabilised.

In many OECD member countries, central government workforces are ageing more rapidly than the rest of society and the wider labour market. The difference is most pronounced in Belgium, where almost 45% of the central government workforce is over 50 compared with just over 20% of the total labour force. In 13 OECD member countries, over 30% of the central government work force will retire within the next 15 years.

Methodology and definitions

Data refer to 2005 and were collected through the 2006 OECD Strategic Human Resource Management in Government Survey. Respondents to the survey were predominately senior officials in central government personnel departments. The Human Resource Management survey was completed by all OECD member countries excluding Greece; Greece subsequently provided the OECD with data for 2005. Australia and Canada subsequently provided 2005 data which were initially missing from their survey responses. Countries missing from the figures include those that did not respond fully to the survey questions or whose data were not comparable with other countries.

The data concern the core civil service at the central level of government. Definitions of the civil service, as well as sectors covered at the central level of government, differ across countries and should be considered when making comparisons. For example, in Germany, a large number of central government employees work in defence or police positions with special rules regarding retirement. The labour force comprises all persons who fulfil the requirements for inclusion among the employed or the unemployed.

Further reading

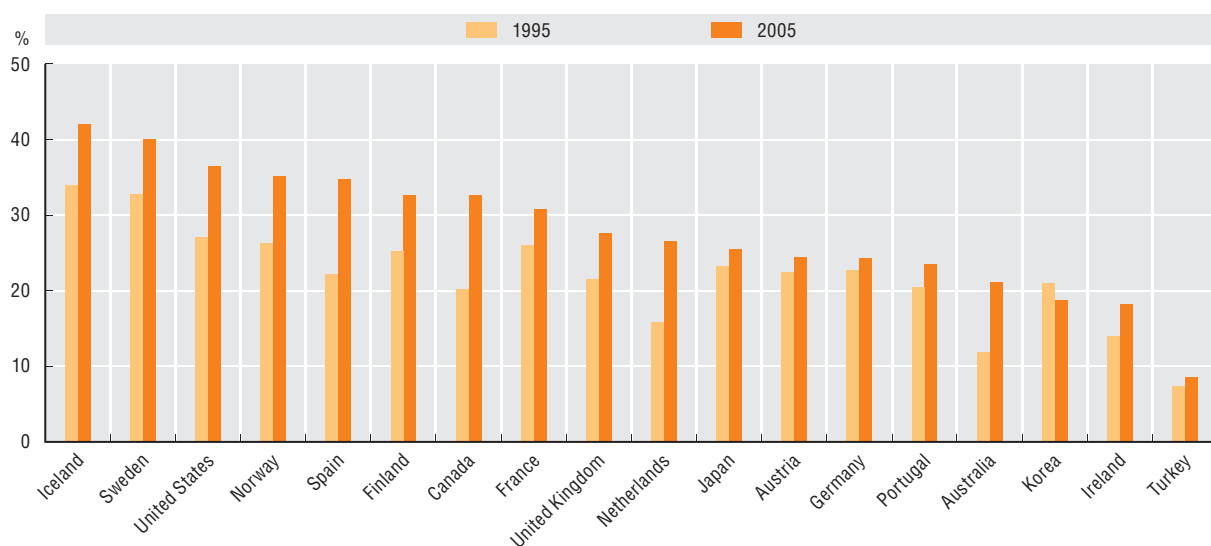
OECD (2007), *Ageing and the Public Service: Human Resource Challenges*, OECD, Paris.

Notes

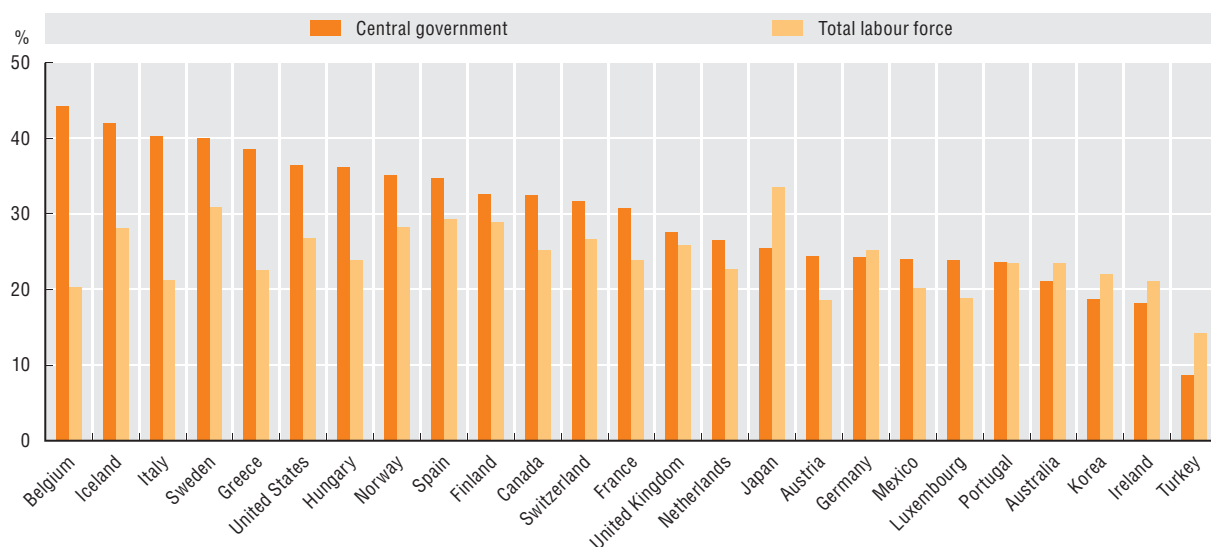
12.1: Data are not available for Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Switzerland.

12.2: Data are not available for the Czech Republic, Denmark, New Zealand, Poland and the Slovak Republic.


12.1 Percentage of central government workers 50 years or older (1995 and 2005)

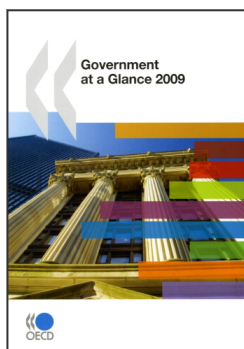


12.2 Percentage of workers 50 years or older in central government and the total labour force (2005)



Source: OECD Strategic Human Resource Management in Government Survey (2006). OECD Labour Force Survey (2006).

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/723656070327>



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