

4. INSTITUTIONS

Main institutional features of the centres of government in OECD countries

The centre of government (CoG), also known as Chancellery, Cabinet Office, Office of the President, Presidencia, White House Executive Office, Privy Council, Casa Civil, among others, is a support structure of a government. Its main objective is to ensure evidence-based, strategic and consistent policy implementation by a government. The structure of the CoG reflects, on the one hand, constitutional and legal requirements, which provide some architectural anchoring, and, on the other, an ability to be highly adaptable to the needs, preferences and personality of the head of government of the moment. To be effective, the CoG needs to be small enough to react rapidly to changing events; as it grows, it risks losing flexibility and becoming unwieldy. At the same time, recent experience suggests that too small could mean too little capacity, which, in turn, endangers the ability to the CoG to provide impartial, authoritative advice and support.

In 2011, total staff at the CoGs rarely exceeded 1 000, except in the United States and Mexico and larger unitary states such as France (2 100), Turkey (2 085), the United Kingdom (1 896), Chile (1 665) and Italy (1 246). In nine OECD countries, there were fewer than 200 people working for the centre of government, namely, Switzerland (192), Belgium (160), Slovenia (153), Sweden (148), Estonia (103), the Netherlands (80), Norway (70), Israel (45) and Iceland (34).

CoGs represent a small fraction of total central government employment. In 2011, CoGs accounted on average one employee per 1 150 employees in the total central government. This rate, even if it is low, varies largely across OECD countries. While countries such as Chile, Switzerland and the Great Britain had relatively large CoGs (10.70%, 5.94% and 3.87% respectively) others such as Norway and Israel had CoGs that represented even less than 0.30% of central government employment.

Between 2008 and 2012, CoG institutions adapted to support new policy directions, and these adaptations were observed in both increases and decreases in resources and size. Sometimes, a more effective CoG can involve decreasing its financial resources and size. For example, for the last few years the government offices of Estonia and Italy have been transferring or eliminating functions. Additionally, new circumstances can also drive change at the centre of government. The establishment in 2010 of the UK Cabinet Office's Efficiency and Reform team is an example of an important change at the CoG driven by a changing economic context. Similarly, some specific events, such as the earthquake in New Zealand, have led to substantial strengthening of capacity at the centre, also visible in increased budgets and staff numbers.

Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government (33 countries, of which 28 OECD countries and 5 non-members, and the European Commission, responded). Respondents were senior officials who provide direct support and advice to heads of government and the council of ministers, or cabinet and provided information for the period 2008-12.

Centre of government (CoG) refers to the administrative structure that serves the Executive (president or prime minister, and the cabinet collectively). The centre of government has a great variety of names across countries, such as General Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Chancellery, Office/Ministry of the Presidency, Council of Ministers Office, etc. In many countries the CoG is made up of more than one unit, fulfilling different functions. A unit that is shared by virtually all CoGs is the unit that serves specifically the head of the government, but not the CoG collectively. This too has a variety of names, such as the Cabinet of the Prime Minister or the Private Office.

Further reading

OECD (2015), "Centre Stage: Driving Better Policies from the Centre of Government", *GOV/PGC/MPM(2014)3*, OECD, Paris, [http://www2.oecd.org/oeclinfo/info.aspx?app=OLISco-teEN&Ref=GOV/PGC/MPM\(2014\)3](http://www2.oecd.org/oeclinfo/info.aspx?app=OLISco-teEN&Ref=GOV/PGC/MPM(2014)3).

Figure notes

Mexican figures are from INEGI (2014) *Ingreso y gasto público en México 2014*, Edición Sede, Aguascalientes.

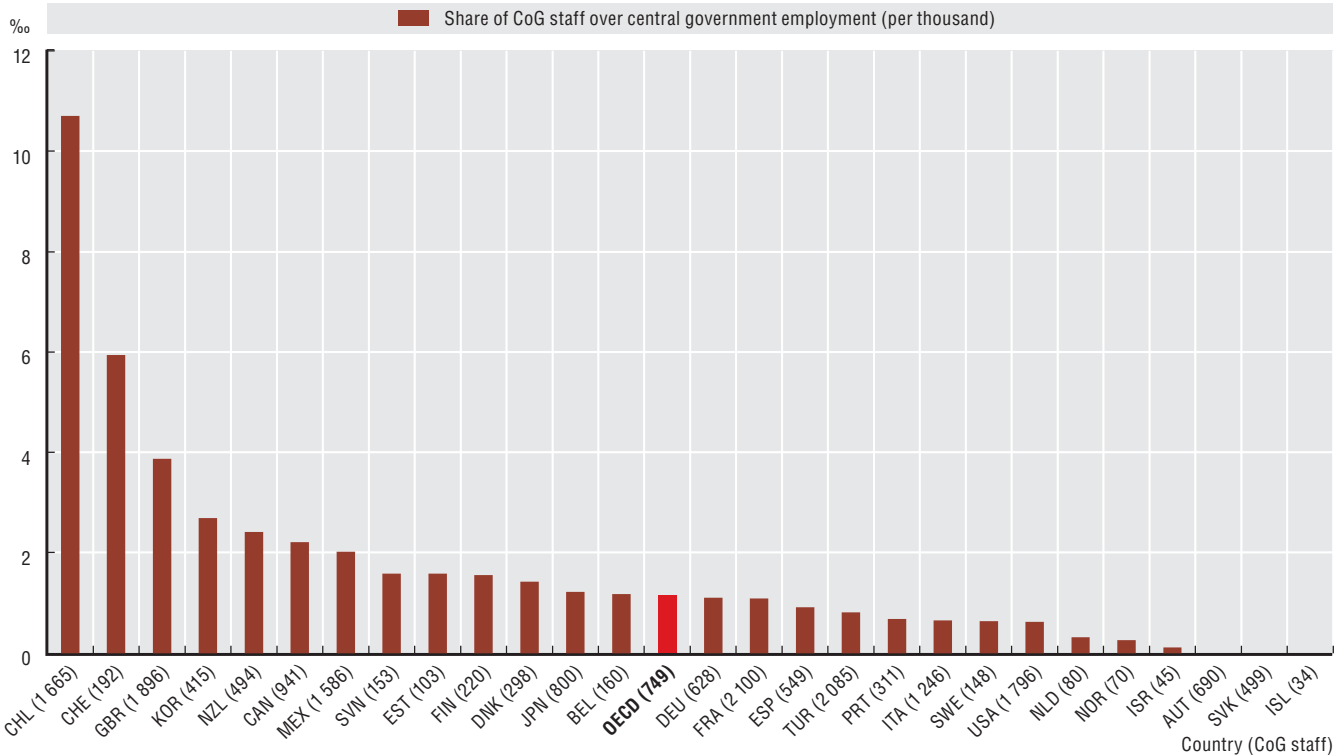
4.1: Centre of government employment data for Australia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg and Poland are not available. Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland and the Slovak Republic are not included in the OECD average. Employment data for Germany, Israel, Ireland, Norway and Sweden are for 2010 rather than 2011. French employment figures are approximations.

4.2 and 4.3: Data for Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Poland are not available. "Other" category refers to the situation where employment and budget both increased and decreased between 2008 and 2012.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

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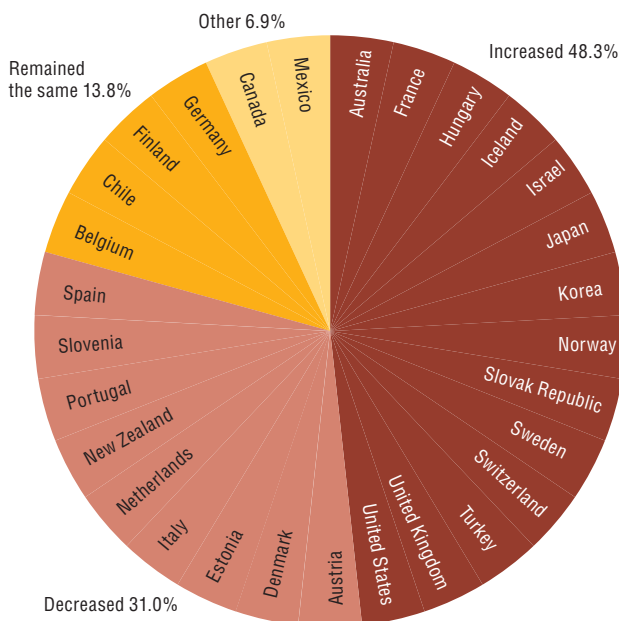
4.1. Centre of government employment in OECD countries, 2011



Source: 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248662>

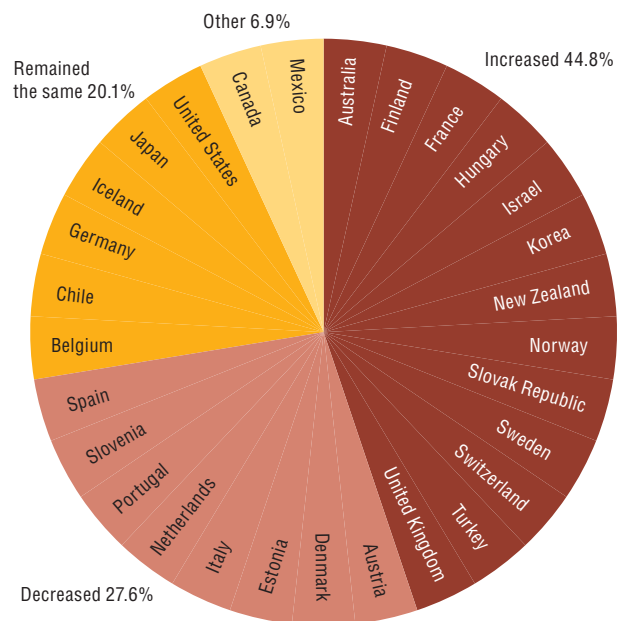
4.2. Changes in employment in centres of government, 2008-12



Source: 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248673>

4.3. Changes in budget in centres of government, 2008-12



Source: 2013 OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933248688>



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