

18. Political influence in senior staffing

Exerting political influence in senior staffing decisions can stem from the need to ensure responsiveness from the civil service, as well as the need to overcome the challenges posed by complex procedures and (at times) slow-moving bureaucracies or institutions. In times of economic and social crises, for example, greater agility and responsiveness from the civil service may be particularly important in designing and implementing policy decisions quickly and effectively. However, although political influence in senior staffing may help increase strategic agility in government, it can also indicate tendencies towards patronage and favouritism that may undermine good governance.

The level of politically influenced turnover in OECD member countries is one indication of the extent to which politics and/or political affiliation play a role in staffing the civil service. Among the six levels of senior civil servants (with Level 1 representing the most senior staff and 6 representing the least senior), the lower levels (Levels 3-6) tend to experience little if any turnover with a change of government. On the other hand, politically motivated turnover is relatively higher in the upper levels (Levels 1 and 2). The group with the highest turnover is advisors to Ministries' leadership, who are often appointed by the Minister (see also Indicator 19).

In the Czech Republic, Hungary and Turkey all positions change systematically in the two top echelons after the election of a new government. All public service positions change in the top echelon with a new government in Korea and the Slovak Republic. In 11 of the OECD member countries surveyed (Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom), there is no turnover in any of the six levels of senior civil servants when there is a change in government.

Methodology and definitions

Data refer to 2010 and were collected through the 2010 OECD Survey on Strategic Human Resources Management. Respondents were predominately senior officials in central government HRM departments, and data refer to HRM practices in central government. The survey was completed by all OECD member countries except Luxembourg. Definitions of the civil service, as well as the organisations governed at the central level of government, differ across countries and should be considered when making comparisons. The terms public and civil service/servants are used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

Further reading

Matheson, A. et al. (2007), "Study on the Political Involvement in Senior Staffing and on the Delineation of Responsibilities Between Ministers and Senior Civil Servants", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 6, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2004), *Policy Brief – Public Sector Modernisation: Modernising Public Employment*, OECD Observer, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2008), *The State of the Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Table notes

In New Zealand, a change of government does not affect the employment of public servants. The exception to this is a small number of public servants who are employed in Ministerial offices on an event-based contract, with the event triggering the termination of their contract being the conclusion of their relevant Minister's term in office.


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

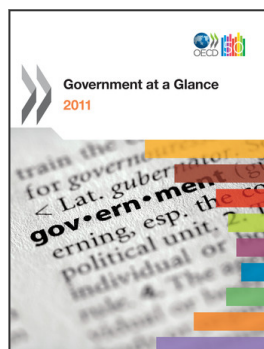
18.1 Turn-over of civil servants with a change in government (2010)

| | Advisors to the Ministry's leadership | (Highest) Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 | (Lowest) Level 6 |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|
| Australia | ■ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Austria | ■ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Belgium | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Canada | n.a. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Chile | n.a. | ■ | ■ | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| Czech Republic | n.a. | ● | ● | ■ | ○ | ○ | n.a. |
| Denmark | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Estonia | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Finland | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| France | ■ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Germany | n.a. | ■ | ■ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Greece | ● | ■ | ■ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Hungary | ■ | ● | ● | ■ | ● | ● | n.a. |
| Iceland | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Ireland | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Israel | ● | ■ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | n.a. |
| Italy | ● | ■ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Japan | n.a. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Korea | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Mexico | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Netherlands | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| New Zealand | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Norway | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Poland | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Portugal | ● | ■ | ■ | ○ | ○ | n.a. | n.a. |
| Slovak Republic | ■ | ● | ■ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Slovenia | ■ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Spain | n.a. | ■ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | n.a. |
| Sweden | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Switzerland | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Turkey | n.a. | ● | ● | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● |
| United Kingdom | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| United States | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | n.a. | n.a. |
| Russian Federation | ○ | ● | ■ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Ukraine | ■ | ● | ■ | ■ | ● | ● | ● |
| Total OECD33 | | | | | | | |
| ● Yes, all | 14 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ■ Yes, many | 7 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| ● Yes, few | 1 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| ○ None | 4 | 11 | 19 | 26 | 28 | 28 | 26 |

n.a.: Not applicable.

Source: 2010 OECD Survey on Strategic Human Resources Management in Central/Federal Governments.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932391963>



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