

17. Senior civil service

Senior civil servants (SCS) are located at a critical junction between strategy making and strategy execution in government. They must display the leadership capabilities to execute high-level policy directives quickly and effectively (particularly in times of crisis) as well as draw from bottom-up institutional knowledge and the experience of the civil service to contribute to evidence-based decision making. Improving governmental performance, agility and efficiency therefore rests partly on the quality and capacity of the senior civil service.

The senior civil service composite indicator shows the extent to which separate management rules and practices are applied to senior civil servants. It examines such factors as whether senior civil servants are considered to be a separate group of public servants; whether policies exist for identifying leaders and potential talent early in careers; or whether SCS have separate performance assessment practices. The index is not an indicator of how well senior civil servants are managed or how they perform. Among OECD member countries, Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States stand out as having institutionalised the management of their senior civil servants the most. HRM practices for senior management are the least differentiated from the rest of the central government civil service in Spain, the Slovak Republic and Sweden.

Because of their strategic roles in government, there is an increased tendency among OECD countries to group senior civil servants separately and manage them under different HRM policies, as is the case in 23 of responding OECD countries and 2 non-member countries. In this group, greater emphasis is placed on capacity building and on incentivising improved performance. For instance, 22 OECD member countries report paying greater attention on the management of senior civil servants' performance, and in 12 countries the portion of their remuneration that is performance-related is higher than for other staff.

Senior civil servants also tend to be recruited through a more centralised process than the rest of the civil servants and, in a majority of countries, there is a defined skills profile applying to them specifically. However, only four of the responding OECD countries (France, Israel, Korea and the United Kingdom) report having mechanisms in place to identify potential senior civil servants early in their careers. Offering opportunities for career development and leadership to qualified candidates early in their careers could help not only attract talent to the civil service but also allow for early mentoring and capacity building.

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.

The index is composed of the following variables: the existence of separate group of SCS; the existence of policies for the identification of potential SCS early in their careers; the use of centrally defined skills profile for SCS; and the use of separate recruitment, performance management and performance-related-pay practices for SCS. The index ranges between 0 (HRM practices are not differentiated for SCS) and 1 (HRM practices are very differentiated for SCS). Missing data for countries were estimated by mean replacement.

See Annex E for further country-specific information as well as details on the methodology and factors used in constructing the index. The variables composing the index and their relative importance are based on expert judgements. They are presented with the purpose of furthering discussion, and consequently may evolve over time.

Further reading

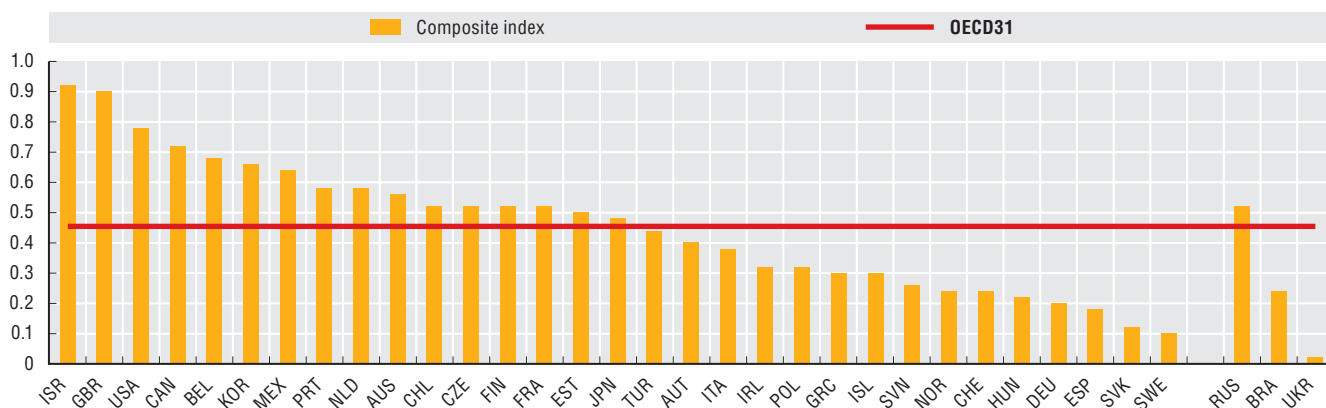
- Matheson, A. et al. (2007), "Study on the Political Involvement in Senior Staffing and on the Delineation of Responsibilities Between Ministers and Senior Civil Servants", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 6, OECD Publishing, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *The State of the Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Figure and table notes

See Annex E for further country-specific information as well as details on the methodology and factors used in constructing the index. Denmark and New Zealand do not have a centralised HRM policy regarding senior civil servants and have therefore been removed from the index.

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

17.1 Use of separate HRM practices for senior civil servants in central government (2010)



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

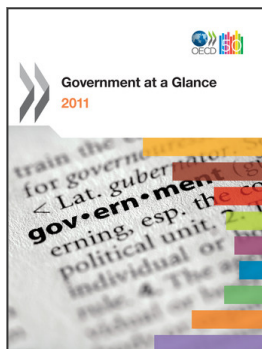
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932390424>

17.2 Central government HRM practices for SCS (2010)

	SCS are considered a separate group from the rest of the public service	More emphasis on the management of SCS performance	SCS recruited through a more centralised process	The part of SCS pay that is performance-related is higher	Potential leadership is systematically identified in performance assessments and staff careers are managed accordingly	SCS recruited as part of a group selected at entry in the public service of few a few years after entry
Australia	●	●	●	○	○	○
Austria	●	●	○	○	○	○
Belgium	●	●	●	○	○	○
Canada	●	●	●	●	●	○
Chile	●	●	●	○	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	●	●	○	●	○	○
Finland	●	●	●	○	○	○
Estonia	●	○	●	○	○	○
France	●	●	○	●	○	●
Germany	○	●	○	○	○	○
Greece	●	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	○	○
Hungary	○	●	○	●	○	○
Iceland	●	○	●	○	○	○
Ireland	○	○	○	●	○	○
Israel	●	●	●	○	●	●
Italy	●	●	●	●	○	○
Japan	●	●	○	○	○	○
Korea	●	●	○	●	○	●
Mexico	●	●	●	○	●	○
Netherlands	●	●	●	○	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	○	●	●	●	○	○
Poland	●	●	●	○	n.a.	n.a.
Portugal	●	●	○	○	○	○
Spain	○	●	○	●	n.a.	n.a.
Slovak Republic	○	○	○	●	○	○
Slovenia	○	○	●	○	○	○
Sweden	○	○	●	○	○	○
Switzerland	●	○	●	○	○	○
Turkey	●	○	○	○	○	○
United Kingdom	●	●	○	●	●	●
United States	●	●	●	●	●	○
Brazil	●	○	○	○	○	○
Russian Federation	●	●	○	○	n.a.	n.a.
Ukraine	○	○	●	○	○	○
Total OECD31						
● Yes	23	22	17	12	5	4
○ No	8	8	13	18	22	23

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

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932391944>



From:
Government at a Glance 2011

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2011-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2011), "Senior civil service", in *Government at a Glance 2011*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2011-23-en

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.