

## 16. Senior civil service

Countries need senior civil servants who are able to pursue performance-oriented management, ensure cohesion across ministries, and at the same time protect the ethos of a politically neutral and professional public administration. The senior civil service is the interface between politicians and the public administration. They are responsible for the implementation of legal instruments and political strategies. They are also responsible for the coherence, efficiency and appropriateness of government activities. Thus, the capacity of the senior civil service has become a key public governance issue.

Due to the growing leadership expectations placed on senior civil servants, there is an increasing tendency to group and manage them separately under different HRM policies. The table shows the level of institutionalisation of specific HRM practices that apply to the group of senior managers. However, the existence of separate management rules and practices applying to senior civil servants does not indicate how well they are managed or how well they perform. The table only reflects the efforts made in recent years to adjust the rules and practices to the management needs created by the increased importance of senior civil servants.

In general, senior civil servants represent a very small percentage of all central government employees, and most are not politically appointed. There is a broad spectrum of senior management arrangements across countries that reflect different administrative cultures and historical developments. Seven OECD member countries do not have a separately defined senior civil service: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, Sweden and Switzerland. The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States stand out as having institutionalised the management of their senior civil servants the most, including the establishment of a separate formal senior executive service.

**Methodology and definitions**

Data refer to 2005 and were collected by the OECD 2006 Strategic Human Resource Management in Government Survey. Respondents were predominantly senior officials in central government personnel departments. To calculate senior civil servants as a percentage of central government staff, 2005 data from the Comparison of Employment in the Public Domain (CEPD) Survey were used for the total number of central government employees, except for Australia and Canada, which subsequently provided updated 2005 data.

Data refer to HRM practices at the central level of government for the civil service. Definitions of the senior civil service, as well as sectors covered at the central level of government, differ across countries and should be considered when making comparisons.

**Further reading**

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

**Notes**

16.1(\*) While Germany, Iceland and Sweden do not have a defined group of senior civil servants, they have implemented certain HRM policies and practices relevant for senior managers.

(\*\*) Finland: Not formally. However, the Ministry of Finance is planning to promote career thinking and systematic development of potential managers and experts. Each ministry and agency are responsible for their HRD.

(\*\*\*) Korea: No. However, the young middle managerial officials who passed the Senior Entrance Exam for Government Service are usually recognized as potential future leaders.

(\*\*\*\*) United States: Federal agencies may establish and administer formal leadership and executive development programmes to prepare future leaders. The establishment of SES Candidate Development Programmes is required by section 3396 of title 5, US Code, and requirements relating to those programmes are found in subpart B of part 412 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

## 16.1 Use of separate HRM practices for senior civil servants (SCS) (2005)


	Existence of separate group of SCS	Identification of SCS early in their careers	Percentage of employees who are SCS	Recruited with a more centralised process	More attention is paid to the management of their careers	More emphasis on the management of their performance	More emphasis on avoiding conflicts of interest	Pay that is not basic salary and not PRP is higher than for regular staff	The part of their pay that is performance-related is higher	Appointment contract is for a specific term	Appointment is shorter than for regular staff	Appointment depends on renewal of contract
Australia	●	○	1.59	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Austria	○	○	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Belgium	●	○	0.12	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	●
Canada	●	n.a.	0.20	●	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○
Czech Republic	●	○	n.a.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Denmark	○	○	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Finland	●	○**	0.11	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
France	●	●	n.a.	●	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	○
Germany	○*	○	n.a.	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Greece	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Hungary	●	○	0.10	●	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○
Iceland	●	○	n.a.	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
Ireland	○*	○	n.a.	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○
Italy	●	○	n.a.	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	○
Japan	●	○	0.16	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Korea	●	○***	0.17	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	○
Luxembourg	●	○	n.a.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mexico	○	○	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
New Zealand	●	○	n.a.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Netherlands	●	●	0.28	●	○	●	○	○	○	●	●	○
Norway	●	○	0.12	○	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○
Poland	●	n.a.	n.a.	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Portugal	●	○	n.a.	○	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	○
Spain	●	●	n.a.	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○
Slovak Republic	●	○	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sweden	○*	○	n.a.	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Switzerland	○	○	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Turkey	●	○	n.a.	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
United Kingdom	●	●	n.a.	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
United States	●	●****	0.25	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○

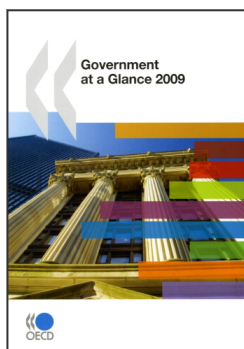
Yes: ●

No: ○

n.a. = not available

Source: OECD Strategic Human Resource Management in Government Survey (2006) and OECD CEPD Survey (2006).

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