An ageing workforce presents challenges and opportunities for governments, as they need to ensure that high rates of retirement will not affect the quality and capacity of the public service. Retirements also create the opportunity to bring in new talent and insights into an organisation. A small share of young employees is a risk factor associated with limited capacity for administrations to create opportunities for renewal. It may also be a sign of low attractiveness of the public sector as an employer. While proper workforce planning is required to avoid the loss of knowledge and experience, the departure of staff can also provide an opportunity to restructure the workforce. For example, administrations can promote horizontal mobility to reallocate resources according to policy priorities or create learning opportunities. Retirements at senior levels could also provide opportunities to rethink the leadership model in terms of gender balance or accountability.

Central public administrations in OECD countries with data available have on average more workers over 55 years old than below 34 years old (24% and 18% respectively). Among OECD countries with available data, the share of people aged 55 years or older in the central public administration has increased the most in Italy since 2010 from around 31% to 45%. This makes Italy the country with the highest proportion of people aged 55 or older. Spain has the second highest increase of employees in this age group from about 25% to 35%, and the third highest share of people aged 55 years or older, following Iceland in second place with 40%. The age distribution in the central public administrations of Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and the United States has remained relatively stable between 2010 and 2015.

An ageing workforce is not a concern for all OECD countries. In Chile, Australia, Hungary, Japan, Korea and Slovenia, less than 20% of central government workforce is aged 55 years or older. Chile is also the country with the highest share of people aged 18-34 years old (32%), followed by Hungary (31%), Latvia and Germany (30%). In contrast, in Italy, Greece, Spain, Poland and Korea less than 10% of central government employees are aged 18 to 34. Estonia is the country where the share of people younger than 35 years has increased the most between 2010 and 2015 (8%). Typically the share of senior managers (D1 and D2 positions) aged at least 55 is higher than for other positions. More than 60% of senior managers are in this age group in Greece (67%), Italy (66%), the Netherlands (66%), Finland (63%) and Belgium (60%). Italy and Spain also have an important proportion of professionals aged 55 or older (42% and 41% respectively).

Methodology and definitions
Data refer to 2015 and were collected through the 2016 OECD Survey on the Composition of the Workforce in Central/Federal Governments. Respondents were predominately senior officials in central government HRM departments, and data refer to composition of the workforce in the central/federal government by age and position. The survey was completed by all OECD countries except Luxembourg and New Zealand. Please refer to Annex D for further details on the classification and the definition of the occupations.

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. Comparisons between the data from Government at a Glance 2011 and 2017 should be made with caution, as the scope and number of country responses vary between the two. Senior management positions include levels D1 and D2.

Further reading

Figure notes
Data are for 2016 rather than 2015 for Greece and the United Kingdom. Data are for 2014 rather than 2015 for Italy and France. The age groups presented are as follows for Poland: 1. below 30 years old; 2. 31-50 years old; 3. above 51 years old. All figures refer to full-time equivalents, not the number of employees for Sweden. Data are not available for Turkey. Data for people aged below 34 years also includes employees below the age of 18 for the United States. Data for France covers employees in the state public service working in ministries in the region Île-de-France (except administrative public institutions – établissements publics administratifs).

Data for Greece, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Slovenia, Poland, Colombia and Lithuania for central government include only managerial (from D1 to D4) and professional (Senior and Junior) positions.

3.6: No data available for Austria, Greece, Israel, Japan, Mexico and the Slovak Republic for 2010. Data for 2015 refer to full-time equivalents, and for 2010 to the number of employees for Estonia. For 2010, the age groups are presented as follows for Estonia: 1. below 30 years old; 2. 31-50 years old; 3. over 51 years old. Data for Estonia do not include higher public servants such as ministers, chancellor of justice, president, or state controller. Data are for 2011 rather than 2010 for Portugal and Switzerland. Data referring to 2015 may not be comparable with data of 2010 for Hungary because of the overall and thorough reforms in public administration (reorganising central and territorial levels etc.).

Information on data for Israel: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602.
3.5. Share of people employed in the central government by age group, 2015


StatLink: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933532124](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933532124)

3.6. Percentage of central government employees aged 55 years or older, 2015 and 2010


StatLink: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933532143](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933532143)