

Government performance is strongly influenced by the quality and capacity of the senior civil service. Senior civil servants (SCS) are located at a critical junction between policy making and delivery, as well as between politicians and the bureaucracy. SCS lead their teams to execute challenging policy agendas quickly and draw from institutional expertise and experience to make evidence-based decisions. SCS are expected to be politically responsive, have a deep understanding of the citizens they serve, and be effective managers capable of steering high-performing public sector organisations.

Most governments recognise the distinct role of SCS by applying separate management rules and practices to this group. The composite indicator examines whether SCS are considered a distinct group of civil servants, whether policies exist for identifying leaders and potential talent early in their careers, and if SCS are managed differently from other civil servants.

The SEA region has a higher average score on this indicator than the OECD average. This is mainly due to the fact that seven out of the nine SEA countries who responded to our survey have policies to identify potential SCS early in their careers, which only happens in 11 OECD countries. Among the four OECD countries in the region, only New Zealand identifies potential leadership in performance assessments, and it is an informal and decentralised process.

With the understanding that the civil service is key to the development of all SEA countries and for regional co-operation, developing and selecting highly skilled SCS is one of the main priority areas for HR reform among SEA countries, as well as OECD countries. With the exception of Viet Nam, all SEA countries have a defined group of SCS. In Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand, this is the result of common practice, whereas other SEA countries have formal defined arrangements (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Singapore). Most SEA countries (all except Cambodia and Lao PDR) also have a specific selection process for senior managers.

The SCS employment framework in SEA countries usually includes a greater emphasis on performance management than the framework for regular staff. However, only three countries – Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand – assess their SCS against outcome, output and organisational management indicators. In five countries, SCS have a specific performance agreement with the minister; in six countries, SCS can be promoted as a direct result of good performance, compared to only five out of 35 OECD countries where competitions are applied as the major tool.

Furthermore, in fast-changing environments, attracting people with the right skills may sometimes require looking outside the civil service to access candidates with different backgrounds, experience and new skills than those traditionally found in career SCS.

The majority of OECD countries tend to open at least a good proportion of management positions to external candidates, like Korea, where all ministries are expected to open 10% to 20% of SCS positions to external candidates. SCS are also among the civil service positions where OECD countries have intentionally enhanced the use of external recruitment. In Australia for example, external recruitment of senior and middle managers has recently been increasing. These measures are the result of a workforce management review conducted in 2015, which recognised that the Australian Public Service needed to attract talent from other sectors. By contrast, in SEA countries, career progression within the civil service tends to be the most common path to identify SCS. Exceptions are Indonesia, where SCS are open to external recruitment, and the Philippines, where external candidates are recruited for a good proportion of SCS positions. Indonesia is the only SEA country surveyed that reports having adopted measures to enhance external recruitment of SCS.

#### Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the OECD Strategic Human Resource Management Survey and refer to 2016 for OECD countries and 2018 for SEA countries. Respondents were predominately senior officials in central government human resources management (HRM) departments, and data refer to HRM practices in central government. The survey was completed in 2018 by the SEA countries except Myanmar, and in 2016 by 35 OECD countries.

The terms public and civil service/servants are used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

The index on senior civil service is composed of the following variables: the existence of a separate group of SCS; the existence of policies for early identification of potential SCS; the use of centrally defined skills profiles for SCS; and the use of separate recruitment, performance management and performance-pay practices for SCS. The index ranges between 0 (HRM practices not differentiated by SCS) and 1 (HRM practices highly differentiated for SCS). The index is not an indicator of how well SCS are managed or how they perform.

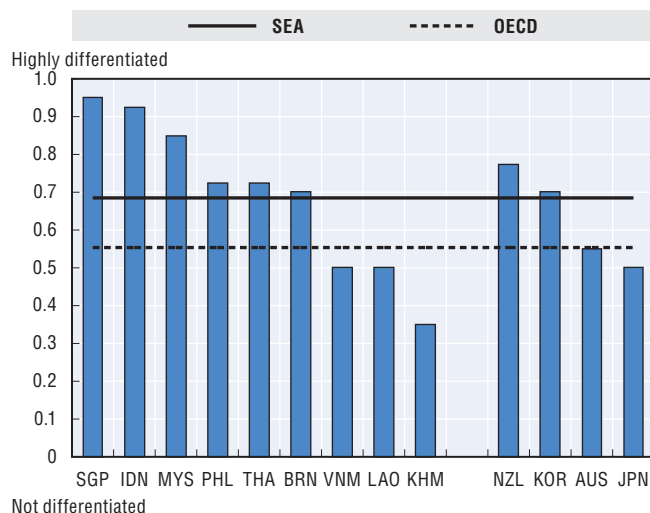
#### Further reading

OECD (2016), *Engaging Public Employees for a High-Performing Civil Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267190-en>.

#### Figure notes

5.6: D1 managers are top public servants below the Minister of Secretary of State.

## 5.6. Extent to which separate human resources management practices are used for senior civil servants in central government, 2018



Sources: For SEA countries, OECD (2018) Strategic Human Resources Management Survey. For OECD countries, OECD (2016) Strategic Human Resources Management Survey.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933841064>

## 5.7. Identification of SCS, 2018

	Competitive examination early on in their careers	Career progression within the public service	Openness to external recruitment		Recent measures to enhance the external recruitment of SCS
			All positions	A good proportion of positions	
Brunei Darussalam	○	●	○	○	○
Cambodia	○	●	○	○	○
Indonesia	○	○	●	○	●
Lao PDR	○	●	○	○	○
Malaysia	●	●	○	○	○
Philippines	○	●	○	●	○
Singapore	○	●	○	○	○
Thailand	○	●	○	○	○
Viet Nam	○	●	○	○	○
<b>SEA Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Australia	○	○	●	●	●
Japan	○	●	○	○	○
Korea	●	○	○	●	●
New Zealand	○	○	○	●	○
<b>OECD Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>

Key:

Yes = ●

No = ○

Sources: For SEA countries, OECD (2018) Strategic Human Resources Management Survey. For OECD countries, OECD (2016) Strategic Human Resources Management Survey.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933841102>

## 5.8. Central government human resources management practices for SCS, 2018

	Existence of a separate group of SCS	SCS are encouraged to have more career mobility	SCS are recruited with a more centralised process	The appointment term of SCS is shorter than for regular staff	Existence of a performance-management regime for SCS	Selected features of the performance-management regime for SCS	
						Performance agreement at D1	Dismissal as a result of poor performance
Brunei Darussalam	●	●	○	○	◆	◆	○
Cambodia	●	○	●	○	○	x	○
Indonesia	●	●	○	●	●	◆□	●
Lao PDR	●	○	●	○	●	◆	●
Malaysia	●	●	●	○	●	□	○
Philippines	●	●	○	○	●	◆	●
Singapore	●	●	●	●	●	x	●
Thailand	●	●	○	○	●	◆	○
Viet Nam	○	○	○	●	●	x	○
<b>SEA Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>4</b>
Yes = ●							
No = ○							
No, it is the same for all civil servants = ◆					1		
No, performance agreement with Minister (at D1) = ◆						5	
Performance agreement with the Administrative head of the civil service (at D1) = □						2	
Not applicable = x						3	0
Australia	●	●	●	○	●	◆□	x
Japan	●	○	○	○	○	□	x
Korea	●	●	○	●	●	x	●
New Zealand	●	●	○	●	●	□	x
<b>OECD Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>		<b>15</b>
Yes = ●							
No = ○							
No, it is the same for all civil servants = ◆					9		
No, performance agreement with Minister (at D1) = ◆						14	
Performance agreement with the Administrative head of the civil service (at D1) = □						10	
Not applicable = x						9	8

Sources: For SEA countries, OECD (2018) Strategic Human Resources Management Survey. For OECD countries, OECD (2016) Strategic Human Resources Management Survey.

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