

Women in central government employment

Central government employment represents a subset of overall general government employment and includes a range of professional, managerial and secretarial positions in central government ministries or departments. The representation of women in central government, including senior administrative positions is therefore an important indicator of the role women play in policy making and implementation in OECD member countries.

On average, women accounted for just over 50% of all central government employees in 2010 in the 22 countries for which data are available. This figure is slightly less than the share of women in general government employment (57%, see Figure 6.2), reflecting the inclusion of female-dominated occupations, such as teachers and nurses, occupations that are more commonly found at state and local levels. Chile, Italy and Poland continue to employ the largest percentages of women in central government, at approximately 70%, while Japan employs the smallest share (16%), followed by Germany (39%). The representation of women in central government remains slightly larger than their employment in the labour force due to, in many countries, policies such as more flexible working conditions and paid parental leave.

The proportion of women in central government employment increased between 2000 and 2010 in nearly all 15 OECD member countries for which data are available (in two countries – Estonia and Japan – the share dropped by less than 1 percentage point). However, despite the growth in women in central government employment over the last decade, women continue to be over-represented in lower-level positions. In 15 of 19 countries, women occupy more than 50% of secretarial positions – in Slovenia and Austria, approximately 90% of secretarial positions are filled by women. Women are far less represented in higher tiers, where they occupy only 40% of middle management and 29% of top management positions (see Figure 6.4).

In addition, women make up a disproportionate share of part-time workers in the central government. In all 16 OECD member countries that provided data, two-thirds or more of part-time workers were women in 2010, including more than 85% in Germany, Luxembourg and France. Although part-time work may be an attractive option for employees seeking greater flexibility in order to balance work and family responsibilities, it generally leads to lower compensation and fewer opportunities for career advancement over the long term. Providing a path from part-time to full-time work is one way that countries can offer flexibility to all employees without damaging their long-term career prospects.

Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the OECD 2011 Survey on Gender in Public Employment. Respondents were predominately senior officials in central government human resource management departments.

Central government (also referred to as the national or federal government) refers to the ministries/ departments and agencies controlled and financed at the central level of government. Employment data refer to staff employed under the General Employment Framework, which covers the employment conditions of most government employees, as well as the majority of statutory employees. Part-time employment includes positions that involve fewer hours per week than a full-time job. The definition of part-time employment varies by country, but is usually fewer than 30 or 35 hours per week.

Top management positions are defined as those posts situated below ministers or deputy ministers. Middle management is the level immediately below top management down to positions responsible for the management of at least three people. These usually encompass heads of divisions/departments/units within a ministry. Professionals are defined as staff between management and clerical/administrative support staff. Secretarial positions include staff responsible for administrative tasks and general office support.

Further reading

OECD (2012), *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264179370-en>.

OECD (2011), *Public Servants as Partners for Growth: Toward a Stronger, Leaner and More Equitable Workforce*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264166707-en>.

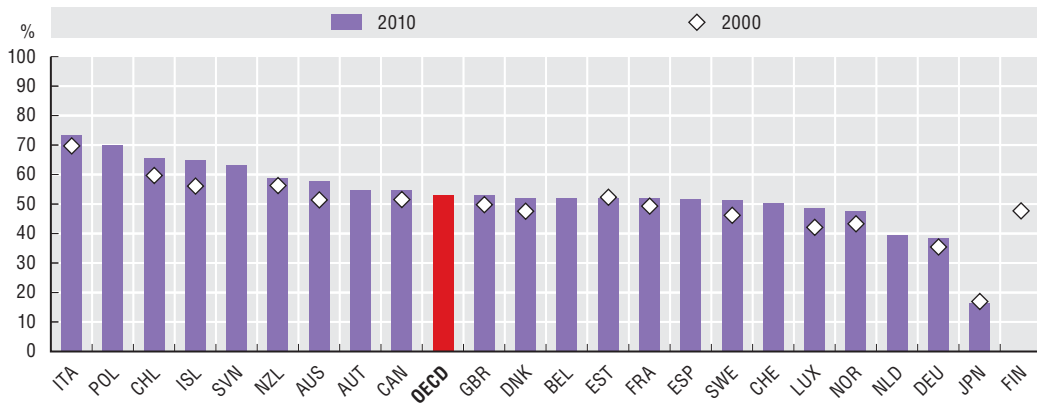
Figure notes

Data for Luxembourg, Slovenia and Sweden are for 2011 rather than 2010. Data for France are for 2009 rather than 2010. Data for the Netherlands are in full-time equivalent.

6.3: Data for Estonia, Japan and Spain are for full-time employees only. Data for Finland are not available for 2010.

6.4: Data for Switzerland on secretarial positions also include technical positions.

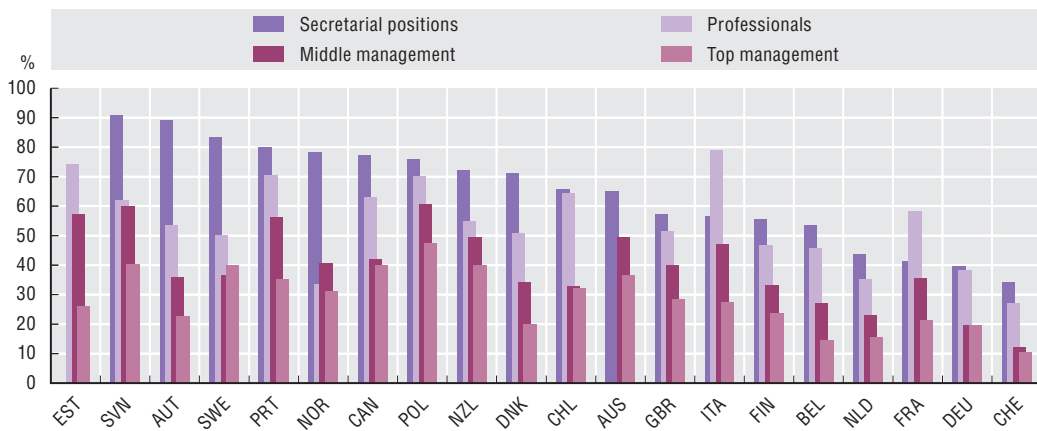
6.3. Share of central government employment filled by women (2000 and 2010)



Source: 2011 OECD Survey on Gender in Public Employment.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932942583>

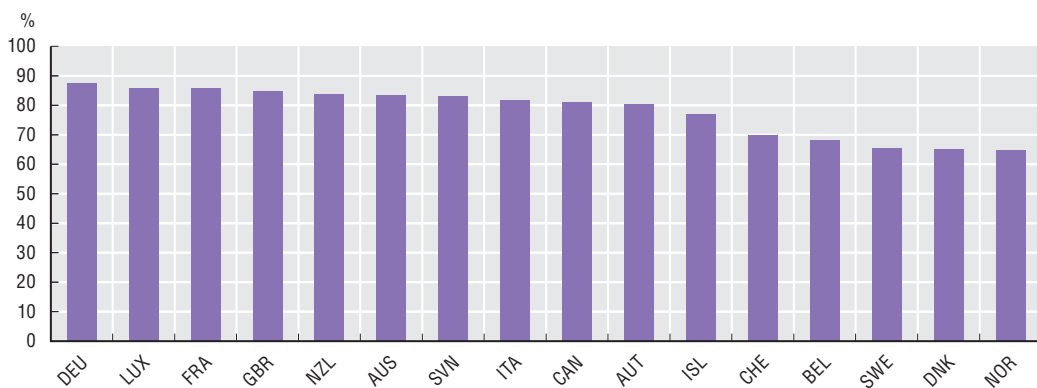
6.4. Share of central government employment by occupation groups filled by women (2010)



Source: 2011 OECD Survey on Gender in Public Employment.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932942602>

6.5. Share of part-time positions in central government filled by women (2010)



Source: 2011 OECD Survey on Gender in Public Employment.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932942621>



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