

### Management of senior level public servants

Public service leaders – senior level public servants who lead and improve major government functions – are at the heart of government effectiveness. They translate political direction into the policies and programmes that keep citizens healthy, safe, and economically productive. They have to make space for innovation while managing risk and being accountable for results, support fast-moving political agendas, manage and transform vast public organisations, motivate and inspire their workforces, and be trusted partners to citizens and an ever-growing list of partners and stakeholders. All of this while promoting the highest level of personal and professional ethics and integrity. These challenges are made more acute in a context of increasingly fast-paced and disruptive change, illustrated most recently by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is why OECD countries use a range of policies to ensure senior level public servants have the skills and operating environments they need to be effective in their jobs.

The OECD recently developed an analytical model that identifies two sets of policies needed to manage senior level public servants: developing leadership capabilities, and managing performance and accountability (Gerson, 2020), captured in a pilot index. Canada, Israel, Korea and the United Kingdom are the four countries that make the most use of these policies overall. For example, Korea's competence assessment centre for senior level public servants helps to ensure that the leadership group is ready to take on complex policy challenges. Policies to develop leadership capabilities include defining leadership capabilities through competence frameworks, hiring people with these competences, and providing leaders with opportunities to learn and develop them. Canada, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are the countries making the most use of such policies. Policies to manage performance and accountability for results include the use of robust performance management systems and accountability frameworks. In this area Canada, Italy, Korea, Mexico and the United Kingdom have the highest scores (Figure 6.3).

Table 6.4 presents the specific ways in which the employment framework for senior level public servants differs from that of other public servants. The most common elements are a more centralised recruitment system and less job security (in 21 out of 34 OECD countries each, or 62%); a greater emphasis on avoiding conflicts of interest and on performance management (17 out of 34 OECD countries each, or 50%). One path to strengthening the senior level public service in many countries may be to develop a pipeline of future leaders within the public service. Investing in this area, through holistic talent management programmes that build skills among high-potential middle managers can help to ensure a ready pool of talent for these positions. However, only Canada and the United Kingdom make use of talent management to identify future senior level public servants early in their careers.

#### Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the leadership module of the 2020 Public Service Leadership and Capability survey. Most respondents were senior officials in central government HRM departments, and the data refer to HRM practices in central government. The survey was completed by all OECD countries except Chile and Iceland, one OECD accession country (Costa Rica), and Brazil and Romania. For this survey, public servants are defined as all government employees who work in the public service, who may be employed through various contractual mechanisms (e.g. civil servant statutes, collective agreements or labour law contracts), on indeterminate or fixed-term employment contracts, but not normally including employees in the wider public sector who are usually regulated under alternative employment frameworks (e.g. most doctors, teachers, police, the military, the judiciary or elected officials). For definitions of the senior occupation levels please refer to Annex D.

The composite indicator is made up of the following dimensions of senior level public service management: 1) the development of leadership capabilities; and 2) the use of performance and accountability tools. Each dimension is built from answers to several related questions. The index ranges from 0 (no policies to manage the senior level public service) to 1 (high level of use of policies to manage the senior level public service). Further details on the composite index are available in Annex E. The variables comprising the index and their relative importance are based on expert judgements. They are presented with the purpose of constructing a pilot index, and so may evolve. Missing data for countries were estimated by mean replacement.

#### Further reading

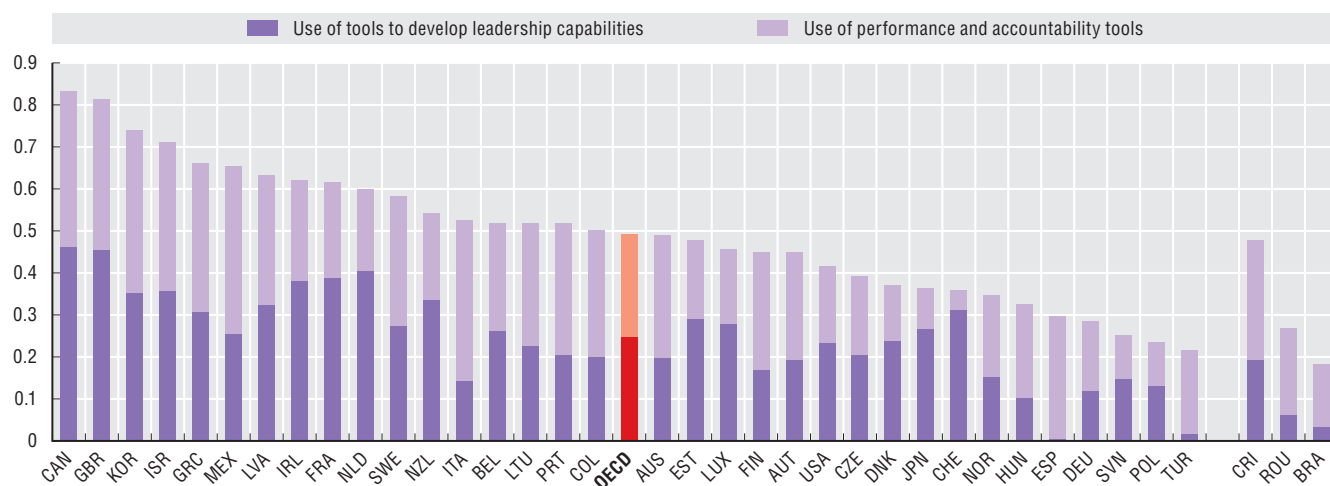
Gerson, D. (2020), "Leadership for a high performing civil service: Towards senior civil service systems in OECD countries", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 40, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ed8235c8-en>.

OECD (2019), *Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability*, OECD, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.

#### Figure notes

Data for Chile, Iceland and the Slovak Republic are not available. Data for the Slovak Republic are not available as the senior level public service is not a formalised group.

## 6.3. Pilot index: Managing the senior level public service, 2020



Source: OECD (2020), Public Service Leadership and Capability Survey.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257983>

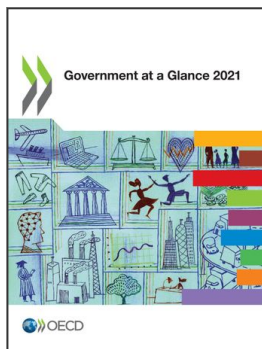
## 6.4. Characteristics of the employment framework of senior level public servants, 2020

Differences between senior level public servants compared to other public servants:

Country	They are recruited with a more centralized process	They are identified early on in their careers and more attention is paid to the management of their careers	More emphasis is put into avoiding conflicts of interest	More emphasis is put into the management of their performance	They are encouraged to have more career mobility	The part of their pay that is performance-related is higher	Their appointment into a post is shorter (e.g. in case of fixed term contracts)	They can be dismissed or demoted more easily than other public servants	There are no differences, all public servants are under the same employment framework
Australia	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Austria	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Belgium	●	○	○	●	●	○	●	●	○
Canada	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Colombia	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	○
Czech Republic	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	●	○
Denmark	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	○
Estonia	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	○
Finland	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	○
France	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	○
Germany	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○
Greece	●	○	●	●	○	●	○	○	○
Hungary	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	○
Ireland	●	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○
Israel	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	○
Italy	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	○
Japan	●	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Korea	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Latvia	●	○	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
Lithuania	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Luxembourg	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○
Mexico	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○
Netherlands	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
New Zealand	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Norway	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Poland	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	●	○
Portugal	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	○
Slovenia	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
Spain	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	●	○
Sweden	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○
Switzerland	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Turkey	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○
United States	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	○
<b>OECD Total</b>									
● Yes	21	2	17	17	11	9	15	21	2
○ No	13	32	17	17	23	25	19	13	32
Brazil	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	○
Costa Rica	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
Romania	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Source: OECD (2020), Public Service Leadership and Capability Survey.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258002>



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