

3. PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

Employment in general government

Governments across OECD countries carry out many tasks that are fundamental to well-functioning societies. The diversity of these tasks partly reflects distinct cultures of public administration across countries and diverging citizen expectations. The large difference in relative sizes of public sector employment highlights the variety of functions carried out by governments as well as the wide array of delivery mechanisms at their disposal to provide services. Services can be delivered by government employees or through a range of partnerships with the private or not-for-profit sectors. In some countries, the large majority of health care providers, teachers and emergency workers, for example, are directly employed by the government. In other countries, these and other types of professionals are employed by the private sector or non-profit organisations.

The size of general government employment varies significantly among OECD countries. Nordic countries report high levels of general government employment, reaching in some cases (Norway) more than 30% of total employment. On the other hand, less than 6% of people working in Japan and 8% of people working in Korea are working in general government. The average across the OECD is 18%.

In general, the numbers employed in general government tend to remain relatively stable over time. Some OECD countries reported considerable reductions in general government employment stemming from the 2007-08 financial crisis, but the average level of general government employment as a percentage of total employment across the OECD in 2017 (17.7%) was only marginally lower than the same figure in 2007 (17.8%). In the United Kingdom, Israel and Turkey, however, the number of people working in general government employment between 2007 and 2017 decreased by 3.1%, 2.9% and 2.3% respectively. In Norway, on the other hand, more people worked in general government in 2017 than in 2007 (around 1% more).

Regarding the annual growth rate of general government employment, the OECD average remains relatively stable with an average annual growth rate of 0.6% during 2007-09, a decrease of 0.2% during 2011-12, and 0.4% growth during 2016-17. Many countries show general government employment growth stifled during the 2011-12 period due to austerity measures, with close to half returning to recovery by 2017. However, a look at individual countries paints a more nuanced picture. For example, Ireland displays the highest growth in 2016-17 at 3.5%, while Estonia displays the greatest reductions of more than 5% in the same period.

Methodology and definitions

Data are derived from the OECD National Accounts Statistics (database), which are based on the System of National Accounts (SNA), a set of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications and rules for national accounting. General government employment covers employment in all levels of government (central, state, local and social security funds) and includes core ministries, agencies, departments and non-profit institutions that are controlled by public authorities. Data represent the total number of persons employed directly by those institutions. Total employment covers all persons engaged in productive activity that falls within the production boundary of the national accounts. The employed comprise all individuals who, during a specified brief period, were in the following categories: paid employment or self-employment.

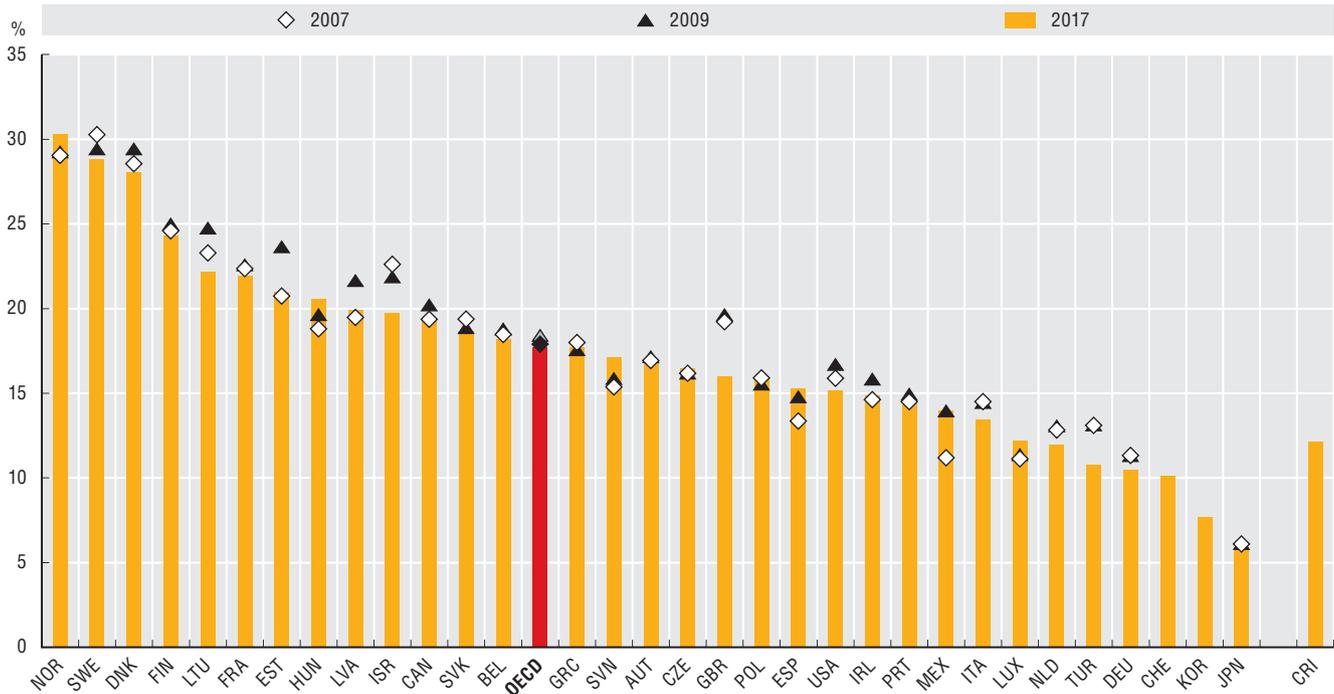
Further reading

- OECD (2019), *Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability*, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.
- OECD (2017), *Skills for a High Performing Civil Service*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264280724-en>
- OECD (2016), *Engaging Public Employees for a High-Performing Civil Service*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267190-en>.

Figure notes

- Data for Australia, Chile, Iceland and New Zealand are not available. On data for Israel, see <http://doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>. Data for Korea and Switzerland are not included in the OECD average due to missing time series. Data for Poland before 2010 are based on estimates. Data for Poland before 2010 are based on estimates.
- 3.1. Data for Mexico, Switzerland and Costa Rica refer to 2016 rather than 2017. Data for the United States refer to 2008 rather than 2009.
 - 3.2. 2007-09: annual average growth rate. Data for Mexico, Switzerland and Costa Rica are for 2015-16 rather than 2016-17. Data for the United States refer to 2008-09 rather than 2007-09.

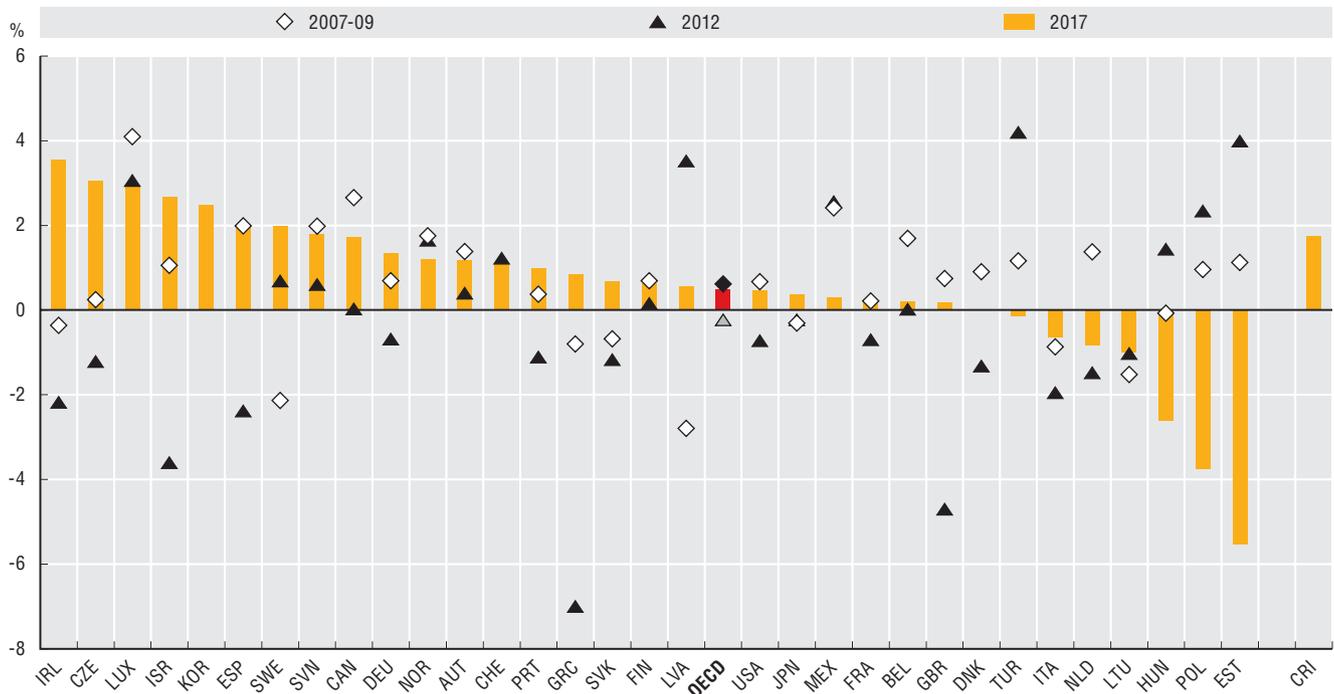
3.1. Employment in general government as a percentage of total employment, 2007, 2009 and 2017



Source: OECD National Accounts Statistics (database). Data for Japan, Korea, Mexico, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States are from the International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT (database), Public employment by sectors and sub-sectors of national accounts.

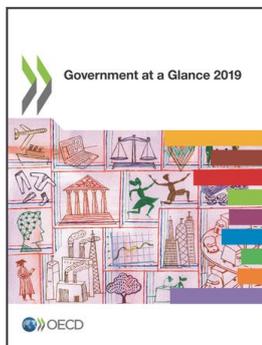
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934031997>

3.2. Annual growth rate of government employment, 2007-09, 2012 and 2017



Source: OECD National Accounts Statistics (database). Data for Japan, Korea, Mexico, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States are from the International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT (database), Public employment by sectors and sub-sectors of national accounts.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934032016>



From:
Government at a Glance 2019

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccf5c38-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2019), "Employment in general government", in *Government at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/fee3c285-en>

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