



International trends in Civil Service

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Abstract

Aim: To present the main international trends in civil service staffing, age composition, and mobility, based on recent OECD and EUPAN data, and to highlight the related human resource management challenges and possible strategic responses.

Methodology: A comparative analysis drawing on official OECD and EUPAN statistics, reports, and relevant literature. The study examines differences between countries in terms of the proportion of public service employment, workforce age distribution, mobility practices, and structural characteristics.

Findings: Public service employment shares remain generally stable across most developed countries, although there are significant variations between OECD members. The aging of the public service workforce is faster than that of the general population, especially in Mediterranean countries, while the proportion of young employees is low, raising concerns about future replacement. Mobility is underutilized as an efficiency-enhancing tool, despite its potential to address skill shortages, distribute competencies more effectively, and support innovation.

Value: The study provides a comprehensive, comparative overview of current international trends in the civil service and formulates practical recommendations for human resource policy, particularly in the strategic use of mobility. The results may assist policymakers in long-term workforce planning and fostering generational renewal in public administration.

Keywords: civil service, trends, staffing, age

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Introduction

In recent years, several domestic and international analyses (Hazafi, 2023) have been published addressing the demographic composition of the civil service workforce and the related human resource management (HRM) challenges. These include the research report produced within the framework of the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) of the European Union (Hazafi et al., 2024) on generational challenges and the Member States' practices in generational management in the civil service. Among other issues, the research sought to answer questions such as whether the ageing of central government staff affects all EUPAN countries in the same way or whether there are differences, what the average age of central government employees is in the EUPAN countries, and how the age structure is evolving. OECD publications, which are rich in data and information, also regularly present statistics on the demographic composition of the civil service and on other current HRM issues. *Government at a Glance 2025* (OCDE, 2025a) compares, by country, the proportion of public service employment, age distribution, educational attainment, gender composition, and certain elements of human resource management (civil service oversight, performance evaluation, measurement of engagement, governance, leadership). The 2021 edition of the *Employment and Public Management* series (OCDE, 2022) addresses preparedness for challenges in an uncertain socio-economic environment in relation to workforce management, while the 2023 yearbook (OCDE, 2023) focuses on flexibility and mobility. The analysis entitled *Combating the Ageing of the Civil Service through Age-Conscious Personnel Policies* (OCDE, 2025b) examines strategic responses to the ageing of staff. Using data from these sources, this study presents the key international trends in the civil service.

Number of Employees

Staffing as an Indicator

One of the most commonly used indicators for comparing Member States is the proportion of civil service employment. In itself, a headcount figure is insufficient to draw any conclusions about the “size” of the civil service. However, if the total number of employees is compared to the working-age (15–64 years) economically active population, the resulting ratio can serve as a basis for ranking countries. It should be noted, however, that the size and composition of the civil service workforce may differ significantly between countries

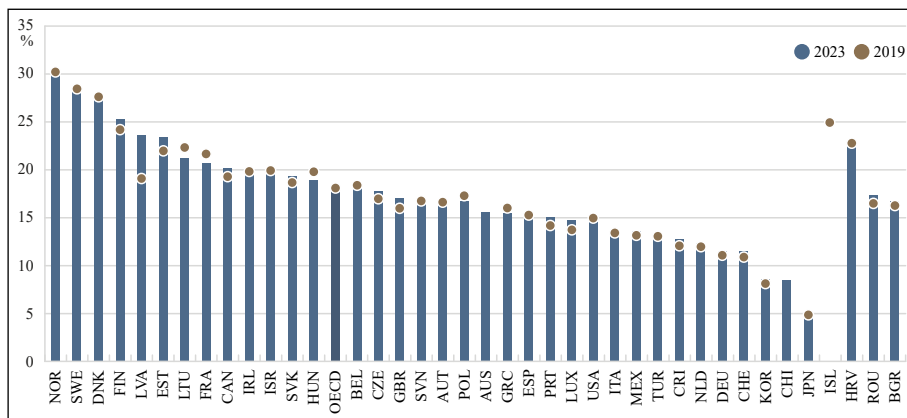
simply because each state employs the personnel providing public services within different institutional frameworks, and therefore under different legal statuses. For example, in some countries, healthcare workers and teachers are civil servants, while in others these positions are primarily filled by employees of private or non-profit organisations receiving state funding (OCDE, 2025a).

Staffing Trends

As noted earlier, the proportion of civil service employment varies significantly across OECD countries. The highest ratios are found in the Nordic states, where the civil service accounts for nearly one-third of all employment: Norway (30.1%), Sweden (28.2%), Denmark (27.3%), and Finland (25.2%). In contrast, Chile, Japan, and South Korea record the lowest ratios, with the public sector representing less than 10% of total employment (OCDE, 2025a). The term “civil service” encompasses all levels of public administration (central government, federal state governments, local authorities, and social security institutions), including ministries, public institutions, agencies, and non-profit organisations governed by public authorities. The figures reflect the number of persons directly employed by these institutions (OCDE, 2025a).

Figure 1

Civil service employment as a proportion of the working-age, economically active population



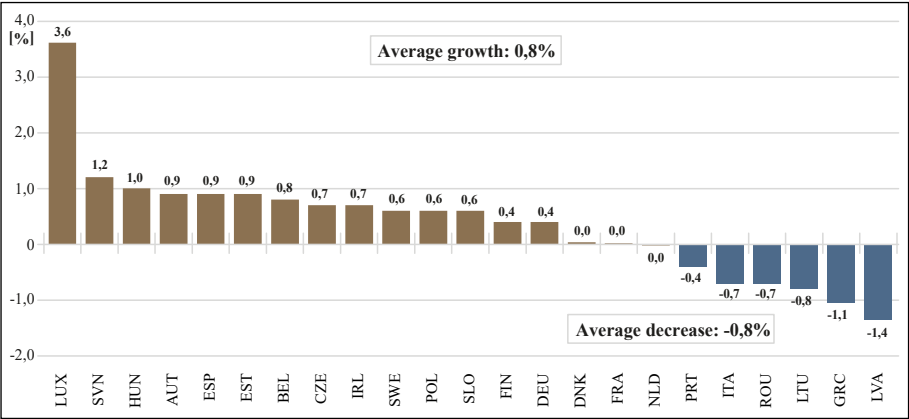
Note. OCDE, 2025a.

Despite the austerity measures introduced following the 2007–2008 financial crisis, the proportion of civil service employment within total employment remained relatively stable: 18.2% in 2007 and 17.9% in 2019 (OECD, 2021a). The

same can be said for the period between 2019 and 2023, although smaller or larger differences can be observed across countries. The largest increases were recorded in Latvia (+4.5 percentage points), Estonia (+1.4 points), and the United Kingdom (+1.1 points). In contrast, the largest decreases occurred in Lithuania (–1.1 points), France (–0.9 points), and Hungary (–0.9 points). Overall, with few exceptions, both total employment and civil service employment grew over the period in question, meaning that employment growth in the civil service outpaced that of total employment. Between 2019 and 2023, civil service employment increased on average by 1.6% per year, compared to only 1.1% for total employment. Within the OECD, only two countries (Costa Rica and Hungary) did not see growth in the number of civil service employees, and in four countries (Costa Rica, Japan, Latvia, and Mexico) total employment did not grow. In roughly two-thirds of OECD member states, civil service employment grew faster—or declined more slowly—than total employment. Among these, Latvia (5.4 percentage points), Costa Rica (2.9 points), and Portugal (2.0 points) registered the largest differences between the growth rates of civil service and total employment. In the remaining one-third of countries, where the share of civil service employment decreased, the largest differences were recorded in Lithuania (1.3 points) and in both France and Hungary (1.1 points each) (OCDE, 2025a).

If we look exclusively at EUPAN countries, it can be observed that between 2007 and 2019 the number of administrative positions increased in the vast majority of states. Luxembourg achieved the highest average annual growth (3.6%), while in Greece and Latvia the average annual decline exceeded 1% (OECD, 2021a).

Figure 2
Average annual change in civil service employment (2007–2019)



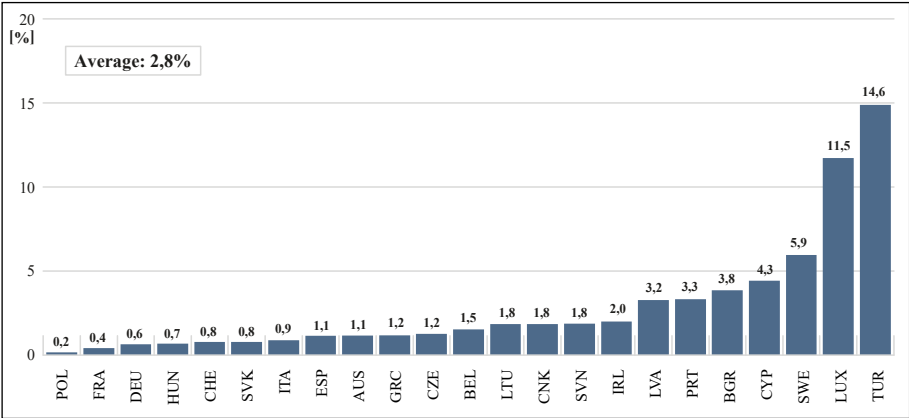
Note. Hazafi et al., 2024.

Civil service employment continued to grow thereafter, and in 2021, with a few exceptions (France and Poland), all countries exceeded the previous year’s level. The largest increases were observed in Latvia and Estonia. This growth can be explained partly by the average annual rise in administrative employment and partly by a slight decline in total employment (Hazafi et al., 2024).

Classification of Countries Based on Staffing Ratios

The proportion of employees working in central government can also be used as an indicator. This ratio regularly appears in EUPAN expert materials. According to these data, in EUPAN countries, central government employees account for an average of 2.8% of the economically active workforce. However, individual countries deviate significantly from this average. In Turkey, the proportion of central government employees is more than five times the average, in Luxembourg more than four times, and in Sweden more than twice the average. In contrast, in eleven countries the share of central government employment is less than half the average, and in Poland the figure does not even reach one-tenth of the average (Hazafi et al., 2024).

Figure 3
Proportion of central government employees relative to the active workforce



Note. Hazafi et al., 2024; EUROSTAT.

Based on the data, different categories can be established, and such categorisation allows for drawing conclusions. According to employment ratios, three groups of countries can be distinguished (Hazafi, in press).

a) Low ratio (0.2–1.0%)

This group includes Poland, France, Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia, and Italy. With the exception of France, these countries are characterised by decentralised public administration, where the central government plays a smaller role in employment. For example, in Germany and Switzerland, there is a strong federal system in which most administrative functions are carried out at the regional or local level. In Poland, the exceptionally low figure may indicate efficiency-enhancing reforms, but it could also mean that certain public functions are outsourced from the central government. This is supported by the fact that Poland's local autonomy index is among the highest. In 2014, it stood at 71.6, having increased by 26.54 points since 1990, clearly indicating a strengthening of decentralisation. By comparison, the same index in Hungary is 48.75, with a trend of –10.87 between 1990 and 2004. The EU evaluates the degree of local autonomy in countries using a comprehensive methodology, assessing the period between 1990 and 2014. This assessment is conducted by an expert network using a standardised methodology. Countries with particularly high levels of local autonomy include Switzerland, the Nordic countries, Germany, and Poland ([URL1](#)).

In France, the state is highly centralised; however, as a result of decentralisation reforms implemented in several waves, the role of local governments and the employment linked to them have increased, while the proportion of employees in central government has declined ([URL1](#)). The local autonomy index for French municipalities is 25.67. Although over the past decade (2011–2022) staffing levels have risen across all subsystems of the civil service, the increase has been greater in local governments and hospitals than in central government (Fonction publique, 2024). This trend can also be observed in other European countries (OCDE, 2021b).

b) Average ratio (1.1–2.8%)

Spain, Austria, Greece, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Lithuania, Denmark, Slovenia, and Ireland have an average proportion of central government employment.

This group represents the European average (2.8%), indicating a more balanced distribution of government employment. For example, in Spain, despite its autonomous regions, the role of central government remains significant. In Lithuania, central government employment constitutes a stable employment base. In Belgium, decision-making powers are divided among the federal government, three regions (Flanders, the Brussels-Capital Region, and Wallonia), and three language communities (Flemish, French, and German-speaking) ([European Union, 2025](#)).

c) High ratio (3.0–14.6%)

Latvia, Portugal, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Sweden, Luxembourg, and Turkey are characterised by high ratios.

In the cases of Latvia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Luxembourg, the high ratio may be linked to the organisational characteristics of small-population states. The key factor is that, given the lower population size, central government operates with proportionally larger staffing levels, enabling it to provide adequate resources and coordination for state functions without relying on an extensive network of local-level institutions. These countries typically also have a small territorial extent. In Turkey, the exceptionally high share of central government employment (14.6%) may be the result of centralised governance and the strong presence of the public sector.

It is, however, very difficult to establish a direct correlation between staffing ratios and countries' demographic, governmental, administrative, economic, or other characteristics; at best, one can point to possible underlying causes for the differences. For example, the form of government (federal or unitary state), the degree of centralisation, population size, and the country's territorial extent can all systematically influence how employment is distributed across administrative levels.

Changes in the Proportion of Age Groups within the Workforce

Examining how changes in the number of civil servants have affected the internal proportions of different age groups reveals three distinct trends across countries. In the Czech Republic, Denmark, and the Netherlands (in the latter two, civil service staffing levels remained unchanged), the share of young people increased significantly – by 15.9%, 10.7%, and 4.4%, respectively. In other countries – such as Austria, Belgium, and Finland – youth employment also rose, but their share did not increase to the same extent as the overall growth in staffing.

Conversely, in some countries, despite the expansion of civil service employment, the proportion of the 18–34 age group declined. This phenomenon is most striking in Germany, where civil service employment grew by 5%, yet the share of young people fell by 13.4%.

In Latvia, Lithuania, and Portugal, not only did the number of civil service employees decrease, but the proportion of young people also declined—in Latvia's case, at twice the rate of the overall reduction (Hazafi et al., 2024).

Summary

The staffing indicator can only be applied with caution, due to the varying definitions and differing organisational structures of public services across countries. Nevertheless, it remains a generally accepted tool for international comparison.

Most commonly, the size of the civil service workforce is compared to total active employment. The country rankings based on this measure have not changed in recent years, and the established order remains valid today. However, the values show significant variation (10–30%).

Despite the austerity measures following the 2007–2008 financial crisis, the proportion of civil service employment within total employment has remained stable overall, and the same applies to the period 2019–2023. At the same time, smaller or larger country-specific differences can be observed.

Based on staffing ratios, countries can be classified into three categories: those with low, average, and high proportions of civil service employment.

In general, both civil service and total active employment have grown, but at a faster rate in the civil service. In some countries, generational restructuring has been observed, with the proportion of younger generations increasing either alongside staffing growth or despite stable staffing levels.

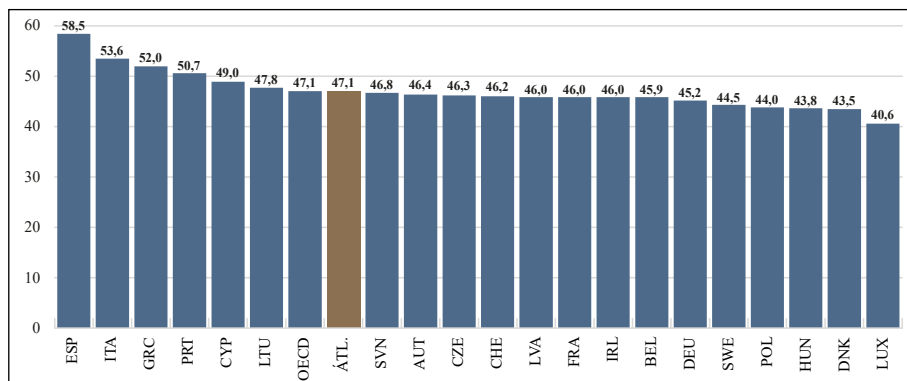
Age

Average Age

In EUPAN countries, the average age is 47.1 years. Spain stands out, with the average age of central government employees reaching 58.5 years (Hazafi et al., 2024).

Figure 4

Average age of central government employees



Note. Hazafi et al., 2024.

A common characteristic of developed countries is the ageing of both society and the civil service workforce, a phenomenon that is more pronounced in public administration than in society at large (Hazafi, 2009). For this reason, “shaping” the age composition of the workforce is one of the most important challenges in human resource management. At the same time, it can be observed that in all EUPAN countries, middle-aged employees represent the largest proportion of the workforce.

In Mediterranean countries (e.g. Spain, Italy, Greece), the above-average age of civil servants compared to the European mean can be attributed to several interrelated economic, social, and administrative factors:

a) Fiscal austerity and hiring freezes

Due to fiscal austerity measures—particularly following the 2008 financial crisis—civil service positions in these countries were frozen for extended periods, preventing the recruitment of new, young employees. The absence of replacements led to a significant increase in the proportion of older age groups already in the system. In Portugal, Italy, and Greece, the share of civil service employment declined between 2007 and 2019.

b) Employment protection and stability

In Mediterranean countries, civil service positions often entail lifelong employment, with strong legal protection and job stability. Employment security

has traditionally been a strength of the Italian civil service. Until the most recent reforms, job security was so strong that, in practice, it was not possible to dismiss a civil servant—even in cases of serious disciplinary offences. However, these guarantees have been substantially weakened as a result of the reforms (Linder, manuscript).

People rarely change jobs, and mobility between the public and private sectors is low, meaning that older employees also remain in the system.

c) Cultural factors and labour market characteristics

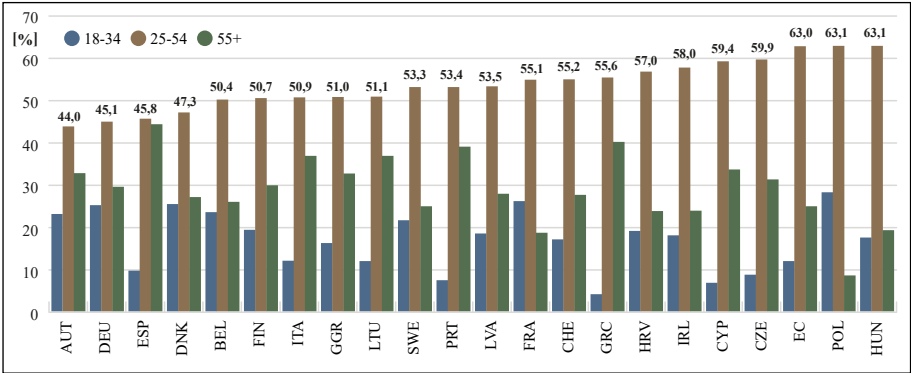
Young people enter the labour market later, spend more time in education, and face a higher incidence of long-term unemployment (particularly in Spain and Greece). As a result, they also enter public administration later—often after the age of 30—if they enter at all. In Italy, entry into the civil service is through merit-based, open competitive examinations. Although this is regarded as a constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity, many consider the process cumbersome, as it significantly prolongs recruitment (Linder, manuscript).

d) Lack of political and administrative reforms

In many Mediterranean countries, administrative reforms—which could have focused on rejuvenation, digitalisation, and mobility—have progressed more slowly. Rigid structures make it difficult for new generations to enter, especially when recruitment is heavily regulated, tied to examinations, or subject to political influence.

Age Composition

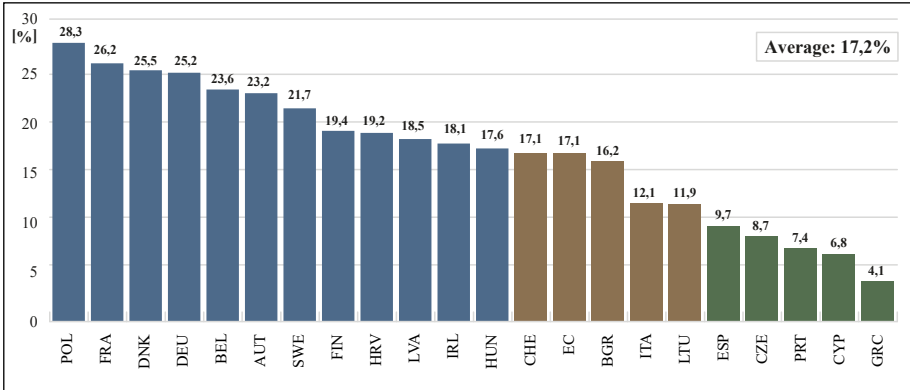
Figure 5
Age composition of the civil service



Note. Hazafi et al., 2024.

The proportion of the 18–34 age group falls below the average (17.2%) in only nine countries (as well as in the European Commission). In five countries, it does not even reach 10%. The difference between the two extremes is nearly sevenfold.

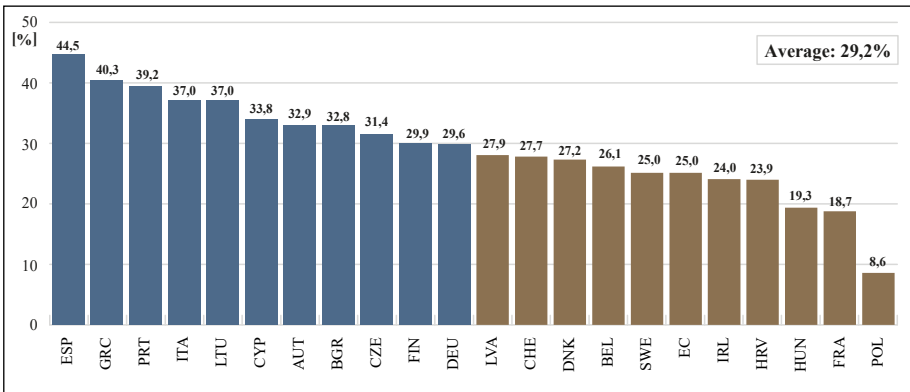
Figure 6
Proportion of the 18–34 age group in public administration



Note. Hazafi et al., 2024.

In eleven countries, the proportion of those aged 55 and over exceeds the average, and in Spain, more than five times as many people from this age group work in public administration as in Poland (Hazafi et al., 2024).

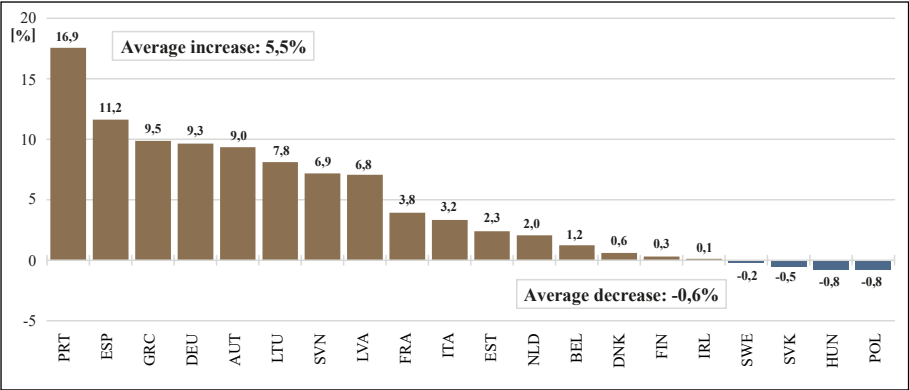
Figure 7
Proportion of the 55+ age group in public administration



Note. Hazafi et al., 2024.

OECD data also show that the rejuvenation process which began between 2015 and 2020 has stalled, and the share of the 55+ age group has started to increase again (OCDE, 2021b).

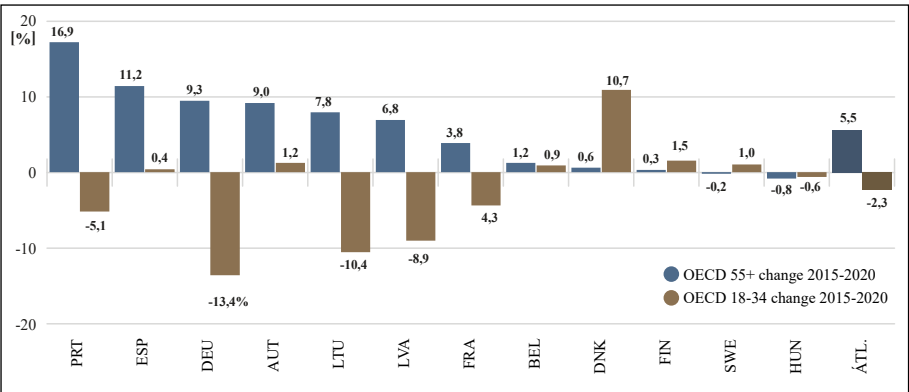
Figure 8
Change in the proportion of the 55+ age group in the civil service, 2015–2020



Note: Hazafi et al., 2024.

The ageing process is further confirmed by the fact that, while the proportion of older age groups has increased, the number of young people has generally declined (OCDE, 2021b).

Figure 9
The ageing process in public administration, 2015–2020



Note. OCDE, 2021b.

Summary

The average age of employees in public administration across EUPAN countries is 47.1 years. This is, in itself, a relatively high figure, indicating an ageing civil service. Spain is an extreme case, with an average age of 58.5 years—an outstanding value that may pose serious challenges in replacing the large number of retirements expected in the near future.

In addition to the general ageing of society, civil service employees are ageing at an even faster pace—meaning the process is more acute in public administration. Middle-aged employees (35–54 years) make up the largest share in every country. This indicates that, in the short to medium term, the workforce remains stable, but in the long term, ageing necessitates immediate succession planning.

Ageing is further reflected in the fact that in eleven countries, the share of employees aged 55 and over exceeds the average, and in Spain their number is five times higher than in Poland. This points not only to differences in age composition, but also to divergent human resource policies.

The share of the 18–34 age group averages only 17.2%, which is extremely low. In only nine countries is the proportion below this average, and in five countries it does not even reach 10%. The nearly sevenfold difference between the extremes reflects substantial structural disparities among Member States in attracting young people. The declining share of youth suggests that public administration is not sufficiently attractive for them (e.g. compared to the opportunities, more flexible working conditions, and faster career progression available in the private sector).

The rejuvenation process stalled by 2020, and positive trends could not be sustained. Conversely, the proportion of those aged 55+ began to rise again, indicating no significant progress in generational renewal. The decrease in the number of young employees is occurring in parallel with the growing dominance of older age groups, which signals long-term operational and succession challenges in the civil service.

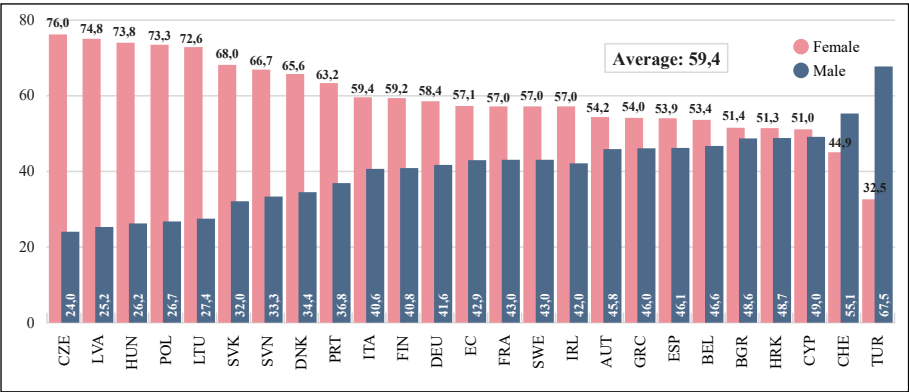
Severe structural ageing can be observed in European public administration—the pace of ageing is often faster than in the overall population. The lack of succession (low proportion of young employees) is particularly concerning and calls for urgent strategic human resource responses.

Differences between countries are significant—Eastern and Western European states show divergent patterns, reflecting the differing structures of their civil service systems.

Gender Distribution

On average, 59.4% of civil service employees are women. Women form the majority in the public administration of every country, with the exception of Switzerland and the Republic of Türkiye. In seven countries, the proportion of female employees exceeds two-thirds (Hazafi et al., 2024).

Figure 10
Gender distribution in the civil service



Note. Hazafi et al., 2024.

In the broader public sector, women account for 59.9% of employees. By contrast, they are underrepresented in the total workforce, making up only 47.7% (OCDE, 2021a).

Mobility as a Tool for Human Capacity Management

The size of the workforce alone reveals nothing about whether the civil service is overstaffed or understaffed, as there is no single “optimal” number against which to measure civil service staffing levels. Spatial (cross-country) and temporal (longitudinal) comparisons are also limited by substantial conceptual and structural differences between national civil service systems, as well as by the lack of comparable retrospective staffing data. Certain trends can be identified, but there are no tools available to capture the optimal staffing level objectively through data and statistics. In the absence of such a measure, Hungarian literature often adopts Lajos Lőrincz’s general definition, according to which optimal staffing is achieved when the quantity and quality of human resources required

for the organisation to perform its tasks are available at the right time. In other words, an organisation can perform its duties with maximum efficiency if the professional competencies required for those tasks are available in sufficient quantity precisely when they are actually needed.

This optimal situation is not a static state. The volume of tasks may fluctuate seasonally; severe social, economic, or public health crises can abruptly reorder task priorities, and the mass delivery of new functions may become necessary. Technological development accelerates the obsolescence of professional knowledge and may require the acquisition of new competencies. The latter can be achieved through training, further training, or by attracting and reallocating suitably qualified personnel. For this reason, the mobility of civil service employees is a key factor in managing the human resources available to an organisation.

Types of Mobility

Mobility can take various forms, depending on the direction of movement, the origin and destination, and whether it is temporary or permanent (OCDE, 2023).

Horizontal mobility is a lateral transfer within the same job classification system or between different systems to a position equivalent to the previous one.

Vertical mobility refers to promotion to a position involving higher professional responsibility, or, conversely, movement to a lower-level position.

- Functional (or “inter-professional”) mobility is a transfer to another field of expertise or occupational category.
- Geographical mobility is a change of city, region, or other area.
- Internal mobility is a transfer to another position within the same body or civil service.
- External mobility is a move from the civil service to another sector (e.g. the private sector), to another level of government, or to an international organisation.
- Temporary mobility means the employee retains their original position and returns to it after a set period.
- Permanent mobility involves a lasting transfer or the taking up of a new position.

Mobility is generally regarded as contributing to the development of an organisation and to increasing its efficiency. Mobility is particularly important in career-based systems, where civil servants are appointed for an indefinite period to a single organisation as their employer. In such systems, external mobility—such

as movement between the civil service and the private sector—is limited, making internal mobility even more significant. However, it should also be recognised that mobility can become counterproductive if not managed properly. Short-term costs (e.g. training expenses) must be taken into account, as they arise from the need for transferred staff to acquire new duties. If mobility is not properly managed, or becomes excessive, it can lead to high turnover, which in turn can have negative consequences for both individuals and organisations. Frequent personnel changes can seriously disrupt project implementation and lead to the loss of institutional knowledge or experience. Rapid turnover of managers may result in mid-course changes to the strategic direction of programmes or projects, as well as a lack of accountability for problems (OCDE, 2023). Conversely, if mobility does not function, the organisation can become stagnant, with rigid organisational and operational conditions. When mobility is low, organisations neither encourage it nor recognise its significance, which fosters institutional isolation and a uniformity of thinking that hinders innovation.

Strategic Mobility

Mobility is most effective when applied to achieve long-term, strategic objectives. In this way, strategic mobility can become a tool of human capacity management.

Table 1
Framework for strategic mobility

	Low mobility	Strategic mobility	Excessive mobility
Length of time in position	Employees remain in a position for too long after they have fully mastered its tasks; as a result, they see no opportunity to change work methods and cannot propose new approaches or ideas for addressing problems.	Employees spend enough time in a position to understand its depth and complexity, complete projects, and pass on their knowledge to others before leaving.	Employees change positions before they fully understand them or have the opportunity to see the results of their own work.
Individual perspective	Employees remain in their positions because they do not believe mobility will be recognised, they fear negative consequences, or they simply wish to stay in a safe, familiar environment. They see few career opportunities, which can lead to apathy, boredom, and the loss of committed, talented staff. There are insufficient opportunities to develop horizontal skills.	Employees follow a logical (horizontal or vertical) career path, work on exciting projects, and can develop their competencies. Motivation is higher, as they have opportunities to acquire new knowledge, and the results of their invested work become visible. Staff are able to strike a balance between acquiring general skills and specialised professional knowledge.	Employees leave due to dissatisfaction, in the hope of higher pay, or because of political instability. Personal development does not occur, as they do not remain in a position long enough to understand all its aspects. Relying on general skills, they become overburdened and stressed, as they do not reach the stage of acquiring deeper professional knowledge. They are characterised by low motivation, since they do not see tangible results from their work.

	Low mobility	Strategic mobility	Excessive mobility
Team-level perspective	Managers hold on to their best employees because they fear they will not be able to achieve their goals without them. Excessive stability can lead to institutional rigidity and one-dimensional thinking, with a lack of energy and new ideas.	Mobility is used as a tool to give teams new momentum, with only one member being transferred at a time.	Entire teams are transferred and reorganised, resulting in no real continuity or institutional memory (except in the case of temporary teams), which can reduce the effectiveness of project implementation.

Note. OCDE, 2023.

There are several prerequisites for achieving balanced strategic mobility (OCDE, 2023).

a) Common framework conditions

A common (uniform) statute is a prerequisite for enabling civil service employees to apply for different positions without structural barriers. Uniform job classifications or pay scales encourage mobility. Clear conflict-of-interest rules, identification of high-risk positions, and the requirement to file asset declarations help prevent abuses.

In the vast majority of OECD member countries, employment is established at the organisational level, meaning that the employment relationship is formed with the organisation as the employer. This limits mobility opportunities, as each employer—at best, within certain common framework conditions—sets its own employment terms (dispositivity). Career-based countries—about 20% of OECD members (OCDE, 2023)—are the exception, where civil servants receive an appointment covering the entire civil service. As a result, the employee is subject to a common statutory framework applying to all organisations, from which no deviation is permitted, or only in exceptional cases (cogency).

In some countries, the two systems operate in parallel. In Spain, for example, “generalists” (*corps général*) are employed centrally, whereas specialists—such as labour or financial inspectors, state engineers, architects, transport experts, diplomats, etc.—are employed directly by the competent ministry or authority (OCDE, 2023).

In Canada, employees of ministries and major bodies are employed by a single central “employer,” while staff of specialised institutions are employed directly by the respective organisation.

Among uniform rules, the most important are unified job classification and pay systems. Most OECD countries have some form of standardised system. Portugal recently carried out significant reform, integrating thousands of separate

“careers” with different pay scales and their own classifications—many tied to specific ministries or bodies—into three overarching, horizontal career paths. In Italy, employment classifications are regulated by law and collective agreements. Only nine OECD countries lack a uniform, commonly applied job classification system (OCDE, 2023).

A unified employer model would remove administrative barriers to mobility, as movement between organisations would not involve a change of employer or regulatory framework (OCDE, 2023).

b) Objectives and directions

Mobility is not an end in itself but a means of achieving predetermined organisational objectives. Different forms of mobility can serve different purposes. While most OECD countries have mobility policies or guidelines, these often do not specify concrete goals or expectations. Only a minority of countries regard mobility as an explicit goal or priority of the civil service, and only 11 countries actively promote internal mobility, while 7 do so for external mobility. In those countries where mobility objectives are defined, the most common aims include addressing sudden surges in labour demand, solving complex problems, developing staff qualifications, and improving the allocation and use of scarce expertise and competencies (OCDE, 2023).

c) Mobility mechanisms

Achieving strategic objectives requires appropriate mechanisms. Although most countries have various tools and measures to promote professional mobility, fully exploiting them remains a challenge everywhere.

Three types of mobility mechanisms can be distinguished: temporary reassignment, career-planning-related internal recruitment, and meeting sudden increases in demand.

Temporary reassignment – This category includes micro-assignments (where a civil servant works part-time in another service while retaining their original position), secondments, exchange programmes, and longer-term rotation schemes.

Under Belgium’s Talent Exchange mobility programme, ministries have the opportunity to exchange staff with each other for 6–12 months to carry out programmes or projects. In Canada, several rotation schemes are available to ministries, one of which is the centrally coordinated Mosaïque leadership programme designed for non-managerial civil servants.

The NORUT Nordic exchange programme enables civil servants to familiarise themselves with administrative practices in another Nordic country. The annual

scholarship budget is allocated by a body composed of representatives from each participating country. The two main conditions of the programme are that participants may retain their salary during the exchange period, and they may only apply to another Nordic country. Exchanges typically last 1–2 months but can extend to as long as 6 months (OCDE, 2023).

In Japan, exchange programmes operate between the public and private sectors, as well as between different levels of government. In 2021, 35 central civil servants were seconded to the private sector, while 308 private-sector employees were appointed to various levels of government. In the same year, 1,788 officials were seconded from central government to local authorities, while the central level—on 1 October 2020—hosted 3,031 local officials (OCDE, 2023).

The European Union Public Administration Cooperation Exchange (PACE) programme offers civil servants from Member States the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the administrative methods and cultures of other EU Member States in specific fields. The programme is organised by the European Commission and involves more than 300 officials from 18 Member States (OCDE, 2023).

Slovenia’s “Partnership for Change” exchange programme was launched to promote knowledge-sharing between the public and private sectors and is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Public Administration together with the American Chamber of Commerce. Each year, there is an opportunity to take part in a mutual exchange lasting up to five days. The programme is open to all and voluntary. At the beginning of the year, interested participants can apply in response to a call issued by the ministry by submitting a motivation letter that includes their position, workplace, and reason for interest. If accepted, a representative of the American Chamber of Commerce contacts private companies, while the ministry’s project manager contacts public institutions. If both parties agree, the exchange takes place (OCDE, 2023).

Career-planning-related internal recruitment (OCDE, 2023) – Many countries also support permanent career changes during an employee’s professional life. This form of mobility can be particularly important for realising the previously mentioned benefits—such as attracting and retaining talent—especially when employees seek varied career paths. However, measuring this type of mobility is challenging. One possible indicator, if available, is the previously mentioned average length of employment. The survey also asked participating countries to indicate whether they use regular and planned transfers as part of career planning or the management of administrative bodies. Fourteen countries reported that they integrate regular transfers into planned career development.

Another tool for promoting internal mobility is to reserve certain positions exclusively for internal applicants. This is most typical of career-based systems,

where large numbers of entrants are recruited through competitive examinations and are then placed in various positions through internal mobility. Spain, for example, follows a “two-step” selection process: applicants join a specific corps through public competitions and examinations, after which they may apply for posts advertised specifically for that corps by individual ministries. These postings describe the positions in detail and set out specific requirements (professional experience, education, language skills, digital competencies, length of service, etc.).

In position-based systems, by contrast, vacancies are advertised for specific jobs, leaving no room for internal mobility. For instance, in Denmark, Estonia, Sweden, and Switzerland, no posts are reserved for internal mobility. However, most OECD member countries use a mixed system. Vacancies are first advertised within the organisational unit or organisation issuing the call, and if they cannot be filled internally, they are then opened to external applicants.

Mobility to address fluctuations in demand (OCDE, 2023) – Demand within the civil service can fluctuate due to seasonal variations, shifts in government priorities, or unexpected emergencies. In such situations, most civil services have the option of requiring staff to move. This can be either permanent or temporary.

d) Incentives and mobility culture

The main barrier to mobility is often cultural in nature. Developing a strategic approach requires rewarding both employees and managers for mobility. Managers must be provided with the necessary tools, information, and incentives to be genuinely able to support the mobility of their staff. For example, participation in mobility should be recognised in performance appraisals and promotion criteria.

Barriers to mobility (OCDE, 2023)

Barriers to mobility may be cultural or structural. Cultural barriers include a lack of managerial support. Managers are the primary “losers” of mobility, as they are expected to reassign staff who have been in their teams for a long time and have already reached peak performance. Moreover, managers tend to hold on to their best-performing employees and therefore do not recommend them for mobility. Another cultural barrier is that knowledge gained through mobility is not always properly recognised. In some countries, experience gained in another organisation is considered an asset, while in others it is valued less. In such an environment, employees are less motivated, as they feel mobility may slow down their career progression.

Structural barriers include the lack of visibility of mobility opportunities for employees.

Encouraging and supporting mobility (OCDE, 2023)

Individual training programmes that create opportunities for mobility are among the most common tools for promoting internal mobility. These programmes are generally selected jointly by the manager and the employee during performance evaluations, thus linking training and development to mobility. Another frequently used tool is the transparent publication of mobility opportunities, often made available on internal noticeboards or intranet sites. In Portugal, all open vacancies in central, local, and regional administration must be posted on a central website. In New Zealand, there is currently a centralised brokerage service designed to fill capacity gaps and develop leaders through leadership coaching and targeted development brokerage. In Lithuania, one of the goals of the civil service reform is precisely to promote staff mobility. In Luxembourg, all mobility-related vacancies in central government are posted on the centralised GovJobs website. In Canada, the Emplois GC portal provides a single access point for all civil service job postings for both applicants and managers. In addition, the Canadian government has created a Career Centre that enables employees to manage their careers and develop their skills through training, job swaps, micro-assignments, and other forms of practical learning.

Monitoring

Mobility is monitored using key indicators such as turnover or retention rates, the average length of service in a given position, participation in secondment programmes, and the number of promotions. Most OECD countries measure the proportion of employees who change positions between ministries (65%) or within them (59%). Temporary reassignments and secondments are tracked at similar rates. Around half of the Member States also record the number of entries into and exits from the civil service sector (OCDE, 2023).

Summary

Mobility could be one of the key elements in managing human capacity, but public administration has not yet taken full advantage of its potential. Mobility can become a factor for increasing efficiency if it is strategic in nature, meaning that the government has a mobility policy that sets out the objectives to be

achieved through greater mobility (e.g. addressing sudden surges in labour demand, solving complex problems, developing staff qualifications, and improving the allocation and use of scarce expertise and competencies), assigns appropriate mobility mechanisms to achieve these objectives (micro-assignments, exchange programmes, transfers between units, organisations or sectors, career-linked job changes, reserve capacity), and adopts measures to encourage and support mobility so as to help build a mobility-friendly organisational culture.

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