

For Official Use**English - Or. English****22 September 2025****COUNCIL****Council****REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OECD
RECOMMENDATION ON PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERSHIP AND
CAPABILITY****(Note by the Secretary-General)****JT03571379**

1. This document presents, in its Annex, a Report by the Public Governance Committee (PGC) on the implementation of the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability [[OECD/LEGAL/0445](#)] (hereafter, the “Recommendation”), including on the implementation of its substantive provisions, its dissemination and its continued relevance.
2. On 8 September 2025, the PGC approved, by written procedure, the Report set out in the Annex and its transmission to Council to be noted and declassified [[GOV/PGC/PEM\(2025\)1/REV2](#)]. Once declassified, the Report will be included on the [online Compendium of OECD legal instruments](#).

Background

3. The Recommendation was adopted by the Council on 17 January 2019 [[C\(2018\)166](#) and [C/M\(2019\)1](#), Item 4]. The Recommendation was developed by the Public Governance Committee’s Working Party on Public Employment and Management (PEM) through subsequent discussions in PEM meetings, thematic groups and workshops. A public consultation was conducted which generated 290 submissions from public officials, academia and civil society, from 29 countries.
4. The Recommendation sets the global standard to ensure that public services are managed in ways that maximise their impact and their efficiency, and that Public Service Leaders are equipped with the right skills and administrative environment to deliver. All OECD Members are Adherents to the Recommendation¹.
5. The Recommendation presents 14 principles of a fit-for-purpose public service under three main themes:
 - A values-driven public service where commonly understood values guide a results-oriented and citizens-centred culture, leadership and policy and services design;
 - A trusted and capable public service with the ability to identify the skills and competencies it needs, and which aligns its employment systems to bring those skills and competencies in, develop them, and motivate their use; and
 - A responsive and adaptive public service with the empowerment, resources and agility needed to effectively and efficiently address fast changing, ongoing and emerging challenges.
6. Since the Recommendation’s adoption in 2019, emerging trends related to new technologies and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have led public administrations to face growing complexity, requiring an increasingly agile workforce with technical, digital, and adaptive leadership skills.
7. When adopting the Recommendation, the Council instructed the PGC, through the PEM, to report to the Council on its implementation no later than five years following its adoption and every ten years thereafter.

Methodology

8. The primary methodological source of the present Report were dedicated surveys on Public Service Leadership and Capability ran in 2020 (module 1 on leadership, module 2 on attraction and retention, module 3 on recruitment), 2022 (module 4 on mobility and flexible working arrangements, module 5 on learning and development), and 2024 (module 6 on human resource management institutions, module 7 on performance management), as well as a survey on the Composition of the Workforce in central/federal governments (2020 and 2024). The latter provides comparative data on government

¹ To date, no non-Member has adhered to the Recommendation.

employees working in the central and federal government level on topics such as representation of men and women, age, hierarchy, or educational level. While the 2020 and 2022 modules were run some time ago, the aggregate results and trends they identify remain relevant as they evolve gradually due to the large size of administrations and length of time it takes for reforms to be designed and implemented.

9. These surveys all gathered above 90% response rate from Adherents, as well as responses from non-Adherents (including some accession candidate countries²). The data from the different surveys has been published online (except for the 2024 surveys) and analysed through two flagship publications: *Public Employment and Management 2021: The Future of the Public Service* and *Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service* (OECD, 2021^[1]) (OECD, 2023^[2]).

10. The present Report also benefited from insights from an action, funded by the European Commission, surveying over 50,000 civil servants in eight EU Member States, six of which are also OECD Members (Belgium, the Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia) and two are accession candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia), on their perception of their working conditions including aspects such as quality of leadership and management, innovation climate, organisational performance, and well-being (OECD, 2025^[3]).

11. The Report also incorporates qualitative insights from OECD projects, including Public Service Leadership and Capability Reviews conducted in Brazil and Thailand. These case studies from non-Adherents provided a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes experienced by Adherents in implementing the Recommendation. By combining large-scale data collection with practical case studies, the Report offers a comprehensive analysis of how the Recommendation is implemented in practice and the key factors shaping its impact.

Process

12. The process for developing this Report began in 2020 with the development and testing of the first modules of the PSLC survey. The first draft of the Report was shared with the PEM for comments by written procedure by 29 April 2025 as well as with the Public Governance Committee for discussion at its meeting on 29-30 April 2025 [[GOV/PGC/PEM\(2025\)1](#)]. A second draft of the Report, integrating comments received on the first draft, was shared with the PEM. On 25 July 2025, the PEM approved by written procedure the transmission of the draft Report to the PGC for approval [[GOV/PGC/PEM\(2025\)1/REV1](#)].

13. On 8 September 2025, the PGC approved, by written procedure, the second draft [[GOV/PGC/PEM\(2025\)1/REV2](#)], incorporating the comments received from the PEM, and its transmission to Council, via the Executive Committee, to be noted and declassified. Once declassified by the Council, the Report will be included on the [online Compendium of OECD Legal Instruments](#).

² The 2024 Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability gathered responses from Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Peru, Romania and Thailand. The 2022 Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability gathered responses from Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Peru and Romania. The 2020 Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability gathered responses from Brazil and Romania. The 2024 Survey on the Composition of the Workforce in central/federal governments gathered responses from Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Peru, Romania and Thailand.

Summary

Implementation

14. The Report highlights that Adherents have made progress in implementing the Recommendation, though the pace and focus of reforms vary. Different Adherents have prioritised specific provisions, reflecting diverse policy contexts and institutional capacities. The main high-level findings of the implementation assessment are:

- **Most Adherents have established public service values.** Common public service values include responsiveness to the elected government, impartiality, integrity, transparency, accountability, and respect for the rule of law. Tensions can arise among these values and are intensified by contemporary trends, such as the increased speed of political decision making, the growing complexity of policy and politics, and the heightened visibility of civil servants which adds new layers of public scrutiny and accountability.
- **A capable senior-level public service is a lynchpin of government effectiveness.** Almost all Adherents have a clearly defined group of Senior Level Public Servants (SLPS) who are expected to be experts in the administrative machinery of government. Leadership development is consistently rated as a top priority and there is scope to increase the use of more sophisticated tools to assess leadership competencies, such as assessment centres and simulations. Furthermore, there is an ongoing challenge to ensure that SPLS have the mandate, competencies, and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power.
- **Attracting and retaining talent in the public service is becoming increasingly challenging, particularly in high-demand fields where competition with the private sector is strong.** While public administrations offer meaningful work, career development, and flexibility, these advantages are often underutilised in employer branding and recruitment efforts. To remain competitive, governments should adopt proactive strategies that align salary structures with labour market realities, enhance career mobility, and communicate the unique value of public service careers to prospective candidates.
- **Many Adherents are looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of their recruitment and performance systems while ensuring they remain transparent and merit-based.** However, Adherents' merit-based systems have often failed to adapt to modern labour market realities. Additionally, the merit principle also requires effective mechanisms to address underperformance. While there should be clear criteria and guidelines for managers to ensure standards around transparency, bias-reduction, and fairness, hiring managers should be trained, trusted, and supported by HR professionals, to conduct hiring processes in ways that meet their needs.
- **Adherents provide regular training to public servants, and could consider taking a more deliberate approach to reskilling.** Much of the training offer for public servants focuses on improving their skills for their current jobs (upskilling), with digital skills as a key focus among many Adherents. However few Adherents take a strategic approach to reskilling – training skills for public servants to change jobs.
- **While some Adherents have embraced modern, data-driven HR functions, many still face challenges in adapting to evolving workforce needs.** Public employment systems rely on a structured network of institutions managing human resources, balancing central oversight with ministerial autonomy. Strengthening HR capabilities and leveraging emerging technologies is essential to ensure agility, efficiency, and strategic workforce planning in an increasingly complex environment.
- **Improved strategic workforce planning could help Adherents navigate demographic and technological transitions amid fiscal pressures.** While some Adherents are beginning to leverage

the vast amount of data available within public services, most have yet to do so. Effective workforce planning is crucial to ensure that any downsizing efforts achieve their objectives while maintaining essential service standards and enabling the public sector to transition to a leaner, technology-driven model with the necessary skills and competence.

- **Recent crises have accelerated digitalisation to strengthen flexibility in many public administrations.** Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated many digital transitions, especially those needed to work remotely, pushing flexible ways of working into the definition of workforce adaptability. Moving forward, efforts should focus on leveraging new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, to enhance worker flexibility and efficiency, while addressing potential risks, including those associated with data bias and algorithmic management.
- **Strategies for reskilling public servants could improve Adherents' readiness for uncertainty.** As governments implement new technologies and priorities shift, some public service positions will become redundant. Effective reskilling strategies, based on identifying at-risk jobs, and mapping out pathways to re-train employees to take on higher-value positions, will be essential to ensure continued productivity from the public service workforce.
- **Public administrations are increasingly balancing permanent and temporary employment to create a more flexible and effective workforce.** While leveraging the strengths of each contract type can enhance adaptability, Adherents should develop clear policies and safeguards to prevent disparities between temporary and permanent staff. Strengthening governance frameworks, monitoring mechanisms, and cost-benefit analyses will be essential to ensure fair, transparent, and sustainable workforce management, particularly in times of fiscal constraints.

Dissemination

15. The dissemination of the Recommendation by Adherents and the Secretariat has significantly contributed to raising awareness and underscoring the relevance of its principles in strengthening public service leadership and employment policies. Efforts to disseminate the Recommendation at national and international levels included reviews, thematic reports, policy papers, and working papers prepared by the Secretariat, covering the Recommendation's key principles or broader cross-cutting issues. Notably, the Recommendation informed discussions at PEM Working Party meetings, regional PEM meetings, and different editions of the OECD Public Service Leaders Roundtable.

16. Additionally, country and regional reviews, along with targeted capacity-building activities, have supported Adherents in implementing relevant provisions, as well as non-Adherents in aligning with them. The Secretariat has also contributed public employment and management insights to ongoing work under the PGC, its subsidiary bodies, and other OECD policy communities and initiatives such as the Reinforcing Democracy Initiative, particularly on Pillar 3 on embracing the global responsibilities of governments. Moreover, the annual meetings of the Public Employment and Management Working Party have provided a valuable platform for sharing good practices and technical expertise, further promoting public employment and management practices aligned with OECD standards. Finally, several references to the Recommendation were made by other international organisations, and directly by Adherents, different stakeholders, and interested parties.

Continued relevance

17. The Report shows that the Recommendation continues to be of high relevance to Adherents, and to the work of the Public Governance Committee and that no revision is required in the short-to-medium term. It shows how many Adherents have made significant progress across all three pillars to align public employment policies and practices to the needs, of a modern and capable government. However, in many areas, governments remain hampered by legacy employment policies and practices that were designed for

another context. These systems risk delaying potential benefits from many of the important opportunities presented by modernisation initiatives, including new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

18. Modernising public employment policies and leadership practices is essential today, as the work of many public servants is becoming more complex, technical, digital and uncertain. Many public sector challenges – such as health, economic growth, and global security – are deeply interconnected, requiring public servants to develop greater understanding, expertise, and leadership, to ensure policy coherence and responsive service delivery. The rise of digitalisation and data-driven decision-making demands new and rapidly evolving technical skills that are often difficult to attract and develop within public administration. Furthermore, public servants operate in an increasingly uncertain environment, shaped by unforeseen crises beyond their control. At the same time, governments face growing fiscal pressures, requiring careful consideration of the cost, size, and structure of the public workforce. These challenges highlight the urgent need to review and revise how public servants are employed and managed throughout their careers to ensure governments maximise the value of their investment in the public workforce.

19. Addressing these challenges requires a particular focus on public service leaders – those who hold the most senior positions in public administration. Public service leaders are expected to oversee large, complex organisations and systems capable of delivering the ambitious policy agendas of democratically elected governments. This requires balancing three key functions: advice, delivery, and stewardship.

20. In line with the conclusions of the Report, work to continue supporting Adherents implement the Recommendation will continue, including through the development of implementation guidance and the PGC will report back to Council on its implementation, dissemination and continued relevance in ten years. An earlier report to Council would be prepared if changes in the field warrant it.

Next steps

21. In light of the preceding, the Secretary-General invites the Council to adopt the following draft conclusions:

THE COUNCIL

- a) noted document [C\(2025\)132](#), in particular the Report set out in its Annex, and agreed to its declassification;
- b) encouraged Adherents to the Recommendation to:
 - (i) step up efforts to address the main findings and challenges identified in the Summary and conclusions section of this Report, with the aim to further strengthen their public employment and management systems; and
 - (ii) continue implementing the Recommendation and disseminating it among relevant government bodies and other stakeholders.
- c) invited the Public Governance Committee, through the Working Party on Public Employment and Management, to:
 - (i) support Adherents in addressing the main challenges set out in the Summary and conclusions section of the Report, including through the development of guidance to support implementation of the Recommendation; and
 - (ii) report back to Council on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the Recommendation in ten years or earlier, if developments in the field warrant it.

Annex. Report on the implementation of the OECD Recommendation Public Service Leadership and Capability

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I. Background

Origin and scope of the Recommendation

1. To address the complex challenges posed by people management and civil service reform in public administrations, the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability [[OECD/LEGAL/0445](#)] (hereafter, the “Recommendation”) was developed by the Public Governance Committee’s Working Party on Public Employment and Management (PEM), through subsequent discussions in PEM meetings, thematic groups and workshops. A public consultation was conducted which generated 290 submissions from public officials, academia and civil society, from 29 countries. Following further discussion by the PEM and the Public Governance Committee, the Recommendation was adopted by the Council on 17 January 2019 [[C\(2018\)166](#) and [[C/M\(2019\)1](#), Item 4].
2. The Recommendation sets the global standard to ensure that public services are managed in ways that maximise their impact and their efficiency, and that Public Service Leaders are equipped with the right skills and administrative environment to deliver. The Recommendation promotes a highly professional administration based on objectivity, impartiality, accountability and the rule of law, as a fundamental condition to ensure citizen trust in public institutions and governance. Building on this foundation, the Recommendation aims to improve the ways of organising and managing public employees to emphasise proactive collaboration and innovation in service to citizens and economic activities in protection of public value and the common interest. All OECD Members are Adherents to the Recommendation³.
3. The Recommendation presents 14 principles of a fit-for-purpose public service under three main themes:
 - A values-driven public service where commonly understood values guide a results-oriented and citizens-centred culture, leadership and policy and services design;
 - A trusted and capable public service with the ability to identify the skills and competencies it needs, and which aligns its employment systems to bring those skills and competencies in, develop them, and motivate their use; and
 - A responsive and adaptive public service with the empowerment, resources and agility needed to effectively and efficiently address fast changing, ongoing and emerging challenges.

Developments in the field since the adoption of the Recommendation

4. Governments across the OECD put significant financial resources in developing and maintaining a skilled public service workforce. In 2023, the public sector employed, on average, nearly 18.4% of workers in OECD Members, their compensation accounting for approximately 20.3% of total government expenditure (OECD, 2025^[4]). In return, governments expect to secure a workforce with the skills and capabilities necessary to achieve policy objectives and ensure the prosperity, health, and safety of citizens. This investment funds the healthcare professionals who protect against pandemics, the teachers who educate future generations, the agents who safeguard borders, the financial managers who uphold transparency and accountability in government spending, and the scientists who predict and manage societal challenges, among many others. In all these cases, the quality of the work of these skilled professionals has a direct impact on public perception of government effectiveness, and, consequently, trust in public institutions.
5. Today, the work of many public servants is becoming more complex, technical, digital and uncertain. Many public sector challenges – such as health, economic growth, and global security – are deeply interconnected, requiring public servants to develop greater understanding, expertise, and leadership, to ensure policy coherence and responsive

³ To date, no non-Member has adhered to the Recommendation.

service delivery. The rise of digitalisation and data-driven decision-making demands new and rapidly evolving technical skills that are often difficult to attract and develop within public administration. Furthermore, public servants operate in an increasingly uncertain environment, shaped by unforeseen crises beyond their control. At the same time, governments face growing fiscal pressures, requiring careful consideration of the cost, size, and structure of the public workforce. These challenges highlight the urgent need to review and revise how public servants are employed and managed throughout their careers to ensure governments maximise the value of their investment in the public workforce.

6. Addressing these challenges requires a particular focus on public service leaders – those who hold the most senior positions in public administration. Public service leaders are expected to oversee large, complex organisations and systems capable of delivering the ambitious policy agendas of democratically elected governments. This requires balancing three key functions: advice, delivery, and stewardship. As advisors, they should have the mandate, expertise, and trust to provide impartial, evidence-based guidance that enhances policy design and implementation. In their delivery role, they should remain mission-focused and responsive to political direction while maintaining impartiality. Both functions depend on a well-equipped public service with the right regulations, policies, and systems to support effective and efficient decision-making. To ensure this, senior leaders should also fulfil a stewardship role – ensuring that public sector organisations are equipped with modern management systems that enable the right talent, technology, regulatory frameworks, and management culture to remain fit for purpose in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Purpose of this Report

7. When adopting the Recommendation, the Council instructed the PGC, through the PEM, to report to the Council on its implementation no later than five years following its adoption and every ten years thereafter. The purpose of this Report is therefore to assess the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the Recommendation with a view to ensure it remains up to date or to adjust it as need be.

II. Methodology

8. Several tools have been used to collect extensive evidence on Adherents' implementation since the adoption of the Recommendation. The primary methodological source of the present Report were dedicated surveys on Public Service Leadership and Capability ran in 2020 (module 1 on leadership, module 2 on attraction and retention, module 3 on recruitment), 2022 (module 4 on mobility and flexible working arrangements, module 5 on learning and development), and 2024 (module 6 on human resource management institutions, module 7 on performance management), as well as a survey on the Composition of the Workforce in central/federal governments (2020 and 2024). The latter aimed at providing comparative data on government employees working in the central and federal government level on topics such as representation of men and women, age, hierarchy, or educational level. While the 2020 and 2022 modules were run some time ago, the aggregate results and trends they identify remain relevant as they evolve gradually due to the large size of administrations and length of time it takes for reforms to be designed and implemented.

9. These surveys all gathered above 90% response rate from Adherents, as well as responses from non-Adherents. The PSLC survey modules have been designed for completion by senior officials from ministries/agencies with responsibilities for public employment and management of the civil service. The development of the different modules always followed the same process: a pilot phase with selected Adherents reflecting the diversity of public employment and management systems, an opportunity for Adherents to comment on the draft survey, and the running of the survey followed by careful data cleaning and analysis. The data from the different surveys has been published online (except for the 2024 surveys) and analysed through two flagship publications: *Public Employment and Management 2021: The Future of the Public Service* and *Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service* (OECD, 2021^[1]) (OECD, 2023^[2]).

10. The present Report also benefited from insights from an action, funded by the European Commission, surveying over 50 000 civil servants in eight EU Member States, six of which are also OECD Members (Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia) and two are accession candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia), on their perception of their working conditions including aspects such as quality of leadership and management, well-being, satisfaction with job quality, etc. (OECD, 2025^[3]).

11. The Report also incorporates qualitative insights from OECD projects, including Public Service Leadership and Capability Reviews conducted in Brazil and Thailand. These case studies from non-Adherents provided a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes experienced by Adherents in implementing the Recommendation. By combining large-scale data collection with practical case studies, the Report offers a comprehensive analysis of how the Recommendation is implemented in practice and the key factors shaping its impact.

III. Implementation

12. The following sections of the Report follow the three pillars and 14 principles, providing insights into the advances that Adherents have made towards implementation and highlighting gaps that remain.

Pillar 1: Build values-driven culture and leadership in the public service, centred on improving outcomes for society.

13. A values-driven culture ensures that public servants exercise their delegated authority in a manner that aligns with the expectations of citizens. These values primarily guide *how* public servants conduct their work, while elected officials determine *what* they work toward through policy directives. Common public service values include impartiality, integrity, transparency, accountability, and respect for the rule of law. By upholding these principles, public servants develop a strong sense of identity, ethos, and cohesion. These values also form the foundation of political impartiality, enabling public servants to serve any democratically elected government with equal dedication. As such, they are an essential pillar of a well-functioning democracy.

14. This pillar aims to foster a values-driven public service culture that is proactive, innovative, and centred on effective leadership. It emphasises identifying and embedding shared public service values that guide decision-making, uphold accountability, and support integrity in public administration (Principle 1). Strong leadership is key, empowering senior-level public servants with the mandate, competencies and conditions to serve as trusted advisors and effectively implement the agenda of the democratically elected government (Principle 2). Additionally, this pillar prioritises inclusion and wellbeing (Principle 3), fostering a forward-thinking and adaptable public administration that promotes long-term policy development and efficient service delivery (Principle 4).

Principle 1. Defining the values

Defining the values of the public service and promoting values-based decision-making, in particular through:

- a. Clarifying and communicating the shared fundamental values which should guide decision-making in the public service;
- b. Demonstrating accountability and commitment to such values through behaviour; and
- c. Providing regular opportunities for all public servants to have frank discussions about values, their application in practice, and the systems in place to support values-based decision making.

15. Public service values shape the actions and policies of public administrations while also guiding the behaviour of individual public servants. A values-based culture helps to foster trust, and provides a necessary balance to rules-based management, which emphasises strict compliance with procedures. This can enable public servants to

exercise judgment while upholding core standards, reinforcing accountability, efficiency, and innovation. Ultimately, displaying values of fairness and integrity in day-to-day interactions with citizens can further contribute to their trust in public institutions (OECD, 2024^[5]).

16. Most Adherents have defined public service values, though not all have done so explicitly. Canada, for example, has clearly articulated its values in the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector, linking each value to specific expected behaviours (Treasury Board of Canada, 2012^[6]). For instance, under the value of Excellence, public servants are expected to demonstrate professional excellence by providing fair, timely, efficient, and effective services that respect Canada's official languages, continuously improving the quality of policies, programmes, and services, and fostering a work environment that encourages teamwork, learning, and innovation.

17. Sweden promotes a values-based public administration grounded in constitutional and legal principles. It defines a set of common basic values for central government employees that emphasise democracy; legality; objectivity; free formation of opinion, respect for all people's equal value, freedom and dignity; and efficiency and service (Council on Basic Values of Sweden, 2016^[7]). These values are embedded in the Swedish Constitution which establishes the principles of objectivity and impartiality in public administration. Rather than being set out in a dedicated civil service act or ethics code, Sweden integrates these values through legal obligations, leadership development, and training initiatives, illustrating how constitutional anchoring can support a coherent and institution-wide public service ethos.

18. Colombia's Constitution expresses a number of core public-service values: defending and promoting human rights; protecting the public interest; proper conduct by public officials; probity in fiscal management; legality of administrative actions; merit as the basis for entry to career positions and promotion; freedom from political influence; prohibition of nepotism (OECD, 2013^[8]).

19. In 2022, European Ministers responsible for public administration, public transformation and the civil service, with the support of the European Commission, adopted the Strasbourg Declaration on the Common values and challenges of European Public Administrations (French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022^[9]). The Declaration acknowledges the existence of common values and challenges for public administrations within the EU and emphasises three areas: attractive, modern and innovative civil services that lead by example; transparent and resilient public services that meet users' expectations; and high quality, inclusive digital public services that respects European values.

20. While most Adherents have established public service values, tensions often arise in their application. These values can sometimes conflict, requiring public service leaders and managers to navigate complex trade-offs. A growing challenge is the balance between two fundamental values: responsiveness to elected governments and adherence to legal frameworks in an environment of increasingly complex rules and regulations. While serving the government of the day often demands creative and proactive solutions, a public service culture based first and foremost on strict legal compliance can lead to an over-reliance on established procedures, driven by concerns about crossing legal boundaries.

21. Modern trends have intensified these pressures. The accelerated pace of decision-making, driven by media and short political cycles, limits the time available for thorough analysis and long-term planning. At the same time, the growing complexity of policy and politics demands that public services meet an increasingly broad range of expectations, while the heightened visibility of civil servants adds new layers of public scrutiny and accountability. These factors make it increasingly difficult for public administrations to balance responsiveness, legal integrity, and long-term policy effectiveness in an environment that demands both agility and stability. In order to balance these competing tensions and priorities, public service leaders will need to reinforce not only values as statements, but as complex public practice. Furthermore, improving responsiveness as a core public service value may require simplifying the complex regulatory environment that often restricts public action, redesigning work processes, and changing the mindsets of many public servants from bureaucratically applying the law, to proactively solving public problems. This requires high capability public service leadership.

Principle 2. Building leadership capability

Building leadership capability in the public service, in particular through:

- a. Clarifying the expectations incumbent upon senior-level public servants to be politically impartial leaders of public organisations, trusted to deliver on the priorities of the government, and uphold and embody the highest standards of integrity without fear of politically-motivated retribution;
- b. Considering merit-based criteria and transparent procedures in the appointment of senior-level public servants, and holding them accountable for performance;
- c. Ensuring senior-level public servants have the mandate, competencies, and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power; and
- d. Developing the leadership capabilities of current and potential senior-level public servants.

22. Values tensions described above place particular pressure at the senior levels of the public service, where politics meets administration. Hence, a capable senior-level public service is a lynchpin of government effectiveness. Senior level public servants (SLPS) should balance many competing demands. They need to understand political ambitions and help to translate these into policies and actions that result in impact on the ground while also being technical experts of governance and ensuring the public administration itself remains objective and impartial. They should be drivers of change, innovation, and transformation to improve upon the status quo – while also ensuring stable delivery of reliable government services to citizens, including in times of crisis. They should also be innovative in their response to political direction while simultaneously improving the way the public service operates (Gerson, 2020^[10]).

23. This calls for a cadre of leaders that can assure the “stewardship function” of the public service – ensuring the government systems remain up to date, modernised, and fit for purpose. This generally requires a long-term and sustained commitment to reforms that often outlast political cycles but which are fundamental for the public service to remain relevant and capable of responding to political direction. Balancing this function with all the other demands of these jobs requires exceptional people with hard-to-find skill sets, a clear mandate and resources, as well as effective communication across the government.

24. A recent survey of public servants in 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, conducted by the OECD Secretariat, gives some insights into the effectiveness of senior leadership across a number of relevant areas. When it comes to values-based leadership, a majority (62%) of respondents agreed that the senior leadership of their organisations uphold and defend public service values, and 57% agree that they maintain high standards of honesty and integrity. Around 14% of respondents disagree with each of these statements, while the remaining responses selected a neutral answer. When it comes to the stewardship function, only 44% of respondents believed that their senior leadership is effectively leading change in their organisation, while 24% did not (OECD, 2025^[3]).

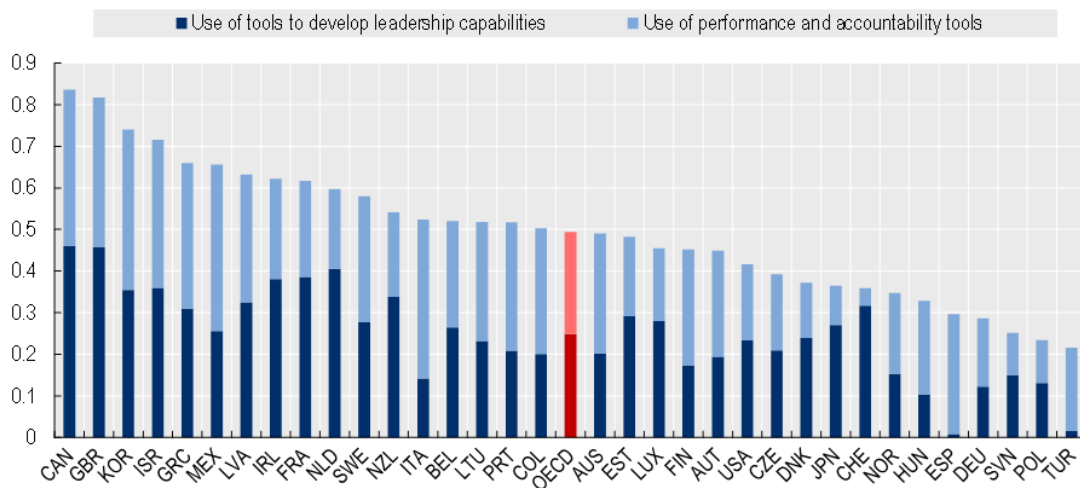
25. Almost all Adherents (94%) have a clearly defined group of senior level public servants who are separate from the political leadership and who are expected to be experts in the administrative machinery of government (OECD, 2021^[11]). Leadership development is consistently rated as a top priority for learning and development investments, as 89% of Adherents identify leadership skills as one of the top five skill types prioritised for learning and development of managers (OECD, 2023^[2]). Additionally, there is growing emphasis on evaluating these capacities when making appointment or promotion decisions, as leadership competencies have been identified as a primary consideration in the recruitment of senior level public servants in virtually all Adherents (OECD, 2021^[11]). This presents a solid foundation for establishing policies that enable governments to recruit the right people into these positions, and manage them effectively.

26. Senior-level public service success relies on having both the right skills and the institutional support to apply them effectively. The Secretariat developed a pilot index based on a recent framework to capture the use of policy

tools that can influence aspects of these two dimensions (Figure 1) (Gerson, 2020_[10]). Firstly, managing the senior-level public service requires tools to define competencies, support the recruitment of skilled leaders, and provide structured learning and development. The dark blue part of the graph’s bar looks at the existence and use of a dedicated leadership competency framework, practices to attract leadership candidates, the assessment of their skills, adequate learning opportunities, and parts of their employment framework. For example, Ireland has created a dedicated competency framework for senior-level public servants, fully integrated into their recruitment process. Italy, more recently, partnered with the OECD Secretariat to design a competency framework tailored for senior-level public servants in their Ministry of Economy and Finance.

27. However, even skilled leaders face barriers such as limited autonomy and rigid management systems. To address this, additional policies should ensure that SLPS have the autonomy, tools, and accountability needed to lead effectively. To capture this, the lighter part of the indicator looks at leaders’ specific managerial accountabilities, their performance assessment systems, and the tools in place to encourage collaboration across ministries and agencies. Adherents on the higher end of the indicator have more robust tools and policies in place than those to the lower side, although the quality and effective application of those tools cannot be assessed.

Figure 1. Pilot index: Managing the senior level public service, 2020



Note: 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.

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

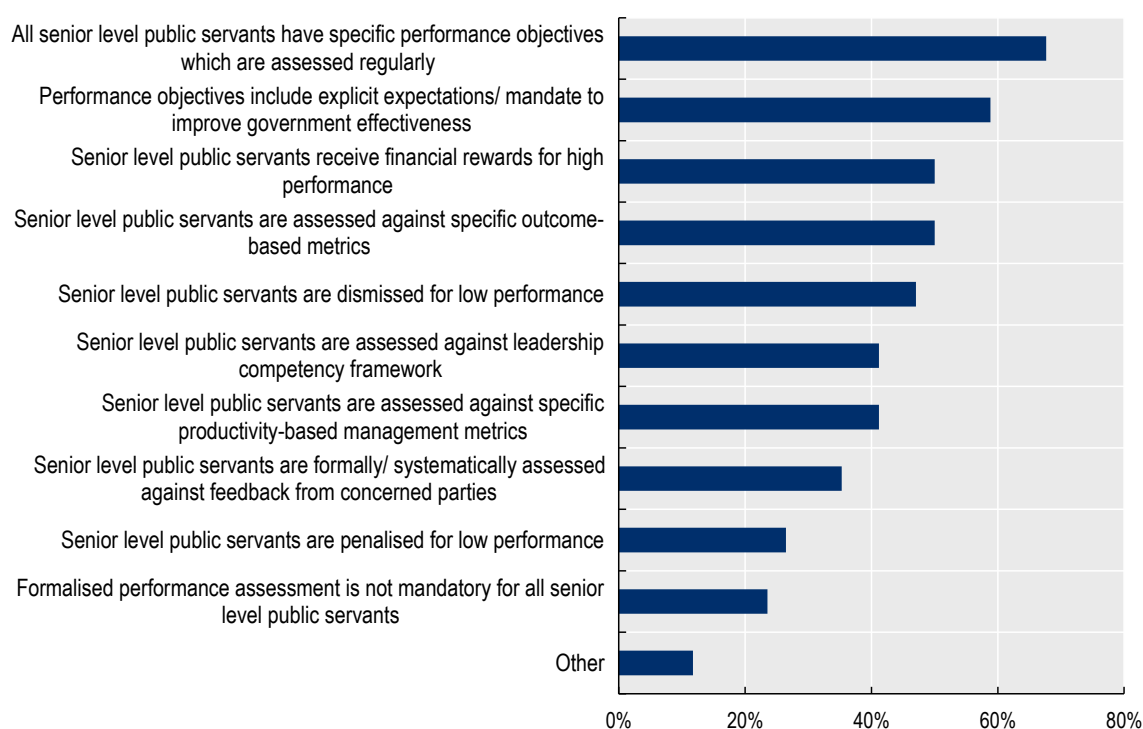
28. The Recommendation calls for “Considering merit-based criteria and transparent procedures in the appointment of senior-level public servants, and holding them accountable for performance”. Almost all Adherents identify job-related experience and leadership competencies as the primary aspects formally considered during recruitment for senior level public servants through competitive processes. This is most commonly done through interviews. Only around a third of Adherents are regularly using more sophisticated tools such as assessment centres and simulations (OECD, 2021_[11]).

29. The role of politically elected officials in the appointment of senior leaders varies across Adherents. In eleven Adherents, political officials (e.g. Ministers) can choose a candidate from a shortlist presented by a selection panel. At times, the appointment also needs to be confirmed by the legislature. In eight Adherents, political officials have full discretion in the recruitment of senior leaders. This is however, often limited to the highest administrative positions (e.g. Director General) (OECD, 2021_[11]). Whether appointments are made by politicians or administrative actors, making them transparently, in ways that show citizens that senior public servants are selected for their skills, experience, motivation and personal integrity, and help ensure they are perceived as trustworthy.

30. The accountability relationship between administrative and political leadership requires carefully designed systems that enable trust. In order to be drivers of change and innovation, senior leaders need clear mandates and objectives, articulated by political leadership. They also need the right level of resources, autonomy and accountability to use their skills and the machinery of government to achieve these results. Performance systems are an important feature of this relationship – and senior leaders are subject to such systems in a majority of Adherents (Figure 2). In almost 60% of these countries, senior leaders are given explicit objectives to improve the functioning of government (stewardship function) while in about half, they have financial rewards associated to their objectives. However, senior level public servants are penalised for low performance in less than a third of Adherents (OECD, 2021^[11]).

Figure 2. Performance assessment of senior level public servants, 2020

Percentage of Adherents in 2020



Note: N=34. Original survey question: Which of the following apply for performance assessment of senior level public servants?
Source: OECD (2020), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability

31. The Recommendation also calls for “Ensuring senior-level public servants have the mandate, competencies, and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power” – these conditions include mutual trust, based on mutual respect for respective roles, expertise, and perspectives; appropriate levels of job security and confidentiality; and resources to invest in evidence-based analysis within the public administration. While hard to measure, in many governments these conditions may be degrading. For example, 42% of responding public servants across 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are Adherents, agree that senior leaders of their organisation provide evidence-based advice to political leaders, even if this advice goes against the dominant political position (16% or respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while the remaining 42% selected a neutral response) (OECD, 2025^[31]).

32. In the years ahead, the fast-changing political-administrative interface will significantly shape the senior-level public service. Increasingly complex boundaries between policy and administration, fast-paced policy cycles, and changing needs and expectations from politicians and citizens will call for senior public servants to be more flexible within a more dynamic and interconnected governance environment. As transformation leaders, it will remain essential that senior-public servants manage to balance political directives with stewardship responsibilities, ensuring

that the public service has the means to translate policy decisions into effective and sustainable programmes going beyond the electoral cycle.

Principle 3. Inclusive and safe public service

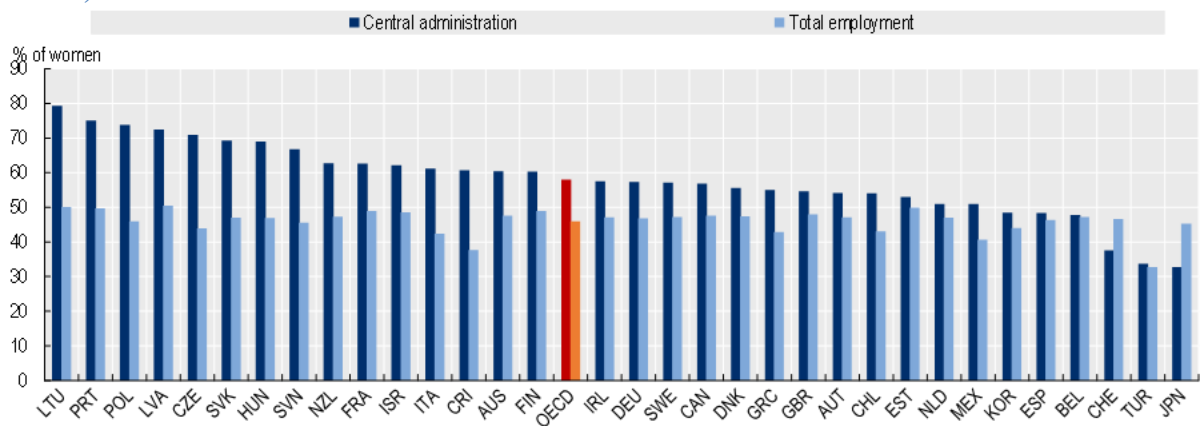
Ensuring an **inclusive and safe public service that reflects the diversity of the society** it represents, in particular through:

- a. Publicly committing to an inclusive, and respectful working environment open to all members of society possessing the necessary skills;
- b. Developing measures of diversity, inclusion and well-being, and conducting measurement and benchmarking at regular intervals to monitor progress, detect and remove barriers, and design interventions; and
- c. Taking active steps to ensure that organisational and people management processes as well as working conditions, support diversity and inclusion.

33. An inclusive workplace brings together individuals with a wide range of skills, experiences, and perspectives needed to address complex public problems. One of the important roles of public service leaders, as stewards of public organisations, is to establish a culture of psychological safety and wellbeing, where individual public servants feel comfortable asking questions, expressing their opinions, and challenging existing norms with a view to constant improvement. This is proven to be one of the most important drivers of innovation and performance in teams (Edmondson, 2021^[11]). Inclusive workforces can contribute to more innovative and resilient organisations by integrating a broader range of employees with different skills, backgrounds, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches.

34. Recognising the link between inclusion, well-being and performance, an increasing number of Adherents have sought to measure and improve well-being across their administrations. Notably, 94% of Adherents have identified the improvement of employee well-being as a factor driving flexible working arrangements in the central/federal administration (OECD, 2023^[2]). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, well-being has gained prominence, reinforcing its role in fostering engagement and performance. Public sector workforces are increasingly diverse, with barriers to advancement to senior levels decreasing in many Adherents. Women, for example, are often better represented in the public sector and in public administrations than in the general labour market (Figure 3). However, this progress is still somewhat tempered by their overrepresentation in non-managerial roles and underrepresentation in senior management across most Adherents.

Figure 3. Percent of women employed in central administration and in the overall labour market, 2023

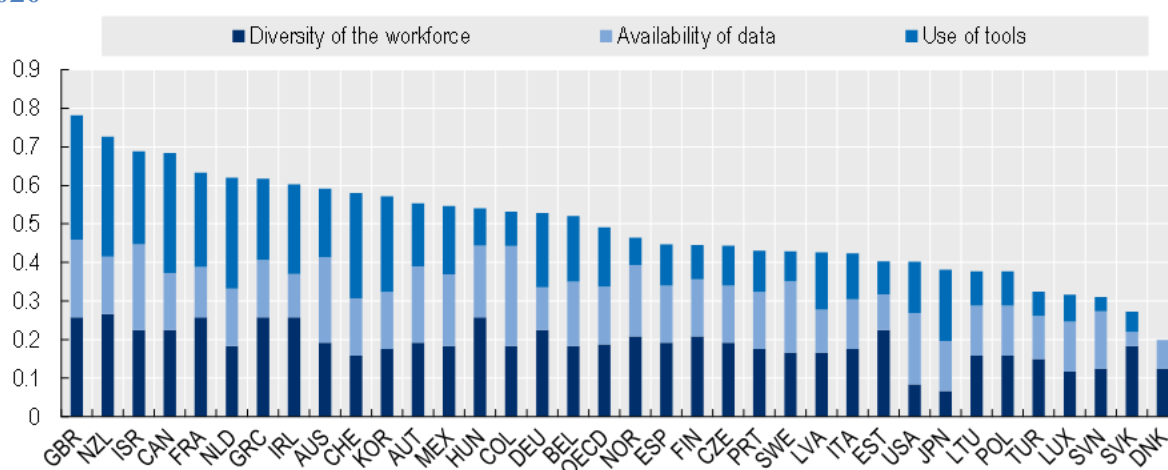


Note: Lithuania and Spain: data refer to civil servants (permanent for Spain). France: data refer to 2021; Italy and Korea: data refer to 2022. Data for Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Latvia are reported in full-time-equivalents (FTEs).

Sources: OECD (2024), Survey on the Composition of the Workforce in Central/Federal Governments; ILOSTAT (database) Employment by sex and age, Annual Labour Force Statistics (LFS)

35. Adherents have taken significant steps to develop a representative central government workforce, including broadening representation, collecting data, and using targeted tools (Figure 4). The presented index for instance seeks to better understand efforts made centrally across Adherents to develop a representative central administration workforce. These efforts aim to ensure equitable access to leadership positions and enhance workforce inclusivity. To tackle this, France introduced the Diversity Label in 2008, managed by the French national organisation for standardisation (AFNOR), to certify organisations committed to preventing discrimination and fostering diversity (Nolan-Flecha, 2019^[12]). The label evaluates HR processes on criteria such as age, disability, origin, sexual orientation, and religion, amongst others. Organisations undergo a risk mapping, implement action plans, and are audited before certification. Follow-up audits every two years ensure ongoing compliance and improvement.

Figure 4. Pilot index: Development of a representative central government workforce, 2020



Note: The pilot index is made up of the following dimensions: 1) the diversity of the workforce; 2) the availability and use of data to track diversity and inclusion; and 3) the use of tools to develop a diverse and inclusive workforce. Each dimension is built from answers to several related questions. The index ranges from 0 (low level of effort to develop a diverse central government workforce) to 1 (high level of effort). Data for Chile and Iceland are not available.

Source: OECD (2020), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability; OECD (2020), Composition of the workforce in central/federal administration survey.

36. The key to improving and advancing on government's achievements related to employee wellbeing and inclusion is to improve the use of workforce data in public administration. Public administrations have the potential to measure and manage these issues using a combination of employee surveys and administrative data. Employee surveys like the one conducted by the OECD Secretariat with 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are Adherents, can help to provide a quantitative baseline that can be compared across organisational units and tracked over time. Expanding this with additional data from administrative system, and more advanced people analytics, could result in more tailored and specific people management policies that improve the performance and innovative potential of public workforces by improving wellbeing, psychological safety, and diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Principle 4. Proactive and innovative public service

Building a **proactive and innovative** public service that takes a **long-term perspective in the design and implementation of policy and services**, in particular through:

- a. Ensuring an appropriate balance of employment continuity and mobility to support policy and service implementation beyond a political cycle;
- b. Investing in foresight, innovation and analytical skills and capabilities; and
- c. Engaging with communities outside the public service to set quality standards and ensure policies and services are responsive to users' needs.

37. The public sector faces increasingly complex challenges that require significant analytical capacity that can drive innovation, forward-thinking and long-term solutions. Innovation in the public sector is crucial for addressing ongoing cross-cutting and complex problems. Foresight allows governments to anticipate disruptions, ensure the long-term relevance of their policies, and deliver services that meet the evolving needs of citizens. Fostering a culture of innovation can therefore strengthen government performance. Ultimately, prioritising flexibility, skill development, and stakeholder engagement enhances the public sector's ability to manage complexity and deliver sustainable and impactful outcomes for society.

38. Many Adherents are taking steps to improve the analytical capabilities of their public servants. Many provide various learning and development interventions (see principle 8). Some take a broader approach that incorporates a wide range of talent management approaches. For example, the Irish Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) was established with the aim of enhancing the role of economics and value for money analysis in public policy making. The IGEES sits in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. IGEES policy analysts work cross-government with all departments and functions as a talent pipeline accessible throughout government. The IGEES has targeted graduate recruitment processes and internships, bringing in young professionals into the public service and training them. Learning and development opportunities include platforms for discussion, policy discussion sessions, seminars and conferences. It is a rotational programme where participants change positions every two years. The IGEES has been a successful way to develop analytical capabilities in a centralised hub and ensuring that their expertise is diffused across the civil service beyond the centre of government.

39. Strategic foresight skills can equip governments with the means to explore plausible futures to anticipate and better prepare for change, and to shape future developments through immediate actions. They strengthen resilience, adaptability, and proactive decision making in public administration, allowing governments to better manage risks, leverage opportunities, shape future developments, and improve long-term policy outcomes. Italy and Lithuania worked with the OECD Secretariat to develop dedicated strategic foresight skills and curricula (OECD, forthcoming). Skills development programmes focused on topics such as anticipatory innovation, strategic flexibility, proactive leadership, aligning for sustainable change. Importantly, the programmes focused on skill development beyond the technical familiarity with methods such as horizon scanning and scenario planning to include tailored skill development for policymakers, senior leaders, and operational staff based their respective roles.

40. Similarly, recent efforts to develop innovation skills have tended to expand beyond individual skills and more toward applied capabilities at the organisational level. For example, Estonia's Competency Framework for Top Civil Service highlights the role of public sector executives in encouraging innovation, particularly under the Leading the Organisation competency, which includes developing strategy, leveraging technology, and organising work in ways that encourage innovative behaviours.

41. Measuring and tracking the impact of such interventions is an ongoing challenge. The OECD has recently piloted a measure of innovation climate in organisations through a survey run in 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are Adherents (OECD, 2025^[31]). This survey found a strong correlation between civil servants' perceptions of innovation climate and their perceptions of organisational performance. In particular, employees rated organisational

performance more positively when they perceived that their organisation learns from past mistakes, and when they feel encouraged to look for new ways of improving the way they work. Employee's perceptions of their organisations' ability to take full advantage of technology and develop innovation skills also play a role.

42. However, civil servants do not perceive that their organisations have strong innovation climates. The index received an average score of only around 5 out of 10 – the lowest of all the indices developed for survey analysis. Individual questions give some insight into why. For example, only 43% of surveyed civil servants feel that their organisation continually encourages them to look for new ways to improve the way they work, or that their organisation learns from past problems. When it comes to resourcing, only about a third feel that their organisation commits resources to develop new ideas, ensures that teams have the necessary skills to innovate, or takes full advantage of new technologies to promote innovation. And even fewer – just over 31% - feel that the legislative and regulatory frameworks that govern their work are sufficiently flexible to enable innovation.

43. Beyond skills, taking a broader systems perspective will be necessary to boost the innovative capacity of public administrations. This will require rethinking the authorising environment to make sure that public servants have the regulatory space, and leadership and management support to put their analytical, innovation, and foresight skills to best use.

Pillar 2. Investing in public service capability in order to develop an effective and trusted public service

44. This pillar emphasises the need for public administrations to invest in public service capability in order to achieve results that matter for citizens. If citizens see public servants making a difference in their lives, and upholding recognised public values (Pillar 1) they will be more likely to see them as trustworthy. This requires a look across the entire “employee lifecycle”, starting with identifying the skills and competencies needed (Principle 5) and then attracting (Principle 6) and recruiting these from the labour market through transparent, open and merit-based processes (Principle 7). Once employed by the public service, public employers should ensure they develop the necessary skills and competencies by creating a learning culture and environment (Principle 8). Finally, performance, talent, and initiative should be systematically assessed, rewarded, and recognised to create a motivated and capable workforce (Principle 9).

45. This is particularly vital to address many of the modern challenges facing governments, which require an increasingly skilled and specialised public service. But it is also essential to keep in mind the needs of the broader public service in times of uncertainty and disruption – including those driven by technological change as well as by budgetary constraints. Skills need to be specific yet adaptable to fast changing circumstances. In many cases, the civil service struggles to keep up.

Principle 5. Identifying skills and competencies needed

Continuously **identifying skills and competencies** needed to transform political vision into services which deliver value to society, in particular through:

- a. Ensuring an appropriate mix of competencies, managerial skills, and specialised expertise, to reflect the changing nature of work in the public service;
- b. Reviewing and updating required skills and competencies periodically, based on input from public servants and citizens, to keep pace with the changing technologies and needs of the society which they serve; and
- c. Aligning people management processes with identified skills and competencies.

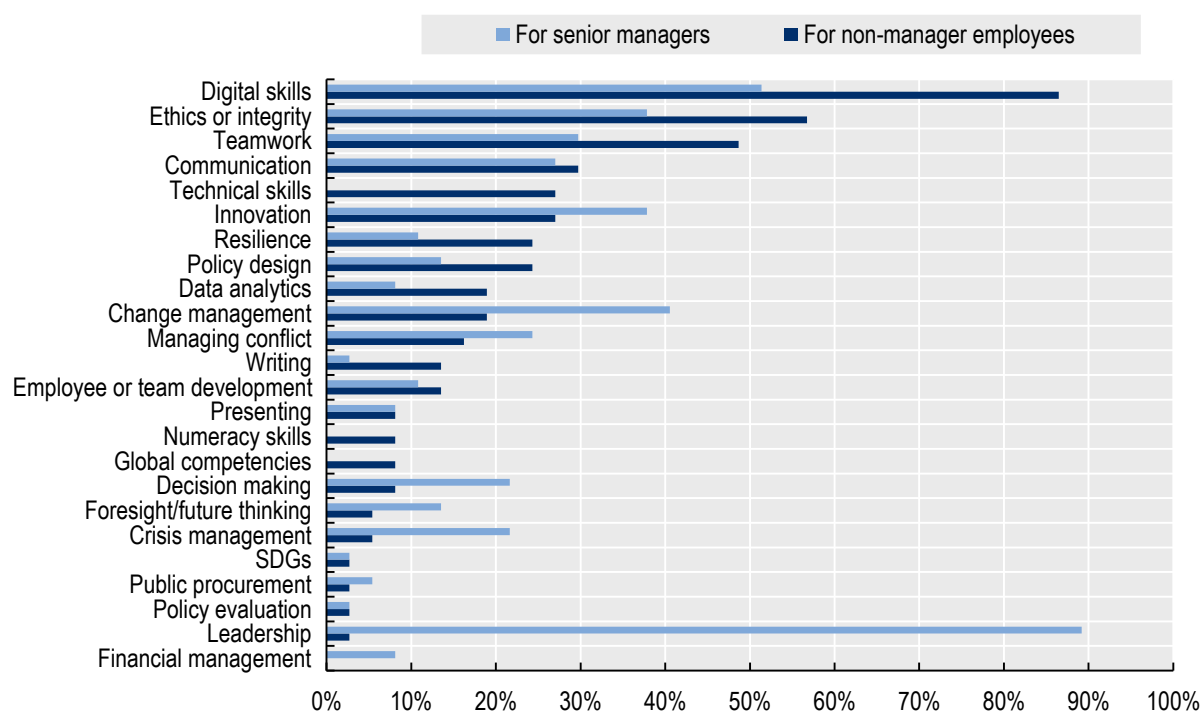
46. A public service equipped with the right skills and competencies is better positioned to deliver high-quality and responsive services. Aligning people management with these skills prepares the workforce for emerging challenges and opportunities, like the digital transformation or evolving societal demands. Transitioning from a job-centric model, based on static job descriptions, to a skills-based model can offer a way forward. By focusing on individual skills and competencies, this approach creates a common language to address cross-cutting objectives and overcome traditional administrative siloes. It places public servants at the centre of workforce management, recognising their skills and growth potential rather than focusing solely on seniority or grade progression. This ultimately reinforces meritocracy, ensuring that skills drive workforce management decisions.

47. Identifying the competencies needed is core to this transformation. This includes mapping technical and transversal skills for each role, addressing gaps, and encouraging employee development. Centralised competency frameworks, adopted by 72% of Adherents, can provide a first step in this endeavour (OECD, 2021^[1]). Such frameworks improve workforce planning, strengthen coordination across administrations, and reduce redundancy. For instance, the Latvian government has recently developed a suite of competency frameworks, including common core competencies for all public servants, and specific frameworks for digital, leadership, and profession-specific competencies (e.g. procurement specialists, legal experts, human resources, etc.). Similarly, the Belgian federal administration has recently implemented a comprehensive competency management framework to guide recruitment, performance management, development, knowledge sharing, and career planning. The framework focuses on four generic areas – thinking and creating, exchanging and collaborating, acting and achieving results, knowing oneself and progressing – encompassing 12 skills, alongside technical expertise. Each area is detailed with specific characteristics. This structured approach ensures clarity in expectations for the organisation, managers, and employees.

48. As governments face increasing challenges to manage complexities such as the digital transition and environmental crises within a context of increasing budgetary pressure, there is an urgent need for governments to understand changing skills needs and put in place strategies to manage them. Adherents have prioritised skills development in areas critical to public service effectiveness (Figure 5) (OECD, 2023^[2]). For non-managerial positions, digital skills (86%), ethics and integrity (57%), and teamwork (49%) are the most commonly prioritised for training across Adherents. For managerial roles, leadership (89%), digital skills (51%), innovation (38%) and ethics and integrity (38%) are the top training priorities, reflecting the distinct demands placed on public sector managers. The focus on digital skills is reassuring, as recent OECD research shows that employees who report that their organisations invest in their digital skills also tend to have more positive views of their organisational performance. However, the size of the challenge and the considerable gap in pay scales for these roles may suggest that a broader strategy will be required to address it.

Figure 5. Top skill or competency type prioritised for learning and development, 2022

Percentage of Adherents in 2022.



Note: N=37. Original survey question: What are the top skill or competency types currently prioritised for learning or development across your country's public service?

Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability

49. Despite the data and examples described above, few governments are really doing the analysis needed to map existing skills and understand their changing skills needs. While competency frameworks such as those described above, are a starting point, a few Adherents are going further by developing skills taxonomies that can underpin a shift to skill-based management. Australia and the United Kingdom, for example, develop function-specific skills taxonomies that can be used to map skills gaps, align workforce development investments to real and future need, and redeploy existing capacity in the face of emergencies and/or shifting priorities. Further developing and refining this kind of skills-based management is even more important when facing budgetary constraints, as cost-cutting strategies should be strategically focused on identifying and reducing skills redundancy while retaining higher value skillsets. Few governments are in a position to do this effectively.

Principle 6. Attraction and retention

Attracting and retaining employees with the skills and competencies required from the labour market, in particular through:

- a. Positioning the public service as an employer of choice by promoting an employer brand which appeals to candidates' values, motivation and pride to contribute to the public good;
- b. Determining what attracts and retains skilled employees, and using this to inform employment policies including compensation and non-financial incentives;

- c. Providing adequate remuneration and equitable pay, taking into account the level of economic development; and
- d. Proactively seeking to attract under-represented groups and skill-sets.

50. Attracting and retaining talent in the public service is a multifaceted challenge that extends beyond offering competitive salaries. It involves positioning the public sector as an employer of choice, promoting its unique value proposition, and ensuring its capacity to recruit the skills and competencies it needs to deliver on its missions. Effective strategies include three elements: understanding what attracts skilled employees to the public service, using these insights to shape employment policies, and communicating proactively about these through tools including employer branding.

51. In many ways, public administrations are well positioned to offer key elements of attractive jobs. Many job seekers suggest they look for opportunities to have positive societal impact in their work, to learn and grow professionally, and to work on a diversity of engaging challenges. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further reshaped candidates and public servants' expectations regarding flexible working methods. The public administration could be very well positioned to deliver on all of these, by, e.g. aligning mobility and learning policies, embedding flexible working practices and communicating proactively about the impact the government has. However these tools are often under-utilised.

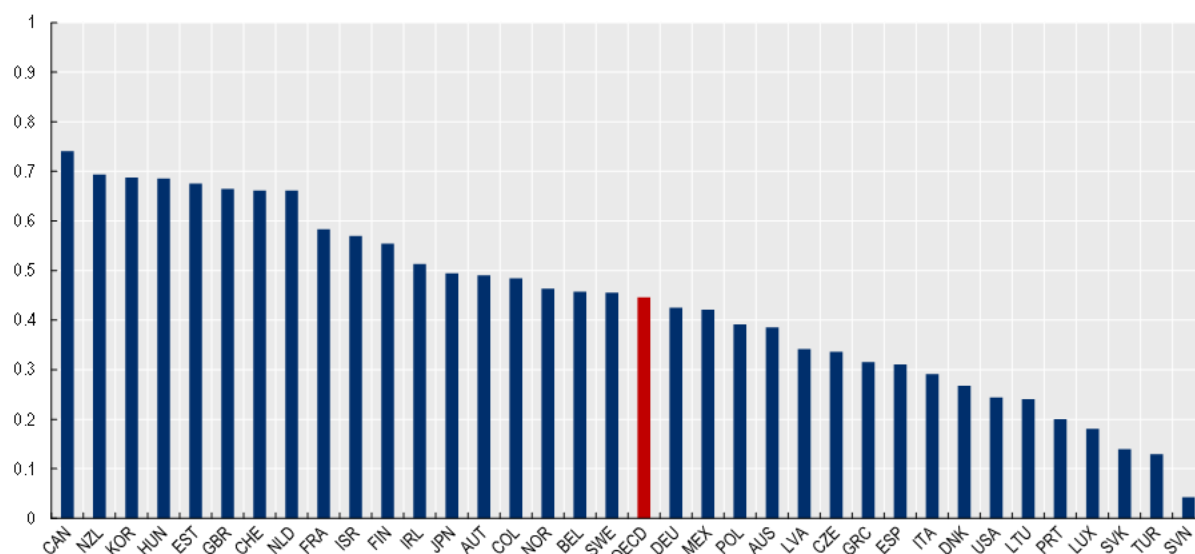
52. Despite these opportunities, there is a general sense that public service jobs in most Adherents are less attractive than they had once been, and often less attractive than equivalent private sector jobs (at least for higher-skilled jobs), with data being collected and analysed regarding the number of applicants to a position and salary comparison studies in over half of OECD Members (OECD, 2021^[11]). Across the European Union, only one in 8 citizens see the public administration as an attractive employer, despite playing a central role in people's lives for 29% of respondents (European Commission, 2023^[13]). Regardless of the overall image of the public service, adherents tend to face targeted difficulties, particularly in recruiting specialists for high-demand fields such as digital, data and STEM (OECD, 2023^[14]) – areas where pay disparities and labour market competition between public and private sectors increase.

53. Salary levels certainly play a role. Data from 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are Adherents, found that only 50% of civil servants are satisfied with their pay, and even fewer feel that they are fairly compensated compared with the private sector (OECD, 2025^[3]). The Secretariat has worked with Israel to review their public sector pay system and provide recommendations on ways to re-align it to boost attractiveness for needed skills, value for money and public sector productivity (OECD, 2021^[15]).

54. Strengthening public service attractiveness requires proactive and tailored strategies that address the specific needs of both administrations and potential candidates. Traditionally, public administrations have relied on their reputation as stable employers to attract new public servants. The changing expectations and reality of the labour market require more proactive recruitment, whereby public services identify key skills gaps and reach out to potential candidates to communicate job opportunities and the public service as a positive place to work. This multifaceted effort has been captured by the OECD composite index on the use of proactive recruitment practices (Figure 6). This index considers aspects such as the content of recruitment materials, policies designed to attract skilled candidates, methods for identifying what appeals to prospective employees, appropriate and flexible pay systems, and actions to enhance the representation of underrepresented groups. Adherents on the left of the indicator have a centralised access to more of these tools than countries on the right. Leveraging such tools allows employers to boost attractiveness by better targeting candidates with the skills they need and tailor recruitment processes and material to them.

Figure 6. Index on the use of proactive recruitment practices, 2020

Adherents in 2020.



Note: Data for Chile and Iceland are not available. 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).

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

55. A common dimension to such strategies relates to the development of an employer brand (OECD, 2021^[11]). Employer branding seeks to promote administrations as employers of choice to a desired target group. Across Adherents, only 47% of them have a common employer branding strategy for the whole central administration. This is for instance the case in France, which developed in 2023 a unique employer brand for the entirety of its public service, called “choisirleservicepublic.gouv.fr” (*Choose the Public Service*) (OECD, 2023^[14]). This brand has been developed in concertation with the three branches composing the French public service and was associated to the creation of a website showcasing all public service job offers.

56. The OECD has worked directly with countries to help them address attractiveness challenges. For example, recent work conducted with France developed a framework that can guide the development of strategies to boost attractiveness by looking at three interrelated factors: the job, career paths, and quality of life (OECD, 2023^[14]). This work suggests that government have much that can have many comparative advantages that can make them attractive employers to job seekers looking for meaningful and varied work experience in a place where they can learn and grow. Governments should take full advantage of this by ensuring their policies around learning, mobility and career development are well aligned, and take active steps to communicate about these to prospective employees. Salary is also a key factor and requires significant reflection. Setting a salary strategy to attract the right people from the labour market may require increasing pay flexibility and looking for trade-offs with, e.g. job security in some cases.

Principle 7. Recruitment, selection and promotion

Recruiting, selecting and promoting candidates through **transparent, open and merit-based processes**, to guarantee fair and equal treatment, in particular through:

- a. Communicating employment opportunities widely and ensuring equal access for all suitably qualified candidates;
- b. Carrying out a rigorous and impartial candidate selection process based on criteria and methods appropriate for the role and in which the results are transparent and contestable;
- c. Filling vacancies in a timely manner to remain competitive and meet operational staffing needs;
- d. Encouraging diversity – including gender equality – in the workforce by identifying and mitigating the potential for implicit or unconscious bias to influence people management processes, ensuring equal accessibility to under-represented groups, and valuing perspective and experience acquired outside the public service or through non-traditional career paths; and
- e. Ensuring effective oversight and recourse mechanisms to monitor compliance and address complaints.

57. When designed effectively, transparent, open, and merit-based recruitment, selection, and promotion processes are essential to ensure the best skilled candidates are selected for the right job. This principle emphasises rigor and impartiality in selection, basing decisions on clear, role-appropriate criteria and methods. It also advocates for diversity of experience by recognising that skills and talent may come from outside traditional public service career paths. This type of practices is crucial for maintaining the highest standards of professionalism and expertise in the public service, and ultimately playing a key role in ensuring trust in public institutions and in the public service specifically. However, across 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, 33% of responding public servants believe that their organisation grants promotions and career development opportunities based on personal connections rather than on skills and abilities; while only 32% did not (OECD, 2025^[3]).

58. Recruitment processes differ significantly across Adherents, reflecting varied approaches to public employment models. For instance, some systems (career-based) tend to rely on civil service exams, designed to assess the candidates' understanding of the public sector ecosystem. While this approach ensures a deep knowledge of the administrative framework, it may fall short in evaluating practical skills needed for specific roles. In contrast, others (job-based systems) prioritise the assessment of job-specific skills but may overlook the broader competencies required as careers and jobs evolve, through, e.g. mobility or reskilling.

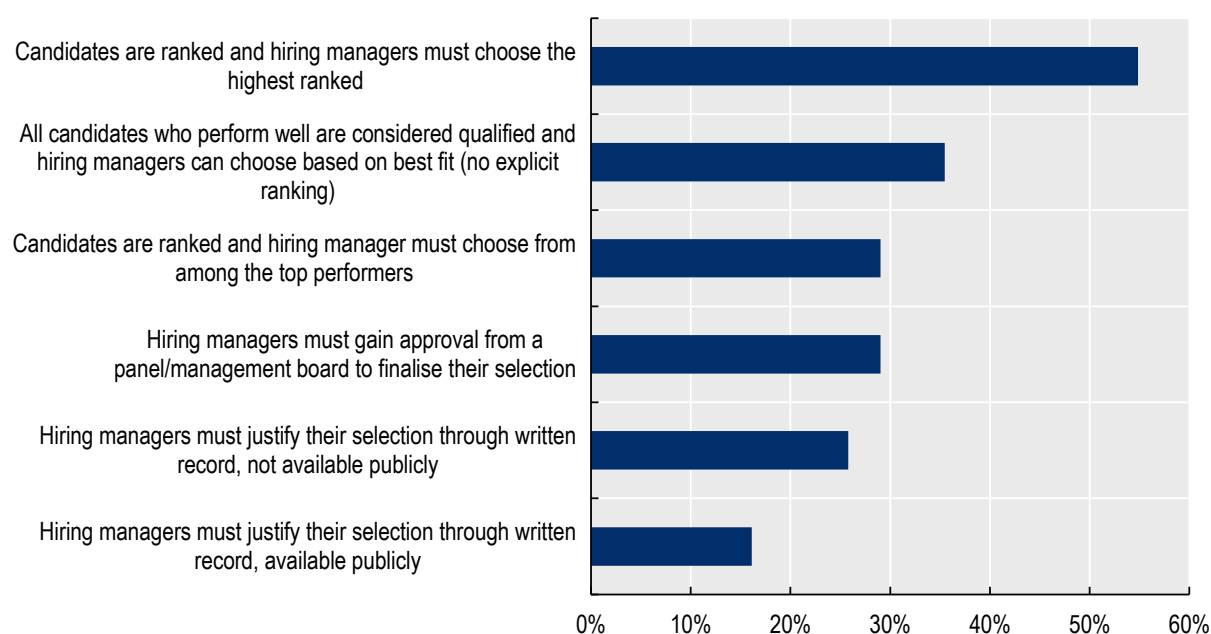
59. In response, many Adherents are exploring ways to integrate the strengths of both models, aiming to strike a balance between sectoral knowledge and practical capability. For instance, in response to a selection process focused primarily on theoretical knowledge, Spain launched a programme in November 2020 to reform its civil service exams ("*oposición*") (OECD, 2023^[14]). Through thematic workshops, debates, and social media discussions, the initiative identified a need to complement theoretical assessments with evaluations of professional skills, such as multiple-choice tests and practical case studies. The United Kingdom, a mostly job-based career system, has expanded the Civil Service Fast Stream programme, an accelerated development programme aimed at preparing talented graduates for senior roles across government, which, as of 2024, consists of 17 different schemes, each targeting particular skill sets (Institute for Government, 2024^[16]). It is composed of 17 schemes aligned with civil service professions and offers candidates a pathway to leadership positions. Despite its importance in developing future public service leaders, the programme faces challenges such as declining applications, perceived uncompetitive pay, and diversity gaps. Recent reforms, including a restructuring of schemes and a pay increase, aim to strengthen its capacity to attract top talent.

60. Looking ahead, transparent, open, and merit-based recruitment processes should evolve to address contemporary workforce challenges while maintaining fairness. Integrating the strengths of career- and job-based systems offers a pathway to more effective talent acquisition. However, in many countries, merit-based systems have failed to adapt to modern labour market realities. They are often too slow to meet the needs of hiring managers and the expectations of candidates. Recent data gathered by the OECD suggest average time to recruit in some Adherents range from 86 to 299 calendar days. For positions in competition with the private sector, this slowness can result in the best candidates dropping out, or not even applying in the first place.

61. A related challenge is that, in many Adherents, hiring managers' discretion is extremely limited, as a way of protecting the merit principle (Figure 7). In some extreme cases, hiring managers have no say over selection – it is all based on test scores that they have no input in designing. While there should be clear criteria and guidelines for managers around, e.g. transparency, bias, fairness, and job profiling, hiring managers should be trained, trusted, and supported by HR professionals, to conduct hiring processes, and be given needed flexibilities (including pay in some circumstances) to match the process to their needs. This, of course, needs to happen with the right guidelines, capabilities, oversight and recourse mechanisms in place to promote merit and fairness, and prevent abuse of the system. In Sweden, a model characterised by its high degree of decentralisation, agencies are responsible for designing transparent selection processes, and hiring managers are actively involved in candidate assessments based on documented criteria such as skills, experience and personal suitability.

Figure 7. Candidate selection in central/federal administrations, 2020

Percentage of Adherents in 2020.



Note: N=31. Original survey question: Candidate selection: which of the following apply?

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

62. Finally, recruitment is often frozen in times of budgetary constraints in order to reduce numbers of public servants through natural attrition. While this process may be less immediately disruptive to current public servants, it is likely to seriously weaken public service capability over the medium-long term. A more effective approach is to target hiring freezes to job profiles that will be made redundant due to technological innovations, while continuing to attract and recruit skills in high-value areas. Governments can also use shorter-term contracts where possible to reduce the longer-term commitment in a carefully balanced way (see principle 13).

Principle 8. Learning culture

Developing the necessary skills and competencies by **creating a learning culture and environment** in the public service, in particular through:

- a. Identifying employee development as a core management task of every public manager and encouraging the use of employees' full skill-sets;
- b. Encouraging and incentivising employees to proactively engage in continuous self-development and learning, and providing them with quality opportunities to do so; and
- c. Valuing different learning approaches and contexts, linked to the type of skill-set and ambition or capacity of the learner.

63. Creating a learning culture in the public service is about embedding continuous development into organisations. A successful learning culture not only equips public servants with essential skills but also fosters an environment where development is seen as necessary, natural, and valued across all levels of the organisation. In an era of complex policy challenges and rapid technological change, a robust learning culture is essential for building a resilient, adaptable, and forward-looking public workforce (OECD, 2023^[2]). A recent survey of civil servants in 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, gives some indication on how learning opportunities are perceived. Around 63% of respondents are happy with the training they've taken, finding that it helped to improve their job performance. However, only around 50% of respondents agree that they are growing professionally, and have access to training they need. These numbers suggest significant room for improvement.

64. The implementation and coordination of training across central administrations plays a key role in shaping the overall learning culture of the public service. Adherents adopt diverse approaches, combining both centralised and decentralised models. While 68% of Adherents report having a central learning and development (L&D) strategy, 65% indicate that ministries or agencies also maintain their own plans. For example, Norway's decentralised model allows organisations to align with national goals while accessing training through a central agency. Similarly, the UK's Government Campus Curriculum unifies training under one framework while preserving ministerial expertise. These varied strategies reflect the flexibility needed to address specific competency requirements and foster effective public sector learning systems.

65. While the organisation of formal training is an important aspect of learning cultures, informal and on-the-job learning are at their core, and this places a special emphasis on managers whose role shifts to coach (Figure 8). Almost two-thirds of Adherents report providing voluntary training for managers on how to develop their staff and the inclusion of employee development in managerial competency frameworks. However, only half of the countries expect managers to co-create learning plans with their employees. This is a tool that can help to embed learning expectations in day-to-day work and form the foundation of a learning culture. Furthermore, even fewer countries take a manager's ability and success at developing employees into consideration for promotion decisions, hold managers responsible for ensuring employees participate in training, or use indicators to measure or track employee development outcomes (OECD, 2023^[2]).

Figure 8. Employee development as an expected managerial task, 2022

Percentage of Adherents in 2022.



Note: N=36. Original survey question: Is employee development reinforced as an expected managerial task through any of the following?

Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability

66. Incentivising learning is also essential to cultivating a robust learning culture. Employees are more likely to engage in learning when they perceive it as purposeful and aligned with their professional growth (OECD, 2023^[2]). This can be achieved by linking learning to tangible incentives, such as performance evaluations (75% of Adherents), career progression (39%), or feedback cycles (33%), rather than relying solely on financial rewards. Such strategies not only motivate employees to acquire new skills but also signal the organisational value placed on continuous development. Additionally, ensuring that newly acquired skills are used effectively fosters a culture of learning, innovation, and satisfaction, which in turn supports workforce resilience and adaptability. By integrating these approaches into learning and development systems, public administrations can better address skills gaps and develop the skills that will be needed tomorrow.

67. One area that is ripe for further development is strategies for reskilling. As government implement new technologies and priorities shift, some public service positions will become redundant. Effective reskilling strategies, based on identifying at-risk jobs, and mapping out pathways to re-train employees to take on higher-value positions, will be essential to ensure continued productivity from the public service workforce. This will be even more urgent as public servants are not easily laid-off in many Adherents. However, reskilling strategies remain rare in public administrations.

Principle 9. Performance management

Assessing, rewarding and recognising **performance, talent and initiative**, in particular through:

- a. Aligning and assessing individual, team and organisational performance through agreed indicators and criteria which are regularly discussed and reviewed;

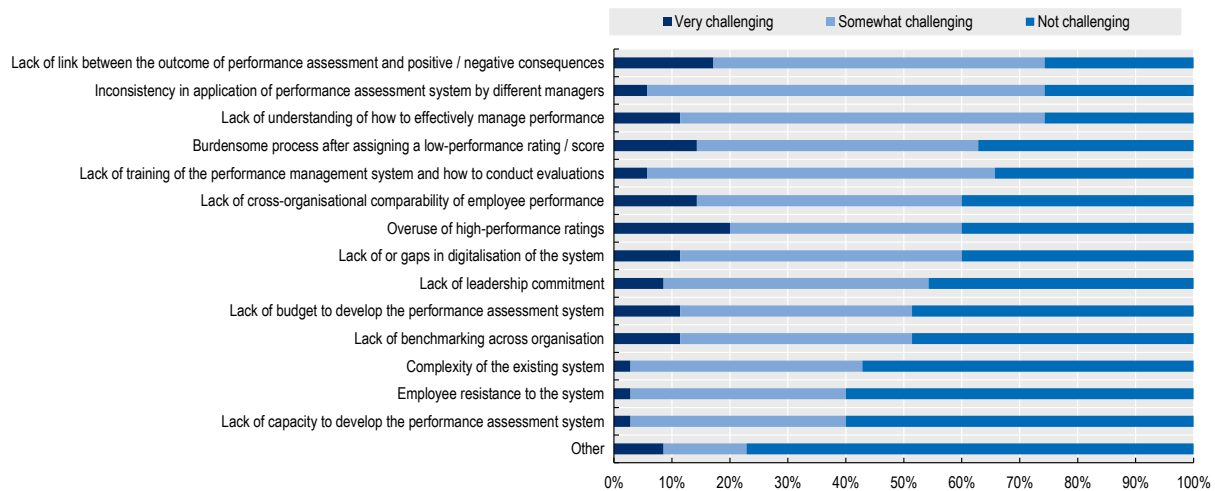
- b. Rewarding employee performance by appropriate means and addressing under-performance as part of a coherent approach to performance management; and
- c. Ensuring that managers have the capabilities and support necessary to carry out performance management and to identify and develop talent.

68. Performance management in the public service involves assessing, rewarding, and recognising public servants’ contributions to align their work with organisational objectives. It aims to ensure fairness, accountability, and improvement by measuring performance against clear and transparent criteria and addressing underperformance. Recognising talent and initiative can help governments foster a culture of excellence across organisations and develop a skilled and adaptable workforce. Therefore, and unlike the private sector where performance is often linked directly to financially measurable outcomes, public sector performance management should be seen more as a tool aligning employees' work with broader societal goals and ensuring equitable service delivery for the public.

69. Performance management is widely implemented across Adherents, with 86% of them making performance assessments mandatory to some extent (OECD, 2024_[17]). However, the breakdown shows significant variation across different levels of public service. While the majority of non-managerial professionals, middle managers, and senior-level public servants (respectively 83%, 80% and 80% of Adherents) are subject to mandatory assessments, a much smaller proportion of ministerial or political advisors (17%) undergo performance evaluations (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Performance assessment system challenges, 2024

Percentage of Adherents in 2024.



Note: N=35. Original survey question: What challenges, if any, are present in your central government regarding performance assessment systems?

Source: OECD (2024), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability

70. Despite the prolific use of these systems, Adherents identify various challenges in their implementation – which relate to the design of the system, and to the managerial skills and incentives for using it. The most common challenges, identified in approximately three quarters of Adherents are: the lack of link between the outcome of performance assessment and consequences, the inconsistency in application of performance assessment system by different managers, the lack of understanding of how to effectively manage performance, and the burdensome process after assigning a low performance rating (OECD, 2024_[17]). To address this, some Adherents are exploring the implementation of more clearly differentiated performance scales, such as a 3-point system, where the default score

is average, and higher scores are given to proven high performances while lower scores are reserved to those with clear performance issues.

71. However, the real issue behind these challenges relates to managers' competence and incentives at doing effective performance management. Managers need skills to identify performance and the right incentives to make use of the tools provided. When managers feel that they are unable to adequately reward high performers, now adequately sanction low performance, they will be naturally reticent to use the tools provided as intended. To address this, most Adherents provide training to managers, although this is mandatory in only 30% of them. Less than 30% of Adherents provide ongoing support through, for example, meeting among managers to discuss results. Almost 60% of Adherents report no formal discussions of performance assessments in any managerial meetings.

72. Related to these challenges are the management of low performance. In 67% of Adherents, it is possible to dismiss below-average performing public servants, however it rarely happens (OECD, 2024_[17]). A recent survey of civil servants in 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, shows that low performers tend not be well managed in public services. 52% of respondents report that low performers stay and continue to underperform in their organisations, while only 16% state that they stay and improve their performance over time, and only 6% state that low performers leave their organisation because they are removed or transferred (OECD, 2025_[3]).

73. However, performance management systems also present a range of risks Adherents continue to struggle with. High levels of performance-related pay, overly directive performance management approaches, or environments based on high levels of trust and mission orientation can inadvertently foster negative outcomes such as gaming, information manipulation, or selective attention, where key aspects of performance are ignored (Franco-Santos and Otley, 2018_[18]). Ultimately, the effectiveness of performance management systems is highly dependent on the specific environment they aim to assess. Public institutions with varying levels of goal alignment and uncertainty require tailored performance management systems that reflect these differences.

Pillar 3. Develop Public Employment systems that foster a responsive and adaptive public service able to address ongoing and emerging challenges and changing circumstances

74. This pillar examines public employment as a complex system within government, requiring flexibility to keep pace with rapid societal changes and respond effectively to unforeseen emergencies. The COVID-19 crisis served as a critical test of this flexibility, revealing both unexpected adaptability and areas for improvement. The pillar emphasises the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities among various actors in the system, as well as effective communication and collaboration (Principle 10). Ideally, this coordination supports strategic workforce planning based on robust HR data and analysis (Principle 11). A key component of flexibility is mobility, ensuring that essential skills are identified and accessible during emergencies or shifting priorities (Principle 12). Adaptability also depends on appropriate employment terms and conditions, as well as diverse contractual mechanisms that provide leaders with the tools to recruit and deploy talent for different needs (Principle 13). Additionally, fostering employee voice creates a crucial feedback loop, enabling leadership to better understand workforce dynamics and enhance adaptability across the public service system (Principle 14).

Principle 10. Institutional responsibilities for people management

Clarifying **institutional responsibilities for people management** to strengthen the effectiveness of the public employment system, in particular through:

- a. Establishing institutional authority to set and oversee common minimum standards for merit-based people-management;
- b. Delegating an appropriate level of autonomy to individual agencies, ministries, leaders and/or managers, in order to allow the alignment of people management with their strategic business objectives;

- c. Ensuring appropriate mechanisms for communication and information sharing among institutional actors in the public employment system; and
- d. Ensuring that each institutional actor in the public employment system has the appropriate mandate and resources to function effectively.

75. Public employment systems depend on a network of institutions and entities responsible for people management. Nearly all Adherents have a defined HR function that includes a central HR policy authority, quasi-independent oversight bodies, and HR departments within ministries and agencies (OECD, forthcoming^[19]). Some leading countries are proactively modernising their HR functions, strengthening strategic and data-driven capabilities to meet the evolving demands of the future.

76. Clear and transparent institutional responsibilities for HRM are a necessary component of an efficient and coherent system. A well-structured HR ecosystem enables organisations to align staffing decisions with their strategic goals and priorities. Delegating responsibilities within a defined framework empowers leaders and managers to make HR decisions that best serve their teams and organisational needs. At the same time, central oversight is necessary to maintain consistency, uphold fair employment conditions, and prevent abuses such as nepotism or undue interference in staffing decisions.

77. The institutionalisation of HRM systems in central government differs greatly across Adherents (OECD, forthcoming^[19]). Adherents generally use a mixed approach, combining central oversight with some autonomy for individual ministries. This balance allows for consistency in key areas, such as merit-based decisions, while offering flexibility for specific needs. On average, Adherents score 0.55 on a scale from 0.36 to 0.76 for HRM decentralisation, showing moderate autonomy (Figure 10). Some countries, like Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, grant more autonomy to ministries, allowing them to make decisions on recruitment and compensation. In these contexts, delegation is often part of a broader governance model built on rule of law and collective agreements, with minimum standards and legal safeguards applying across the public service. Others, like Chile, Greece, and Korea, centralise many HR functions to ensure consistency, including recruitment, performance pay, and employee surveys. This highlights the trade-off between autonomy and central control, and the need for strong HRM capabilities at both central and ministry levels.

Figure 10. Index of delegation of public employment in central administrations, 2024



Note: The index on delegation is composed of three variables: the extent of delegation around *financial and budgetary decisions*; *attraction, recruitment and onboarding*; and *workforce planning decisions*. The index ranges from 0 (no delegation) to 1 (high level of delegation). The variables comprising the index and their relative importance are based on expert judgements and weighted equally.

Source: OECD (2024), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability

78. Automation and emerging technologies present significant opportunities for Adherents to modernise legacy HR systems and invest in new functionalities, skill sets, and roles. This transformation is particularly crucial in the face of fiscal pressures, as workforce reductions are often seen as a means of cost savings. A modern, well-designed and highly capable HR function is essential for achieving long-term efficiency gains without compromising productivity or performance. However, only a few leading countries are proactively redesigning their HR approach to take advantage of these opportunities. Realising the full potential of modernisation requires strategic investment in new HR capabilities at both central and ministerial levels, ensuring that public administrations remain agile and effective in a changing environment.

Principle 11. Long-term, strategic and systematic approach to people management

Developing a **long-term, strategic and systematic approach to people management** based on evidence and inclusive planning that:

- a. Is informed by evidence-based assessment of skills needed and skills available to meet current and future core business requirements, using HR and workforce data for strategic and predictive analytics, while taking all necessary steps to ensure data privacy;
- b. Sets strategic direction and priorities with input from relevant stakeholders, in particular public servants and/or their representatives, and the management accountable for implementation;
- c. Considers all relevant aspects of people management and ensures alignment with strategic planning processes of the government, including budget and performance management; and
- d. Includes appropriate indicators to monitor progress, evaluates the impact of HR policies and processes, and informs decision-making.

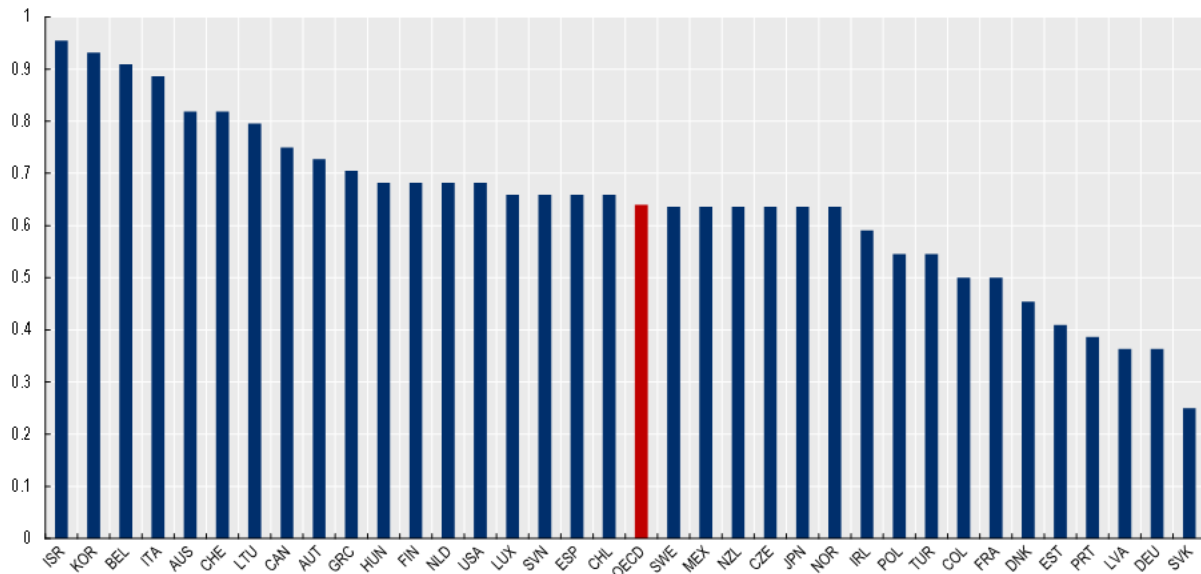
79. Effective strategic workforce planning is central to implementing a long-term, strategic, and systematic approach to people management. This forward-looking process ensures that organisations have the right skills and talent in the right roles at the right time (OECD, 2021^[11]). Strategic workforce planning, underpinned by robust workforce data, enables organisations to proactively address workforce challenges and anticipate future needs. By ensuring alignment between human resources and organisational goals, it supports the delivery of core services and fosters a resilient and adaptable workforce. It is also a necessary component of any public administration modernisation strategy, for example, when implementing new technologies such as AI.

80. Strategic workforce planning can also be used to identify encourage flexibility in the face of uncertainty, which is particularly critical in times of rapid change or crisis. This was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, where organisations with robust workforce planning and data were better equipped to identify relevant skills, redeploy staff and address urgent demands. Beyond crisis management, strategic workforce planning drives workforce transformation, ensuring that public sector organisations remain able to deliver services in fast-changing environments.

81. Workforce data is increasingly available and being further developed (Figure 11) – the Secretariat has been working with Adherents on this. For example, through the first Survey of Civil Servants in 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, the OECD has looked at perceptions of multiple management and leadership issues, and allows for the development of comparative indicators among the 8 countries and beyond. A People Analytics group has been gathered with delegates from the PEM, bringing together those in charge of developing and using workforce data to provide actionable business insights. This group has begun to identify key HR performance indicators and has established common methodologies to measure them. A pilot data collection has been undertaken and a stock taking paper will be published in the summer of 2025. The Secretariat has also recently worked with Lithuania and Latvia to establish a common set of organisational performance indicators including many related to people management. These are now used to monitor the implementation of key public administration modernisation initiatives.

Figure 11. Collection and availability of administrative human resources data in central/federal government, 2020

Degree to which administrative human resources (HR) data is collected and made available by the central government



Note: This indicator was first developed in 2016, and updated in 2020. More information on the methodology available at <https://www.oecd.org/gov/survey-on-strategic-human-resources-management-theoretical-framework-2016.pdf>.

Source: OECD (2020), Survey of the composition of the central/federal public administration workforce.

82. However, the application of this data to HR workforce planning is only developed in a few leading countries which provide a guiding light for others. The Australian Public Service (APS) has established the Workforce Planning Centre of Excellence (CoE) to elevate workforce planning from an operational activity to a strategic tool aligned with long-term organisational objectives (OECD, 2021^[1]). Part of the "Delivering for Tomorrow – APS Workforce Strategy 2025," the CoE provides tools, resources, and frameworks to help agencies anticipate workforce needs, address challenges like digital transformation, and integrate planning with broader business strategies. A maturity model guides agencies in improving capabilities across data use, governance, and leadership accountability. This initiative addresses critical gaps in workforce planning, such as limited skills, siloed efforts, and underutilised data. By enhancing collaboration, fostering data-driven insights, and strengthening leadership accountability, the CoE aims to create a more adaptive and resilient workforce, ensuring public services can effectively meet current and future challenges.

83. Greece is also taking steps to address workforce planning gaps through the development of an AI-based strategic workforce planning tool, designed by the Ministry of the Interior in collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Governance. The tool uses predictive AI technologies and big data to analyse both supply (organisational charts, job profiles, educational background, existing skills and competences) and demand (duties, quantitative needs, labour standards, emerging skills requirements) across the public sector. It generates objective insights on organisational capacity and provides recommendations for cross-department deployments as well as targeted new hires.

84. Strategic workforce planning will become increasingly vital as Adherents navigate demographic and technological transitions amid fiscal pressures. However, this remains an underdeveloped area in most Adherents. While some Adherents are beginning to leverage the vast amount of data available within public services, most have yet to do so. There is a significant opportunity to harness large datasets for workforce insights, yet data scientists are rarely found in public sector HR offices. Effective workforce planning is also crucial to ensure that any downsizing

efforts achieve their objectives while maintaining essential service standards and enabling the public sector to transition to a leaner, technology-driven model.

Principle 12. Workforce mobility and adaptability

Setting the necessary conditions for internal and external **workforce mobility and adaptability** to match skills with demand, in particular through:

- a. Establishing common frameworks and/or vocabulary to identify transversal job requirements and competencies (for example, through common competency frameworks and/or standardised job profiles);
- b. Enabling and encouraging short- and medium-term assignments within and outside of the public sector, while ensuring conflicts of interest are avoided, in order to encourage learning and exchange of information or to occasionally meet short-term labour demands;
- c. Valuing mobility as an asset for merit-based and transparent job promotion; and
- d. Making available adaptable and remote working options where possible and suited to the needs of the organisation, in order to enhance productivity.

85. Workforce mobility is essential for enhancing the flexibility of the public service. It allows organisations to quickly adapt to changing demands, ensuring that the right skills are deployed where they are most needed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, mobility played a crucial role in reallocating staff to high-priority areas, such as crisis management, where immediate action was required. More generally, strategic mobility allows organisations to use skills efficiently while offering public servants valuable and varied work experiences (OECD, 2023^[2]). However, too much mobility can lead to disruption, while too little can result in stagnation. By carefully balancing mobility and aligning it with strategic goals, public administrations can remain agile, responsive, and better equipped to meet both current and future challenges. When used strategically, mobility can not only address organisational needs but can also help to attract and retain talent, since in-demand employees are often looking to work on a variety of exciting projects throughout their career.

86. Developing strategic mobility requires clear and aligned goals, both at the organisational and individual levels. While all Adherents have mobility tools, policies and/or guidelines in place within the public service, internationally and to other sectors, some countries actively encourage mobility as a strategic workforce development tool that helps to ensure appropriate levels of flexibility in the face of shocks or adaptability for new technologies. Slovenia has embraced strategic mobility as a key workforce development tool through the creation of *Is-Muza*, an interactive IT system designed to enhance employee mobility and career development within the public administration. Initially piloted in the Ministry of Public Administration, the platform has since been expanded across the central administration, providing an internal labour market for temporary and permanent mobility. The system allows public servants to explore new opportunities, enabling managers to identify and attract talent efficiently. Beyond mobility, *Is-Muza* also supports skills development by facilitating structured development interviews and aligning training needs with workforce planning. This holistic approach seeks to ensure strategic mobility is a leadership priority by providing dedicated tools to all the stakeholders involved.

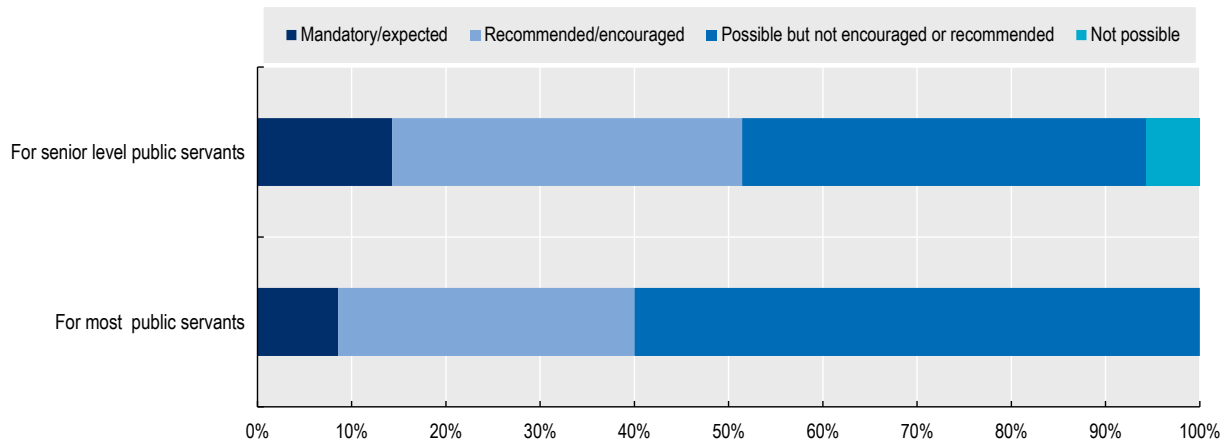
87. Mobility mechanisms in public services are diverse and relatively abundant (OECD, 2023^[2]). These include temporary mechanisms to address immediate needs or foster skill development; short- and long-term secondments; and mechanisms to encourage job rotations and reassignments as part of career planning. Additionally, most countries have mechanisms to enable exchanges with other sectors and/or governments (international or sub-national).

88. However, despite the existence of these tools, mobility is under-utilised. Only 40% of Adherents make internal lateral mobility mandatory or recommended for most public servants (Figure 12) (OECD, 2023^[2]). To maximise the benefits of mobility, Adherents need to identify and address barriers to mobility. The primary barrier is cultural – managers are not incentivised to encourage it. This includes clarifying the strategic intent behind mobility

initiatives, aligning them with organisational goals, and incentivising participation among public servants. At the same time, it is crucial to anticipate and mitigate potential adverse effects, such as the loss of institutional knowledge, operational disruptions, or conflict of interest. By balancing these factors, Adherents can leverage mobility not only as a reactive tool but as a proactive strategy to strengthen workforce adaptability, enhance public service delivery, and meet future challenges with greater resilience.

Figure 12. Internal lateral mobility in the public administration, 2022

Percentage of Adherents in 2022.



Note: N=35. Original survey question: Is internal lateral mobility in the public service...
 Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability

89. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic also pushed flexible ways of working into the definition of workforce adaptability, and served as a catalyst for transforming flexible working arrangements in public administrations. While many Adherents had already implemented some forms of flexibility in work location and hours, the pandemic rapidly expanded these practices, pushing them to the forefront of workforce management. In 2022, 64% of Adherents offered part-time to most public employees, and 61% remote-work part time and flexitime (OECD, 2023^[2]). In practice, across 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, this translated for remote work as being a practice as common as not working remotely at all, with similar proportions of employees working remotely on a weekly basis (43%) and never working remotely (37%) (OECD, 2025^[3]). Public administrations are now navigating the "new normal," reflecting on the benefits of flexible modalities experienced during the crisis while grappling with uncertainties about their future scope and depth. Across Adherents, approaches to flexible working vary widely in scale, coverage, and organisation, underscoring the need for strategic integration into broader workforce planning. Flexible arrangements should align with goals for attraction, retention, performance and engagement, balancing employee autonomy with organisational priorities.

90. As hybrid work continues to reshape public service, Adherents may need to adapt regulatory frameworks, reimagine office spaces, and assess the long-term implications of flexible arrangements. Rolling back these modalities risks undermining proven benefits in talent attraction, retention, and employee engagement, which may be increasingly important to maintain in times of fiscal pressure. New evidence from the EU employee survey shows that wellbeing, engagement and team performance are higher among employees who work remotely. Occasional or infrequent remote workers report the highest level of engagement while regular remote workers report the highest level of wellbeing and team performance (OECD, 2025^[3]). Moving forward, efforts should focus on leveraging these levels of flexibility strategically, balancing their advantages with operational needs, and embedding mobility as a core element of workforce planning.

Principle 13. Employment terms and conditions

Determining and offering transparent **employment terms and conditions** (e.g. compensation, term length, job security, rights and obligations) that appropriately match the functions of the position, taking into account external and internal labour markets, in particular through:

- a. Clearly defining the categories of employment that fall under civil service statutes, where such statutes exist, or general labour law, based on transparent and objective criteria;
- b. Clearly defining, and consistently applying, the terms and conditions of employment for functions and positions based on factors such as the nature of the work, labour market considerations, and public service capability development needs; and
- c. Engaging representatives of public employees in legitimate consultation procedures, negotiating through open and fair processes such as collective bargaining, and setting procedures for monitoring the implementation of agreements.

91. Transparent employment terms and conditions involve clearly defining and communicating the rights, responsibilities, and benefits associated with public service positions. This includes aspects such as compensation, job security, term lengths, and overall obligations. Most Adherents have multiple employment categories that are available for different employment situations. While traditional public service employment tends to be associated with career-long open contracts that emphasise job stability, many countries are introducing more flexible employment contracts for shorter-term employment. These contractual employment mechanisms may also offer more pay flexibility to help public leaders attract specific skill sets needed for key projects. Ideally, there should be clear criteria to help managers know when to use which kind of contract that take into account aspects such as the nature of the work, labour market dynamics, and broader public service needs.

92. Employment frameworks tend to be standardised across public administrations. For example, most Adherents (70% of them) standardise job classification systems across the entire public service, regardless of the specific ministry or agency in which public servants are employed (OECD, 2023^[2]). However, this does not necessarily mean that public servants are employed by a centralised public service. In fact, the vast majority are contractually employed by individual ministries or agencies. Only 20% of Adherents, including Switzerland, Costa Rica, Israel, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, or Portugal employ public servants centrally for the public service as a whole. Some countries use a hybrid approach. For example, in Spain, civil servants in the "general corps" are employed centrally, while those in "special corps" with specific functions – such as finance inspectors or diplomats – are employed directly by their respective ministries (OECD, 2023^[14]). Similarly, in Canada, civil servants in core departments and agencies share a central employer, but those in separate agencies are employed directly by those entities (OECD, 2023^[2]). In both cases, public servants retain their civil servant status regardless of the employing body, highlighting variations in employment models while maintaining a unified classification system.

93. Many Adherents are rebalancing employment policies and contractual modalities to get the best out of both permanent and temporary contractual employment, leveraging the strengths of each to create a more dynamic and effective public service. These approaches strive to combine the adaptability and role-specific flexibility of temporary contracts with the institutional knowledge and stability inherent in career-based structures. For example, and to address competitive examination attraction challenges, France has taken steps to rebalance its traditionally career-based public service model through its public service transformation law of 6 August 2019 (OECD, 2023^[14]). This reform facilitated and diversified the pathways into public service, significantly expanding opportunities for contract-based workers. Contractual employees can now access senior management positions, roles within all public establishments of the state, and most permanent positions in state administrations. This approach aims to introduce greater flexibility and adaptability within the French public service while maintaining the core strengths of the career-based system.

94. Going forward, this growing trend will need to be framed by clear policies and guidelines to ensure balance and fairness between various contractual modalities. Expanding the use of temporary hiring, for instance, should avoid creating a two-tiered system where permanent and temporary employees perform identical roles under different conditions. To mitigate this risk, Adherents should establish robust frameworks to define when and how temporary recruitment can be used, ensuring it addresses short-term or surge capacity needs rather than long-term structural gaps. Clear guidance from HR offices, enhanced monitoring mechanisms, and stakeholder consultations will be essential to uphold merit, transparency, and equality of access. Without these measures, the shift towards a blended model risks undermining trust, coherence, and the ability to attract and retain talent. This will be ever more important in the context of fiscal constraints where different employment modalities may be used with different short and long-term budgetary impact. Temptation to replace public service hiring with private sector outsourcing should be tempered by clear analysis of (long term) costs, risks and benefits. Most Adherents still lack a robust framework to do this.

Principle 14. Employee voice

Ensuring that **employees have opportunities to contribute** to the improvement of public service delivery and are engaged as partners in public service management issues, in particular through:

- a. Enabling employee representation and entering into constructive social dialogue with them;
- b. Regularly consulting employees on issues such as their well-being and engagement, in order to identify strengths, challenges and trends to inform leadership and improve management decision-making;
- c. Ensuring ongoing communication between the front lines and senior-level public servants, and horizontally through networks and communities of practice;
- d. Having processes in place for employees to report grievances and violations of integrity standards, without fear of retribution or harassment, and providing appropriate follow-up procedures.

95. Giving employees a voice that is heard and valued focuses on actively involving public sector employees as partners in improving service delivery and addressing management issues. It includes facilitating employee representation through constructive social dialogue, fostering communication between frontline staff and senior leaders, and creating networks for collaboration. Regular consultations on employee well-being and engagement help identify workforce strengths and challenges, providing valuable insights for leadership and decision-making. Furthermore, robust grievance mechanisms ensure employees can report concerns, such as breaches of integrity, without fear of retaliation, with clear follow-up procedures in place. Collectively, these measures establish a participatory framework that empowers employees to contribute meaningfully while reinforcing their value within the organisation.

96. Engaging employees as active contributors fosters a more inclusive and dynamic organisational culture. By encouraging open dialogue and regular feedback, Adherents can identify challenges early, adapt to emerging needs, and create an environment where employees feel valued and heard. Transparent communication and collaboration across roles enhance cohesion and collective problem-solving, while robust mechanisms for addressing concerns promote trust and integrity. This participatory approach not only boosts morale and motivation but also drives innovation and effectiveness, ensuring that organisations remain adaptable and responsive to their employees' needs, concerns and ideas. For example, Sweden has a long-standing tradition of institutionalised employee voice, anchored in collective bargaining and formalised consultation procedures. Public agencies are required to engage in regular dialogue with employee representatives at both agency and central levels, governed by national collective agreements and public employment legislation.

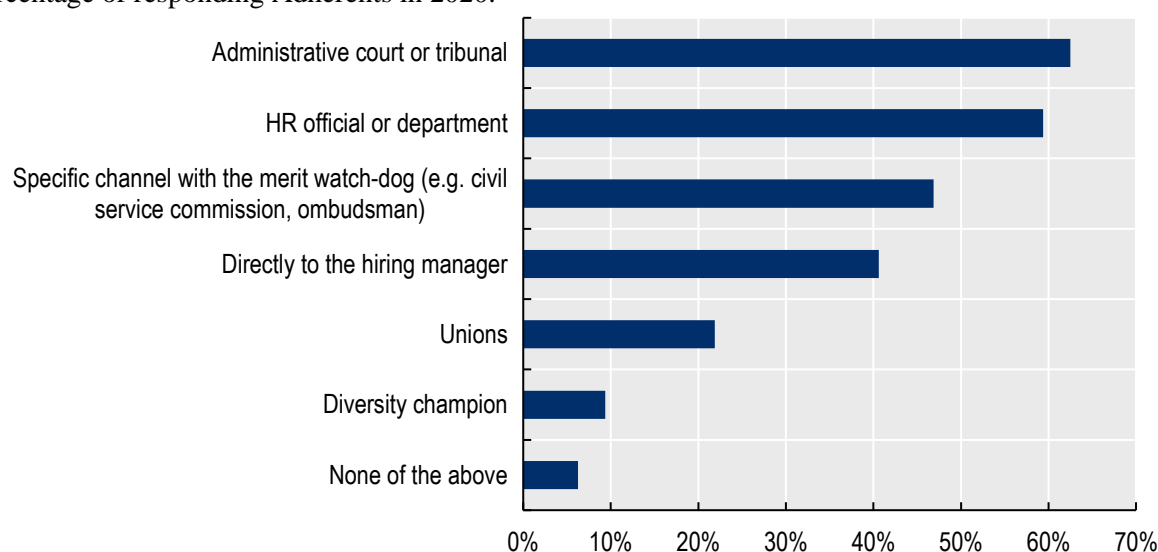
97. Across Adherents, public administrations are increasingly using employee surveys to measure well-being and engagement levels. These surveys are conducted in 91% of Adherents, although their scope varies – nearly half

of them administer them at both public-service wide, and ministry levels, providing insights that capture both public service-wide and organisation-specific trends (OECD, 2024^[17]). However, recent data from across 8 EU Member States, 6 of which are also Adherents, highlights that only 42% of respondents have positive perception that their organisation's leadership would take actions based on the results of the survey (OECD, 2025^[3]). In Ireland, biennial Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys have been conducted since 2015 as part of the Civil Service Renewal Plan. These surveys benchmark Ireland's results against international data from countries like Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, helping to identify areas for improvement. Beyond national efforts, the Secretariat recently collaborated with eight EU Member States on a European Commission-funded project to develop a standardised employee survey covering engagement, well-being, organisational and team performance, learning and development, innovation and working conditions. Establishing an internationally comparable evidence base can provide Adherents with deeper insights into the drivers of employee satisfaction and strategies to enhance it, but should be followed by concrete and tangible actions.

98. Additionally, employee voice should also be used to report grievances and integrity violations without fear of retaliation is essential for maintaining trust and accountability in public administrations. For instance, virtually all Adherents have channels available to contest recruitment decisions (Figure 12) (OECD, 2021^[1]). In 63% of Adherents, an administrative court or tribunal play a role with that process. In New Zealand, recourse for appointment disputes is handled at the agency level, with individuals able to escalate grievances under employment law or to the Human Rights Commission in cases of alleged discrimination. Across Adherents, these reporting mechanisms should be accompanied by clear follow-up procedures, guaranteeing that concerns are addressed transparently and that employees are protected for retaliation. Strengthening these safeguards reinforces ethical standards and fosters a culture of integrity.

Figure 13. Recruitment contestation channels in central/federal administrations, 2020

Percentage of responding Adherents in 2020.



Note: N=32. Original survey question: Which of the following channels are available to contest recruitment decisions?

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

99. Going forward, Adherents should ensure that employee voice leads to meaningful action, any many public servants remain sceptical about whether their input drives real change. Strengthening trust in engagement mechanisms requires visible follow-through, such as policy adjustments or direct leadership communication. At the same time, expanding participation should be balanced with efficiency, ensuring that consultation processes remain structured and impactful and are not perceived as being too bureaucratic. Embedding employee voice into governance frameworks and fostering continuous dialogue can only enhance trust, agility and resilience in the public sector.

IV. Dissemination

100. The dissemination of the Recommendation by Adherents and the Secretariat has significantly contributed to raising awareness and underscoring the relevance of its principles in strengthening public service leadership and employment policies. Efforts to disseminate the Recommendation at national and international levels included reviews, thematic reports, policy papers, and working papers prepared by the Secretariat, covering the Recommendation's key principles or broader cross-cutting issues.

101. For example, the PEM and PGC have published two "Public Employment and Management" reports (OECD, 2021^[11]), (OECD, 2023^[21]) with a third scheduled for release towards the end of 2025. Each of these reports includes analysis and guidance on the implementation of specific aspects of the Recommendation. These are supplemented by policy papers ((OECD, 2021^[15]), (OECD, 2023^[14])), and working papers ((Nolan-Flecha, 2019^[12]), (Gerson, 2020^[10]), (OECD, 2021^[20])). Meanwhile, workforce professionalisation has become a cross-cutting priority in many PGC sub-bodies and beyond, including in the field of public procurement (OECD, 2023^[21]), digital government (OECD, 2021^[20]), public sector innovation and integrity (OECD, 2020^[22]).

102. The Secretariat has participated in many national and international forums where the Recommendation has been presented and discussed. These include regular meetings and workshops organised by the OECD's Public Governance Committee and its Public Employment and Management Working Party, for sharing good practices and technical expertise, further promoting public employment and management practices aligned with the Recommendation. The Secretariat has also presented the Recommendation at meetings of The European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), the United Nations' Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) and various conferences and events organised and hosted by Adherents on topics related to civil service reform. Additionally, country and regional reviews, along with targeted capacity-building activities, have supported Adherents in implementing relevant provisions, as well as non-Adherents in aligning with them. The Secretariat has also contributed public employment and management insights to ongoing work under the PGC, its subsidiary bodies, and other OECD policy communities and initiatives such as the Reinforcing Democracy Initiative. Finally, several references to the Recommendation were made by other international organisations, and directly by Adherents, different stakeholders, and interested parties.

V. Summary and conclusions

Implementation

103. The Report highlights that Adherents have made progress in implementing the Recommendation, though the pace and focus of reforms vary. Different Adherents have prioritised specific provisions, reflecting diverse policy contexts and institutional capacities. The main high-level findings of the implementation assessment are:

- **Most Adherents have established public service values.** Common public service values include responsiveness to the elected government, impartiality, integrity, transparency, accountability, and respect for the rule of law. Such values can enable public servants to exercise judgment while upholding core standards, reinforcing accountability, efficiency, and innovation. Tensions can arise among these values and are intensified by contemporary trends, such as the increased speed of political decision making, the growing complexity of policy and politics, and the heightened visibility of civil servants which adds new layers of public scrutiny and accountability. Managing these tensions requires high capability public service leadership.
- **A capable senior-level public service is a lynchpin of government effectiveness.** Almost all Adherents have a clearly defined group of Senior Level Public Servants (SLPS) who are expected to be experts in the administrative machinery of government. Leadership development is consistently rated as a top priority and there is scope to increase the use of more sophisticated tools to assess leadership competencies, such as assessment centres and simulations. Furthermore, there is an ongoing challenge to ensure that SPLS have the

mandate, competencies, and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power. As administrative leaders, it will remain essential for SLPS to maintain a long-term focus on administrative modernisation, to ensure that the public service has the means to provide meaningful advice and translate policy decisions into effective and sustainable services and programmes.

- **Attracting and retaining talent in the public service is becoming increasingly challenging, particularly in high-demand fields where competition with the private sector is strong.** While public administrations offer meaningful work, career development, and flexibility, these advantages are often underutilised in employer branding and recruitment efforts. To remain competitive, governments should adopt proactive strategies that align salary structures with labour market realities, enhance career mobility, and communicate the unique value of public service careers to prospective candidates.
- **Many Adherents are looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of their recruitment and performance systems while ensuring they remain transparent and merit-based.** However, Adherents' merit-based systems have often failed to adapt to modern labour market realities. They are often too slow to meet the needs of hiring managers and the expectations of candidates. A related challenge is that hiring managers' discretion is often limited, as a way of protecting the merit principle. Additionally, the merit principle also requires effective mechanisms to address underperformance, including clear evaluation processes and structured exit strategies when necessary. While there should be clear criteria and guidelines for managers to ensure standards around transparency, bias-reduction, and fairness, hiring managers should be trained, trusted, and supported by HR professionals, to conduct hiring processes in ways that meet their needs.
- **Adherents provide regular training to public servants, and could consider taking a more deliberate approach to reskilling.** Much of the training offer for public servants focuses on improving their skills for their current jobs (upskilling), with digital skills as a key focus among many Adherents. However few Adherents take a strategic approach to reskilling – training skills for public servants to change jobs. This will become increasingly important as public administrations invest more in transformative technologies which will change the nature and scope of public sector work.
- **While some Adherents have embraced modern, data-driven HR functions, many still face challenges in adapting to evolving workforce needs.** Public employment systems rely on a structured network of institutions managing human resources, balancing central oversight with ministerial autonomy. Strengthening HR capabilities and leveraging emerging technologies is essential to ensure agility, efficiency, and strategic workforce planning in an increasingly complex environment.
- **Improved strategic workforce planning could help Adherents navigate demographic and technological transitions amid fiscal pressures.** While some Adherents are beginning to leverage the vast amount of data available within public services, most have yet to do so. There is a significant opportunity to harness large datasets for workforce insights, yet data scientists are rarely found in public sector HR offices. Effective workforce planning is also crucial to ensure that any downsizing efforts achieve their objectives while maintaining essential service standards and enabling the public sector to transition to a leaner, technology-driven model with the necessary skills and competence.
- **Recent crises have accelerated digitalisation to strengthen flexibility in many public administrations.** Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated certain digital transitions, pushing flexible ways of working into the definition of workforce adaptability. Moving forward, efforts should focus on leveraging new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, to enhance worker flexibility and efficiency, while addressing potential risks, including those associated with data bias and algorithmic management.
- **Strategies for reskilling public servants could improve Adherents' readiness for uncertainty.** As government implement new technologies and priorities shift, some public service positions will become redundant. Effective reskilling strategies, based on identifying at-risk jobs, and mapping out pathways to re-train employees to take on higher-value positions, will be essential to ensure continued productivity from the public service workforce. This will be even more urgent as public servants are not easily laid-off in many Adherents. However, reskilling strategies remain rare in public administrations.

- **Public administrations are increasingly balancing permanent and temporary employment to create a more flexible and effective workforce.** While leveraging the strengths of each contract type can enhance adaptability, Adherents should develop clear policies and safeguards to prevent disparities between temporary and permanent staff. Strengthening governance frameworks, monitoring mechanisms, and cost-benefit analyses will be essential to ensure fair, transparent, and sustainable workforce management, particularly in times of fiscal constraints.

Dissemination

104. The dissemination of the Recommendation by Adherents and the Secretariat has significantly contributed to raising awareness and underscoring the relevance of its principles in strengthening public service leadership and employment policies. Efforts to disseminate the Recommendation at national and international levels included reviews, thematic reports, policy papers, and working papers, covering the Recommendation's key principles or broader cross-cutting issues. Notably, the Recommendation informed discussions during the annual PEM Working Party meetings, regional PEM meetings, and different editions of the OECD Public Service Leaders Roundtable.

105. Additionally, country and regional reviews, along with targeted capacity-building activities, have supported Adherents in implementing relevant provisions, as well as non-Adherents in aligning with them. The Secretariat has also contributed public employment and management insights to ongoing work under the PGC, its subsidiary bodies, and other OECD policy communities and initiatives such as the Reinforcing Democracy Initiative. Moreover, the annual meetings of the Public Employment and Management Working Party have provided a valuable platform for sharing good practices and technical expertise, further promoting public employment and management practices aligned with OECD standards. Finally, several references to the Recommendation were made by other international organisations, and directly by Adherents, different stakeholders, and interested parties.

Continued relevance

106. The Report shows that the Recommendation continues to be of high relevance to Adherents, and to the work of the Public Governance Committee and that no revision is required in the short-to-medium term. It shows how many Adherents have made significant progress across all three pillars to align public employment policies and practices to the needs, of a modern and capable government. However, in many areas, governments remain hampered by legacy employment policies and practices that were designed for another context. These systems risk delaying potential benefits from many of the important opportunities presented by modernisation initiatives, including new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). For example, very few Adherents have developed effective workforce planning policies and practices that focus on building capacity for AI initiatives and accompanying their implementation. Few Adherents have reskilling strategies that ensure the existing public administration workforce can be redeployed to adjust to new (e.g. digital) ways of working or take on new priorities. And many public administrations' recruitment systems remain slow and unable to identify, target and attract key skills needed for the future. Addressing these challenges requires further investment in the stewardship function of leadership described above. However, many Adherents are facing increasing tension at the top, where senior level public servants are challenged to remain objective and impartial in the face of increasingly demanding and wide-ranging political expectations. This challenges the ability for senior level public servants to effectively discharge their duties to advise, deliver and steward.

107. Modernising public employment policies and leadership practices is essential today, as the work of many public servants is becoming more complex, technical, digital and uncertain. Many public sector challenges – such as health, economic growth, and global security – are deeply interconnected, requiring public servants to develop greater understanding, expertise, and leadership, to ensure policy coherence and responsive service delivery. The rise of digitalisation and data-driven decision-making demands new and rapidly evolving technical skills that are often difficult to attract and develop within public administration. Furthermore, public servants operate in an increasingly uncertain environment, shaped by unforeseen crises beyond their control. At the same time, governments face growing fiscal pressures, requiring careful consideration of the cost, size, and structure of the public workforce. These

challenges highlight the urgent need to review and revise how public servants are employed and managed throughout their careers to ensure governments maximise the value of their investment in the public workforce.

108. Addressing these challenges requires a particular focus on public service leaders – those who hold the most senior positions in public administration. Public service leaders are expected to oversee large, complex organisations and systems capable of delivering the ambitious policy agendas of democratically elected governments. This requires balancing three key functions: advice, delivery, and stewardship. As advisors, they should have the mandate, expertise, and trust to provide impartial, evidence-based guidance that enhances policy design and implementation. In their delivery role, they should remain mission-focused and responsive to political direction while maintaining impartiality. Both functions depend on a well-equipped public service with the right regulations, policies, and systems to support effective and efficient decision-making. To ensure this, senior leaders should also fulfil a stewardship role—ensuring that public sector organisations are equipped with modern management systems that enable the right talent, technology, regulatory frameworks, and management culture to remain fit for purpose in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Next steps

109. In line with the conclusions of the Report, work to continue supporting Adherents implement the Recommendation will continue, including through the development of implementation guidance and the PGC will report back to Council on its implementation, dissemination and continued relevance in ten years. An earlier report to Council would be prepared if changes in the field warrant it.

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