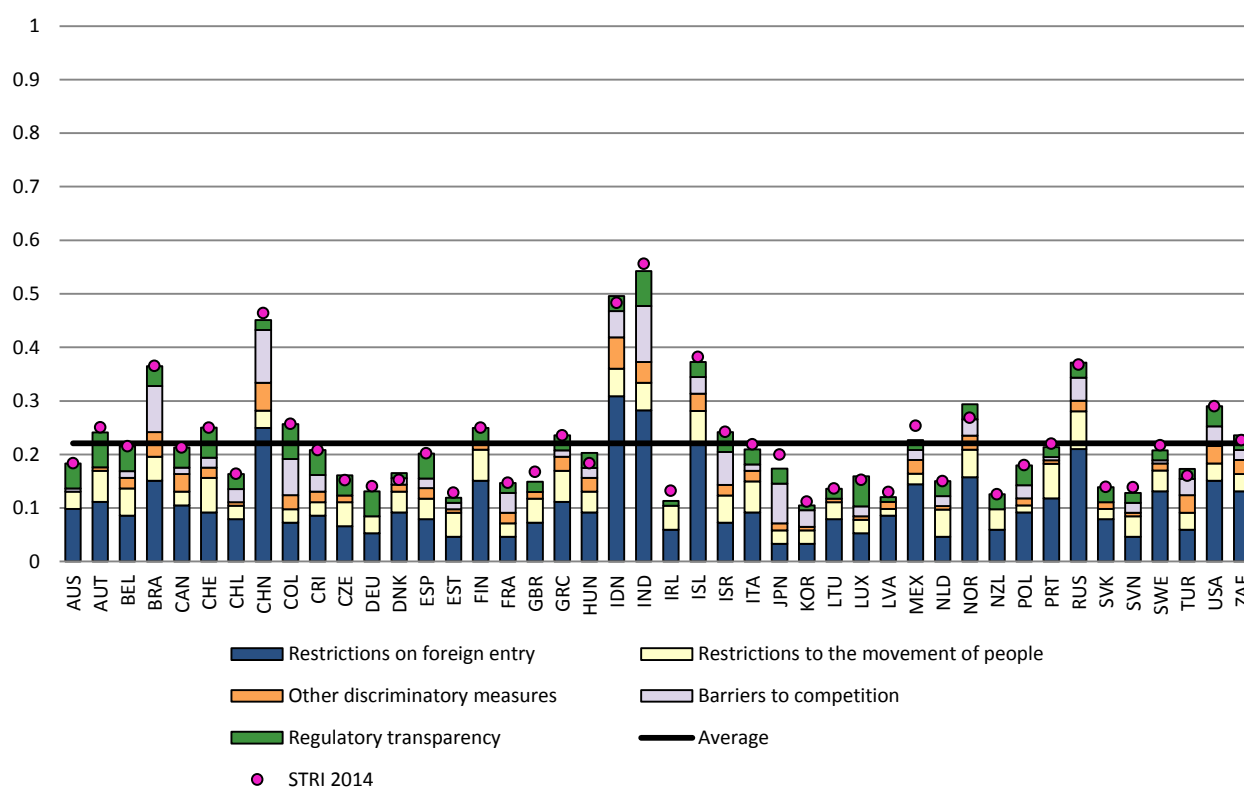


STRI Sector Brief: Insurance

This note presents the Services Trade Restrictiveness Indices (STRIs) for the 35 OECD countries and Brazil, the People's Republic of China, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and South Africa in 2016.

Insurance services comprise life insurance, property and casualty insurance, reinsurance and auxiliary services. Private health insurance and private pensions are not covered. Major exporters are the United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland. Efficient insurance services are one of the backbones of dynamic economies, providing firms with risk management tools and channelling savings towards long-term investment.

STRI by policy area : insurance services (2016)



Note: The STRI indices take values between zero and one, one being the most restrictive. They are calculated on the basis of the STRI regulatory database which records measures on a Most Favoured Nations basis. Preferential trade agreements are not taken into account.

The 2016 scores in the insurance sector range between 0.11 and 0.54 with an average of 0.22. The distribution according to restrictiveness is slightly skewed towards the low end, as there are 28 countries below and 16 countries above the average.

The measures in the STRI database are organised under five policy areas as indicated in the chart. The results are mainly driven by two policy areas: *Restrictions on foreign entry* and *Barriers to competition*. This reflects the special characteristics of the sector as well as the policy environment in which it operates. As the insurance sector plays a significant role in every country's economic and financial systems, restricting entry and competition has sometimes been used as a means for authorities to retain control over its operations in the absence of effective prudential regulation. Commercial establishment through subsidiaries, branches and acquisitions is the primary mode of entry into foreign markets for insurance companies. However large-scale commercial transactions, reinsurance and marine, aviation and transport insurance are more commonly conducted cross-border.

Restrictions on foreign entry feature most prominently in the indices. Only four out of the 44 countries limit the foreign equity share in local insurance companies, but 16 countries restrict the establishment of branches of foreign insurers, 14 countries impose more stringent requirements to grant a license to foreign-owned insurers than domestic ones, and five countries restrict cross-border bank mergers and acquisitions. In most cases insurance carriers must to be locally established in order to provide a full range of services to residents: only four countries allow primary non-life insurance to be sold cross-border, and six countries for life insurance. However 12 countries allow non-life insurance to be placed abroad when the risk cannot be covered in the country. The provision of reinsurance services on a cross-border basis is allowed without restrictions in 29 out of the 44 countries. Lastly 16 countries require at least one member of an insurance carrier's Board of Directors to be a national or permanent resident, among which nine countries impose this condition on a majority of the Board.

Barriers to competition also contribute to the scores of the countries with the highest index values. Product-level regulations, including price restrictions and prior approval requirements for individual insurance products, are significant drivers of this result. Another common issue is the lack of independence of the regulatory and supervisory authorities. In 28 countries full operational, management and budget independence from the government is not guaranteed. Government ownership is also widely observed in the sector. In 15 countries, one of the largest life or non-life insurers is state-owned.

The *Regulatory transparency* policy area builds on information from administrative laws and regulations, information from the migration authorities on requirements for obtaining a business visa and the World Bank Doing Business Survey. The latter records time, cost and number of procedures required for establishing a company. There are 29 countries included in the STRI database that are not among the 40 best performing countries on one or more of these measures. Regarding transparency in the process of granting licenses, seven countries do not mandate the authorities to provide grounds for rejecting an applicant, and nine do not specify a maximum time to decide on an insurer's license application.

Turning to the other policy areas there is no country in the database that does not limit market access for natural persons providing services on a temporary basis as intra-corporate transferees, contractual services suppliers or independent services suppliers. Most countries do not have an established process for recognising the professional qualifications of foreign intermediaries. Other discriminatory measures specific to the sector contain impediments include mandatory cessions to domestic reinsurers or caps on cessions to foreign reinsurers in five countries, discriminatory financial requirements imposed on non-established reinsurers in five countries, and restrictions on writing insurance contracts in foreign currencies in five countries.

Compared to 2014, denoted by the red dots in the chart, the STRI index is unchanged for 19 countries, 16 have a lower (less restrictive) score, and 9 record a higher value of the STRI index (more restrictive) in 2016. Most of the changes reflect the evolution of general business regulation. India stands out as having implemented significant reforms as the foreign equity limit has been raised from 26% to 49% and foreign reinsurers have been allowed to enter the market through branches. Among other countries that have introduced reforms, Mexico has allowed foreign insurers to establish branches subject to certain conditions; Slovenia has eased the conditions on the establishment of foreign branches; the People's Republic of China has started allowing mutual insurance; Indonesia has enhanced compliance with international standards on financial transparency; and Ireland has introduced a 6 month time frame to grant or deny insurers' license applications.

It should be noted that insurance is a heavily regulated sector for the purpose of maintaining the stability and soundness of the financial system. Prudential rules and standards are set by national governments and regulators as well as international financial standard-setting bodies. The STRI does not seek to define the scope or nature of what measures would be considered prudential, but aims to record in an objective and comparable manner the state of legal and regulatory impediments faced by foreign insurers.

More information

- » Access all of the country notes, sector notes and interactive STRI tools on the OECD website at <http://oe.cd/stri>
- » Contact the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate with your questions at stri.contact@oecd.org

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.