

Government at a Glance 2023

Country Notes

Belgium

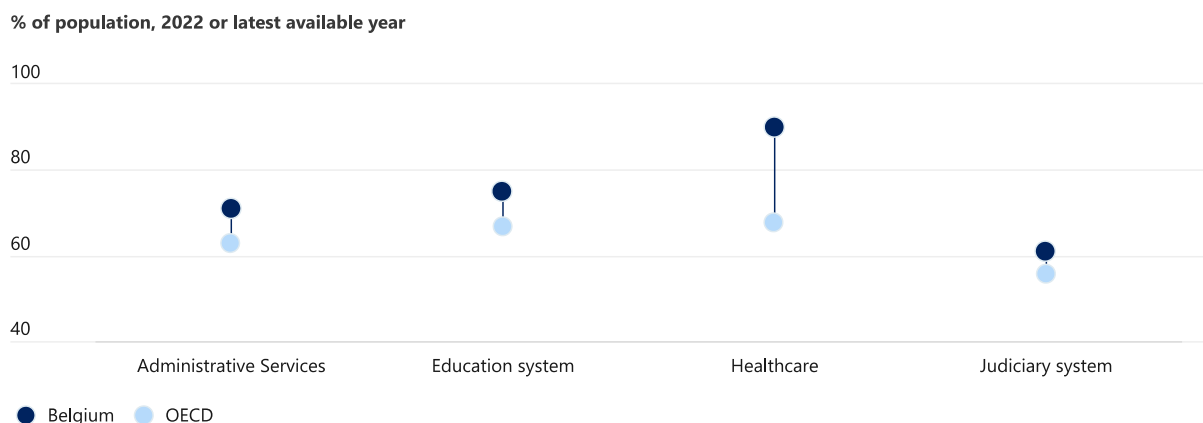
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Trust and satisfaction with public services

Trust in public institutions and satisfaction with public services are important yardsticks of the quality of public governance. They reflect people's perceptions of government competence in designing and delivering policies and services, and expectations on the behaviour of public institutions and their representatives. Although high trust in public institutions is not a necessary outcome of democratic governance, trust and satisfaction with public services facilitate effective governance, as they correlate with high rates of compliance with policies, participation in public life and social cohesion.

In Belgium, satisfaction with public services is generally higher than the OECD average. Satisfaction with the health care system is particularly high at 90%, significantly higher than the 68% average across OECD countries. Satisfaction with the education system is also higher, standing at 75% compared to the 67% OECD average. Furthermore, satisfaction with administrative services in Belgium is at 71%, which is notably above the OECD average (63%).

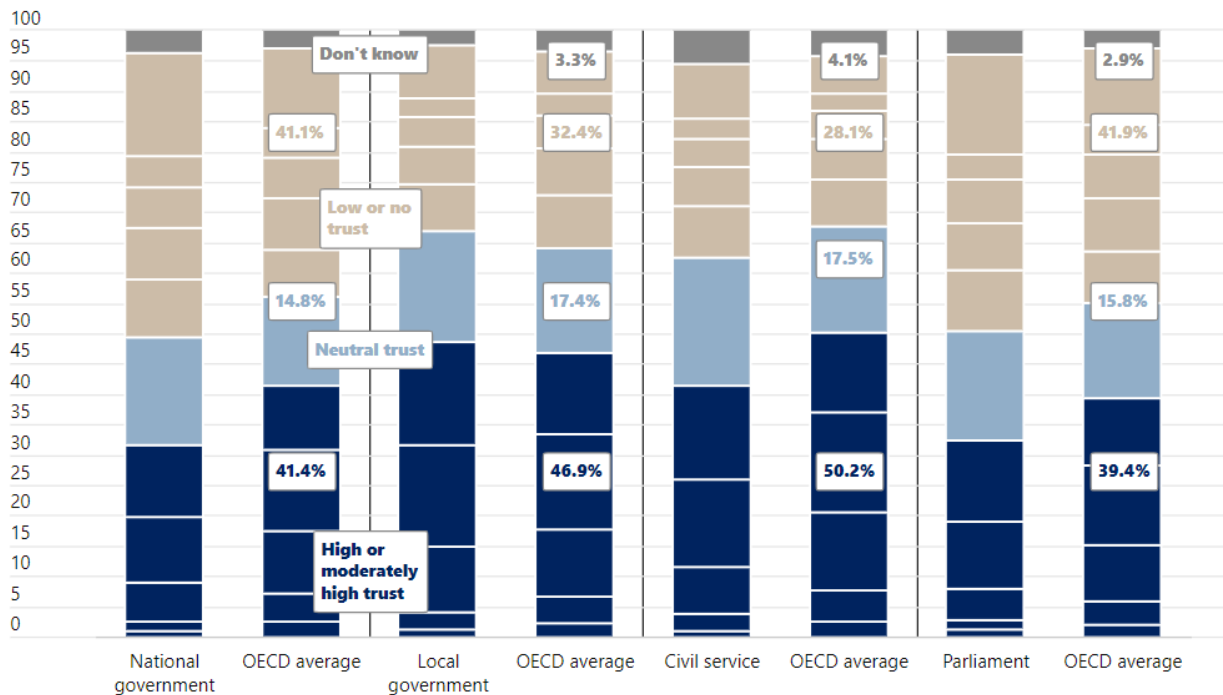
Figure 1. Satisfaction with public services, 2022



Trust in public institutions in Belgium was below the OECD average in 2021. Slightly less than one third of Belgians report high or moderately high trust in their national government (32%), below the OECD average (41%). Trust in the local government (49%) is instead higher than the OECD average (47%). The share of people reporting high or moderately high trust in the civil service is also comparatively low at 41%, compared to the OECD average (50%). High or moderately high trust in parliament is 33% in Belgium, below the 39% average across OECD countries.

Figure 2. Trust in public institutions, 2021

% of population reporting high or moderately high trust in various public institutions, Belgium, 2021



Achieving results with good governance practices

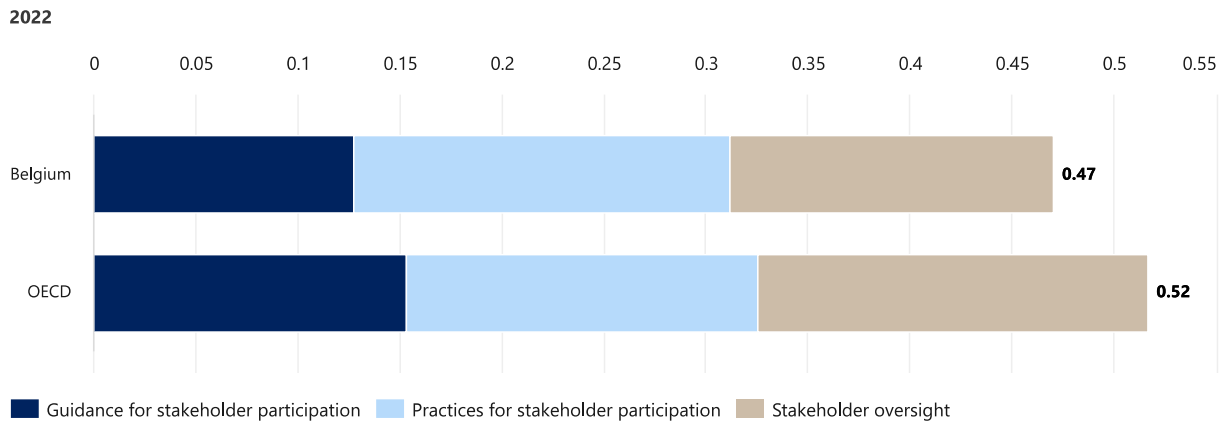
In an age of multiple crises, governments need to adopt more advanced practices to build trust in public institutions and enhance democratic resilience. Actions include building on democratic strengths, such as enhancing citizen and stakeholder engagement in decision making; reinforcing key competences to handle crises, such as budgeting and public financial management processes to address the green and digital transitions; and protecting against threats to democratic values, such as maintaining effective public integrity rules and promoting ethical use of artificial intelligence.

Citizen and stakeholder engagement in decision making helps to improve the design, implementation, and public acceptance of policies, infrastructure and services. The OECD Infrastructure Governance Index (IGI) on stakeholder participation provides an overview of countries' performance in developing national guidance for stakeholder engagement, promoting their effective participation, and ensuring stakeholder oversight over infrastructure projects.

Belgium scores 0.47 in the IGI on stakeholder participation, slightly below the OECD average (0.52). Belgium scores above the OECD average on stakeholder participation practices (0.18 out of a maximum value of 0.33) but could improve on stakeholder participation guidance and stakeholder oversight.

Figure 3. Index on stakeholder participation in infrastructure decision making

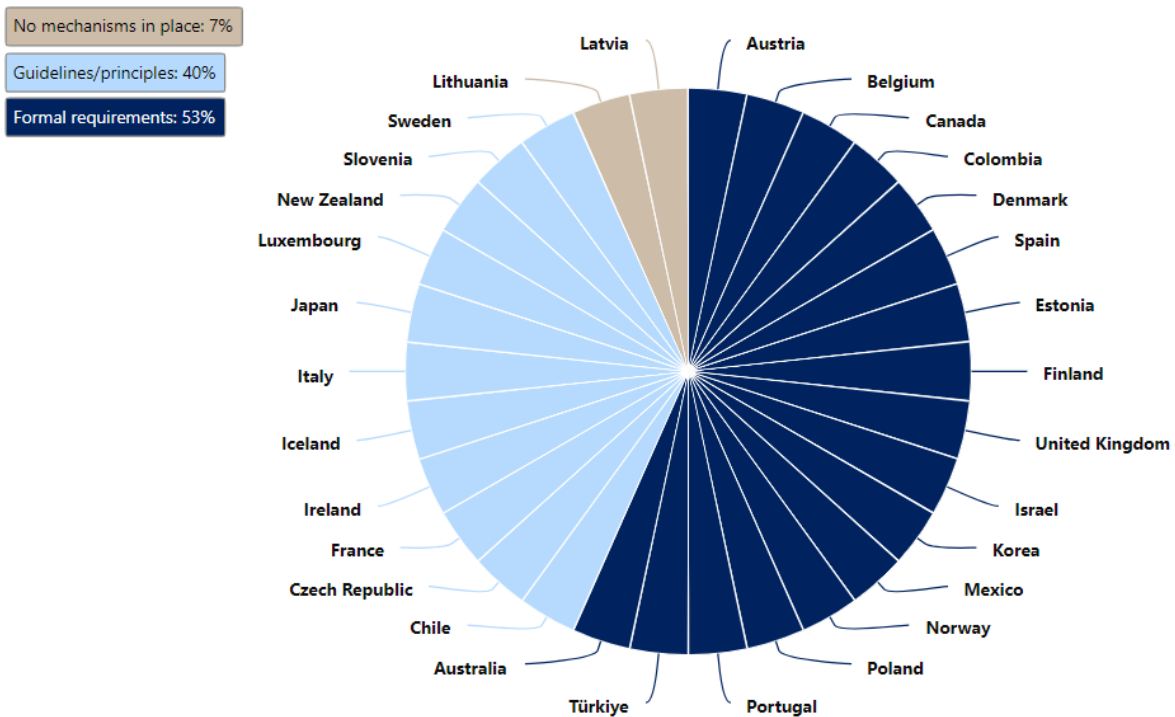
From 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest), 2022



Strengthening information integrity has become particularly complex in the digital age. While digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) provide enormous opportunities, including in expanding and protecting the exercise of some democratic rights and freedoms, their use also brings challenges for governments such as ensuring that they enhance people’s willingness and ability to engage constructively in democratic life and that they benefit society as a whole.

Belgium has introduced laws and regulations (formal requirements) to ensure ethical use of AI.

Figure 4. Mechanisms used to ensure the ethical use of artificial intelligence in government, 2022

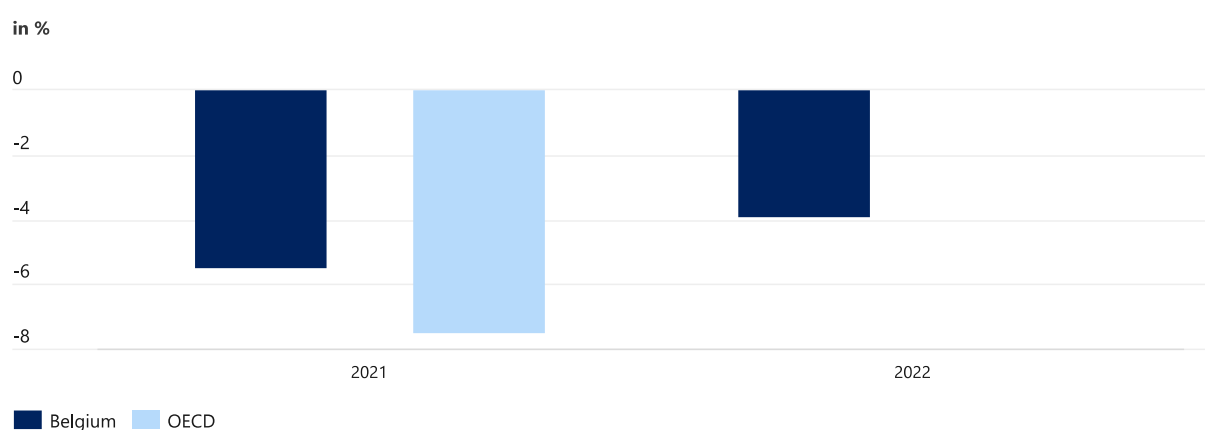


What resources public institutions use and how they are managed

After stark deterioration due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which required emergency measures and direct support mechanisms to business and people, public finances show positive signs, but the recovery remains fragile. The fiscal balance is the difference between a government's revenues and its expenditures in a year. When the government spends more than it collects, it has a fiscal deficit. When it spends less, it has a fiscal surplus.

In 2021, Belgium had a fiscal deficit of -5.5% of GDP, which was below the average across OECD countries (-7.5%). In 2022, the deficit was reduced to -3.9%. In 2021, Belgium had one of the highest debt rates in the OECD, (129.1% of GDP, compared to 120.8% on average across the OECD). The debt ratio to GDP was reduced to 103.8% of GDP in 2022.

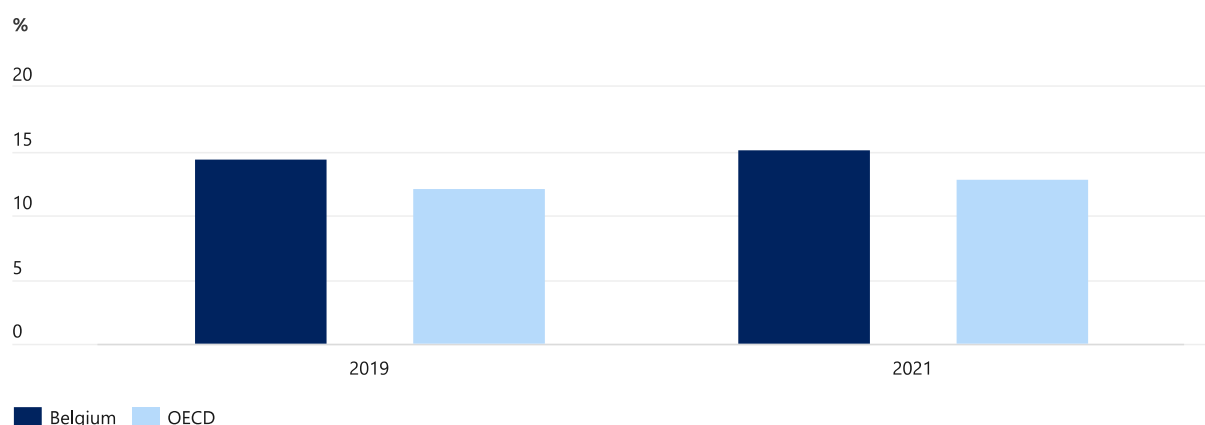
Figure 5. General government fiscal balance as a percentage of GDP



Public investment can enhance productivity and economic growth and help implement long-term policies, such as green energy infrastructure to support action on climate change. In turn, governments procure large amounts of goods, services and works to help them implement policies and deliver public services.

In 2021, Belgium spent 15.2% of GDP on public procurement, which was above the average across OECD countries (12.9%). In 2021, Belgium's public investment spending was 2.8% of GDP, below the OECD average (3.4% of GDP).

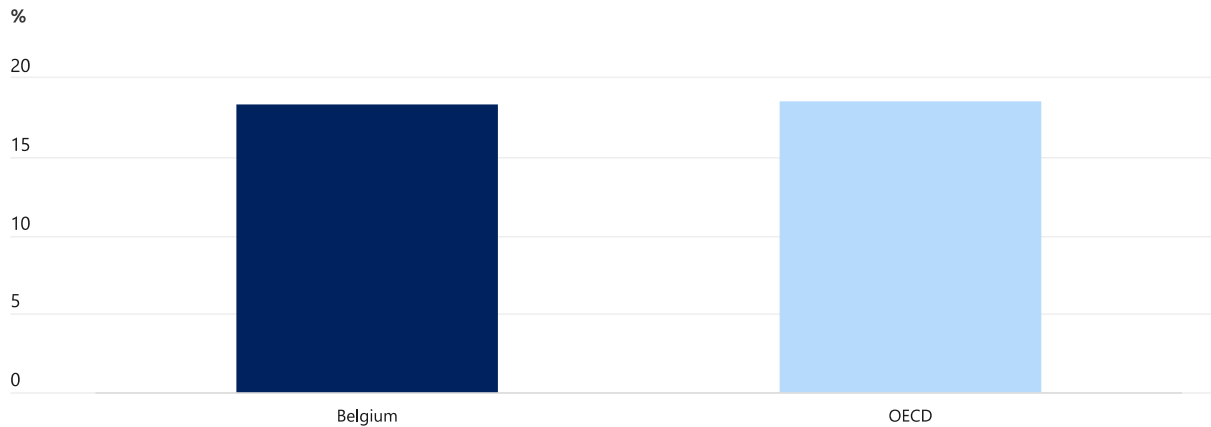
Figure 6. Government procurement spending as a share of GDP



The size of public employment varies significantly among OECD countries, ranging from around 10% to just above 30%.

In 2021, the size of public employment as share of total employment in Belgium was 18.4%, compared to 18.6% on average across OECD countries.

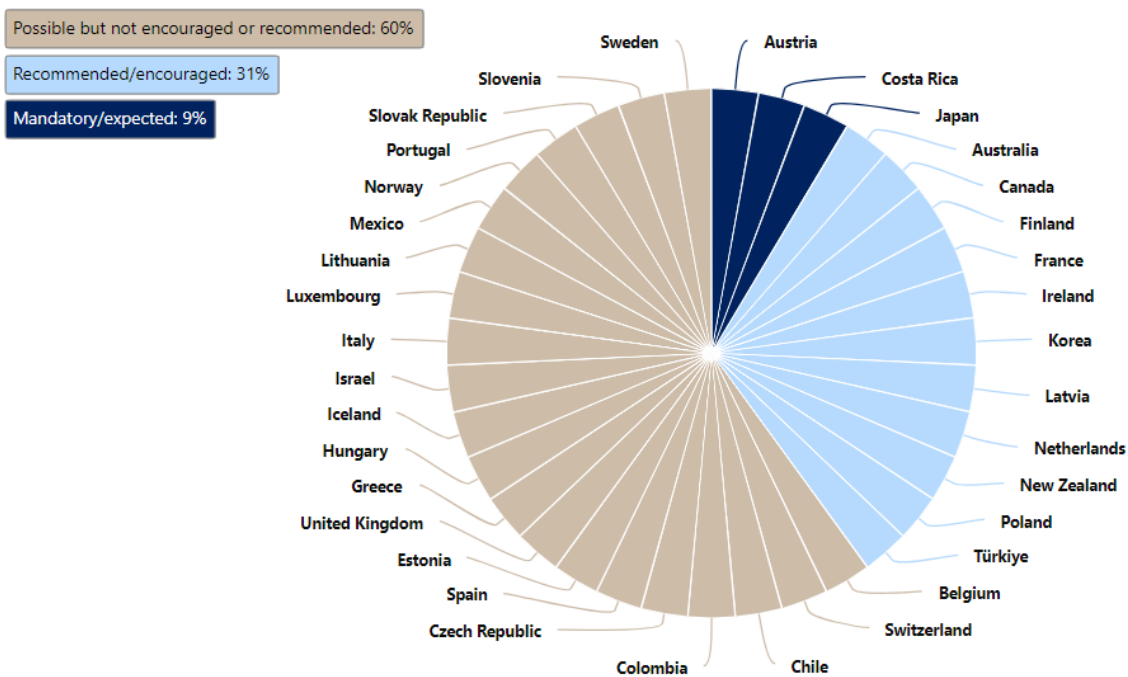
Figure 7. Public employment as a percentage of total employment, 2021



Governments use different mechanisms to harness and develop the capacity of their workforce. For example, internal mobility in public administrations helps to pool human resources across government and attract and retain civil servants.

In Belgium, similar to several OECD countries, internal mobility is possible for civil servants, but is not encouraged or expected. In addition, internal mobility is also possible for senior-level civil servants although it is not encouraged or expected. Belgium has not implemented the practice of developing learning plans for most or all employees in the public sector.

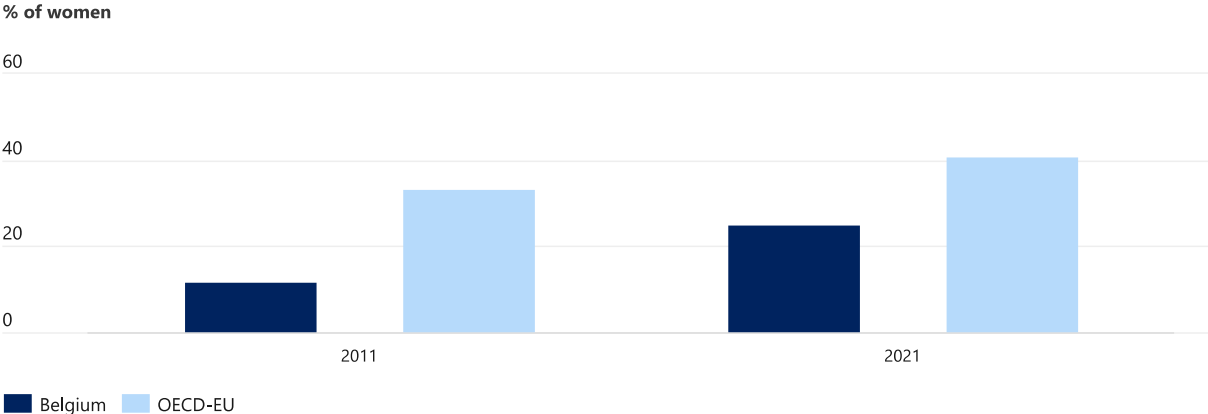
Figure 8. Mobility of civil servants across public administrations in central government, 2022



Equal representation of women and men in the public sector is a key indicator of progress towards gender equality, diversity and better representation. In 2020, a majority of employees in the public sector in OECD countries were women (58.9%), with large differences among countries. However, women are often under-represented in managerial positions.

Belgium is below the OECD average for gender equality in senior management in national administration, with around 25.3% women in senior posts compared to the OECD-EU average of 40.8%. However, Belgium has exceeded the OECD average in achieving gender equality in ministerial positions with 57% women, compared to the OECD average for 2023 which stands at 36%.

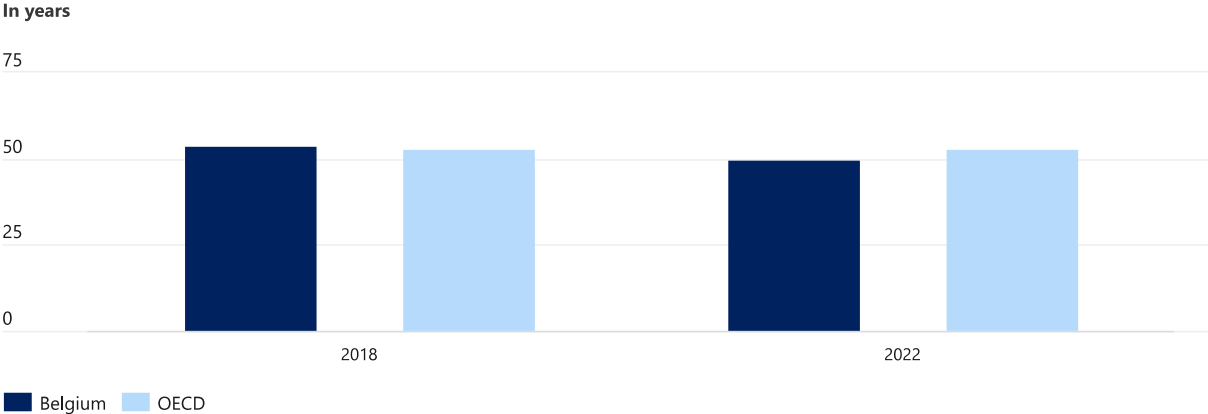
Figure 9. Gender equality in senior management positions in national administration, 2021



Young people are under-represented in public and political life across the OECD, with the risk that their voice and interests are not sufficiently taken in consideration in policymaking.

The average age of cabinet members in Belgium is 50 years, 3 years below the OECD.

Figure 10. Average age of cabinet members, 2018 and 2022



About the report

Government at a Glance presents the most up-to-date internationally comparable data on how public administrations function and perform in OECD countries, accession countries, and other major economies. Country factsheets highlight key indicators against the OECD average. Data included in the factsheets are derived from the new Government at a Glance data portal, which allows for a more user-friendly and interactive way of comparing countries with each other and the OECD average. The factsheets do not provide a comprehensive picture of public governance performance, but rather a snapshot of key indicators in the three sections of the publication: a) trust and satisfaction with public services; b) achieving results with good governance practices and c) what resources public institutions use and how they are managed.

Figure notes

People who express satisfaction with public services: for the judiciary and the courts the data reflect the proportion of citizens who express having confidence in the institution. Data on satisfaction with administrative services come from the OECD 2021 Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. Data on satisfaction with the education and health systems and confidence in the judiciary are from the Gallup World Poll.

Data on public finance and economics are derived from the System of National Accounts (SNA) and were extracted on 5 May 2023.

Fiscal balance as reported in SNA framework, also referred to as net lending (+) or net borrowing (-) of government, is calculated as total government revenues minus total government expenditures.

Government gross debt is reported according to the SNA definition, which differs from the definition applied under the Maastricht Treaty. It is defined as all liabilities that require payment or payments of interest or principal by the debtor to the creditor at a date or dates in the future. All debt instruments are liabilities, but some liabilities such as shares, equity and financial derivatives are not debt.

Public employment refers to employment in the general government as defined in the System of National Accounts (SNA). Data on employment in general government were extracted on 17 April 2023.

Data on employment in general government for Iceland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Türkiye and the United States are from the International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT.

Data show women as a share of cabinet members who head ministries as of 1 January 2023 (excluding ministers without portfolios).

The data on age of cabinet members reflects the situation as of 20 December 2022.

OECD average refers to the unweighted average with the exception of public finance indicators.

For more information see

www.oecd.org/governance/government-at-a-glance.htm