

Services Trade Restrictiveness Index: Accounting and auditing services

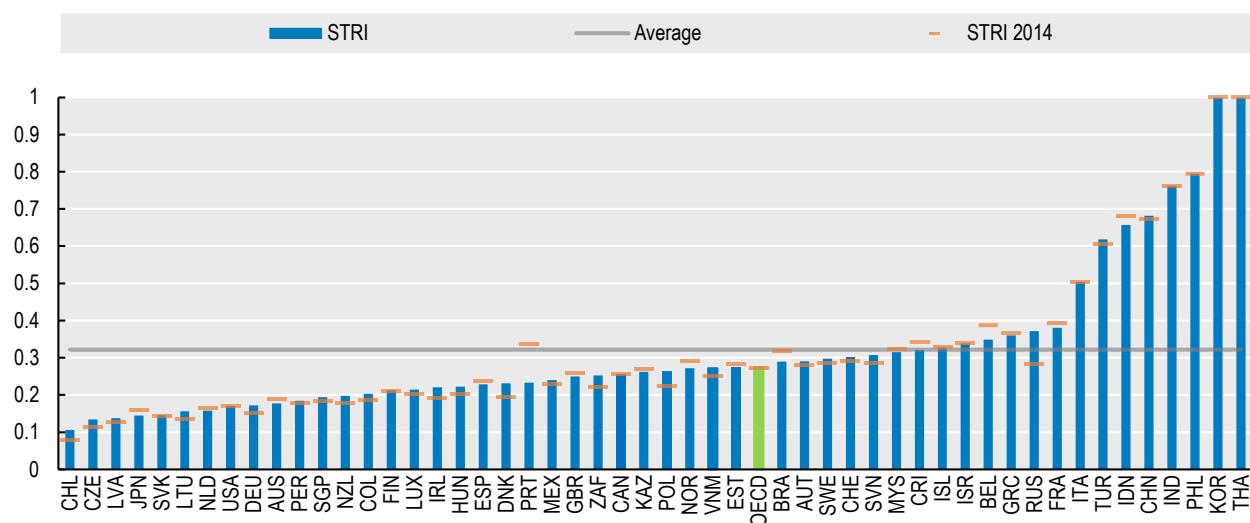
Key findings

- The average 2024 STRI in the accounting services sector is 0.32 out of a maximum of 1 (most trade restricted), indicating a relatively high overall level of restrictiveness. However, individual country scores diverge considerably, ranging between 0.11 and 1.00.
- The best performing countries in the sector are Chile, Czechia, and Latvia. Most reforms in 2024 were recorded in Portugal and Greece.
- In this sector, barriers related to restrictions to the movement of people are most prominent in OECD economies, amounting to 39% of all restrictions. In non-OECD economies, barriers related to restrictions on foreign entry are relatively more prominent (49% of all restrictions).
- OECD estimates suggest that halving the distance to best practice in this sector is associated with a reduction in the costs of cross-border trade in accounting services between 6% and 20% for the average country included in the STRI database.

The STRI covers accounting, auditing and book-keeping services (ISIC Rev 4 code 692). The international market for these services is dominated by a handful of corporations characterised by a high degree of concentration, organised as a network, and generally owned and managed independently with presence in a large number of countries.

The 2024 STRIs in the accounting sector range between 0.11 and 1.00, with a sample average of 0.32 (Figure 1). There are 37 countries below and 14 countries above the average. The best performing countries in the sector are Chile, Czechia and Latvia.

Several countries introduced regulatory changes affecting the STRIs in 2024 and more so since 2014 (Figure 2). In 2024, the STRIs in this sector saw the biggest policy changes in Australia (6%), Singapore (6%), Greece (-5%), and Portugal (-22%). Since 2014, on the one hand, countries that have had the strongest restrictive trends in the accounting services sector include Chile (35%), the Russian Federation (31%) and Denmark (20%). On the other hand, strong liberalisation has taken place in Japan (-9%), Belgium (-10%), and Portugal (-31%).

Figure 1. STRI in accounting services, 2024

Source: OECD (2024). STRI database.

Figure 2. Change in the last year and since 2014, by country

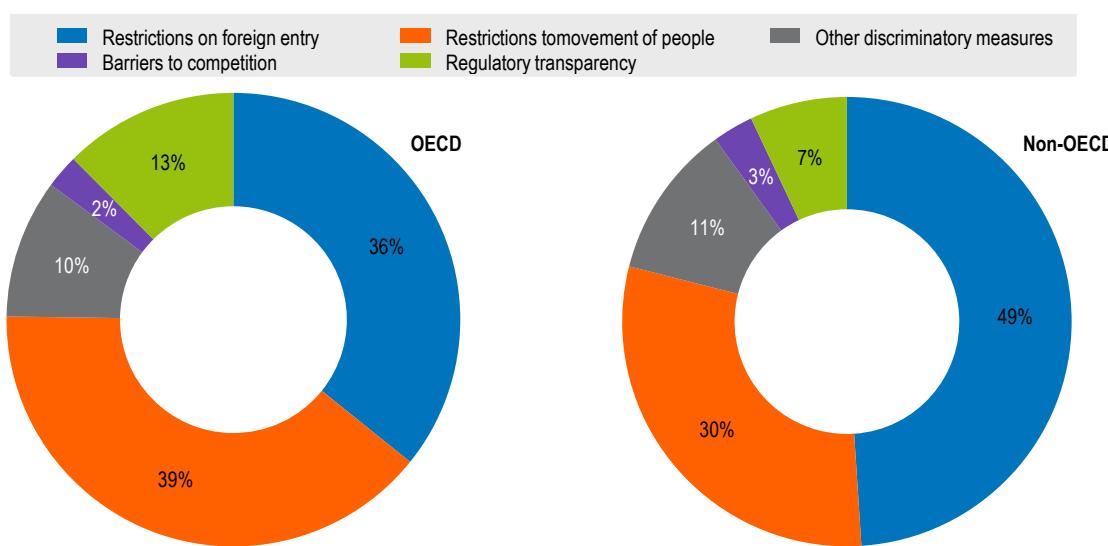
Note: Selection criteria for Panel A was based on largest absolute changes since 2023. Panel B selection shows the three largest increases and the three largest decreases in the STRI since 2014.

Source: OECD (2024). STRI database.

The measures in the STRI database are organised under five policy areas (Figure 3). Restrictions on foreign entry include barriers related to establishing and operating companies such as foreign equity limits or requirements on board of directors and cross-border data flows. Restrictions on the movement of people cover barriers that affect the temporary entry of foreign services providers through quotas, labour market tests and short durations of stay. Other discriminatory measures include discrimination of foreign services suppliers as far as taxes, subsidies and public procurement are concerned. Barriers to competition include information on anti-trust policy, government ownership of major firms and the extent to which government-owned enterprises are exempt from competition laws. Regulatory transparency includes information on consultations and dissemination prior to laws and regulations entering into force. It also records information on obtaining a license or a visa.

In this sector, barriers related to restrictions to the movement of people are most prominent in OECD economies, amounting to 39% of all restrictions. In non-OECD economies, barriers related to restrictions on foreign entry are relatively more prominent (49% of all restrictions).

Figure 3. STRI for accounting services by policy areas in OECD and non-OECD economies, 2024



Source: OECD (2024). STRI database.

Thailand and Korea have a maximum STRI score of 1 in this sector.

Table 1 lists the most common restrictions identified in each policy area. Under restrictions on foreign entry, foreign equity limits are rarely used in both accounting and auditing services. Yet, many countries restrict the firms' ownership to locally-qualified professionals, particularly in auditing services. Ownership restrictions are often coupled with requirements that the majority of the board (or equity partners in the case of partnerships) and the manager of auditing firms must be locally qualified. Commercial presence is required to provide cross-border auditing services in 25 countries.

Accounting and auditing services are skilled labour intensive and subject to licensing in a number of countries. For instance, auditing is subject to a license requirement almost everywhere. Under restrictions to the movement of people, common limitations include nationality and domicile requirements to practice, and the absence of a temporary licensing system for auditing services. Local examinations for foreign professionals are also prominent in auditing services.

Under other discriminatory measures, barriers related to accessing public procurement markets for foreign tenderers remain the most common challenge. Under barriers to competition, minimum capital requirements are common as well as restrictions on advertising which is often subject to specific regulation and conditions for auditing services. Government recommendations for auditors' fees exist in nine countries while in six countries fees are regulated.

Under barriers related to regulatory transparency, procedural hurdles related to business visas are the most common challenges in this sector. In addition, the public consultation process for new legislative instruments falls short of best practice in 14 countries and the time prior to the entry into force of new laws is considered short in nine countries.

Table 1. Top 5 most relevant measures by policy area, 2024

Policy area	Measure	Countries having a restriction ¹
Restrictions on foreign entry	Board of directors: majority must be licensed professionals (auditing)	43
	Acquisition and use of land and real estate by foreigners is restricted	36
	Manager must be a licensed professional (auditing)	37
	Commercial presence is required in order to provide cross-border services (auditing)	25
	Equity restrictions applying to not licensed individuals or firms (auditing)	24
Restrictions to movement of people	Memo: Licence or authorisation is required to practice (auditing)	50
	A temporary licensing system is in place (auditing)	42
	Foreign professionals are required to take a local examination (auditing)	43
	Domicile required for licence to practice (auditing)	21
	Nationality or citizenship required for licence to practice (auditing)	11
Other discriminatory measures	Public procurement: Procurement regulation explicitly prohibits discrimination of foreign suppliers	44
	Public procurement: The procurement process affects the conditions of competition in favour of local firms	25
	Public procurement: Explicit preferences for local suppliers	22
	Memo: The procurement process below the value thresholds affects the conditions of competition in favour of local firms	19
	Laws, regulations or relevant standard-setter impose standards that deviate from international standards on auditing	7
Barriers to competition	Minimum capital requirements	34
	Restrictions on advertising (auditing)	14
	Fee-setting: mandatory minimum and/or maximum fees (auditing)	6
	Fee-setting: recommended minimum and/or maximum fees (auditing)	9
	Other restrictions in barriers to competition	7
Regulatory transparency	Range of visa processing time	36
	Number of documents needed to obtain a business visa	31
	Cost to obtain a business visa	15
	There is an adequate public comment procedure open to interested persons, including foreign suppliers	14
	There is a legal obligation to communicate regulations to the public within a reasonable time prior to entry into force	9

Note: The count for “memo” type of measures, which are not scored in the STRI, indicates the number of positive answers recorded for that measure across the 51 countries covered. The topmost relevant measures are selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) most restricted horizontal measures (i.e. same answer across sectors), (2) most restricted sector-specific measures, (3) key measures, or (4) memos affecting the score of other measures through hierarchy rules.

Source: OECD STRI database (2024).

More information

- » Access all country notes, sector notes, and interactive STRI tools at oe.cd/servicestrade.
- » Read more on evidence from ten years of monitoring services trade policies through the STRI in [Revitalising Services Trade for Global Growth](#).
- » Learn more about current services trade issues on the [OECD website](#).
- » Contact the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate with your questions at stri.contact@oecd.org.

This work is published under the responsibility of the OECD Working Party of the Trade Committee and was prepared for publication by the OECD Secretariat.

The STRI indices take values between zero and one, one being the most restrictive. The STRI database records measures on a Most Favoured Nation basis. Air transport and road freight cover only commercial establishment (with accompanying movement of people). The indices are based on laws and regulations made public by 31 October 2024 and in force on 31 December 2024. The STRI regulatory database covers the 38 OECD Members, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand and Viet Nam. 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.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.



Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. By using this work, you accept to be bound by the terms of this licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Attribution – you must cite the work.

Translations – you must cite the original work, identify changes to the original and add the following text: *In the event of any discrepancy between the original work and the translation, only the text of original work should be considered valid.*

Adaptations – you must cite the original work and add the following text: *This is an adaptation of an original work by the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this adaptation should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its Member countries.*

Third-party material – the licence does not apply to third-party material in the work. If using such material, you are responsible for obtaining permission from the third party and for any claims of infringement.

You must not use the OECD logo, visual identity or cover image without express permission or suggest the OECD endorses your use of the work.

Any dispute arising under this licence shall be settled by arbitration in accordance with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Arbitration Rules 2012. The seat of arbitration shall be Paris (France). The number of arbitrators shall be one.