

Services Trade Restrictiveness Index: Architecture services

Key findings

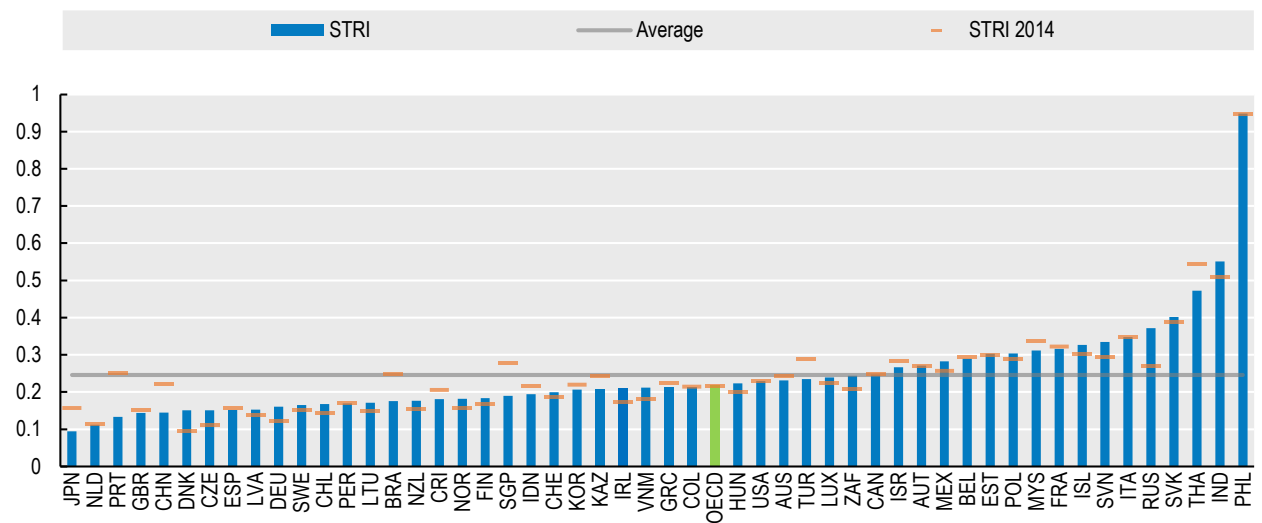
- The average 2024 STRI in the architecture services sector is 0.25 out of a maximum of 1 (most trade restricted), indicating substantial scope for reductions of barriers to services trade. However, individual country scores diverge considerably, ranging between 0.09 and 0.95.
- The best performing countries in the sector are Japan, the Netherlands and Portugal. Most reforms in 2024 were recorded in Greece.
- In this sector, barriers related to regulatory transparency are most prominent in OECD economies, amounting to 31% of all restrictions. In non-OECD economies, barriers related to restrictions on foreign entry are relatively more prominent (37% 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 architecture services between 4% and 15% for the average country included in the STRI database.

The sector covers architectural services and related technical consultancy (ISIC Rev 4, code 71). These services constitute the backbone of the construction sector, with key roles in building design and urban planning. An important feature is the regulatory complementarity between architecture, engineering and construction services. Often, architectural and engineering activities are combined into projects offered by one company, and are sometimes subsumed within the building and construction sector.

The 2024 STRIs in the architecture sector range between 0.09 and 0.95, with a sample average of 0.25 (Figure 1). There are 34 countries below and 17 countries above the average. The best performing countries in the sector are Japan, the Netherlands and Portugal.

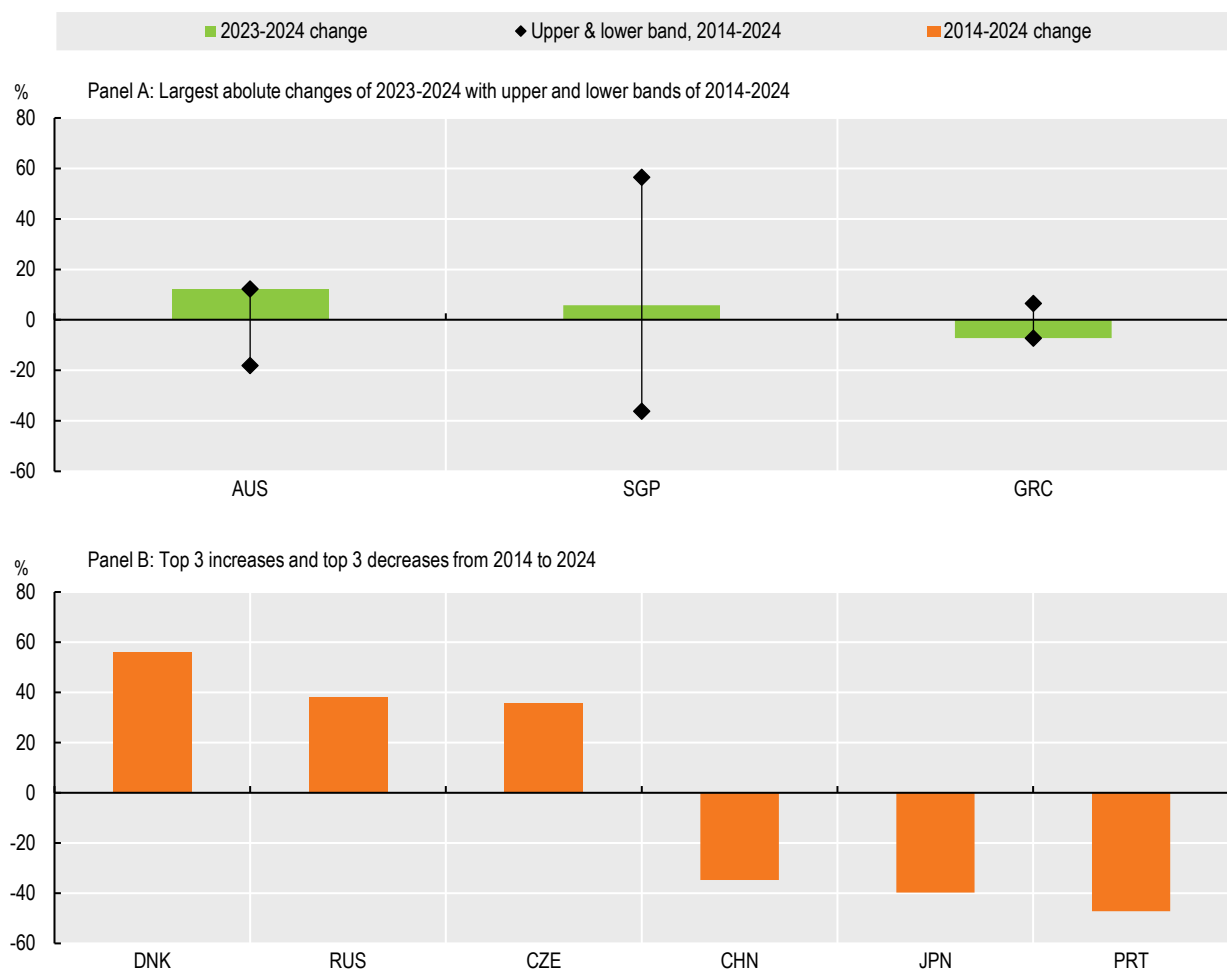
Several countries introduced regulatory changes affecting the STRIs in 2024 and more so since 2014 (Figure 2). In 2024, the STRIs in this sector saw the biggest policy changes in Australia (12%), Singapore (6%), and Greece (-7%). Since 2014, on the one hand, countries that have had the strongest restrictive trends in the architecture services sector include Denmark (56%), the Russian Federation (38%) and Czechia (36%). On the other hand, strong liberalisation has taken place in China (-35%), Japan (-40%), and Portugal (-47%).

Figure 1. STRI in architecture services, 2024



Source: OECD (2024). STRI database.

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



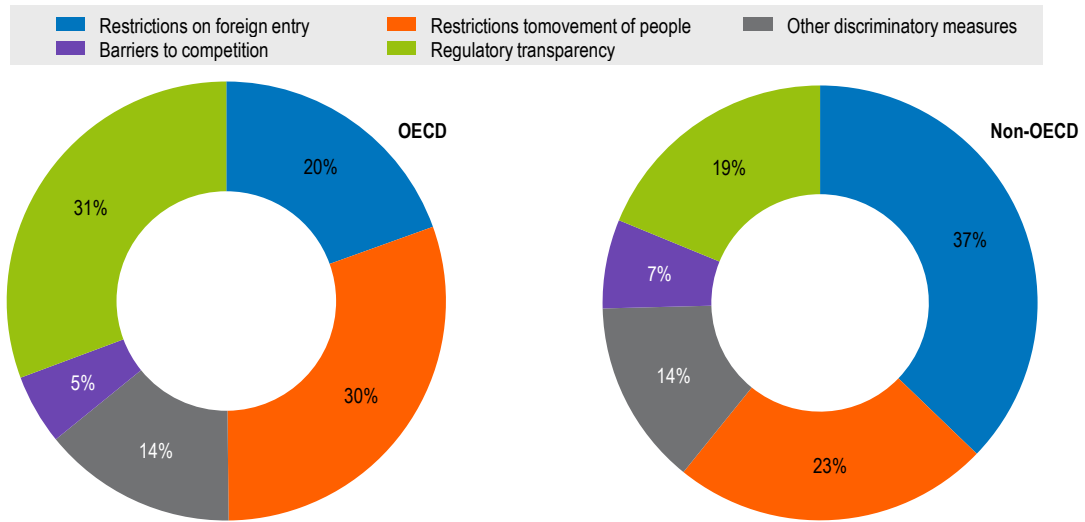
Note: Selection criteria for Panel A was based on largest absolute changes since 2023. Panel B selection is the 3 largest increases, and the 3 largest decreases in the STRI since 2014.

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 the architecture sector, barriers related to regulatory transparency are most prominent in OECD economies, amounting to 31% of all restrictions. In non-OECD economies, barriers related to restrictions on foreign entry are relatively more prominent (37% of all restrictions).

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



Source: OECD (2024). STRI database.

Table 1 lists the most relevant restrictions identified in each policy area.

Examples of restrictions on the movement of people in architectural services include labour market tests for services suppliers coupled with short durations of stay. As a regulated profession in 42 countries, licenses and/or authorizations are required to practice.

Under restrictions on foreign entry, common impediments relate to restrictions to the acquisition and use of land and real estate, screening of investment, and residency requirements for members of the board of directors and managers. License requirements for management and executive bodies are also common requirements.

Under other discriminatory measures, explicit preference for foreign suppliers or non-prohibition of discrimination of foreign suppliers in public tenders are the most common challenges. In barriers to competition, minimum capital to set up an architectural company is required in more than half of the countries in the STRI sample. Fee setting and restrictions on advertisers are also present in ten and eleven countries respectively.

Under barriers related to regulatory transparency, cumbersome visa conditions for architects and other related professions and 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 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	Acquisition and use of land and real estate by foreigners is restricted	35
	Screening exists without exclusion of economic interests	26
	Manager must be a licensed professional	22
	Memo: Licensing or authorization is required to enter the market	21
	Board of directors: at least one must be resident	21
Restrictions to movement of people	Memo: Licence or authorisation is required to practice	42
	Limitation on duration of stay for contractual services suppliers (months)	37
	Labour market tests or similar economic considerations: intra-corporate transferees /contractual services suppliers	38/40
	A temporary licensing system is in place	30
	Foreign professionals are required to take a local examination	26
Other discriminatory measures	Public procurement: Procurement regulation explicitly prohibits discrimination of foreign suppliers	42
	Public procurement: The procurement process affects the conditions of competition in favour of local firms	24
	Public procurement: Explicit preferences for local suppliers	21
	Memo: The procurement process below the value thresholds affects the conditions of competition in favour of local firms	19
	Foreign suppliers are treated less favourably regarding taxes and eligibility to subsidies	5
Barriers to competition	Minimum capital requirements	32
	Restrictions on advertising	11
	Fee-setting: recommended minimum and/or maximum fees	10
	Fee-setting: mandatory minimum and/or maximum fees	6
	Other restrictions in barriers to competition	2
Regulatory transparency	Range of visa processing time (days)	33
	Number of documents needed to obtain a business visa	29
	There is an adequate public comment procedure open to interested persons, including foreign suppliers	9
	There is a legal obligation to communicate regulations to the public within a reasonable time prior to entry into force	8
	Cost to obtain a business visa (USD)	7

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](#).
- » Calculation based on: Benz, S. and A. Jaax (2020), "The costs of regulatory barriers to trade in services: New estimates of *ad valorem* tariff equivalents", *OECD Trade Policy Papers*, No. 238, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bae97f98-en>
- » 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

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