Strategic Mobility in the Public Service
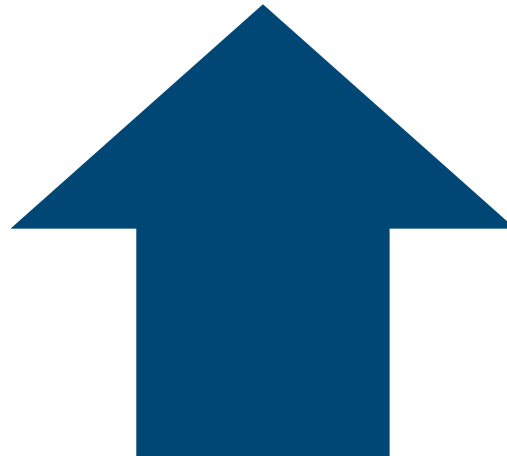
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Top Down

- Match skills supply and demand
- Emergency response
- Inclusion
- Innovation

Bottom up

- Employee development
- Exciting career paths
- Employee empowerment
- Attraction and retention

> Potential problems include:
> - Team disruption
> - Loss of institutional memory
> - Loss of ownership/continuity
> - Learning curves
> - Lack of specialisation
> - Conflicts of interest

The OECD Strategic Mobility Framework

	Not enough mobility	Strategic mobility	Too much mobility
Length of time in role	People staying in their positions long after they have mastered their tasks, to the point where they see few opportunities to change the way they do things and fail to bring new approaches, ideas or perspectives to tackle challenges.	People stay in one role long enough to learn about its depth and complexity, to see projects through to completion and to pass on their insights to others before moving on.	People move before they can really learn the role and see the results of their work.
Individual perspective	Employees do not think mobility will be rewarded, are afraid of negative consequences, or do not want to leave their comfort zone.	Employees move to logical next steps in their career (lateral and vertical) – to work on interesting projects and develop their skills and capabilities.	People move because they are unhappy, or to get salary increases, or as a result of political instability.
Team perspective	Managers hold onto their best staff for fear of not being able to achieve goals without them.	Mobility is used to generate new energy in teams, moving one member at a time.	Whole teams are moved and reconstituted so there is little continuity or institutional memory which can reduce rates of project completion.
Organisation perspective	Organisations do not promote or value mobility. Some may even punish mobility – often unintentionally.	Organisations enable mobility to achieve specific and well thought out objectives – addressing complex problems and emergencies, developing staff.	Often the result of instability or negative working cultures and not linked to organisational development objectives.

Tools to implement strategic mobility:

Well-balanced, strategic mobility therefore relies on adequate oversight and managerial processes in place that encourage mobility while mitigating risks. This can be achieved through the use of the following tools and policies:

> Common framework conditions – e.g. job classifications and pay schemes

> Goals and intent – a strategic approach should be clear on what objectives organisations wish to achieve through mobility practices

> Mobility mechanisms – a range of tools and policies that can support different kinds of employee mobility

> Incentives and culture – the biggest barrier to mobility is often cultural

> Support tools – to minimise negative disruptions such as succession planning and onboarding.

> Data to monitor and evaluate mobility.

Some recent data on Mobility in the Public Service

Mobility strategies and/or policies aim to achieve the following stated objectives:

Stated objectives of mobility strategies or policies (% of OECD countries with a mobility strategy)
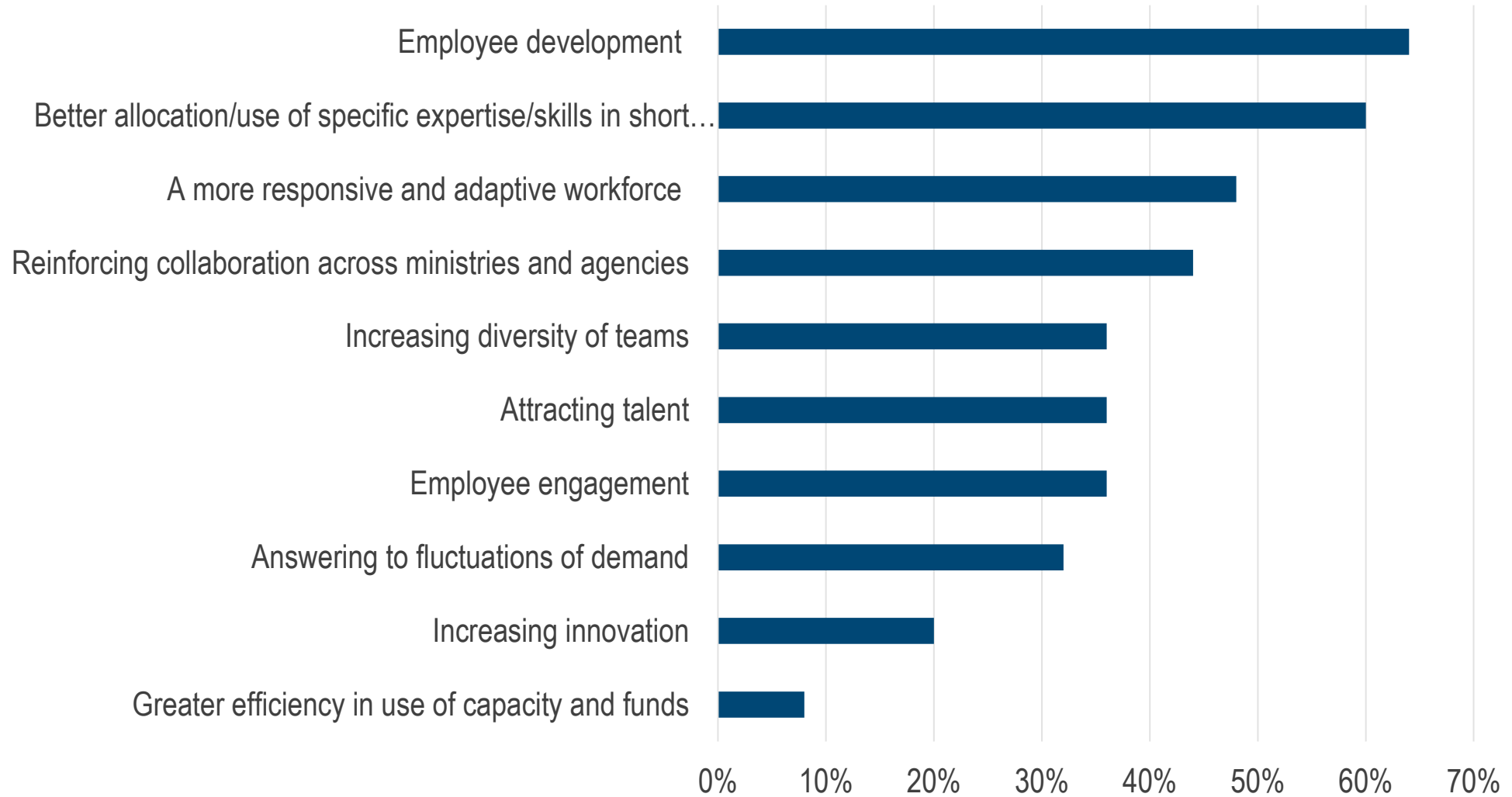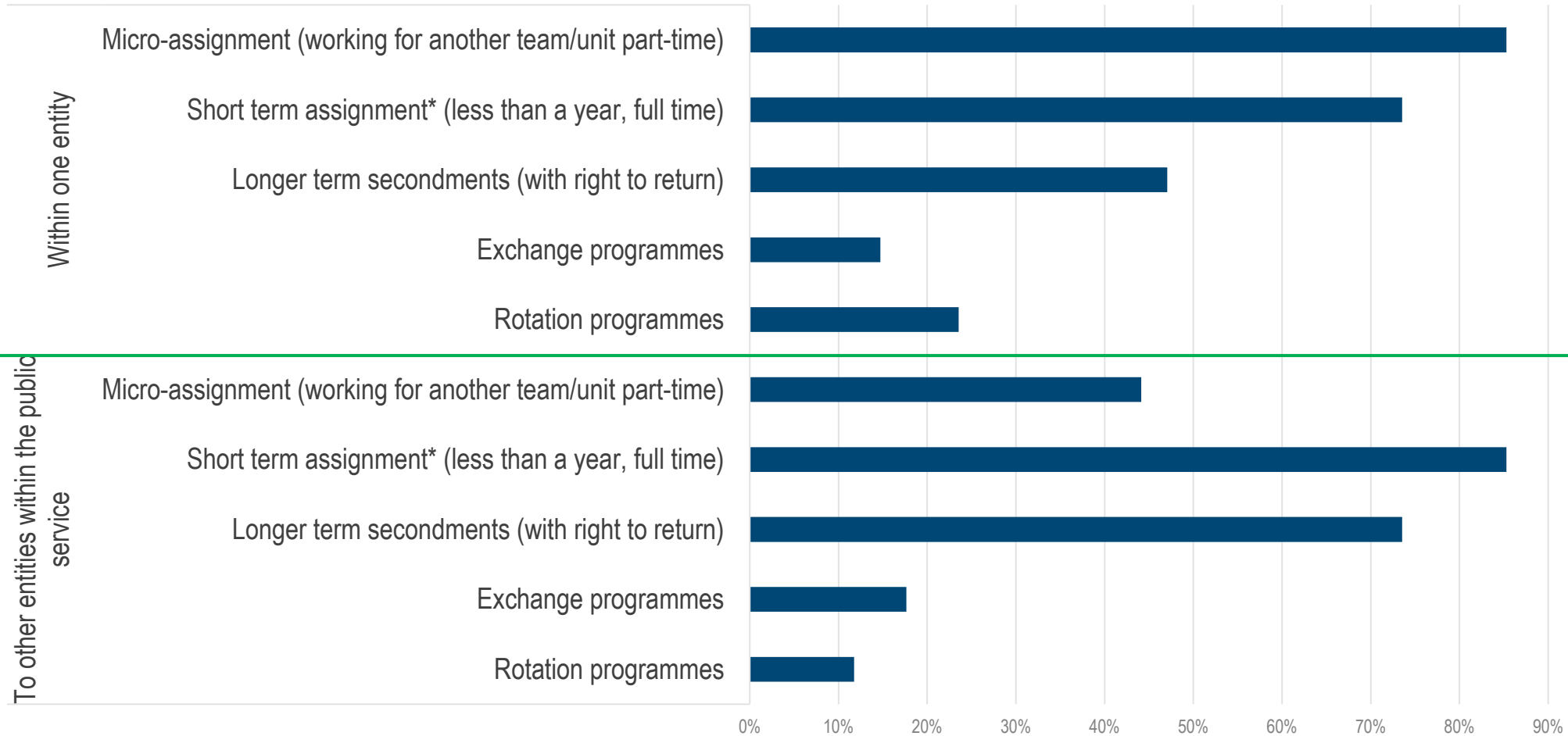
Note: N=25. Original question: "Do the stated objectives of the [mobility] strategy/policy include [the following]".
Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 4 on Mobility.

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Governments use a variety of tools to achieve these objectives

Use of temporary mobility mechanisms (% of OECD countries which responded to the survey)

Within one entity
- Micro-assignment (working for another team/unit part-time)
- Short term assignment* (less than a year, full time)
- Longer term secondments (with right to return)
- Exchange programmes
- Rotation programmes

To other entities within the public service
- Micro-assignment (working for another team/unit part-time)
- Short term assignment* (less than a year, full time)
- Longer term secondments (with right to return)
- Exchange programmes
- Rotation programmes

Tools for international mobility outnumber those for other forms of external mobility

Use of temporary mobility mechanisms (% of OECD countries which responded to the survey)

To subnational levels of government
- Micro-assignment (working for another team/unit part-time)
- Short term assignment* (less than a year, full time)
- Longer term secondments (with right to return)
- Exchange programmes
- Rotation programmes

To other sectors (Private or non-for-profit)
- Micro-assignment (working for another team/unit part-time)
- Short term assignment* (less than a year, full time)
- Longer term secondments (with right to return)
- Exchange programmes
- Rotation programmes

Internationally (e.g. EU, other countries or international organisations)
- Micro-assignment (working for another team/unit part-time)
- Short term assignment* (less than a year, full time)
- Longer term secondments (with right to return)
- Exchange programmes
- Rotation programmes

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

Note: N=35. Data for the United States, Germany and Lithuania and not available. Original question: "Which types of modalities are used for mobility in central administrations?".
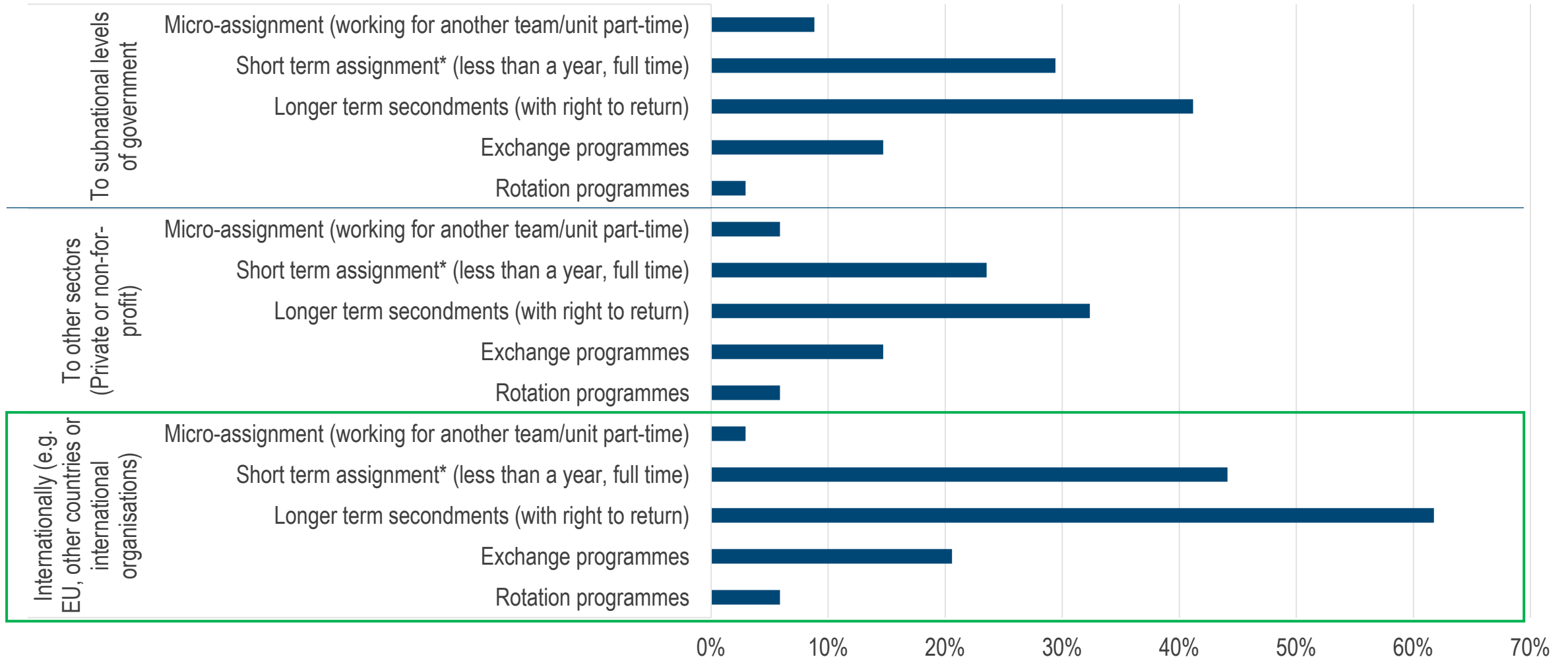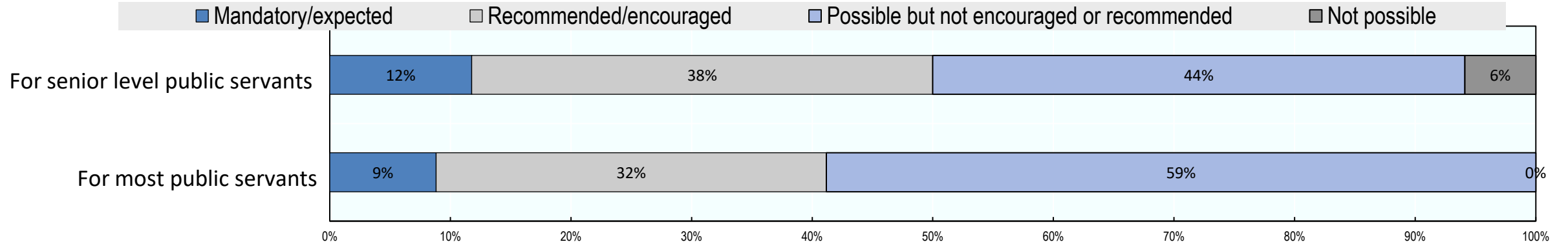Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 4 on Mobility.
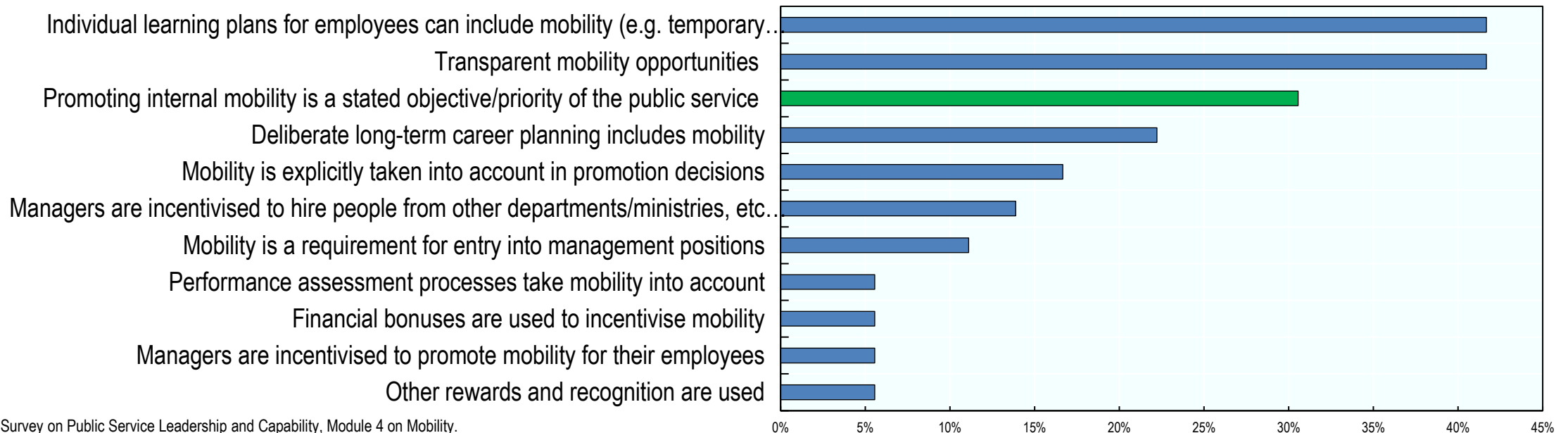
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Requirements for internal lateral mobility in the public service (% of OECD countries which responded to the survey)

■ Mandatory/expected □ Recommended/encouraged ■ Possible but not encouraged or recommended ■ Not possible

For senior level public servants	12%	38%	44%	6%
For most public servants	9%	32%	59%	0%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Incentivising mobility within the public service(% of OECD countries which responded to the survey)

- Individual learning plans for employees can include mobility (e.g. temporary…
- Transparent mobility opportunities
- Promoting internal mobility is a stated objective/priority of the public service
- Deliberate long-term career planning includes mobility
- Mobility is explicitly taken into account in promotion decisions
- Managers are incentivised to hire people from other departments/ministries, etc…
- Mobility is a requirement for entry into management positions
- Performance assessment processes take mobility into account
- Financial bonuses are used to incentivise mobility
- Managers are incentivised to promote mobility for their employees
- Other rewards and recognition are used

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45%

Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 4 on Mobility.

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And barriers remain, especially those that are cultural

Common barriers to mobility (% of OECD countries which responded to the survey)
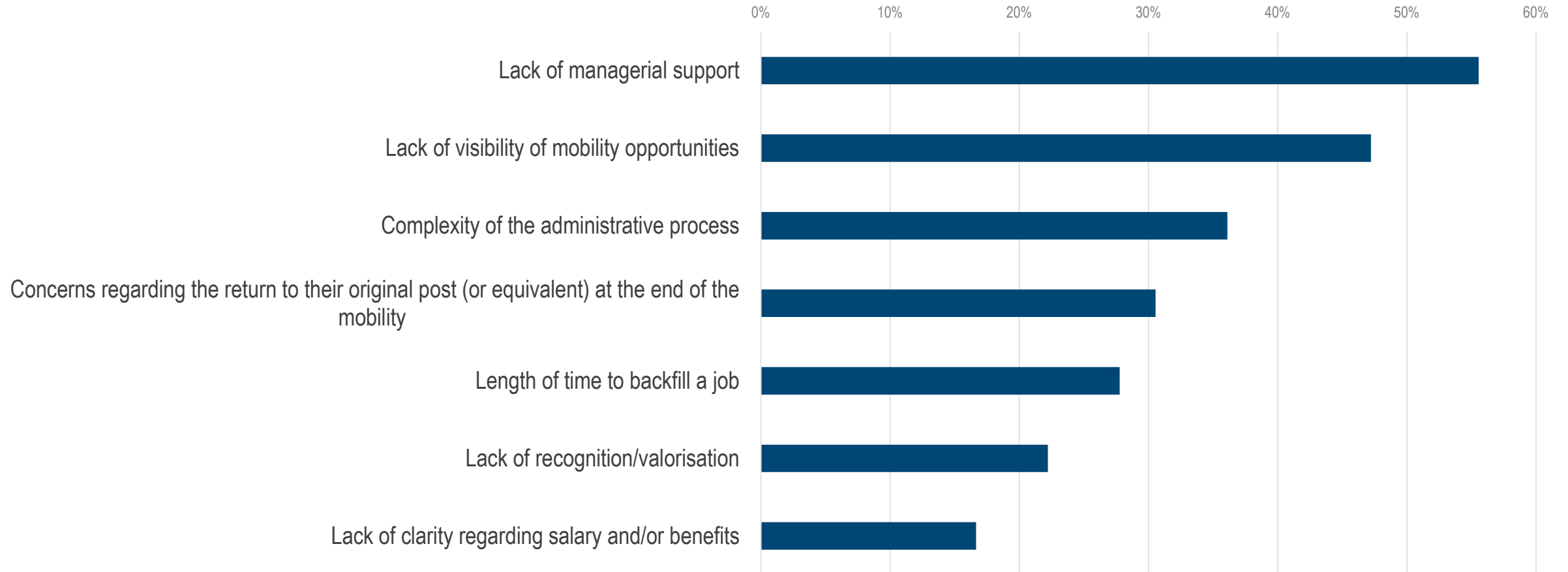
Note: N=36. Data for the United States and Denmark not available. Original question: "Which of the following barriers to mobility exist in your public service?".
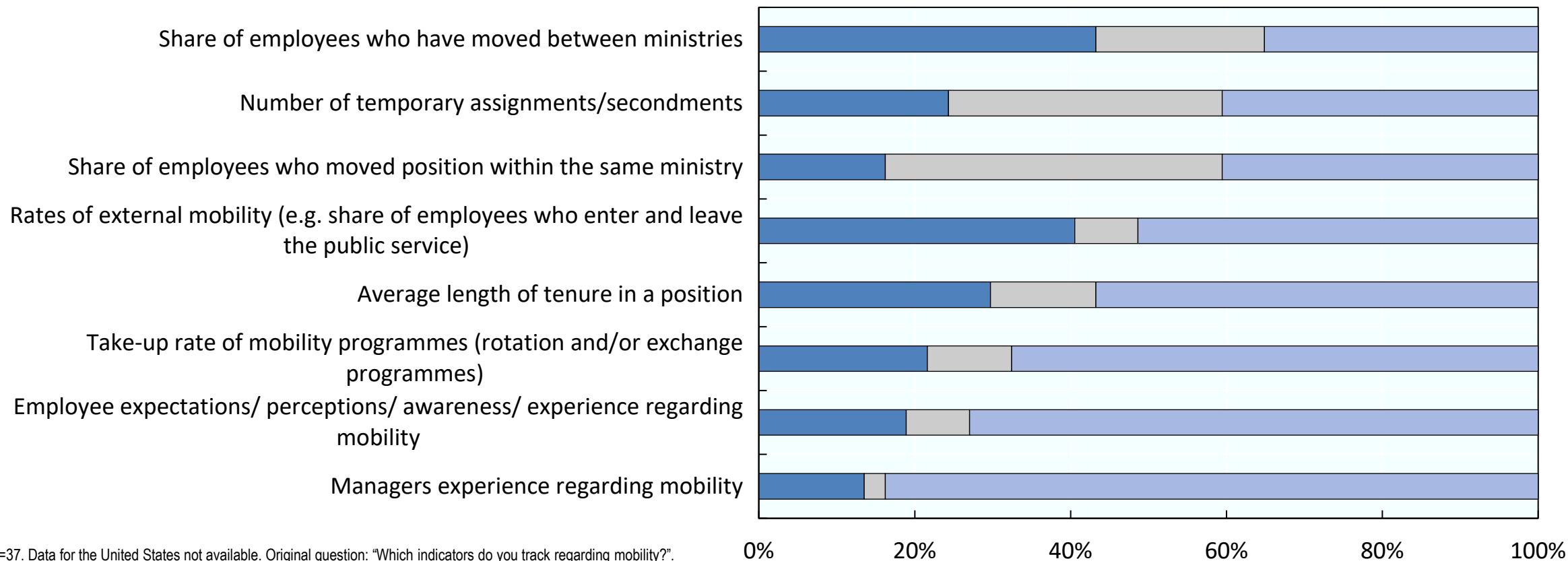Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 4 on Mobility.

Systematic monitoring of mobility is underused in most OECD countries

Mobility indicators tracked by OECD countries (% of OECD countries which responded to the survey)

■ Data are collected and aggregated centrally for whole or most of central/ federal administration
☐ Data are only collected at the ministry level by all/most ministries
■ Data are not collected centrally nor by most ministries

Note: N=37. Data for the United States not available. Original question: "Which indicators do you track regarding mobility?".
Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 4 on Mobility.

Concluding considerations

> Mobility can be an effective way at addressing EU countries' public workforce priorities, including the attraction, retention and development of key skill sets.

> However, mobility remains an under-used tool in most OECD countries' public services – while many mechanisms exist, there appears to be an overall lack of strategic implementation.

> Programmes like the European Commission's PACE can contribute to the strategic development of EU public services, especially if EUMS can ensure the right conditions to achieve their full potential, such as:
>> Prioritising Mobility as strategic tool to be used effectively
>> Addressing the (cultural) barriers of mobility – esp. focusing on supporting managers.
>> Embedding mobility in the career paths of public servants.
>> Clearly communicating mobility opportunities inside and outside the public service