Regulation

Civil servants' salaries: warning signals ***ignored***

20.02.2026

At a glance

- Civil servant wages significantly exceed those of the private sector and continue to grow steadily.
- Necessary corrections have not been made, although privileges and wage trends have been criticized for years.
- In future, wages must be aligned with the private sector. The wage gap with the private sector must gradually erode.

Everywhere, people are annoyed by the civil service in Bern, which is able to push through higher wage increases than the private sector year after year. Civil servants' salaries have risen by 1.5 to 4 percent per year in recent years. Although salary increases are linked to performance appraisals, 96.7 percent of all employees achieve a "good" or "very good" rating. In addition to the individual salary adjustments, there is also the cost-of-living adjustment, which has usually been granted in full and to a large extent in recent years. This is in stark contrast to the private sector, which had to cope with a Swiss franc shock, a pandemic and a customs conflict. Despite the numerous crises, real wages also rose solidly in the private sector in the medium term, but to a much lesser extent than in the federal government.

The Federal Council accepts the staff's proposals and although Parliament grumbles here and there, it does not put an end to the hustle and bustle. The fact is that civil servant salaries are now significantly higher than salaries for comparable jobs in the private sector. The IWP recently estimated this "wage premium" at almost 12 percent.

In summary, this means that civil servants have a fairly secure job, regular working hours, overtime pay and generous pension fund solutions and earn an additional 12 percent more than people who finance the whole thing through their taxes.

A jolt should now be sent through federal Bern: We have heard the criticism from "outside". We need to reduce our salaries and bring them back into line with those in the private sector. The civil service must make a contribution so that federal finances rise less sharply in the coming years.

It is almost incomprehensible, even somewhat impertinent, that the federal government is not taking decisive corrective action. The Federal Council does intend to reduce the growth in federal wages somewhat in future. However, this will not reverse the excessive wage increases of the past. The salary privilege of civil servants will thus be further cemented. And even worse: starting salaries are to be increased. The federal government will thus continue to be more attractive as an employer than private companies, even without the prospect of such generous pay rises as in the past. Incidentally, it is the wrong approach for young people to join the federal government straight after completing their studies anyway. They should first gain professional experience in the private sector.

The solution would be obvious: civil servants' salaries must be based on comparable jobs in the private sector. If wages have risen more sharply in the past than in the private sector, they must therefore fall in the coming years. However, lowering nominal wages is hardly realistic.

One possible approach could be to allow the wage gap to the private sector to gradually erode. This would allow the wage premium to disappear over time. However, this requires federal wages to stop rising for a certain period of time. There needs to be a moratorium on federal wage increases until the wage gap with the private sector is zero. Wage increases should only take place if they can be justified by a promotion or change of position. In these cases, a moderate salary increase may be granted. The cost-of-living adjustment must also be abolished until further notice.

It is not right for the federal government to merely pretend to be making savings on staff, while in reality maintaining privileges and wage levels that are significantly higher than those in the private sector. Unfortunately, the public's disapproval is still being ignored. Or as the saying goes: "The jug goes to the well until it breaks."

This text was first published in an abridged version in the Tages-Anzeiger on February 20, 2026.

Rudolf Minsch
Head of General Economic Policy & International Relations, Chief Economist, Deputy Chairman of the Executive Board