

DOCTORS

Doctors play a central role in health systems, and there are concerns in many OECD countries about current or future shortages of doctors, and the problem this might create for access to care.

Definition

Practising physicians are defined as the number of doctors providing care to patients. Generalists include doctors assuming responsibility for the provision of continuing care to individuals and families, as well as other generalist/non-specialist practitioners. Specialists include paediatricians, obstetricians/gynaecologists, psychiatrists, medical specialists and surgical specialists. Medical doctors not further defined include interns/residents if they are not reported in the field in which they are training,

Overview

From 2000 to 2010, the number of doctors per 1 000 population has grown in all OECD countries, except in Estonia and Poland where it decreased slightly. On average across OECD countries, it increased from 2.7 doctors per 1 000 population in 2000 to 3.1 in 2010. The number increased particularly rapidly in countries which started with lower levels in 2000, such as Turkey, Korea and Mexico. But it also increased rapidly in Greece, although all of the growth took place between 2000 and 2008 and the number has stabilised since then.

In nearly all countries, the balance between generalist and specialist doctors has changed over the past few decades, with the number of specialists increasing much more rapidly. As a result, there are more specialists than generalists in most countries, except in Ireland, Norway and Portugal. This may be explained by reduced interest in the traditional mode of practice of “family medicine”, given the workload and constraints attached to it. In addition, in many countries, there is a growing remuneration gap between generalists and specialists.

Virtually all OECD countries exercise some form of control over medical school intakes, often by limiting the number of available training places, for example in the form of a *numerus clausus*. In 2010, Austria, Ireland, Denmark, Greece and the Czech Republic had the highest number of medical graduates per 100 000 population. However, in countries such as Ireland and the Czech Republic, a large share of graduates is made up of foreign students who may return home upon graduation. Graduation rates were the lowest in Israel, Chile, Japan and France. The average across OECD countries was slightly over ten new medical graduates per 100 000 population in 2010, up from nine in 2000.

and doctors not elsewhere classified. The numbers are based on head counts.

Comparability

In several countries (Canada, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic and Turkey), the data include not only physicians providing direct care to patients, but also those working in the health sector as managers, educators, researchers, etc. This can add another 5-10% of doctors. Data for Portugal refer to all physicians licensed to practice (resulting in a large overestimation). Data for Spain include dentists and stomatologists, while data for Belgium include stomatologists. Data for Chile are an under-estimation as they do not cover all practising doctors.

Not all countries are able to report all their practising physicians in the two broad categories of specialists and generalists because of missing information.

Sources

- OECD (2012), *OECD Health Statistics*, OECD Publishing.
- WHO-Europe for Russian Federation, and national sources for other non-OECD countries.

Further information

Analytical publications

- Fujisawa, R. and G. Lafortune (2008), “The Remuneration of General Practitioners and Specialists in 14 OECD Countries: What are the Factors Influencing Variations across Countries?”, *OECD Health Working Papers*, No. 41.
- OECD (2008), *The Looming Crisis in the Health Workforce: How Can OECD Countries Respond?*, *OECD Health Policy Studies*, OECD Publishing.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2012), *Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2012*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2012), *Health at a Glance: Europe 2012*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2011), *Health at a Glance*, OECD Publishing.

Online databases

- OECD Health Statistics.

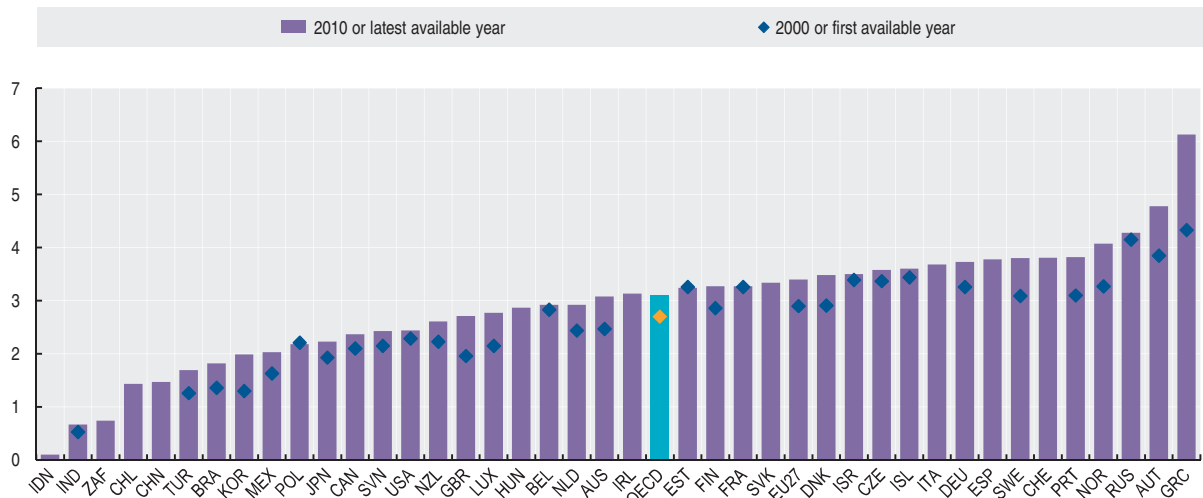
Websites

- OECD Health Data (supplementary material), www.oecd.org/health/healthdata.
- OECD Health at a Glance (supplementary material), www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance.



Practising physicians

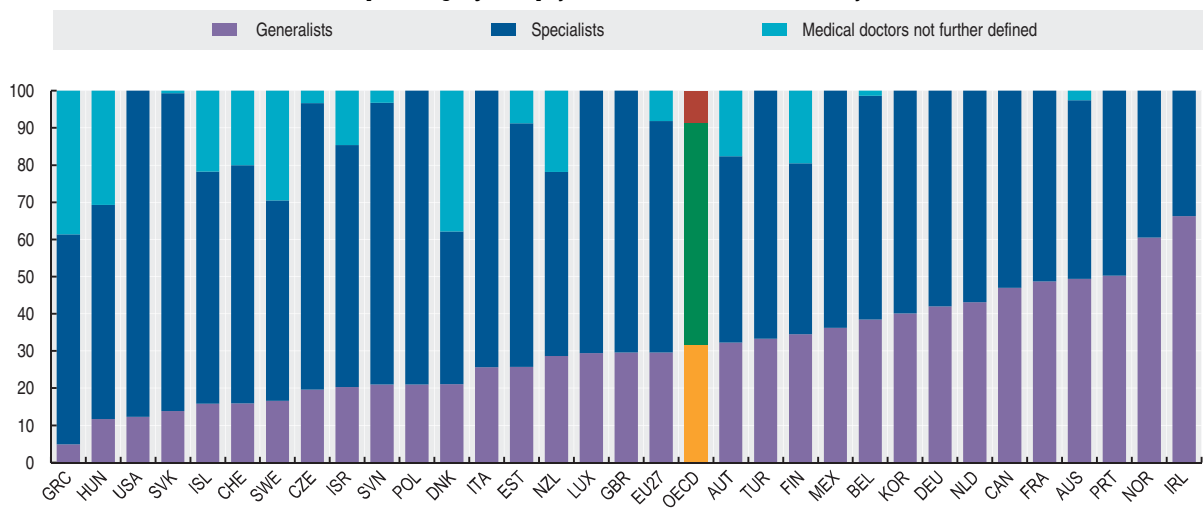
Per 1 000 inhabitants



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710878>

Categories of physicians

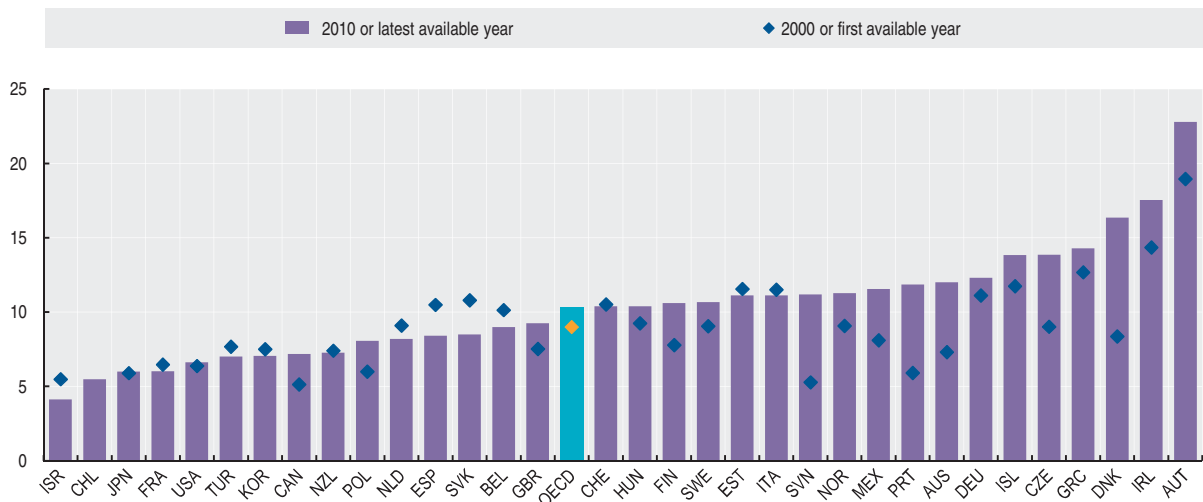
As a percentage of total physicians, 2010 or latest available year



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710897>

Medical graduates

Per 100 000 inhabitants



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710916>



From:
OECD Factbook 2013
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2013-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2013), "Doctors", in *OECD Factbook 2013: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2013-101-en>

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