

NURSES

Nurses are usually the most numerous health profession, outnumbering physicians on average across OECD countries by almost three to one. However, there are concerns in many countries about shortages of nurses, and these concerns may well intensify in the future as the demand for nurses continues to increase and the ageing of the “baby-boom” generation precipitates a wave of retirements among nurses. These concerns have prompted actions in many countries to increase the training of new nurses combined with efforts to increase the retention of nurses in the profession.

Definition

The number of nurses includes all those employed in public and private settings providing services to patients (“practising”), including the self-employed. In those countries where there are different levels of nurses, the data include both “professional nurses” who have a higher level of education and perform higher level tasks and “associate professional nurses” who have a lower level of education but are nonetheless recognised and registered as

nurses. Midwives and nursing aids who are not recognised as nurses are normally excluded.

Comparability

In several countries (France, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Turkey and the United States), the data include not only nurses providing direct care to patients, but also those working in the health sector as managers, educators, researchers, etc. Data for Belgium and Italy refer to all nurses who are licensed to practice (resulting in a large overestimation).

Austria reports only nurses employed in hospitals, resulting in an under-estimation. Data for Germany do not include about 270 000 nurses (representing an additional 30% of nurses) who have three years of education and are providing services for the elderly.

Overview

On average across OECD countries, there were 8.6 nurses per 1 000 population in 2010. The number was highest in Switzerland and Denmark, with over 15 nurses per 1 000 population. It was also high in Belgium, although the data relate to all nurses licensed to practice, resulting in a large overestimation. The number of nurses per capita in OECD countries was lowest in Chile, Turkey, Mexico and Greece. It was also low compared with the OECD average in major emerging economies, such as Indonesia, India and Brazil, where there were fewer than 1 nurse per 1 000 population in 2010.

The number of nurses per capita increased in almost all OECD countries over the past decade, with the exception of Israel and the Slovak Republic. The increase was particularly rapid in Korea, Spain and Portugal, although the number of nurses per capita in these three countries remained well below the OECD average in 2010.

The number of nurses per doctor ranged from more than four in Japan, Denmark, Canada and the United States, to less than one in Greece and about one per doctor in Turkey, Chile and Italy. The average across OECD countries is just below three nurses per doctor, with most countries reporting between two to four nurses per doctor. In Greece and Italy, there is evidence of an over-supply of doctors and under-supply of nurses, resulting in an inefficient allocation of resources.

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

- Buchan, J. and S. Black (2011), “The Impact of Pay Increases on Nurses’ Labour Market: A Review of Evidence from Four OECD Countries”, *OECD Health Working Papers*, No. 57.
- Colombo, F. et al. (2011), *Help Wanted?: Providing and Paying for Long-Term Care*, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing.
- Delamaire, M. and G. Lafortune (2010), “Nurses in Advanced Roles: A Description and Evaluation of Experiences in 12 Developed Countries”, *OECD Health Working Papers*, No. 54.

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.

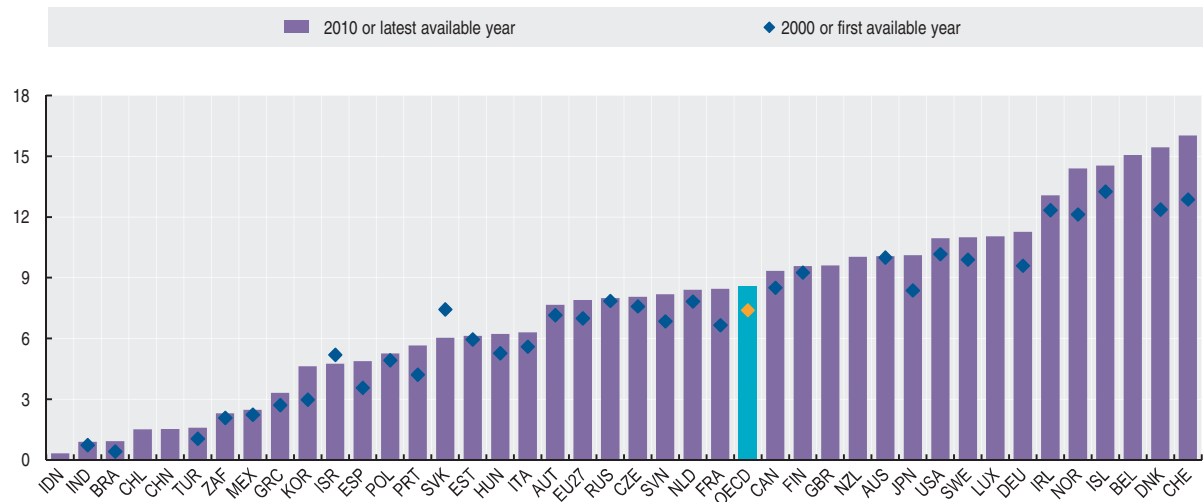
Websites

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



Practising nurses

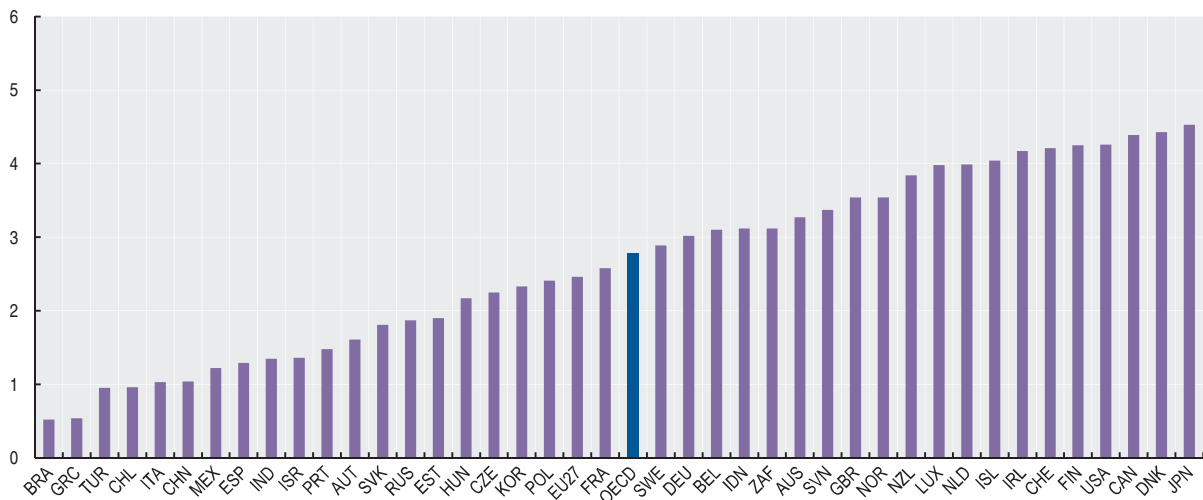
Per 1 000 inhabitants



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710935>

Ratio of nurses to physicians

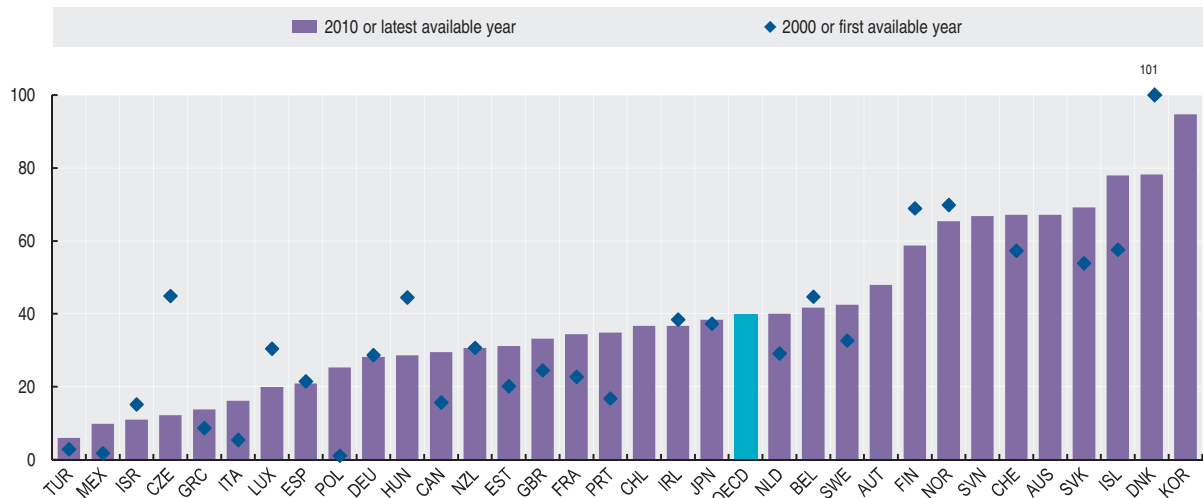
2010 or latest available year



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710954>

Nursing graduates

Per 100 000 inhabitants



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932710973>



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