

## 4. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

### How many students are in each classroom?

- On average, there are more than 21 students per class at primary level, but this varies from more than 29 in Chile and China to nearly half that number in Luxembourg and the Russian Federation.
- On average, the number of students per class increases by two or more between primary and lower secondary education.
- The student-to-teacher ratio in lower and upper secondary education is slightly lower in private than in public institutions.

#### Significance

This spread examines the number of students per class at the primary and lower secondary levels, and the ratio of students to teachers at all levels. Class size is a hotly debated topic in many OECD countries. While smaller classes are often perceived as enabling a higher quality of education, evidence on the impact of class size on student performance is mixed.

#### Findings

At the primary level, the average class size in OECD countries is slightly more than 21 students, ranging from more than 29 in Chile and China to fewer than 20 in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Poland, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland (in public institutions).

In lower secondary education, the average class size is 24 students, ranging from 20 or fewer in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland (in public institutions) and the United Kingdom to more than 35 students per class in Indonesia and Korea and to over 50 in China.

At the primary level, the ratio of students to teaching staff (with part-time and full-time teachers combined and expressed in terms of full-time equivalents), ranges from 24 students or more per teacher in Brazil and Mexico to fewer than 11 in Hungary, Italy, Norway and Poland. The OECD average in primary education is 16 students per teacher, and 14 at secondary level (see Chart D2.3 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

Across the OECD, average class size at the primary and lower secondary levels does not differ by more than one student per class between public and private institutions. However, there are differences between countries. At primary level, the average class in a public institution has at least four more students than a private institution in Brazil, the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Poland, the Russian Federation, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. By contrast, the

reverse is true for China, Japan, Luxembourg and Spain. At the lower secondary level, where private education is more prevalent than at the primary level, class size is larger in private institutions in 13 OECD countries.

#### Trends

Among two-thirds of countries with comparable data, primary class size tended to decrease slightly between 2000 and 2009, most notably in countries that had relatively large classes in 2000, such as Korea and Turkey. By contrast, they tended to increase in countries that had relatively small classes in 2000, such as Iceland.

#### Definitions

Data refer to the 2008-09 school year, and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2010. Class size has been calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of classes. The ratio of students to teachers has been calculated by dividing the number of full-time students at a given level of education by the number of full-time teachers at that level. Data for Switzerland refer to public institutions.

Information on data for Israel:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

#### Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2011* (Indicator D2).

Areas covered include:

- Average class size, by type of institution and level of education.
- Ratio of students to teaching staff.
- Teaching staff and non-teaching staff employed in educational institutions.

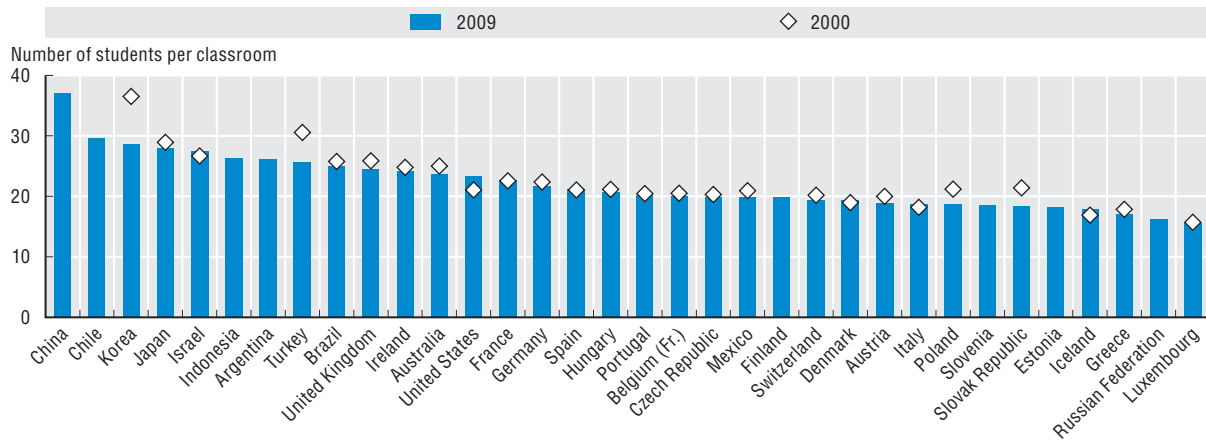
#### Further reading from the OECD

*Improving School Leadership* (Vol. 1: Policy and Practice) (2008).

*21st Century Learning Environments* (2006).

Figure 4.3. Trends in average class size in primary education (2000, 2009)

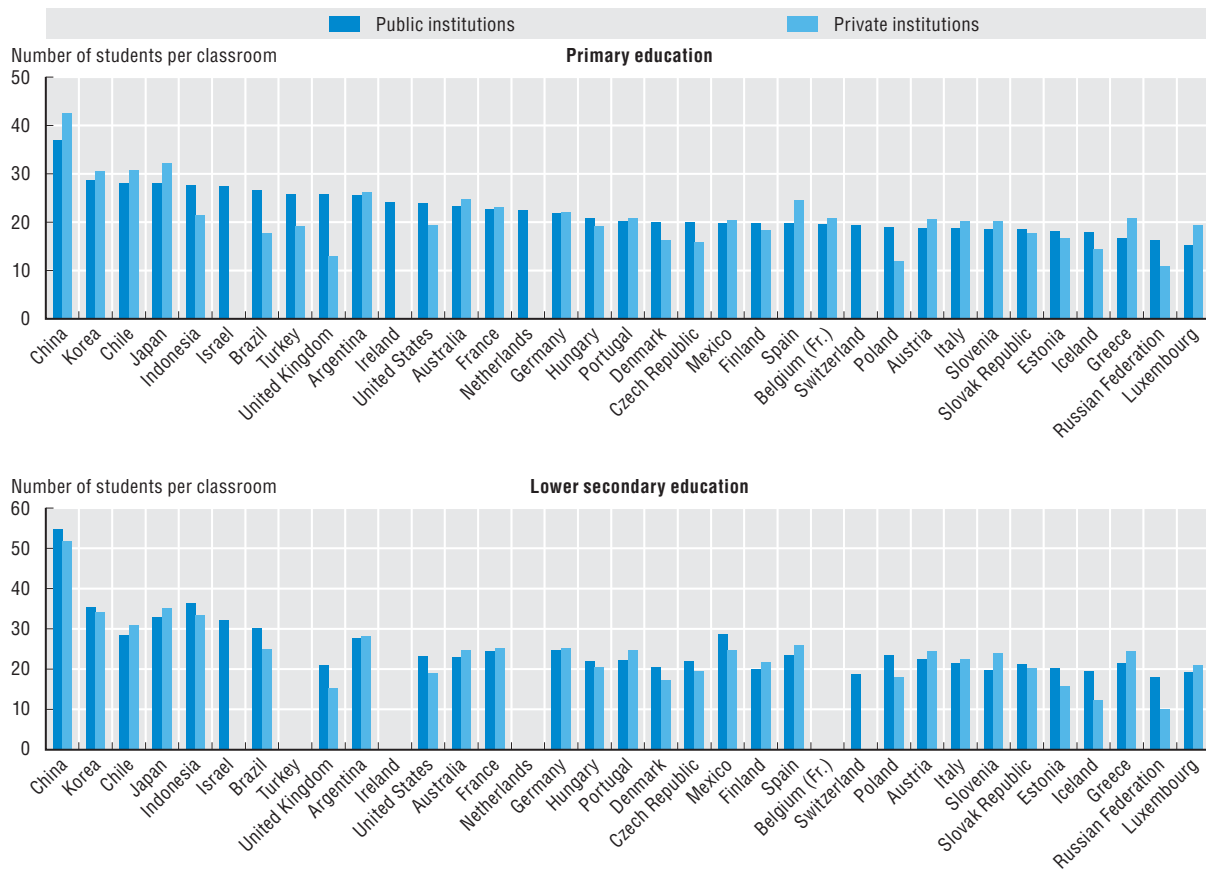
This figure shows the number of students on average in primary classes, and whether these numbers have risen or fallen.



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Tables D2.1 and D2.4, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465170> and <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465227>.

Figure 4.4. Average class size in public and private institutions, 2009

These figures show whether class size differs between public and private schools.



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table D2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465170>.



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