

3. HEALTH WORKFORCE

3.8. Nursing graduates

Many OECD countries have taken steps in recent years to expand the number of students in nursing education programmes in response to concerns about current or anticipated shortages of nurses. Increasing investment in nursing education is particularly important as the nursing workforce is ageing in many countries and the baby boom generation of nurses approaches retirement.

In 2009, there were 39 newly graduated nurses per 100 000 population on average across OECD countries, up from 36 in 2007 (Figure 3.8.1). The number was by far the highest in the Slovak Republic, with 152 graduates per 100 000 population. Since 2006, the number of nursing graduates in the Slovak Republic has more than doubled, rising from 3 732 graduates in 2006 to over 8 000 in 2009. Nurse graduation rates have traditionally been low in Turkey, Chile, Greece and Italy, four countries which report a relatively low number of nurses per capita. In Luxembourg, nurse graduation rates are also low, but many nurses are foreign-trained.

The institutional arrangements for nursing education differ across OECD countries. In some countries, the number of students admitted in nursing programmes is not limited. This is the case in Belgium, Chile, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand and the United States, although in this latter case State decisions on public funding for nursing education have a direct impact on the capacity of nursing schools to admit students. In most countries, however, entry into nursing programmes is regulated (OECD, 2008a).

The expansion of nursing education is also visible in the number of graduates per 1 000 practising nurses (Figure 3.8.2). There were 58 nurse graduates per 1 000 employed nurses on average in OECD countries in 2009, up from an average of 42 in 2007. The number of new graduates per practising nurses was highest in the Slovak Republic, Korea and Chile, although in the latter two countries this is partly explained by the relatively low number of nurses. The number of new graduates per practising nurses is the lowest in Luxembourg, which is compensated by the import of nurses trained in other countries.

The number of nursing graduates has increased in many OECD countries over the last decade. This has been the case, for instance, in France where the number increased by 60% between 2000 and 2009, and Switzerland where the number went up by 27% over the same period (Figure 3.8.3).

In Italy, concerns about current and future shortages of nurses have led to a significant increase in student intake in university nursing programmes in recent years, resulting in a rise in the number of newly-graduated nurses from less than 6 000 in 2002 to almost 11 000 in 2009. Nonetheless, this may not be sufficient to meet demand, given that the number of nurses leaving the profession annually was estimated to be in the range of 13 000 to 17 000 (Chaloff, 2008).

In Japan, the number of nursing graduates declined slightly between 2000 and 2006. However, this trend has been reversed since 2006, and a growing number of graduates is expected in the years ahead.

The impact of the expansion of nursing education on the supply of nurses depends on other workforce policies as well. Policy changes, such as efforts to retain nurses in the workforce longer by offering them better pay and working conditions may ensure that the investment in training a larger number of nurses pays off (Buchan and Black, 2011).

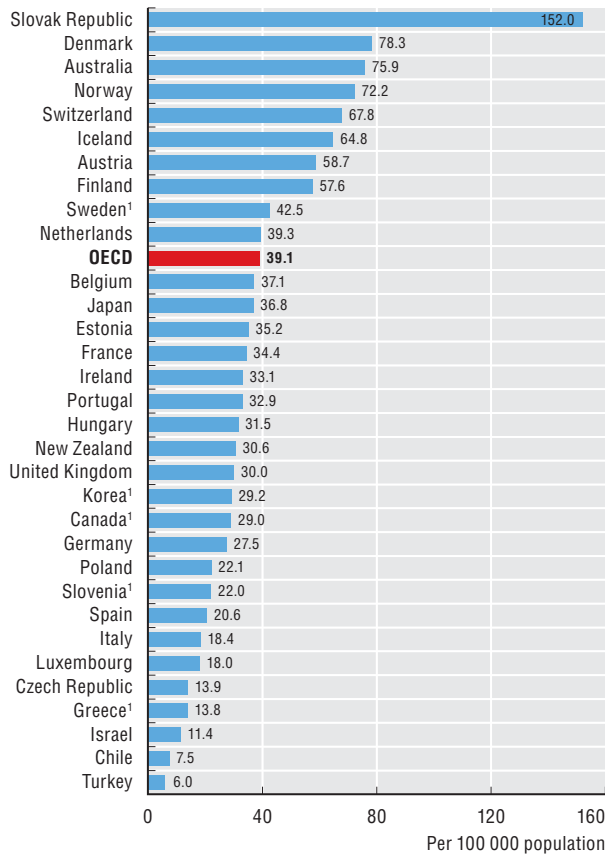
Definition and comparability

Nursing graduates refer to the number of students who have obtained a recognised qualification required to become a licensed or registered nurse. They include graduates from both higher level and lower level nursing programmes. They exclude graduates from Masters or PhD degrees in nursing to avoid double-counting nurses acquiring further qualifications.

The numbers reported by Canada, Greece, Korea, Slovenia and Sweden do not include graduates from lower level nursing programmes, nor are graduates from three-year education programmes focusing on elderly care included in Germany, resulting in an under-estimation in graduation rates per capita. However, the calculation of graduation rates per practising nurses includes the same categories of nurses in the numerator and the denominator to avoid any under-estimation. The United Kingdom data excludes nursing graduates from overseas.

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

3.8.1 Nursing graduates per 100 000 population, 2009 (or nearest year)

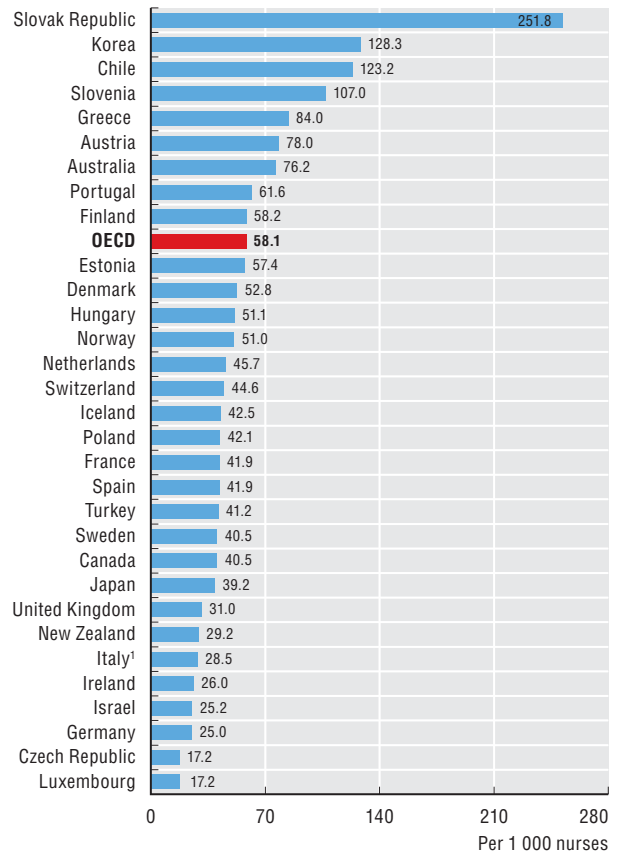


1. The number of graduates does not include graduates from lower level nursing programmes, resulting in an under-estimation.

Source: OECD Health Data 2011.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932524317>

3.8.2 Nursing graduates per 1 000 nurses, 2009 (or nearest year)



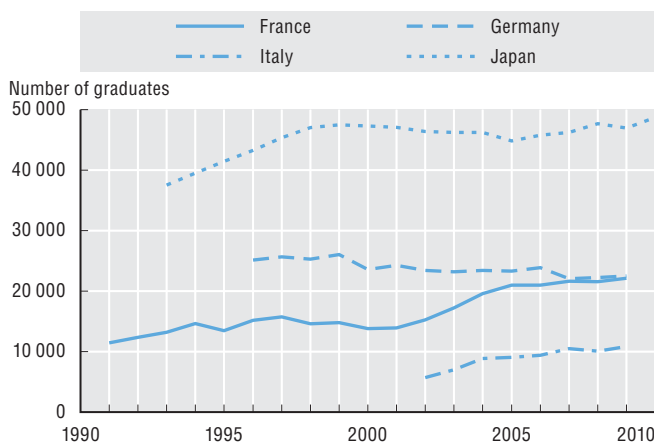
Note: The categories of nurses included in the denominator are the same as the graduate numbers included in the numerator.

1. The denominator data include all nurses licensed to practice.

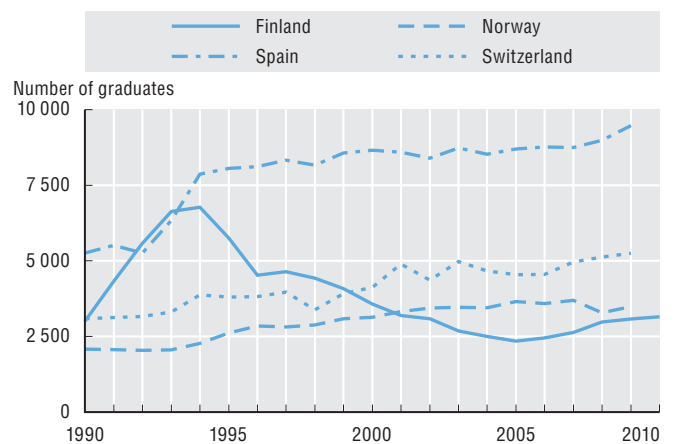
Source: OECD Health Data 2011.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932524336>

3.8.3 Absolute number of nursing graduates, selected OECD countries, 1990 to 2010



Source: OECD Health Data 2011.



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932524355>



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