

3. HEALTH WORKFORCE

3.9. 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.

On average in OECD countries, there were 36 newly-graduated nurses per 100 000 population in 2007 (Figure 3.9.1). The number was the highest in the Slovak Republic, Norway and Switzerland. In the Slovak Republic, nurse graduation rates in 2007 were much higher than in preceding years, signalling recent efforts to increase the number of nurses. In Norway and Switzerland, nurse graduation rates have consistently been above the OECD average since the mid-1980s, explaining why these countries have a higher number of nurses per capita (see Indicator 3.8). On the other hand, nurse graduation rates have traditionally been low in Turkey, Greece and Italy, three countries which report a relatively low number of nurses per capita. In Luxembourg, nurse graduation rates are also low, but a large number of 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 decided in a decentralised way, without any numerical limits. This is the case in Belgium, 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, 2008e).

When compared to the current number of nurses, there were 42 nurse graduates per 1 000 practising nurses on average in OECD countries in 2007 (Figure 3.9.2). The number of new graduates per practising nurses was high in the Slovak Republic, Korea and Portugal, 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. Nurse graduation rates are also low in Ireland which has also been relying on immigration to fill some of its need (OECD, 2007a).

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 over 10 000 in 2007. Nonetheless, this may not be sufficient to meet current and future demand, given that the number of nurses leaving the profession annually is estimated to be in the range of 13 000 to 17 000 (Chaloff, 2008).

In many OECD countries, there has been an increase in the number of students graduating from nursing programmes since 2000 (Figure 3.9.3). This has been the case, for instance, in France, Norway, Switzerland and the United States. In the United States, the Federal budget for fiscal year 2010 provides for additional funding to enhance the capacity of nursing schools to increase the number of nurses (Office of Management and Budget, 2009).

In Denmark, the number of nursing graduates has been relatively stable between 2000 and 2007, but the capacity of nursing colleges has also been increased by 10% since 2007 in response to reported shortages of nurses (OECD, 2008b). In Japan, the number of nursing graduates has declined between 2000 and 2007, reflecting a reduction in the number of nursing schools and student capacity. However, this reduction in training capacity has been reversed since 2006, which should lead to a growing number of graduates in the years ahead (Japanese Nursing Association, 2009).

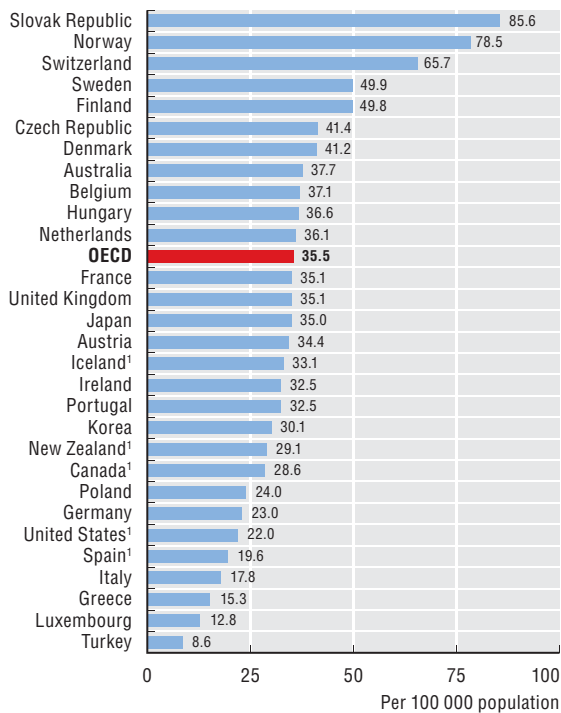
Definition and deviations

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

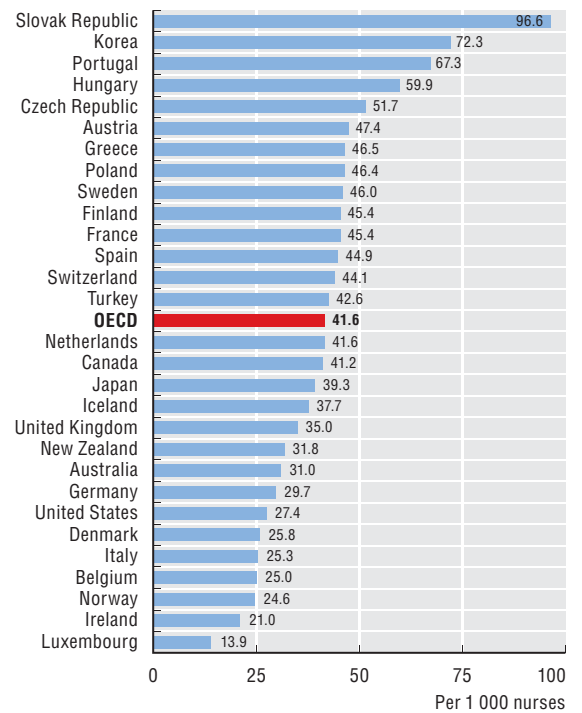
The numbers reported by Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Spain and the United States do not include graduates from lower level nursing programmes, nor are graduates from three-year education programmes focusing on elderly care included in Germany, resulting in an under-estimation in graduation rates per 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 excludes nursing graduates from overseas.

3.9.1 Nursing graduates per 100 000 population, 2007 (or latest year available)

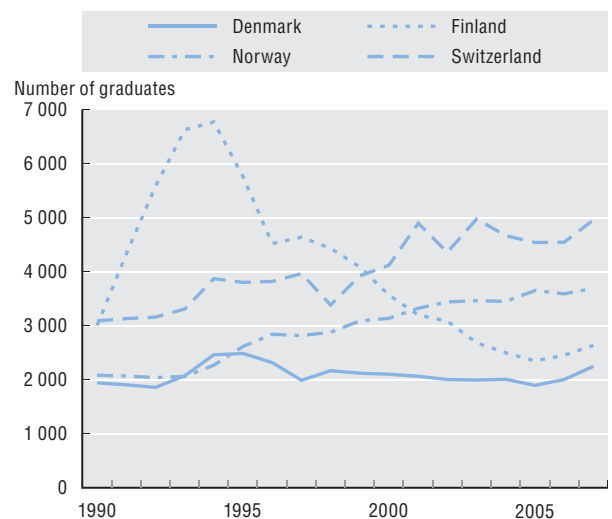
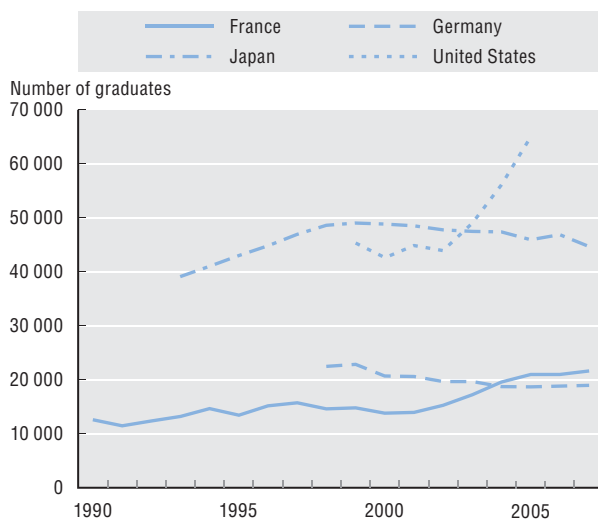


3.9.2 Nursing graduates per 1 000 nurses, 2007 (or latest year available)



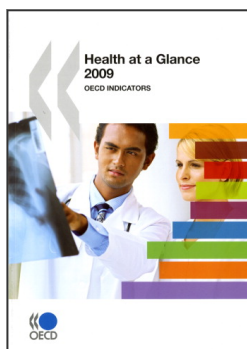
1. The number of graduates reported by Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Spain and the United States does not include graduates from lower level nursing programmes, resulting in an under-estimation compared with other countries in graduation rates per capita (Figure 3.9.1). However, the calculation of graduation rates per practising nurses (Figure 3.9.2) only include professional nurses (higher level nurses), to avoid any under-estimation.

3.9.3 Absolute number of nursing graduates, selected OECD countries, 1990-2007



Source: OECD Health Data 2009.

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