

3. HEALTH WORKFORCE

3.6. Psychiatrists

At any point in time, about 10% of the adult population will report having some type of mental or behavioural disorder (WHO, 2001). People with mental health problems may receive help from a variety of professionals, including general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, specialist nurses and others. This section focuses on one category of mental health service provider, psychiatrists, as the availability of comparable data on others, such as psychologists, is more limited. Psychiatrists are responsible for diagnosing and treating a variety of serious mental health problems, including depression, learning disabilities, alcoholism and drug addiction, eating disorders, and personality disorders such as schizophrenia.

In Europe, a population-based survey carried out in 2010 indicated that, on average across EU countries, 15% of the population reported seeking help from a health professional for a psychological or emotional health problem over the past year (Eurobarometer, 2010). Among the people who sought help, almost three quarters (73%) had consulted a general practitioner, while 11% sought help from a psychiatrist and another 14% from a psychologist (Figure 3.6.2).

In 2009, the number of psychiatrists in most OECD countries was between 10 and 20 per 100 000 population. The number was by far the highest in Switzerland with 42 per 100 000 population, followed by several Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden) and France with between 21 and 23 psychiatrists per 100 000 population. In Mexico, Turkey, Chile, Korea and Poland, there were less than 10 psychiatrists per 100 000 population (Figure 3.6.1).

The number of psychiatrists per capita has increased since 2000 in most OECD countries for which data are available. Across these OECD countries, the average annual growth rate was just over 2% between 2000 and 2009. The rise has been particularly rapid in Poland, Switzerland, Austria and the United Kingdom. There was a slight decrease in the number of psychiatrists per capita during this time period in Israel, France and the United States (Figure 3.6.1).

As is the case for many other medical specialties, psychiatrists may be unevenly distributed across regions within each country, with some regions being underserved. For

example, in Australia, the number of psychiatrists per capita is 4.6 times greater in major cities than in remote regions (AIHW, 2010a).

The role of psychiatrists varies across countries. For example, in Spain, psychiatrists work in close co-operation with general practitioners (GPs). Hence, although the number of psychiatrists is relatively low, consultation rates of psychiatrists by people with mental disorders are higher than in many other countries that have more psychiatrists, because of higher referral rates from their GPs (Kovess-Masfety *et al.*, 2007).

The role of other mental health service providers such as psychologists also varies across countries. For instance, in the Netherlands, there is a high number of psychologists who are very active in providing services that are covered under health insurance systems. In other countries such as France, the number of psychologists is lower and the services that they provide are not covered under public health insurance (Kovess-Masfety *et al.*, 2007).

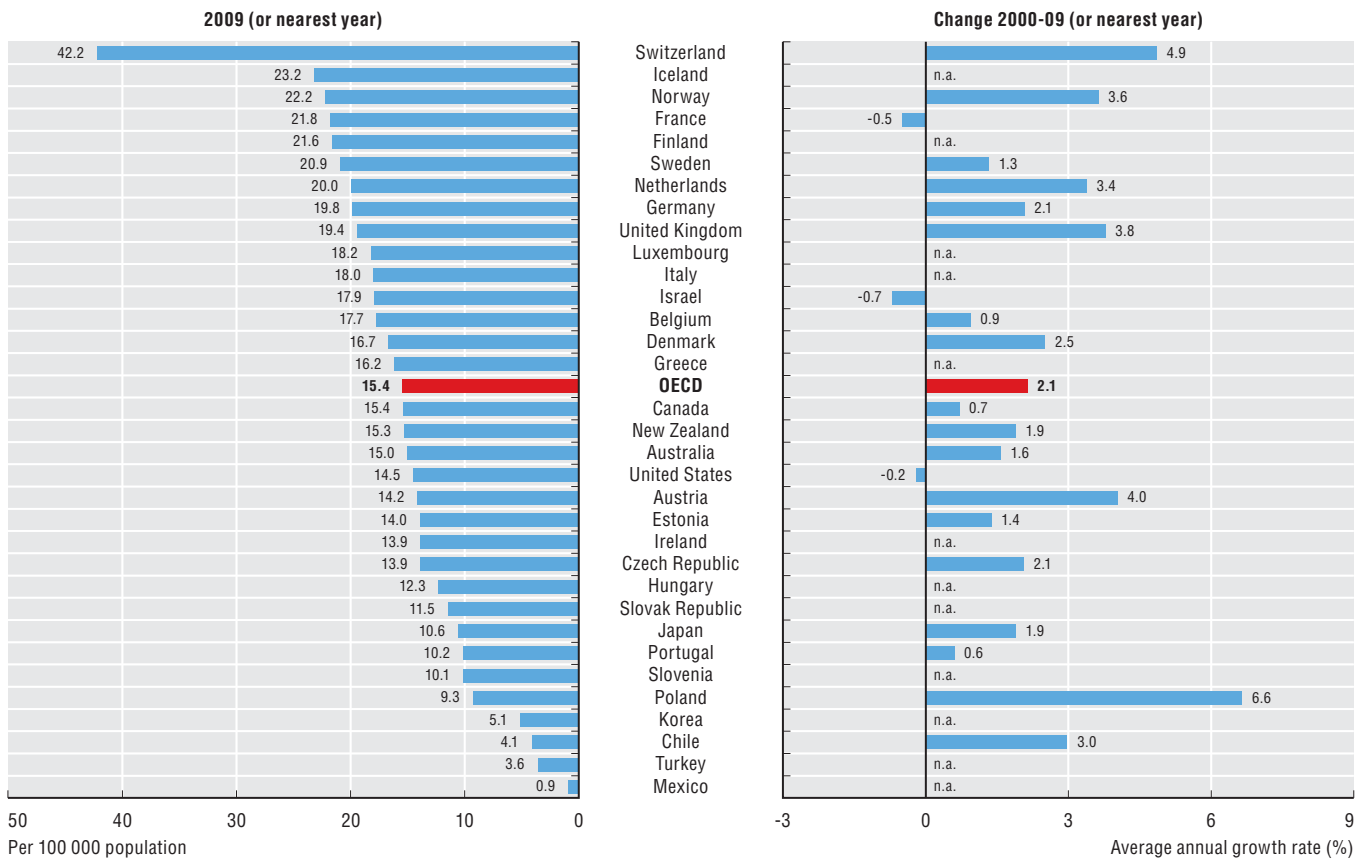
Definition and comparability

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialise in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. They have post-graduate training in psychiatry, and may also have additional training in a psychiatric specialty, such as neuropsychiatry or child psychiatry. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, which psychologists cannot do in most countries.

The figures normally include psychiatrists, neuropsychiatrists and child psychiatrists. Psychologists are excluded. The numbers are presented as head counts, regardless of whether psychiatrists work full-time or part-time.

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

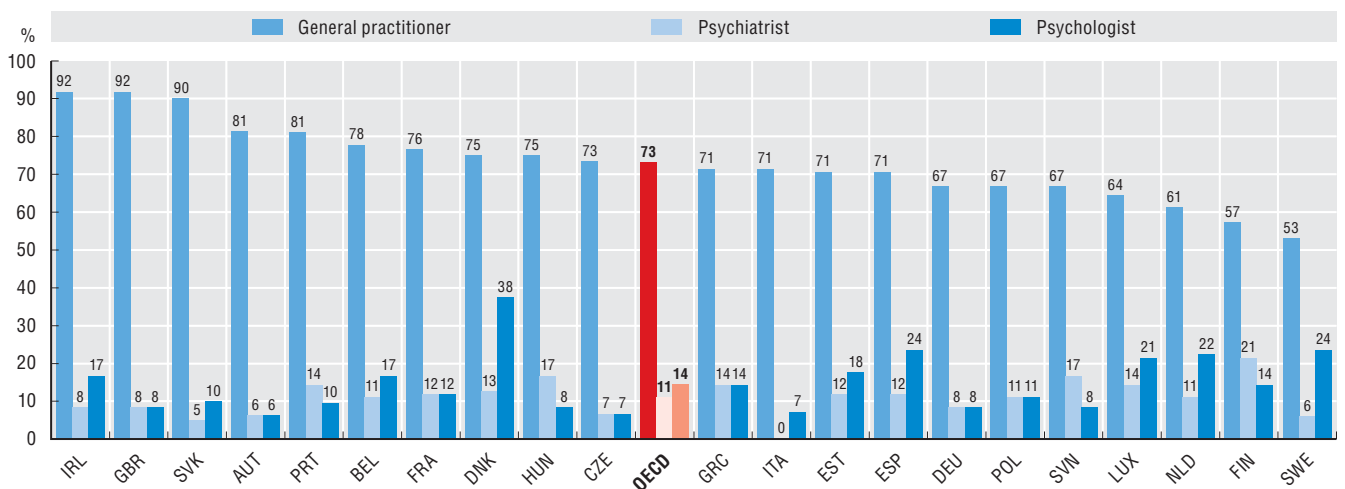
3.6.1 Psychiatrists per 100 000 population, 2009 and change between 2000 and 2009



Source: OECD Health Data 2011.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932524241>

3.6.2 Type of provider(s) consulted for mental health problems, selected EU countries, 2010



Note: The question asked during the interview was: In the last 12 months, did you seek help from a professional because of a psychological or emotional problem? If yes, indicate who in the provided list (multiple answers possible).

Source: Eurobarometer, February-March 2010.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932524260>



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