

Availability of dentists and consultations with dentists

Dental health is an integral part of general health and quality of life. Access to dental care was often disrupted during the pandemic, with over one-fourth of people in the EU reporting unmet needs for dental care in spring 2021 and spring 2022 (Eurofound, 2022^[1]).

Dentists play a key role in both preventing and treating oral health problems. In 2020, there were between 0.4 and 1.3 dentists per 1 000 population across EU countries (Figure 7.14.). Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Lithuania and Bulgaria had the highest numbers of dentists per capita, although the numbers in Greece and Portugal are over-estimated as they include all dentists licensed to practice.

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of dentists per capita increased or remained stable in most EU countries, except in Greece, Sweden and Denmark where it decreased at least slightly. The number of dentists per capita rose particularly strongly in Portugal, Lithuania, Romania and Spain (Figure 7.14.).

While there is no general consensus about how often people should visit a dentist, the recommendation in several countries is that children should have a visit at least once a year to prevent and treat any problem quickly, while adults without problems may wait as long as two years. On average across EU countries, people had 1.3 consultations with a dentist in 2019, but this number dropped by 15% during the first year of the pandemic in 2020. The drop was particularly marked in the Netherlands (which nonetheless still had a relatively high number of dentist consultations during the pandemic), Spain and Hungary (Figure 7.15).

The higher number of consultations in the Netherlands before and during the pandemic can be explained by the strong preference of people for regular dental check-ups arising from well-established programmes to promote prevention of oral health issues at a young age. The National Dutch programme “Keep your Mouth Healthy” provides oral health education to children and is considered one of the best practices in Europe. Several other European countries have similar programmes of oral health promotion and prevention among children and adolescents.

The extent of public coverage for dental care costs can also partly explain some of the cross-country variations in the number of dentist consultations (see indicator “Extent of health care coverage”). In Romania for example, only 6% of dental care spending is publicly funded. By contrast, in France and Germany, more than 60% of dental spending is publicly covered. In the Netherlands, while dental care is not comprehensively covered in the benefit package for adults, voluntary health insurance plays an important role in covering dental costs.

Definition and comparability

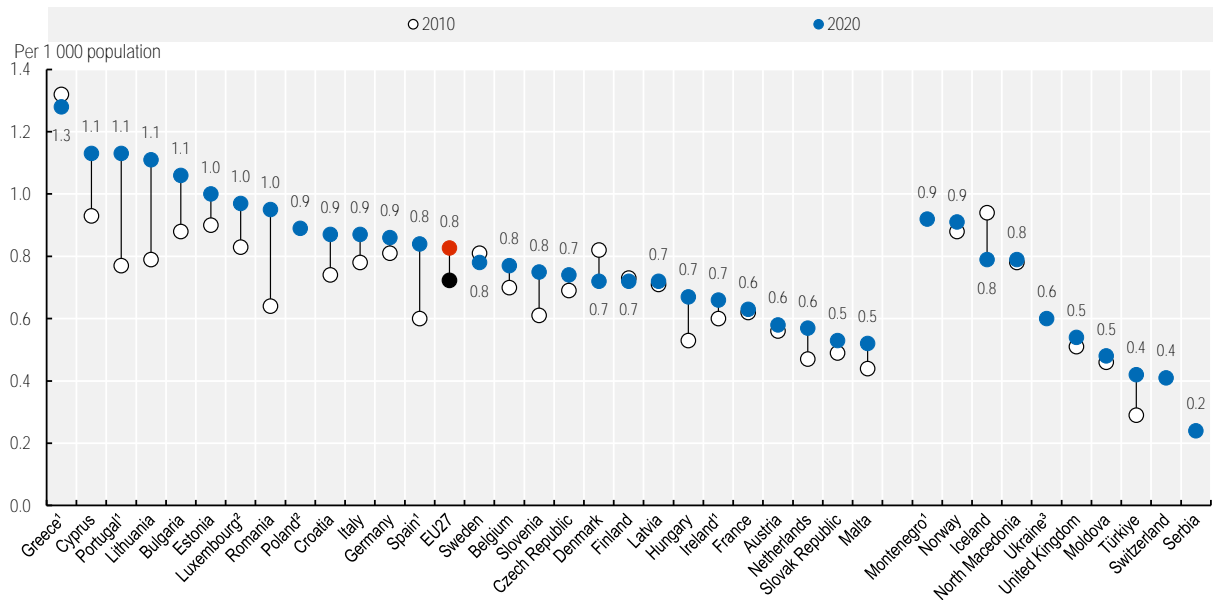
Data include both salaried and self-employed dentists. In most countries, the data only include dentists providing services to patients, but this is not the case in Greece, Ireland, Montenegro, Portugal and Spain where the data refer to all dentists licensed to practice, resulting in an over-estimation.

Dentist consultations include visits at the dentist’s office as well as in outpatient departments in hospital, although the coverage of these settings may differ across countries. The data come mainly from administrative sources, although in some countries (Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland) the data come from health interview surveys. Data from administrative sources tend to be higher than those from surveys because of recall problems and non-response rates and because some surveys only cover adults, resulting in an under-estimation if the number of visits among children is greater. Austria, Hungary, Serbia and the United Kingdom do not cover consultations privately financed or provided in the private sector, also resulting in an under-estimation.

References

- Eurofound (2022), “Fifth round of the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey: Living in a new era of uncertainty”, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2022/fifth-round-of-the-living-working-and-covid-19-e-survey-living-in-a-new-era-of-uncertainty#tab-01>. [1]

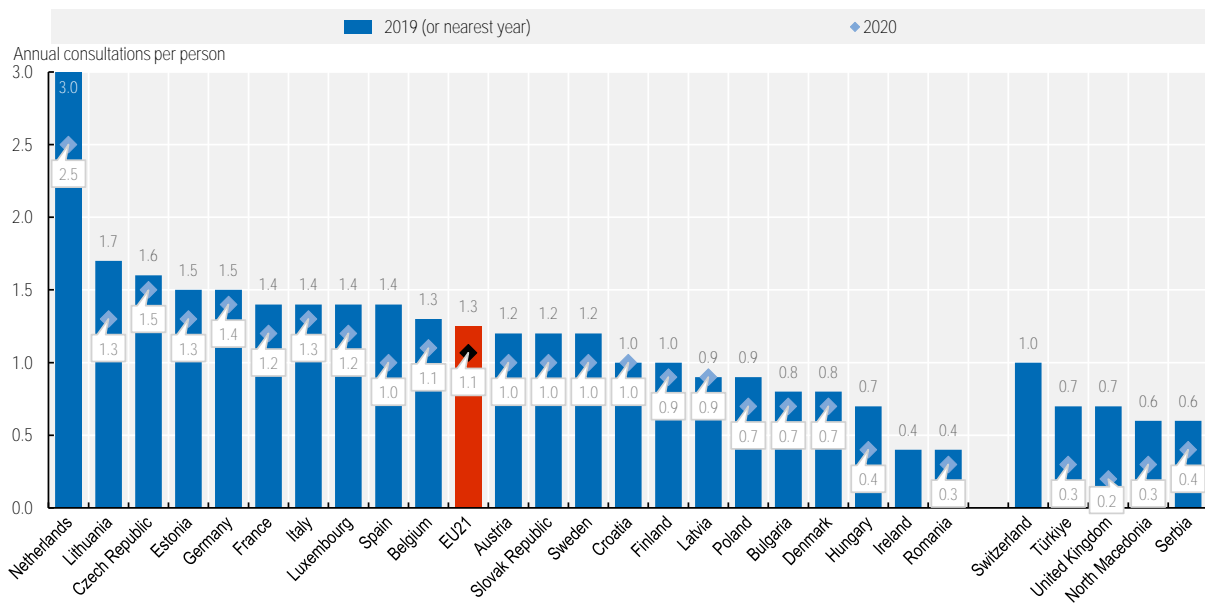
Figure 7.14. Practising dentists per 1 000 population, 2010 and 2020 (or nearest year)



Note: The EU average is unweighted. 1. Data refer to all dentists licensed to practice, resulting in an over-estimation of practising dentists. 2. The latest data refer to 2017 only. 3. The latest data refer to 2014 only.
 Source: OECD Health Statistics 2022; Eurostat Database; WHO National Health Workforce Accounts for Moldova and Ukraine.

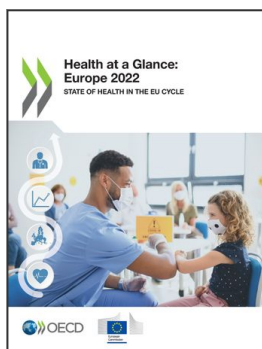
StatLink <https://stat.link/ru4mh0>

Figure 7.15. Number of dentist consultations per person, 2019 and 2020



Note: The EU average is unweighted.
 Source: OECD Health Statistics 2022; Eurostat Database.

StatLink <https://stat.link/h67gsk>



From:
Health at a Glance: Europe 2022
State of Health in the EU Cycle

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/507433b0-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2022), “Availability of dentists and consultations with dentists”, in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2022: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/e4ba581d-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.