

Doctors (overall number)

The number of doctors in OECD countries increased from about 2.8 million in 2000 to 3.4 million in 2010 and 4.1 million in 2019. In most OECD countries, the number of doctors increased more rapidly than population size, so that, on average, the number of doctors rose from 2.7 per 1 000 population in 2000 to 3.6 in 2019 (Figure 8.3). Israel was an exception to this general trend, as the 38% increase in the absolute number of doctors was not enough to keep pace with total population growth of 44% between 2000 and 2019.

In 2019, the number of doctors in OECD member countries ranged from less than 2.5 per 1 000 population in Turkey, Colombia, Poland and Mexico, to over 5 in Austria, Portugal and Greece. However, the numbers in Portugal and Greece are overestimated as they include all doctors licensed to practise.

In Indonesia, South Africa and India, there was less than one doctor per 1 000 population in 2019. In the People's Republic of China (China), the number of doctors increased rapidly from 1.2 per 1 000 population in 2000 to 2.2 per 1 000 population in 2019. In Brazil, the number of doctors per 1 000 population also increased rapidly between 2000 and 2019, but it remains low compared to most OECD countries.

The rising number of doctors in OECD countries over the past two decades has been driven mainly by increases in the number of students admitted and graduating from domestic medical education and training programmes (see indicator "Medical graduates"). Concerns about doctor shortages and the ageing of the medical workforce prompted many OECD countries to increase the number of students in medical education programmes (OECD, 2016[6]). In some countries, immigration of foreign-trained doctors also contributed to the growth (see indicator "International migration of doctors and nurses"). A third factor that contributed to the rise is a growing number of doctors in several countries prolonging their working lives and working beyond the previous standard retirement age.

The increase in the number of doctors per 1 000 population since 2000 has been strong in some countries that had a low number in 2000, such as Korea, the United Kingdom, Slovenia and New Zealand, although the number in these countries

continues to be below the OECD average (Figure 8.4). There has also been a strong increase in several countries where the number of doctors was already above the OECD average in 2000, such as Austria, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Denmark.

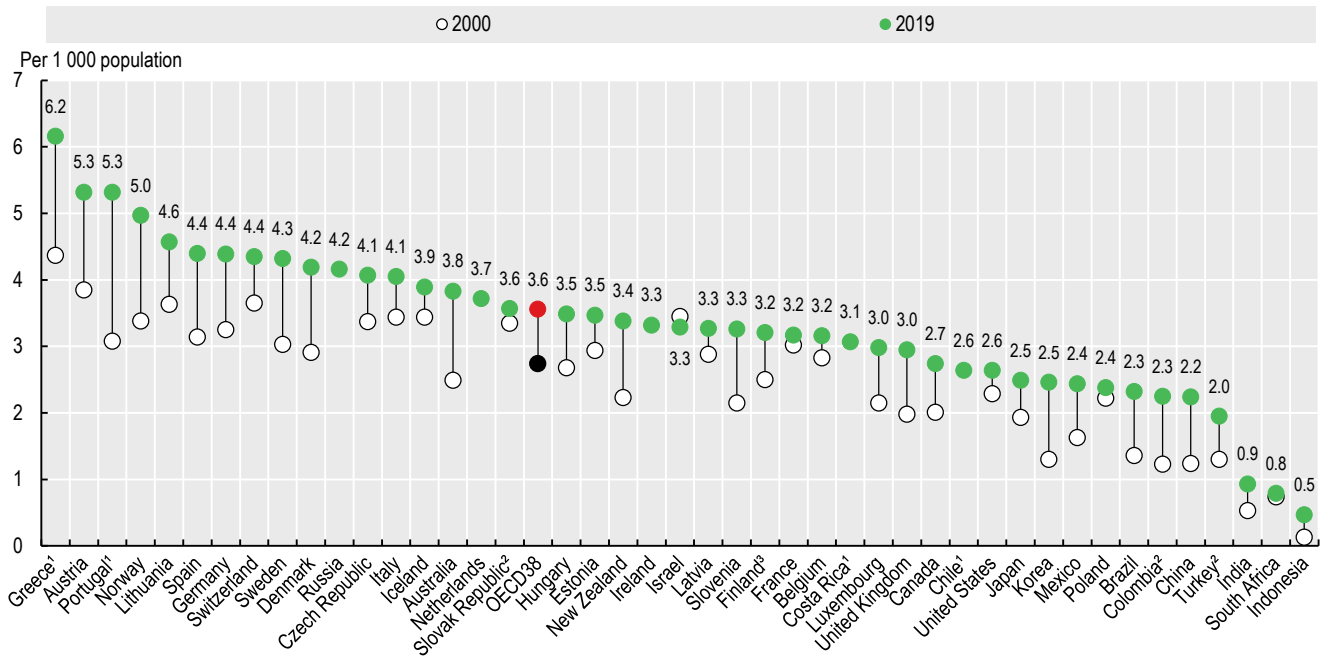
The number of doctors per capita grew only modestly from 2000 in France, Poland and the Slovak Republic. In France, the number of doctors just kept up with the increase in population growth, and it is projected to fall in the next few years, both in absolute levels and per capita, as the number of doctors who will retire is expected to exceed those entering the profession. This has prompted recommendations to increase by an additional 20% the number of students admitted to medical schools in France during 2021-25 compared with the previous five-year period (ONDPS, 2021[7]). The long duration of doctors' education and training, however, means that it takes about a decade to feel the impact of any increase in student intakes into medical education.

In most OECD countries, concerns and policy responses relate more specifically to addressing shortages of general practitioners (GPs) (see indicator "Doctors by age, sex and category") and shortages of doctors in rural and remote regions (see indicator "Geographic distribution of doctors").

Definition and comparability

The data for most countries refer to practising doctors, defined as the number of doctors providing care directly to patients. In many countries (but not all), the numbers include interns and residents (doctors in training). Colombia, the Slovak Republic and Turkey also include doctors who are active in the health sector even though they may not provide direct care to patients, adding another 5-10% of doctors. Chile, Costa Rica, Greece and Portugal report the number of physicians entitled to practise, resulting in an even larger overestimation of the number of practising doctors.

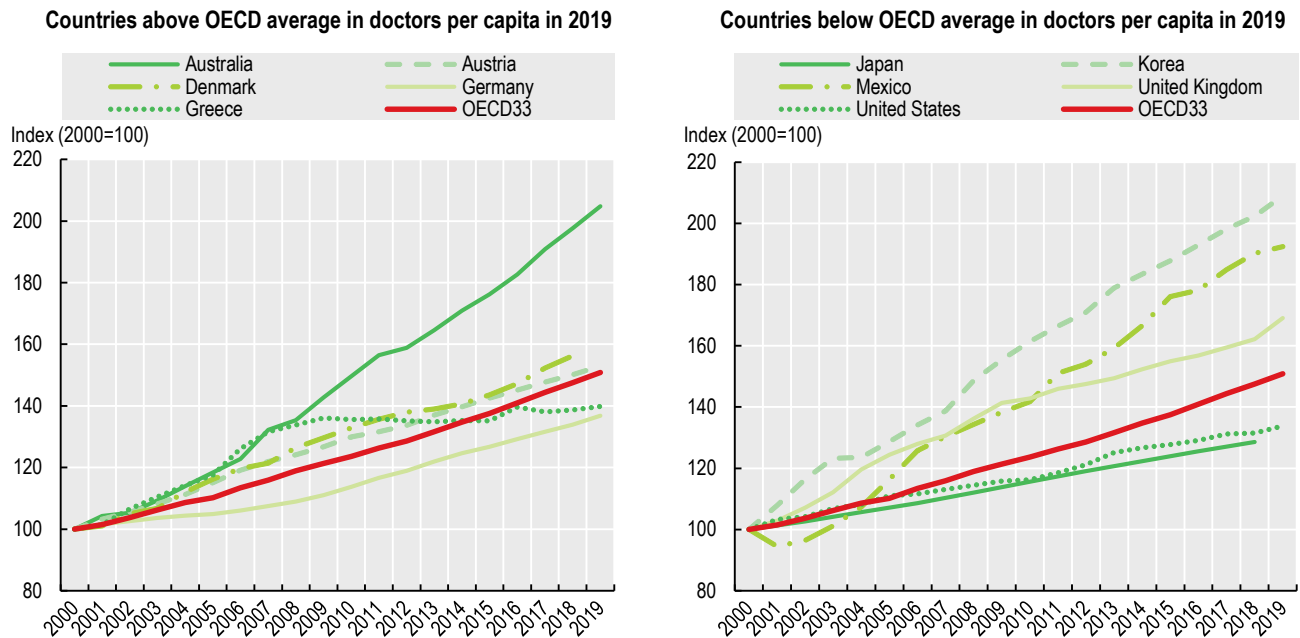
Figure 8.3. Practising doctors per 1 000 population, 2000 and 2019 (or nearest year)



1. Data refer to all doctors licensed to practise, resulting in a large overestimation of the number of practising doctors (e.g. of around 30% in Portugal). 2. Data include not only doctors providing direct care to patients but also those working in the health sector as managers, educators, researchers and similar (adding another 5-10% of doctors). 3. In Finland, the latest data refer to 2014 only.
Source: OECD Health Statistics 2021.

StatLink <https://stat.link/3pasve>

Figure 8.4. Evolution in the number of doctors, selected countries, 2000-19 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2021.

StatLink <https://stat.link/qub5zr>



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