

4. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How many students are in each classroom?

- On average, there are more than 21 students per class at primary level in OECD countries, but numbers are usually larger in other G20 countries. Overall class size varies from more than 29 in Chile and China to nearly half that number in Luxembourg and the Russian Federation.
- On average, the number of students per class increases by two or more between primary and lower secondary education. In lower secondary education, the average class in OECD countries has about 23 students.
- The student-to-teacher ratio in lower and upper secondary education is slightly lower in private than in public institutions.

Significance

This section examines the number of students per class at the primary and lower secondary levels, in both public and private institutions. Class size is a hotly debated topic in many OECD countries. While smaller classes are often perceived as enabling a higher quality of education, evidence on the impact of class size on student performance is mixed.

Findings

At the primary level, the average class size in OECD and G20 countries is around 21 students, ranging from more than 29 in Chile and China to fewer than 20 in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Poland, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland (in public institutions).

The number of students per class tends to increase between primary and lower secondary education. In lower secondary education, the average class size is more than 23 students, ranging from 20 or fewer in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland (in public institutions) and the United Kingdom to more than 34 students per class in Indonesia and Korea and to over 50 in China.

In Brazil, China, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Mexico and Poland, the increase in average class size between primary and lower secondary education exceeds four students while the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Switzerland (public institutions only) show a drop in the number of students per class between these two levels of education.

Across the OECD, average class sizes at the primary and lower secondary levels do not differ by more than one student per class between public and private institutions. There are, however, marked differences between countries. At primary level, the average class in a public institution has at least four more students than a private institution in Brazil, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel,

Poland, the Russian Federation, Turkey and the United Kingdom. By contrast, the reverse is true for China and Spain. At the lower secondary level, where private education is more prevalent than at primary level, class sizes are larger in private institutions in 13 OECD countries.

Trends

From 2000 to 2010, the average class size in countries with available data for both years decreased by one student at both the primary and lower secondary levels. The decrease in average primary class size can be partly explained by reforms of class size during that period. Primary class sizes decreased most notably (by more than four students) in countries that had relatively large class sizes in 2000, such as Korea and Turkey. By contrast, class size increased or was unchanged in countries that had the smallest classes in 2000, such as Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Luxembourg.

Definitions

Class sizes have been calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of classes. Data for Switzerland refer to public institutions. Data refer to the 2009-10 school year, and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2011.

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

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2012* (Indicator D2).

Areas covered include:

- Average class size, by type of institution and level of education.
- Ratio of students to teaching staff.
- Teaching staff and non-teaching staff employed in educational institutions.

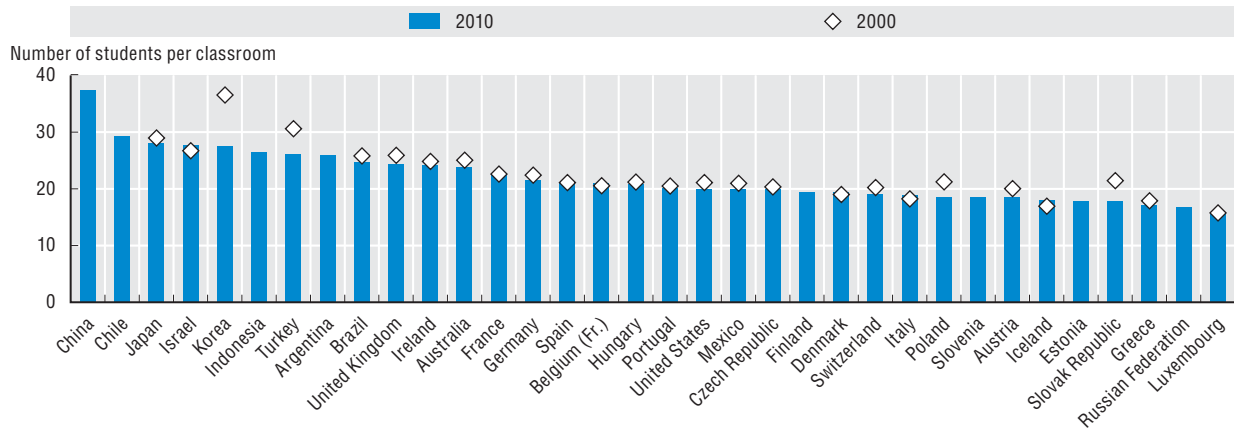
Further reading from OECD

Improving School Leadership (Volume 1: Policy and Practice) (2008).
21st Century Learning Environments (2006).

This page includes revisions. Details available at: www.oecd.org/publishing/corrigenda.

Figure 4.3. Trends in average class size in primary education (2000, 2010)

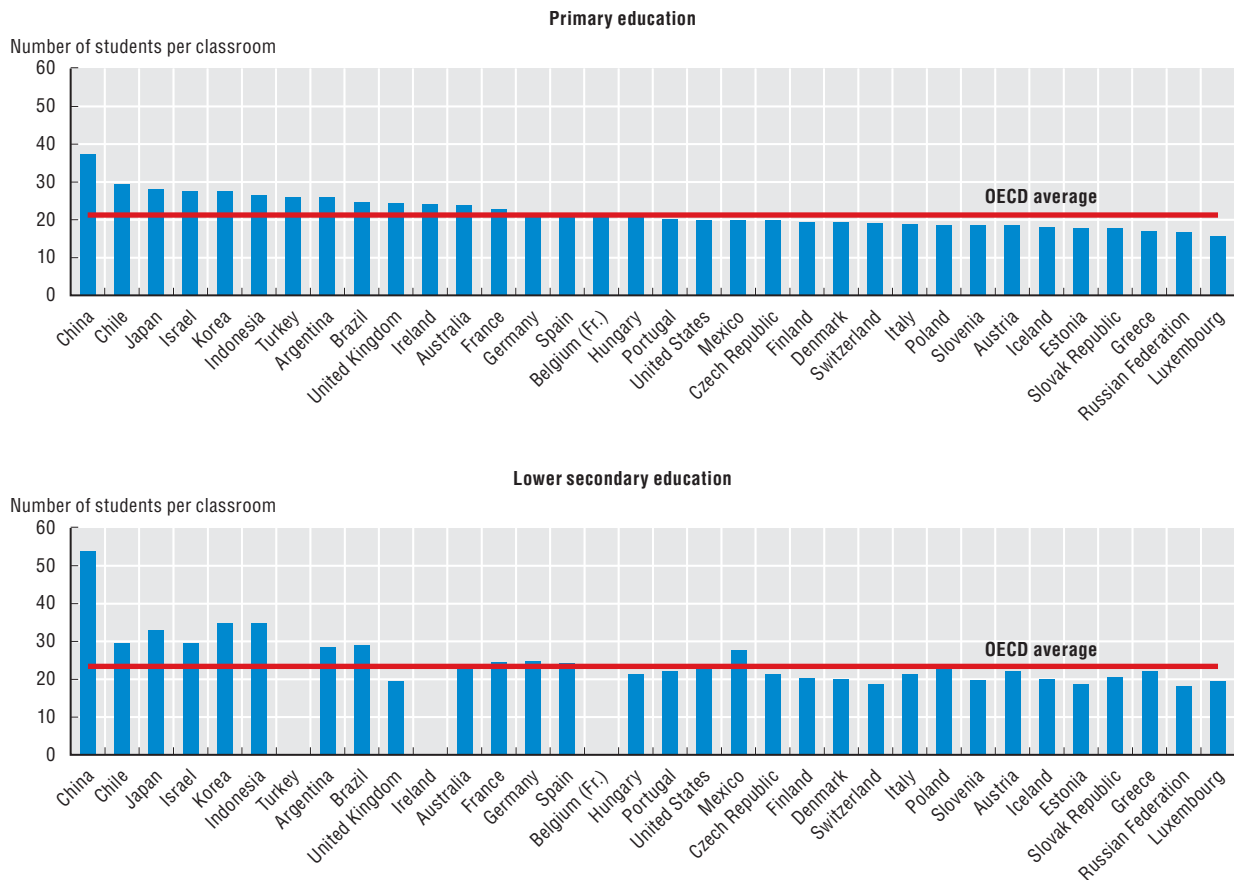
This figure shows the number of students on average in primary classes, and whether these numbers have risen or fallen.



Source: OECD (2012), Education at a Glance 2012, Tables D2.1 and D2.5, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932667976> and <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932668071>.

Figure 4.4. Average class size, by level of education, 2010

These figures show how class sizes differ between primary and lower secondary education.



Source: OECD (2012), Education at a Glance 2012, Table D2.2, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932667995>.



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