

5. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How many students are in each classroom?

- There are about 21 students per class at primary level in OECD countries, on average, but numbers are larger in other G20 countries.
- The number of students per class increases by two or more students between primary and lower secondary education, on average in OECD countries.
- The average class size at primary level decreased between 2000 and 2011, especially in countries that had relatively large classes, such as Korea and Turkey.

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 and has a considerable impact on the level of current spending on education. While smaller classes are often perceived as enabling a higher quality of education, particularly among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, overall evidence of the effect of differences in class size on student performance is weak.

Findings

The average primary school class in OECD and G20 countries numbers around 21 pupils, ranging from fewer than 16 pupils in Luxembourg to more than 30 in Chile and China. The number of students per class tends to increase between primary and lower secondary education. In lower secondary education, the average class size in all countries with available data is more than 23 students, ranging from fewer than 20 students in Estonia, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, to 34 students per class in Korea and almost 53 students in China.

The student-teacher ratio decreases between the primary and lower secondary levels in 27 of the 30 OECD and G20 countries with available data. This decrease in the student-teacher ratio reflects differences in annual instruction time for students, which tends to increase with the level of education.

The student-teacher ratio in secondary education is slightly more favourable in private than in public institutions, on average across OECD countries. This is most striking in Mexico where, at the secondary level, there are nearly 17 more students per teacher in public than in private institutions. On average across OECD countries, there is at most one student more per class in public than in private institutions at the primary and lower secondary levels. Class size varies significantly within countries. The difference between the smallest and largest classes is as large as

30 students in Brazil, Iceland, Malaysia, Mexico and Turkey. This may result partly from differences in the size of the community to which the school belongs or from differences between public and private schools.

Trends

From 2000 to 2011, the average class size in countries with available data for both years decreased by one student at both the primary and lower secondary levels, and the range of class size among OECD countries narrowed. The slight decrease in average primary class size can be partly explained by reforms on 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 has grown in some countries that had relatively small classes in 2000, most notably Denmark and Iceland.

Definitions

Data refer to the 2010-11 school year, and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2012. Class sizes have been calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of classes.

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 2013* (Indicator D2).

Areas covered include:

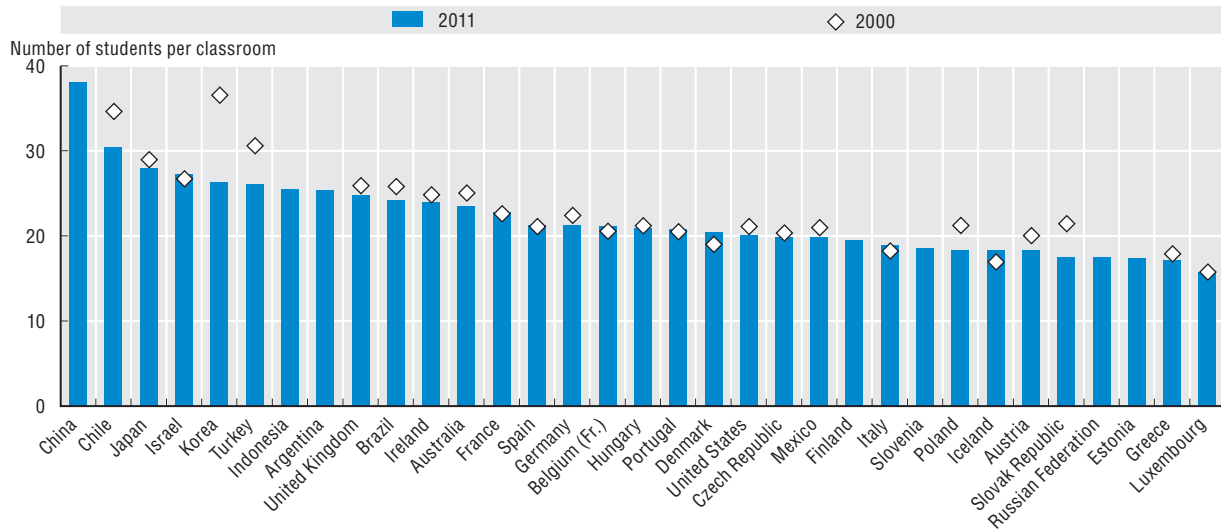
- Average class size, by type of institution and level of education.
- Ratio of students to teaching staff.
- Teaching staff and non-teaching staff employed in educational institutions.

Further reading from OECD

Improving School Leadership (Vol. 1: Policy and Practice) (2008).

Figure 5.3. Trends in average class size in primary education (2000, 2011)

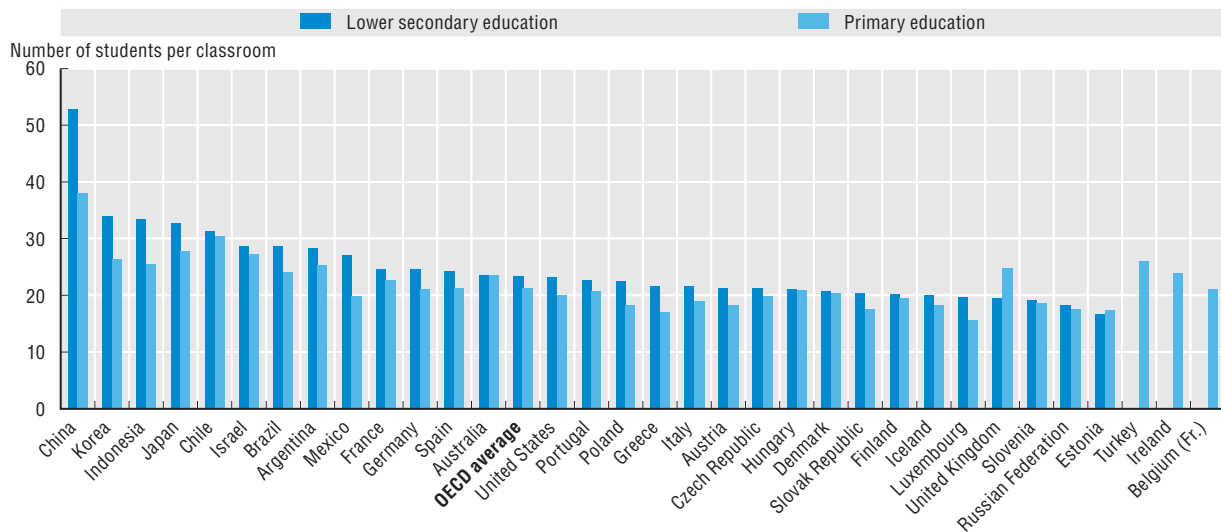
This figure shows the average number of students in primary classes, and whether these numbers have risen or fallen.



Source: OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013, Chart D2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932851668>.

Figure 5.4. Average class size, by level of education, 2011

This figure shows how class sizes differ between primary and lower secondary education.



Source: OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013, Chart D2.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932851687>.



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