

Nurses are usually the most numerous health profession, outnumbering physicians in most European countries. Nurses play a critical role in providing health care not only in traditional settings such as hospitals and long-term care institutions but increasingly in primary care (especially in offering care to the chronically ill) and in patients' homes. However, there are concerns in many countries about shortages of nurses, and these concerns may well intensify in the future as the demand for nurses continues to increase and the ageing of the "baby boom" generation precipitates a wave of retirements among nurses. These concerns have prompted many countries to increase the training of new nurses combined with efforts to increase retention rates in the profession (OECD, 2008b).

This section presents data on the number of nurses, including both "professional nurses" and "associate professional nurses" in those countries where two such levels of nurses exist. It also provides data on other lower-skilled caring personnel such as nursing aides.

In 2008, there were about 15 professional and associate professional nurses per 1 000 population in Finland, Iceland, Ireland and Switzerland, and slightly fewer in Denmark and Norway. Turkey had the fewest nurses, followed by Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus, with all these countries having fewer than five nurses per 1 000 population.

The mix between different categories of nurses varies widely across European countries. In some countries such as France, Portugal and Poland, a lower-level category of "associate professional nurses" does not exist, and all nurses are reported to be at the same level. In other countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria, the vast majority of nurses are considered to be professional nurses, but a minority are considered to be at a lower-level. In yet another group of countries including the Netherlands and Slovenia, the number of lower-level nurses is greater than higher-level nurses (Figure 3.2.1).

In addition to different categories of recognised nurses, other categories of caring personnel such as nursing aides play an important role in supporting nurses in providing care in some countries. However, because these personnel are usually not part of a registered profession, the availability and coverage of data is more limited. Based on the available data, the number of such additional caring personnel is the highest in the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark. In the Netherlands and France, there are in fact more caring personnel than nurses.

Since 2000, the number of nurses per capita has increased in all European countries, except in Lithuania and the Slovak Republic. The increase was

particularly large in Portugal and Spain, where the number of nurses per population increased by 45% and 33% respectively. In France and Switzerland, there was also a fairly large increase in the supply of nurses, rising by 15-20% between 2000 and 2008.

In 2008, the number of nurses per doctor ranged from about six in Ireland and Finland to under one nurse per doctor in Greece and Turkey (Figure 3.2.2). The average across European countries is over two-and-a-half nurses per doctor, with many countries reporting between two to four nurses per doctor. Beyond Greece and Turkey, the nurse-to-doctor ratio is also relatively low in other southern European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus. In Greece and Italy, there is evidence of an over-supply of doctors and under-supply of nurses, resulting in an inefficient allocation of resources (OECD, 2009; Chaloff, 2008).

### Definition and deviations

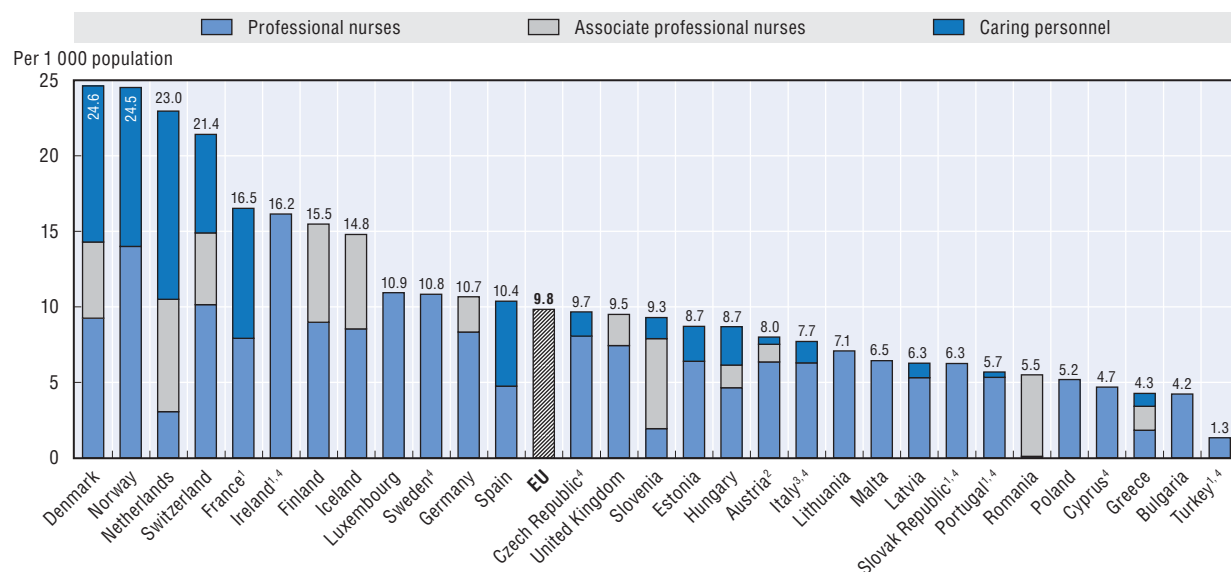
The data refer to nurses and other caring personnel providing direct care to patients, although in some countries they also include nurses working in management, research and other roles. This adds another 5-10% to nursing numbers.

"Professional nurses" are defined by ISCO-08 code 2221, and include categories of nurses such as registered nurses, clinical nurses, nurse anaesthetists, nurse practitioners, public health nurses, and specialist nurses. "Associate professional nurses" are defined by ISCO-08 code 3221, and include categories of nurses such as "enrolled nurses" and "practical nurses". "Caring personnel" includes two categories of workers defined in ISCO-08: 1) "health care assistants" (code 5321) who "provide direct personal care and assistance with activities of daily living to patients and residents in a variety of health care settings"; and 2) "home-based personal care workers" (code 5322), including home care aides, nursing aides at home, and personal care providers.

Midwives are usually excluded from nurses. However, about half of European countries report midwives together with nurses, as they are considered specialist nurses.


Austria reports only nurses working in hospitals. The data for Germany does not include nurses who have three years of education and are providing services for the elderly.

### 3.2.1. Professional nurses, associate professional nurses and caring personnel per 1 000 population, 2008 (or nearest year available)

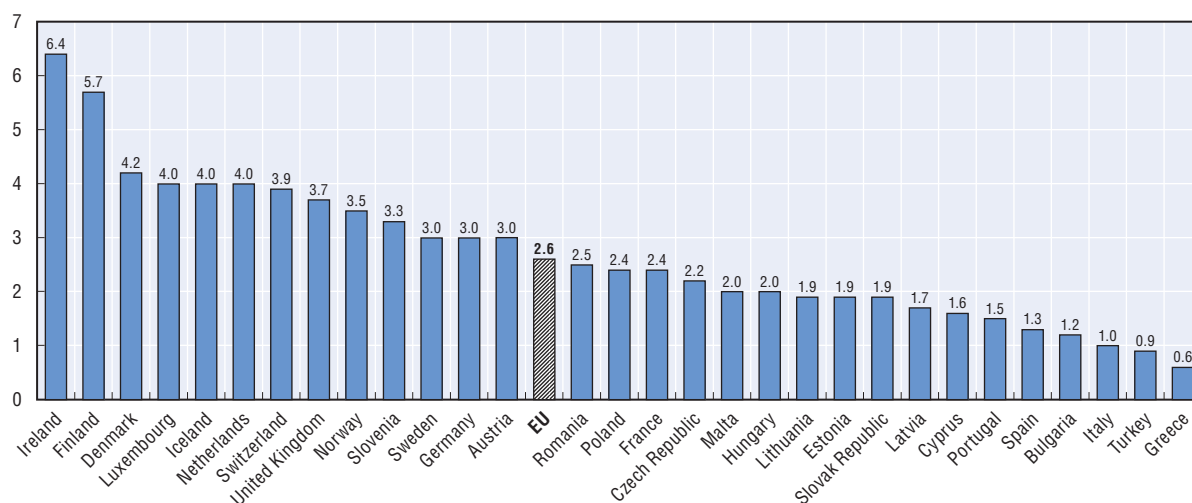


1. Data include not only nurses providing direct care to patients, but also those working in the health sector as managers, educators, researchers, etc. (adding another 5-10% of nurses).
2. Austria reports only nurses employed in hospitals.
3. In Italy, data refer to all nurses who are licensed to practice.
4. The breakdown between professional and associate professional nurses is not available.

Source: OECD Health Data 2010; Eurostat Statistics Database.


StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932336692>

### 3.2.2. Ratio of nurses to physicians, 2008 (or nearest year available)



Note: Nurses only include professional and associate professional nurses and exclude other caring personnel.

Source: OECD Health Data 2010; Eurostat Statistics Database.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932336711>



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