

## Nursing graduates

The number of new nursing graduates is a key indicator to assess the number of new entrants to the nursing profession who might be available to replace those nurses who will be retiring and respond to any current or future shortages of nurses. The number of nursing graduates in any given year reflect decisions that were made a few years earlier (about three years) related to student admissions, either through explicit *numerus clausus* policies (the setting of quotas on student admissions) or through other decision-making processes, although graduation rates are also affected by student dropout rates.

Overall, the number of nurse graduates across OECD countries increased from about 350 000 in 2000 to 520 000 in 2010 and 620 000 in 2019. In 2019, the number of new nurse graduates ranged from fewer than 20 per 100 000 population in Colombia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Italy and Turkey to over 100 in Australia, Switzerland and Korea (Figure 8.21). The low number in Colombia, Mexico and Turkey is related to the low number of nurses working in the health system (see indicator “Nurses”). In Luxembourg, the low number of nurse graduates is offset by a large number of students from Luxembourg who get their nursing degree in another country, as well as the capacity of the country to attract nurses from other countries through better pay and working conditions (see indicator “Remuneration of nurses”).

In Italy, the number of nurse graduates increased fairly rapidly in the 2000s but has decreased since 2013. There was a sharp drop in the number of applicants to nursing education programmes in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, signalling reduced interest in the profession.

In many countries, young people still see nursing as an occupation with low professional status and autonomy, and with few career opportunities. The OECD 2018 PISA survey of 15-year-old students in secondary schools shed light on the challenge in many countries of recruiting students to nursing. The survey asked these 15-year-olds what job they expected to have at age 30. On average across OECD countries, around 3% of young people anticipated going into nursing. In Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Turkey, fewer than 1% of respondents were thinking of nursing. Across all countries, considerably more girls expressed interest in nursing than boys. On average across OECD countries, 92% of those young people who anticipated going into nursing were women (Mann and Denis, 2020[20]). This continues to reflect the traditional gender composition of the nursing workforce.

A key strategy to attract more students to nursing is to target a more diversified and less traditional group of nursing students,

including men and people from minority groups. However, as noted in a 2019 independent review commissioned by the Australian Government, the capacity to increase the representation of men and other under-represented students in nursing is constrained by the perception that nursing is “women’s work”, and the perceived status of nursing in the community (Williams et al., 2020[21]).

Despite this challenge, several countries have been able to increase the number of students in nursing, as reflected by rising numbers of new graduates (Figure 8.22). In the United States, the number of nurse graduates doubled between 2000 and 2010 (from around 100 000 in 2000 to 200 000 in 2010), in a context of widespread concern that there would be a huge shortage of nurses, although the number has remained fairly stable since 2010. In Switzerland, the number of new graduates has increased by about 50% since 2010, driven mainly by an increase in the number of graduates from “associate professional nurses” programmes (“intermediate care workers”).

In Norway, the number of students admitted to and graduating from nursing education programmes has also increased since 2010: the number of new nursing graduates in 2017 was one-third higher than in 2010. However, as many as one in five recently graduated nurses work outside the health sector. This has led to the implementation of a series of measures in recent years to improve the working conditions of nurses to increase retention rates, including pay raises.

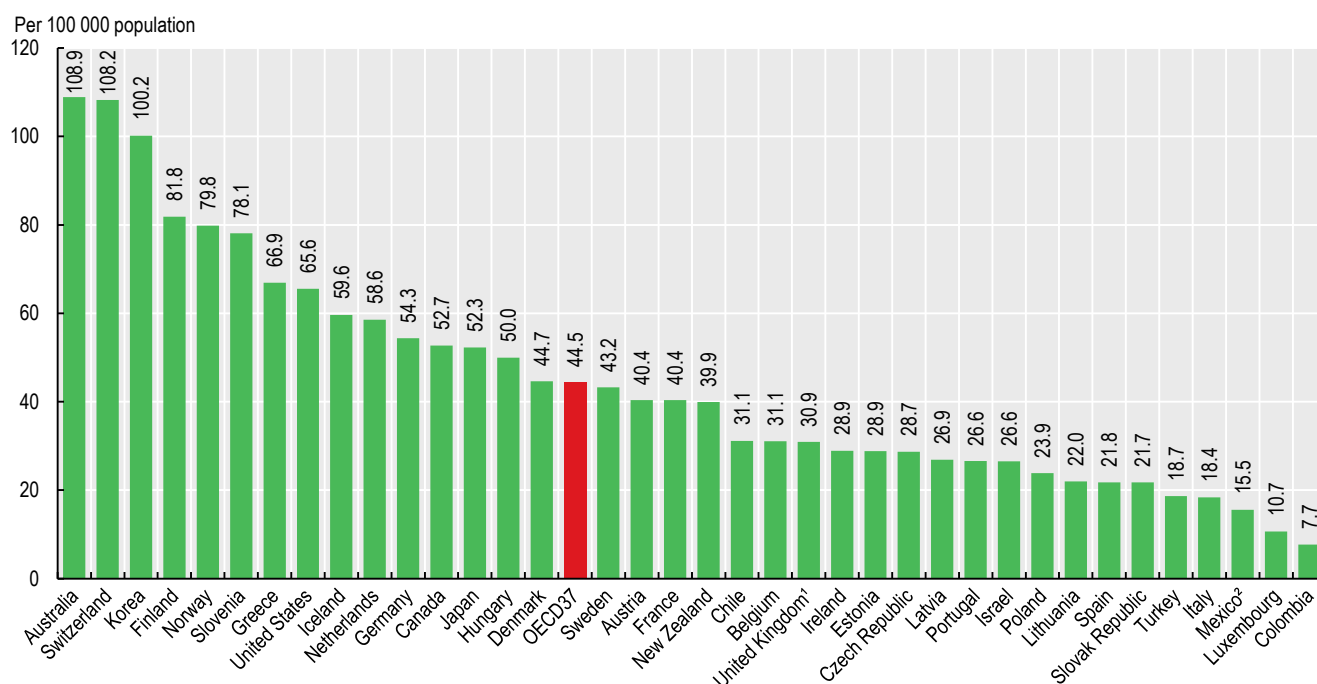
The number of new nurse graduates in Israel has increased by a factor of nearly 2.5 since 2010, but it remains below the OECD average relative to the country’s population size.

### Definition and comparability

Nursing graduates are students who have obtained a recognised qualification required to become a licensed or registered nurse. They include graduates from both higher-level and lower-level nursing programmes in countries where this distinction exists. They exclude graduates from master’s or doctorate degrees in nursing to avoid double-counting nurses acquiring further qualifications.

The data for the United Kingdom are based on the number of new nurses receiving an authorisation to practise.

Figure 8.21. Nursing graduates, 2019 (or nearest year)



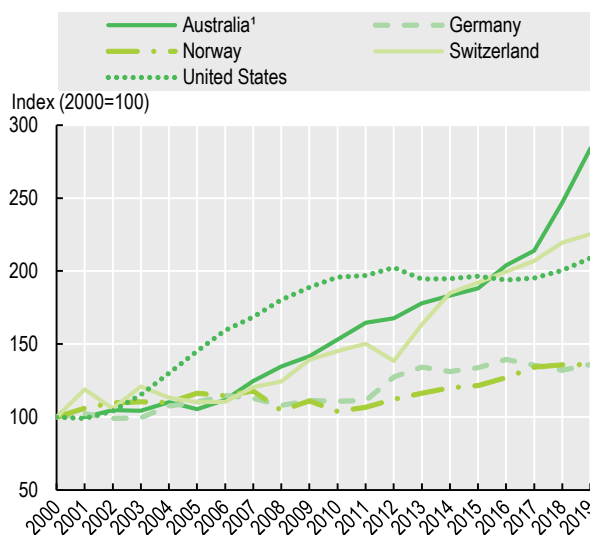
1. In the United Kingdom, the numbers refer to new nurses receiving an authorisation to practise, which may result in an overestimation if these include foreign-trained nurses. 2. In Mexico, the data include professional nursing graduates only.

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2021.

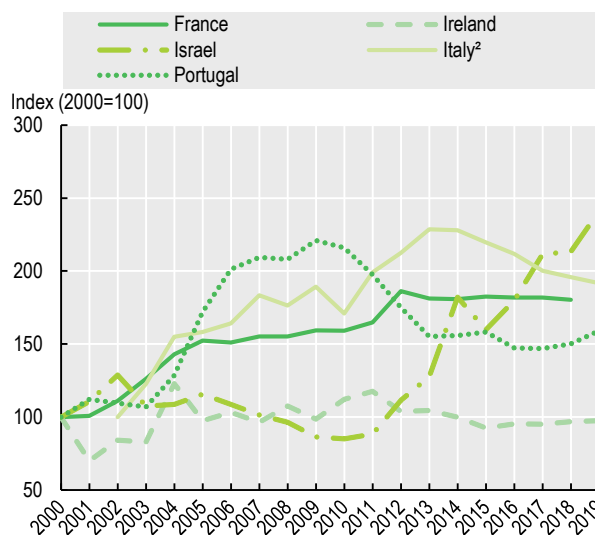
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Figure 8.22. Evolution in the number of nursing graduates, selected OECD countries, 2000-19

## Countries above OECD average in graduates per capita in 2019



## Countries below OECD average in graduates per capita in 2019



1. Index for Australia, 2001=100. 2. Index for Italy, 2002=100.

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2021.

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