

## Health and social care workforce

In OECD countries, health and social care systems employ more workers now than at any other time in history. In 2021, more than one in every ten jobs (10.5%) was in health or social care, up from 9.5% in 2011 (Figure 8.1). In Nordic countries and the Netherlands, more than 16% of all jobs were in health and social work. Between 2011 and 2021, the share of health and social care workers increased particularly rapidly in Korea and Türkiye, although it remained lower than the OECD average in both countries.

Job numbers in the health and social care sector increased much more rapidly than in other sectors over the past decade. On average across OECD countries, employment in health and social work increased by 24% between 2011 and 2021 – over twice the rate of overall employment growth (Figure 8.2).

In most OECD countries, over 75% of workers in the health and social care sector are women (Figure 8.3). While women's jobs tend to be concentrated more in lower-skilled and lower-paid occupations, half of all doctors on average across OECD countries in 2021 were female (see section on “Doctors by age, sex and category”).

Nurses make up the most numerous category of health and social care workers in most OECD countries, accounting for approximately 20-25% of all workers. Personal care workers (including healthcare assistants in hospitals and nursing homes and home-based personal care workers) also account for a relatively large share, sometimes exceeding the number of nurses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, higher national numbers of health and social care workers were significantly associated with lower mortality across OECD countries, based either on registered COVID-19 deaths or the broader measure of excess mortality (OECD, 2023<sup>[1]</sup>). Unsurprisingly, the strongest increases in job postings during the pandemic in many countries (including Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States) were in the healthcare sector (OECD, 2023<sup>[2]</sup>).

Population ageing, technological change and rising incomes are expected to continue to boost demand for health workers in the coming years and decades. This is confirmed by national projections that forecast substantial employment growth in the health sector in the years ahead. In the United States, the most recent projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics forecast that the healthcare and social assistance sector is projected to not only grow more rapidly than any other sector, but it is also projected to create about 45% of all new jobs between 2022 and 2032 (BLS, 2023<sup>[3]</sup>). In Canada, the health sector is also projected to post the largest increases in employment between 2022 and 2031 (Government of Canada, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>).

The demand for social care (long-term care) workers is also projected to increase strongly, mainly due to population ageing. Recent OECD projections forecast that growth in demand for long-term care workers over the next decade across OECD countries will be much higher than the actual recorded increase over the past decade. Further efforts will be required to increase the attractiveness of the profession and recruitment and retention of workers in the long-term care sector to avoid a sharp increase in unmet needs and workforce shortages (OECD, 2023<sup>[5]</sup>).

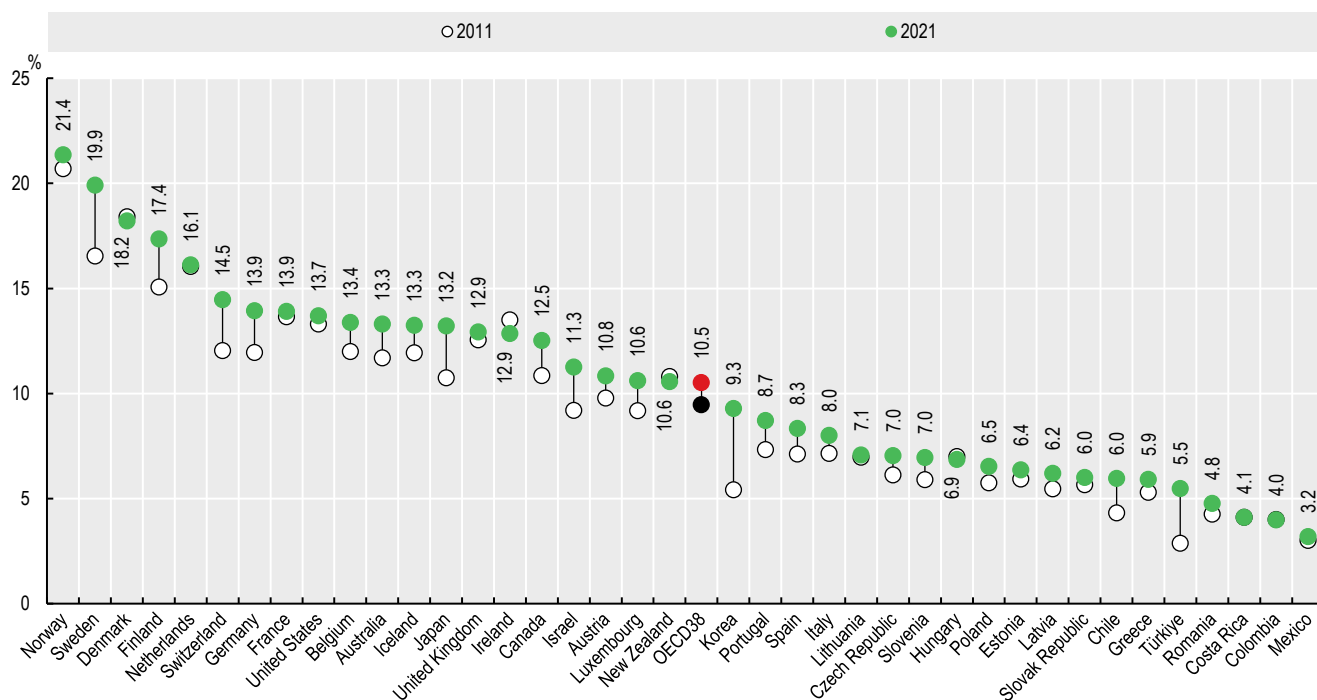
### Definition and comparability

Health and social work is one of the economic activities defined according to the major divisions of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities. Health and social work is a sub-component of the services sector, and is defined as a composite of human health activities, residential care activities (including long-term care) and social work activities without accommodation.

### References

- BLS (2023), *Occupational Employment Projections, 2022-32*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/>. [3]
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- OECD (2023), *Beyond Applause? Improving Working Conditions in Long-Term Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/27d33ab3-en>. [5]
- OECD (2023), *OECD Employment Outlook 2023: Artificial Intelligence and the Labour Market*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/08785bba-en>. [2]
- OECD (2023), *Ready for the Next Crisis? Investing in Health System Resilience*, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1e53cf80-en>. [1]

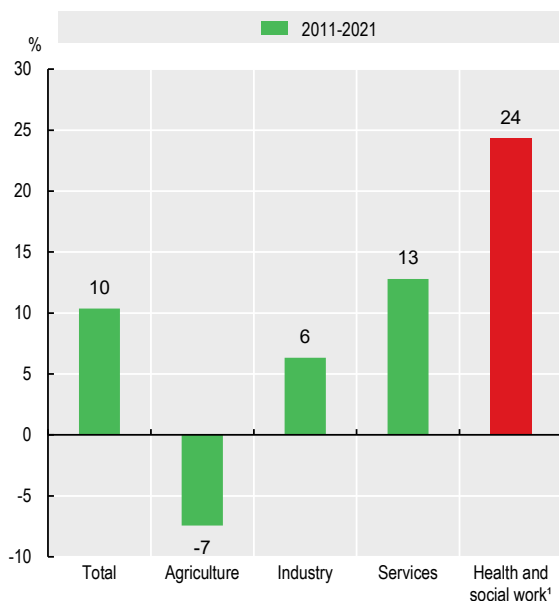
Figure 8.1. Employment in health and social work as a share of total employment, 2011 and 2021 (or nearest year)



Sources: OECD National Accounts; OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics for Türkiye.

StatLink <https://stat.link/6xwjmy>

Figure 8.2. Employment growth by sector, OECD average, 2011-21 (or nearest year)

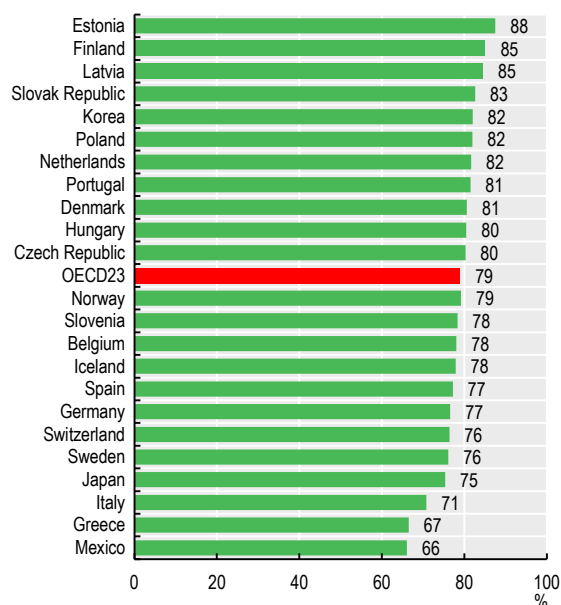


1. Classified as a sub-component of the services sector.

Source: OECD National Accounts.

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

Figure 8.3. Share of women in health and social work, 2021 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Annual Labour Force Statistics.

StatLink <https://stat.link/szu19e>



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