

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 2019, one in every ten jobs (10%) was in health or social care, up from less than 9% in 2000 (Figure 8.1). In Nordic countries and the Netherlands, more than 15% of all jobs are in health and social work. From 2000 to 2019, the share of health and social care workers increased in all countries except the Slovak Republic, where it decreased in the 2000s and has remained stable since 2010, and Sweden, where this share came down in recent years but remains among the highest. The share of health and social care workers increased particularly rapidly over the past two decades in Japan (by over 5 percentage points) and in Ireland and Luxembourg (by about 4 percentage points).

Job numbers in the health and social care sector have increased much more rapidly than in other sectors since 2000. On average across OECD countries, employment in health and social work increased by 49% between 2000 and 2019, outpacing even the growth in the service sector, while employment in agriculture and industry continued to decline during that period (Figure 8.2).

At the same time, the sector has also been more robust to cyclical downturns than other sectors. While total employment declined during the global economic crisis in 2008-09, employment in the health and social care sector continued to grow in many OECD countries. Not surprisingly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many jobs with the strongest increase in online job postings were in the health care sector. For example, online job postings for carers for aged and disabled people increased by 35% in Australia; for licensed practical nurses by 39% in Canada; for community health workers by 91% in the United States; and for health professionals by 25% in the United Kingdom (OECD, 2021[1]).

Nurses make up the most numerous category of health and social care workers in many OECD countries, accounting for approximately 20-25% of all workers. Personal care workers (including health care 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. By comparison, doctors account for a much lower share.

In most OECD countries, over 75% of workers in the health and social care sector are women. While women tend to be

concentrated more in lower-skilled and lower-paid occupations, nearly half of all doctors on average across OECD countries in 2019 were female (see indicator “Doctors by age, sex and category”).

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, investment in health and social care jobs (the “care economy”) can be expected to provide a stimulus to the job recovery. Such jobs can be offered across all regions and for a wide variety of skill sets. Megatrends such as population ageing and technological change are expected to continue to play a key role in boosting the demand for workers in health and social care.

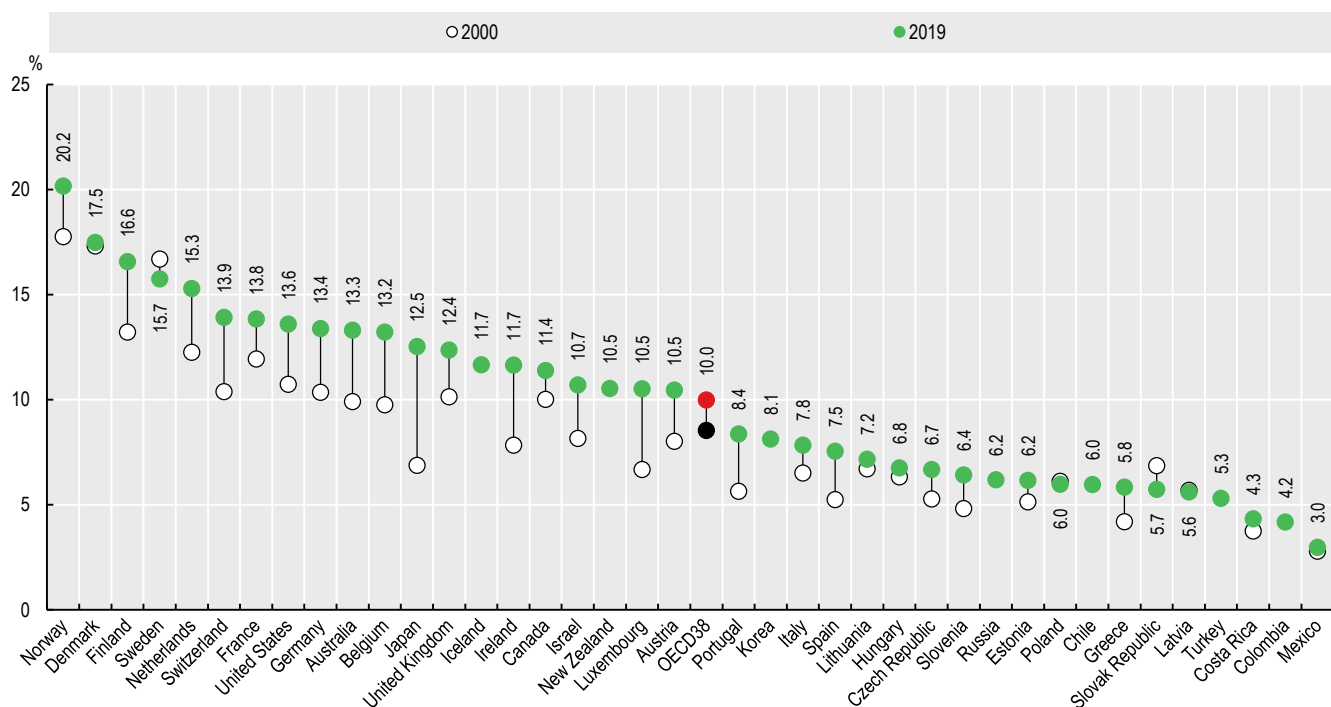
Most national projections foresee substantial employment growth in the health and social care sector in the coming years. In the United States, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that jobs in the sector would be the fastest growing between 2020 and 2030, with five out of the ten fastest growing occupations being in that sector (BLS, 2021[2]). In Australia, jobs in health and social work are also expected to increase rapidly between 2020 and 2025, with projected increases of 15% for health professionals and of 25% for carers for aged and disabled people over this five-year period (Australian Government, 2021[3]). In Canada, projections carried out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic foresaw an increase of 8% across all health occupations between 2020 and 2028, including an increase of over 10% in registered nurses (Government of Canada, 2019[4]).

New technologies, particularly information technology and artificial intelligence, can also be expected to generate demand for new jobs and new skills in the health and social care sector, while reducing the importance of some tasks (OECD, 2019[5]).

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.

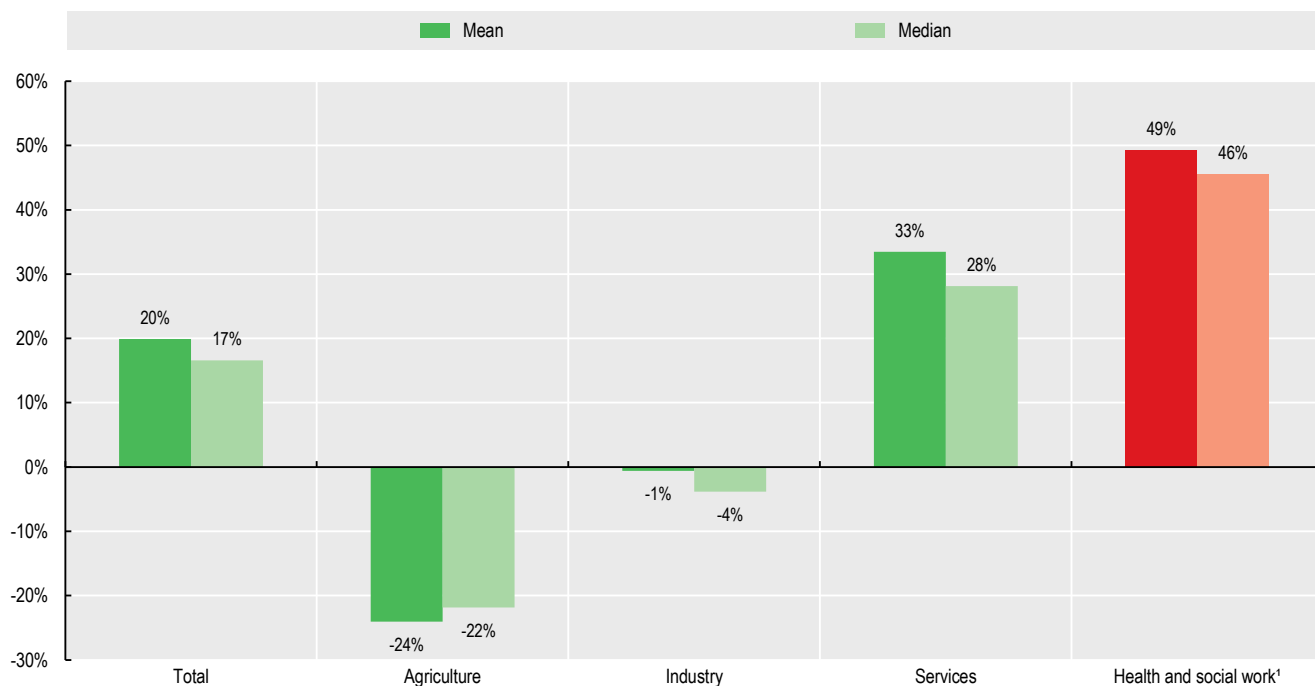
Figure 8.1. Employment in health and social work as a share of total employment, 2000 and 2019 (or nearest year)



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

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

Figure 8.2. Employment growth by sector, OECD average, 2000-19 (or nearest year)



1. Health and social work is classified as a sub-component of the services sector.

Source: OECD National Accounts.

StatLink <https://stat.link/ycib1d>



From:
Health at a Glance 2021
OECD Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/ae3016b9-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2021), “Health and social care workforce”, in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/8218c4fe-en>

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