

5. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How many students are in each classroom?

- The average primary school class in OECD countries has 21 students, but classes are usually larger in partner countries.
- The number of students per class increases by two students between primary and lower secondary education, on average in OECD countries.
- The average class size at primary level decreased between 2000 and 2012, 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 countries had 21 pupils in 2012, ranging from fewer than 16 pupils in Latvia and Luxembourg to more than 30 in Chile. China also had more than 30 pupils per class. The number of students per class tends to increase between primary and lower secondary education. In lower secondary education, the average class in OECD countries has nearly 24 students. Class size for all countries with available data range from 20 students or less in Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, to around 33 students per class in Japan, Korea and Indonesia, and almost 52 students in China.

The student-teacher ratio decreases in all countries with available data between the primary and lower secondary levels in all but four OECD countries: Chile, Iceland, Mexico and Norway.

Average class size generally does not differ between public and private institutions by more than two students per class, among OECD and partner countries. However, there are marked differences among countries. For example, the average primary school class at a public school is larger by four or more students than that at a private school in Brazil, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Poland, the Russian Federation, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. In contrast, the average private school class exceeds the average public school class by four or more students in Spain.

Class size varies significantly within countries. The biggest classes in primary education are in Chile and China, with 30 or more students per classroom, whereas in Estonia,

Latvia and Luxembourg classes have less than 17 students on average.

Trends

From 2000 to 2012, the average class size in countries with available data for both years decreased 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. However, class size has grown in some countries that had relatively small classes in 2000, most notably Denmark and Iceland.

Definitions

Class size is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of classes. In order to ensure comparability among countries, special-needs programmes are excluded. Data refer to the 2011-12 school year, and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2012.

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 2014* (Indicator D2).

Areas covered include:

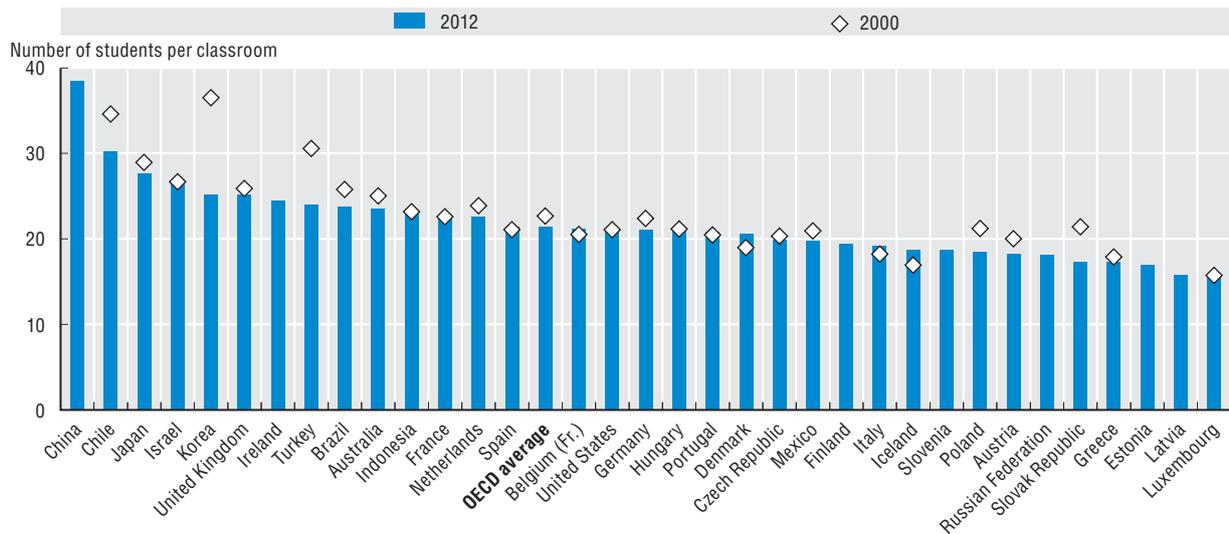
- Average class size, by type of institution (public, government-dependent private and independent private) and by level of education (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary).
- Ratio of students to teaching staff.
- Teaching staff and non-teaching staff (teachers' aides) employed in educational institutions.

Further reading from OECD

OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>.

Figure 5.3. Average class size in primary education (2000, 2012)

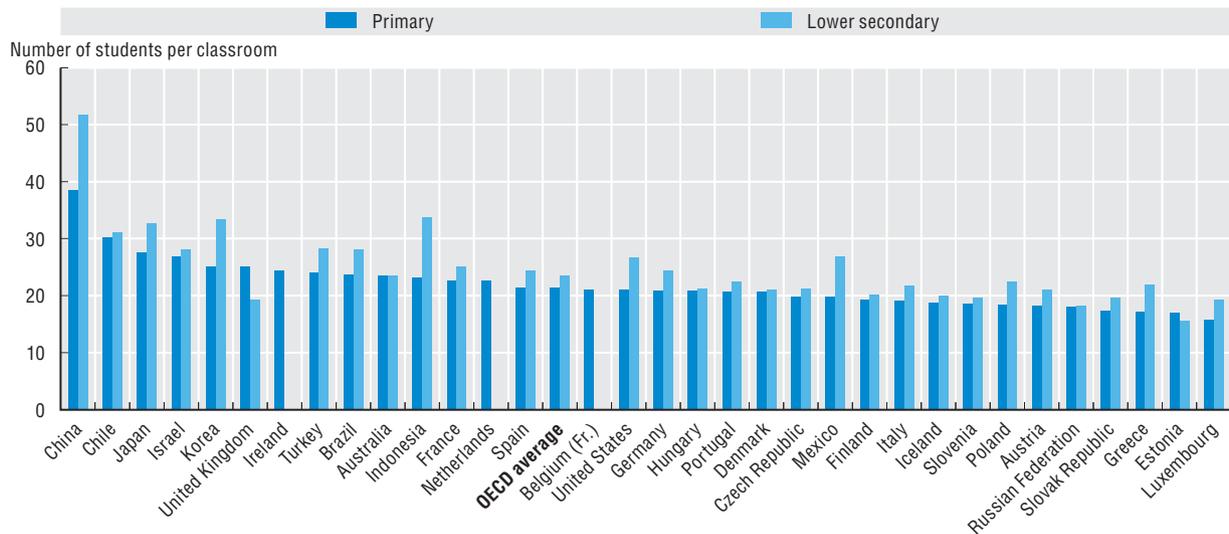
This figure shows the number of students on average in primary classes.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart D2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933119758>.

Figure 5.4. Average class size, by level of education, 2012

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



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart D2.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933119777>.



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