

Healthcare personnel statistics - physicians

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in November 2016. Most recent data: Further Eurostat information, Main tables and Database . Planned article update: October 2017.

This article presents an overview of [European Union \(EU\)](#) statistics on [physicians](#) . It provides information on [specialist healthcare personnel](#) , as well as data pertaining to the number and ratio of graduates in this field (note that all physicians need to possess a degree in medicine).

Physicians are licensed to provide services to patients as consumers of healthcare, including: giving advice, conducting medical examinations and making diagnoses; applying preventive medical methods; prescribing medication and treating diagnosed illnesses; giving specialised medical or surgical treatment.

Physicians are split into two broad occupational groups:

- generalist medical practitioners (which includes general practitioners (GPs));
- specialist medical practitioners, which can, in turn, be subdivided into:
 - medical specialists (doctors specialising in the diagnosis and non-surgical treatment of physical disorders and diseases);
 - surgical specialists (doctors who specialise in the use of surgical techniques to treat disorders and diseases).

This article is one of a set of statistical articles concerning [healthcare resources](#) in the EU which forms part of an online publication on [health statistics](#) .

Main statistical findings

Healthcare personnel

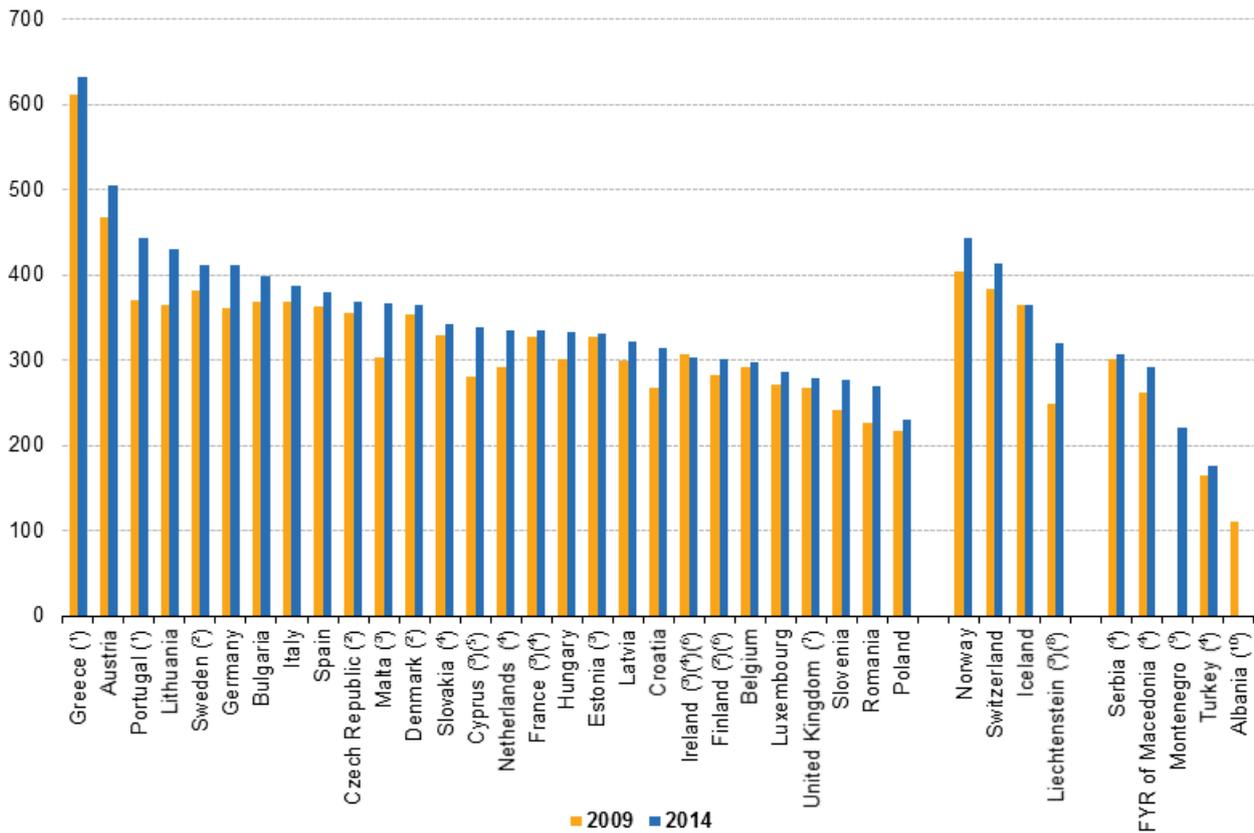
For [physicians](#) , Eurostat collects data for three concepts:

- 'practising', in other words, physicians providing services directly to patients;
- 'professionally active', in other words, 'practising' physicians plus physicians for whom their medical education is a prerequisite for the execution of their job;
- 'licensed', in other words, physicians who are registered and entitled to practise as physicians.

In this article preference is given to the concept of 'practising' physicians which is also used for the [European core health indicator](#) (ECHI) on practising physicians. For some EU Member States data are not available for this concept and therefore data are presented for one of the alternative concepts instead: footnotes indicate these exceptions in each table and figure.

There were approximately 1.8 million physicians working in the EU

In 2014, there were approximately 1.8 million practising physicians in the EU-28 (based on the same data availability as shown in Figure 1 in terms of the latest available reference period for each of the EU Member States and the different concepts used for some Member States).



(*) Licenced to practice.
 (*) 2013 instead of 2014.
 (*) Break in series.
 (*) Professionally active.
 (*) 2009: estimates.
 (*) Estimates.
 (*) 2014: estimates.
 (*) 2009: definition differs.
 (*) 2009: not available.
 (*) 2008 instead of 2009 and definition differs. 2014: not available.

Figure 1: Practising physicians, 2009 and 2014(per 100 000 inhabitants)Source: Eurostat (hlthrsprs1)

The highest overall number of practising physicians was recorded in the largest EU Member States: Germany (333 thousand), followed at some distance by Italy (236 thousand), France (206 thousand), the United Kingdom (181 thousand) and Spain (177 thousand). Together, these five Member States accounted for close to two thirds (64 %) of the total number of practising physicians in the EU, above their combined 63 % share of the EU’s population. The next highest number of practising physicians was in Poland, 88 thousand, equivalent to just under 5 % of the EU total.

Greece had the highest number of physicians per 100 000 inhabitants

On the basis of a comparison in relation to population numbers, Greece (licensed to practice) recorded the highest number of physicians among the EU Member States, at 632 per 100 000 inhabitants in 2014. This was considerably higher than in any of the other EU Member States, as Austria (505) and Portugal (443 physicians licensed to practise) had the next highest ratios of physicians to inhabitants and along with Lithuania (431) were the only other Member States to record over 430 physicians per 100 000 inhabitants. By contrast, there were fewer than 270 practising physicians per 100 000 inhabitants in Romania, and Poland, where the lowest ratio was recorded (231 physicians per 100 000 inhabitants).

	(number)								(per 100 000 inhabitants)							
	Total	Generalist medical practitioners	General paediatricians	Gynaecologists and obstetricians	Psychiatrists	Medical group of specialists	Surgical group of specialists	Other specialists not elsewhere classified	Total	Generalist medical practitioners	General paediatricians	Gynaecologists and obstetricians	Psychiatrists	Medical group of specialists	Surgical group of specialists	Other specialists not elsewhere classified
Belgium	33 353	12 560	1 429	1 405	1 907	9 309	6 339	.	297.0	112.0	13.0	13.0	17.0	83.0	56.0	.
Bulgaria	28 801	4 747	1 459	1 449	568	9 640	6 822	4 116	398.7	66.0	20.0	20.0	8.0	133.0	94.0	57.0
Czech Republic (*)	38 776	7 371	1 296	2 662	1 533	16 002	9 397	.	368.8	70.0	12.0	25.0	15.0	152.0	89.0	.
Denmark (*)	20 519	4 024	394	572	989	3 626	3 238	495	365.4	72.0	7.0	10.0	18.0	65.0	58.0	9.0
Germany	332 695	139 616	10 069	16 809	17 813	77 498	69 027	1 863	410.8	172.0	12.0	21.0	22.0	96.0	85.0	2.0
Estonia	4 364	1 058	162	290	236	1 452	1 024	142	332.0	80.0	12.0	22.0	18.0	110.0	78.0	11.0
Ireland	12 982	7 626	427	346	843	2 754	1 970	36	287.2	165.0	9.0	7.0	18.0	60.0	43.0	1.0
Greece	68 807	5 322	3 963	3 337	2 340	26 499	14 833	548	631.7	49.0	36.0	31.0	21.0	243.0	136.0	5.0
Spain	176 665	34 880	12 070	5 595	4 891	44 938	45 104	608	380.1	75.0	26.0	12.0	11.0	97.0	97.0	1.0
France	206 159	102 485	7 861	8 127	15 048	54 833	30 570	2 056	311.6	155.0	12.0	12.0	23.0	83.0	46.0	3.0
Croatia	13 302	3 502	798	762	640	4 838	2 708	54	314.0	83.0	19.0	18.0	15.0	114.0	64.0	1.0
Italy	235 889	53 463	17 495	11 857	10 956	84 657	57 461	0	388.0	88.0	29.0	20.0	18.0	139.0	95.0	0.0
Cyprus	2 880	680	238	161	88	953	760	0	337.8	80.0	28.0	19.0	10.0	112.0	89.0	0.0
Latvia	6 412	1 394	256	423	311	1 883	1 410	735	321.6	70.0	13.0	21.0	16.0	94.0	71.0	37.0
Lithuania	12 631	2 769	778	723	646	4 494	3 023	198	430.7	94.0	27.0	25.0	22.0	153.0	103.0	7.0
Luxembourg	1 589	489	84	89	124	464	338	1	285.6	88.0	15.0	16.0	22.0	83.0	61.0	0.0
Hungary	32 791	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	332.3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Malta	1 566	346	68	57	35	316	322	.	366.4	81.0	16.0	13.0	8.0	74.0	75.0	.
Netherlands	56 535	24 934	1 628	1 490	3 768	14 311	7 004	3 400	335.2	148.0	10.0	9.0	22.0	85.0	42.0	20.0
Austria	43 126	14 130	1 440	1 812	1 421	9 667	8 495	67	504.9	165.0	17.0	21.0	17.0	113.0	99.0	1.0
Poland	87 687	13 744	5 143	4 982	3 356	39 474	20 733	255	230.7	36.0	14.0	13.0	9.0	104.0	55.0	1.0
Portugal	46 036	23 748	1 914	1 699	1 213	11 150	7 042	707	442.6	228.0	18.0	16.0	12.0	107.0	68.0	7.0
Romania	53 720	15 740	2 501	2 454	2 081	20 152	10 309	483	269.8	79.0	13.0	12.0	10.0	101.0	52.0	2.0
Slovenia	5 712	1 284	574	340	251	1 922	1 160	31	277.0	62.0	28.0	16.0	12.0	93.0	56.0	2.0
Slovakia	18 574	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	342.8	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Finland (*)	16 410	7 167	720	948	1 496	4 000	3 377	235	301.7	131.0	13.0	17.0	27.0	73.0	62.0	4.0
Sweden (*)	39 524	6 195	1 006	1 364	2 189	8 995	6 372	1 225	411.7	65.0	10.0	14.0	23.0	94.0	66.0	13.0
United Kingdom	180 543	51 480	10 047	7 748	12 143	43 666	50 987	4 730	279.4	80.0	16.0	12.0	19.0	68.0	79.0	7.0
Iceland	1 193	188	15	43	72	357	235	0	364.4	57.0	5.0	13.0	22.0	109.0	72.0	0.0
Liechtenstein	119	33	6	8	10	37	25	0	319.5	89.0	16.0	21.0	27.0	99.0	67.0	0.0
Norway	22 754	4 595	744	572	1 243	3 784	2 609	251	442.9	89.0	14.0	11.0	24.0	74.0	51.0	5.0
Switzerland	33 785	9 225	1 635	1 664	4 089	5 834	6 219	198	412.6	113.0	20.0	20.0	50.0	71.0	76.0	2.0
Montenegro	1 368	245	163	100	66	537	258	0	220.0	39.0	26.0	16.0	11.0	86.0	41.0	0.0
FYR of Macedonia	6 035	2 112	396	379	199	1 774	894	281	291.9	102.0	19.0	18.0	10.0	86.0	43.0	14.0
Albania (*)	3 578	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Serbia	21 900	6 440	1 911	1 274	956	6 044	3 869	1 406	307.1	90.0	27.0	18.0	13.0	85.0	54.0	20.0
Turkey	135 616	41 450	7 132	6 915	3 334	39 409	31 933	5 443	175.7	54.0	9.0	9.0	4.0	51.0	41.0	7.0

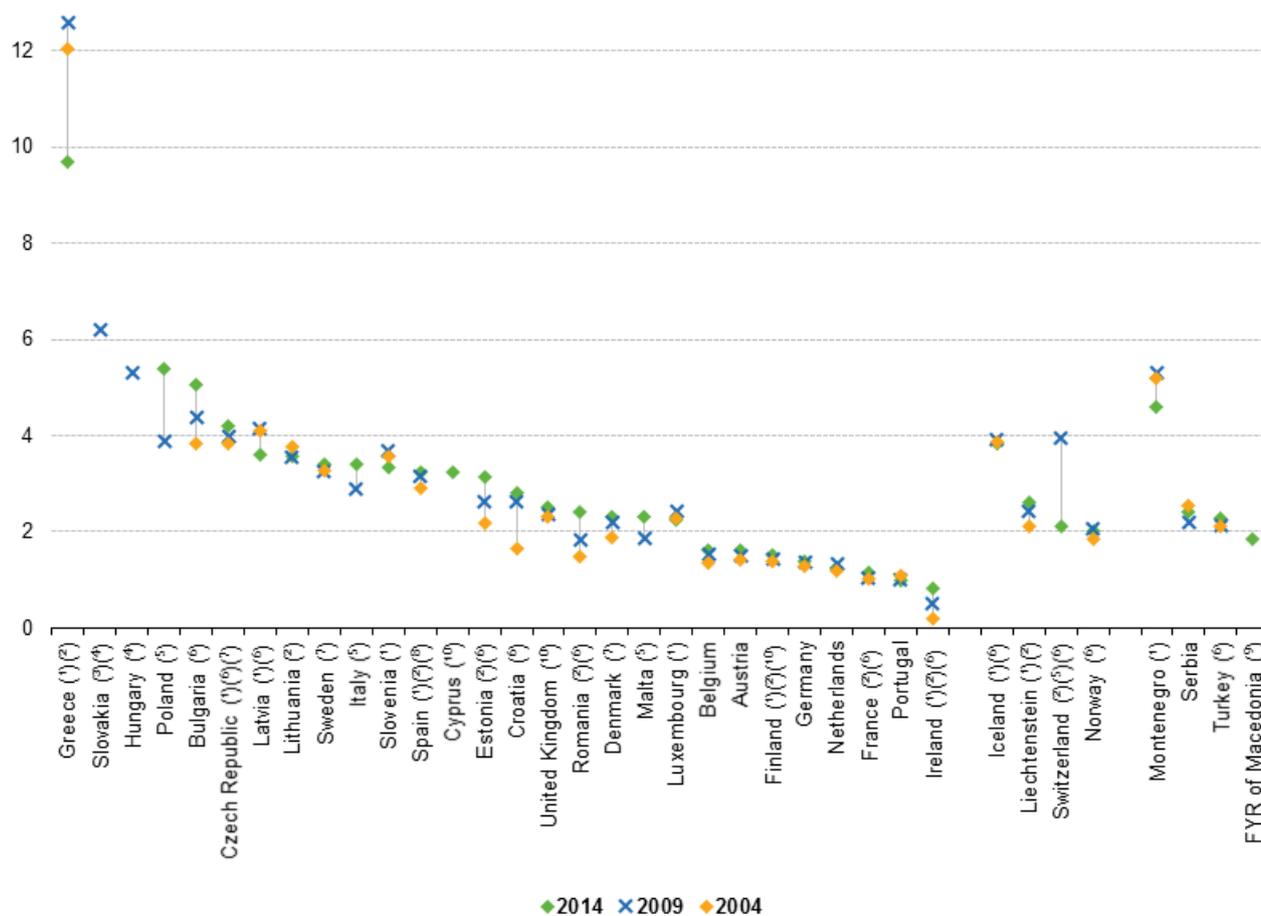
Note. Practising physicians, except the Netherlands, Slovakia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey (professionally active); Greece and Portugal (licensed).
(*) 2013.
(*) Total: 2013.
(*) 2011.

Table 1: Physicians, by speciality, 2014Source: Eurostat (hlthrsprs1) and (hlthrsspec)

General rise in the ratio of physicians per 100 000 inhabitants throughout EU between 2009 and 2014

The number of physicians per 100 000 inhabitants increased in each of the EU Member States between 2009 and 2014 (see Figure 1 for the data availability), except in Ireland which may reflect a break in the time series. Note that the increases could result from a higher absolute number of physicians or from a smaller number of inhabitants and that in Malta, Cyprus, France, Estonia and Liechtenstein there were also breaks in the series.

The largest relative increases (and only taking into consideration the countries without breaks in the series) for this ratio were recorded in Portugal, where the number of physicians or doctors licensed to practise rose from 370 per 100 000 inhabitants to 443 per 100 000 inhabitants (+ 19.7 %), while Romania and Lithuania recorded the next highest increases. By contrast, there were increases of just 1.5 % of practicing physicians per 100 000 inhabitants in Belgium over the same period.



(*) 2005 instead of 2004.
 (*) 2009-14: break in series.
 (*) 2007 instead of 2009.
 (*) 2004 and 2014: not available.
 (*) 2004: not available.
 (*) 2004-09: break in series.
 (*) 2013 instead of 2014.
 (*) Specialists: definition differs.
 (*) 2004 and 2009: not available.
 (*) 2014: estimates.

Figure 2: Physicians — ratio of specialists to generalists, 2004, 2009 and 2014 Source: Eurostat (hlthrsspec)

Spain was the only EU Member State to report having more surgical specialists than general medical practitioners or medical specialists

The three most common types of physicians across the EU Member States (see Table 1 for data availability; no data available for Hungary or Slovakia) were generalist medical practitioners, the medical group of specialists and the surgical group of specialists.

Generalist medical practitioners do not limit their practice to certain disease categories or methods of treatment, and may assume responsibility for the provision of continuing and comprehensive medical care to individuals, families and communities.

The medical group of specialists includes doctors who specialise in the diagnosis and non-surgical treatment of physical disorders and diseases, for example specialists in internal medicine, cardiology, oncology and radiology.

The surgical group of specialists includes doctors who specialise in the use of surgical techniques to treat disorders and diseases, for example, specialists in general surgery, neurological surgery, plastic surgery, anaes-

thesiology as well as accident and emergency medicine.

In 12 of the EU Member States, including Germany, France and the United Kingdom, the most common specialisation in 2014 was generalist medical practitioners. By contrast, there were more medical specialists in 13 of the Member States (including Italy), leaving Spain as the only Member State to record a higher number of surgical specialists (just slightly higher than the medical specialists). In 2014, the highest ratios of generalist medical practitioners to population size — in excess of 200 per 100 000 inhabitants — were recorded in Portugal (licensed to practice). The highest ratios for both medical and surgical specialists were found in Greece (243 and 136 licensed to practice physicians per 100 000 inhabitants, respectively) and Lithuania (153 and 103 per 100 000 inhabitants, respectively).

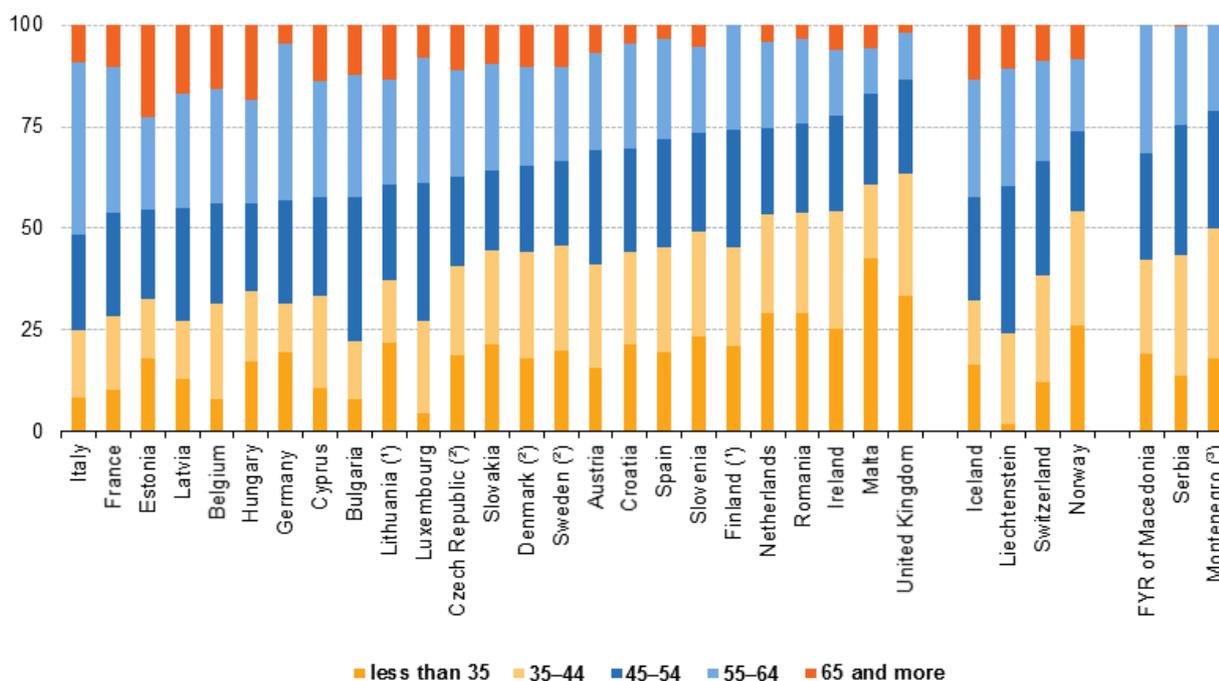
A widespread — but not uniform — increase in the ratio of specialist to generalists Apart from Ireland and Portugal (licensed to practice) in all of the EU Member States there were more specialist physicians than generalists in 2014. Over time there has been a widespread — but not uniform — movement towards more specialists relative to the number of generalists. Figure 2 shows the ratio of specialists to generalists for 2004, 2009 and 2014: see the footnotes for precise information concerning the years covered for each Member State or non-member country.

In a number of EU Member States the increase in the number of specialists relative to the number of generalists between these years is clear, for example in Croatia, Bulgaria and Estonia (note that all had at least one break in series during the period studied). 13 out of 22 Member States where data was available for the three years also followed this pattern although the development was smaller in scale. The remaining 8 Member States that had data for all three years reported downward or stable developments. Note that only 10 of the countries listed above did not present breaks in the series. The three EU Member States for which data are only available for two of the three years — Poland, Italy and Malta — all recorded an increase in the ratio of specialists to generalists between 2009 and 2014.

Italy had the highest share of physicians aged 55 or over

There has been a rapid ageing of the healthcare workforce in the EU as the baby-boom generation started to reach retirement age. This is reflected in the share of physicians who were aged 55 or over, which rose from 24 % in 2004 to 37 % in 2014¹. The share of physicians aged 55 or over in the total number of physicians was within the range of 40–46 % in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Belgium, Latvia, Estonia and France, peaking at 52 % in Italy. By contrast, the relative importance of this age group was less than one fifth in Malta (17 %) and the United Kingdom (13 %).

¹These percentages were estimated based on data for 18 EU Member States with data available for 2004 (or 2003) and 2014 (or 2013). These 18 EU Member States in 2014 represented 85 % of all EU physicians, including the five largest ones.



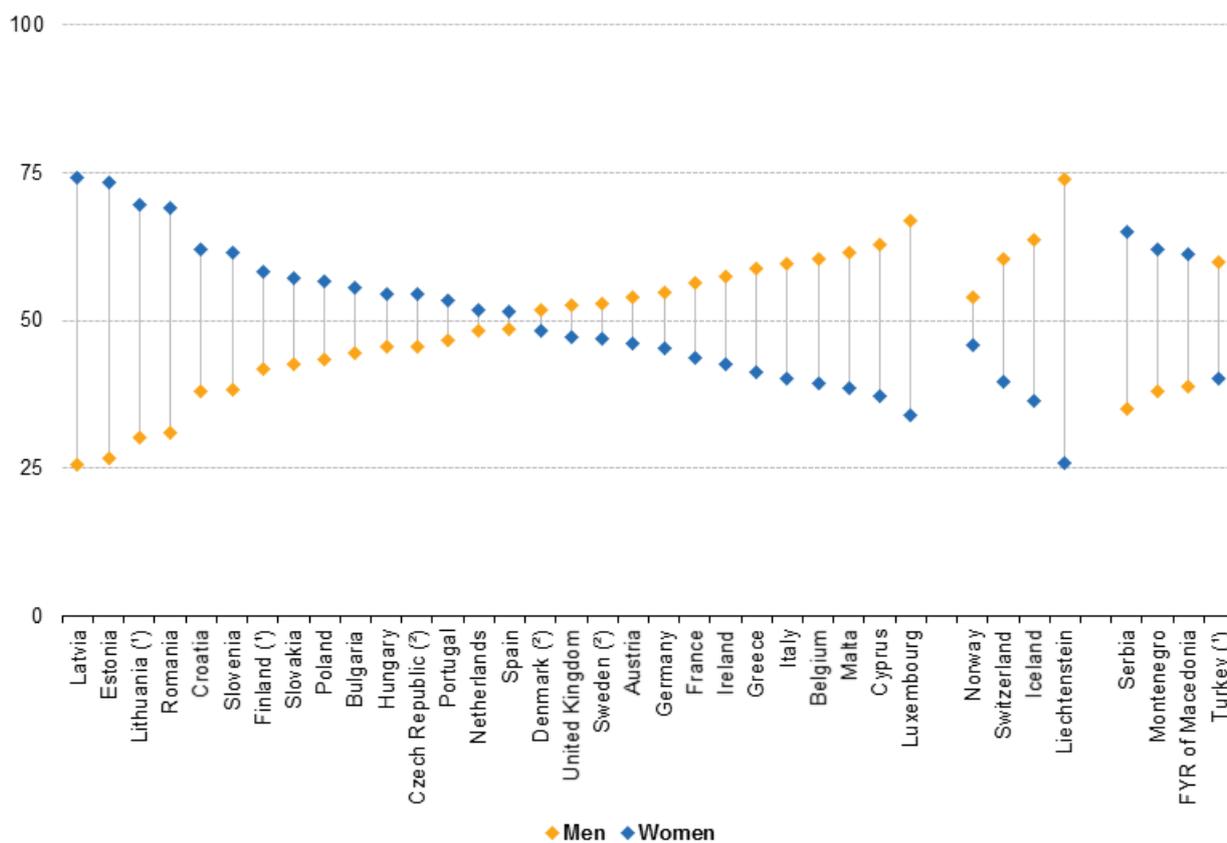
Note: Greece, Poland and Portugal: not available. The figure is ranked on the share of those aged 55 or more in the total number of physicians.
 (*) Estimates.
 (*) 2013.
 (*) 55 to 64 years of age: definition differs.

Figure 3: Physicians, by age, 2014(%)Source: Eurostat (hlthrsphys)

Almost three quarters of the total number of physicians in Estonia and Latvia were women

An additional analysis is presented in Figure 4, which shows that there were considerable differences between EU Member States with respect to the share of physicians accounted for by each of the sexes. Between 2004 and 2014 the proportion of female physicians in the total number of physicians generally rose from 41 % to 48 % . In 2014, there were 13 EU Member States where the share of male physicians was higher (than that for women), while the 15 remaining Member States reported a higher share of female physicians.

In 2014, the highest female shares (60 % or more of the total number of physicians) were recorded in the Baltic Member States, Romania, Croatia and Slovenia, peaking in Estonia and Latvia, where women accounted for almost three quarters of the total number of physicians. By contrast, the highest share of male physicians (67 %) was recorded in Luxembourg; relatively high shares for men were also recorded in Cyprus (63 %), Malta and Belgium (both 61 %), Italy (60 %), Greece (59 %) and Ireland (57 %).



(*) Estimates.

(*) 2013.

Figure 4: Physicians, by sex, 2014(%)Source: Eurostat (hlthrsphys)

Hospitals employed more than half of the total number of physicians in the majority of the EU Member States

Table 2 provides further information in relation to the number of medical doctors who were employed in hospitals; note that these data refer to the number of physicians directly employed by a hospital and physicians with service contracts (for example, self-employed physicians employed to treat hospital patients).

Medical doctors employed in hospitals accounted for just over four fifths (82 %) of the total number of physicians in France and 74 % in Denmark (2013 data). By contrast, medical doctors employed in hospitals accounted for around one quarter of the total number of physicians in Cyprus (28 %) and Belgium (23 %; 2013 data); elsewhere the share ranged from 36 % to 66 %.

In 2014, the highest absolute number of medical doctors employed in hospitals was recorded in Germany (179 thousand), ahead of France (170 thousand). Italy (128 thousand) and Spain (103 thousand) were the only other EU Member States (for which data are available, note there are no data for the United Kingdom) to record in excess of 45 thousand medical doctors employed in hospitals.

Although only a partial set of information is available for 20 of the EU Member States (see Table 2 for data availability), this shows that with the exception of Estonia, the number of medical doctors employed in hospitals systematically increased between 2004 and 2014 for these Member States. In absolute terms, the highest increases in doctor numbers were recorded in Germany (an additional 41 thousand doctors), Spain (21 thousand more) and France (19 thousand more with a break in series). In relative terms, the fastest growth rates were recorded in Cyprus, the Netherlands and Lithuania, where the number of medical doctors employed in hospitals increased by at least 30 % over the period under consideration, although in Cyprus and the Netherlands there was a break in series.

The availability of data converted into full-time equivalent units indicates that physicians working in hospitals generally worked close to full-time: among the 13 Member States with data available for 2014 (or another recent year), the ratio between the data in head counts and that in full-time equivalents was 82 % or higher except in France where it was notably lower at 73 %. As such, despite Germany having only 5 % more medical doctors employed in hospitals than France when measured as a head count, after converting to full-time equivalents the number in Germany was around 28 % higher.

A comparison between 2004 and 2014 for the number of medical doctors employed in hospitals expressed in full-time equivalents confirmed the pattern of an increase already observed for the data based on head counts, although in this case the comparison is limited to nine EU Member States (for which there was no break in series), the increases ranged from 6.0 % in Belgium (2004–13) to 28.7 % in Denmark.

The final three columns in Table 2 show the number of medical doctors employed in hospitals in full-time equivalents calculated as a ratio per 100 000 inhabitants. In general, this number ranged between 100 and 250 medical doctors per 100 000 inhabitants in 2014 (see Table 2 for data availability), with Belgium and Cyprus recording a value less than the lower limit of this range and Austria, Denmark and Lithuania recording values above this range, peaking in Lithuania (335 full-time equivalent medical doctors employed in hospitals per 100 000 inhabitants).

	Head count (number)			Full-time equivalents (number)			Full-time equivalents (per 100 000 inhabitants)		
	2004	2009	2014	2004	2009	2014	2004	2009	2014
Belgium (*)	7 263	7 600	7 732	5 970	6 090	6 326	57.3	56.4	56.6
Bulgaria	12 425	13 963	16 103	.	.	.	.	.	.
Czech Republic (*)	20 162	21 242	23 156	17 931	19 480	21 104	175.2	185.8	200.5
Denmark (*)	11 795	13 866	15 245	11 751	13 886	15 120	217.4	251.4	269.3
Germany	138 000	153 000	179 000	125 000	139 000	159 000	151.5	169.7	196.3
Estonia (*)	2 861	2 946	2 813	2 654	2 712	2 504	197.5	202.4	190.4
Ireland	6 013	6 424	7 158	5 281	6 018	6 770	129.7	135.0	146.6
Greece	24 728	27 386	24 577	.	.	.	.	.	.
Spain (*)	82 628	101 394	103 344	.	.	.	.	.	.
France (*)	150 303	160 374	169 739	96 401	108 088	123 876	154.2	167.6	187.3
Croatia	.	6 913	7 850	.	.	.	.	.	.
Italy (*)	121 558	129 074	127 686	.	.	.	.	.	.
Cyprus (*)	540	613	811	540	613	811	73.0	75.9	95.1
Latvia	.	.	3 651	.	.	.	.	.	.
Lithuania	6 324	7 510	8 321	8 437	9 341	9 818	245.6	279.7	334.8
Luxembourg	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Hungary (*)	14 797	14 724	19 265	13 631	12 926	16 971	135.3	129.0	172.0
Malta	.	636	1 022	.	615	935	.	148.6	218.8
Netherlands (*)	17 126	21 541	24 367	15 472	19 012	23 052	95.0	115.0	136.7
Austria	19 009	21 758	24 101	18 422	20 450	21 757	225.4	244.5	254.7
Poland	.	42 963	41 893	.	.	.	.	.	.
Portugal	20 844	21 652	21 893	.	.	.	.	.	.
Romania (*)	20 505	22 675	26 864	.	22 467	26 368	.	104.6	132.4
Slovenia	2 634	2 822	3 221	.	.	.	.	.	.
Slovakia (*)	.	.	.	7 485	8 219	8 936	138.9	151.7	164.9
Finland (*)	7 285	7 876	8 355	6 935	8 096	8 059	132.7	151.6	147.6
Sweden	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
United Kingdom	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Iceland	.	748	824	.	556	560	.	174.6	171.1
Liechtenstein	7	13	18	7	9	13	19.3	25.4	35.3
Norway (*)	9 669	11 577	12 269	9 429	11 327	11 909	205.3	234.6	231.8
Switzerland (*)	16 188	19 960	23 570	14 230	17 437	19 776	192.6	225.2	241.5
Montenegro (*)	620	690	752	.	.	.	.	.	.
FYR of Macedonia	.	.	2 088	.	.	.	.	.	.
Serbia	9 974	10 890	11 525	9 865	10 738	11 324	132.2	146.7	158.8
Turkey	76 264	95 652	106 648	.	.	.	.	.	.

(*) 2013 instead of 2014.

(*) 2005 instead of 2004.

(*) 2009-14: break in series.

(*) 2006 instead of 2004.

(*) 2009-14 head count: break in series.

(*) 2004-09: break in series.

(*) 2004-09 head count: break in series.

(*) 2004-09 full time equivalents: break in series.

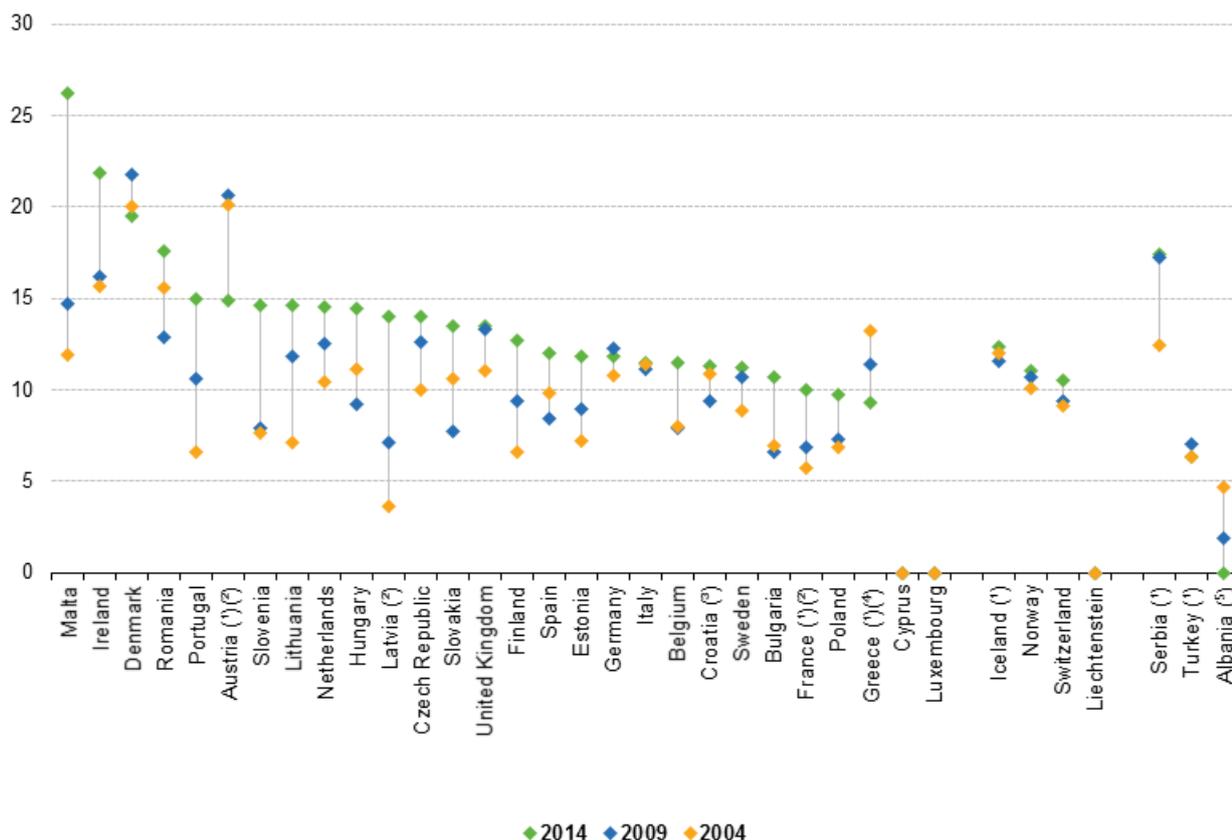
Table 2: Medical doctors employed in hospitals, 2004, 2009 and 2014 Source: Eurostat (hlthrsprshp1)

Health graduates

Some EU Member States face concerns over a lack of supply in relation to future numbers of physicians available to work in their healthcare workforces and this has led some to promote measures that are designed to encourage more students to follow medical degrees.

Figure 5 provides information on the number of medical doctors graduating per 100 000 inhabitants. In 2014, there were 26.2 medical graduates per 100 000 inhabitants in Malta, 21.9 in Ireland, 19.5 in Denmark and 17.6 in Romania; most of the remaining Member States for which data are available recorded ratios of 10.0–15.0 graduates per 100 000 inhabitants, although Poland and Greece (2013 data) had ratios under 10.0, while there were no medical students graduating in Cyprus or Luxembourg.

A comparison between 2004 and 2014 shows that the number of graduates of medical doctors per 100 000 inhabitants rose in most of the EU Member States; note that in some Member States this may have reflected a fall in the population as opposed to an increase in the number of graduates. The biggest increases were recorded in Malta, Latvia (note there is a break in series), Portugal, Lithuania and Slovenia.



(*) 2013 instead of 2014.

(*) 2004-09: break in the series.

(*) 2012 data instead of 2014.

(*) 2005 data instead of 2004.

(*) 2008 data instead of 2009 and 2014 not available.

Figure 5: Graduates — medical doctors, 2004, 2009, 2014 (per 100 000 inhabitants) Source: Eurostat (hlthsrgrd)

Data sources and availability

Key concepts

Practising physicians provide services directly to patients. They include people who have completed studies in medicine at university level and who are licensed to practice, be they salaried or self-employed, irrespective of the place of service provision. Unemployed physicians, retired physicians and students who have yet to graduate are excluded, as are physicians working in administration, research and other posts that exclude direct contact with patients.

Employment data cover the number of health care staff (head counts) and the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) persons directly employed in hospitals (both general and specialised hospitals); the self-employed

working in hospitals are also included, for example, those working with service contracts as non-employed health professionals.

Data on medical graduates for any given year cover the number of students who have graduated in medicine from medical faculties or similar institutions. The data exclude those who have graduated in pharmacy, dentistry/stomatology, or public health and epidemiology, as well as individuals who have completed post-graduate studies or training in medicine.

Healthcare resources

Statistics on healthcare resources (such as personnel and medical equipment) are documented in this [background article](#) which provides information on the scope of the data, its legal basis, the methodology employed, as well as related concepts and definitions.

Common definitions have been agreed between [Eurostat](#), the [OECD](#) and the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) with respect to the employment of various health care professionals. Three main concepts are used to present this data; Eurostat gives preference to the concept of 'practising' physicians:

- 'practising', in other words, health care professionals providing services directly to patients;
- 'professionally active', in other words, 'practising' professionals plus health care professionals for whom their medical education is a prerequisite for the execution of their job;
- 'licensed', in other words, health care professionals who are registered and entitled to practise as health care professionals.

Data on physicians are classified according to the [International Standard Classification of Occupations](#) (ISCO); they are defined under ISCO 08 as code 221:

- 221 Medical doctor;
 - 2211 Generalist medical practitioner;
 - 2212 Specialist medical practitioner.

For country specific notes, please refer to these background information documents:

- [physicians](#) ;
- [physicians by speciality](#) ;
- [health personnel employed in hospitals](#) ;
- [health graduates](#) .

Note on tables: the symbol ':' is used to show where data are not available.

Context

An increasing number of health professionals seek jobs in another EU Member State: aside from the potential benefits for the individuals concerned, their movement can help rectify labour market imbalances between countries. [Directive 2005/36/EC](#) on the recognition of professional qualifications provides a Europe-wide legal framework enabling Member States to recognise each other's qualifications. A range of health professionals — including doctors — enjoy automatic recognition, in other words, if they are a certified practitioner in their home country then they are automatically entitled to practice anywhere else in the EU. The directive defines basic medical training as comprising a total of at least six years of university study or 5 500 hours of theoretical and practical training.

In the coming decades, population ageing will be a major challenge for the EU's health sector. The demand for

healthcare will increase dramatically as a result of an ageing population and at the same time the proportion of the people in work will likely decline. As a result, there could be staff shortages in certain medical specialisations or geographic areas. In 2012, about one third of all doctors in the EU were aged 55 or over. According to the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, more than 60 thousand doctors (or 3.2 % of the workforce) are expected to be leaving the profession each year by 2020.

An [action plan for the EU health workforce](#) seeks to help EU Member States tackle this challenge, by: improving workforce planning and forecasting; anticipating future skills' needs; improving the recruitment and retention of health professionals; mitigating the negative effects of migration on health systems. The plan is part of the broader strategy ' [Towards a job-rich recovery](#) ' (COM(2012) 173).

See also

Online publications

- [Health in the European Union – facts and figures](#)
- [Disability statistics](#)

Healthcare human and physical resources

- [Nursing and caring professionals](#)
- [Dentists, pharmacists and physiotherapists](#)
- [Beds](#)
- [Medical technology](#)

Methodology

- [Healthcare non-expenditure](#)

General health statistics articles

- [Health statistics introduced](#)
- [Health statistics at regional level](#)
- [The EU in the world — health](#)

Further Eurostat information

Main tables

- [Health care](#) (hlthcare)

Database

- [Health care](#) (hlthcare)

Health care resources (hlthres)

Health care staff (hlthstaff)

Health personnel employed in hospital (hlthrsprshp1)

Physicians by medical speciality (hlthrsspec)

Physicians by sex and age (hlthrsphys)

Health personnel by NUTS 2 regions (hlthrsprsrgr)

Health graduates (hlthrsgrd)

Health personnel (excluding nursing and caring professionals) (hlthrsprs1)

Dedicated section

- [Health](#)
- [Health care](#)

Methodology / Metadata

- [Healthcare resources](#) (ESMS metadata file — hlthres)

Source data for tables and figures (MS Excel)

- [Physicians: tables and figures](#)

External links

European Union, OECD and WHO

- [European Commission — Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety — European core health indicators \(ECHI\)](#)
- [European Commission — Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety — Health workforce](#)
- [OECD — Health policies and data](#)
- [WHO Global Health Observatory \(GHO\) — Health systems](#)
- [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) — Health workforce](#)

Other external links

- [European Association of Senior Hospital Physicians](#)
- [The European Union of General Practitioners \(UEMO\)](#)
- [The Standing Committee of European Doctors \(CPME\)](#)

Notes

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Healthcare_personnel_statistics_-_physicians