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# Press release

*For immediate release*

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## **Annual membership census reveals global state of the physiotherapy profession**

**Responses to the latest World Physiotherapy annual membership census reveal the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on physiotherapy services globally.**

World Physiotherapy publishes data from its member organisations every year on a range of issues, including professional regulation, practice, education, and the number of employed physiotherapists. This data provides a comprehensive and valuable global profile of the profession.

In 2020, the annual membership census also included questions about how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted physiotherapy practice and the governance of World Physiotherapy's member organisations.

The annual membership census date was 30 June 2020.

The most recent data is based on the census completed by 111 of World Physiotherapy's 122 member organisations in mid-2020. The high response rate, 91%, demonstrates strong engagement between World Physiotherapy and its member organisations and data reliability. The data gives a global snapshot of the physiotherapy profession across the world, showing variations in the density of physiotherapists in different countries and between World Physiotherapy regions. Highlights of the 2020 census include:

- 57% of respondents said membership of their organisation had increased
- 86% of respondents said COVID-19 had impacted on physiotherapy practice in their country/territory, most of them reported disruption between March and June 2020
- 63% of respondents said physiotherapists in their country/territory reported challenges in accessing personal protective equipment during March and June 2020
- 27% of respondents said there was full direct access in their country/territory and people could refer themselves to a physiotherapist without a referral, to public health systems and to private practice
- globally, 63% of physiotherapists are women – but only 14% of countries/territories globally has fewer women than men practicing as physiotherapists
- in 75% of countries/territories, physiotherapists can provide telehealth.

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World Physiotherapy chief executive officer Jonathon Kruger said: “The responses to the surveys from our member organisations are critical to the capacity of World Physiotherapy to provide ongoing support. This year the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on our entire community. The data that has been provided is being further analysed and we will be reporting separately on this later this year”.

The profile maps, which are developed from responses to the annual membership census, allow people to see how the global profession has evolved since 2013. The maps are an interactive resource that can be printed or downloaded, and can be accessed [here](#).

Feedback from World Physiotherapy member organisations has been overwhelmingly positive:

“This year we’ve faced some great challenges, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and, here in Peru, the enactment of our professional practice law, and the creation of a professional physiotherapy college.

“We’ve had to provide so much information, statistics, and letters to different institutions and authorities.

“World Physiotherapy has given us so much advocacy support and we’re really grateful.”

#### [Peruvian Association of Physiotherapy](#)

“When we joined World Physiotherapy at the beginning of 2020 nobody could have predicted the challenges caused by COVID-19. All the more we have appreciated being a part of a global community dealing with the pandemic.

“We translated the pivotal materials shared by World Physiotherapy, we celebrated World PT Day, took part in surveys on education and telehealth. We participated in the global #PPE4PT action organised by World Physiotherapy and we welcomed the organisation’s support when advocating for telehealth in Poland.

“It was a real privilege for us to represent World Physiotherapy in the WHO-FIC Network.”

#### [Polish Chamber of Physiotherapists](#)

### **Related links**

[World Physiotherapy member organisations](#)

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### **EDITOR’S NOTES**

#### **About physiotherapy**

Physiotherapists are experts in developing and maintaining people’s ability to move and function throughout their lives. With an advanced understanding of how the body moves and what keeps it from moving well, they promote wellness, mobility and independence. They treat and prevent many problems caused by pain, illness, disability and disease, sport and work related injuries, ageing and inactivity.

Physiotherapists are educated over several years, giving them a full knowledge of the body’s systems and the skills to treat a wide range of problems. This education is usually university-based, at a level that allows physiotherapists to practise independently. Continuing education

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ensures that they keep up to date with the latest advances in research and practice. Many physiotherapists are engaged in research themselves.

**About World Physiotherapy**

World Physiotherapy is the profession's global body representing over 660,000 physiotherapists from member organisations in 125 countries. More information: [www.world.physio](http://www.world.physio)