World Physiotherapy
Africa region

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP CENSUS 2020
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Physiotherapy regions and membership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telehealth</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct access</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global highlights</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to survey</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BACKGROUND

World Physiotherapy collects data and information from its member organisations.

Since 2017, the data collection has taken place on an annual basis, providing comparisons at a national, regional and global level. World Physiotherapy and its member organisations use this data to influence policy decisions around health, health service delivery, human resource planning, and education—and to show variations in the density of physiotherapists in different parts of the world and across World Physiotherapy regions.

In 2020, 122 World Physiotherapy member organisations were sent an online survey, which included questions about:

- number of
  - individual members for the World Physiotherapy member organisation
  - practising physiotherapists
  - entry level and physiotherapy programmes
- professional name used
- special interest groups
- publications and conferences
- how they communicate with their membership
- professional practice
- telehealth
- direct access
- sources of funding
- regulation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a set of 13 questions about this issue was included in the survey to gain insights into how the pandemic had impacted physiotherapy practice and World Physiotherapy member organisations’ governance. These questions included:

- impact of COVID-19 pandemic on World Physiotherapy member organisations’ operations (budgeting, governance or service providing)
- impact of COVID-19 pandemic on physiotherapy practice at a national level
- actions undertaken by World Physiotherapy to support their membership (for example, advocacy, training, access to personal protective equipment (PPE))

At the end of the data-gathering period, 111 responses were received from a possible 122 member organisations. The high response rate, 91%, was greater than the previous year, 87.5%, and demonstrates strong engagement between World Physiotherapy and its member organisations, even in such a complex year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The census date was 30 June 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Physiotherapy region</th>
<th>Member organisations within the region</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Number of physiotherapists in each region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>21,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Western Pacific</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>383,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>807,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America Caribbean</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>256,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>432,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>1,901,585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY REGIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

World Physiotherapy has five regions, each composed of member organisations in that geographical area. Further information about World Physiotherapy regions can be found at https://world.physio/regions.

% OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN EACH REGION

- Africa 1%
- Asia Western Pacific 19%
- South America 23%
- North America Caribbean 13%
- Europe 44%

WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY MEMBERSHIP AND PRACTISING PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

In 2020, World Physiotherapy represented, through its member organisations, 658,433 physiotherapists who are members of their national physiotherapy association. This is an increase of 154,951 physiotherapists compared with 2019. In 2020, the global number of physiotherapists was 1,901,585 and 35% of these physiotherapists were a member of a World Physiotherapy member organisation (2019: 29%).

35 member organisations have seen a decline in their membership numbers. Most of these member organisations have 1,000 or less members. Of World Physiotherapy’s seven largest member organisations, only one has seen a decline in its membership. This suggests physiotherapists continue to see the value of membership, despite the many challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

57 member organisations have seen an increase in their membership numbers. According to OECD reports, in 2017, life expectancy at birth was 80.7 years on average across OECD countries/territories, over 10 years higher than it was in 1970. In OECD partner countries (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa), levels are converging rapidly towards the OECD average with considerable gains in longevity.

In addition, global estimates of the need of rehabilitation based on the burden of disease in 2019 have recently been published. The Lancet, states that globally, in 2019, 2.41 billion individuals had conditions that would benefit from rehabilitation. This number has increased by 63% between 1990 and 2019.

In the context of an aging population and increased rehabilitation need, it is clear there will need to be continued growth in the physiotherapists’ workforce to reach the current unmet need of rehabilitation for the global population.
AFRICA

35% of the physiotherapy workforce in the region are members of their national physiotherapy association. This is the same as the World Physiotherapy global average.

Although 52% of World Physiotherapy member organisations in the region reported a growth in their membership, there was a total decline of 227 individual members across the whole region compared with 2019.

Many member organisations in the region reported the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly impacted physiotherapists in the region, leaving many physiotherapists unemployed and unable to pay membership fees to their national physiotherapy associations.

The Africa region has the lowest per capita level of physiotherapists per population worldwide. All countries/territories in the region have less than 0.5 physiotherapists per 10,000 of the population, except South Africa (1.3), Morocco (0.8) and Namibia (0.6). Across the whole region, the average is 0.2 physiotherapist per 10,000 population. This ratio is seven times less than Asia West Pacific region, 32 times less than North America Caribbean region, 39 times less than South America region and 58 times less than Europe region.

The WHO estimates a projected shortfall of 18 million health workers by 2030. This shortfall will be most acutely felt in low- and lower-middle income countries/territories. This workforce shortage is a public health emergency in a region in which 88% of countries/territories are classified as low or low-middle income. In addition, global estimates of the need of rehabilitation based on the burden of disease in 2019 have recently been published. The Lancet states this region has 214 million people in need of rehabilitation services.

World Physiotherapy has previously reported on the needs of rehabilitation on fragile health systems and vulnerable communities, and the role of physiotherapists in the delivery of rehabilitation. It is clear efforts should be undertaken by all stakeholders involved in the delivery of rehabilitation to support greater investment in physiotherapy services in this region.
GENDER

Globally, 63% of practising physiotherapists are women. However, there are variations between World Physiotherapy regions: 70% in the North America Caribbean region and 54% in the Asia Western Pacific region.

Of the 111 respondents to the annual membership census, in 17 countries/territories women make up 80% or more of practising physiotherapists and in 17 countries/territories women make up less than 50% of practising physiotherapists – 11 in the Africa region and six in the Asia Western Pacific region.

AFRICA REGION

62% of practising physiotherapists in the Africa region are women.

There are significant variations in the region: Namibia (82%), South Africa (80%), Togo (14%), Mali (15%). Five countries/territories have less than 30% of women in their physiotherapy workforce (Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Togo, Uganda).

THE 3 COUNTRIES/TERRITORIES WITH THE HIGHEST % OF FEMALE PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN THE AFRICA REGION

Congo (DR) Namibia South Africa

PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY REGIONS

70% in North America Caribbean region
67% in Europe region
62% in South America region
54% in Asia Western Pacific region
COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on both individual physiotherapists and World Physiotherapy member organisations.

Many member organisations stated that lack of access to PPE was the cause of the disruption to physiotherapy services, particularly in relation to private practice.

World Physiotherapy member organisations reported some advocacy actions to support their membership and to highlight the role of physiotherapists as frontline health workers as part of the acute response.

According to a WHO report on COVID-19 and non-communicable diseases, rehabilitation is the most commonly disrupted service and "Rehabilitation continues being wrongly perceived as a non-essential health service for all patients when for many patients it is essential".

Further analysis of how COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the global physiotherapy profession will be provided in a separate report, due to be published in March 2021.

TELEHEALTH

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability of health systems to facilitate access to teleconsultations has been of critical importance. A growing body of evidence suggests telehealth can be safe, cost-effective, and, in some cases, provide better outcomes than face-to-face care.

Telehealth has been shown to be a tool that allows physiotherapy services to continue while avoiding risks (for example, travelling, maintaining social distance) associated with other treatment approaches.

67% of World Physiotherapy member organisations in the Africa region reported physiotherapists are permitted to provide telehealth services...

The lack of access to proper digital tools or connectivity issues were reported as a challenge for some member organisations in the region.
DIRECT ACCESS

Direct access and patient self-referral refer to the circumstances where physiotherapy services are available to patients/clients without needing a referral. Direct access is a key advocacy goal for many World Physiotherapy member organisations who consider this a key pathway to achieving professional independence and recognition in a country/territory.

According to a WHO report on disability, “international, regional, and national policy and legislation can help meet the health care needs of people with disabilities where political will, funding, and technical support accompany implementation”.

A growing body of evidence suggests that direct access to physiotherapy treatment is cost-effective for public health systems, especially in primary care and related to muscle-skeletal conditions.

There are different categories in which the type of direct access can be analysed:
- no direct access at all
- direct access only in public health system
- direct access only in private practice
- full direct access

Across the globe, 28% of countries/territories have full direct access and 42% have direct access only in private practice. In contrast, 27% of World Physiotherapy member organisations said there is no direct access, in any form, in their country/territory.

Direct access remains a priority advocacy issue for the global profession. World Physiotherapy advocates for the right of those seeking physiotherapy services to self-refer to a physiotherapist if they so desire, and believes that this right promotes the autonomy of users of physiotherapy services and enables fair and equitable access to such services.

52% of World Physiotherapy member organisations in the Africa region reported full direct access and 29% have direct access only in private practice. This is the highest percentage for all the World Physiotherapy regions.

Only 10% of World Physiotherapy member organisations in the region said there is no direct access, in any form, in their country/territory. This high figure for direct access may be due to the lack of broader regulation for the physiotherapy profession in many countries/territories in the region.
Education programmes, at entry and postgraduate level, are the foundations of every healthcare profession and can offer insights into the development of a profession in a particular location.

Globally, there are more than 3,800 physiotherapist entry level education programmes and it is estimated more than 129,000 students graduated worldwide during the last academic year.

Analysis by region is included in each regional report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Physiotherapy region</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of ELEP</th>
<th>Number of new graduates</th>
<th>% of new graduates globally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1,803</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Western Pacific</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1,017</td>
<td>43,531</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>35,696</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America Caribbean</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>11,649</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,559</td>
<td>36,939</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>3,877</td>
<td>129,618</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

Access to a PhD programme is one of the steps to measure the development of the profession at a national level. Physiotherapists who complete a PhD may be able to more easily access leadership management or academic roles, or lead research groups and secure funding.

Of the respondents, 48% said there was access to PhD programmes in their country/territory, although this varies across the world: Europe region (73% of countries/territories with access to PhD programmes), North America Caribbean region (17% of countries/territories with access to PhD programmes).

72 physiotherapist entry level education programmes exist in the Africa region and it is estimated that over 1,803 people graduated during the last academic year. The ratio of 0.5 programmes per 5 million population in the region is the lowest ratio globally: four times less than the ratio for the Asia Western Pacific region, eight times less than for the North America Caribbean region, 15 times less than for the Europe region.

52% of countries/territories in the region have post-professional education programmes but only 19% of World Physiotherapy member organisations reported having access to PhD programmes in their country/territory.

It is a key issue for governments in the region to foster and fund physiotherapist training programmes at all levels, especially entry level education programmes, to address current and future health needs of their populations.
GLOBAL HIGHLIGHTS

- **74%** of member organisations recognise special interest groups
- **79%** of member organisations provide CPD for their members
- **58%** of countries/territories have support personnel to work with physiotherapists
- **16%** of countries/territories a physiotherapist has to be a member of our MO to practice
- **71%** of countries/territories have postgraduate education
- **48%** of countries/territories have access to PhD programmes
The survey was sent to World Physiotherapy’s 122 member organisations, of which 111 responded, representing a 91% response rate.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

World Health Organisation, Health workforce [Accessed 12 December 2020 [https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1]


DISCLAIMER

• The data in this report is based on responses to the annual membership census sent to World Physiotherapy’s member organisations.

• In 2020 the annual membership census was sent to 122 member organisations and 111 responded. The census date was 30 June 2020.

• Some data in this report has been collated from other sources available to World Physiotherapy.

• If you have any questions or concerns, or want to make changes to the data about your country/territory, please contact membershipcensus@world.physio.

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