



# World Physiotherapy

Europe region

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**ANNUAL  
MEMBERSHIP  
CENSUS**

**2020**

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## 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:

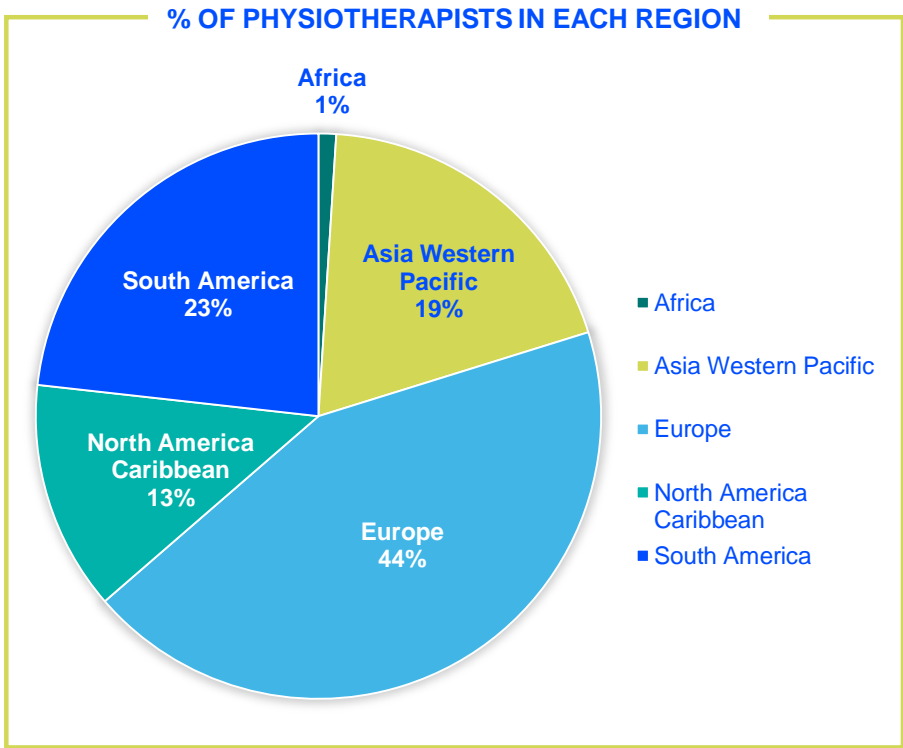
- impact of COVID-19 pandemic on World Physiotherapy member organisations' operations (budgeting, governance or service providing)
- impact of COVID-19 pandemic on physiotherapy practice at a national level
- actions undertaken by World Physiotherapy to support their membership (for example, advocacy,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

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

# 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>.



## 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.

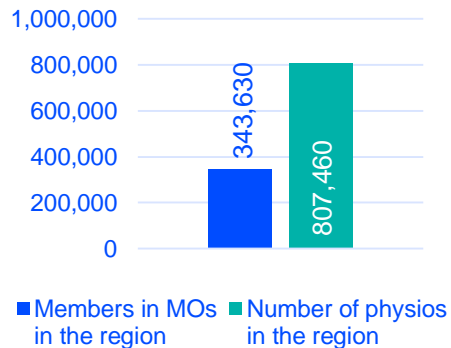
According to OECD reports, in 2017, life expectancy at birth was 80.7 years on average across OECD countries/territories, over 10 years higher than it was in 1970. In OECD partner countries (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa), levels are converging rapidly towards the OECD average with considerable 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.**

# EUROPE

## PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN THE EUROPE REGION OF WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY



**43%** of the physiotherapy workforce in the region are members of their national physiotherapy association.

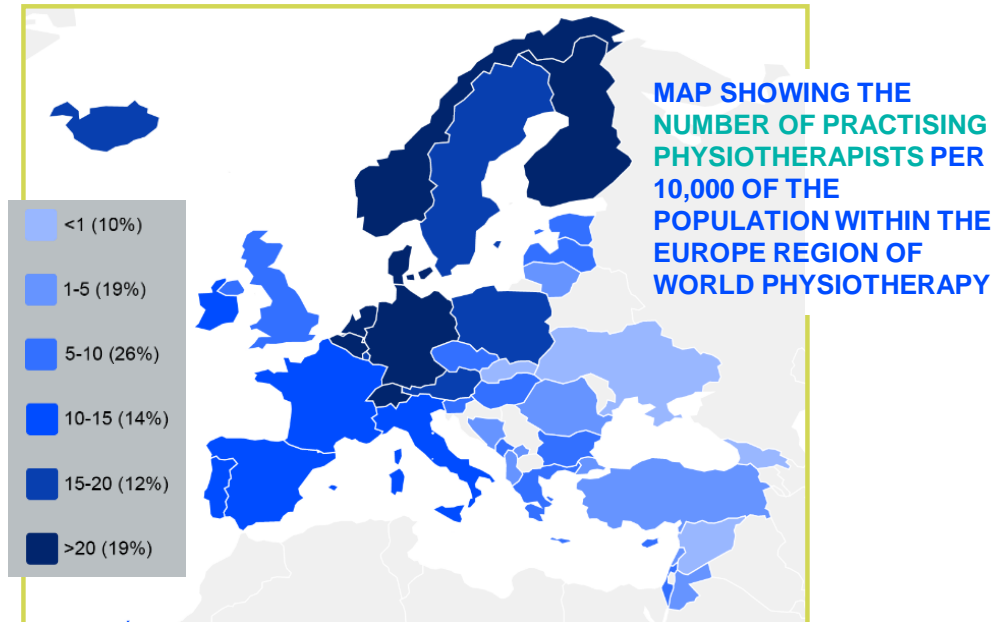
**51%** of the member organisations in the region reported a growth in their membership figures, an increase of 157,490 members in the region. This is almost entirely due to new member organisations in France (91,333 members) and Poland (68,529 members).

According to OECD, life expectancy at birth exceeds 80 years in almost two-thirds of countries/territories in the region. Spain and Italy had the highest life expectancy, with life expectancy reaching more than 83 years in 2018.

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 373 million people in need of rehabilitation services. It also has the highest age-standardised prevalence of 34% and years lived with disability rate per person.

**11.7** practising physiotherapists per 10,000 population in the region. This is the highest ratio for all World Physiotherapy regions. However, the disparity across the region is marked.

**6** countries/territories (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Lebanon, Ukraine, Slovakia) have less than two practising physiotherapists per 10,000 population. In five countries/territories (Jordan, Kosovo, Lithuania, Romania,



Turkey) the ratio is below five practising physiotherapists per 10,000 population. These 11 countries/territories are in the east or south east of the region.

**8** countries/territories (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland) have 20 or more practising physiotherapists per 10,000 population. These countries/territories are in the centre and north of the region.

**This highlights the geographical differences in the physiotherapy workforce across the region. This uneven distribution must be addressed to help the physiotherapy profession support the growing need for rehabilitation services in the 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.

## EUROPE REGION

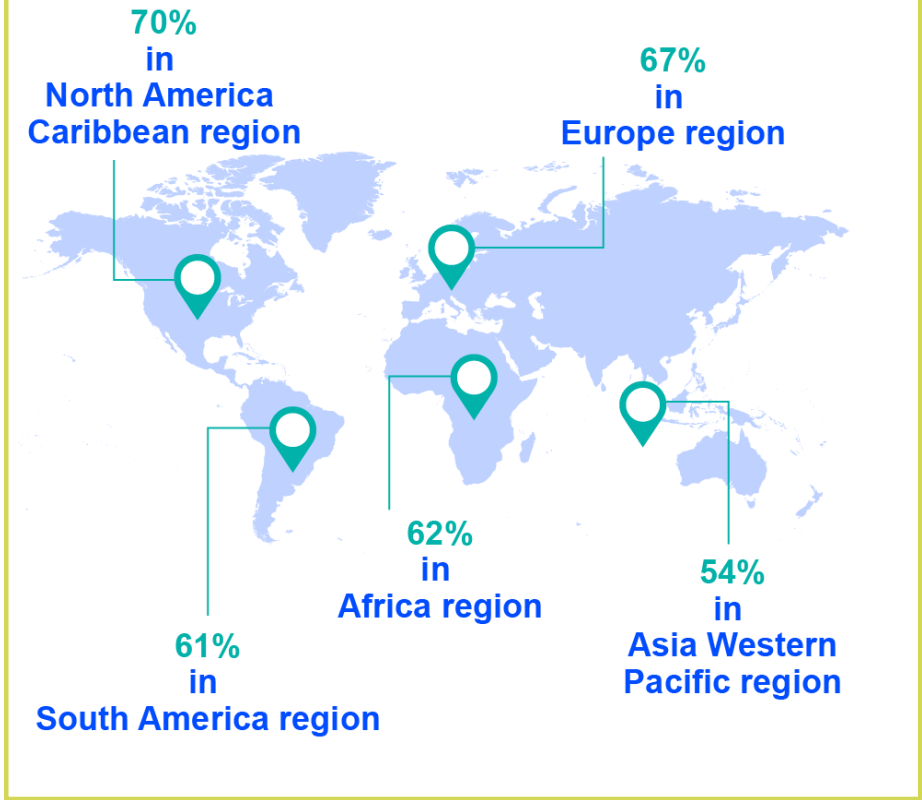
**67%** of practising physiotherapists in the Europe region are women.

Most countries/territories in the region have more women than men practising as physiotherapists, with the exception of Ukraine and Luxembourg where 50% are women. There are variations within the region: Hungary (95%), Ukraine (50%), Luxembourg (50%). In 18 countries/territories in the region, 70% of practising physiotherapists were women.

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



### PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY REGIONS



# COVID-19

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



**90%**

of member organisations in the Europe region reported physiotherapy practice was disrupted during the pandemic in their country/territory



**73%**

of respondents in the Europe region said physiotherapists in their country/territory had difficulty in accessing the PPE equipment they required

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.

**76%** of World Physiotherapy member organisations in the Europe region reported physiotherapists are permitted to provide telehealth services. Recognition and proper payment for this service is still a challenge in many countries/territories in the region.

**Member organisations in the Europe region reported undertaking significant advocacy activities to gain recognition from governments and insurance companies.**



# 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”*.

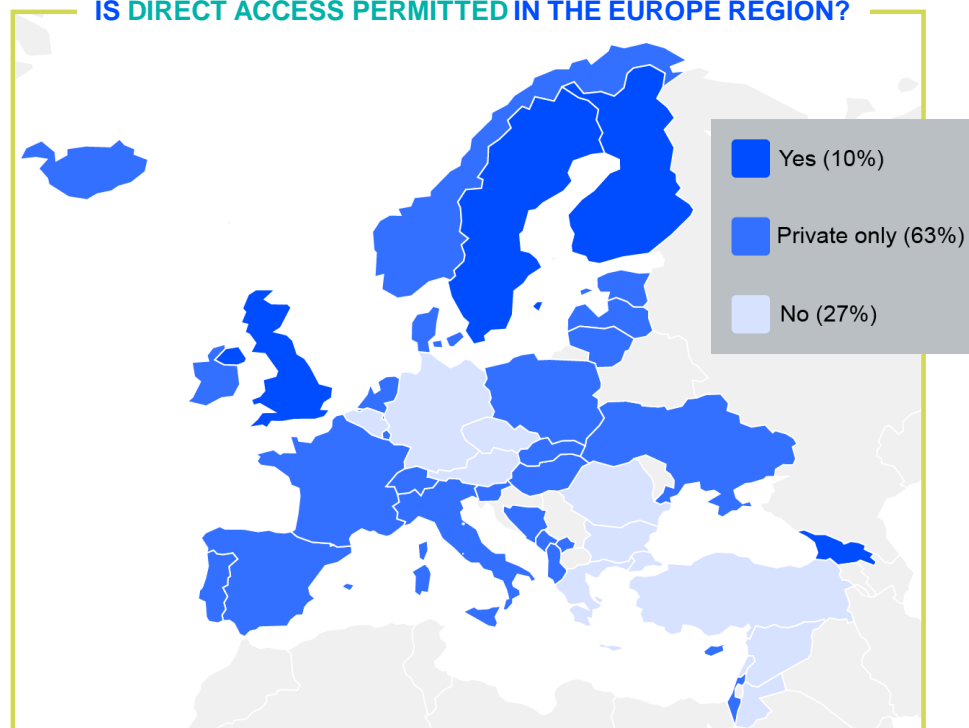
A growing body of evidence suggests that direct access to physiotherapy treatment is cost-effective for public health systems, especially in primary care and related to muscle-skeletal conditions.

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**

## IS DIRECT ACCESS PERMITTED IN THE EUROPE REGION?



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.

In the Europe region only 10% of World Physiotherapy member organisations reported full direct access, 63% reported having direct access only for private practice, and 27% reported there is no direct access, in any form, in their country/territory. This is the lowest percentage for all World Physiotherapy regions.



# EDUCATION

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.

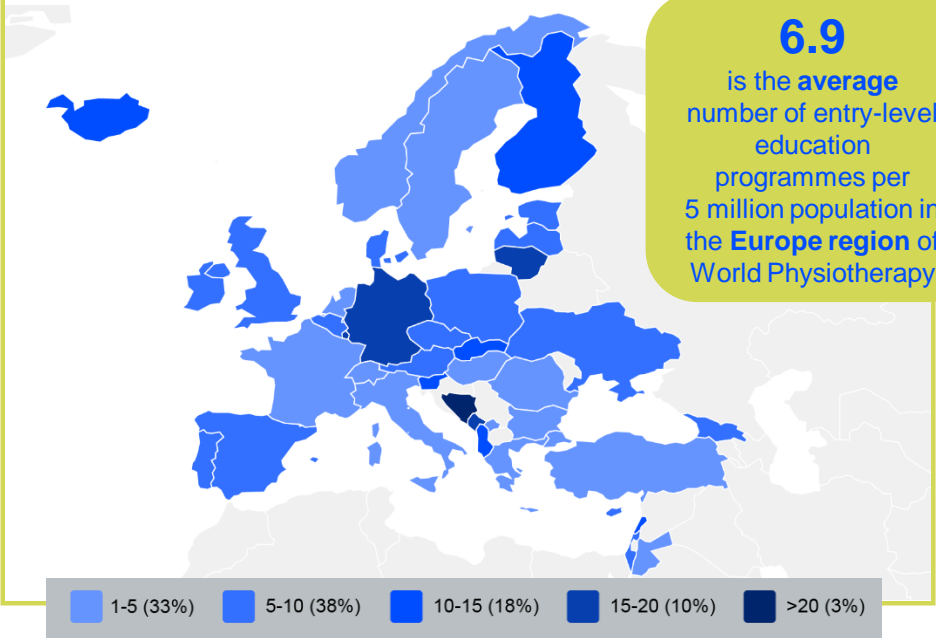
Analysis by region is included in each regional report.

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

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).

NUMBER OF ENTRY LEVEL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES PER 5,000,000 POPULATION

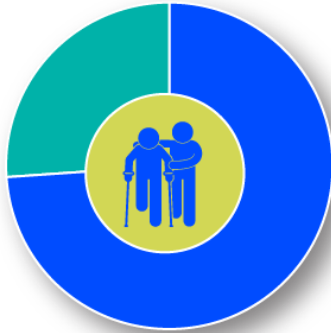


**948** physiotherapist entry level education programmes exist in the Europe region and it is estimated that over 35,000 people graduated during the last academic year. The ratio of 6.9 programmes per 5 million population in the region is the second highest ratio globally.

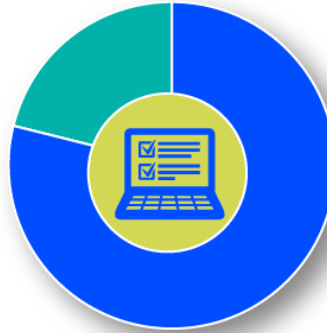
**90%** of countries/territories in the region have post-professional education programmes and 73% of World Physiotherapy member organisations have access to PhD programmes in their country/territory. Both graduate and PhD education figures are by far the highest globally and suggest physiotherapist education is well established within the region.

## GLOBAL HIGHLIGHTS

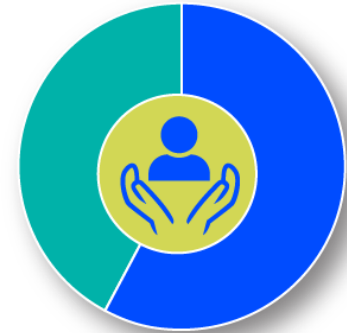
**74%** of member organisations recognise special interest groups



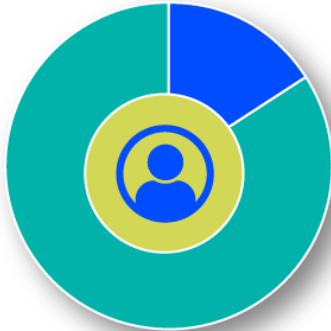
**79%** of member organisations provide CPD for their members



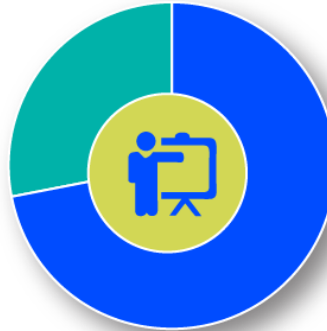
**58%** of countries/territories have support personnel to work with physiotherapists



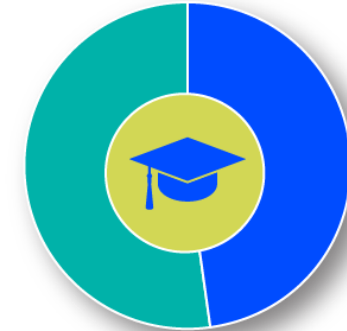
**16%** of countries/territories a physiotherapist has to be a member of our MO to practice



**71%** of countries/territories have postgraduate education



**48%** of countries/territories have access to PhD programmes



# RESPONSES TO SURVEY

## WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY MEMBER ORGANISATIONS FROM THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES/TERRITORIES RESPONDED:

Africa region	Asia Western Pacific region		Europe region		North America Caribbean region	South America region
Benin	Afghanistan	Singapore	Albania	Latvia	Bahamas	Argentina
Cameroon	Australia	Sri Lanka	Austria	Lebanon	Barbados	Bolivia
Congo (Democratic Republic)	Bangladesh	Taiwan	Belgium	Liechtenstein	Bermuda	Brazil
Ethiopia	Bhutan	Thailand	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Lithuania	Canada	Chile
Eswatini	Cambodia	United Arab Emirates	Bulgaria	Luxembourg	Guyana	Colombia
Ghana	Fiji		Cyprus	Malta	Haiti	Costa Rica
Ivory Coast	Hong Kong		Czech Republic	Montenegro	Jamaica	Ecuador
Kenya	India		Denmark	Netherlands	Panama	Mexico
Madagascar	Indonesia		Estonia	Norway	St Lucia	Peru
Malawi	Japan		France	Poland	Suriname	Uruguay
Mali	Korea (Republic of)		Finland	Portugal	Trinidad and Tobago	Venezuela
Morocco	Kuwait		Georgia	Romania	United States	
Namibia	Macau		Germany	Slovakia		
Niger	Malaysia		Greece	Slovenia		
Nigeria	Mongolia		Hungary	Spain		
Rwanda	Myanmar		Iceland	Sweden		
Senegal	Nepal		Ireland	Switzerland		
South Africa	New Zealand		Israel	Turkey		
Togo	Papua New Guinea		Italy	Ukraine		
Uganda	Philippines		Jordan	United Kingdom		
Zimbabwe	Saudi Arabia		Kosovo			

The survey was sent to World Physiotherapy's 122 member organisations, of which 111 responded, representing a 91% response rate.

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## 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](mailto:membershipcensus@world.physio).