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 this year’s census, 125 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
- governance
687,623 physiotherapists were represented by World Physiotherapy in 2021 through its member organisations. This is an increase of 29,190 physiotherapists compared with 2020.

35% of the global number of physiotherapists were a member of a World Physiotherapy member organisation in 2021. The global number of physiotherapists was 1,901,585.

82% of the total membership globally is represented by the very large member organisations.
There are, on average, 3.9 physiotherapists for every 10,000 people across the world. However, this varies widely across World Physiotherapy’s five regions: 12.8 in Europe, 8.6 in North America Caribbean, 7.3 in South America, 1.6 in Asia Western Pacific, 0.2 in Africa. This highlights the unmet need for the physiotherapy workforce globally, which is more significant in low and middle income countries/territories.

Despite the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of member organisations reported significant growth in their individual members. Some of the factors that influenced this increase included:

- fostering relationships with physiotherapy entry level education students to show the added value of membership, so they look to become members on graduation
- using digital communications and social media to promote the activities of the member organisation and highlighting advocacy and campaign successes
- addressing membership needs in different fields (for example, economic, education), creating resources or adapting existing materials
- advocating for the physiotherapy profession during the COVID-19 pandemic (for example, access to vaccination programmes and recognition as frontline workers)

61% of member organisations reported an increase in the number of their individual members.

9% of member organisations reported no change in the number of their individual members.

27% of member organisations reported a decrease in the number of their individual members, most of them have 1,000 members or less. Only one of the very large member organisations reported a decrease (5%) in the number of their individual members.
of the individual members of World Physiotherapy member organisations are female

of practising physiotherapists globally are female

There are more women than men employed as physiotherapists around the world. However, 48% of board members with World Physiotherapy member organisations are female and, globally, 42% of World Physiotherapy member organisations have female presidents or chairs.
One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a change in the delivery of physiotherapy services, for example, the provision of telehealth.

The ability of health systems to facilitate access to telehealth 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.

A number of member organisations have advocated for telehealth services, and for their inclusion within the scope of practice for physiotherapists.

The number of countries/territories where physiotherapists are allowed to provide telehealth services has increased by 12% in the last year (2021: 94, 2020: 78).

This has been especially relevant in the Asia Western Pacific region where this has increased by 19%.
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 musculoskeletal 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, **31% of countries/territories have full direct access** (28% in 2020) and **41% have direct access only in private practice**. Since 2019, the number of countries/territories reporting full direct access to physiotherapy services has increased from 32 to 36.

In contrast, **25% of World Physiotherapy member organisations reported no direct access** (27% in 2020).

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.
74% of respondents said special interest groups were recognised in their country/territory interest groups are recognised.

56% of respondents said there was support personnel working with physiotherapists in their country/territory.

15% of respondents said a physiotherapist has to be a member of their national association to practice in their country/territory.

47% of respondents said physiotherapists have access to PhD programmes in their country/territory.
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The annual membership census was sent to 125 member organisations, of which 117 responded, representing a **94% response rate**, up from 92% in 2020. This increased response rate demonstrates strong engagement between World Physiotherapy and its member organisations.
Find out more about physiotherapy around the world: Global profiles

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Discover World Physiotherapy’s website: www.world.physio

DISCLAIMER

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

• In 2021 the annual membership census was sent to 125 member organisations, of which 117 responded, representing a 94% response rate. The census date was 30 June 2021.

• 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 your country’s data, please contact membershipcensus@world.physio.