

POPULATION BY REGION

Population is unevenly distributed among regions within countries. Differences in climatic and environmental conditions discourage human settlement in some areas and favour concentration of the population around a few urban centres. This pattern is reinforced by higher economic opportunities and wider availability of services stemming from urbanisation itself.

Definition

The number of inhabitants of a given region, i.e. its total population, can be measured as either its average annual population or as the population at a specific date during the year considered. The average population during a calendar year is generally calculated as the arithmetic mean of the population on 1 January of two consecutive years, although some countries estimate it on a date close to 1 July.

Comparability

The main problem with economic analysis at the sub-national level is the unit of analysis, i.e. the region. The word “region” can mean very different things both within and among countries, with significant differences in area and population.

The population across OECD regions ranges from about 400 inhabitants in Balance ACT (Australia) to 37 million in California (the United States).

Overview

In 2010, 10% of regions accounted for approximately 40% of the total population in OECD countries. The concentration of population was highest in Australia, Canada, Chile and Iceland, where differences in climatic and environmental conditions discourage human settlement in some areas.

Two-thirds of the OECD population live in urban areas, but the urban experience is very different according to country. Of the 21 million Canadians living in urban areas, half of them reside in large metropolitan areas. For the 21 million urban population in Poland, only 25% live in large metropolitan areas, while half of them reside in medium-sized or small urban areas.

In 2010, almost half of the total OECD population (48%) lived in predominantly urban regions, which accounted for around 6% of the total area.

Predominantly rural regions accounted for one-fourth of total population and 80% of land area. In Ireland, Finland, Norway and Slovenia the share of national population in rural regions was twice as high as the OECD average.

To address this issue, the OECD has classified regions within each member country to facilitate comparability at the same territorial level. The classification is based on two territorial levels: the higher level (TL2) consists of 362 large regions and the lower level (TL3) consists of 1 794 small regions. These two levels are used as a framework for implementing regional policies in most countries. In Brazil, China, India, the Russian Federation and South Africa only TL2 large regions have been identified. This classification (which, for European Union countries, is largely consistent with the Eurostat NUTS classification) facilitates comparability of regions at the same territorial level.

All the regional data shown here refer to small regions with the exception of Brazil, China, India, the Russian Federation and South Africa.

In addition, the OECD has established a regional typology to take into account geographical differences and enable meaningful comparisons between regions belonging to the same type. Regions have been classified as predominantly rural, intermediate and predominantly urban on the basis of the percentage of population living in local rural units.

The metropolitan database identifies more than 1 000 urban areas (with a population of 50 000 or more) in 28 OECD countries. Urban areas are defined on the basis of population density and commuting patterns to better reflect the economic function of cities in addition to their administrative boundaries. Urban areas in OECD countries are classified as large metropolitan areas if they have a population of 1.5 million or more, metropolitan areas if their population is between 500 000 and 1.5 million, medium-size urban areas with a population between 200 000 and 500 000 and small urban areas with a population between 50 000 and 200 000.

Sources

- OECD (2011), *OECD Regions at a Glance*, OECD Publishing.

Further information

Analytical publications

- OECD (2011), *OECD Regional Outlook 2011*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2012), *OECD Territorial Reviews*, OECD Publishing.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2011), *Labour Force Statistics*, OECD Publishing.

Online databases

- OECD Regional Database.

Websites

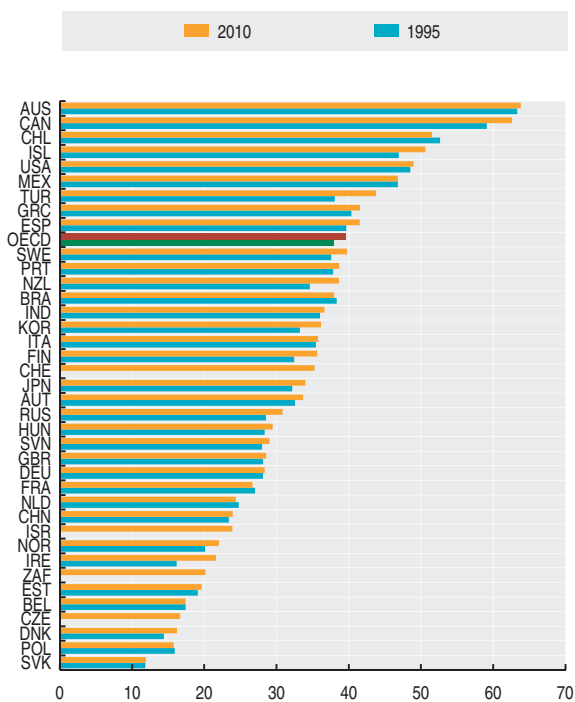
- Regional Development, www.oecd.org/gov/regionaldevelopment.
- Regional Statistics and Indicators, www.oecd.org/gov/regional/statisticsindicators.



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Share of national population in the ten per cent of regions with the largest population

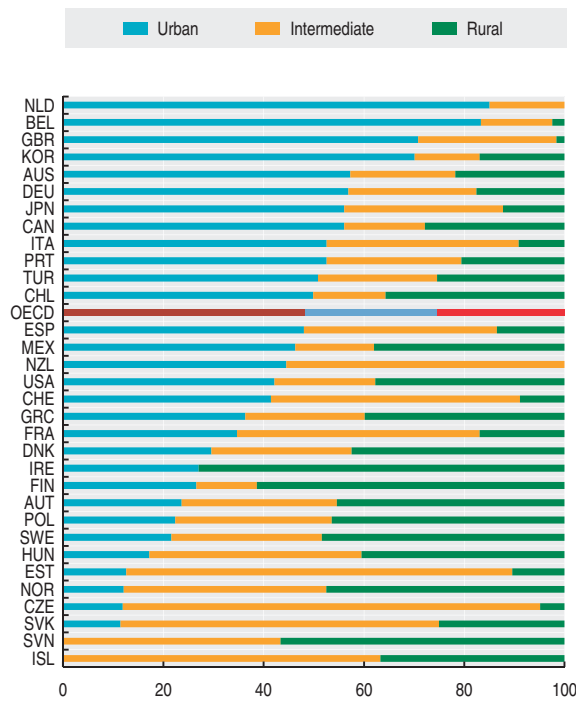
Percentage



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932706052>

Distribution of the national population into urban, intermediate and rural regions

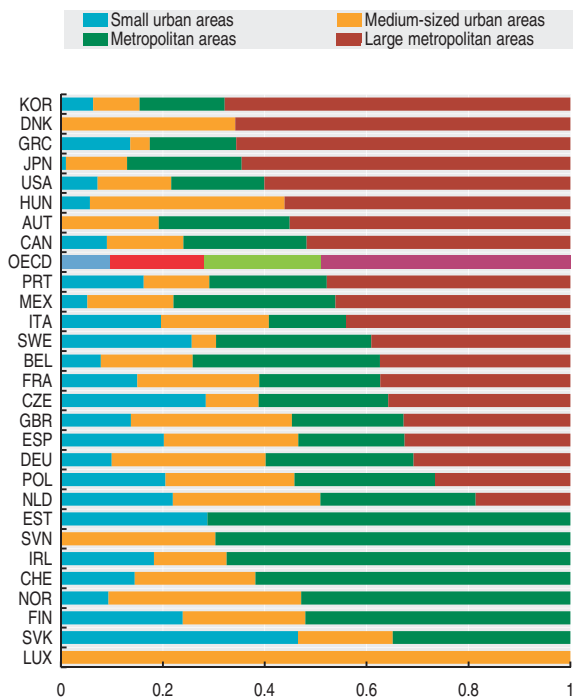
Percentage, 2010



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932706090>

Percentage of urban population by city size

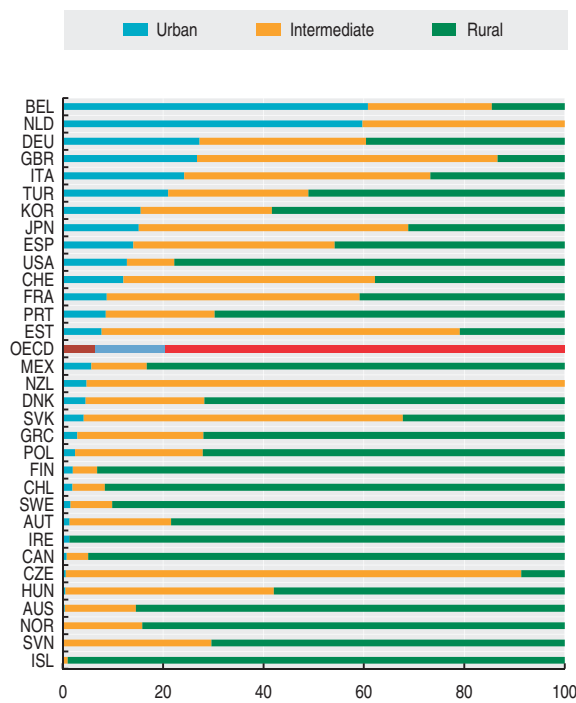
Percentage, 2008



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932706071>

Distribution of the national area into urban, intermediate and rural regions

Percentage, 2010



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932706109>



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