

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 smallest OECD region (Melilla, Spain) has an area of 13 square kilometres whereas the largest region (Northwest Territories and Nunavut, Canada) has an area of over 3 million square kilometres. Similarly, the population across OECD regions ranges from about 400 inhabitants in Balance ACT (Australia) to more than 47 million in Kanto (Japan).

Overview

In 2009, 10% of regions accounted for approximately 40% of the total population in OECD countries. The concentration of population was highest in Australia, Canada, Iceland and the United States, where differences in climatic and environmental conditions discourage human settlement in some areas.

In large metropolitan regions, population growth has been faster than the growth of the total OECD population (1.3 times higher), suggesting that migration, besides demographic dynamics, has increased the size of urban regions. Growth of population within countries, though, has varied. Compared to the national rate, the growth rate of the population in large metropolitan regions has been particularly intense in Ireland, Turkey, New Zealand and Canada.

In 2009, almost half of the total OECD population (47%) lived in predominantly urban regions, which accounted for less than 6% of the total area. More than 60% of the population lived in predominantly urban regions in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

Predominantly rural regions accounted for one-fourth of total population and 80% of land area. In Ireland, Finland, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden 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 larger regions and the lower level (TL3) consists of 1 794 smaller regions. These two levels are used as a framework for implementing regional policies in most countries. In Brazil, China, India and the Russian Federation 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 90 large metropolitan regions (with a population of 1.5 million or more) in OECD countries on the basis of the TL3 territorial classification. For Canada, Mexico and the United States national definitions are applied.

Sources

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

Further information

Analytical publications

- OECD (2011), *OECD Regional Outlook 2011*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2011), *OECD Territorial Reviews*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2006), *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*, OECD Publishing.

Statistical publications

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

Online databases

- *OECD Regional Database*.

Websites

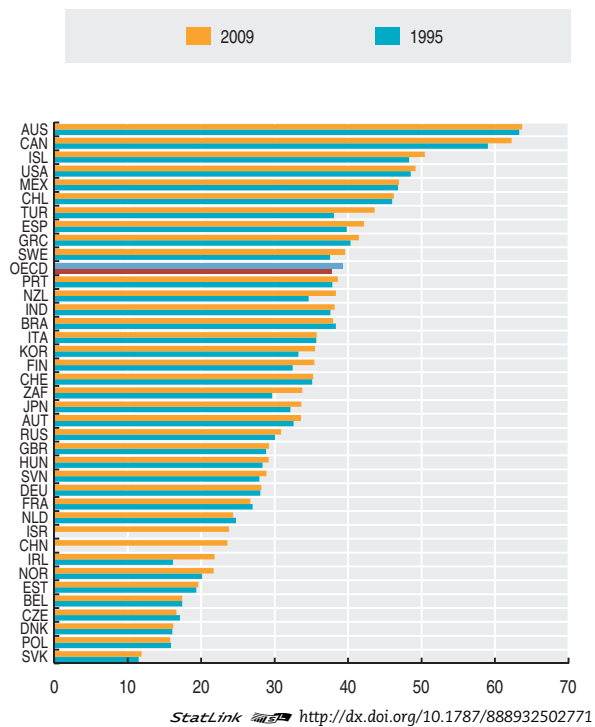
- Regional Development, www.oecd.org/gov/regionaldevelopment.
- Regional Statistics and Indicators, www.oecd.org/gov/regional/statisticsindicators.



POPULATION BY REGION

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

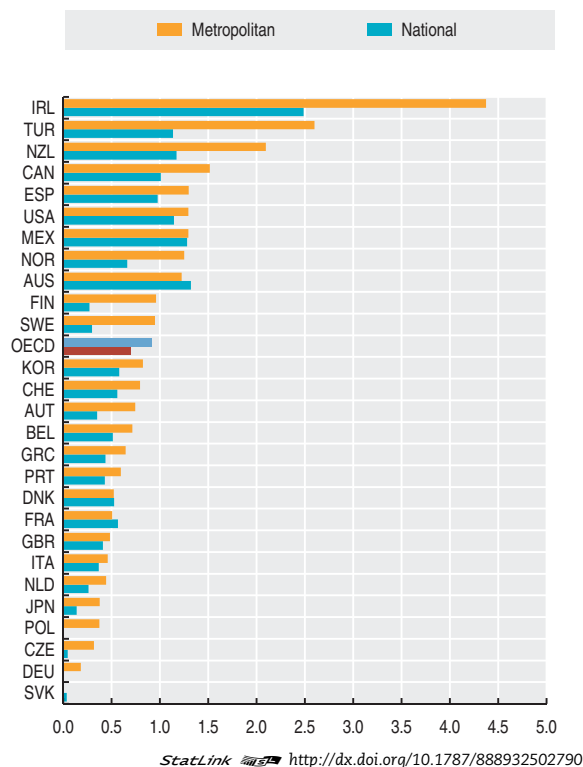
Percentage



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/8888932502771>

Total population: metropolitan regions and country average

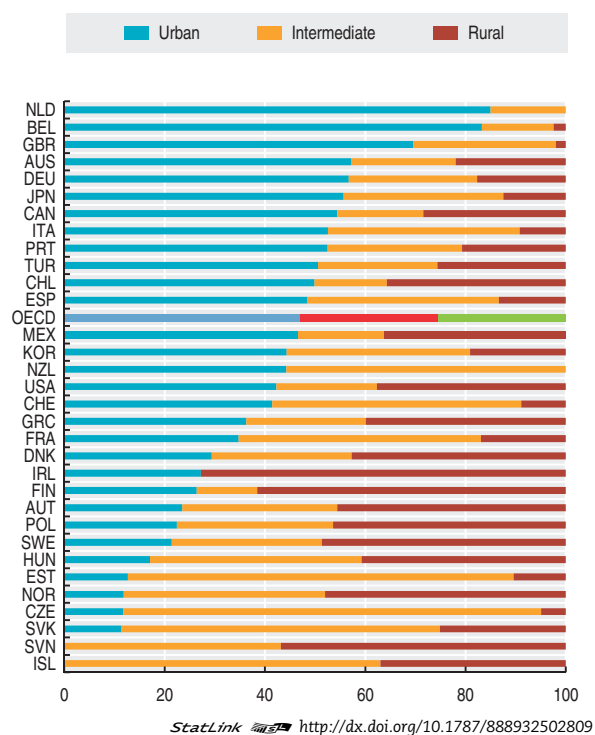
Percentage, annual change 1997-2008



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/8888932502790>

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

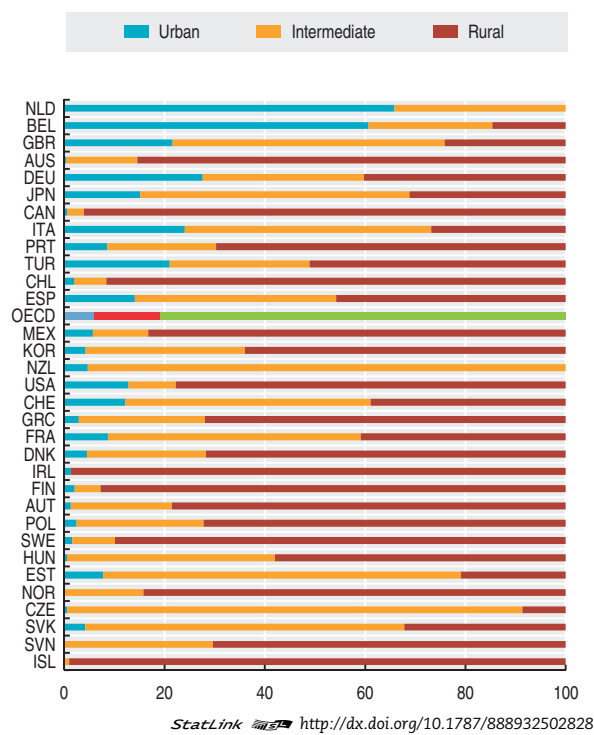
Percentage, 2009



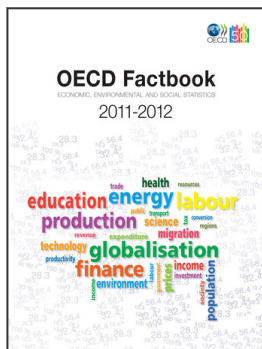
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/8888932502809>

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

Percentage, 2009



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/8888932502828>



From:
OECD Factbook 2011-2012
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2011-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2011), "Population by region", in *OECD Factbook 2011-2012: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2011-11-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.