

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 the 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.

The index of geographic concentration offers a picture of the spatial distribution of the population. It compares the share of population and land area over all regions in a given country, and it takes into account both within- and between-country differences in the size of all regions. This index lies between 0 (no concentration) and 100 (maximum concentration) and is suitable for international comparisons.

Overview

The concentration of population is highest in Australia, Canada, Iceland, the United States, Mexico and Chile where 10% of regions account for no less than 45% of their population. In contrast, the territorial distribution is more balanced in the Slovak Republic, Poland, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Belgium.

The index of geographic concentration is highest in Canada, Australia, Iceland and Israel; and lowest in the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Belgium.

Paris, in France, is the region with the highest population density, recording more than 20 000 inhabitants per km², while Põhja-Eesti, in Estonia, has only 121 inhabitants per km².

Almost half of the OECD population (46%) lives in predominantly urban regions, which accounted for less than 6% of the total area. Concentration in urban regions is over 60% in the Netherlands, Belgium and United Kingdom. Predominantly rural regions account for almost one fourth of total population (24%) and extend on an area of 80% of the total. In Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Norway the share of national population in rural regions is more than twice than the OECD average.

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).

To address this issue, the OECD has classified regions within each country based on two territorial levels. The higher level (Territorial Level 2) consists of 578 large regions and the lower level (Territorial Level 3) is composed of 1 793 small regions, including the accession and enhanced enlargement countries. 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 data shown here refer to small regions with the exception of Brazil, Chile, China, India, Russian Federation and South Africa.

In addition, the OECD has established a typology according to which regions have been classified as predominantly urban, predominantly rural and intermediate, based on the percentage of regional population living in rural communities.

Sources

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Further information

Analytical publications

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- OECD (2006), *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *OECD Territorial Reviews*, OECD, Paris.
- Spiezia, V. (2003), “Measuring Regional Economies”, OECD Statistics Brief, No. 6, October, OECD, Paris, www.oecd.org/std/statisticsbrief.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2009), *Labour Force Statistics*, OECD, Paris.

Online databases

- *OECD Regional Database*.

Web sites

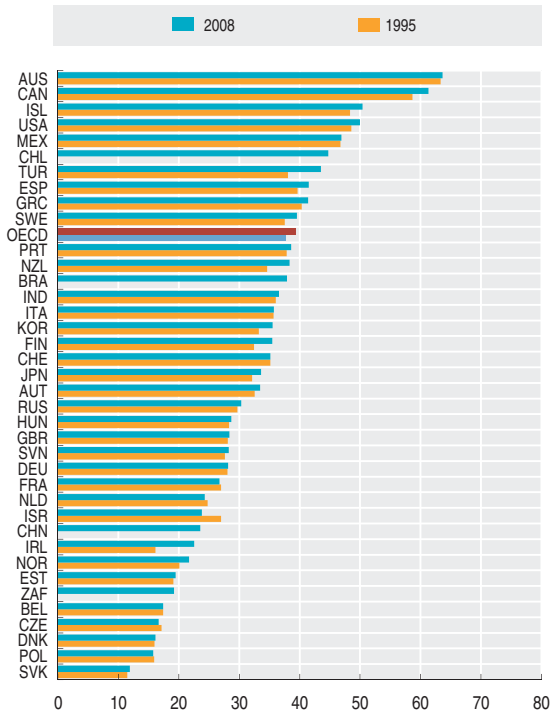
- OECD eXplorer, www.oecd.org/gov/regionaldevelopment.
- Territorial grids, www.oecd.org/gov/regional/statisticsindicators.



POPULATION BY REGION

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

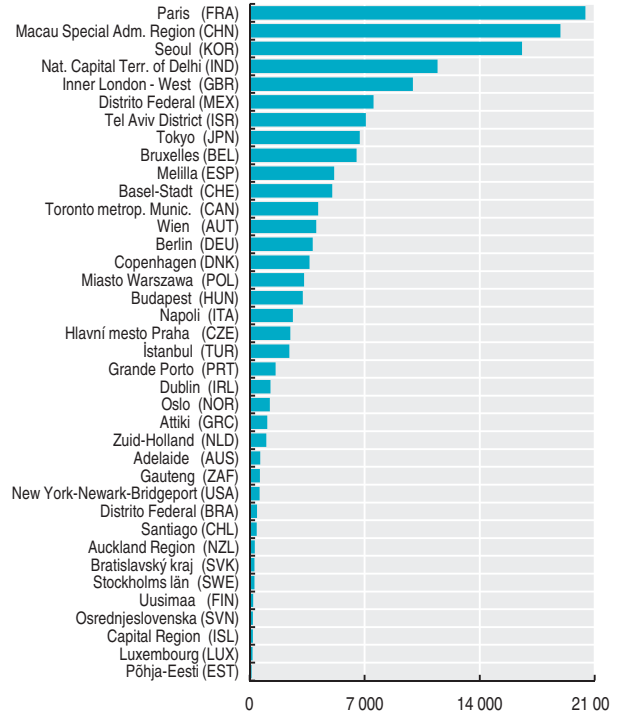
Percentage



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/817575228785>

Regions with the highest population density in each country, small regions

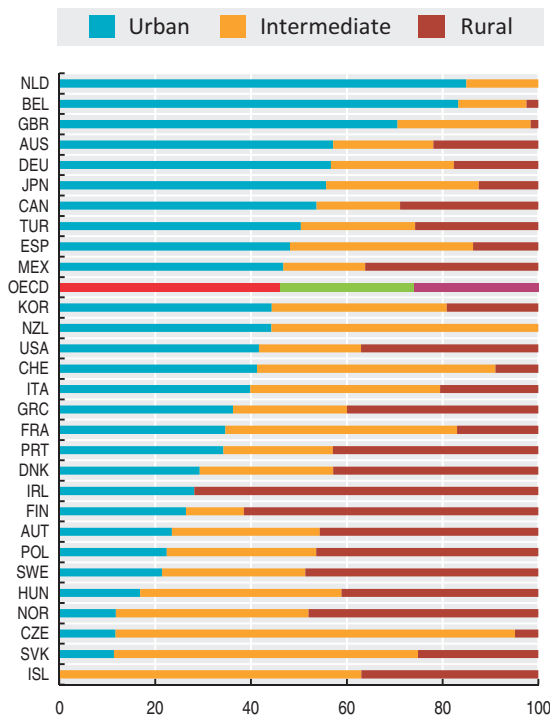
Inhabitants per km², 2008



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/817588537262>

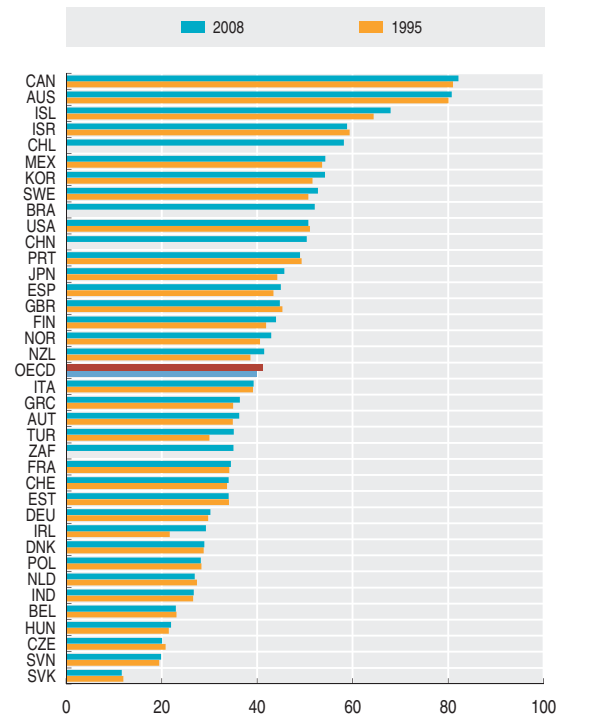
Distribution of the national population into urban, intermediate and rural regions, small regions

Percentage, 2008

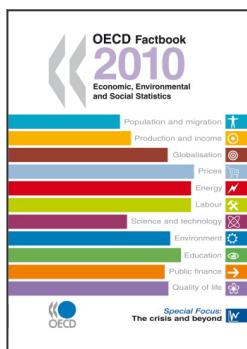


StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/817651371158>

Index of geographic concentration of population, small regions



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/817723667414>



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