

REGIONAL POPULATION

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, the total population, can be either the average annual population or 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 (it is also referred to as the mean population). However, some countries estimate it on a date close to 1 July (mid-year population).

The index of geographic concentration offers a picture of the spatial distribution of the population, as it takes into account the area of each region.

The index compares the economic weight and the geographic weight over all regions in a given country and is constructed to account for both within- and between-country differences in the size of all regions. It lies between 0 (no concentration) and 100 (maximum concentration) and is suitable for international comparisons.

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.

Overview

The concentration of population is highest in Australia, Canada, Iceland, the United States, and Mexico where 10% of regions account for no less than 47% of their population. In contrast, the territorial distribution appears more balanced, according to this statistic, in the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Belgium and Denmark.

The index of geographic concentration shows that Canada, Australia and Iceland are the countries with the most uneven population distribution; in contrast, geographic concentration is lowest in the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Belgium, the Netherlands and Poland.

Paris is the region with the highest population density in France recording more than 20 000 inhabitants per km²; while the Capital region, the region with the highest population density in Iceland, has only 179 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 extended on an area share of 80%. In Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Norway the share of national population in rural regions is more than twice (50% or higher) than the OECD average.

The smallest OECD region (Melilla, Spain) has an area of 13 square kilometres whereas the largest (Northwest Territories and Nunavut, Canada) has over 3 million square kilometres. Similarly, the population in 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 member country. The classification is based on two territorial levels. The higher level (Territorial Level 2) consists of 335 large regions and the lower level (Territorial Level 3) is composed of 1 681 small regions. This classification which, for European Union countries, is largely consistent with the Eurostat NUTS classification facilitates greater comparability of regions at the same territorial level. Indeed, these two levels, which are officially established and relatively stable in all member countries, are used as a framework for implementing regional policies in many countries.

In addition, different typology of regions – urban or rural – can affect the comparability at sub-national level. For instance, in the United Kingdom, one might question the relevance of comparing the highly urbanised area of London to the rural region of the Shetland Islands, despite the fact that both regions belong to the same territorial level. To take account of these differences, the OECD has established a regional typology according to which regions have been classified as predominantly urban, predominantly rural and intermediate. This typology, based on the percentage of regional population living in rural communities, enables meaningful comparisons between regions belonging to the same type (see OECD (2009) “Regions at a Glance” for definition).

Source

- OECD (2009), *OECD Regions at a Glance 2009*, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- OECD (2001), *OECD Territorial Outlook, 2001 Edition*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *OECD Territorial Reviews*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2006), *OECD Territorial Reviews – Competitive Cities in the Global Economy*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2006), *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*, OECD, Paris.
- Spiezia, V. (2003), “Measuring Regional Economies”, OECD Statistics Brief, No. 6, October, OECD, Paris, www.oecd.org/std/statisticsbrief.

Online databases

- OECD Regional Database.

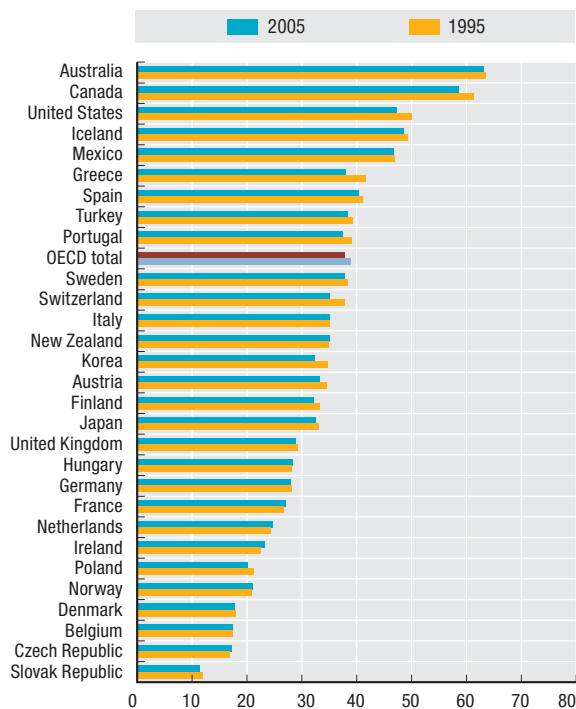
Websites

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



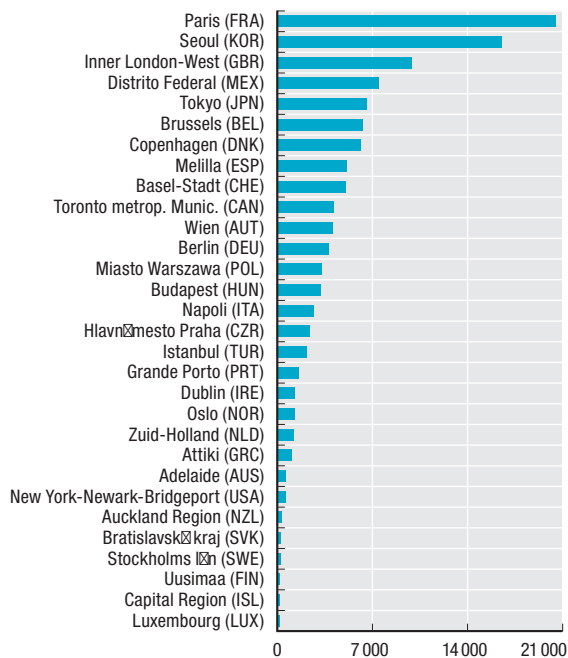
Share of national population in the 10% of regions with the largest population, small regions

Percentage



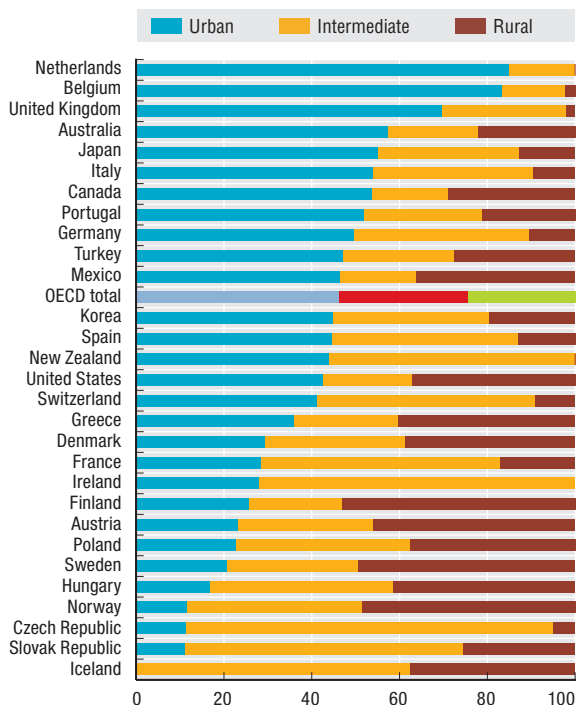
Regions with the highest population density in each country, small regions

Inhabitants per km², 2005

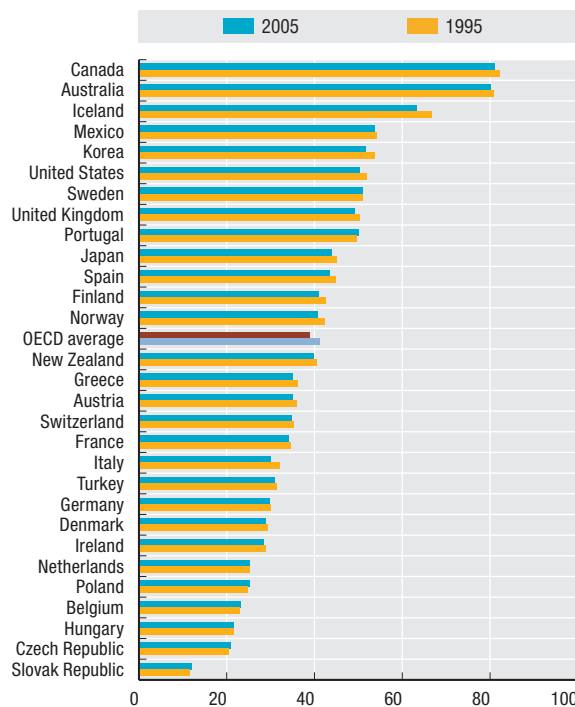


Distribution of the national population into urban, intermediate and rural regions, small regions

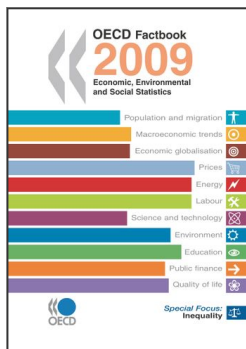
Percentage, 2005



Index of geographic concentration of population, small regions



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