

Foreword

There is no shortage of research on the changing nature of cities and the ways the increasing urbanisation is shaping modern life. Yet too often we fail to ask this simple, but fundamental question: What is a city? How do we determine what is, and what is not an urban reality. Of course we know that London is a bustling UK city, and sparsely populated farmland and moorland in Cumbria are not. In South Africa, we are aware that Gauteng province is urban, while Northern Cape province is not. Increasingly, however, geographical areas are emerging that do not so clearly fit inside or outside such a classification. As metropolitan areas evolve, as mid-sized cities reveal characteristics that are both urban and suburban, as cities and rural life are increasingly interconnected, defining just what we mean when we talk about cities becomes crucial.

By establishing a clear definition of “urban” and an internationally recognised definition of urban areas as functional economic areas of similar size across countries, we believe that research into all aspects of metropolitan life can greatly benefit, helping us to more clearly understand the current reality and design better policies for cities, large and small alike. Policy makers are paying increasing attention to the capacity of urban areas to contribute to economic growth and the delivery of social and environmental goals. At the same time, researchers are actively debating the role of economic agglomeration in fostering growth, and regional policies in maximising and re-balancing national economic performance. This report contributes to the policy debate, by enhancing the tools available to researchers and policy makers at local, national and international level to build robust evidence.

This report is published to set out the progress on the work led by the OECD, with delegates of the OECD Working Party on Territorial Indicators (WPTI) and in co-ordination with the European Commission, to set a functional definition of urban areas that can inform discussions on our economies, societies and shared environment. It draws on OECD work on regions and urbanisation, including *OECD Regional Outlook* (2011), *OECD Regions at a Glance* (2011), *Cities and Climate Change* (2010), *Regions Matter* (2009). It is intended to be a first step in redefining the way we study

urban areas and the interactions within and between them in OECD countries and beyond. The next step is to enhance its scope to compare the development of cities and metropolitan areas, which will require the active involvement of governments and statistical experts and authorities. The OECD looks forward to taking this work further.

Acknowledgements

This publication is the final report of two years' work led by the OECD on the functional definition of urban areas. The work was carried out with delegates of the OECD Working Party on Territorial Indicators (WPTI), in co-ordination with the European Commission and with financial support from the Northern Way (United Kingdom).

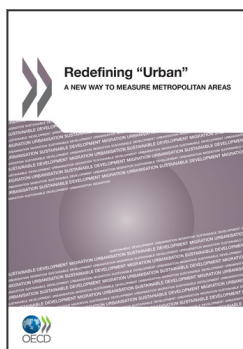
The work benefited from comments and advice of national experts from across OECD member countries during the following meetings:

- Experts meeting “Defining and measuring world metro-regions: issues and methodology”, co-organised by the OECD, the UK Office for National Statistics and the Greater London Authority (29-30 September 2009).
- Roundtable on “Environmental indicators for cities”, organised by the OECD Working Party on Territorial Indicators (29 November 2010).
- Discussion of interim results at the Northern Way Research Forum in Leeds, United Kingdom (14 December 2010).
- Workshop on “Measuring regional development: issues from emerging economies”, organised by the OECD Working Party on Territorial Indicators (14 June 2011).
- Presentation of Prof. Juwei Wang on “Urbanisation trends in China” at the OECD Working Party on Territorial Indicators (7 December 2011), with the support of the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research.

This report was co-ordinated by Monica Brezzi, Head of the Regional Analysis and Statistics Unit, under the supervision of Joaquim Oliveira Martins, Head of the Regional Development Policy Division at the OECD, Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development. Richard Baker (Director at RBLs) provided overall advice on the project, as well as contributions to the draft.

Chapter 1 was written by Monica Brezzi, Mario Piacentini, Konstantin Rosina and Daniel Sanchez-Serra (Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development). Chapter 2 was written by Hermanus S. Geyer, Danie J. Du Plessis, Hermanus S. Geyer Jr. and Amanda van Eeden, from the Centre for Regional and Urban Innovation and Statistical Exploration, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Juwei Zhang and Yifei Cai from the Chinese Academy of Social Science wrote Chapter 3 and Richard Baker from RBL Consulting wrote Chapter 4.

The methodology for defining urban areas in OECD countries described in Chapter 1 was developed together with the European Commission, DG for Regional Policies and Eurostat. Lewis Dijkstra, Stig Heinesen, Francois Laplanche and Hugo Poelman (European Commission, DG for Regional Policies) and César de Diego Diez and Oliver Heiden (European Commission-Eurostat) computed the methodology for European countries. Comments from Rafael Boix Domènech (Universitat de València), Mike Coombes (Newcastle University), Kate Lancaster (OECD), Peter Murphy (Statistics Canada), Karen Maguire (OECD), Paolo Veneri (OECD) and Jagdev Singh Virdee (previous WPTI Chair) are gratefully acknowledged. Jennifer Allain and Jeanette Duboys prepared the manuscript for publication.



From:
Redefining "Urban"
A New Way to Measure Metropolitan Areas

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264174108-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2012), "Foreword and Acknowledgements", in *Redefining "Urban": A New Way to Measure Metropolitan Areas*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264174108-1-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.