

# Foreword

Over the past 40 years, global population has almost doubled. As a result, the size of rural areas, towns and especially cities has also grown rapidly. Today, cities are home to almost half of the global population and this share is projected to reach 55% by 2050. Global megatrends such as the climate emergency, demographic change and digitalisation will affect cities, towns and rural areas in different ways. This underlines the importance of designing efficient and coherent policy responses that are place-specific and cut across different policy domains.

The global scale and the urgency of these challenges require achieving consensus on common solutions, on data and approaches, facilitated and supported by the work of multilateral and international organisations such as the OECD and the European Commission (EC). Both the OECD and the EC possess a long tradition of analysing and building regional, urban and rural policies. Moreover, both aim to boost growth and improve well-being in all regions, cities and rural areas through dedicated platforms for the exchange of best practices. This includes, for example, the OECD Regional Development Committee (RDPC), and the EU's cohesion policy and rural development policy.

This study, *Cities in the World*, offers a valuable illustration of how such a collaboration can make a significant contribution to evidence-based policy and, ultimately, to better lives. Despite intense global discussions around urbanisation, a global definition of a 'city', 'urban area' and 'rural area' has been lacking, and thereby, limiting meaningful international comparisons. *Cities in the World* also offers a new perspective on urbanisation by analysing, for the first time, the growth of cities, towns and rural areas using the definition that the Statistical Commission of the United Nations endorsed in March 2020.

*Cities in the World* also sheds light on the drivers and the consequences of urbanisation. It highlights, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of living in cities, compared to towns and rural areas. On the one hand, this includes better employment opportunities as well as better access to healthcare and education; on the other, it includes a higher cost of living, air pollution, congestion and crime. Focusing on the growth of metropolitan areas, the study shows that the population of the largest metropolitan areas has grown fastest, while one fifth of metropolitan areas are shrinking. It also highlights the importance of towns in connecting cities and rural areas. Managing rapid population growth, but also population decline in some metropolitan areas, calls for new, efficient policies to provide public services, transport, infrastructure and affordable housing.

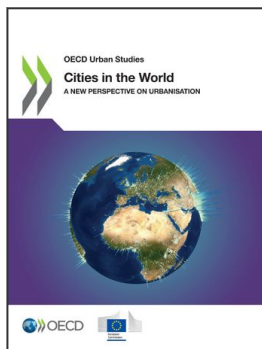
This study opens up new ways for future public policy. By categorising, measuring and comparing complex patterns of human settlements consistently across the world, it helps identify current and future needs to promote prosperous and inclusive cities, towns and rural areas. It also provides a new tool for policymakers to monitor and pursue the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and thus makes an active contribution to achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainable development in all areas.



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**From:**  
**Cities in the World**  
A New Perspective on Urbanisation

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/d0efcbda-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD/European Commission (2020), "Foreword", in *Cities in the World: A New Perspective on Urbanisation*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/67bdab3c-en>

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