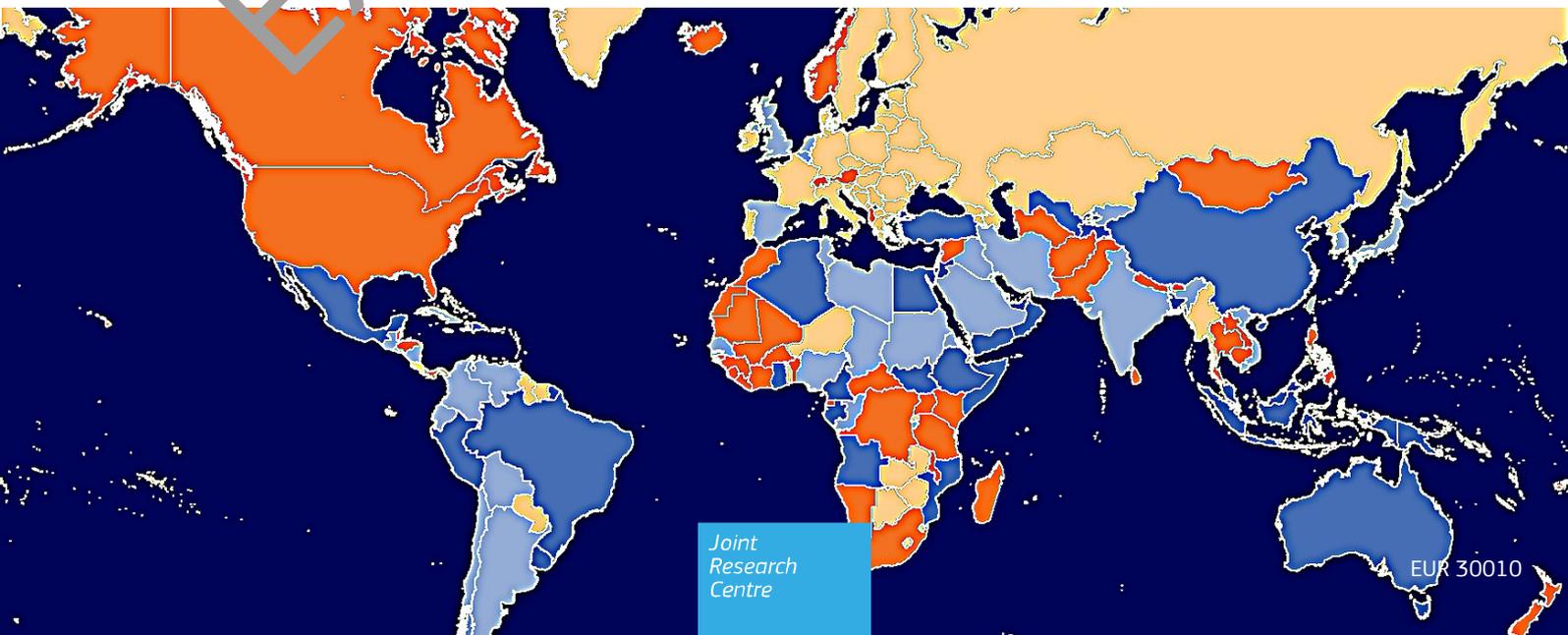


JRC SCIENCE FOR POLICY REPORT

Atlas of the Human Planet 2019

*A compendium of
urbanisation dynamics in 239
countries*

2019



Executive Summary

The Atlas of the Human Planet 2019 provides key figures about urbanisation in 239 countries across the globe. With a continued increase of the global urban population, and the environmental, social and economic implications of urbanisation, it is key to increase our awareness of the physical and demographic aspects of urbanisation. This Atlas uses a globally harmonised concept to delineate settlement typologies (the GHS Settlement Model grid) and a population grid (the GHS Population grid) to derive urbanisation statistics compiled in 239 Country Urbanisation Briefs. The briefs report on trends over 40 years of urbanisation status, dynamics and Sustainable Development Goals targets.

Policy Context

The Atlas of the Human Planet 2019 contributes directly to the voluntary commitment to develop a people-based Global Definition of Cities, Urban and Rural Areas¹. The definition is essential for monitoring of progress in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development². The monitoring across regions of the world requires common approaches to reporting and data collection. This Atlas presents Country Urbanisation Briefs, which provide harmonised information at country level supporting policymakers and researchers in analysing and responding to urbanisation processes and serves as baseline for the 2030 Development Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and other international frameworks.

The Atlas of the Human Planet 2019 is also a deliverable to the GEO (Group on Earth Observations) Human Planet Initiative³. The initiative maximises the use of (big) open data through artificial intelligence (AI) to bring Earth Observation (EO) data in the socio-economic and other domains. By developing a new generation of measurements and information products, the initiative provides new scientific evidence and a comprehensive understanding of the human presence on the planet that can support global policy processes with agreed, actionable and goal-driven metrics.

Key Conclusions

The focus of the Atlas of the Human Planet 2019 is on key urbanisation and human settlements figures (organised in 239 country brief) and commented global analysis over 40 years' time (1975 – 2015). This vast data and fact book is based on a harmonised method to identify settlement classes across the globe. This is implemented with the GHSL Settlement Model Grid, that is the result of modelling and geoinformation production to scale the Degree of Urbanisation method developed in the European Union to the globe.

Information contained in this Atlas serve as companion for researchers, experts, and policy makers for a first hand quick reference on key human settlement statistics. The global picture provided in the commented statistics adds to the global knowledge on urbanisation, sustainable urban development trajectories and SDG 11. It highlights that the periodic production of global statistics on human settlements helps addressing several policy areas in the European Commission portfolio as well as in global agreements on sustainable development.

Main Findings

The application of the European Degree of Urbanisation definition to the globe provides novel statistics and understanding of human settlement dynamics. First, with the harmonised definition of urban areas, a rather different share of global urban population is obtained. In 2015 76.5% of the global population is accounted in settlements of the urban domain (5.6 billion people). Second, the hierarchy of urban centres has changed over time. Urban centres have almost doubled in number (from more than 6,900 in 1975 to more than 13,100 in 2015) and their population size has also grown. The globe is experiencing an urban driven process of demographic growth. In the majority of countries urban population grows faster than the rural one. The process of urbanisation follows different speeds across world regions. Most countries in Africa are urbanising faster compared to the global average, while in most countries the global North the transition is below global average. Urban areas are rather efficient in the use of land (SDG 11.3.1). The efficiency is increasing with progression in settlement class (from the village to the city). Suburban areas have an efficiency that is on average half that of urban centres. In the last 25 years, urban population has more than doubled almost all across sub-Saharan Africa, while it was shrinking in Eastern Europe. A big gap persists for the built-up area per capita. In the majority of countries in the Global North, the built-up area per capita in 2015 is at least 25% higher than global average, and in several countries it is even double or more than three times the global average.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cros/content/about_en

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

³ <https://www.earthobservations.org/activity.php?id=119>

Related and Future JRC work

At the core of the GHSL framework is the understanding of the planet. The project supports several Knowledge Centres in the Commission (Disaster Risk, Territorial Policies, Migration and Demography). The GHSL project is the key test cases of the Joint Research Centre Earth Observation Data and Processing Platform (JEODPP). The processing power and storage of JEODPP are essential for the success of GHSL, which relies on artificial intelligence approaches applied to global fine scale data sets.

The UN Statistical Commission is expected to discuss the global definition in 2020. In the run-up to the discussion, the GHSL project at the JRC supports the partners of the commitment (OECD, World Bank, FAO, and UN-HABITAT) with the promotion of the definition in the UN member states through workshops and pilot applications.

Following the successful 'fitness for purpose' test of the GHSL products, the JRC is working with the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW), on an integration of settlements products in the Land Monitoring Service of the Copernicus programme.

Quick guide

The Atlas of the Human Planet 2019, fourth in the Atlas series, exploits the 2019 public release of GHSL data (GHSL Data Package 2019). This GHSL data set combines Earth Observation satellite data and demographic information and applies a people-based global definition of cities, urban and rural areas to all countries of the world. The 2019 edition of Atlas presents a Global Urbanisation Brief commenting key urbanisation and human settlements statistics and maps over a 40 years' timeframe (1975 – 2015) as a compilation of *Country Urbanisation Briefs* for 239 countries. Information and data contained in this report support policy areas in regional policy, external actions, development and cooperation and are a key contribution to the baseline information for the 2030 Development Agenda.

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