Applying the degree of urbanisation manual - Conclusions

Statistics Explained

11. Conclusions

This article forms part of an online methodological manual, *Applying the Degree of Urbanisation – A methodological manual to define cities, towns and rural areas for international comparisons: 2021 edition* .

The endorsement of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020 of the methodology for the delineation of cities and urban and rural areas was a key milestone. However, work in this area is not over. As part of the endorsement process, the UN Statistical Commission made two additional requests. First, that a technical report on the implementation of the methodology for the delineation of cities and urban and rural areas was made available as quickly as possible; this manual responds to that request. Second, that the UN Statistics Division and the sponsoring organisations review the implementation of the methodology for the delineation of cities and urban and rural areas and report back to the UN Statistical Commission at one of its future sessions. As a result, the focus of the work will now shift to three different lines of action.

First, to encourage and support countries applying the methodology for compiling statistics by degree of urbanisation (level 1). The current census round presents an opportunity to apply this methodology using data with a high spatial resolution. In particular, countries that have conducted or will conduct a digital census and collect the GPS location of all households can produce a high-quality population grid. Such a population grid will create a highly robust and accurate classification of a country's settlements. This methodological manual presents a number of tools to make it easier to compile statistics by degree of urbanisation. Nevertheless, hands-on training and responding to specific questions will be needed to ensure that as many countries as possible apply the methodology in a consistent and coherent manner. Several of the organisations behind this work are ready to provide such training and technical support. This experience will then be summarised to report back on the implementation phase to the UN Statistical Commission.

Second, to improve and update global data. To support this work, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission has produced a global, estimated population grid for the years 1975, 1990, 2000 and 2015. Using new imagery, the Sentinel 1 and 2 satellites and improved methods relying on artificial intelligence and cloud computing, the JRC will publish improved population grids and produce regular updates for free. This will ensure that national administrations, NGOs, the academic community and other interested parties have access to coherent, complete and up-to-date information. In addition, the JRC will explore how to project these population grids up to 2050 and even 2100 by incorporating the latest UN World Population Projections.

Third, to integrate this new methodology in the documentation of the relevant sustainable development indicators . To facilitate the comparison of data for cities, towns and rural areas, the methodology should be included in the metadata of relevant SDG indicators. This will encourage more countries to produce the SDG indicators in such a way that they can be reliably compared across national borders. To this end, the organisations involved in this work will reach out to the custodian agencies of the various SDG indicators that might be analysed by degree of urbanisation (level 1).