

Population growth in regions

The share of the population in metropolitan regions has increased since 2000.

Over the last 40 years, there has been a slow but constant process of concentration of population in or around large and densely populated places in OECD countries. The concentration and geographic distribution of the population within a country reflects that of economic activities and it affects the way public services are delivered, with implications for people's well-being. In 2019, almost half of the population of OECD countries (48%) lived in predominantly urban regions, which represented only 6% of the total OECD surface area. Of the remaining population, 28% lived in intermediate regions and 24% in regions with a predominantly rural population (Figure 4.1).

Across OECD countries, the distribution of population across different types of regions is highly heterogeneous. While more than 70% of the population live in predominantly urban regions in Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, less than 20% of the population live in such regions in Croatia, Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia (Figure 4.1). On average, predominantly rural regions accounted for around one-quarter of the population and 82% of the land area in OECD countries but in countries such as Ireland or Slovenia, the share of the national population in predominantly rural regions was more than twice as high as the OECD average (Figure 4.2). Since 2000, the share of population living in predominantly urban regions has increased by 0.8 percentage points across the OECD, mainly at the expense of predominantly rural regions.

The relatively small increase in the population shares of predominantly urban regions masks a more pronounced increase in regions located close to metropolitan areas (i.e. FUAs of at least 250 000 inhabitants). Distinguishing regions based on the extent to which people live in or close to metropolitan areas reveals a more nuanced picture of changing spatial concentration of the population during the last two decades. Since 2000, the share of population living in metropolitan regions – i.e. regions where more than half of the population live in a metropolitan area – has increased faster than in all other types of regions in almost all OECD countries with available data. During this period, the share of the population in metropolitan regions has increased on average by 1.8 percentage points across OECD countries. The relative growth of metropolitan regions was particularly strong in Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, where their population share rose by over 3 percentage points over the last 2 decades.

Overall, the population of regions across OECD countries grew at an average rate of 0.4% per year between 2000 and 2019 (Figure 4.3 to Figure 4.6). This picture masks a substantial heterogeneity, with a significant share of regions in Asia and Europe experiencing population decline. The 10 regions with the highest population growth rate – 3.6% per year or more on average – are found in Canada (Mirabel, Quebec), Chile (Chacabuco and Isla de Pascua), Mexico (Baja California Sur, Hidalgo, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon and Quintana Roo) and Spain

(Fuerteventura). Belgium, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland recorded population growth in all of their regions during this period, while Estonia, Hungary, Japan, Latvia and Lithuania experienced a decrease in the total resident population in more than 80% of their regions, partially due to the overall decrease in the national population.

In various OECD countries, population growth was particularly concentrated in specific regions. Chile, Spain and Turkey recorded the largest regional differences in the population growth rate between 2000 and 2019, with gaps above 4 percentage points between the fastest and slowest growing regions. On the other hand, regions in Belgium, the Czech Republic and Italy experienced relatively similar growth paths, with at most a 1.5 percentage point difference between the fastest and slowest growing regions.

Definition

The OECD classifies small regions (Territorial Level 3, TL3) according to two different but complementary classifications.

The urban-rural typology classifies regions in predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural. The access to metropolitan areas typology considers the extent to which the majority of the regional population lives either within or in proximity to metropolitan areas of different sizes. More details are provided in the Reader's guide.

Source

OECD (2020), *OECD Regional Statistics (database)*, OECD, Paris <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/region-data-en>.

Reference years and territorial level

2000-19; TL3. TL2 regions for BRA, COL, CRI, IND, PER, CHN, RUS and ZAF.

Further information

Territorial grids and regional typology (Reader's Guide and Annex A)

Eurostat (2013), *Urban-Rural Typology*, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/rural-development/methodology>.

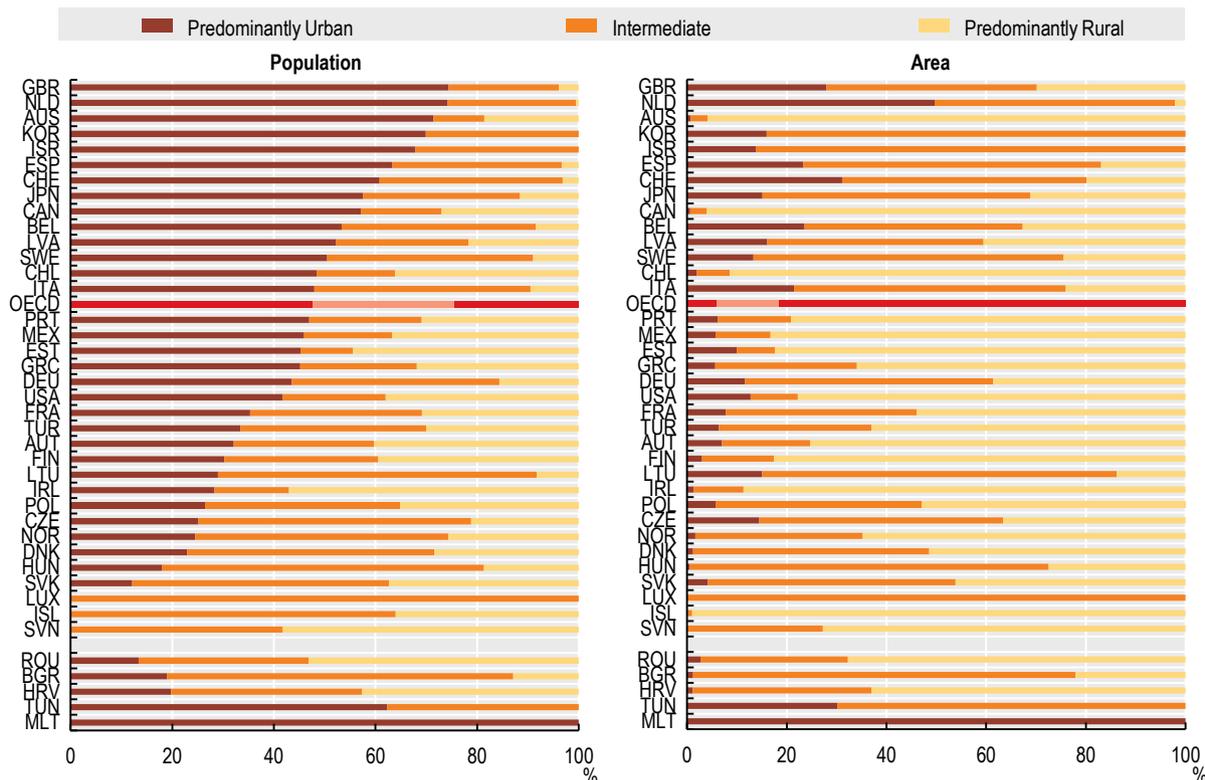
Fadic, M. et al. (2019), "Classifying small (TL3) regions based on metropolitan population, low density and remoteness", *OECD Regional Development Working Papers*, No. 2019/06, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b902cc00-en>.

Figure notes

Figure 4.1-Figure 4.2: Weighted average of TL3 regions.

Figure 4.1: 2019 or latest available year. TUN (2016); AUS, CAN, HRV, HUN, ISR, JPN, LTU, and USA (2018).

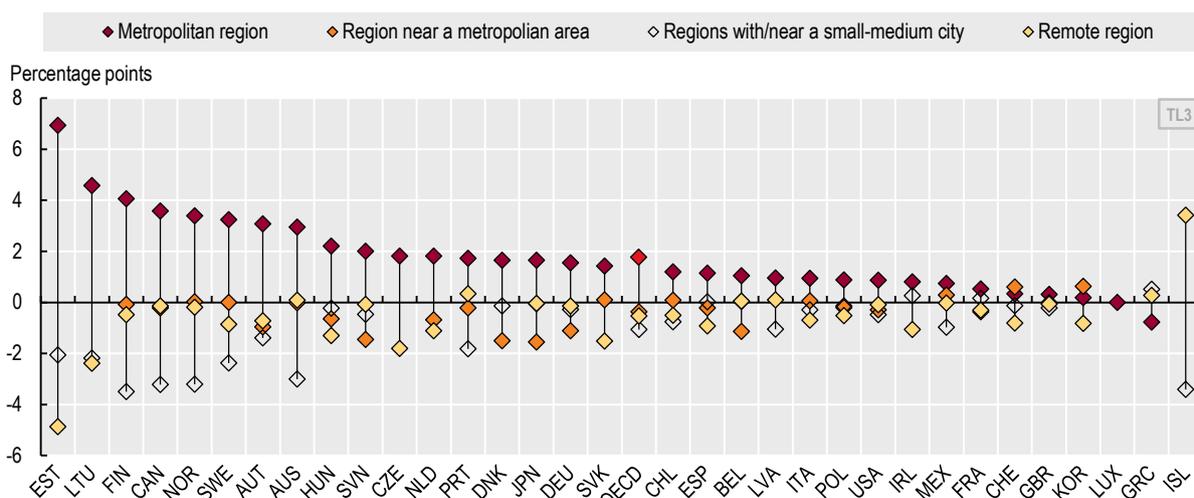
4.1. Distribution of population and area by type of small regions (TL3), 2019



StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934190495>

4.2. Change in the share of population by type of small regions (TL3), 2000-19

Change in the share of the population by type over total population



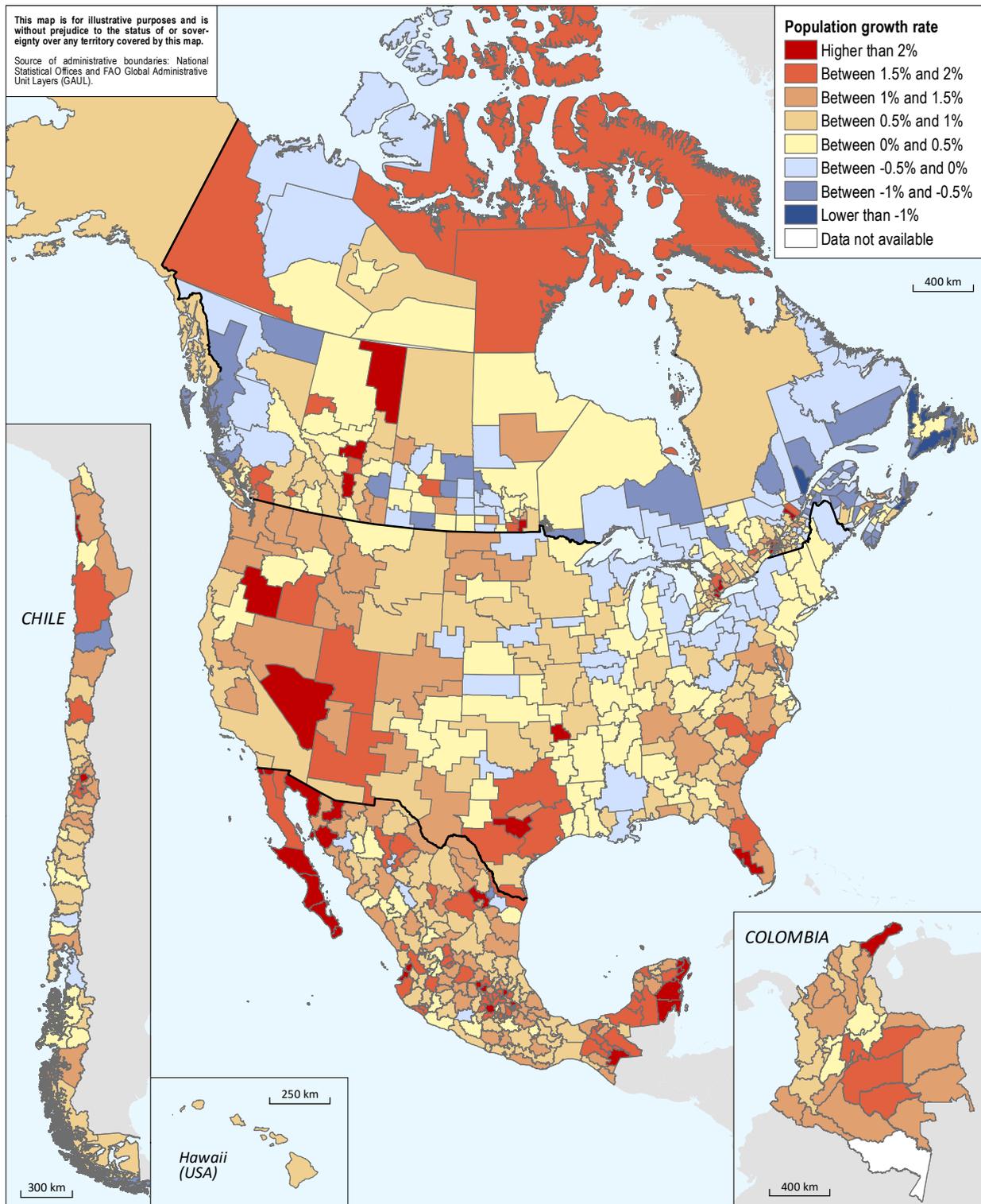
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934190514>

4. REGIONS AND CITIES IN THE FACE OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, AGEING AND URBANISATION

Population growth in regions

4.3. Regional population growth: North America, Chile and Colombia, 2000-19

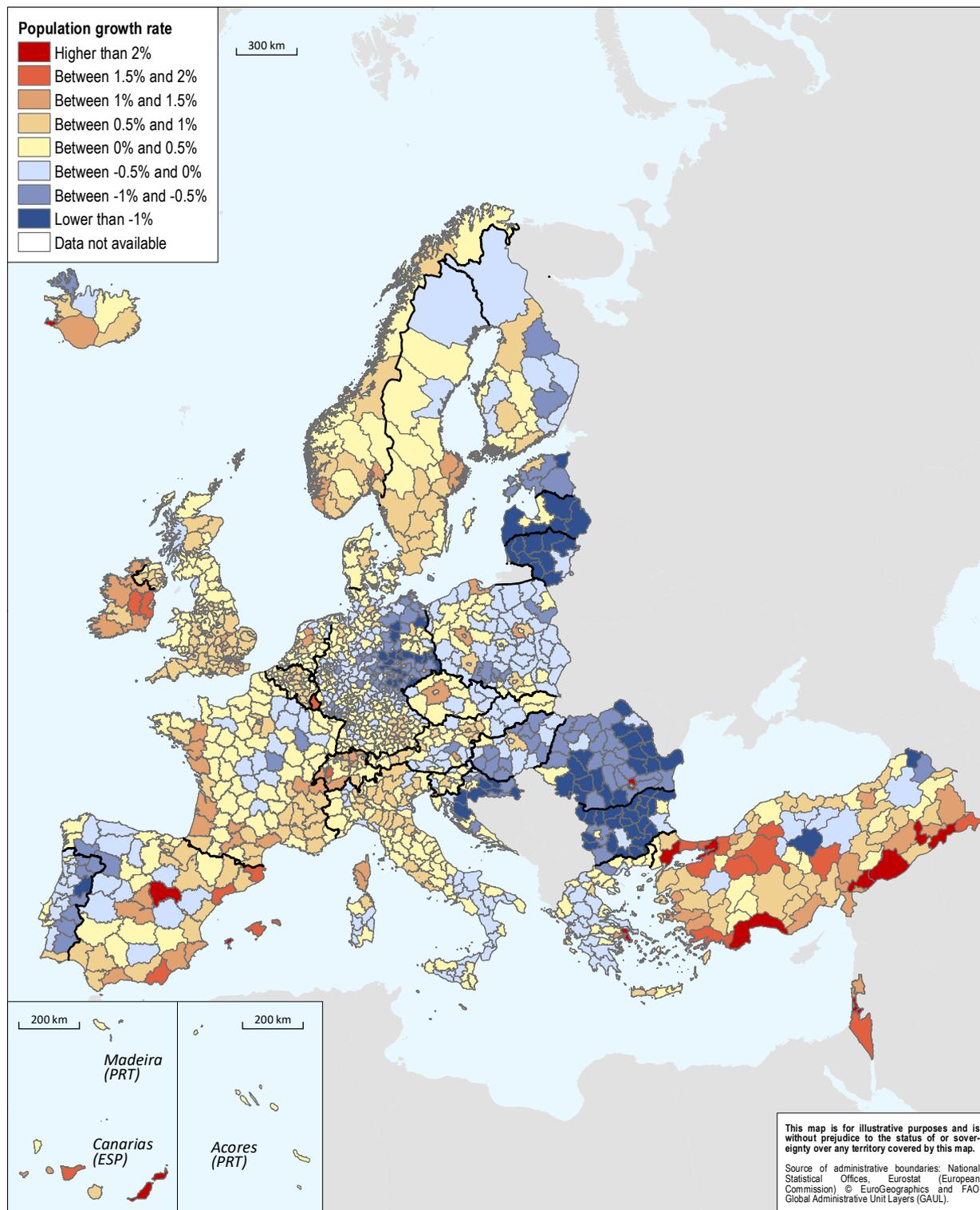
Average annual growth rate, small regions (TL3)



StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934190533>

4.4. Regional population growth: Europe, 2000-19

Average annual growth rate, small regions (TL3)



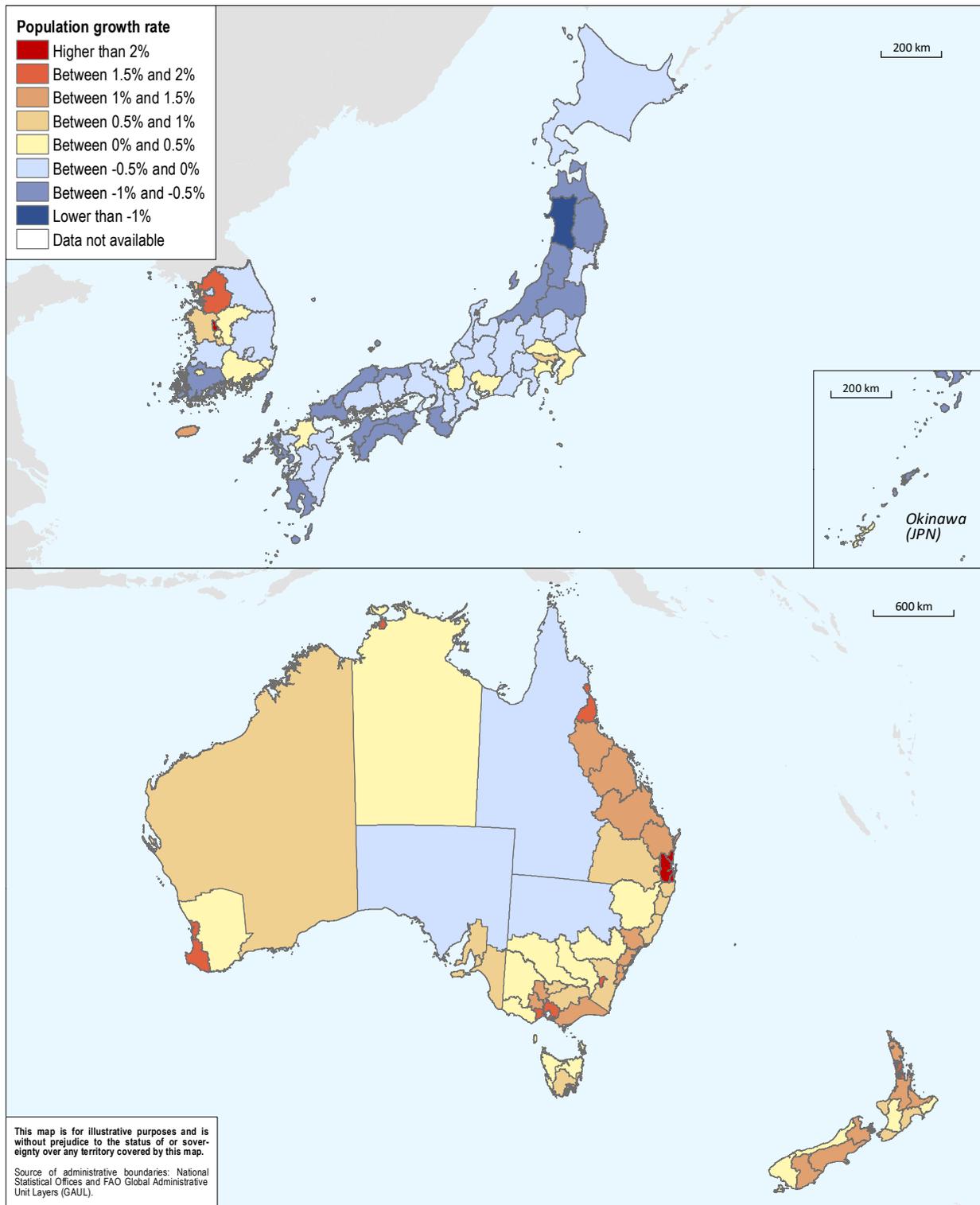
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934190552>

4. REGIONS AND CITIES IN THE FACE OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, AGEING AND URBANISATION

Population growth in regions

4.5. Regional population growth: Asia and Oceania, 2000-19

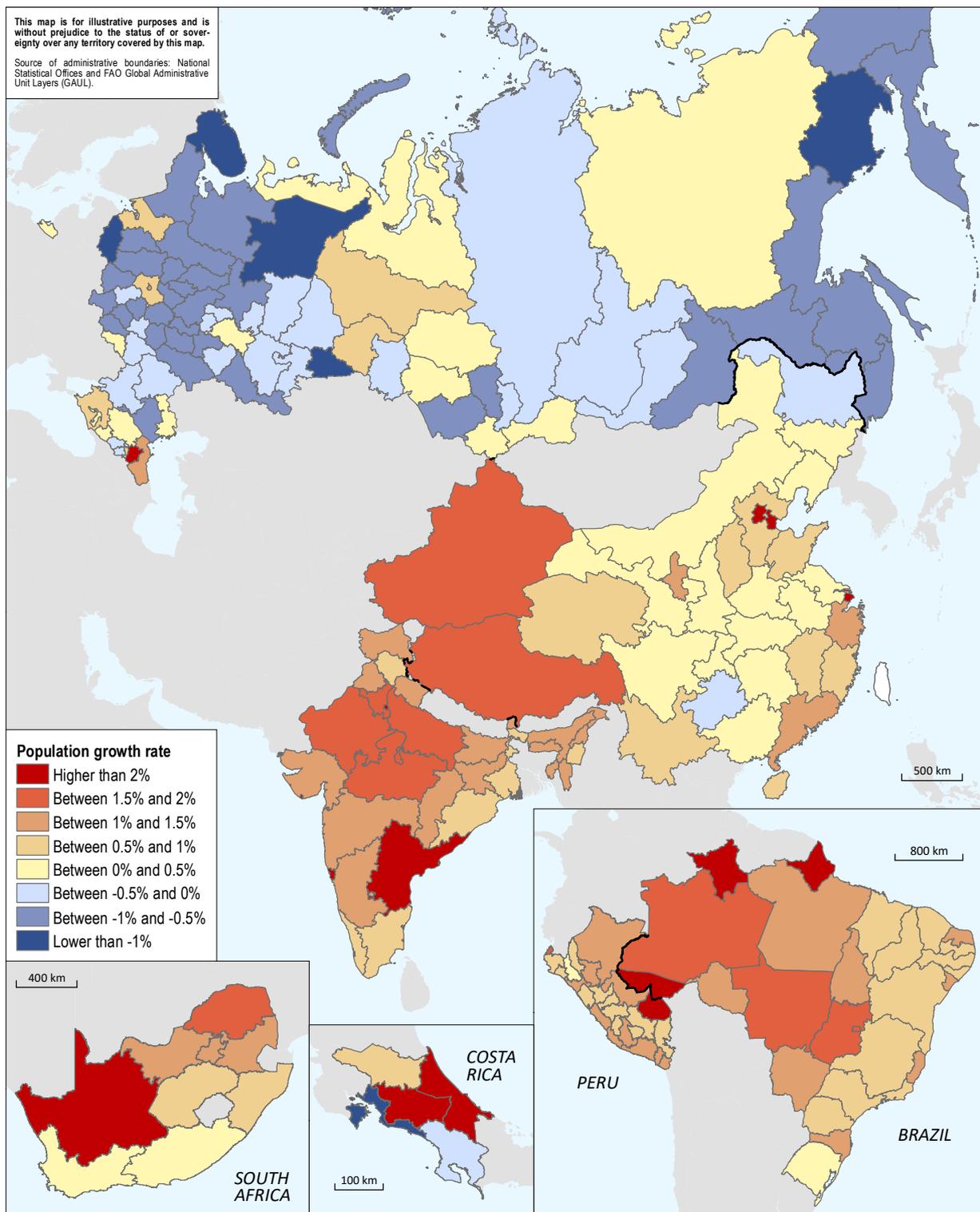
Average annual growth rate, small regions (TL3)



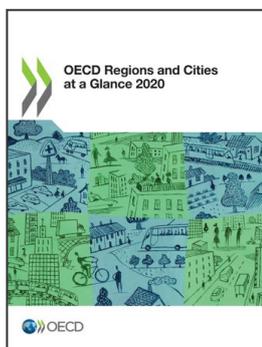
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934190571>

4.6. Regional population growth: Emerging economies, 2000-19

Average annual growth rate, small regions (TL3)



StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934190590>



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