

Statistics

in focus

GENERAL STATISTICS

THEME 1 – 2/1999

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# The densely populated areas in the European Union

## Towards a delimitation and characterisation of urban areas

Between "1980" and "1990", almost three-quarters of the European Union's conurbations recorded a growth in population. Over the same period, the active population of these conurbations increased by 12 %, whilst the population employed in the services sector grew by 20%. However, these are average figures and mask considerable variations. For example, changes in the activity rate vary by a factor of three in French conurbations, and by a factor of four in Spanish urban areas.

### Recent changes in the urbanisation process in the European Union, and delimitation of conurbations by Eurostat

What is urbanisation? What constitutes an urban area may seem obvious to most people, but as soon as we are asked for an operational definition, things become more complicated. How can we pin something down that is marked by frequent and rapid changes, often has vague boundaries and varies in both time and space? There is no generally accepted definition that could be used to delimit urban areas in a straightforward and uncontroversial fashion, just as there is no consensus on the statistical criteria that allow us to accurately distinguish between urban and rural areas. So how can we have a single, comparative basis for describing urbanisation in Europe?

Eurostat has been endeavouring to answer this question. Urbanisation could be defined as the process whereby the population concentrates in certain areas. Eurostat calls these areas "densely populated areas". Concentration of the population increases the population density and simultaneously causes a spatial expansion of areas which, if they were separate entities, would be incorporated into "conurbations". For the purposes of this exercise, these are broadly defined as groups of basic territorial units at NUTS level 5<sup>(1)</sup> with more than 50,000 inhabitants and consisting of contiguous local units each with a population density of over 500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>(1)</sup> NUTS is the name given to the system for dividing up a country's area into separate spatial units. NUTS level 5 is the smallest administrative unit of the European Union countries. Cf. *Nomenclature of Territorial Statistical Units - NUTS*, Eurostat, 1995.

Figure 1 shows, for each country, the proportion of the resident population by "population density area" around 1990. There are three types of area: densely populated areas (DPA), intermediate areas (IA) and sparsely populated areas (SPA)<sup>(1)</sup>. On average, for all the countries in question, densely populated areas account for 48 % of the population. The rest is divided evenly between intermediate areas (24 %) and sparsely populated areas (26 %)<sup>(2)</sup>. Intermediate areas comprise both countryside and, to a greater extent, small and medium-sized built-up areas (tens of thousands of inhabitants). The most heavily built-up countries are Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where the portion of the population living in densely populated areas is well above the European Union average. In Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, however, the most densely populated areas likewise contain the greatest concentrations of population. These are, however, below the European average. Conversely, the Scandinavian countries, Austria, Ireland and Greece are the least densely populated, and a large portion of their

populations live in sparsely populated areas.

### Changes in urban population in the European Union between "1980" and "1990"

Based on the figures yielded by the most recent population censuses and on the definition above, there were 471 conurbations of over 50 000 inhabitants in the European Union at the beginning of the 1990s. Population figures for "1980" and "1990"<sup>(3)</sup> were compared for both conurbations that did not change in area and for those that expanded, these being the two possible variants under the approach used. To be more precise, of the 293 conurbations for which comparable data were available<sup>(4)</sup> in "1980" and "1990", 151 (52 %) did not change by more than 1%, whereas 142 (48 %) saw much larger changes in size<sup>(5)</sup>.

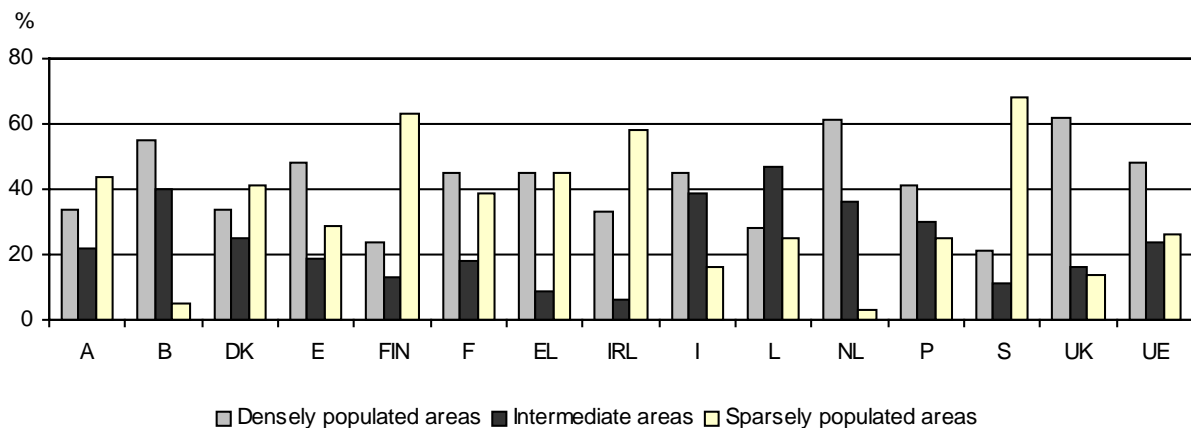


Figure 1: The quantification of urban areas in the countries of the European Union around 1990

<sup>(1)</sup> For a more detailed definition of these areas, cf. the methodological annex.

<sup>(2)</sup> The sum of these three components is slightly less than 100 %, as there is a residual category of local units which, owing to a lack of cartographic information, could not be allocated to the above three zones. For all the European Union countries taken together, this category accounts for just under 3 % of the population.

<sup>(3)</sup> The data in question were yielded by censuses carried out around "1980" and "1990". The exact census dates are given in the methodological annex.

<sup>(4)</sup> These data are not available for all the current Member States of the European Union. For further details, cf. the methodological annex.

<sup>(5)</sup> For further details, readers are referred to the general table given below. It can be seen that 116 conurbations (40 %) remained the same size between "1980" and "1990".

As for the trend in the population of conurbations between "1980" and "1990", in 71% of cases we can see an increase in the population. Obviously, the conurbations that have expanded most in size, e.g. Siena, Marseille and Cardiff, have also seen the most sustained growth. If we look merely at the conurbations that have not changed in size, 39 % (59 out of 152) saw a fall in their population between "1980" and "1990". Thus, the Italian cities of Mantova, Genoa and Bologna, for example, lost just over 10 % of their populations. The same is true in France of Roanne and, to a lesser extent, Angoulême (- 7 %).

Table 1 shows, for each country, the conurbation that has seen the most marked population loss and gain, together with the absolute number of conurbations that saw their populations rise or fall between "1980" and "1990". The index is the ratio of the population at the beginning of this period to that at the end, expressed as a percentage<sup>(1)</sup>. Most of the conurbations that recorded a fall in their population are in France and Italy. Of the countries studied, Greece is unique in that its conurbations have recorded an across-the-board increase in population. Finally, the data in Table 1 show that trends within each country differ considerably.

### Changes in the activity rate between "1980" and "1990"

Over this period, the active population of conurbations in the European Union increased by 11.7 %. This average, which is calculated on the basis of the countries for which data are available, masks major disparities. For 55 % of the conurbations studied, the trend in the active population is below the European average. This is the case with most conurbations in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, France and the Netherlands, where 15 % of these - mostly in France and the in United Kingdom - actually saw a decrease in their active populations between "1980" and "1990".

The relative trend in the activity rate can be studied by comparing the relative trends in the active and total populations (Figure 2). The diagonal line separates the conurbations which have seen an increase in activity rate (above the line) from those which have seen a fall (below the line). This is the case in 13 % of conurbations, most of them in France and the United Kingdom. By contrast, in Spain, Greece, Italy and Belgium, the activity rate has increased in all cases (Table 2). Aside from this division, the differences within each country may also be considerable.

Country	Conurbations unchanged in area (+/- 1%) with lowest population increase		Conurbations unchanged in area (+/- 1%) with highest population increase		Number of conurbations with:	
	Conurbations	Change	Conurbations	Change	Fall in population	Increase in population
Belgique	Charleroi/Mons	- 3,7 %	Hasselt/Genk	+ 2,0 %	2	6
Danmark	Kobenhavn	- 0,2 %	Aarhus	+ 1,8 %	1	2
Ellas	Khania	+ 9,5 %	Iraklion	+ 14,0 %	0	8
Espana	El Ferrol	- 3,6 %	Marbella	+ 7,7 %	9	37
France	Roanne	- 10,4 %	Cherbourg	+ 9,6 %	25	49
Italia	Mantova	- 12,8 %	Barletta	+ 7,3 %	28	27
Nederland	Vlissingen/Middel.	- 0,2 %	Leerdam/Culenberg	+ 3,1 %	2	15
United Kingdom	Scunthorpe	- 4,9 %	Loughborough	+ 6,9 %	18	64

Table 1: Changes in the population of conurbations in a number of EU Member States between "1980" and "1990"

<sup>(1)</sup> It should be noted that the general population censuses are not carried out in all countries at the same time, and that the period between censuses is not always 10 years. This is, for example, the case in France. In other words, the trend indices given here are not always strictly comparable. Cf. methodological annex.

## Changes in the percentage of persons employed in the services sector between "1980" and "1990"

Services are the predominant sector in most conurbations. Between "1980" and "1990", the number of people employed in this sector increased by an average of 20 % in absolute terms in the conurbations of the European Union<sup>(1)</sup>. For 44 % of the conurbations studied (cf. Table 6), the trend was less than this average, and for 12 % - mostly in Italy — the number of people employed in the tertiary sector fell between "1980" and "1990".

Table 3 shows the changes in the proportion of persons employed in services. Of the conurbations showing an increase in the proportion of persons employed in the services sector, we find all of France's conurbations and most of Spain's. In Belgium and Italy, by contrast, the proportion of the active population employed in this sector has fallen in most conurbations. In France, Italy and Spain, the disparities between conurbations are considerable.

## The impact of urbanisation on the activity rate and the proportion of people employed in the services sector

Does a major increase in the population of a

conurbation necessarily mean an increase in the activity rate and in the proportion of the active population employed in services?

A comparison of the first variable with each of the other two shows that there is no correlation between an increase in the population of conurbations and the change in the activity rate ( $r^2 = -0.055$ ) or the change in the relative proportion of the active population employed in the services sector ( $r^2 = 0.003$ ). Fig. 3 illustrates this lack of correlation for the activity rate.

## The activity rate in the conurbations of the European Union in "1990"

Around 1990, the activity rate in the conurbations of the European Union was 67.1%. In 54 % of these conurbations, the activity rate was below the average. Greece, Italy and Spain have the lowest activity rates, and the United Kingdom and Denmark the highest (cf. Table 4). Aside from this classification, almost all the conurbations in Belgium, Spain, France, Greece, Ireland and Italy show activity rates that are below the European average. In the Netherlands, most conurbations fall into this category too, whereas in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, almost all the activity rates for conurbations are above the European average.

Country	Conurbations with smallest change in activity rate		Conurbations with largest change in activity rate		Total number of conurbations with:	
	Conurbation	Change	Conurbation	Change	Fall in activity rate	Increase in activity rate
Belgique	Verviers	+ 0,1%	Charleroi/Mons	+ 5,4%	0	8
Danmark	Odense	- 1,4 %	Kobenhavn	- 0,7 %	3	0
Ellas	Volos	+ 4,1 %	Khania	+ 16,1 %	0	8
Espana	Alcoy	+ 4,1 %	Malaga	+ 20,2 %	0	46
France	Roanne	+ 4,4 %	Ajaccio	+ 15,4 %	15	59
Italia	Siena	+ 1,6%	Napoli	+ 48,7 %	0	55
Nederland	S'-Hertogenbosch	- 16,4%	Groningen	+ 4,0%	4	13
United Kingdom	Hartlepool	- 7,2 %	Basingstoke	+ 12,8 %	13	69

Table 2: Changes in activity rate of the population of conurbations in a number of Eurostat Union countries between "1980" and "1990"

(1) This variable is not available for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

### Persons employed in the tertiary sector in the conurbations of the European Union in "1990"

At this level, the disparities between European conurbations are particularly marked. The minimum value is for Guimarães, with 23 % of people employed in the tertiary sector, whereas the equivalent figure for Ceuta is over 85%. The differences within countries

may also be considerable. This is, for example, true of Spain, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom (cf. Table 5)

Just under half of all conurbations show a proportion of people employed in services that is under the European average. Figures include, for example, 72 % for Greece, 71 % for Spain, 53% for the United Kingdom, 49% for Italy and 39% for France.

Country	Conurbation with the smallest change in the proportion of persons employed in services		Conurbation with the largest change in the proportion of persons employed in services		Total number of conurbations with:	
	Conurbation	Change	Conurbation	Change	Fall in the proportion of persons employed in services	Rise in the proportion of people employed in services
Belgique	Namur	- 11,1%	Hasselt/Genk	+ 5,0%	5	3
Danmark	Odense	+ 0,5 %	Aarhus	+ 0,8 %	0	3
Ellas	Khania	- 3,5 %	Iraklion	+ 9,4 %	8	38
Espana	Gerona	- 20,5 %	Eibar	+ 34,6 %	0	74
France	Ajaccio	+ 1,9 %	Dunkerque	+ 34,1 %	3	5
Italia	Siena	- 43,5 %	Vigevano	+ 22,0 %	43	12

Table 4: Changes in the proportion of persons employed in the tertiary sector in the conurbations of certain European Union countries between "1980" and "1990"

Country	Conurbations with the lowest activity rate		Conurbations with the highest activity rate		Number of conurbations with an activity rate below or above the European average	
	Conurbation	AR	Conurbation	AR	Below	Above
Belgique	Charleroi/Mons	57,0 %	Leuven	65,2 %	8	0
Danmark	Aarhus	79,7 %	Kobenhavn	82,3 %	0	2
Ellas	Ioannina	51,3 %	Iraklion	57,1 %	11	0
Espana	Cadiz	52,5 %	Gerona	67,2 %	47	1
France	Longwy/Differdange	55,5 %	Annemasse	76,0 %	52	30
Ireland	Cork	58,4 %	Dublin	64,8 %	3	0
Italia	Grottaglie	52,2 %	Modena	68,5 %	58	2
Luxembourg			Luxembourg	68,9 %	0	1
Nederland	S'-Hertogenbosch	55,6 %	Almere	75,3 %	13	10
Osterreich	Innsbruck	66,3 %	Wels	74,1 %	1	5
Portugal	Cova da Piedade	66,6 %	Guimarães	77,5 %	2	7
Suomi/Finland	Lahti	73,5 %	Helsinki	78,6 %	0	5
Sverige	Malmo	72,4 %	Stockholm	79,5 %	0	3
United Kingdom	Merthyr Tydfil	63,9 %	Basingstoke	82,1 %	3	101

Table 3: Activity rates in conurbations in the countries of the European Union around 1990

Country	Conurbations with the lowest proportion of people employed in the tertiary sector		Conurbations with the highest proportion of people employed in the tertiary sector		Number of conurbations with an above- or below (European) average proportion of people employed in the tertiary sector	
	Congglomeration	AR	Congglomeration	AR	Below	Above
Belgique	Hasselt/Genk	59.3%	Leuven	80.0%	4	4
Danmark	Odense	70.0%	Kobenhavn	81.3%	0	3
Ellas	Khalkis	55.3%	Ioannina	74.6%	8	3
Espana	Eibar	38.0%	Ceuta	85.4%	35	14
France	Montbeliard	45.6%	Poitiers	83.3%	32	50
Ireland	Limerick	64.2%	Dublin	72.4%	2	1
Italia	Arzignano	33.2%	Reggio di Calabria	83.3%	30	31
Luxembourg			Luxembourg	71.3%	0	1
Nederland	Oss	55.0%	Den Helder	84.0%	8	13
Osterreich	Wels	61.5%	Innsbruck	77.4%	2	4
Portugal	Guimarães	23.0%	Coimbra	80.8%	7	9
Suomi/Finland	Porvoo	61.1%	Helsinki	78.8%	2	3
Sverige	Malmö	74.6%	Stockholm	81.6%	0	3
United Kingdom	Mansfield	50.1%	Cambridge	79.5%	55	49

Table 5: Variations in the proportion of people employed in the tertiary sector in the conurbations of the European Union around 1990

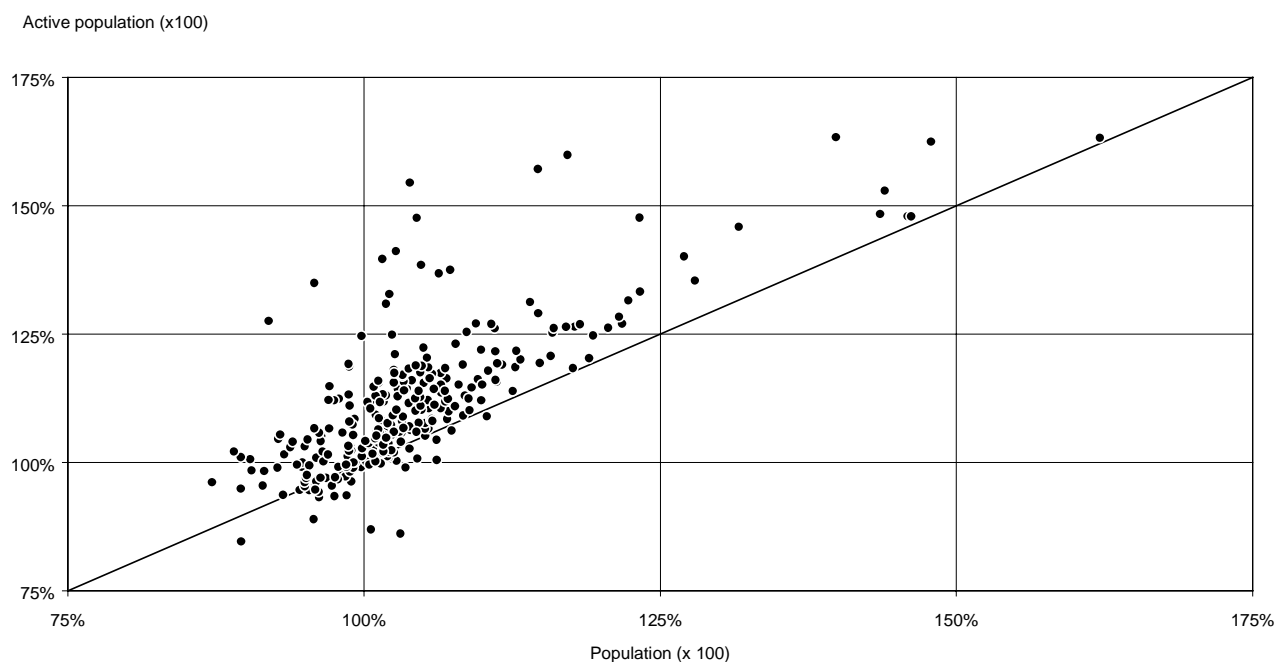


Figure 2: Changes in the population and active population of conurbations between 1980 and 1990

Conurbation	Region Code	Pop.1980	Pop. 1990	Area 80	Area 90	Active pop. 1980	Active pop. 1990	Pop. empl. in serv. "1980"	Pop. empl. in serv. "1990"
PARIS	FR1	8 816 744	9 314 971	215 782	233 605	4 355 868	4 714 899	2 433 040	3 202 888
LONDON	UK52	7 963 293	8 021 489	234 182	235 418	4 044 910	4 113 201		2 762 499
RANDSTAD HOLLAND	NL32	5 219 640	5 455 249	290 573	305 164	2 405 000	2 423 000		1 512 000
MILANO	IT20	5 368 287	5 397 780	298 810	320 862	2 254 546	2 491 131	1 081 677	1 279 424
MADRID	ES3	4 225 661	4 279 340	121 070	125 810	1 562 426	1 805 141	868 755	1 040 879
NAPOLI	IT82	3 857 433	4 007 165	172 757	182 317	1 009 236	1 559 152	524 956	621 259
MANCHESTER/ LIVERPOOL	UK31	3 973 985	3 866 936	176 202	180 734	1 886 983	1 800 557		1 026 238
BARCELONA	ES51	3 702 555	3 657 704	74 370	73 160	1 449 868	1 610 236	602 214	728 420
BRUXELLES/BRUSSEL/ ANTWERPEN/GENT	BE31	2 758 644	3 245 245	211 824	258 432	1 135 336	1 343 671	678 053	738 186
ROMA	IT60	3 156 148	3 149 403	188 748	190 812	1 101 239	1 372 410	763 059	916 091
ATHINAI	GR3	3 035 954	3 122 583	40 287	49 180	1 067 749	1 205 121	664 847	738 885
WEST YORKSHIRE	UK31	1 719 316	2 787 493	100 597	169 290	809 994	1 321 631		731 396
WEST MIDLANDS	UK73	2 422 935	2 446 561	79 469	83 595	1 166 356	1 168 969		608 831
LILLE/LENS/KORTRIJK	FR3	2 167 322	2 360 501	150 671	166 077	847 846	934 215	388 420	508 803
TORINO	IT11	1 581 898	1 430 169	51 457	46 326	650 232	654 180	322 941	325 634
VALENCIA	ES52	1 267 417	1 309 962	52 450	52 440	467 096	540 725	202 331	253 192
KOBENHAVN	DK	1 301 405	1 298 561	82 018	82 018	739 714	732 886	548 523	547 104
MARSEILLE	FR82	940 352	1 150 331	32 889	73 067	370 272	487 002	209 700	313 774
LYON	FR71	1 087 744	1 146 948	40 110	43 714	500 568	533 451	262 152	332 486

Table 6: Basic data on "LFS urban agglomerations"

<sup>(1)</sup> The complete table is available on request

## ➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

For the purposes of this exercise, only data from the SIRE database were used. The European infra-regional information system (SIRE) was created by Eurostat to meet a growing demand for local data, i.e. at NUTS level 5, meaning the *commune* in Belgium and France, the *municipio* in Spain, the *Gemeinde* in Germany, or other equivalent territorial units. This system has the advantage of allowing territorial units to be aggregated into functional zones such as conurbations. The concept of urbanisation was introduced into a number of statistical operations to describe the place of residence of the persons surveyed. Three types of area were defined according to the degree of urbanisation, each consisting of a set of contiguous local units (NUTS 5). This produced the following:

- *Densely populated areas.* These have more than 50 000 inhabitants and consist of contiguous local units, each of which has a population density of over 500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. May also include units of lower density, providing these are entirely within the area in question.
- *Intermediate areas.* These consist of contiguous local units with a population density of over 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, and not belonging to the densely populated area. Such areas have at least 50 000 inhabitants or border a densely populated area.
- *Sparsely populated areas.* These comprise a set of continuous local units that belong neither to densely populated areas nor to intermediate areas.

This issue of *Statistics in focus* uses only some of the variables contained in the SIRE database. Maximum use was made of these by comparing the figures yielded by the censuses conducted around "1980" and "1990". For this reason, comparisons cannot always be made in certain countries. This is the case, for example, with Germany, which did not carry out a population census around 1980 and which only has a micro-census dating from 1987. Nor are there 1980 data for Austria, Finland and Sweden, which joined the Union only in 1995 and supplied retrospective data for 1990 only. Finally, between "1980" and "1990", Portugal changed the NUTS 5 breakdown, switching from "concelhos" to "freguesias".

Country	1980	1990
Osterreich	05-1981	05-1991
Belgique	03-1981	03-1991
BR Deutschland	*	05-1987
Danmark	(1989)	(1991)
Espana	03-1981	03-1991
Suomi/Finland	11-1980	(1991)
France	03-1982	03-1990
Ellas	04-1981	03-1991
Ireland	10-1981	04-1991
Italia	03-1981	10-1991
Luxembourg	(1989)	03-1991
Nederland	03-1981	(1990)
Portugal	09-1981	04-1991
Sverige	09-1980	(1991)
United Kingdom	04-1981	04-1991

### Conventional surveys carried out in the countries of the European Union around "1980" and "1990"

\* In Germany and the Netherlands, the conventional censuses planned for around 1980 were not carried out. In Scandinavia, the conventional census was replaced by alternative methods based wholly or partly on administrative registers (cf. Eggerickx T., Begeot F., *Les recensements en Europe dans les années 1990s. De la diversité des pratiques nationales à la comparabilité internationale des résultats* [Censuses in Europe in the 1990s. From the diversity of national practices to the international comparability of results], Population, 6, 1993, pp. 1705-1732). The dates in brackets are the reference years for SIRE data that do not come from population censuses.

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## For information on methodology

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