



Context: inequality plays out at the scale of cities

Cities are everywhere places of opportunities. When they function properly, they allow both workers and firms to benefit from thick labour markets, proximity with other firms and workers and easy physical access to many high-level services that are important to grow and prosper. However, cities are also places where inequalities in many dimensions are higher than in non-urban places. Inequalities in cities can be assessed from a peculiar perspective, since they have an inherent spatial dimension. Unequal cities can create gaps and barriers that produce exclusive spaces, which can in turn exacerbate societal disparities. Such phenomenon is also known in the literature as socio-economic spatial segregation, which is a situation where people of a similar background – i.e. for example in terms of income, culture, race, religion, etc. – often live clustered in certain parts of the city, with few interactions and different living conditions.

The OECD, in partnership with the Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI), launches the project “**Divided cities: understanding intra-urban disparities**” to better understand the different dimensions of inequality within cities and metropolitan areas throughout OECD countries.

Rationale

Segregation can be a consequence of inequality and poverty and it can have both positive and negative sides. It is deemed to be especially problematic when it is involuntary. People and households with high income have a certain level of freedom which allows them to choose in which neighbourhood to live, while low income households have much less options, and often end up in areas where housing is cheap and accessible, but where access to services can be lower. The concentration of disadvantage might affect the current and future living conditions of the people who live there or grow up there. In this context, policies for building inclusive and prosperous cities should help harness the potential and dynamism of cities to reduce harmful social gaps and mitigate their effects.

There is a large literature on spatial segregation in cities and on how inequality plays out in across city neighbourhoods. However, most of the research focuses on single countries or cities and takes into account the concentration of people and households mainly by income or race. International evidence and a systematic reflection on the different types of spatial segregation that can characterise contemporary cities are still missing. It represents anyway an important step to help policy makers design policy to promote good living standards everywhere and to avoid that opportunities for people could be negatively affected according to the place, within the city, where they live or grow up.

For more information and interest in participating in this project, please contact:

paolo.veneri@oecd.org



What does the project offers

The project aims to better understand intra-urban inequality in order to help national and sub-national policy makers to make cities more inclusive and prosperous. It does so by providing new evidence for a subset of OECD metropolitan areas on segregation and intra-urban inequality from a multi-dimensional perspective, as well as examples of national and local responses to spatial segregation and concentration of disadvantages.

The final report including the main results of the work is foreseen for the end of 2017.

The project addresses different aspects of spatial segregation or intra-urban disparities and at different scales, analysing its complex and variegated implications. The final report will cover several dimension of inequality – such as income, wealth, race, religion – or specific cross-cutting issues in the topic, such as the causes and implications of spatial segregation; the role of governance structures on levels of segregation, etc. The different scales (i.e. neighbourhood, municipalities, etc.) at which spatial segregation characterises contemporary cities will also be addressed in the final report.

Preliminary outline and possible subjects covered by the project

- Linking income inequality and segregation in OECD metropolitan areas
- Wealth disparities and migration in US metropolitan areas
- Refugees in cities: governance approaches and location patterns
- The spatial concentration of high and low-educated migrants
- Cultural and religion patterns in urban concentration
- Local taxation and spatial segregation in French cities

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