

# Population

Population is the area in which there appears to be the most discrepancy between different statistical sources for the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone. The main reason is that China's national statistical approach to population has not kept pace with the actual movement of people around the country.

The most widely quoted figure for population for the Pearl River Delta region is that for 'registered population', defined as population with official police registration. This is the series that most investment analysts seem to quote. This series differs from 'Census population', which is the population actually resident in a location at the time of the national census. The 'registered population' series is reported every year and thus gives a continuous series. The national census is taken only every ten years. The last one was in the year 2000. There is also an 'Interim Census', derived from a one-percent sample that is taken every five years mid-way in the ten year Census cycle, most recently in 2005.

The annual series 'registered population' figure was 27.63 million in 2005. This figure differs substantially from the region's 'Interim Census population', which was 45.47 million in 2005.<sup>10</sup> The main reason for the difference is that the Interim Census population figure includes the migrant population and the registered population figure does not. Given the large number of people that come to the Pearl River Delta region for employment, but do not have official 'registered' status, this discrepancy is larger in the Pearl River Delta region than anywhere else in China. According to the Guangdong Statistics Bureau, Shenzhen's 'registered population' in 2005 was 1.82 million, while 'Interim Census

<sup>10</sup> *Interim Census Population 2005 is year-end figure.*

population' was 8.28 million. In Dongguan, 'registered population' in 2005 was 1.66 million, while 'Interim Census population' was 6.56 million. In Foshan, 'registered population' in 2005 was 3.54 million, while 'Interim Census population' was 5.80 million. The discrepancies for other jurisdictions in the Pearl River Delta region were smaller, though they were still significant.<sup>11</sup>

As of 2005, the actual population of the Pearl River Delta region substantially exceeded the 2005 Interim Census population. Based on press reports, some analysts have estimated that the population of the Pearl River Delta region could be 60 million. The upshot is that the most commonly used population figures for the Pearl River Delta region, i.e. registered population, are equal to only around one-half or less of the actual population. Even the 2005 Interim Census population figures appear to underestimate substantially the actual population in the Pearl River Delta due to a variety of factors that make it difficult to achieve full head counts.

As mentioned above, for most of China, the registered and Census populations are similar, so the discrepancy is not as great as in the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone. In the Yangtze River Delta region, for example, the Census population of 87.43 million in 2000 is not that much larger than the 2002 registered population of 75.71 million and is comparable to the 2005 registered population of 82.64 million.<sup>12</sup>

Hong Kong and Macao report the results of population censuses and estimates for the same population series for years between the censuses.

<sup>11</sup> Figures were compiled from statistics bureaux of local jurisdictions in the Pearl River Delta region and figures from Report of Guangdong One-percent Sample Survey on Population 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Statistical Yearbooks of China, Shanghai, Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province, and local jurisdictions in Jiangsu, Zhejiang Provinces, and their respective statistics bureaux. The 2000 Census population for the Yangtze River Delta region includes Taizhou in Zhejiang Province.

## Comments

Usually population is a fundamental statistic that is not particularly controversial. The wide range of population figures for the Pearl River Delta region thus can be misleading, particularly when they propagate into other statistics that use population as a denominator. In our view, the 'best measure' of population for the Pearl River Delta region is that provided by the 2005 Interim Census, since it is an attempt to identify all the people living in the region. It should be noted that the level of government in a location and the level of public services often is determined by the 'official' population number (i.e. 'registered population'). Thus, an inappropriate figure can have an impact that goes well beyond the simple statistics themselves.

