HISTORICAL INCOME AND PRODUCTIVITY LEVELS

The process of “catch-up” in average income implies that less advanced economies should experience faster growth in output per capita, typically by adopting the practices of more advanced economies, notably as regards capital, technology and labour utilisation. While less developed countries may grow more rapidly at the beginning of the catching-up process, their economic growth rates are expected to decline over time as their income levels come closer to those of the more advanced countries.

**Definition**

For each country, the rate of “catch-up” vis-à-vis the United States is calculated as the difference between the average annual compounded growth rate of its GDP per capita level over the period and the average annual compounded growth rate of the United States’ GDP per capita level over the same period.

**Comparability**

Comparisons of income and productivity levels for a particular year are derived from the time series of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), population, employment and hours worked of the OECD Productivity Database. For some countries, GDP and population data were also derived from Angus Maddison (2001), *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, OECD Development Centre, OECD, Paris.

Calculations are based on GDP measures converted from national currencies to US dollars using 2006 Purchasing Power Parities.

**Long-term trends**

Since the 1970s, GDP per capita and labour productivity have broadly converged in the OECD area. Over the period 1973-2006, Ireland and Korea had the highest rates of catch-up in GDP per capita with 2.3% and 3.8% per year, respectively. More advanced economies that started with relatively high income levels in the 1970s have had lower rates of catch-up, even stagnated or recently have diverged vis-à-vis the United States; this was also the case for less advanced economies such as Eastern European countries, Mexico and Turkey.

Estimates of levels of GDP per hour worked display slightly different patterns. Since the beginning of the new millennium, several European countries have surpassed the United States in terms of average labour productivity levels. Only Australia, Canada, Mexico and New Zealand did not catch-up vis-à-vis the United States’ productivity levels.

**Sources**

- OECD Productivity Database.

**Further information**

**Statistical publications**


**Methodological publications**


**Websites**

### Income and productivity levels relative to the United States

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