

---

Subject: Re: Has urban/ rural classification changed over the years?

Posted by [fred.arnold@icf.com](mailto:fred.arnold@icf.com) on Thu, 04 Jul 2024 15:06:16 GMT

[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

---

You are correct that the urban/rural classifications used in all five NFHS surveys are based on definitions decided upon by the most recent census. For each census, the Registrar General and Census Commissioner in New Delhi decides on the characteristics that are required for an area to be classified as urban or rural. All NFHS surveys use the most recent census lists of urban and rural areas to select a subset of primary sampling units (PSUs) for the NFHS sample. For NFHS-5, for example, the 2011 Census list of urban and rural areas was used to select PSUs for the survey.

The census bureau delineates urban areas by applying specific criteria to census data and other data. Rural areas encompass all population, housing, and territory not included within urban areas.

The census of India defines an urban area as having the following characteristics:

- A. A minimum population of 5,000
- B. A density of population of at least 400 persons per square kilometer
- C. At least 75 percent of the working population engaged in non-agricultural occupations

Residential addresses under a panchayat administration governed by a Gram Sabha are considered to be rural, whereas residential addresses coming under the jurisdiction of a Municipality, Municipal Corporation, Nagar Panchayat, or Notified area committees are considered to be urban. Census data have always been presented for rural and urban areas separately.

Going back to each previous census prior to an NFHS survey, I would say that it's not possible to be certain what urban-rural criteria were used for each census. This information is not always transparent. Another complication is that for a variety of reasons, an area that should be classified as urban according to the definition might actually be changed to be classified as a rural area and an area that should be classified as rural is sometimes changed to be classified as urban. This may happen if the population size of the area, the population density, or the working population engaged in non-agricultural occupations have changed. In some instances a local area may persuade the government to change their urban or rural status even if their characteristics have not changed because they may receive certain benefits or avoid certain requirements if a change is made. Such changes might also be politically motivated.

In general, I would say that the urban and rural classifications have not changed much between censuses and consequently between NFHS surveys, but there does not appear to be any way to be certain that is the case.