

What does the practice of hand therapy look like in IFSHT member countries?

Summary of the 2014 IFSHT member survey

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In keeping with IFSHT's mission "to provide global networking & educational opportunities to develop and enhance the practice of hand therapy", a survey of our membership was conducted in 2014. The aim was to identify key elements and trends for hand therapy in IFSHT member countries around the world.

The online platform, Survey Monkey, was used to conduct the survey. The survey had 22 questions written by a native English speaker and evaluated and adapted for clarity by a non-native English speaker. The survey asked about:

- number of members in the society
- ratio of occupational to physical therapists within the hand therapy organization
- settings where hand therapy services were provided
- opportunities to specialize or certify as a hand therapist
- renewal requirements for any certification process
- titles for recognition of hand therapists
- advantages for recognition of hand therapists
- hand therapy educational opportunities
- barriers to achieving a qualification system for hand therapy
- barriers to accessing hand therapy information
- types of hand therapy information available
- methods supporting development of hand therapy in their country.

In July 2014, we launched the online e-survey with our 33 full member delegates in IFSHT, with a reminder email sent to non-responders after 6 weeks. By September 1, 2014, 29 of 33 full member countries had responded (88% response rate). For the four countries that did not respond, we included data from our IFSHT membership records in our analyses where possible. Additionally, a supplemental "needs assessment" questionnaire was sent by email to 9 corresponding members with relevant information from this questionnaire also included in our analyses. Country total population data for each member country were obtained from www.countrywatch.com (accessed July 2014). Information by individual country can be viewed in Appendix 1.

As of September 2014, there were 8385 hand therapists identified as members in the 42 member organizations in IFSHT (33 full members, 9 corresponding members). In this report, all members of IFSHT are defined as "hand therapists".

Ratio of Hand Therapist to country population: The greatest ratio of hand therapists per capita was in Finland, where there is one hand therapist per 17, 218 people, followed by New Zealand, Switzerland, Denmark and the Netherlands. Among the IFSHT members, eleven countries had less than 100,000 people served by one hand therapist. Fifteen member countries had between 100,001 and 999,999 people served by one hand therapist. Sixteen countries had 1,000,000 or more people for each hand therapist. Figure 1 provides a color coded world map for ratio of hand therapists to total population in each of our member organizations. Table 1 provides detailed information by country as to the population served by a single hand therapist in that country.

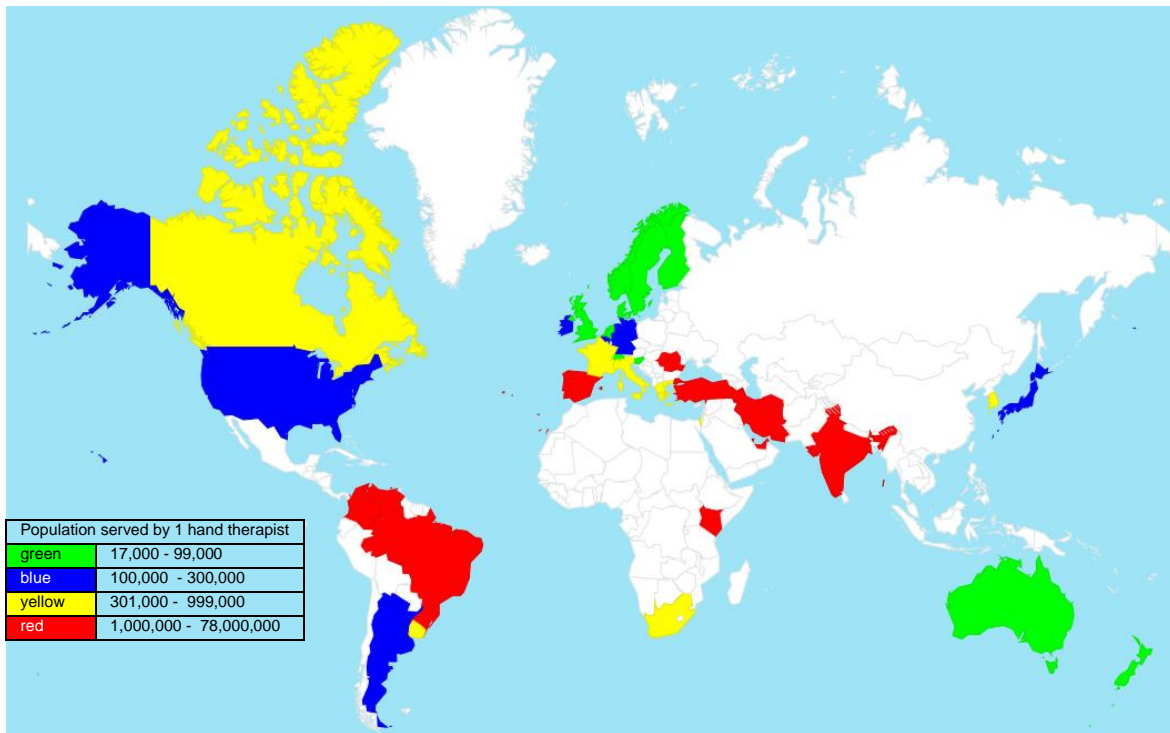


Figure 1: Ratio of hand therapists to total population in our member organization countries.

Table 1: Population served by 1 Hand Therapist in IFSHT member organization countries .

Country	Population per 1 Hand Therapist	Country	Population per 1 Hand Therapist	Country	Population per 1 Hand Therapist
Finland	17'218	Japan	222'209	Bahrain	1'332'171
New Zealand	23'168	Barbados	284'548	Brazil	1'401'160
Switzerland	27'058	Belgium	298'553	Gaza	1'600'000
Denmark	27'434	Argentina	298'780	Turkey	1'632'388
Netherlands	30'686	France	343'863	Colombia	1'778'665
Sweden	45'679	South Africa	345'540	Qatar	2'020'000
Norway	64'031	Canada	351'867	Spain	2'386'897
Slovenia	66'276	Greece	359'185	Kenya	3'000'670
Australia	75'025	Uruguay	416'622	India	8'526'514
United Kingdom	84'991	Israel	521'457	United Arab Emirates	9'346'129
Hong Kong	89'844	Italy	881'145	Romania	19'963'581
United States	106'504	South Korea	980'800	Sri Lanka	20'483'000
Germany	139'649	Portugal	1'081'383	Saudi Arabia	28'828'870
Ireland	161'092	Venezuela	1'085'900	Iran	77'447'168

Percentage of PT to OT professionals working as hand therapists: In our member countries about 70% of hand therapy professionals are occupational therapists (OT) and 30% are physical therapists (PT). However, there were notable differences in whether an OT or PT was the most common profession in each country. Two countries reported that one profession dominated the field of hand therapy; Denmark reported that 99% of hand therapists were OTs, and Turkey reported only PTs specialized in the treatment of hand injuries. Figure 2 shows the percentage of PT to OT professionals in each of our member organizations.

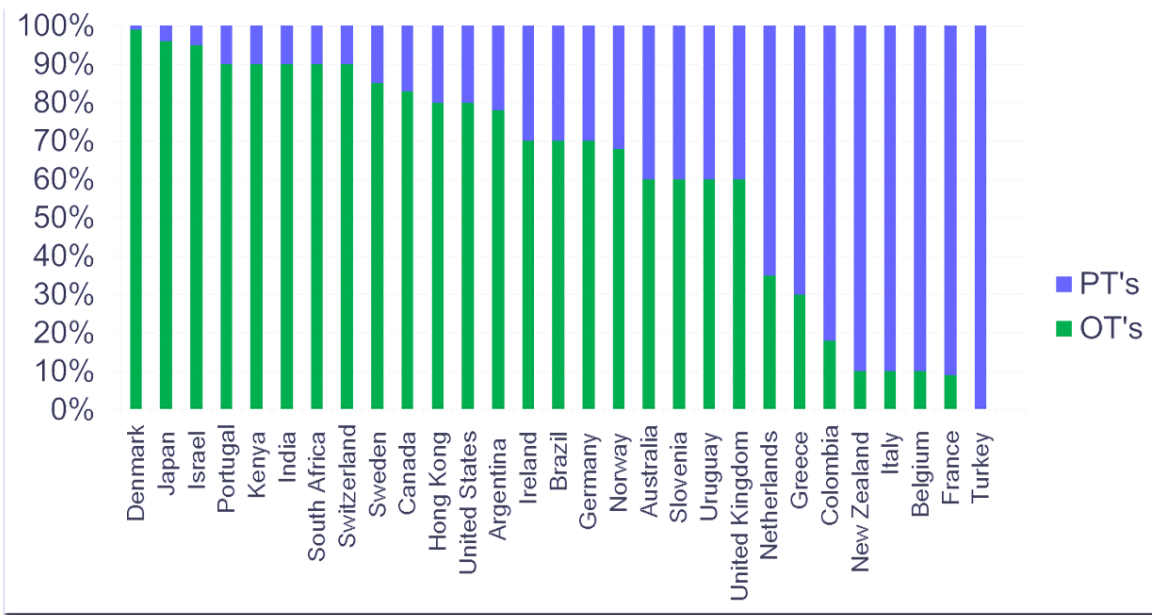


Figure 2: Percentage of PT and OT professionals working as hand therapist in our member organizations.

Hand therapy skill development: How occupational or physical therapists developed skills in hand therapy also varied (Figure 3). Respondents indicated that participation in hand therapy skills courses was the most frequently utilized method for therapists in their country to learn about hand therapy. Other opportunities commonly utilized included visiting programs, hand therapy internship programs and post-graduate certificate programs. In several countries there are post graduate or university level programs available to learn about hand therapy.

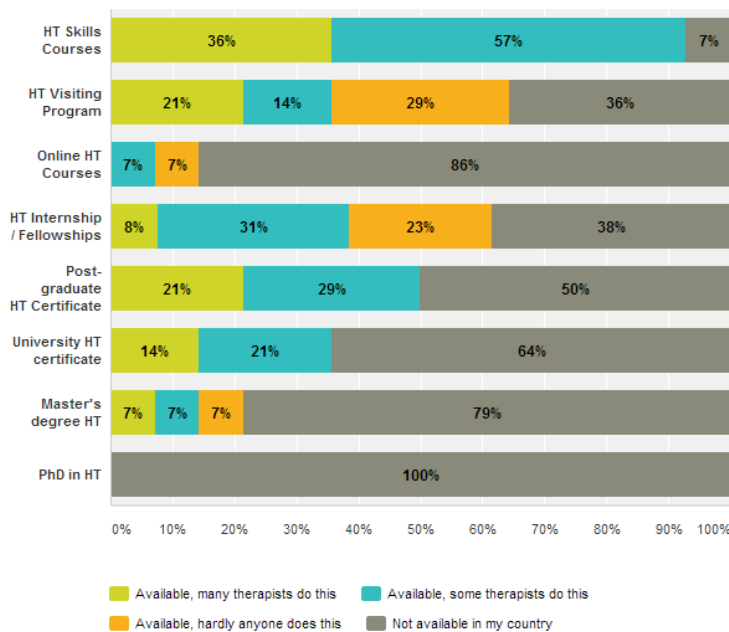


Figure 3: Different methods for hand therapy skill development in our member organizations.

Access to hand therapy information: Respondents were asked about the availability of hand therapy literature in their country in the primary language(s) spoken in their country (Table 1). Seven countries reported that hand therapy textbooks are not available in their country's primary language in comparison to eight countries reporting that there were more than 10 hand therapy textbooks available. In 12 countries a hand therapy journal was available and in 14 countries no hand therapy journal was available. Despite increased access to the internet globally, many respondents indicated that language barriers and the expense of acquiring information continued to limit their ability to access information relevant to hand therapy. More information about perceived barriers is visible in Figure 4.

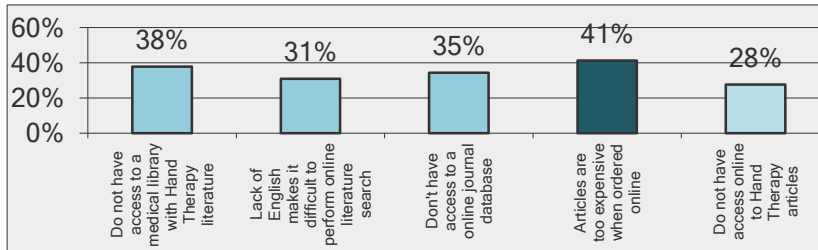


Figure 4: Barriers to accessing hand therapy literature.

Recognition of Hand Therapists: The survey asked if it was possible to attain formal recognition as a hand therapist in the member country. Delegates from 29 countries responded to this question, with 13 (45%) indicating that hand therapy was recognized in their country and 16 (55%) indicating recognition of hand therapy was not possible. The countries where hand therapy recognition was not yet possible listed the following reasons: too small for a formal recognition program, legal issues prevent formal recognition in that country, too expensive to develop, no perceived need for a formal recognition program, members have access to this process in other countries, working on a process for formal recognition of hand therapists but it takes time.

In the 13 countries with a formal recognition process in place, the process to attain recognition as a hand therapist varied. All 13 countries noted that therapists had to first complete training as either an occupational or physical therapist before specializing in hand therapy. Additional qualification to become a hand therapist followed one of three pathways: 1) **formal educational programs** that lead to a diploma or certificate in Hand Therapy, 2) **portfolio programs** that recognize experience that requiring evidence of experience and knowledge of hand therapy practice, and 3) **auto-didactic programs** that issue certification upon completion of a hand therapy exam (Figure 5 A). Some countries, such as New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, have multiple pathways for obtaining recognition as a hand therapist (Figure 5 B).

Figure 5 A: Overview of three pathways for accrediting hand therapists.

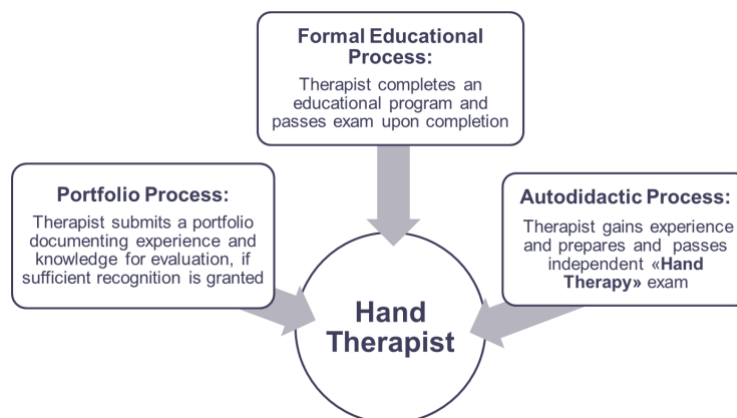
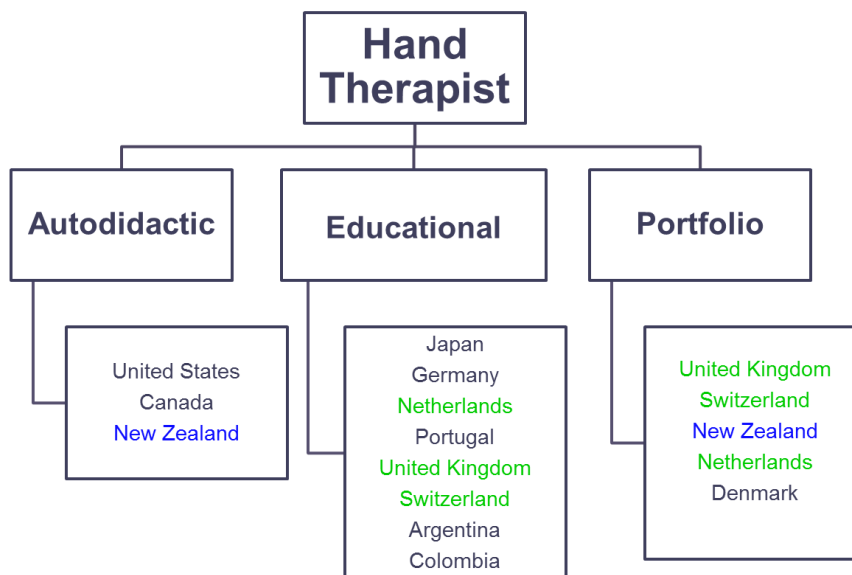


Figure 5 B: Overview of pathway to hand therapy accreditation by member country.



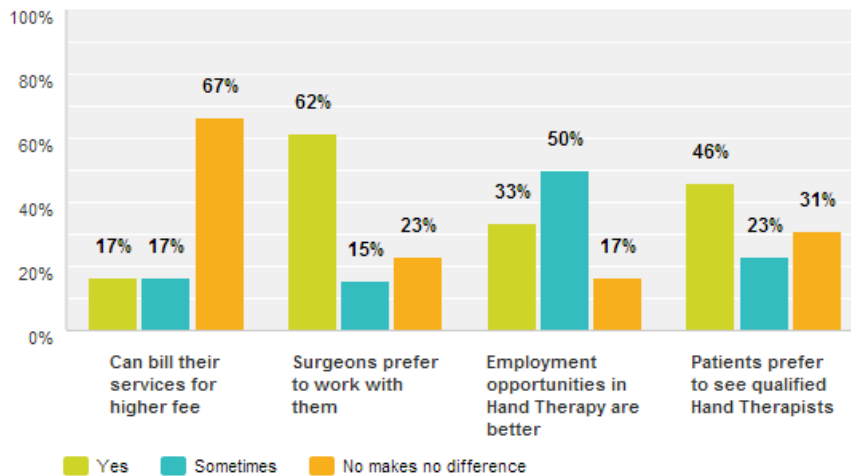
Among the 13 countries with a formal accreditation process in place, different titles were used to identify hand therapists and recertification requirements vary from every 2 to 10 years (Table 2). The most common renewal period was five years in 6 countries. Four countries do not require recertification.

Table 2: Certification renewal time frames in member countries with formal recognition of hand therapy.

Country	Title	Re-certification Interval
Argentina	Terapistas de Mano.	5 years
Canada	Certified Hand Therapist CHT	5 years
Columbia	Especialista en Rehabilitacion de la Mano y Membro Superior	None
Denmark	Specialergoterapeut i Håndterapi	None
Germany	zertifizierter HT-DAHTH	7 years
Japan	Japan Certified Hand Therapist JCHT	5 years
Kenya	Therapist ,OT or PT with hand rehabilitation experience	None
Netherlands	Certificaat Hand Therapeut in Nederland CHT-NL	5 years
New Zealand	Registered Hand Therapist	2 years
Portugal	Reeducador do Membro Superior e Mão	None
Switzerland	Zertifiziere/r Handtherapeut/in Schweiz ZHT-CH	10 years
United Kingdom	Accredited Hand Therapist (BAHT)	5 years
United States	Certified Hand Therapist CHT	5 years

For the countries that had recognition of hand therapists, the perceived benefits for therapists with this qualification were explored. An overview of responses to benefits for a hand therapist is provided in Figure 6. The two most frequently identified benefits were that surgeons and patients preferred to work with qualified hand therapists. Fifty percent of the responses indicated that sometimes there were better employment opportunities for accredited hand therapists. The majority (67%) of respondents indicated that despite efforts to achieve recognition as a specialist in hand therapy, therapists could not expect to receive greater financial remuneration for their services.

Figure 6. Perceived benefits for accredited hand therapists.



Facilitating development of hand therapy: Member organizations identified the importance of their role in supporting the further development of the practice of hand therapy in their own country. Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated that their national hand therapy organization supported the development of hand therapy in the following ways: organizing national hand therapy congresses, having a hand therapy society website, and by organizing hand therapy courses.

In summary: Worldwide, both occupational therapists and physical therapists provide hand therapy services. Overall, our survey indicates that 70% of hand therapy is provided by occupational therapists in IFSHT member countries. Opportunities to be formally recognized as a “hand therapist” are available in less than half the IFSHT full membership nations. In countries where recognition processes are in place, therapists cannot expect a greater fee for service than other therapists, but they can expect that physicians and patients value their contribution and prefer to work with them. Barriers continue to exist to accessing current literature for therapists interested in hand therapy. Perceived barriers include lack of English language skills to read articles published in English, insufficient vocabulary to perform an effective search in English and lack of literature in the countries’ preferred language. National societies for hand therapy play an important role in supporting the development of the profession by organizing hand therapy congresses and courses for their members. IFSHT’s ongoing support of the development of hand therapy worldwide by connecting hand therapists with one another and facilitating the spread of knowledge through the IFSHT triennial congress is indeed essential.

Appendix 1: Listing of Countries & respective hand therapy societies / corresponding members included in this report.

Hand Therapy Organization	Country	Reported Members	Population *
Capitulo de Terapistas de la Mano de la Asociacion de Cirugia de la Mano <i>The Argentine Chapter for Hand Therapy</i>	Argentina	144	43'024'376
Australian Association of Hand Therapy	Australia	300	22'507'616
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Bahrain	1	1'332'171
<i>Corresponding member</i>	Barbados	1	284'548
Belgian Hand Therapists	Belgium	35	10'449'361
Sociedade Brasileira de Terapeutas da Mao e do Membro Superior <i>Brazilian Society of Hand Therapists</i>	Brazil	150	210'174'032
Canadian Society of Hand Therapists	Canada	99	34'834'840
Asociación Colombiana de Terapeutas de la Mano (ASCOTEMA) <i>Colombia Hand Therapy Association</i>	Colombia	26	46'245'296
Dansk Selskab for Håndterapi <i>Danish Society for Hand Therapy</i>	Denmark	203	5'569'077
Suomen Käsiterapiayhdistys ry <i>Finnish Hand Therapy Society</i>	Finland	306	5'268'799
Société Française de Rééducation de la Main <i>French Society of Hand Therapists</i>	France	192	66'021'744
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Gaza	1	1'600'000
Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Handtherapie <i>German Society of Hand Therapy</i>	Germany	580	80'996'688
Hellenic Scientific Society of Physiotherapy - Hand Therapy Association	Greece	30	10'775'557
Hong Kong Society for Hand Therapy Limited	Hong Kong	80	7'187'500
Society for Hand Therapy, India	India	145	1'236'344'576
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Iran	1	77'447'168
Irish Association of Hand Therapy	Ireland	30	4'832'765
Israeli Society of Hand Therapists	Israel	15	7'821'850
Associazione Italiana Riabilitazione Mano <i>Italian Association for Rehabilitation of the Hand</i>	Italy	70	61'680'120
Japan Hand Therapy Society	Japan	572	127'103'392
Kenya Hand Therapy Association	Kenya	15	4'501'056
Nederlandse Vereniging voor Handtherapie <i>Netherlands Society for Hand Therapy</i>	Netherlands	550	16'877'352
New Zealand Association of Hand Therapists Inc.	New Zealand	190	4'401'916
Norwegian Society for Hand Therapy	Norway	74	4'738'261
Associação Portuguesa de Terapia da Mão <i>Portuguese Society of Hand Therapy</i>	Portugal	10	10'831'834
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Qatar	1	2'020'000
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Romania	1	19'963'581
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Saudi Arabia	1	28'828'870
Slovenian Society for Hand Rehabilitation	Slovenia	30	1'988'292
South African Society of Hand Therapists	South Africa	140	48'375'644

Hand Therapy Organization	Country	Reported Members	Population *
Korean Society of Hand Therapy	South Korea	50	49'039'984
Asociacion Española de Terapia de Mano y Extremidad Superior <i>Spanish Association of Hand and Upper Extremity Therapy</i>	Spain	20	47'737'940
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Sri Lanka	1	20'483'000
Swedish Association for Rehabilitation of the Hand	Sweden	200	9'135'785
Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Hand Rehabilitation / Societe Suisse de Reeducation de la Main, <i>Swiss Association for Rehabilitation of the Hand</i>	Switzerland	284	7'684'536
Turkish Society of Physiotherapy Hand Therapy Group	Turkey	50	81'619'392
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	United Arab Emirates	1	9'346'129
British Association of Hand Therapists	United Kingdom	750	63'742'976
American Society of Hand Therapists	United States	3000	319'510'848
Asociacion Uruguaya de Terapistas de Mano <i>Uruguayan Association of Hand Therapists</i>	Uruguay	8	3'332'972
Sociedad Venezolana de Terapeutas de Mano <i>Venezuelan Society of Hand Therapists</i>	Venezuela	28	30'405'207

* Population data obtained from www.countrywatch.com on July 31, 2014, with the following exceptions:

- Bahrain, Hong Kong, Iran, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela: data obtained from www.countryeconomy.com on Aug 10, 2014
- Barbados: data obtained from www.worldpopulationreview.com Aug 10, 2014
- Gaza: data obtained from www.wikipedia.org on August 10, 2014