



## Ecological Footprints

Another attempt to measure the impact of human development on the planet and on future generations is through what is known as the 'ecological footprint'. This statistic seeks to measure the amount of space that would be necessary to support:

- the food, timber and other resources people use
- the energy that they consume
- and the space used for built-up land.

Added together this estimates how much ecological space each country takes up on the planet – this amounts to its 'footprint'.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) identifies that, in 2001, the earth had 11.3 billion hectares globally that were productive (including both land and sea). When this was divided out across the human population of the planet it gave an average of 1.8 global hectares per person, leaving no space left for any other species (obviously, as the earth's population continues to grow, the footprint available to each person will decline). They estimate that in 2001, human consumption accounted for on average 2.2 global hectares per person, an '*overshoot*' of 0.4 hectares per person. This means that in 2001 our global Ecological Footprint is equivalent to 1.21 planets. In effect, they are arguing that

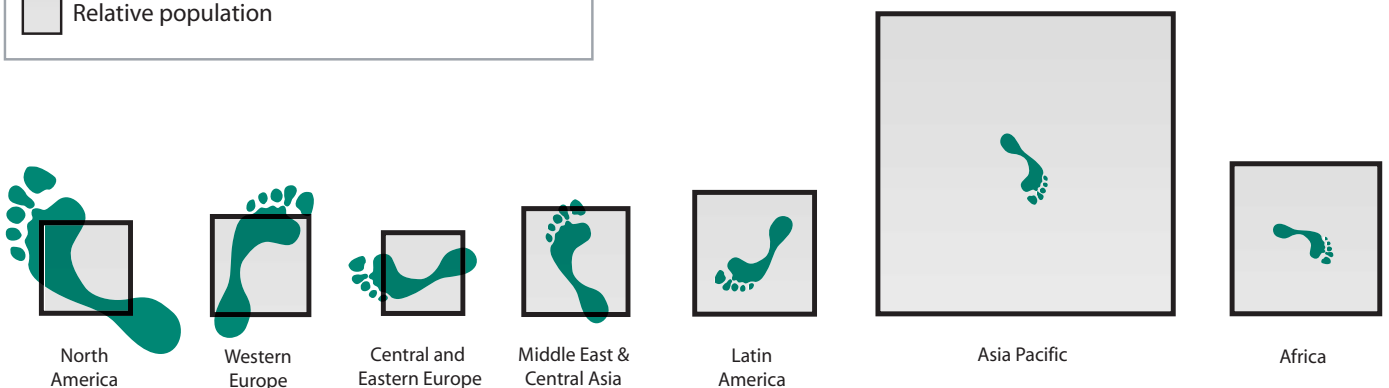
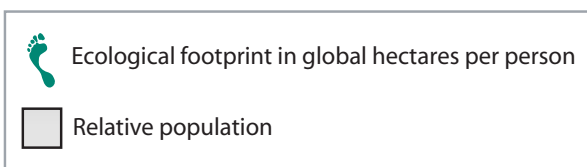
we have already passed the limits of the earth's carrying capacity and are using up more of the earth's resources than is sustainable and that we have been doing so since the 1980s.

Of course, not everyone on the planet is consuming the same amount and the ecological footprint of countries differs quite radically. According to the WWF the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America and Kuwait all have an ecological footprint of more than 9 hectares per person, Australia's ecological footprint is almost 8 hectares per

### Relative sizes of ecological footprints per person



### Ecological Footprint by region, 2002





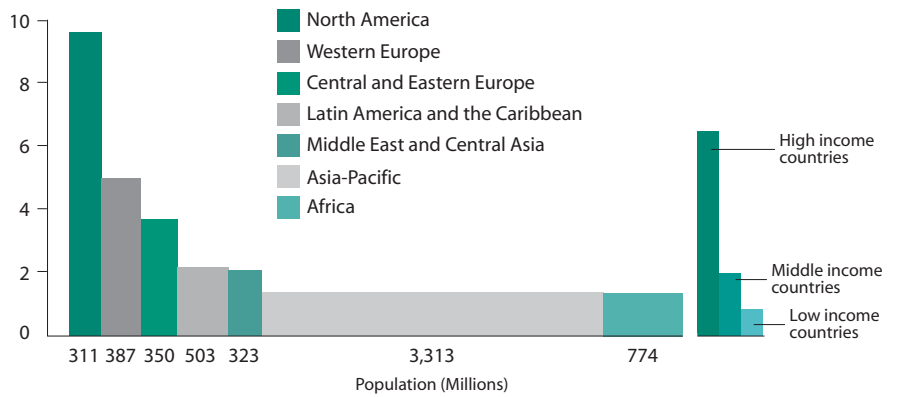
person, Ireland's footprint is over 6 hectares per person while the United Kingdom's footprint is just below 6 hectares per person. Countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, Haiti, Tajikistan and Bangladesh, on the other hand, have footprints that are a fraction of the 1.8 hectares per person level.

One of the biggest components of many countries' ecological footprint is energy use. The five countries listed by the WWF as having the highest energy footprint per person in 2001 were, in order, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Australia and Ireland.



Check out your footprint on [www.myfootprint.org](http://www.myfootprint.org)

### Ecological Footprint by region and income group, 1999



The above graph highlights the footprints of 7 regions in the world in 1999. The footprint per person of high income countries was on average over 6 times that of low income countries, and over 3 times greater than the Earth's biological capacity. Source: World Wildlife Fund, Living Planet Report 2004.

### Ecological Footprint per person, by country 2002

