

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The twentieth century witnessed the rapid urbanization of the world's population. The global proportion of urban population increased from a mere 13 per cent in 1900 to 29 per cent in 1950 and, according to the *2005 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects*, reached 49 per cent in 2005. Since the world is projected to continue to urbanize, 60 per cent of the global population is expected to live in cities by 2030. The rising numbers of urban dwellers give the best indication of the scale of these unprecedented trends: the urban population increased from 220 million in 1900 to 732 million in 1950, and is estimated to have reached 3.2 billion in 2005, thus more than quadrupling since 1950. According to the latest United Nations population projections, 4.9 billion people are expected to be urban dwellers in 2030.

These overall trends, however, obscure striking differences in urban population change between the more developed regions and the less developed regions. While a majority of the inhabitants of the less developed regions still live in rural areas, in the more developed regions the population is already highly urbanized. In 2005, 74 per cent of the population of the more developed regions was urban, compared to 43 per cent in the less developed regions. Because urbanization tends to rise as the level of development increases and socio-economic development is expected to continue in all countries, the levels of urbanization are generally projected to rise in the future. Thus, by 2030 the less developed regions are expected to have 56 per cent of their population living in urban areas, nearly triple the proportion they had in 1950 (18 per cent). In more developed regions the proportion urban is projected to reach 81 per cent by 2030.

Despite their lower levels of urbanization, less developed regions have more than double the number of urban dwellers than the more developed regions (2.3 billion vs. 0.9 billion). While in 1900 the urban population of the more developed regions was nearly double that of the less developed regions (150 million vs. 70 million), by 1968 the urban population of the less developed regions surpassed for the first time that of the more developed regions and continued to do so thereafter. Furthermore, the rapid growth of the population of the less developed regions combined with the near stagnation of the population in the more developed regions implies that the gap in the number of urban dwellers between the two will continue to increase. By 2030 the urban population in the less developed regions is projected to be nearly four times as large as that in the more developed regions (3.9 billion vs. 1 billion people).

Another important difference between the more developed regions and the less developed regions concerns trends in the growth of the rural population. Whereas the rural population of the more developed regions has been declining steadily during the second half of the twentieth century, that of the less developed regions has continued to increase. In 2000-2005, the annual growth rate of the rural population in the more developed regions was -0.4 per cent whereas that in the less developed regions was 0.5 per cent. During 2005-2030, the rural population in the more developed regions is projected to decline further. In comparison, the rural population in the less developed regions will continue to rise until 2019 when a slow decline will start. As a consequence of the contrasting trends in rural population growth in the more and the less developed regions, 91 per cent of the rural population in the world (3.3 billion) resided in the less developed regions in 2005. The nine countries with more than 50 million rural residents in 2005 (Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Viet Nam and the United States of America) are all located in the less developed regions with the sole exception of the United States.

The more developed regions differ from the less developed regions also with regard to the number of mega-cities, that is, cities with 10 million residents or more. In 2005, among the 20 mega-cities in the world, 15 were located in the less developed regions and by 2015, 17 of the 22 mega-cities projected to exist will be in today's developing countries.

During the next few decades the urban areas of the less developed regions are projected to absorb all the population growth expected worldwide. That is, global population growth is becoming a largely urban phenomenon accounted for by the less developed regions. As urbanization proceeds in developing countries, the speed and scale of urban population growth generate important challenges for planners and Governments. This is especially true in countries where urbanization has not been associated with sustained industrialization and development, such as in most of sub-Saharan Africa, where increasing urban poverty and the growth of slums are two of the most critical challenges in urban areas.

Still, the urban poor in the less developed regions often fare better than the average rural resident with respect to access to basic services, such as drinking water, sanitation, electricity or educational facilities (National Research Council, 2003).¹³ Thus, it is simplistic to view urbanization in developing countries as a phenomenon with mainly negative consequences. In fact, the concentration of people in cities is generally a response to the concentration of the most dynamic economic activities in urban centres. Such a concentration often produces economies of scale and leads to social and economic benefits of various kinds, including the technological development that is crucial to maintain the development momentum. The health advantages of cities are another example of such benefits, with urban dwellers often enjoying higher quality and more accessible health services than rural dwellers. Cities are also at the forefront of political and cultural change. Given their concentrated political power, trade and cultural activity, cities are places where new ideas and products emerge and from which they spread. Often, the development of rural areas is inextricably tied to the dynamism of the urban centres to which they are linked. Cities are therefore engines of economic, social, political and cultural change. Urbanization can thus be viewed as an indicator of development, with higher urban levels generally associated with more industrialized and technologically advanced economies.

The challenge faced by developing countries today is to take advantage of the rapid urbanization that has resulted from unprecedented levels of natural increase in their urban populations coupled with the redistribution of population from rural to urban centres and the transformation of rural settlements into cities. This challenge is often related to issues of governance, as when cities expand beyond their administrative boundaries and thus lack the financial or jurisdictional capacity to provide the necessary services to all the city's inhabitants. Collaboration among local, regional and national authorities can go a long way in addressing these management problems. Since continued urbanization is expected in every country, a focus on improving the lives of city dwellers needs to be maintained. At the same time, one has to recognize that many countries still have large and growing rural populations whose well-being often depends on the viability and success of cities. Given that the world's future will be urban, development initiatives must address the challenges and make the best of the opportunities that growing urban centres bring.

¹³ National Research Council (2003). *Cities Transformed: Demographic Change and its Implications in the Developing World*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2005 REVISION

1. In 2005, there were 3.2 billion urban residents in the world, nearly four times as many as in 1950. They represented 49 per cent of the global population.
2. The urban population passed the 1 billion mark in 1961. It took 25 years to add another billion urban dwellers and just 17 years more to add a third billion. Thus, the urban population reached 3 billion in 2003 and is projected to increase to 4 billion in 2018, 15 years later. By 2030, it is expected to be about 5 billion.
3. With an annual urban growth rate of 1.8 per cent, nearly double that projected for the total population (1 per cent), the world's urban population is expected to increase from 3.2 billion in 2005 to 4.9 billion in 2030, when 60 per cent of the global population is expected to live in urban areas.
4. Although the world is urbanizing rapidly, the number of rural dwellers is high and still growing. However, as of 2019 the rural population is projected to decline slowly. Consequently, the number of rural-dwellers in 2030 is expected to be slightly lower than that in 2005 (3.3 billion). In 2005, 71 per cent of all rural dwellers lived in Asia, primarily in India, China, Indonesia and Bangladesh, in order of rural population size.
5. Population growth is projected to be particularly rapid in the urban areas of the less developed regions, averaging 2.2 per cent annually during 2005-2030. As a consequence, the urban population in the less developed regions will increase from 2.3 billion to 3.9 billion over the next 25 years.
6. Migration from rural to urban areas and the transformation of rural settlements into urban places are important determinants of the high urban population growth anticipated in the less developed regions. Assuming that migration and reclassification account for 40 per cent to 50 per cent of urban population growth in the less developed regions, a total of 250 million to 310 million people in developing countries would be expected to become urban-dwellers between 2005 and 2015 either because they would migrate from rural to urban areas or because their rural settlements would become urban.
7. The urban population of the more developed regions is projected to increase very slowly, rising from 0.9 billion in 2005 to 1 billion in 2030. Between 2005 and 2030, its average annual growth rate is projected to be 0.5 per cent, about a third of the 1.4 per cent per year estimated for the period 1950-2005.
8. Urbanization is very far advanced in the more developed regions where in 2005 almost three quarters (74 per cent) of the population lived in urban settlements. The proportion urban in the more developed regions is projected to increase to 81 per cent by 2030. In the less developed regions, the equivalent proportion was 43 per cent in 2005 and is projected to rise to 56 per cent by 2030.
9. Africa and Asia were the least urbanized areas in the world in 2005 (38 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively). A combination of a large starting population and a projected rate of urban population growth that remains relatively high over the next 25 years results in a marked increase of the urban populations of both continents. By 2030, Asia will rank first and Africa second in terms of the number of urban dwellers. Indeed, in 2030, almost 7 out of every 10 urban residents in the world will be living in Africa or Asia. The proportion urban is projected to reach 54 per cent in Asia and 51 per cent in Africa by 2030.
10. The region of Latin America and the Caribbean is already highly urbanized, with 77 per cent of its population living in cities in 2005. By 2030, that proportion is projected to reach 84 per cent.

11. In Europe the proportion of the population residing in urban areas is expected to rise from 72 per cent in 2005 to 78 per cent in 2030. In Northern America, the increase in the proportion urban is projected to be from 81 per cent in 2005 to 87 per cent in 2030. In Oceania, the equivalent rise is from 71 per cent in 2005 to 74 per cent in 2030.
12. The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of mega-cities, that is, cities with 10 million inhabitants or more. Never before had such large populations been concentrated in cities. Since 1950 the number of mega-cities has risen from 2 to 20 in 2005. Two additional mega-cities are projected to emerge over the next decade, to reach 22 by 2015, among which 17 are located in developing countries. In 2005, mega-cities accounted for 9 per cent of the world's urban populations.
13. The populations of mega-cities, being large, tend to grow less rapidly than other urban centres. Among the 20 mega-cities in existence in 2005, 13 had populations that grew by less than the average annual growth rate of the world's urban population during 1975-2005 (2.4 per cent). Only seven of the 20 mega-cities grew faster. Thus, Dhaka in Bangladesh and Lagos in Nigeria each grew by 5.8 per cent annually; Delhi in India by 4.1 per cent; Karachi in Pakistan by 3.6 per cent; Jakarta in Indonesia by 3.4 per cent; Mumbai (Bombay) in India by 3.1 per cent; and Manila in the Philippines by 2.5 per cent. For the future, six of the 22 mega-cities projected to exist in 2015 are projected to grow by more than 1.9 per cent per year, the average annual growth rate projected for the global urban population during 2005-2015. These cities are: Lagos in Nigeria, Dhaka in Bangladesh, Karachi in Pakistan, Jakarta in Indonesia, Guangzhou in China and Delhi in India, in order of their annual growth rates.
14. With 35 million residents in 2005, the metropolitan area of Tokyo was by far the most populous urban agglomeration in the world. Tokyo had slightly more residents than the entire country of Kenya in 2005 (34 million). Tokyo was also the most populous capital in the world. After Tokyo, the next largest urban agglomerations are Ciudad de México (Mexico City) and the urban agglomeration of New York-Newark, with 19 million inhabitants each, followed by São Paulo and Mumbai (Bombay) with 18 million people each.
15. In 2015 Tokyo will still be the largest urban agglomeration with 35 million inhabitants, followed by Mumbai (Bombay) and Ciudad de México (Mexico City) with 22 million people each, and São Paulo with 21 million inhabitants.
16. Some cities dominate the urban system of their countries. The population of Al Kuwayt (Kuwait City), for instance, accounted for 69 per cent of all urban residents in Kuwait. In the same year, 68 per cent of all urban residents in Puerto Rico lived in San Juan and 64 per cent of the urban population of Haiti resided in Port-au-Prince.
17. Small cities, that is, those with a population of fewer than 500,000 people, were the place of residence of about 51 per cent of all urban dwellers in the world in 2005. Thus, the majority of urban dwellers lived in fairly small urban settlements.
18. The spatial distribution of population has always figured prominently on the policy agenda of Governments. The Governments of developing countries have often expressed concern about being unable to provide basic services for their rapidly growing urban populations, including safe drinking water, sanitation, affordable housing and public transportation. Measures used to shape the spatial distribution of the population have included policies to reduce migration to urban agglomerations by imposing internal migration controls; the creation of new centres of economic growth by, for instance, moving the national capital to a new location; incentives for businesses and industry to locate in medium-sized cities, and the development of infrastructure and services in smaller or medium-sized cities to attract businesses and migrants alike.

19. Today, almost half of humanity lives in cities. By 2030, three out of every five people on earth will likely reside in urban centres, and nearly half of the world's population will live in the cities of developing countries. Urbanization brings with it both opportunities and challenges. The more developed regions are highly urbanized indicating that urbanization is a natural concomitant of development. In the developing world, urbanization has been rapid, but major areas, such as Africa and Asia, still lag far behind the rest of the world in their levels of urbanization. Countries in those regions, in particular, face the double challenge of rising urbanization and continued rural population growth. If the twenty-first century is to respond creatively to the many opportunities that the growth of urban areas brings, then the economic dynamics of cities have to be nurtured.