II. THE PROSPECTS FOR WORLD URBANIZATION AND RURAL POPULATION GROWTH

The world urban population is estimated to have reached 2.9 billion in 2000, a figure nearly four times as large as that estimated for 1950 (0.8 billion). Indeed, over the second half of the twentieth century, the world urban population increased at an average annual rate of 2.67 per cent, implying that it doubled, on average, every 26 years. In comparison, the total population of the world increased at an average annual rate of 1.75 per cent, doubling every 40 years (table 3). The difference between those two rates of growth, that is, between the speed of growth of the urban and that of the total population, determines the speed of growth of the proportion urban. Thus, between 1950 and 2000, the world population urbanized rapidly, with the proportion urban rising at a rate of 0.91 per cent per year and passing from 29.7 per cent in 1950 to 47 per cent in 2000. As a result of these unprecedented trends the population of the world, which during most of human history had lived mainly in rural settlements, is on the verge of crossing the threshold that will make it urban in its majority. According to the current projections, half of the world population will be urban in 2007.

Although the urbanization of the world population is expected to continue, neither the urban population nor the proportion urban is expected to grow as rapidly in the future as it did in the recent past. During 2000-2030, the world urban population is projected to increase at a rate of 1.8 per cent per year, nearly a full percentage point lower than the urban growth rate estimated for 1950-2000. The decline in the speed of growth will be smaller for the proportion urban, which is expected to rise at a robust 0.83 per cent per year during 2000-2030, with the result that by 2030 the population of the world will likely be 60.3 per cent urban and urban dwellers will number 4.9 billion.

In contrast with the rapid rise of the urban population, the growth of the world rural population has been slowing markedly. In 1950, 7 of every 10 persons on earth lived in rural areas, and they numbered 1.8 billion. Over the course of the next fifty years, rural population growth averaged 1.19 per cent per year and the rural population nearly doubled, reaching an estimated 3.2 billion by 2000. However, over the coming thirty years (2000-2030), rural population growth is expected to be minimal so that by 2030 the number of rural inhabitants will be hardly changed, remaining at 3.2 billion.

These trends imply that virtually all the population growth expected at the world level during 2000-2030 will be concentrated in urban areas. During that period the urban population will likely increase by 2 billion persons, passing from 2.9 billion to 4.9 billion, the same number that will in all probability be added to the whole population of the world, which is projected to rise from 6.1 billion in 2000 to 8.1 billion in 2030. Since natural increase is generally lower in urban than in rural areas and is expected to decline in both, the substantial growth still expected in the urban population is most likely to be fueled by both rural-urban migration and the geographical expansion of urban settlements, particularly through the transformation of rural villages into cities. That process has been and will continue to be especially important for the developing world where the potential for the emergence of new urban settlements is still high. Indeed, one of the crucial factors in assessing the future of urbanization is to consider the contrasting experiences of the more and the less developed regions of the world. The following section discusses in some detail the past and future patterns of urban and rural growth in those regions.

A. CONTRASTING TRENDS BETWEEN THE LESS DEVELOPED AND THE MORE DEVELOPED REGIONS

Striking differences are apparent between the more developed and the less developed regions with respect to their patterns of urbanization. While most of the population of the less developed regions currently lives in rural areas, the large majority of the population of the more developed regions resides in urban areas. Moreover,
the urban population of the less developed regions has been growing considerably faster than that of the more developed regions and, as a result, its share of the world urban population has been rising (figure 1). In 1950 the urban population of more developed regions was considerably higher than that of the less developed regions (446 million versus 304 million), so that the more developed regions accounted for 60 per cent of the world urban population at a time when they had just 32 per cent of the world’s inhabitants. But already in the 1950s the patterns of growth of the urban populations of the more developed and the less developed regions were showing signs of divergence, with the former growing rather slowly compared to the latter. As a consequence, by 1975 the urban population of the less developed regions had surpassed that of the more developed regions (810 million versus 734 million) and the difference between them increased rapidly thereafter. In 2000, 1.94 billion urban dwellers are estimated to live in the less developed regions and just 0.9 billion in the more developed regions (table 3). Today, the less developed regions account for 68 per cent of the world urban population and 80 per cent of the total population (table 8). As the world becomes increasingly urbanized, the difference between these two figures will decline further. By 2030, with 3.9 billion urban dwellers, the less developed regions will have 79 per cent of the world urban population and 85 per cent of the total. Correspondingly, with 1 billion urban dwellers, the more developed regions will account for 21 per cent of the world urban population and 15 per cent of the total.

Sustained high fertility and declining mortality were at the root of the fast population growth experienced by the less developed regions until 1970 and, still today, despite substantial reductions of fertility, the population growth of less developed regions remains high. The urban populations of de-

---

**Figure 1. Estimated and projected urban population in the world, the more developed and the less developed regions, 1950-2030**

![Population chart](image.png)
Table 8. Distribution of the total, urban and rural population of the world between the more developed and the less developed regions, 1950-2030

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<th>Development groupings</th>
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Developing countries, in spite of being generally characterized by lower fertility than the overall population, have experienced particularly high growth because of high rural-urban migration and the expansion of urban localities through the transformation of rural settlements into cities. As a result, the urban areas of the less developed regions have been absorbing a rising share of the annual increment to the world urban population. As table 9 shows, the annual increment of the urban population rose steadily from 24 million persons in 1950-1955 to 58 million in 1985-1990, and after a decline in the early 1990s it stood at an estimated 57 million in 1995-2000. The next 25 years are expected to see a steady rise of the annual increment of the urban population until it reaches 72 million in 2020-2025 and then drops slightly to 71 million in 2025-2030. The overall increase of the annual increment of the urban population has been accompanied by a dramatic change in its distribution between the more and the less developed regions. Whereas in 1950-1955 the urban areas of the less developed regions absorbed 55 per cent of the annual increment of the world urban population, by 1995-2000 they were absorbing 91 per cent and by 2025-2030 they are expected to absorb 97 per cent (figure 2). For, just as the absolute increase of the urban population of less developed regions has been rising, that of the population in the cities of the more developed regions has been slowing down. In 1995-2000, the urban areas of more developed regions grew by 5 million persons annually whereas 52 million were added every year to the urban areas of less developed regions. By 2025-2030 it is expected that 69 million persons will be added annually to the urban population of the less developed regions whereas the urban areas of more developed regions will gain just 2 million new residents every year.

Not only are the urban areas of less developed regions absorbing most of the population growth occurring in urban areas worldwide, they are also increasingly absorbing most of the growth of the total world population. Thus, whereas in 1950-1955 the increase in the population of the urban areas of the less developed regions accounted for 28 per cent of the total increment to the world population, by 1995-2000 that increase accounted for 67 per cent of the annual increment to the world population and by 2020-2025 it will surpass the latter. Indeed, as figure 3 shows, in contrast with the annual increment to the world population, which began a steady decline after 1985-1990 when it reached a peak of 86 million, the annual increment to the urban population of the less developed regions is expected to increase steadily after 1995 so that by 2025-2030 it will have surpassed the annual increment of the world population by 19 per cent. Such an outcome is consistent with a net transfer of population from rural to urban areas in the less developed regions, either through migration or as a result of the territorial expansion of urban settlements and the transformation of rural villages into cities.

Urban areas are also absorbing most of the growth occurring within regions. In the more developed regions, only the urban areas gained population during 1950-1995, while the rural areas lost population (table 9). In contrast, both the urban and the rural populations of less developed regions have been growing steadily, though urban areas are absorbing a rising share of the annual population increment. In 1950-1955 their annual population gain amounted to 36 per cent of the total, a figure that rose to 70 per cent in 1995-2000. By 2025-2030 the annual increase in the urban population of less developed regions is expected to surpass that of the total population of those regions by 17 per cent. At that time, the urban areas of more developed regions will barely be growing, but their growth, even if slight, will contrast sharply with the overall de-
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<th>World Rural population</th>
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<th>More developed regions Urban population</th>
<th>More developed regions Rural population</th>
<th>Less developed regions Total population</th>
<th>Less developed regions Urban population</th>
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The contrasting trends in urban growth between the more and the less developed regions are also apparent when population growth rates are considered. As figure 4 shows, the growth rate of the urban population of the less developed regions has been considerably higher than that of the urban population of more developed regions during 1950-1995 and the difference between the two is expected to remain high. Furthermore, whereas the urban growth rate of the more developed regions has been declining fairly steadily since 1950, that of the less developed regions fluctuated during 1950-1995 showing no marked tendency to decrease before 1990 (table 10). The first major drop of the urban growth rate in the less developed regions occurred between 1985-1990 and 1990-1995 when it declined by nearly 0.8 percentage points, from 3.8 per cent per year to 3 per cent per year. For 1995-2000, the urban growth rate in the less developed regions is estimated at 2.9 per cent per year, equivalent to five times that estimated for the more developed regions (0.56 per cent per year) and the divergence between the two is expected to be accentuated in the future, so that by 2025-2030, the growth rate of the urban population of the less developed regions is projected to be 1.85 per cent per year, nearly ten times the one projected for the urban population of more developed regions (0.19 per cent per year). One way of assessing the implications of the differences in urban growth rates between the more developed and the less developed regions is to note that, if the urban population of the less developed regions were to continue growing at the average annual rate expected during 2000-2030, it would double in 60 years. In contrast, given the low rate of growth expected for the urban population of the more developed regions after 2000, it would take more than a thousand years for it to double (table 3).
An intriguing feature of past trends in the urban growth rate of less developed regions is its fluctuating pattern before 1995. As figure 5 shows, that pattern is determined by the trends in urban growth experienced by China, which in 2000 is estimated to account for 21 per cent of the urban population in less developed regions. Thus, the urban growth rate of the less developed regions excluding China shows no fluctuations: it rises initially from 3.9 per cent per year in 1950-1955 to 4.2 per cent per year in 1960-1965 and then declines steadily to reach 3 per cent in 1995-2000. In contrast, the urban growth rate for China has fluctuated markedly, passing from 4.3 per cent per year in 1950-1955 to 2.2 per cent per year in 1970-1975, rising again to reach 5 per cent in 1985-1990 and then dropping abruptly to 2.7 per cent in 1990-1995 (table 11). As figure 6 shows, the trends in urban population growth in China do not reflect similar changes in overall population growth. Instead, the decline in urban population growth stems largely from the virtual stagnation of the proportion urban during 1960-1970 and its subsequent rise is associated with the increases in the proportion urban recorded in 1980-1990. The period of sharp decline in urban growth (1965-1970), when even the proportion urban declined slightly, coincides with the initial phase of the Cultural Revolution, a programme of radical political and socio-economic reform that resulted in considerable instability and civil strife in the cities of China and was accompanied by the forceful relocation of large numbers of urban dwellers to rural areas. The reduction of the proportion urban reflects both the effects of this programme and the use of an official definition of urban localities and urban population that might not have provided an adequate measure of the actual changes taking place in the urban system. Lack of census information for the period 1960-1980 limits the possibility of assessing the accuracy of the official estimates available. The census conducted in 1982 provides the first comprehensive source of data on the urban
population of China, its cities and towns since the 1950s. However, starting in 1983, the official criteria to determine the geographical demarcation of cities and towns have changed several times (Zhang and Zhao, 1998), leading to an increase in the number of localities considered as urban and producing sharp rises in the urban population. Reclassification has therefore played an important role in determining urbanization trends in China since 1980. Such considerations should be borne in mind in interpreting the trends in urban growth experienced by that country as well as their effect on the overall growth of the urban population of the less developed regions.

The more and less developed regions also differ markedly in the trends experienced by their rural populations. Thus, whereas the rural population of more developed regions has been declining steadily during most of the twentieth century, that of less developed regions has been growing (table 10). In fact, the growth rate of the rural population of less developed regions peaked at 2.13 per cent per year in 1965-1970 and has been declining ever since. By 1995-2000, the rural growth rate of less developed regions stood at just 0.78 per cent per year and is expected to drop to 0.02 per cent by 2015-2020 before becoming negative (figure 7). As a consequence, the rural population of less developed regions will be declining in 2025-2030 at a pace similar to that experienced by the rural areas of more developed regions during 1950-1960.

The diverging patterns of growth of the rural populations of the more and the less developed regions have resulted in a significant redistribution of the rural population among the two development groups. In 1950, the 367 million rural dwellers in the more developed regions constituted 21 per cent of the rural population of the world, whereas by 2000, the projected number of rural dwellers in the more developed regions (285 million) barely accounted for 9 per cent of the world rural population. By 2030, the share of the rural population of more developed regions is expected to drop further (to 6 per cent) and the rural population is projected to

Figure 4. Growth rates of the urban population of the world, the more developed and the less developed regions, 1950-2030
### Table 10. Urban, rural and total population in the world, more developed regions and less developed regions, and their annual rates of growth, 1950-2030

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>Growth rate (percentage)</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
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**A. Total**

**B. Urban**

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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.37</td>
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Table 10 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>Growth rate (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World</td>
<td>More developed regions</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1 772</td>
<td>367</td>
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<td>1955</td>
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<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2 531</td>
<td>315</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2 683</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>2 834</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2 974</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3 106</td>
<td>294</td>
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<td>3 337</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>3 325</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>3 287</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>3 223</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Comparison of the urban growth rate of China and of the less developed regions excluding China
Figure 6. Growth rates of the urban and total population of China compared, 1950-2030

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Percentage urban at the beginning of the period</th>
<th>Growth rate (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban population</td>
<td>Total population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1955</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-1960</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1965</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1970</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1975</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1980</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1985</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1990</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1995</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2000</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2005</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2010</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2015</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2020</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-2025</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025-2030</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison, the growth of the rural population of less developed regions has been impressive. The number of rural dwellers in less developed regions rose from 1.4 billion in 1950 to 2.9 billion in 2000, more than doubling over those 50 years. But the next 30 years are expected to witness a major reduction in rural population growth. As a result, between 2000 and 2020, the rural population of less developed regions will increase by just 170 million persons to reach 3.1 billion (table 10) and it is expected to start declining thereafter so that by 2030 it will stand at 3 billion, just 98 million higher than in 2000.

As a consequence of the contrasting patterns of growth of the urban and rural populations of the more and the less developed regions, the two groups
of regions have experienced and are expected to experience different trends in the growth of the proportion urban. As already noted, the more developed regions were already highly urbanized by 1950, when 55 per cent of their population lived in urban areas. At that time, the less developed regions were barely urbanized, having just 18 per cent of their inhabitants living in cities (table 12). However, because the growth of the urban population of less developed regions was rapid in relation to that of the total population, between 1950 and 2000 the proportion urban had more than doubled, reaching 40 per cent. In the more developed regions, the proportion urban rose by a more modest amount, passing from 55 to 76 per cent between 1950 and 2000. Consequently, the difference between the proportion urban of the more developed regions and that of the less developed regions became smaller. The future is expected to see a further reduction of that difference, since the proportion urban in less developed regions is expected to rise to 56 per cent by 2030 and that of the more developed regions is projected to reach 84 per cent. These results imply that by 2030 there will still be ample room for the expansion of the proportion urban in the less developed regions whereas that of the more developed regions will be nearing an upper limit. Such a contrast is made clearer by considering the rate of urbanization (i.e. the growth rate of the proportion urban). As table 12 shows, since 1980 the more developed regions have had and are expected to have a very low rate of urbanization, ranging between 0.28 and 0.33 per cent per year. In contrast, the rate of urbanization of the less developed regions, which was mostly of the order of 1.8 per cent to 1.9 per cent per year before 1990, is expected to remain above 1 per cent per year until 2025 and will still be 0.98 per cent in 2025-2030. At that rate, the proportion urban in the less developed regions would reach 70 per cent by 2050.
The differences in the levels of urbanization between the more developed and the less developed regions are also apparent when one considers the distribution of countries and areas in each group according to the proportion urban (table 13). In 1950, three-quarters of the 173 countries or areas in the less developed regions had at most 37.5 per cent of their population living in urban areas whereas half of the 55 countries or areas in the more developed regions had already more than 50 per cent of their population living in urban areas. By 2000, in half of the countries or areas of the less developed regions at least 48.6 per cent of the population is estimated to live in urban areas and in three-quarters more than 32.4 per cent do so. That is, the bulk of the distribution of less developed countries by level of urbanization has shifted upward. And there has also been a significant upward shift of the distribution of countries in the more developed regions, with three-quarters of them exhibiting a proportion urban at or above 65 per cent. By 2030, even the least urbanized country in the more developed regions will have attained a level of urbanization higher than 40 per cent and in three-quarters of the developed countries, over 74 per cent of the population is expected to live in urban areas. In the less developed regions, a few small island countries are expected to remain mostly rural even by 2030, but three-quarters of all countries or areas in those regions will likely exhibit levels of urbanization above 49 per cent. The marked upward shift of the distributions of countries by level of urbanization make plain the momentous change that has taken place over the course of the twentieth century and that is expected to lead to a highly urbanized world during the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, there will continue to be considerable variation among countries and among major areas and regions in terms of the level of urbanization attained. The next section explores those differences in terms of major areas.

B. PATTERNS OF URBAN AND RURAL GROWTH IN THE MAJOR AREAS

The different patterns of urbanization observed at the level of more developed and less developed regions are the result of the varying experiences of the major areas that constitute them. Europe and Northern America, being part of the developed world, exhibit high levels of urbanization (i.e.
Table 13. The distribution of countries or areas in more developed and less developed regions by the proportion of the population living in urban areas compared, 1950, 1975, 2000, and 2030

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Less developed regions</th>
<th>More developed regions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower extreme</td>
<td>Lower extreme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>32.4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>70.0</td>
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<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The upper and lower extremes indicate the highest and lowest values observed; the lower quartile, the median and the upper quartile divide the distribution into four parts, each with the same number of observations. Consequently, half of the observed values fall between the two quartiles and the median is an indicator of the centre of the distribution.

High proportions of the population living in urban areas and slowing rates of urban population growth. In the developing world, Africa and Asia remain largely rural, whereas Latin America and the Caribbean considered jointly have a high proportion of their population living in cities. Oceania, which straddles the developed and the developing world, is also highly urbanized (table 14). Yet high levels of urbanization do not correlate well with the number of urban dwellers in each major area. Asia, albeit characterized by having the lowest proportion urban (36.7 per cent in 2000), has the largest number of persons living in urban areas (1.4 billion). It is followed by Europe, with 545 million urban dwellers; Latin America and the Caribbean with 391 million; and Africa with 297 million. Because of the high growth rates of the urban population expected in Africa and Asia, by 2030 those two major areas will have the largest numbers of urban dwellers in the world: 2.6 billion in Asia and 766 million in Africa, although they will still be the least urbanized major areas of the world.

In 1950 Asia was the second least urbanized major area, with 17.4 per cent of its population living in cities. By 2000 that proportion is expected to have risen to 36.7 per cent but is still one of the lowest of the world and, despite the robust rate of urbanization that Asia is expected to experience during 2000-2030 (1.25 per cent per year, the highest of any major area), the proportion urban in Asia will be the lowest among major areas by 2030, standing at 53.4 per cent (table 14).

Africa, which in 1950 was the major area with the lowest proportion of its population living in cities, experienced the fastest rate of urbanization of any major area during 1950-2000 and saw that proportion rise from 14.7 per cent in 1950 to 37.9 per cent in 2000. Although Africa’s average rate of urbanization over the next 30 years is expected to be lower than during the second half of the twentieth century (1.21 per cent per year instead of 1.89 per cent per year), it will still be among the highest experienced by all major areas and will result in a level of urbanization of 54.5 per cent by 2030. That is, if the projected trends hold, by 2030 the level of urbanization in both Africa and Asia will have passed the 50 per cent mark and their populations will have become more urban than rural.

Compared to Africa and Asia, the urbanization of Latin America and the Caribbean was already fairly advanced by 1950 when the region had 41.4 per cent of its population living in urban areas. Although this level of urbanization was lower than that characterizing Europe or Northern America in 1950, over the next 50 years Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a rapid increase of the proportion urban, averaging 1.2 per cent per year. Consequently, by 2000, the proportion urban in Latin America and the Caribbean had reached levels similar to those characterizing Europe and Northern America (table 14). With nearly three-quarters of their populations already living in cities, those three major areas are expected to experience a marked decline of the rate of urbanization, and the proportion urban is expected to rise moderately to reach values in the range of 82.6 to 84.4 per cent by 2030. It is noteworthy that by that date, the second most urbanized major area of the world is expected to be Latin America and the Caribbean (table 14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major area</th>
<th>Percentage urban</th>
<th>Rate of urbanization (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>29.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
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<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oceania, the major area with the smallest population, was the second most urbanized area in 1950, when already 61.6 per cent of its population lived in cities. Since then it has experienced the lowest rate of urbanization in the world, amounting to 0.26 per cent per year. Such a low rate of growth of the proportion urban resulted in a level of urbanization of 70.2 per cent in 2000 and, because the rate of urbanization is expected to decline further during 2000-2030, by 2030 the proportion urban will not be as high as that expected for Europe or Northern America. Thus, instead of reaching a level of urbanization of 80 per cent or more, the proportion of Oceania’s population living in urban areas is expected to be 74.4 per cent in 2030 (table 14).

A more detailed picture of the trends in urbanization experienced by the major areas can be obtained by considering changes in the rate of urbanization over time (figure 8). The rate of urbanization, being the growth rate of the proportion urban, is equivalent to the difference between the growth rate of the urban population and that of the total population. Consequently, its trajectory over time is very likely to reflect the changes taking place in the urban growth rate. As figure 8 shows, there is considerable variation in the trends experienced by the major areas in terms of the rate of urbanization. Only Latin America and the Caribbean displays a smoothly declining trend in the rate of urbanization: it drops steadily from 1.8 per cent per year in 1950-1955 to 0.26 per cent per year in 2025-2030 (table 15). In Africa, whose rates of urbanization have generally been the highest in the world, the rate of urbanization declines markedly from 1960 to 1980, passing from 2.35 per cent per year in 1960-1965 to 1.6 per cent per year in 1975-1980. After 1985 it experiences a slight recuperation, rising to 1.73 per cent per year by 1990-1995. From there on the rate of urbanization in Africa is projected to follow a smooth downward trend that reaches 0.99 per cent per year by 2025-2030. In contrast with Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean, the rate of urbanization in Asia shows no clear trend before 1995, having fluctuated sharply over the period. The urbanization trends in China, which is the home of 30 per cent of the urban population in Asia, are the cause of such fluctuations. In fact, as figure 9 shows, the fluctuations reflected in the urbanization rate of Asia as a whole are an attenuated version of those characterizing the rate of urbanization in China. As discussed earlier in relation to the urban growth rate of the less developed regions, such fluctuations stem both from historical events that retarded or even reversed urbanization in China during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and from the official definition of urban used in China until the 1980s which in all likelihood did not reflect adequately the expansion of existing cities and the emergence of new cities in that country.

In general the urbanization rates experienced by Europe, Northern America and Oceania have been considerably lower than those exhibited by the major areas of the developing world. Furthermore, the respective rates of urbanization of those three major areas declined markedly between 1960 and 1975 or 1980. In Oceania, that decline led to negative rates of urbanization as of 1975-1980, and even by 1990-1995, after a slight recuperation of the urbanization rate, the proportion urban in Oceania was still declining. In Northern America the urbanization rate dropped to nearly zero in the
Figure 8. Urbanization rate for the major areas, 1950-2030

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Latin America and the Caribbean</th>
<th>Northern America</th>
<th>Oceania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>0.79</td>
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<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.66</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
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<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2000....</td>
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<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2005....</td>
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<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2010....</td>
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<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2015....</td>
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<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2020....</td>
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<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-2025....</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
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Figure 9. Urbanization rate for Asia and China, 1950-2030

In the 1970s and by 1990-1995 had risen to a low 0.22 per cent per year. Europe maintained higher urbanization rates than the other two major areas over the whole 1950-1995 period but, even so, by 1990-1995 it had a rate of urbanization of just 0.35 per cent per year. Over the projection period all three major areas are expected to see their urbanization rate converge to values ranging from 0.26 to 0.31 per cent per year. Such projected values imply a fairly important rise in the rate of urbanization for Oceania, a slight recuperation for Northern America and a modest decline for Europe.

The reduction of the urbanization rates experienced by Europe, Northern America and Oceania between 1960 and 1980 can be related to the phenomenon known as “counter-urbanization” which entailed a shift in population distribution down the urban hierarchy. Although, strictly speaking, counter-urbanization involves a redistribution of the population within the urban system and not a return of urban dwellers to rural areas, in highly urbanized countries counter-urbanization was associated with a faster aggregate growth of non-metropolitan populations in relation to the growth of the population in metropolitan areas (Korcelli, 1984; Champion, 1991 and 1998), and in some countries an increase of the rate of growth of the rural population was also noticeable. Thus, as figure 10 shows, the rural growth rate of Europe, despite remaining negative over the whole 1950-1995 period, showed a slight recuperation between 1970 and 1985. A more significant increase occurred in both Northern America and Oceania where the rural growth rate increased markedly between 1965-1970 and 1970-1975 (figure 10 and table 16). Furthermore, in Oceania the rural growth rate continued to increase for another decade and was still 1.72 per cent per year in 1990-1995, higher than the 1.43 per cent per year at which the urban population was growing at the time. In Northern America the growth spurt of the rural population recorded in the early 1970s lasted
for just a decade before a decline set in, so that by 1990-1995 the rate of rural population growth stood at 0.33 per cent per year (table 16).

In the major areas of the less developed world, two types of trends are discernible in terms of the rural growth rate. The major area constituted by Latin America and the Caribbean has seen its rural growth rate decline steadily so that by 1990-1995 it was just 0.05 per cent per year. Africa and Asia, in contrast, both experienced an increase of the rate of growth of the rural population during the 1950s and 1960s. In the case of Africa, declining mortality combined with sustained high fertility produced the increase in the rural population growth rate, which reached a peak of 2.22 per cent per year in 1975-1980 and is estimated to have declined to 1.64 per cent per year in 1990-1995. In Asia, the highest growth rate of the rural population occurred in 1965-1970, when rural growth reached 2.18 per cent per year, largely as a result of events in China and the high rural growth rate experienced by that country. Since then, the growth rate of the rural population of Asia has been declining steadily so that by 1990-1995 it had reached 0.93 per cent per year.

For all major areas, the projections of rural population growth entail a steady reduction of the rural growth rate (figure 10), but it is noteworthy that by the end of the projection period the major areas will vary considerably in terms of the rate of growth of their rural populations. Thus, by 2025-2030, Europe’s rural population is expected to be declining at a rate of −1.69 per cent per year; that of Northern America will be decreasing at a rate of −0.89 per cent per year; those of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania will be experiencing a reduction in size at rates ranging from −0.55 to −0.11 per cent per year; and only the rural population of Africa will still be experiencing positive growth, increasing at a rate of 0.47 per cent per year (table 16).
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As a result of such trends, the number of rural inhabitants in Africa is expected to more than triple between 1950 and 2030, rising from 188 million in 1950 to 487 million in 2000 and reaching 640 million by the end of the projection period (table 17). In Asia, the major area with the largest number of rural inhabitants, the rural population is estimated to have grown from 1.2 billion in 1950 to 2.3 billion in 2000, and although it is expected to reach 2.4 billion by 2010, it will likely decline to slightly less than 2.3 billion by 2030. Latin America and the Caribbean are expected to see their rural population drop from 128 million in 2000 to 122 million in 2030, and the relative reductions of the rural population will be more marked in Northern America and Europe. Thus, the number of rural dwellers in Northern America will likely be cut by 18 per cent during 2000-2030, dropping from 71 million to 58 million; and Europe will experience a 35 per cent reduction of the rural population (from 184 million to 120 million). Only in Oceania will the reductions be minimal, so that the rural population is still expected to increase from 9 million in 2000 to 11 million by 2030.

Changes in the size of the rural population of the major areas will result in a significant redistribution of the rural population of the world by major area. As table 18 shows, Europe’s share of the rural population, which has already dropped from 14.7 per cent in 1950 to 5.7 per cent in 2000, is expected to be reduced further to 3.7 per cent in 2030. The share of Northern America will also be cut significantly, from 3.5 per cent in 1950 to 2.2 per cent in 2000 and to an expected 1.8 per cent in 2030. Latin America and the Caribbean will also see its share drop by nearly two percentage points, from 5.5 in 1950 to 3.8 in 2030. In contrast, the shares of Africa and Asia will increase markedly. By 2030, Africa is expected to be the home of nearly 20 per cent of the world rural population, almost double the figure that the continent accounted for in 1950 (10.6 per cent); and Asia will remain as the home for the vast majority of the world’s rural dwellers. By 2030, 70.5 per cent of the world rural population will live in Asia, a somewhat lower proportion than the one the continent houses today (72.6 per cent) but still considerably higher than the share Asia had in 1950 (65.4 per cent).

The redistribution of the world urban population over time in many ways parallels that of the rural population. As table 18 indicates, the urban growth rates of the major areas largely follow the same gradient as the rural growth rates. Africa, for instance, has experienced and is expected to experience the highest urban and rural growth rates in the world. Asia has experienced the second highest rate of rural growth and the third highest in terms of urban growth. It is followed by Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of rural growth and preceded by it in terms of urban growth. At the other extreme, Europe has been characterized by the lowest rates of both urban and rural population growth. As figure 11 shows, the variations in the urban growth rate over time echo, as expected, those of the rate of urbanization. Africa’s urban growth rate has been very high, averaging 4.4 per cent per year over 1950-2000 and is expected to remain above 3 per cent per year over most of the projection period. The urban growth rate of Latin America and the Caribbean started at a level close to that of Africa in 1950-1955, but has declined rapidly, reaching 2.36 per cent in 1990-1995 and being expected to drop to 1.07 per cent by 2025-2030. In Asia, the urban growth rate shows the fluctuations associated with the urbanization trends experienced by China and remains relatively high until 1990, averaging 3.4 per cent per year during 1950-2000 (table 18). By 1990-1995, the urban growth rate in Asia stood at 2.78 per cent per year and it is expected to decline to 1.74 per cent per year by 2025-2030. In Europe, Northern America and Oceania, the urban growth rate declined markedly between approximately 1960 and 1980, during the period of counter-urbanization but, whereas it showed signs of recuperation or stabilization in Northern America and Oceania after 1980, in Europe it kept on declining. As a result, by 1990-1995, the urban population of Europe was growing at just 0.51 per cent per year, whereas that of Northern America was increasing at 1.24 per cent per year and that of Oceania at 1.43 per cent per year. Further reductions of the urban growth rate are projected for these three major areas so that by 2025-2030 the urban population of Europe will be declining slowly, and those of Northern America and Oceania will be growing at rates of 0.7 and 1.07 per cent per year, respectively (table 16).
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### Table 18. Key indicators of the evolution of the urban and rural populations of major areas, 1950, 2000 and 2030

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<tr>
<th>Major area</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>Percentage distribution</th>
<th>Growth rate (percentage)</th>
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The rapid urban growth experienced by the major areas of the developing world has resulted in large numbers of urban dwellers. Africa’s urban population increased nine-fold between 1950 and 2000, rising from 32 million to 297 million in the course of half a century (table 18). The urban populations of Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean increased by more than five-fold each, from 244 million to 1.4 billion in Asia, and from 69 million to 391 million in Latin America and the Caribbean. The number of urban dwellers in Northern America more than doubled (from 110 million to 239 million) and so did the number of those in Oceania (rising from 8 million to 21 million). Even the urban population of Europe, whose growth rates were fairly low, increased by 90 per cent, passing from 287 million to 545 million during 1950-2000. Yet, owing to the large differences in urban growth rates among major areas, a significant redistribution of the world urban population resulted. Africa’s share of the urban population more than doubled, rising from 4.3 per cent in 1950 to 10.4 per cent in 2000. Asia gained 15 percentage points, seeing its share increase from 32.5 per cent to 47.5 per cent. Latin America and the Caribbean also recorded an increase, so that by 2000 their urban population accounted for 13.7 per cent of the world urban population, up from the 9.2 per cent in 1950. But those rising shares were counterbalanced by sharp declines in the shares of Europe and Northern America. The former saw its share of the world urban population drop from 38.3 per cent to 19.2 per cent, and Northern America’s share declined from 14.6 per cent to 8.4 per cent.

Over the next thirty years, the differentials in urban population growth will further accentuate the redistribution of the urban population that took place from 1950 to 2000. Africa’s urban population will increase by 2.6 times between 2000 and 2030, and Asia’s will nearly double. With 766
million urban dwellers in 2030, Africa will have 15.7 per cent of the urban population, and Asia will have 53.3 per cent amounting to 26 billion persons. Between the two, they will account for 69 per cent of the world urban population. All other major areas are expected to see their share of the world urban population decline, even though their urban populations are projected to increase substantially. The urban population of Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, will increase by 50 per cent, rising from 391 million in 2000 to 604 million in 2030, but its share of the world urban population will decline from 13.7 per cent to 12.4 per cent. Similarly, the share of Northern America is expected to decline from 8.4 per cent to 6.4 per cent although its urban population will likely increase by 30 per cent. But the major reduction expected is in Europe’s share, which will decrease from 19.2 per cent to 11.7 per cent between 2000 and 2030 as a result of the very low increase of Europe’s urban population over the period (table 18).

Given their high urban growth rates and their growing shares of the world urban population, Africa and Asia account for a large proportion of the increment of the urban population. During 1950-2000, 65.5 per cent of the 41.9 million persons that, on average, were added annually to the urban population of the world was absorbed by the urban areas of Africa and Asia (table 19). And the shares of both major areas are expected to increase over the next thirty years. Thus, during 2000-2030, Asia alone will account for 61.3 per cent of the annual increment to the world urban population while Africa will account for 22.9 per cent. That is, Africa and Asia will together absorb 84.2 per cent of the average annual increase of the urban population over the next thirty years (amounting to 57.4 million persons annually). All the other major areas are expected to see their share of the average annual increment to the urban population decline. In Latin America and the Caribbean the reduction expected will be of 32 per cent, meaning that its share will drop from
15.4 per cent in 1950-2000 to 10.4 per cent in 2000-2030. For Oceania and Northern America the reductions in share will be of the order of 17 and 42 per cent respectively, but for Europe, they will amount to 90 per cent. That is, Europe is expected to see its share of the average annual increment of the urban population in 2000-2030 reduced to one tenth of the value it had in 1950-2000: from 12.3 per cent to 1.3 per cent. Indeed, Europe is the only major area expected to experience a reduction of its urban population by 2030, amounting to a loss of 150,000 persons between 2025 and 2030.

The rapid growth of the urban population of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean combined with the expected reduction of population growth in rural areas has important implications for the geographical distribution of overall population growth. Between 1950 and 2000, the average annual increment of the urban population of Asia accounted for 31 per cent of the average annual increment of the total population of the world, which is estimated at 71 million. During 2000-2030, when the world population is expected to increase annually by 69 million, the urban areas of Asia will absorb 61 per cent of that increment, meaning that their share is expected almost to double. Similarly, the share of the urban areas of Africa will increase markedly, passing from 7.5 per cent of the average annual population increment in 1950-2000 to 22.6 per cent of that expected during 2000-2030. Consequently, between 2000 and 2030, the urban areas of Asia and Africa will jointly absorb 83 per cent of the increment in the world population. Since the urban areas of Latin America and the Caribbean will account for a further 10.3 per cent, these results imply that most of the population growth expected over the next thirty years (93.5 per cent) will be concentrated in the cities of Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.