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# World Urbanization Prospects 2025

## Summary of Results

November 2025 . <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/> . #UNPopulation

*Urbanization is one of the most significant demographic shifts in human history, fundamentally altering how and where people live and build communities. For the first time, the 2025 edition of World Urbanization Prospects presents population estimates and projections using the “Degree of Urbanization” methodology. This new framework provides harmonized and comparable estimates and projections across three distinct categories along a continuum—cities, towns, and rural areas—revealing that urbanization is more widespread than national statistics often suggest. This approach offers a new lens for understanding settlement patterns and crafting integrated policies that support sustainable development in an increasingly urban world.*

*The following key messages are based on **World Urbanization Prospects 2025: Summary of Results**, prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).*

## Ten key messages

### **1. The world has become increasingly urban; more people live in cities today than in towns or rural areas.**

In 2025, cities are home to 45 per cent of the world's 8.2 billion people, more than double the 20 per cent share in 1950. Over the same period, the share of the global population living in towns declined from 40 to 36 per cent, and the share in rural communities fell by half, to just 19 per cent. Projections indicate that two-thirds of the world's population growth between now and 2050 will occur in cities, with most of the remainder in towns, while the rural population is expected to peak in the 2040s before beginning to decline.

### **2. The number of “megacities” (10 million inhabitants or more) continues to grow; over half are in Asia.**

The number of megacities quadrupled from eight in 1975 to 33 in 2025, with 19 of them located in Asia, and is projected to reach 37 by 2050. Jakarta (Indonesia) currently ranks as the world's most populous city with nearly 42 million inhabitants, followed by Dhaka (Bangladesh) at 37 million and Tokyo (Japan) at 33 million. Fast-growing Dhaka is expected to become the world's largest city by mid-century, while Tokyo's population is projected to shrink, causing it to fall to seventh rank by 2050.

### **3. More people live in small and medium-sized cities than in megacities; many of these smaller settlements are among the fastest growing, especially in Africa and Asia.**

The majority of the world's population residing in cities live in small and medium-sized ones, not in megacities. Of the 12,000 cities worldwide in 2025, 96 per cent have fewer than 1 million inhabitants, and 81 per cent have fewer than 250,000. Many of the fastest-growing settlements are these smaller cities, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia. These smaller cities often lack the planning capacity and resources to manage their growth sustainably and require support for basic services and land-use management.

### **4. Growth of the world's city population between now and 2050 will be concentrated in seven countries.**

Over half of the projected 986 million increase in global city dwellers by 2050 will be concentrated in just seven countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia. Together, these countries are expected to add more than 500 million city residents. Their ability to manage this growth sustainably will profoundly shape global development outcomes and progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

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## **5. City population growth is uneven; most cities are growing, but thousands have shrinking populations.**

Worldwide, more than 3,000 cities experienced population decline between 2015 and 2025. Most of these shrinking cities have fewer than 250,000 inhabitants, with over a third in China and 17 per cent in India. These diverse trajectories underscore the need for policies that address both expansion and contraction. Growing cities must prepare to provide services for more people, while cities with shrinking populations face challenges in maintaining services and adapting their economies.

## **6. Towns are home to more than a third of humanity and are critical for sustainable development.**

In 2025, towns remain the most common settlement type in 71 countries, including diverse nations like Germany, India, Uganda, and the United States. India and China alone host more than 1.2 billion town dwellers, representing over 40 per cent of the global town population. Towns often serve as critical connectors between rural areas and cities, providing essential services and supporting local economies. In regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, town populations are projected to grow significantly through 2050. Proactive planning for towns can promote balanced territorial development and reduce pressure on large cities.

## **7. As the world's rural population approaches its peak size, it faces unprecedented challenges.**

The global rural population is expected to peak in the 2040s and decline thereafter. In 2025, rural areas are still the most common settlement type for 62 countries, including many in sub-Saharan Africa and several in Europe, such as France, Poland, and Romania. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that experienced substantial rural population growth in recent decades and will account for nearly all future rural growth. Many rural communities face growing pressures from population ageing and out-migration as young people move to cities and towns. These trends highlight the need to strengthen urban–rural linkages—such as transport, digital connectivity, and access to basic services—to address territorial disparities and support rural resilience, which is critical for food security and sustainability.

## **8. The expansion of built-up areas is outpacing population growth worldwide.**

Between 1975 and 2025, the extent of the built-up area occupied by humans grew almost twice as fast as the global population. As a result, the built-up area per person rose from 43 to 63 square meters. This expansion has been uneven across regions, with Europe, Northern America, Australia, and New Zealand using the most land per capita, and Central and Southern Asia the least. Notably, about 60 per cent of land converted to urban use since 1970 was previously productive farmland, underscoring the urgency of promoting compact and efficient urban growth to safeguard agricultural lands and natural ecosystems, and mitigate climate change.

## **9. The Degree of Urbanization methodology reveals the world is more urbanized than national statistics suggest.**

National definitions of “urban” vary widely, often using administrative criteria or different population thresholds. Aggregating disparate national definitions suggests 58 per cent of the world's population is urban in 2025. This is well below the combined 81 per cent living in cities (45 per cent) and towns (36 per cent) according to the Degree of Urbanization methodology. The discrepancy arises because many settlements classified as “towns” (and in few cases even as “cities”) under the Degree of Urbanization are considered rural in national contexts, particularly in Central and Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

## **10. Sustainable development requires integrated planning that treats cities, towns and rural areas as interconnected and interdependent.**

Cities, towns, and rural areas are fundamentally linked; about 60 per cent of the land converted to urban space since 1970 was formerly productive farmland. Bridging the urban-rural divide requires coordinated investments in transport, digital connectivity, infrastructure, and essential services, alongside national urban policies that integrate housing, land use, mobility, and service provision. Policies that recognize the unique roles of all settlement types and promote economic activity in towns can lead to more compact urban growth while protecting agricultural lands and natural ecosystems, and ensuring the availability of essential services in all settlement types. To effectively plan and monitor these dynamics, regular censuses and integrated geospatial–statistical systems are essential, enabling data-driven decisions that recognize the unique roles of all settlement types.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). These key messages are based on the report *World Urbanization Prospects 2025: Summary of Results*.

More work of the Population Division is available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>.