

Launch of *World Urbanization Prospects 2025: Summary of Results*

Tuesday, 18 November 2025, 12:45 pm EST

UN Press Briefing Room, S-237, UN Headquarters, New York

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, ASG Sandkjær, for setting the stage for the global launch of our new report. My remarks will focus on the major innovation of this new edition of the *World Urbanization Prospects*: the presentation and comparison of two data series based on a traditional and a new methodology. Both approaches have value, but they serve different purposes. A comparison of the two data series is broadening our understanding of human settlement patterns, including how they have changed over time.

Previously, all UN estimates of world urbanization were based on national definitions of “urban”. The global percentage urban has always been obtained by aggregating national estimates based on criteria for distinguishing “urban” from “rural” that vary considerably across countries and over time. One common criterion for the “urban” classification is population size, but the required threshold varies widely, from as little as 200 in some countries to as much as 50,000 in others. National definitions of “urban” may also consider factors like population density, administrative status, economic functions and other characteristics. With such a broad range of national definitions of “urban”, it has been difficult to make meaningful international comparisons or to track progress globally on the indicators chosen for monitoring SDG 11.

Within countries, national definitions reflect local context and domestic policy priorities. They may not be standardized and uniform, but they are meaningful. Therefore, the WUP series will continue to provide estimates and projections of urbanization based on national definitions. The new edition of the series incorporates information from the 2020 round of censuses for over 145 countries; it supersedes all past editions.

In tandem, today’s release provides estimates and projections of human settlements based on a new, standardized methodology, called the Degree of Urbanization, that depicts the urban-rural continuum. It uses population data mapped to territorial grid cells of one square kilometre to

classify all land area into seven categories ranging from mostly uninhabited rural areas to densely populated cities.

The new methodology was developed by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and was refined through the joint efforts of the European Commission, UN-Habitat, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and The World Bank. It was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2020 as a recommended method for international statistical comparisons. In the present report, the seven categories are collapsed into three—cities, towns and rural areas—to simplify the presentation and discussion.

The new approach offers a powerful tool for advancing our understanding of human settlement patterns and the urbanization process. Both the concept of an urban-rural continuum and the standardized methodology are very important steps forward. A comparison of results based on the new and the traditional methodology indicate a general alignment between the two approaches at the extremes of the continuum, both for large cities and for sparsely populated rural areas. Differences arise in the middle of the continuum, concerning whether smaller cities and towns should be categorized as “urban” or “rural”. Broadly speaking, towns are typically considered urban in Europe, Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, while they are often classified as rural in Asia and Africa. This new lens on urbanization allows us to consider the distinct characteristics of towns as compared to cities or rural areas, which can contribute to better tailored policies and planning for each type of settlement.

In addition, the new geospatial approach provides us data on built-up areas for the first time, enabling new analyses examining the expansion of human settlements and changes in land use, which have important implications for sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by recognizing the invaluable contributions of several partners in this work. The Degree of Urbanization dataset analyzed in this report was produced by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, whose team also provided inputs to and feedback on the report. In addition to the organizations mentioned earlier, our colleagues in the UN Statistics

Division and in UNFPA have played a vital role in developing the capacities of countries to implement the Degree of Urbanization methodology.

I wish to thank and congratulate Mr. Patrick Gerland and all members of the WUP team for their work in preparing the 2025 edition of this classic data set. I would also like to thank Mr. Pablo Lattes and his team for IT support, and Ms. Karoline Schmid and associates for managing the publication of the report and supporting this launch. I also wish to thank all of the other colleagues and interns in the Population Division who have contributed their time, skills and expertise to this launch.

Lastly, thanks to all of you for your kind attention. At this point, I will hand over to my colleague, Sara Hertog, who will present the top-line findings from the report.