

**Press briefing upon release of data from
*World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision***

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Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address you here today.

In today's increasingly global and interconnected world, 55 per cent of the world's people now live in urban areas. The coming decades are expected to bring a continued gradual increase in the percentage of the world's population that resides in cities and urban areas. The shift toward urban living has been happening in all regions of the world. It is one of the four demographic megatrends that are reshaping human society and the world (the others being population growth, population ageing and international migration).

For the systematic tracking of levels and trends in urbanization throughout the world, the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations has issued a recurrent series, known as *World Urbanization Prospects*, since 1988. The series provides estimates and projections of the size of the urban and rural populations of all countries and of the populations of cities or urban agglomerations above a threshold of 300,000 inhabitants. Today, we are releasing the results of the 2018 Revision of *World Urbanization Prospects*.

Urbanization is considered a “megatrend” because it represents a fundamental historical change with major consequences across all dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. The recent session of the Commission on Population and Development explored the theme of “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. During the session, both Member States and other speakers emphasized that well-managed urban growth can help cities to reap the benefits of agglomeration while minimizing environmental damage and other potential adverse impacts of growing numbers of city dwellers.

When cities are growing, the need for essential infrastructure and services increases as well. When urban growth is rapid, ensuring access to housing, water, sanitation, electricity, public transport, education and health care for all is especially challenging. For densely settled urban populations, however, infrastructure and services can often be provided in a more economical and less environmentally damaging way compared to providing similar support to a dispersed rural population.

The level of urbanization now stands at one half or more in all major geographic regions except Africa. This refers to the percentage of the population that resides in urban areas. In terms of economic production, the increasing weight of urban areas is even more pronounced. As a result, managing urban growth to ensure that it is sustainable has become one of the most important development challenges of the current century, especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the most rapid urbanization is expected to occur between now and 2050. Urban policies will play a key role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Success or failure in building sustainable cities will influence a country’s chances of achieving several targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Dear Colleagues,

The 2018 Revision of *World Urbanization Prospects* presents the latest United Nations estimates of the size of urban and rural populations for 233 countries or areas from 1950 to 2018, with projections until 2050. It also includes data on population size for close to 1,900

urban settlements having 300,000 inhabitants or more in 2018. These 1,900 cities or urban areas are now home to nearly 60 per cent of the world's urban population.

This latest revision highlights some important patterns and trends in global urbanization and city growth. Allow me to highlight a few of the key findings:

- First, well over half of the world's population now lives in urban settlements. By 2050, it is projected that just over two-thirds of all humans will reside in urban areas.
- Second, the growth of the world's urban population will continue to be driven by two factors. One is the overall growth of the world's population, which is projected to continue in the coming decades. The other is the continuing shift in place of residence from rural to urban areas. Both factors – overall growth and the shift toward urban residence – will drive the urbanization that is projected for the future: it is projected that around 2.5 billion people will be added to the world's urban population by 2050. Over 90 per cent of this increase will take place in Asia and Africa, emphasizing the need for action especially in these geographical regions.
- Third, in 1990, there were just 10 “megacities” globally, defined as cities with 10 million inhabitants or more. Together, these 10 cities were home to 153 million people, or just under 7 per cent of the global urban population at that time. Today, in 2018, there are 33 such megacities worldwide, and they represent 13 per cent of the world's urban population. By 2030, the world is projected to have 43 megacities, most of which will be located in developing countries.
- Fourth, Tokyo remains the largest city in the world with 37 million inhabitants. Delhi, however, is projected to surpass Tokyo as the world's largest agglomeration around the year 2028. It is interesting to note that, around the same time, India is expected to surpass China as the country with the world's largest total population.
- Fifth, in many discussions of sustainable development, there is a tendency to focus on the growth of very large cities, including megacities with 10 million inhabitants or more. These cities are indeed very significant, both demographically and otherwise: many are hubs of international economic and financial activity. However, these latest estimates demonstrate that almost half – around 48 per cent – of all urban dwellers reside in

settlements with fewer than half a million inhabitants. Consequently, a successful urban planning agenda will require a focused effort on ensuring the sustainable development of urban settlements of all sizes.

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In short, Ladies and Gentlemen, this latest revision of *World Urbanization Prospects* provides valuable information on levels and trends in urbanization and city size. The updated data set will inform policymakers and planners throughout the world on the scale of changes taking place in urban and rural populations and on the resulting challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable development.

Lastly, I wish to note that this new data set is the result of many months of work by several colleagues in the Population Division. I would like to acknowledge the dedicated and hard-working staff of the United Nations who have contributed to the work being released today.

I would be happy to receive your questions at this point.