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WORLD URBANIZATION PROSPECTS THE 2009 REVISION

KEY FINDINGS

- By the middle of 2009, the number of people living in urban areas (3.42 billion) had surpassed the number living in rural areas (3.41 billion) and since then the world has become more urban than rural. However, major disparities in the level of urbanization remain among development groups. Thus, whereas the proportion urban in the more developed regions was already nearly 53 per cent in 1950, it will still take another decade for half of the population of the less developed regions to live in urban areas (around 2020).
- The world urban population is expected to increase by 84 per cent by 2050, from 3.4 billion in 2009 to 6.3 billion in 2050. By mid-century the world urban population will likely be the same size as the world's total population was in 2004. Virtually all of the expected growth in the world population will be concentrated in the urban areas of the less developed regions, whose population is projected to increase from 2.5 billion in 2009 to 5.2 billion in 2050. Over the same period, the rural population of the less developed regions is expected to decline from 3.4 billion to 2.9 billion. In the more developed regions, the urban population is projected to increase modestly, from 0.9 billion in 2009 to 1.1 billion in 2050.
- The world rural population is expected to reach a maximum of 3.5 billion in 2020 and to decline slowly thereafter, to reach 2.9 billion in 2050. These global trends are driven mostly by the dynamics of rural population growth in the less developed regions, which house today 91 per cent of the world rural population. Whereas the rural population of the more developed regions has been declining steadily during the second half of the twentieth century and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, the rural population of the less developed regions more than doubled since 1950 and will likely continue to grow until 2022 before a long-term decline sets in.
- The rate of growth of the world urban population is slowing down. Between 1950 and 2009, the world urban population grew at an average rate of 2.6 per cent per year and increased nearly fivefold over the period, passing from 0.7 billion to 3.4 billion. During 2009-2025, the world urban population is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.8 per cent, which, if maintained, would lead to a doubling of the urban population in 39 years. During 2025-2050, the urban growth rate is expected to decline further to 1.3 per cent per year, implying a doubling time of 53 years.
- The sustained increase of the urban population combined with the pronounced deceleration of rural population growth will result in continued urbanization, that is, in increasing proportions of the population living in urban areas. Globally, the level of urbanization is expected to rise from 50 per cent in 2009 to 69 per cent in 2050. The more developed regions are expected to see their level of urbanization increase from 75 per cent to 86 per cent over the same period. In the less developed regions, the proportion urban will likely increase from 45 per cent in 2009 to 66 per cent in 2050.
- The world urban population is not distributed evenly among cities of different sizes. Over half of the world's 3.4 billion urban dwellers (51.8 per cent) lived in cities or towns with fewer than half a million inhabitants. Such small cities account for 53.2 per cent of the urban population in the more developed regions and for 51.3 per cent of that in the less developed regions. Between 2009 and 2025, small urban centres with fewer than half a million inhabitants are expected to account for 45 per cent of the expected increase in the world urban population.
- In 2009, cities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants accounted for one third of the world urban population, amounting to 1.14 billion. Cities with

populations ranging between 100,000 and 500,000 were home to a further 629 million people, equivalent to 18 per cent of the world urban population. Taken together, cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants account for 51.8 per cent of the urban population.

- In contrast, the 21 megacities in the world, each with at least 10 million inhabitants, accounted for 9.4 per cent of the world urban population. The number of megacities is projected to increase to 29 in 2025, at which time they are expected to account for 10.3 per cent of the world urban population. In relation to the overall population of the world, the share of megacities was 4.7 per cent in 2009, implying that just about one in every twenty people on Earth live in megacities.

- Until 1975 there were just three megacities in the world: New York, Tokyo and Mexico City. Since then, their number has increased markedly and most new megacities have arisen in developing countries. Today, Asia has 11 megacities, Latin America has four, and Africa, Europe and Northern America have two each. Eleven of those megacities are capitals of their countries. By 2025, when the number of megacities is expected to reach 29, Asia would have gained another five, Latin America two, and Africa one.

- Tokyo, the capital of Japan, is today the most populous urban agglomeration. Its population, estimated at 36.5 million in 2009, is higher than that of 196 countries or areas. If it were a country, it would rank 35th in population size, surpassing the populations of Algeria, Canada or Uganda. To reach such a large number of inhabitants, Tokyo, the megacity, is actually an urban agglomeration that comprises not only Tokyo-to but also 87 surrounding cities and towns, including Yokohama, Kawasaki and Chiba, large cities in their own right. Often, megacities arise because of the fusion of several cities or urban localities that are functionally linked and form an urban agglomeration.

- Following Tokyo, the next largest urban agglomerations are Delhi in India with 22 million inhabitants, São Paulo in Brazil and Bombay in India, each with 20 million inhabitants, and Mexico City in Mexico and New York-Newark in the United States of America, each with about 19 million inhabitants. The smallest megacities are located in Africa and Europe. They include the two megacities in Africa, namely, Cairo in Egypt, with 11 million inhabitants and Lagos in Nigeria, with 10 million, and the two megacities in Europe, namely, Paris in France and Moscow in the Russian Federation, each with about 10.5 million inhabitants. Istanbul in Turkey is also among the group, being the least populous megacity in Asia, with 10.4 million inhabitants.

- In 2025, Tokyo is projected to remain the world's most populous urban agglomeration, with 37 million inhabitants, although its population will scarcely increase. It will be followed by the two major megacities in India: Delhi with 29 million inhabitants and Mumbai with 26 million, both expecting important population gains. São Paulo in Brazil, would come next, with 22 million inhabitants, a modest increase compared to 2009. Dhaka in Bangladesh would follow, with 21 million, implying a 46 per cent increase since 2009.

- Megacities are experiencing very different rates of population change. The populations of 9 of the 21 megacities of 2009 are expected to grow at rates ranging from a very low 0.02 per cent per year to at most 0.51 per cent per year during 2009-2025. The megacities exhibiting such relatively slow rates of population growth include all those located in developed countries (France, Japan, the Russian Federation and the United States) plus the four megacities in Latin America. Very high rates of growth are expected in Lagos in Nigeria, Dhaka in Bangladesh

and Karachi in Pakistan (all having growth rates well above 2 per cent per year). In addition, the megacities in India (Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay) plus Manila in the Philippines are expected to grow considerably faster than those in China, Egypt or Turkey. These trends are consistent with the overall differentials in fertility among the national populations concerned. Given that the excess of births over deaths is an important contributor to population growth in most urban areas, the projected rates of population growth in megacities reflect the gradient in natural increase of the countries they belong to.

- Although megacities attract considerable attention because of their population size and geographical complexity, they represent the extreme of the distribution of cities by population size. They are followed by large cities with populations ranging from 5 million to just under 10 million, which in 2009 numbered 32 and are expected to number 46 in 2025. Three quarters of these "megacities in waiting" are located in developing countries and account for just 6.6 per cent of the urban population.

- Cities in the next size class, with more than a million inhabitants but fewer than 5 million, are numerous (376 in 2009 increasing to 509 in 2025) and they account for 22 per cent of the urban population. Smaller cities, with populations ranging from 500,000 to one million inhabitants, are even more numerous (509 in 2009 rising to 667 in 2025), but they account for just 10 per cent of the overall urban population.

- The distribution of the urban population by city size class varies among the major areas. Europe, for instance, is exceptional in that 67 per cent of its urban dwellers live in urban centres with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and only 8 per cent live in cities with 5 million inhabitants or more. Africa has a distribution of the urban population by size of urban settlement resembling that of Europe, with 58 per cent of urban dwellers living in smaller cities (those with fewer than half a million inhabitants) and just 9 per cent living in cities with over 5 million inhabitants. In Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern America, the concentration of the urban population in large cities is marked: about one in every five urban dwellers in those major areas lives in a large urban agglomeration. At the same time, the proportion of urban dwellers living in small cities is between 48 per cent and 49 per cent in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean and is a low 37 per cent in Northern America. Oceania is a special case because it lacks cities with more than 5 million inhabitants but also has a relatively low percentage of its population living in urban centres with fewer than half a million inhabitants (38 per cent).

- Historically, the process of rapid urbanization started first in today's more developed regions. In 1920, just under 30 per cent of their population was urban and by 1950, more than half of their population was living in urban areas. In 2009, high levels of urbanization, surpassing 80 per cent, characterized Australia, New Zealand and Northern America. Europe, with 73 per cent of its population living in urban areas, was the least urbanized major area in the developed world. By 2050, Australia, New Zealand and Northern America are all expected to be over 90 per cent urban while Europe's level of urbanization is projected to be lower, at 84 per cent.

- Among the less developed regions, Latin America and the Caribbean has an exceptionally high level of urbanization (79 per cent), higher than that of Europe. Africa and Asia, in contrast, remain mostly rural, with 40 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively, of their populations living in urban areas. Over the coming decades, the level of urbanization is expected to increase in all major areas of the developing world, with Africa and Asia urbanizing more rapidly than the rest. Nevertheless, by mid-century, Africa and Asia are expected still to have lower levels of urbanization than the more developed regions or Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Despite its low level of urbanization, in 2009 Asia was home to about half of the urban population in the world. Europe had the second highest share, at 16 per cent. Over the next four decades, Africa and Asia will experience a marked increase in their urban populations. In Africa the urban population is likely to treble and in Asia it will almost double. By mid-century, most of the urban population of the world will be concentrated in Asia (54 per cent) and Africa (20 per cent).

- With the exception of Africa and Oceania, all major areas are expected to have smaller rural populations in 2050 than today. Africa's rural population may start to decline before the mid-century. Today, the majority of rural dwellers live in Asia (70 per cent) and Africa (18 per cent) and the concentration of the world rural population in these two major areas combined is expected to increase so that, by 2050, 65 per cent of all rural inhabitants are projected to live in Asia and 27 per cent in Africa.

- The world urban population is highly concentrated in a few countries. In 2009, about three quarters of the 3.4 billion urban dwellers on Earth lived in 25 countries, whose urban populations ranged from 31 million in South Africa to 620 million in China. China, India and the United States accounted for 36 per cent of the world urban population. Most of the 25 countries with the largest urban populations are highly urbanized, but eight have levels of urbanization ranging from 28 per cent to 49 per cent and they include some of the most populous countries in the world: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan.

- Most countries have small urban populations. In 2009, two thirds of the 230 countries or areas considered had fewer than 5 million urban dwellers and they accounted for 6 per cent of the world urban population. Among them, 58 per cent had urban populations below one million and accounted for 0.5 per cent of all urban dwellers on Earth. By 2050, just half of all countries or areas are expected to have fewer than 5 million urban dwellers and will account for 2.1 per cent of the world urban population.

- Similarly, the increases in the world urban population are concentrated in a few countries, with China and India together projected to account for about a third of the increase in the urban population in the coming decades. Between 2009 and 2025, the urban areas of the world are expected to gain 1.1 billion people, including 231 million in China and 167 million in India, which account together for 36 per cent of the total increase. Nine additional countries are projected to contribute 26 per cent of the urban increment, with increases ranging from 16 million to 51 million. The countries involved are: Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa; Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines in Asia; Brazil and Mexico in Latin America, and the United States of America. Among them, those in Africa and Asia will experience high rates of urban population growth, usually surpassing 2 per cent or even 3 per cent per year.

- A further urban increment of 1.7 billion people is expected globally during 2025-2050, with India being the major contributor (352 million) and China following (186 million). Together, the two most populous countries on Earth are expected to account for 31 per cent of urban growth during 2025-2050. In 2050, China will still have the largest urban population (1 billion), followed by India (0.9 billion).

- In a few developed countries, the urban population will decrease. Despite the projected increases in the level of urbanization, overall population decline in several countries will lead to a reduction in the number of urban dwellers. Between 2009 and 2025, the urban population of the Russian Federation and that of Ukraine are projected to decline by 3 million and 0.7 million, respectively. Between 2025 and 2050, more countries

will experience reductions in the urban population. Those with the largest drops include Japan (a reduction of 4.5 million), the Republic of Korea (2.9 million), the Russian Federation (4.1 million) and Ukraine (2 million).

- The rural population is even more highly concentrated in a few countries than the urban population. In 2009, 18 countries accounted for 75 per cent of the rural population and all but three (Japan, the Russian Federation and the United States) are located in Africa or Asia. India has the largest rural population (842 million), followed by China (725 million). Together, they account for 46 per cent of the world rural population. Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan follow, each with over 115 million rural inhabitants.

- In Africa, the largest rural populations are located in Nigeria (79 million), Ethiopia (69 million), Egypt (47 million), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (43 million), the United Republic of Tanzania (32 million) and Kenya (31 million). During 2009-2025, the rural populations of most of those African countries are projected to increase at rates higher than 1.3 per cent per year, except in the cases of Nigeria and Egypt. Among the populous countries in Asia, Pakistan is expected to experience the highest growth rate of the rural population during 2009-2025 (1.2 per cent per year). In contrast, in seven of the 18 countries with large rural populations, the rural population is declining, with China, Japan, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States having the fastest rates of decline.

- As in the case of the urban population, most countries have small rural populations. In 2009, two thirds of the 230 countries or areas considered had at most 5 million rural inhabitants and accounted for 4.8 per cent of the world rural population. In three quarters of them, the rural population is projected to decrease during 2009-2050.

- Faced with the opportunities and challenges associated with urbanization, many Governments have consistently considered their population's spatial distribution as a concern. In 2009, 83 per cent of Governments expressed concern about their pattern of population distribution, down from 89 per cent in the 1970s. Among developing countries, 58 per cent expressed the desire to modify in a major way the spatial distribution of their populations, whereas 28 per cent wanted to effect only minor changes. Among developed countries, 29 per cent desired a major change and 43 per cent a minor change.

- Disatisfaction regarding patterns of population distribution was highest in Africa (75 per cent of its countries wished to make major changes in the spatial distribution of their populations) and Asia (67 per cent desired a major change). In Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania and Europe, about 40 per cent of Governments considered that major changes in spatial distribution were desirable.

- Policies aimed at modifying the spatial distribution of a population often focus on ways to reduce migrant flows to large cities. In 1976, 44 per cent of developing countries reported having implemented such policies and by 2009, that proportion had increased to 72 per cent. At the same time, among developed countries, the proportion having policies to reduce migrant flows to large cities declined from 55 per cent in 1976 to 26 per cent in 1996 but increased later to 34 per cent in 2009. In Oceania, 83 per cent of countries have such policies, in Africa 77 per cent, in Asia 66 per cent and in Latin America and the Caribbean 68 per cent.

- Historically, urbanization has been driven by the concentration of investment and employment opportunities in urban areas. Productive activities in industry and services cluster in cities. By one estimate, 80 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated by urban areas. As cities attract businesses and jobs, they bring together both the human and the entrepreneurial resources to generate new ideas, innovations and increasingly productive uses of technology. The 2009 *Revision of World Urbanization Prospects* provides a useful basis for the analysis of the world's urban transformation and the dynamics of city growth.



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The figures presented are from *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision*.

Data on CD-ROM can be purchased from:

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