



UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2009

FACT SHEET

URBANIZATION TRENDS

GLOBAL SITUATION

- Population shift is one of the main factors affecting urbanization. Less than 5 per cent of the world's population lived in cities a century ago. In 2008, for the first time in humanity, that figure exceeded 50 per cent. By 2050, it will have reached 70 per cent, representing 6.4 billion people. Most of this growth will be taking place in developing regions.
- Between 2007 and 2025, the annual rate of change in the urban population in developing countries is expected to be 2.27 per cent, and 0.49 per cent in developed regions. China's urban population is expected to double from about 40 per cent of its national population during 2006 to 2030 to more than 70 per cent by 2050.
- In developed countries the level of urbanization reached the 50 per cent mark more than half a century ago; developing countries will only reach this level in 2019.

DEVELOPED & TRANSITIONAL COUNTRIES

- Urbanization is much more advanced in the developed parts of the world. Here, about 74 per cent of the population live in cities. This trend is expected to continue as 86 per cent of the population is expected to be urban by 2050. While urbanization in this region is high, the rate of urban population growth is low: the average growth rate between 1975 and 2007 was 0.8 per cent; this is expected to decline to 0.3 per cent between 2025 and 2050.
- Current and expected urban growth in this region will be due mainly to international migration from developing or poorer countries. On average 2.3 million people migrate to the developed countries each year. International migration, therefore, accounts for about one-third of urban growth in developed countries.

WESTERN EUROPE

- Urban population growth in this region has been declining since 1950, from 1.84 per cent between 1950 and 1975 to 0.54 per cent between 1975 and 2007. Migration from Eastern Europe and developing countries now accounts for a large proportion of population growth in this region.

NORTH AMERICA

- Currently, 81 per cent of the people of this region live in urban areas, making it the most urbanized region in the world.
- Between 1970 and 2000, many cities experienced population decline. Examples of this include St Louis, which lost 59 per cent of its population; Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Detroit, which lost between 48 per cent and 51 per cent of their population.

OCEANIA & JAPAN

- Urbanization declined sharply from 1950 to 1990, and stabilized thereafter. Urbanization in Japan has been declining since 1960s. The overall trend in Australia and New Zealand has been slow, with nearly half of the cities in both countries growing at less than 1 per cent annually. Currently, the level of urbanization stands at 71 per cent and is projected to reach 76 per cent in 2050.
- International migration accounts for a significant proportion of Oceania's urban growth. In 2000, Australian immigrant population was 5.8 million, or 18 per cent of the country's population. Australia and New Zealand's indigenous people, Aborigines and Maori respectively, were largely rural people. However, their presence in cities has been increasing since the 1930s as cities expand and incorporate previously rural communities or as the indigenous people pursue urban-based opportunities.

TRANSITIONAL COUNTRIES

- Two related democratic trends are noteworthy: first, Eastern European cities witnessed a population decrease in 75 per cent of their cities between 1990 and 2005. This decline was due to increased migration to the European Union,

PLANNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

negative economic trends, rising rates of mortality and decreasing fertility rates, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Second, there has been a rapid increase in the ageing population, as manifested by the proportion of people aged over 60 years.

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

- Apart from Latin America and the Caribbean which have stabilised, developing countries are experiencing the fastest rate of urbanization worldwide. This is due to the high levels of natural increase and an increase in rural to urban migration.
- About 44 per cent of the population of developing countries live in urban areas; this is expected to reach 67 per cent by 2050. The average annual growth rate was 3.1 per cent between 1975 and 2007; this is expected to decline to 2.3 per cent for 2007 to 2025, and 1.6 per cent for 2025 to 2050.

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

- Urban population increased from 41 per cent in 1950s to 78 per cent in 2007, making it the most urbanized region in the developing world. Between 1950 and 1975, the region's urban growth rate stood at 4.2 per cent. This decreased to 2.6 per cent between 1975 and 2007. A further decrease of 1.4 per cent is expected between 2007 and 2025. The region's four largest countries – Brazil, Mexico, Colombia and Argentina – are about 80 per cent urbanized; the smaller ones 45 per cent to 60 per cent urbanized.

ASIA

- Asia is home to some 3.7 billion people, which is more than 60 per cent of the world's population. The region constitutes one of the world's most rapidly urbanizing regions. The urban population increased from 237 million (17 per cent) in 1950 to 1.65 billion (41 per cent) in 2007. By 2050, it is expected that more than two-thirds of the population will be urban. Regional urban growth has been declining since the 1990s, from an annual average of 3.13 per cent to the present rate of 2.5 per cent.
- There are three trends that have implications for urban planning in the region: first, an increasing trend toward ageing marks the demographic profile; second there has been an accentuation of socio-economic class disparities and the emergence of a strong middle class; third, there is a change in consumption habits, particularly in increasingly wealthy cities such as Shanghai, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shantou (China); Mumbai, New Delhi, (India); Jakarta (Indonesia); Bangkok (Thailand); and Seoul (South Korea).

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

- Urbanization in the Middle East and North Africa is characterized by considerable diversity. For example, while Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar were already 80 per cent urbanized during the 1970s, most of the other countries were still predominantly rural. Between 1950 and 2000, the region's level of urbanization increased from 27 per cent to 58 per cent. While urban growth is projected to decline, the level of urbanization is expected to reach 70 per cent by 2030.
- Another demographic feature is international migration, which constitutes a significant proportion of the region's population. In Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, international migrants significantly outnumber the local population.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

- This is the world's least urbanized region, but most rapidly urbanizing one. During the 1950s, 11 per cent of the region's population was urban; this had increased to 35 per cent by 2005. It is projected that by 2030 and 2050, that figure will have reached 48 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively.
- The HIV/AIDS pandemic is robbing countries of their most productive population, contributing to increasing urban poverty and placing a severe burden on the limited health infrastructure within cities.
- In many countries of the region, rapid urbanization is occurring within the context of economic stagnation or low economic growth, poor agricultural performance, rising unemployment, financially weak municipalities incapable of providing basic services, poor governance and the absence of coherent urban planning policy. Such conditions have led to widespread urbanization of poverty, in the form of slums and informal settlements.

GRHS/09/FS1

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