

Urbanization: A Turning Point in History

The year 2007 marks a turning point in history. One out of every two people will be living in a city. This should be a cause for celebration. After all, since time immemorial, cities have been centres of economic growth and cultural creativity. However, with one out of three city dwellers –nearly one billion people- currently living in slums, the new UN-HABITAT State of the World' Cities Report 2006/7 questions the whole notion of urban sustainability.

In 2005, the world's urban population was 3.17 billion out of a world total of 6.45 billion. Current trends predict that the number of urban dwellers will keep rising, reaching almost 5 billion by 2030 out of a world total of 8.1 billion.

Between 2005 and 2030, the world's urban population is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.78 per cent, almost twice the growth rate of the world's total population. After 2015, as more and more people occupy cities, the population of rural settlements around the globe will begin to contract, decreasing at an average annual rate of -0.32 through 2030 – a decrease of more than 155 million people over 15 years.

Whereas **Europe**, **North America** and **Latin America** experienced intense urbanization – the increased concentration of people in cities rather than in rural areas – and rapid urban growth through the mid-20th century, the trend has now shifted to the developing regions of **Asia** and **Africa**. In-migration, reclassification and natural population increase are contributing to a rapid urban transformation of these regions.

- Annual urban growth rates are highest in **Sub-Saharan Africa** (4.58 per cent)
- Followed by **South-Eastern Asia** (3.82 per cent), **Eastern Asia** (3.39 per cent), **Western Asia** (2.96 per cent), **Southern Asia** (2.89 per cent) and **Northern Africa** (2.48 per cent).
- The developed world's cities are growing at a slower pace, averaging 0.75 per cent a year.
- **Asia** and **Africa** will continue to dominate global urban growth through 2030.
- Currently the least urbanized regions in the world, with 39.9 per cent and 39.7 per cent of their populations living in cities in 2005, respectively, by 2030, both regions will become predominantly urban, **Asia** with 54.5 per cent of its population living in cities, and **Africa** with 53.5 per cent of its population urban.
- **Asia** alone will account for more than half the world's urban population (2.66 billion out of a global urban population of 4.94 billion);
- the urban population of **Africa** (748 million) will by 2030 be larger than the total population of **Europe** at that time (685 million).

Small cities with less than 500,000 inhabitants and intermediate cities with between 1 and 5 million inhabitants, not megacities (defined as cities with 10 million or more people), will continue to absorb most of the urban population around the world well into the future. More than 53 per cent of the world's urban population lives in cities of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, and another 22 per cent of the global urban population lives in cities of 1 to 5 million inhabitants.

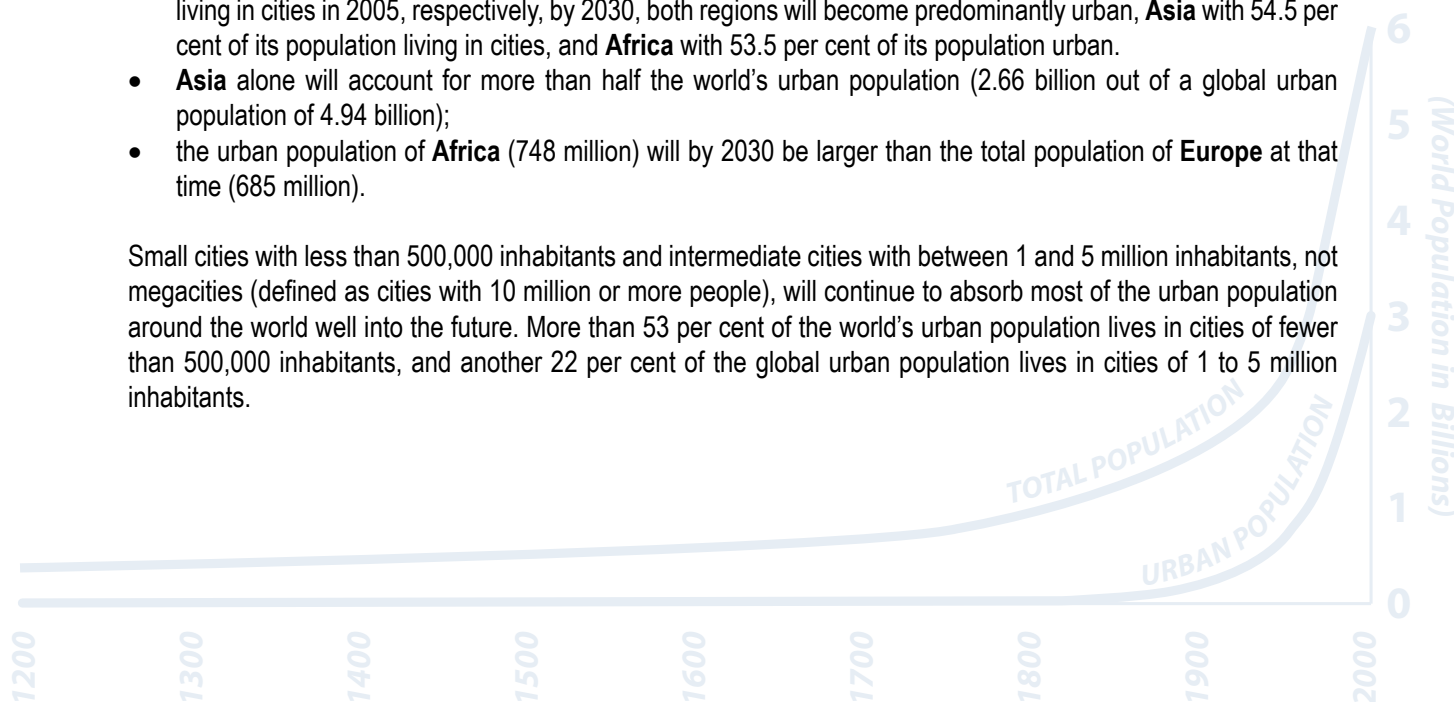
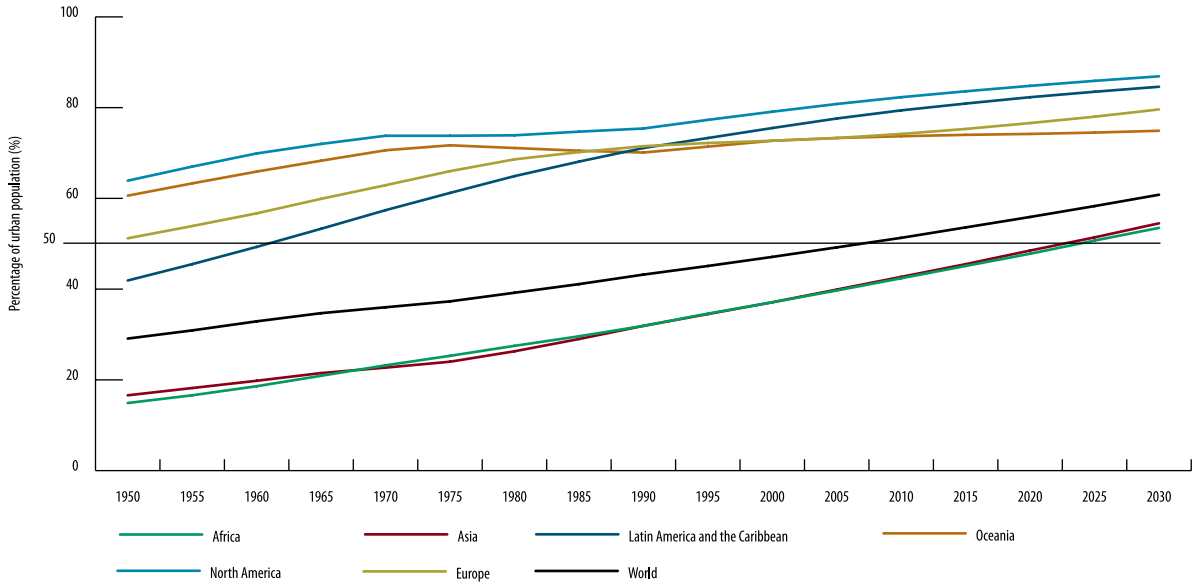
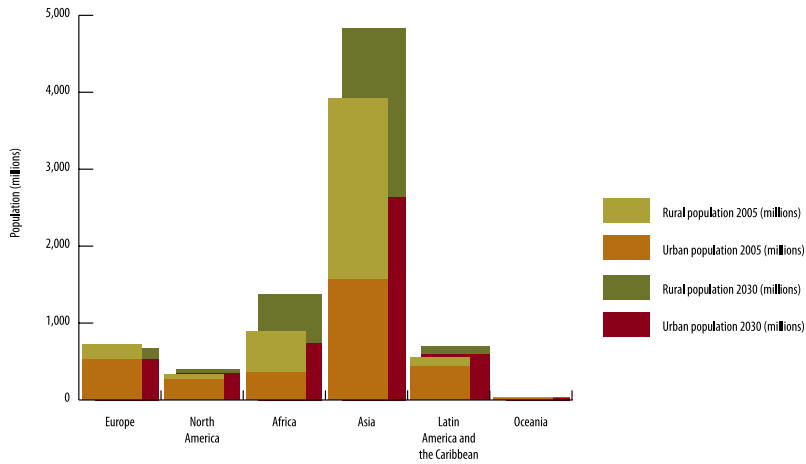


FIGURE 1.1.1 PROPORTION OF URBAN POPULATION BY REGION, 1950-2030



Source: United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision.

FIGURE 1.1.2 RURAL AND URBAN POPULATION BY REGION IN 2005 AND 2030



Source: United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision.

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