

# Urbanization in the 21st Century



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The population of the world continues to grow more and more quickly, and for a variety of reasons, people in the developing world are moving into cities at a rate not seen since the Industrial Revolution swelled the cities of the developed world more than a century ago. The overall population growth rate for the world is 1 percent, while the growth rate for urban areas is nearly double, or 1.8 percent. Growth will be even more rapid in the urban areas of less developed regions, averaging 2.3 percent per year. Cities have existed for over 5 000 years. Even so, by 1800, only 2 per cent of the world's population was urban. As we enter the "urban millennium", half of the world's people are living in towns and cities, with 180 000 people added to the urban population each day.

In 2008, more than half of the population, 3.3 billion people, will thus be living in urban areas. By 2030, the number is expected to grow to almost 5 billion. While urban localities concentrate half of the Earth's population, the urban land area is less than 3 per cent of Earth's land area. Most of the urban population growth will be in developing countries. The urban population of Africa and Asia is expected to double between 2000 and 2030. The urban population of the developed world is expected to

grow relatively slowly in numbers, from 870 million to 1.01 billion. During the last decades for example European urban systems have become increasingly balanced, in the sense that the share of population living in their largest cities has fallen. By 2030, 84 per cent of the population in developed countries will be living in urban areas.

Rapid urbanization creates also mega-cities. In 1950, New York City was the only metropolitan area with a population of over 10 million. By 2015, it is expected that there will be 23 such cities and 19 of these will be in developing countries. Today's mega-cities account for 4 per cent of the world's population and 9 per cent of all urban inhabitants. 52 per cent of the world's urban population continue to live in settlements of less than 500 000 people. Smaller cities tend to have more flexibility in terms of territorial expansion, attracting investment and decision-making.

One phenomenon which is accelerating the urbanization process is immigration to the urban areas. Immigrant cities are growing in number due to globalization and the increase of immigrant flows driven by income differentials, social networks, and various state policies. Among 20 cities with more than 1 million foreign-born residents three are located in Europe. Many of these cities are

established immigrant gateways such as London.

One of the alarming prospects of climate change is its impact on sea level and its potential consequences for coastal urban areas. Coastal zones have always concentrated people and economic activities because of their natural resources and trading opportunities. Sea level rise would flood large parts of these areas. So-called low elevation coastal zones currently account for only 2 per cent of the world's land area but 13 per cent of its urban population. Africa and Asia have much larger proportions of their urban populations in coastal zones than North America and Europe.

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