



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

World Urbanization Prospects 2025

Summary of Results



Key messages

The world has become increasingly urban; more people live in cities today than in towns or rural areas.

- For the first time, the 2025 edition of the World Urbanization Prospects presents population estimates and projections for three “Degree of Urbanization” categories: cities, towns and rural areas.⁴
- In 1950, city living was relatively unusual: just 20 per cent of the world’s 2.5 billion people lived in cities, defined as population centres with at least 50,000 inhabitants and a density of at least 1,500 people per km². Following many decades of urbanization, cities are now (in 2025) home to 45 per cent of the world’s 8.2 billion people, more than double the proportion in 1950.
- The share of the global population living in towns, defined as population clusters of at least 5,000 inhabitants and a density of at least 300 people per km², declined gradually from 40 per cent in 1950 to 36 per cent in 2025.
- Rural communities are less densely populated than cities and towns. Today, they are home to just 19 per cent of the global population, a share that has fallen by half since 1950.
- Projections indicate that two thirds of the growth of the world’s population between now and 2050 will take place in cities, with most of the remainder concentrated in towns. The size of the global rural population is expected to peak sometime during the 2040s and then begin to decline.
- Urbanization is one of the most significant demographic shifts in human history, fundamentally altering how and where people live, work and build communities across the globe.

The number of “megacities” (10 million inhabitants or more) continues to grow; over half are in Asia.

- The number of megacities quadrupled from eight in 1975 to 33 in 2025, with 19 in Asia. Projections indicate that there will be 37 megacities globally by 2050, as the populations of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Dar es Salaam (United Republic of Tanzania), Hajipur (India) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) grow to over 10 million.
- Jakarta (Indonesia) is the world’s most populous city, with nearly 42 million inhabitants in 2025, followed by Dhaka (Bangladesh) with almost 37 million and Tokyo (Japan) with 33 million. Cairo (Egypt) is the only city among the world’s ten largest that is not located in Asia.
- Fast-growing Dhaka is expected to become the world’s largest city by mid-century. Karachi (Pakistan) will enter the top ten by 2030 and could rank fifth by 2050. Meanwhile, Tokyo is projected to fall in rank from third in 2025 to seventh in 2050, as its population shrinks to around 31 million.

More people live in small and medium-sized cities than in megacities; many of these smaller settlements are among the fastest growing, especially in Africa and Asia.

- The total number of cities worldwide more than doubled between 1975 and 2025. Among the world’s 12,000 cities, 96 per cent have fewer than 1 million inhabitants, and 81 per cent have populations below 250,000. This distribution underscores that the majority of the world’s urban population resides not in megacities, but in small and medium-sized urban centres that play a critical role in shaping sustainable urban development. By 2050, there could be more than 15,000 cities in the world, mostly with populations below 250,000.

⁴ Throughout this report, “cities”, “towns” and “rural areas” refer to standardized categories based on population size and density, as explained in box 1.1 where “towns”, in particular, refers to “towns and semi-dense areas”.

- Of the roughly 400 cities that grew faster than 4 per cent per year between 2015 and 2025, one third were in sub-Saharan Africa and another quarter were in Central and Southern Asia. Over two thirds had fewer than 250,000 inhabitants.
- Smaller settlements often lack the planning capacity and resources to manage their growth sustainably. They can benefit from improved access to basic services, better land-use management and increased connectivity.

Growth of the world's city population between now and 2050 will be concentrated in seven countries.

- Taken together, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Bangladesh and Ethiopia are expected to add more than 500 million city residents between 2025 and 2050, accounting for over half of the projected 986 million increase in the global number of city dwellers over that period.
- The success or failure of urbanization in these key countries will shape global development outcomes. Their ability to manage city growth sustainably will have profound implications not only for their populations but also for global progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and climate objectives.

City population growth is uneven; most cities are growing, but thousands have shrinking populations.

- Worldwide, more than 3,000 cities experienced population decline between 2015 and 2025.
- Most cities with shrinking populations have fewer than 250,000 inhabitants in 2025. More than one third are in China and another 17 per cent are in India.
- Growth and decline can occur simultaneously within countries. Some cities' populations shrank even as their country's population grew. Conversely, some cities' populations grew despite shrinking national populations.
- Size does not guarantee growth. While most megacities' population grew faster than their countries overall between 2015 and 2025, a few very large cities, such as Mexico City (Mexico) and Chengdu (China), registered population declines.
- For roughly half of the world's cities, population density – the number of inhabitants per km² – is higher now (in 2025) than in 2000, including for 74 per cent of cities in sub-Saharan Africa. If urban population growth is poorly planned or managed, increases in density may reflect conditions of crowding or sprawl.
- Diverse city growth trajectories underscore the need for urban policies that can address both expansion and contraction of city populations. Growing cities must prepare to provide services and infrastructure to more people while managing a changing relationship with surrounding towns and rural areas. Cities with shrinking populations often face different challenges associated with maintaining essential services for fewer residents and adapting to changing economic conditions without the impetus of growth.

Towns are home to more than a third of humanity and are critical for sustainable development.

- Despite the global shift towards city life, towns remain (in 2025) the most common settlement type in 71 countries. Countries in all regions and at diverse levels of economic development are found within this group, including Germany, India, Uganda and the United States of America.
- Together, India and China host more than 1.2 billion town dwellers, representing over 40 per cent of the global population of towns.
- The towns of sub-Saharan Africa and of Central and Southern Asia are expected to continue to experience robust population growth between 2025 and 2050. In other regions, however, the number of people living in towns has levelled off or begun to decline.

- Towns often serve as connectors between rural areas and cities, providing essential services and supporting local economies. Proactive urban planning for towns can promote balanced territorial development, reduce pressure on large cities and contribute to more sustainable and inclusive growth.

As the world's rural population approaches its peak size, it faces unprecedented challenges.

- Rural areas continue to be (in 2025) the most common settlement type for 62 countries or areas, compared to 116 countries or areas in 1975 and 44 in 2050. These include, for example, several countries in Europe, such as Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Poland and Romania, as well as numerous countries in sub-Saharan Africa, like the Central African Republic, Chad, Eswatini, Mali, Mozambique, South Sudan and Zambia, among others.
- In 26 countries, including Bhutan, Eswatini, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Zimbabwe, more than half of the population still resides in rural areas.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that experienced substantial growth in the size of its rural population over recent decades. Nearly all future growth of the world's rural population will take place in sub-Saharan Africa.
- In the region encompassing Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand, the number of rural dwellers has been declining since 2015.
- Many rural communities face growing pressures from population ageing and out-migration, as young people move to cities and towns in search of education and employment opportunities. Strengthening urban-rural linkages is key to reducing intraregional disparities.

The expansion of built-up areas is outpacing population growth worldwide.

- Between 1975 and 2025, the extent of the built-up area occupied by humans grew almost twice as fast as the global population. As a result, the built-up area per person rose from 43 to 63 square meters.
- Populations in Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand use the most land per capita for buildings and other structures. The region of Latin America and the Caribbean has the second highest built-up area per capita, while countries in Central and Southern Asia have the lowest.

The Degree of Urbanization methodology yields estimates of the populations living in cities, towns and rural areas that are comparable across countries and over time. Using this new metric, the world appears to be more urbanized than national statistics suggest.

- Many countries maintain definitions of urban and rural areas based on criteria that differ from those given priority in specifying the categories of settlements used for the Degree of Urbanization. While most countries use administrative criteria to define urban areas, many also use population thresholds (e.g. from as low as 200 inhabitants in Denmark to 50,000 in Japan), and others additionally include economic or functional criteria. These national definitions are valuable because they are tailored to specific contexts and policy requirements. Accordingly, the *World Urbanization Prospects* presents estimates and projections of urban and rural populations that are aligned with national definitions alongside those derived using the Degree of Urbanization methodology.
- Comparing population estimates for urban areas according to national definitions to those for cities and towns according to the Degree of Urbanization indicates that national definitions tend to classify fewer settlements as urban, and this can lead to lower urban figures than the combined population of cities and towns. This

occurs because many settlements that meet the definition of “town” by consistent criteria of population size and density are seen and classified by countries as “rural” areas rather than being included in their national urban population totals. This is especially true for many countries in Central and Southern Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.

- Aggregating estimates of urban population across disparate national definitions suggests that 58 per cent of the world’s population lives in urban areas in 2025, which is well below the combined population of cities (45 per cent) and towns (36 per cent) according to the Degree of Urbanization.
- The positive association between level of urbanization and national income is much stronger when using national definitions than when cities and towns are identified using the Degree of Urbanization approach. Countries with similar income levels have quite disparate shares of their populations living in cities and towns, suggesting that the link between a country’s level of development and the share of its population living in relatively large and densely populated settlements is mediated by factors associated with the national definition of urban space. In other words, a country’s choice of how to conceptualize and measure the urban-rural dichotomy may be related to its success in development, either by direct causation or by association with another factor.

Sustainable development requires integrated planning that treats cities, towns and rural areas as interconnected and interdependent.

- Cities, towns and rural areas are fundamentally interdependent. About 60 per cent of the land converted to urban space since 1970 was formerly productive farmland.
- National urban policies that coordinate housing, land use, mobility and basic services across cities and towns can relieve pressure on large cities and foster balanced territorial development. Bridging the urban-rural divide requires coordinated investments in transport, digital connectivity, infrastructure and essential services, along with support for smallholder agriculture and rural enterprises. Planning for rapidly growing towns and peri-urban areas that reflects local migration patterns and settlement hierarchies can yield shared benefits across cities, towns and rural hinterlands.
- Policies that recognize the unique roles of all settlement types, that spur investment in rural infrastructure and services and that promote economic activity in small and medium-sized towns can lead to compact urban growth and help to protect agricultural lands and natural ecosystems.
- Better data are key to effective planning. Conducting censuses at regular intervals and integrating geospatial and other statistical information can enable better monitoring of settlement patterns and service access. Indicators that track both people and land, such as built-up land per capita and population density, provide useful information about human interactions with the environment.