

UN-HABITAT

STATE OF THE WORLD'S CITIES 2006/7



Slums: Past, Present and Future

The word "slum" first appeared in 19th century **London**, when the burgeoning urban working classes moved into overcrowded and poorly serviced tenements, living close to the factories and industrial plants that employed them. The term referred to what was initially designated "a room of low repute", but over time took on the generic definition, "a squalid and overcrowded urban area inhabited by very poor people".

Although slums continued to grow over the course of the last two centuries, their evolution was particularly swift in the latter half of the 20th century as the developing world became more urbanized. Today's slums are much larger and have many more residents than the slums prevalent in 19th century **Europe** and **North America**. The slum population of **Rio de Janeiro**, for example, is almost the same size as the total population of **Helsinki**. **Mumbai's** more than 5 million slum dwellers exceed the total population of **Nairobi**. Slum dwellers now live primarily in the cities of **Africa**, **Asia** and **Latin America**, although a smaller number also live in cities of the developed world.

Will slums become a predominant type of settlement in the 21st century? If no preventive or remedial action is taken, they may indeed come to characterize cities in many parts of the developing world. The vast majority of slums, more than 90 per cent, are located in cities of the developing world, where urbanization has become virtually synonymous with slum formation. This is especially so in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, **Southern Asia** and **Western Asia**, where urban growth over the last 15 years has been accompanied by a commensurate growth in slums.

Slum and urban growth rates are highest in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, 4.53 per cent and 4.58 per cent per year, respectively – nearly twice those of **Southern Asia**, where slum and urban growth rates are 2.2 per cent and 2.89 per cent per year, respectively. In **Western Asia**, annual slum and urban growth rates are quite similar, at 2.71 per cent and 2.96 per cent respectively, while in **Eastern Asia** and **Latin America**, slum growth rates are significantly lower than urban growth rates, although slum growth rates are relatively high in both regions: 2.28 per cent and 1.28 per cent per year, respectively.

South-Eastern Asia and **Northern Africa** are two regions where the proportion of slum dwellers has actually declined in recent years from over 36 per cent of the urban population in 1990 to approximately 25 per cent in 2005.

Eastern Asia and **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** also have urban growth rates that are higher than slum growth rates. This suggests that countries within these regions have in recent years taken active steps to reduce the number of slum dwellers or prevent slum formation.

Some of the major urbanisation trends in the 21st century highlighted in the report include:

- By 2030 there will be 5 billion people living in cities
- Cities of the developing world will account for 95% of urban expansion in the next two decades and by 2030 will be home to 80% of the world's urban population (4 billion people).
- **Sub-Saharan Africa** has the world's highest annual urban growth rate (4.58%) and highest slum growth rate (4.53%).
- Over half the world's urban population will be living in **Asia** (2.66 billion)
- More Africans will be living in cities than the total population of **Europe** (748 million)
- There will be more and more Metacities with populations of more than 20 million especially in **Asia**, **Latin America** and **Africa**.
- The fastest urban growth, spurred by migration from the countryside, will occur in small cities and towns of less than 1 million inhabitants.

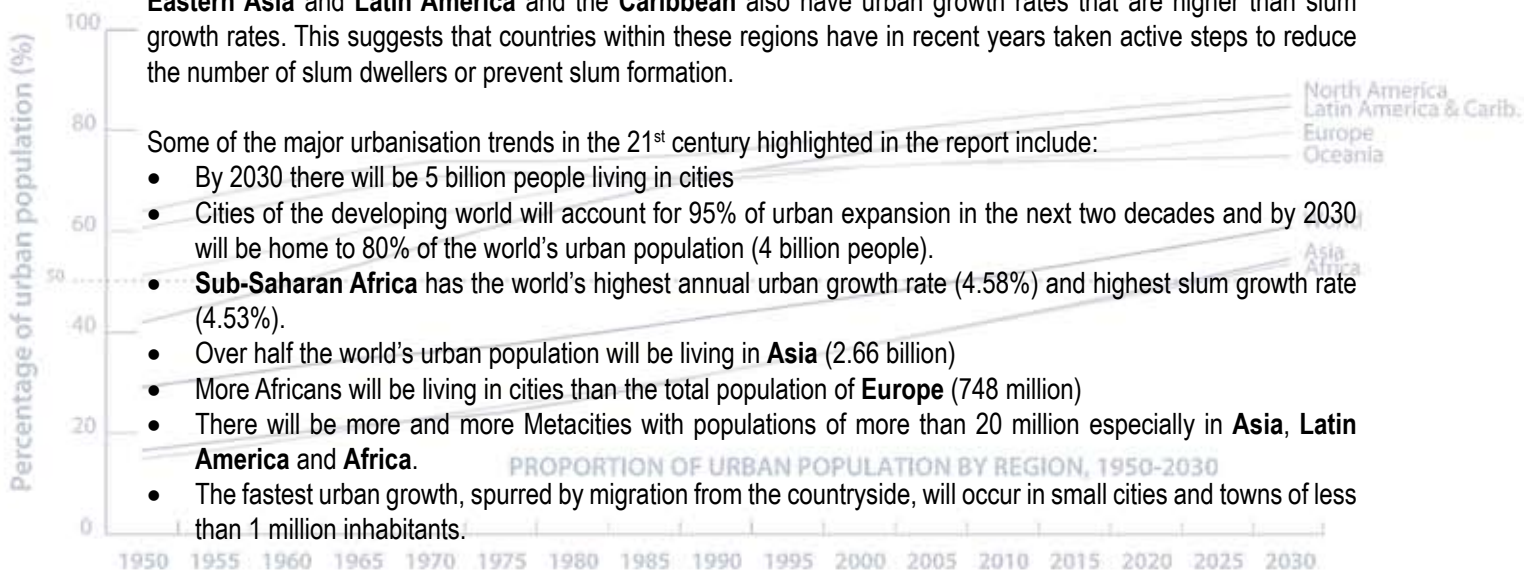


TABLE 1.2.1 POPULATION OF SLUM AREAS AT MID-YEAR, BY REGION; 1990, 2001, 2005 AND ANNUAL SLUM GROWTH RATE

Region	% slum 1990	Slum Population (thousand) 1990	% slum 2001	Slum Population (thousand) 2001	% slum 2005	Slum Population (thousand) 2005	Slum annual growth rate (%)
WORLD	31.3	714,972	31.2	912,918	31.2	997,767	2.22
Developed regions	6.0	41,750	6.0	45,191	6.0	46,511	0.72
EURASIA (Countries in CIS)	10.3	18,929	10.3	18,714	10.3	18,637	-0.10
European countries in CIS	6.0	9,208	6.0	8,878	6.0	8,761	-0.33
Asian countries in CIS	30.3	9,721	29.4	9,836	29.0	9,879	0.11
Developing regions	46.5	654,294	42.7	849,013	41.4	933,376	2.37
Northern Africa	37.7	21,719	28.2	21,355	25.4	21,224	-0.15
Sub-Saharan Africa	72.3	100,973	71.9	166,208	71.8	199,231	4.53
Latin America and the Caribbean	35.4	110,837	31.9	127,566	30.8	134,257	1.28
Eastern Asia	41.1	150,761	36.4	193,824	34.8	212,368	2.28
Eastern Asia excluding China	25.3	12,831	25.4	15,568	25.4	16,702	1.76
Southern Asia	63.7	198,663	59.0	253,122	57.4	276,432	2.20
South-Eastern Asia	36.8	48,986	28.0	56,781	25.3	59,913	1.34
Western Asia	26.4	22,006	25.7	29,658	25.5	33,057	2.71
Oceania	24.5	350	24.1	499	24.0	568	3.24

Source: UN-HABITAT 2005, Global Urban Observatory, Urban Indicators Programme, Phase III.

Note: % slum indicates the proportion of the urban population living in slums; 2005 figures are projections.

TABLE 1.2.2 URBAN AND SLUM GROWTH RATES BY REGION

Regions	Urban growth rate	Slum growth rate
Urban growth significantly higher than slum growth		
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.21	1.28
Northern Africa	2.48	-0.15
Eastern Asia	3.39	2.28
South-Eastern Asia	3.82	1.34
Urban and slum growth similar		
Western Asia	2.96	2.71
Southern Asia	2.89	2.20
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.58	4.53
Developed world	0.75	0.72
World	2.24	2.22

Source: UN-HABITAT 2005, Global Urban Observatory.

This is a UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder, please feel free to publish or quote from this article provided UN-HABITAT is given credit. Suitable photographs are available on our website. For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson, or Ms. Zahra Hassan, Press & Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: (254 2) 7623153/7623151, Fax: (254 2) 7624060, E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, Website: www.unhabitat.org. SOWC/06/07/B/Slum1