

Regional up-dates: Asia at a glance

Growth and more urban growth

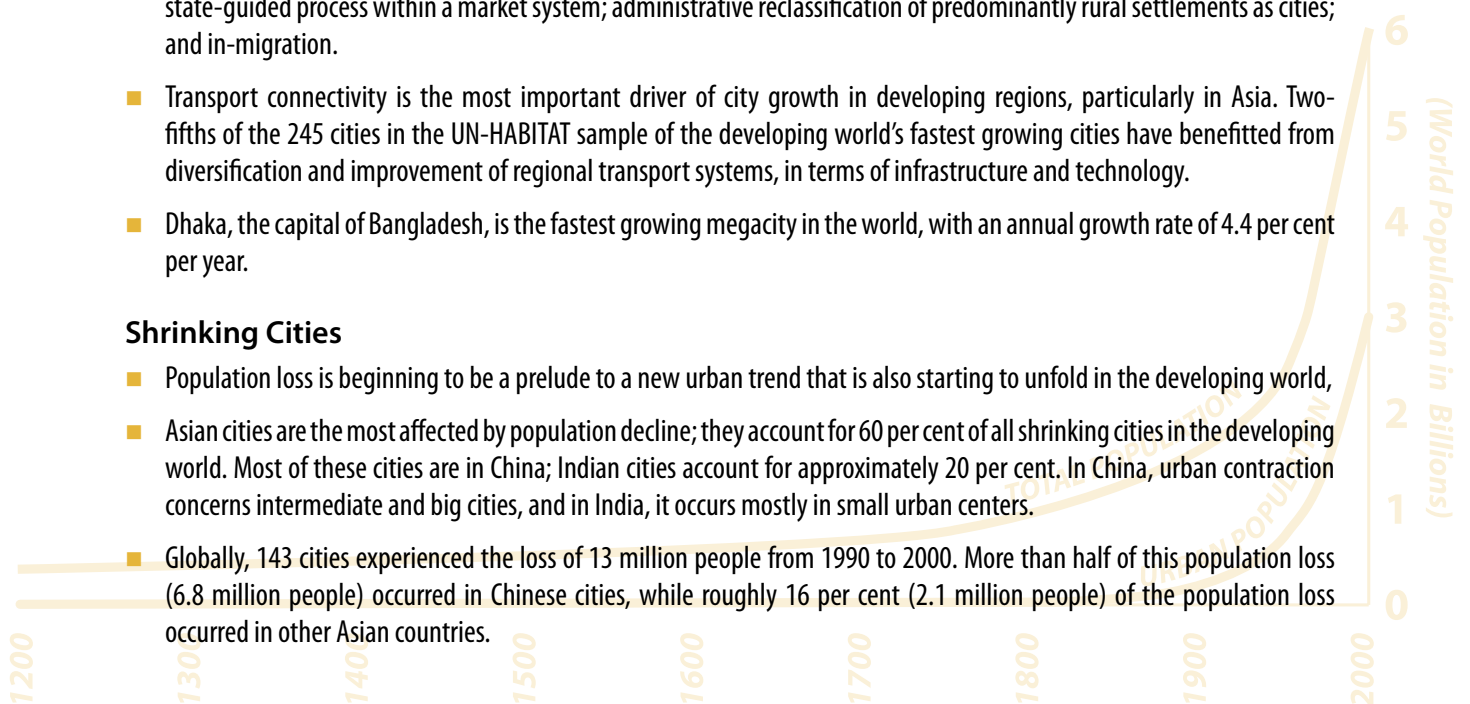
- Globally, urbanization levels will rise dramatically in the next 40 years to 70 per cent by 2050. More than 70 per cent of the populations of Europe, North America and Latin America are already urban; Asia and Africa remain predominately rural, with 39 per cent and 41 per cent of their populations living in urban areas, respectively.
- In the last two decades, the urban population of the developing world has grown by an average of 3 million people per week – an unprecedented scale and rate of growth. Altogether, 95 per cent of the world's urban population growth over the next four decades will be absorbed by cities in developing countries.
- By the middle of the 21st century, the total urban population of the developing world will more than double, increasing from 2.3 billion in 2005 to 5.3 billion in 2050.
- Asia is urbanizing rapidly, with approximately 40 per cent of its inhabitants now living in cities. The region is expected to experience significantly high rates of urbanization over the next 20 years.
- By 2050, Asia will host 63 per cent of the global urban population, or 3.3 billion people. In Asia, the urban transition will occur even earlier than Africa, owing to rapid urban growth rates in China, a country that is expected to be 70 per cent urban by 2050. Urban growth rates in India will be slower; by 2050, 55 per cent of its population, or 900 million people, will live in cities.

Growing cities

- Many cities in China are growing at staggeringly high growth rates of more than 10 per cent per year, including Chongqing, Xiamen and Shenzhen which can be attributed to a variety of factors; including the adoption of a pro-urban approach to economic development by the government of China, shifting from a state-directed process under a planned economy to a state-guided process within a market system; administrative reclassification of predominantly rural settlements as cities; and in-migration.
- Transport connectivity is the most important driver of city growth in developing regions, particularly in Asia. Two-fifths of the 245 cities in the UN-HABITAT sample of the developing world's fastest growing cities have benefitted from diversification and improvement of regional transport systems, in terms of infrastructure and technology.
- Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is the fastest growing megacity in the world, with an annual growth rate of 4.4 per cent per year.

Shrinking Cities

- Population loss is beginning to be a prelude to a new urban trend that is also starting to unfold in the developing world,
- Asian cities are the most affected by population decline; they account for 60 per cent of all shrinking cities in the developing world. Most of these cities are in China; Indian cities account for approximately 20 per cent. In China, urban contraction concerns intermediate and big cities, and in India, it occurs mostly in small urban centers.
- Globally, 143 cities experienced the loss of 13 million people from 1990 to 2000. More than half of this population loss (6.8 million people) occurred in Chinese cities, while roughly 16 per cent (2.1 million people) of the population loss occurred in other Asian countries.





For richer or poorer: Urban Inequalities

- Asia is the most equal region in the developing world: the urban Gini coefficient is 0.39, slightly below the unacceptable inequality threshold of 0.4. It is also the region with the greatest variations in income distribution, with some countries maintaining low levels of inequality or reducing them further, and others experiencing a rise in levels of inequality.
- Inequalities in Asian countries – measured by income or consumption indexes – are generally higher in urban than in rural areas, with the exception of China, which is the only country in the region with higher Gini coefficients in the countryside than in urban areas.
- Malaysia is the only country in the region where levels of inequality are more or less equal in urban and rural areas.
- Many countries in the region, particularly China, are grappling with income disparities between rural and urban areas. This type of rural-urban inequality has increased in the last two decades mainly as a result of economic liberalization and concentration of economic activities in urban areas or city regions. Today, China has one of the widest income gaps between rural and urban areas of any country in the world.
- However, there are significant income distribution differences among cities, even within the same country, which shows that national aggregates are not necessarily reflected at the local level. For instance, Beijing, the capital of China, is the most equal city in Asia; its Gini coefficient is not only the lowest among Asian cities, but is the lowest in the world (0.22), whereas Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of China, has the highest Gini coefficient among all Asian cities, and a relatively high value by international standards (0.53).
- Recent analyses suggest that India is undergoing an inequality trend somewhat similar to that of China as a result of economic liberalization and globalization. All of these changes in the occupational structure of the country are affecting levels of inequality. In 2002, for instance, the income gain of the richest 10 per cent of the population was about 4 times higher than the gain of the poorest 10 per cent.

Slums

- One out of every three people living in cities of the developing world lives in a slum. Not all slum dwellers suffer the same degree or magnitude of deprivation, however, nor are all slums homogeneous – some, in fact, provide better living conditions than others. The degree of deprivation depends on how many of the five shelter deprivations used to measure slums – lack of access to improved water, lack of access to sanitation, non-durable housing, insufficient living area, and security of tenure – are associated with a particular slum household.
- Slum concentrations throughout Asia vary widely, from an average of 43 per cent in Southern Asia and 37 per cent in Eastern Asia, to 24 per cent in Western Asia and 28 per cent in South-Eastern Asia. The high concentration of slum households in Southern Asia can be associated with a variety of factors, including lack of investment in the sub-region's housing sector, poverty and instability.
- In Eastern Asia, 83 per cent of the urban population is concentrated in China. Slums households in the sub-region, however, are concentrated in Mongolia, comprising 65 per cent of that country's households. Most slum households in Mongolia suffer from multiple shelter deprivations, mainly resulting from a lack of attention to housing needs in general.
- Although Western Asia has a relatively low average slum concentration, it is important to note that within the sub-region, several countries, including Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates, have low slum prevalence while other countries, such as Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq, have large proportions of urban dwellers living in slum conditions.
- The Philippines has a moderate prevalence of slum households compared with the rest of Asia, with 37.8 per cent of households in the capital and large cities classified as slums, compared with 29.1 per cent in small cities.



Urban Environmental Risks and Burdens

- In high-income industrialized countries, cities are dealing more with the “green agenda”, including non-point source pollution and consumption-related burdens, including greenhouse gas emissions.
- In developing countries, cities tend to struggle most with localized, immediate and health-threatening environmental issues belonging to the “brown” agenda, such as lack of safe water, inadequate sanitation and poor waste management.
- Environmental burdens and risks are heavily concentrated in cities because most human activity is – and will continue to be – urban-based. The United States, China, the European Union, Russia, and India together contribute approximately 61 per cent of global emissions.
- In newly industrializing countries, such as China and India, the combined impact of population growth, urbanization, motorization and increased energy use act as drivers of emissions.

Emissions at the city level

- Cities are key players in the carbon emissions and climate change arenas because most human and economic activities are concentrated in urban areas.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 1 billion people in Asia alone are exposed to outdoor air pollutant levels that exceed WHO guidelines, leading to the premature death of half a million people annually. WHO’s Global Burden of Disease project attributes 58,000 annual premature deaths to urban air pollution

Urban Energy Consumption

- Today, humanity’s ecological footprint is 2.2 ha per person – over 21 per cent greater than the earth’s biocapacity (1.8 ha), or its capability to regenerate the resources used. It now takes more than one year and two months for planet Earth to regenerate what we, its inhabitants, use in a single year.
- Middle- and low-income countries, on average, do not contribute to the global over-consumption of resources, but exceptions include China and India, whose ecological footprints are twice their biocapacity. There are exceptions in the high-income countries too, such as New Zealand and Canada, whose ecological footprints are less than half their biocapacity.
- Built-up areas in cities also consume a large amount of the world’s energy, which contributes to global warming. Energy for heating and lighting residential and commercial buildings generates nearly a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions globally, while transportation contributes 13.5 per cent, of which 10 per cent is attributed to road transport.
- In megacities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Kolkata, industries consume more than 50 per cent of total energy uses, reflecting the fast growth of Chinese and Indian economies.

Urban household consumption

- In developing countries, respiratory disease—linked to air pollution—ranks second, after HIV/AIDS, as the leading cause of premature death. It is estimated that indoor air pollution is responsible for between 2.7 and 2.8 million deaths annually.
- UN-HABITAT analyses also show that indoor air pollution is a leading cause of respiratory illnesses among women and children living in Asian and African slums, as they are most likely to be exposed to poorly ventilated cooking areas.

Urban Mobility

- Transport is a key element in our race toward keeping the earth's temperature at an acceptable level.
- Motorized urban transport accounts for a large share of energy consumption in cities, ranging from more than half of total energy consumption in cities such as Mexico City, Cape Town and Hong Kong to roughly a quarter of total energy consumption in cities such as London, Seoul and Bologna.
- Urban form strongly influences energy consumption and CO2 emissions. Urban density and CO2 emissions have a direct, inverse correlation: in general, the lower the density of a city, the higher its emissions from the transport sector.
- An analysis of 28 cities shows that while car use tends to be higher in cities of the developed world, a significant number of cities in the developing world, particularly in Asia, have very high car ownership. Bangkok and Dar es Salaam, for instance, have more cars per capita than Tokyo and Mumbai. And in Singapore, the number of private vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants is lower than that of many cities in the developing world – a result of the city-state's effective mobility policy.
- Western Europe and high-income Asian cities have placed more emphasis on public transport, rather than on individual car ownership, and therefore have lower ratios of car ownership to wealth.

Drowned and dangerous: Cities and climate change

- In Asia, the dominance of port cities is even greater than Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean: 18 of the region's 20 largest cities are either coastal, on a river bank or in a delta.
- Japan, with less than 10 per cent of its cities in low elevation zones, has an urban population of 27 million inhabitants at risk, more than the urban population at risk in North America, Australia and New Zealand combined.
- There are 3,351 cities in the low elevation coastal zones around the world. Of these cities, 64 per cent are in developing regions; Asia alone accounts for more than half of the most vulnerable cities, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (27 per cent) and Africa (15 per cent).
- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that the populations of cities like Mumbai, Shanghai, Miami, New York City, Alexandria, and New Orleans will be most exposed to surge-induced flooding in the event of sea level rise.
- By 2070, urban populations in cities in river deltas, which already experience high risk of flooding, such as Dhaka, Kolkata, Rangoon, and Hai Phong, will join the group of most exposed populations. Also, port cities in Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Viet Nam, and India will have joined the ranks of cities whose assets are most exposed.
- 17 per cent of the total urban population in Asia lives in the low elevation coastal zone, while in South-Eastern Asia, more than one-third of the urban population lives there.

¹ The Gini coefficient is the most widely used measure to determine the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini coefficient of 0 indicates perfect equality; Whereas a Gini coefficient of 1 indicates perfect inequality.