

A World of Cities

The post-2015 development agenda will need to address old and new challenges for the wellbeing of millions of urban dwellers around the world. Cities and urban areas are at the heart of economic, social, and environmental processes that impinge on sustainability. Achieving sustainable development will therefore require well-planned urbanization, taking into account the growth of cities of all sizes. Patterns of city size and growth vary greatly over space and time, as shown by new United Nations estimates and projections of cities and urban areas.¹

1. Though increasing in number, megacities are home to a small share of the urban population

In 1990, there were ten megacities with 10 million inhabitants or more, which were home to 153 million people. Today, the number of megacities worldwide has more than doubled. In 2014, 28 megacities were home to 453 million people or about 12 percent of the world's urban dwellers. Among those 28 megacities, sixteen are located in Asia, four in Latin America, three each in Africa and Europe, and two in Northern America (see map).

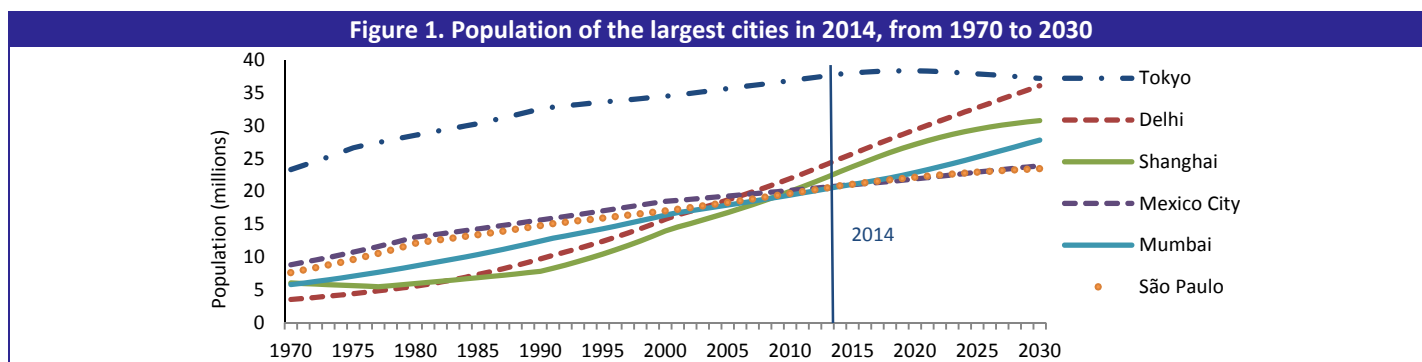
Tokyo remains the world's largest urban agglomeration with 38 million inhabitants, followed by Delhi with 25 million, Shanghai with 23 million,

and Mexico City, Mumbai and São Paulo, each with around 21 million inhabitants (figure 1). Osaka (Kinki Major Metropolitan Area) has just over 20 million, followed by Beijing with slightly less than 20 million. The New York-Newark area and Cairo complete the list of the ten most populous urban areas with around 18.5 million inhabitants each.

By 2030, thirteen new megacities will emerge in the less developed regions. Although Tokyo's population is projected to decline, it is expected to remain the world's largest city in 2030 with 37 million inhabitants, followed closely by Delhi, whose population is projected to rise swiftly to 36 million by 2030. New megacities will emerge in the less developed regions, including capital cities such as Bangkok, Bogota, Lima, and Luanda, plus seven more megacities in Asia and two in Africa.

2. Small cities are home to a large share of the urban population, with many growing rapidly

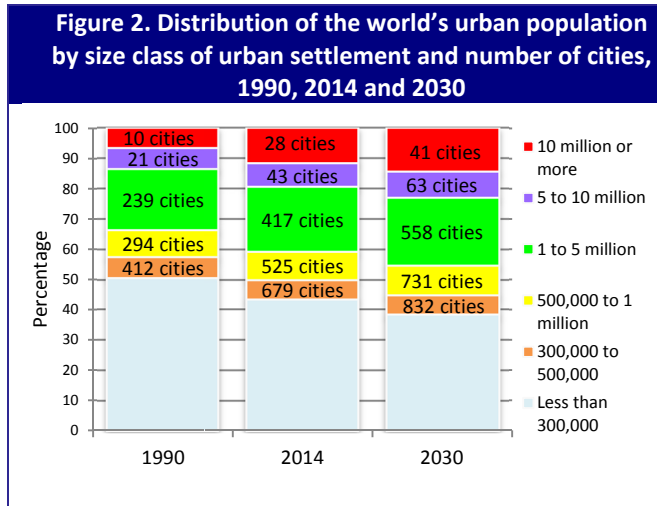
Overall, nearly half of the world's 3.9 billion urban dwellers reside in relatively small settlements with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants. In 2014, around 505 million people in the more developed regions were living in urban settlements with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, while in the less developed regions 1.4 billion did so. In the least developed countries, over half of the urban



Data source: United Nations (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*.

population (56 per cent) lived in these relatively small urban areas.

Small towns and cities with fewer than 300,000 inhabitants have accounted for a large, albeit declining, proportion of the urban population since 1990 (figure 2). Meanwhile, cities of 1 million or more have been increasing their share of the world's urban population.



Data source: United Nations (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*.

Many small cities are growing rapidly. Among the 679 urban settlements with 300,000 to 500,000 inhabitants in 2014, 271 have grown at an average annual rate of 3 per cent or more during the period 1990-2014.

3. More cities are growing slowly or declining

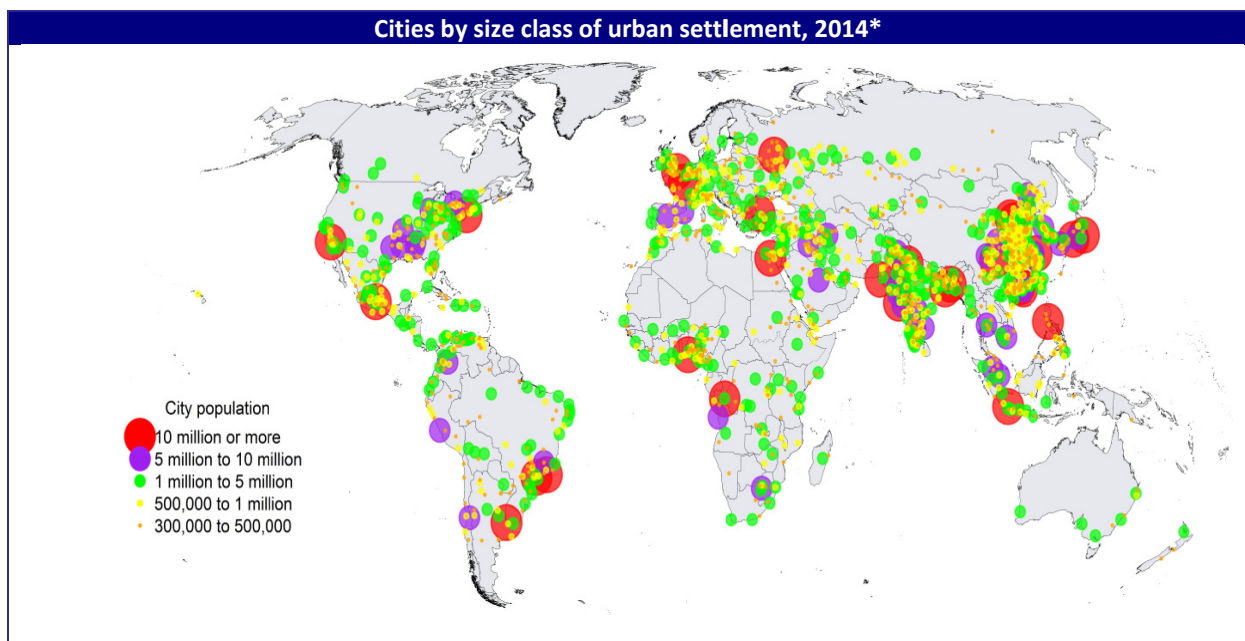
Most of the cities with low growth rates during 1990-2014 are in Europe, Northern America and Eastern Asia.

The number of cities with annual growth rates of less than 1 per cent has doubled from 129 cities during 1970-1990 to 264 cities during 1990-2014. Only three cities in Africa had such low growth rates.

Although the number of cities estimated to have lost population is relatively small, it has increased in recent decades.

During 1970-1990, 60 cities experienced negative growth, most of which were in the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States of America. During 1990-2014, the number of cities with declining populations rose to 98, many of which are in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and other European countries. Cities in decline included several capitals, such as Bratislava, Budapest, Riga, Sarajevo, Tallinn, Tbilisi and Yerevan. During 2014-2030, the number of cities with declining populations is expected to fall to 45, and these are found mostly in low-fertility countries with stagnating or declining populations.

¹ The figures cited in this publication come from *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*, available online from www.unpopulation.org. The population living in urban areas of less than 300,000 inhabitants was calculated as the difference between the estimated total urban population and the combined estimates for urban areas with 300,000 inhabitants or more.



Data source: United Nations (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*.

* Urban agglomerations of 300,000 inhabitants or more in 2014.

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