



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



Mind the Gap. Leave No One and No Place Behind

/ Minding the Gap /

1 General population overview



- Cities are here to stay, and the future of humanity is undoubtedly urban: The world that will continue to urbanize over the next three decades—from **56% in 2021** to **68% in 2050**. This translates into an **increase of 2.2 billion urban residents**, living mostly in Africa and Asia.
- Ninety-six percent of urban growth will occur in the less developed regions of East Asia, South Asia and Africa with three countries—India, China and Nigeria—accounting for **35% of the total increase in global urban population from 2018 to 2050**.
- **Africa is the rapidly urbanizing** region in the world, with an **urban growth rate of 3.4%**. The urban growth rate of Africa is almost 11 times more rapid than the growth rate in Europe. In many African countries, urbanization is taking place within the context of rising unemployment, financially weak municipal authorities, weak governance structures, increasing levels of poverty and inequality, proliferation of slums and other forms of vulnerability.
- **Asia, with 2.3 billion people living in cities**, has the highest number of urban dwellers worldwide; the region is **50.1% urbanized** and accounts for **54% of the world's urban population**.
- Over the next five decades, growth in city land area will mostly take place in low-income countries (141%), lower-middle-income (44%) and high-income countries (34%).
- Secondary cities of less than 1 million inhabitants account for 55% of the urban population of the less developed regions of the world.¹

2 Income and poverty



- It is estimated that **one-third of all urban residents are poor**, which represents one-quarter of the world's total poor with the majority residing in small cities and towns in developing countries.²
- Inequalities between developed and developing regions remains large. For example, **the average income of people living in North America is 16 times higher than Sub-Saharan Africa**.³ The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated global income inequality, placing the progress over the last two decades in jeopardy. Projections suggest that between-country **inequality rose by 1.2% between 2017 and 2021**.⁴
- The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the emergence of newly poor people. **In 2020, the pandemic-induced new poor globally was between 119 and 124 million people**; this is projected to have risen to between 143 and 163 million in 2021.⁵ A majority of the new poor will be living in urban areas; thereby, presenting additional burden to already overstretched local governments especially in developing countries.⁶

1 UNDESA, 2019.

2 Baker, 2008.

3 UNDESA, 2020

4 United Nations, 2022.

5 Lakner et al, 2021

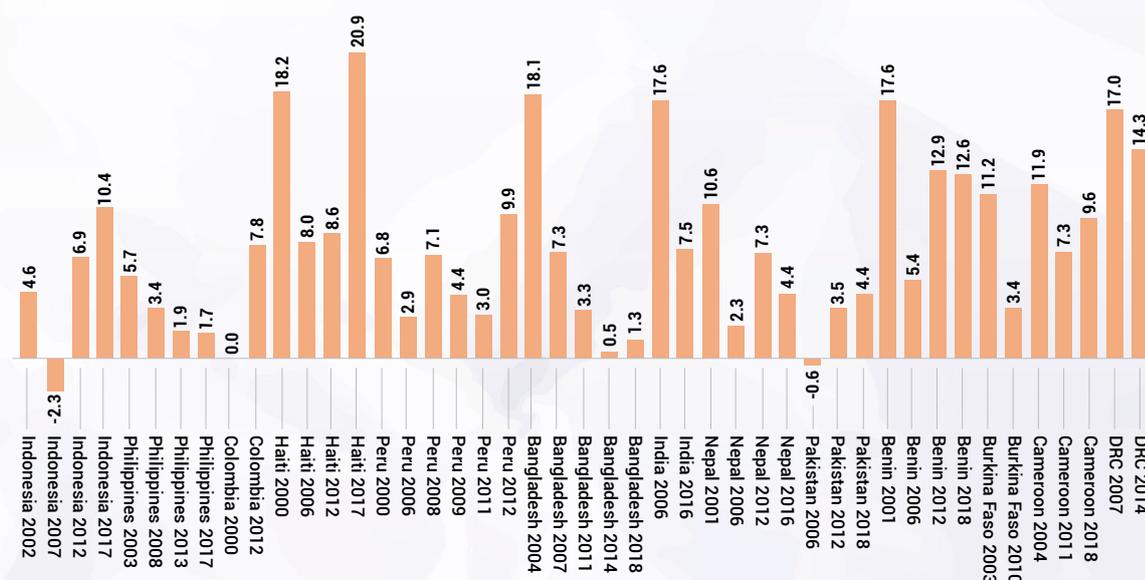
6 UN-Habitat, 2022 ; Sanchez-Paramo, 2020.

- Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are off-track in achieving the goal of ending poverty by 2030, and there is a risk of poverty becoming entrenched in the region. The region has the highest incidence of urban poverty globally with about 23% of the urban population living below the international poverty line and 29% experiencing multidimensional poverty.⁷ **The rate of multidimensional urban poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is 11 times higher than in Latin America and the Caribbean.** Additionally, poverty is on the rise in close to one-third of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸
- Current projections suggest that **the number of people living in extreme poverty will remain above 600 million in 2030**, resulting in a global poverty rate of 7.4%.⁹
- **61.2% of global employment is in the informal sector.** Over 2 billion people across the globe are employed in this sector, and these are the main users of streets and public spaces in developing countries contributing to the liveability and vibrancy of cities. The prevalence of informal employment is highest in urban areas of Africa (88.3%) and Asia and the Pacific (86%). However, the *World Cities Report 2022* stresses that, despite its contribution to the livelihoods of the poor and urban economies, the sector faces multiple barriers that constrain its productivity.

3 Health



- **Mental illness is on the rise in urban areas.** The number of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost due to mental illness has increased by over 55% over the last two decades, from 80.8 million in 1990 to 125.3 million in 2019.¹⁰ Access to mental healthcare is especially rare in low- and middle-income countries. Most of the people affected – 75% in many low-income countries – lack access to the treatment they need.¹¹
- Globally, an estimated **25 million children are missing out on basic vaccines.**¹² In urban areas, the *World Cities Report 2022* illustrates the prevalence of an urban health divide in terms of vaccination rates between slum and non-slum areas. For example, it shows profound inequitable access to vaccines in Haiti, where in 2017, there was a 20.9 percentage point difference between vaccination rates for measles between slum and non-slum areas; 48.2% in slum compared to 79.1% in non-slum areas. Unequal access has also pronounced across wealth quintiles in urban areas.¹³



Urban inequalities in measles vaccination rates as shown through differences between non-slum urban areas and slums (in absolute per cent) for children aged 12–23 months, selected countries

- The odds of developing tuberculosis in urban slums are five times more compared to national prevalence rates highlighting the urban health divide pervading many cities globally.¹⁴
- The health impacts of armed conflict disproportionately affect women and children with over 60% of preventable maternal deaths and 45 % of neonatal deaths estimated to occur in fragile conflict burdened settings.¹⁵
- There is growing consensus of the urgency to provide universal health coverage (UHC) for the 4 billion people who currently lack such guaranteed care.¹⁶

7 UN-Habitat, 2020.

8 World Bank, 2018.

9 Lakner et al, 2020.

10 GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators, 2022.

11 WHO, 2022.

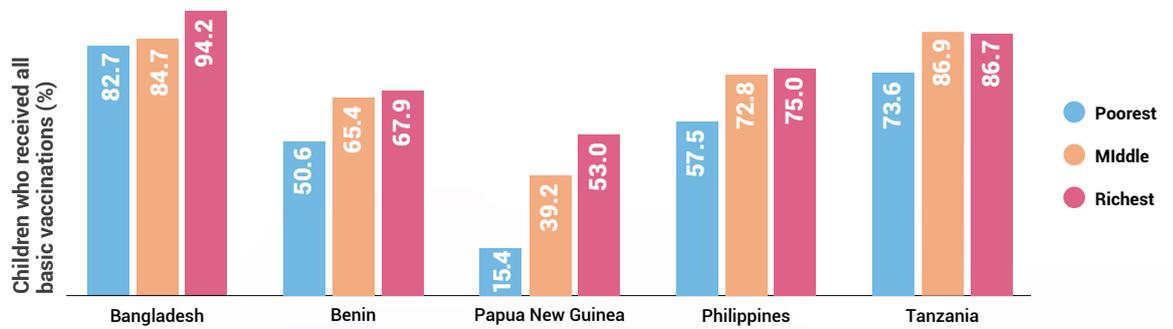
12 UNICEF, 2022.

13 UN-Habitat, 2022; UN-Habitat Data Analytics Unit database

14 Noykhovich et al, 2019.

15 UN-Habitat, 2022; Shaw et.al, 2021.

16 United Nations, 2021a.



Urban inequalities in basic vaccination, selected countries

4 Education



- **The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems worldwide** and entrenched existing gaps. An estimated **147 million children missed more than half of their in-person instruction over the past two years**. Further, an estimated 24 million learners from the pre-primary to university level are at risk of not returning to school.¹⁷
- Entrenched inequities in education have worsened during the pandemic as evidenced by unequal participation rates. Disparities in attendance were found based on gender (39%), urban or rural location (76%) and household wealth (86%).¹⁸
- Digital literacy remains a significant additional barrier for certain communities, both in developed and developing countries. **In low-income countries, for example, less than a third (32%) of the population has basic digital skills.**¹⁹

5 Digitalisation



- Approximately **5.3 billion people – or 66.3% of the world's population – are using the Internet in 2022**. However, nearly 2.7 billion people are still offline.²⁰ Africa has the lowest proportion of the population (39.7%) using the Internet whilst Europe has the highest (89.5%).
- Much of the world's digital divide is also urban/rural. Estimates show that **75.6% of urban population had access to the Internet in 2020**, a figure twice that of rural areas (38.8%). Largest gaps exist in Least Developed Countries, where only 24.6% (47.1% and 13.9% in urban and rural, respectively) are estimated to use the Internet. In terms of geographic regions, Africa faces the biggest gap with usage among 29.5% population (50.2% and 15.1% in urban and rural areas, respectively). This is followed by the Asia-Pacific region having 56.2% (74.6% and 39% in urban and rural areas, respectively).²¹
- Whilst 100% of urban population is covered by mobile cellular network, connectivity **gaps persist in rural areas, particularly in LDCs about 15% of the population lack coverage in 2021**.²²
- **Gender gaps exist in Internet usage, with 69.2% the male population is using the internet in 2022, compared to 63.4% of females**. Women remain woefully under-represented online in Least Developed Countries (26.9%, a figure 13.1 percentage points lesser than males). Africa has the largest gender gap in Internet usage at 11.5% (34% and 45.5% for females and males, respectively) followed by Arab States at 9.5% (65.4% and 74.9% for females and males, respectively).²³
- The elderly in urban areas are digitally disconnected. Up to **27% of the urban older population lack internet connectivity**.²⁴

¹⁷ United Nations, 2022.

¹⁸ United Nations, 2022.

¹⁹ UN-Habitat, 2021a.

²⁰ ITU, 2022.

²¹ Based on data from ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

²² Based on data from ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

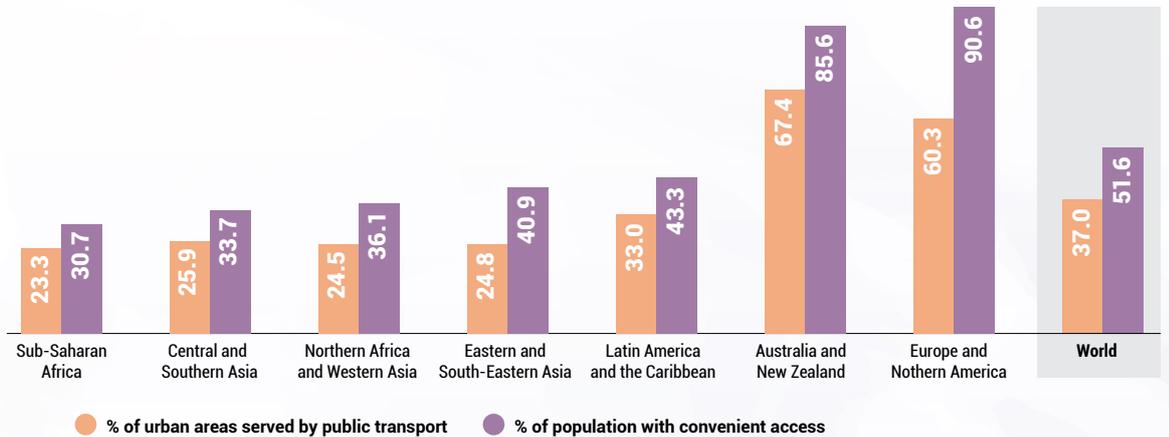
²³ Based on data from ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

²⁴ UN-Habitat, 2021b.

6 Mobility



- **Only 37% of the urban area across the world is served by public transport.** With variations in population concentrations within the cities, this translates to only about 52% of the world population having convenient access to public transport.²⁵
- **The lowest proportion of urban area served by public transport is in Sub-Saharan Africa (23.3%).** This coverage translates to 30.7% of the population having convenient access to public transport. Europe and North America have the highest proportion of population with convenient access to public transport (90.6%).



Coverage of public transport and share of population with convenient access in urban areas, 2020

7 Housing



- **Globally, 1.6 billion people or 20% of the world's population live in inadequate housing,** of which one billion reside in slums and informal settlements.²⁶
- **The number of slum dwellers continues to grow, and it was over one billion in 2020.** Slum dwellers are most prevalent in three regions, which are home to about 85% of the slum residents in the world – Central and Southern Asia (359 million), Eastern and Southeastern Asia (306 million), and Sub-Saharan Africa (230 million).²⁷



Municipal solid waste collection and management in controlled facilities, 2022

²⁵ Meaning that they reside within 500 metres walking distance to low-capacity transport systems (such as buses or trams) and/or 1,000 metres to high-capacity systems (such as trains and ferries); UN-Habitat Data Analytics Unit database.

²⁶ UN-Habitat, 2022; UN-Habitat Data Analytics Unit database.

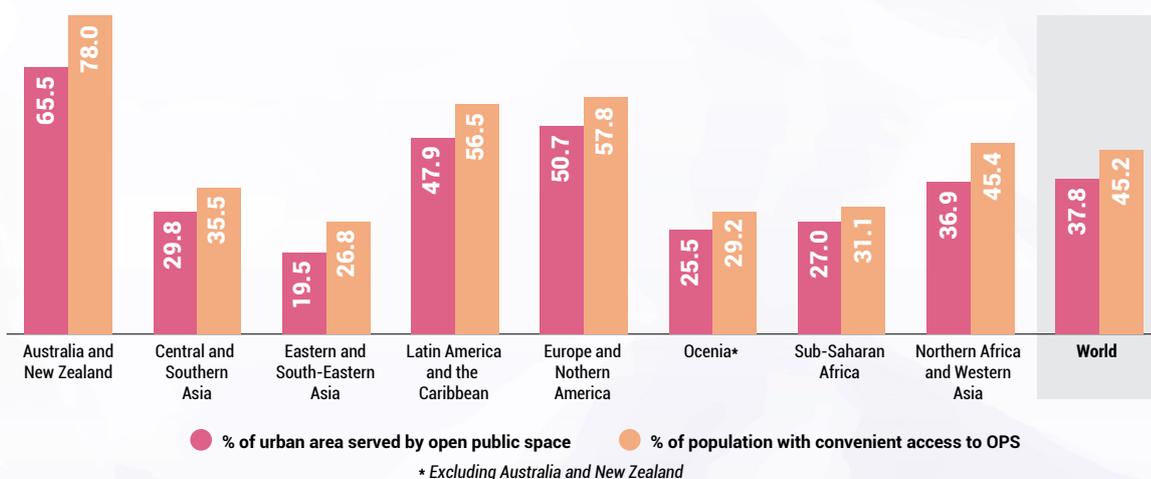
²⁷ UN-Habitat, 2022; UN-Habitat Data Analytics Unit database.

- **The lowest levels of infrastructure provision are to be found in Africa**, where of the urban population only 54% have access to safely managed water and only 23% have access to sanitation.²⁸ For Latin America and the Caribbean, 81 % of the region's urban population has access to safely managed water and 40% have access to sanitation.
- **In 2022, an average of 82% of municipal solid waste was being collected, globally, and 55% was being managed in controlled facilities.** Whilst most regions of the world have waste collection rates exceeding 70%, municipalities in Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania have an average collection rate of less than 60%.

8 Public Spaces



- **There is a poor distribution of open public spaces in most regions.** On average, the percentage of urban area conveniently located within 400 metres walking distance to an open public space is 37.8%, globally. This translates into significant gaps in access to these spaces—**only about 45% of the global urban population having convenient access to these spaces.**²⁹
- The share of population with convenient access to open public spaces is lowest in Eastern Asia and South-eastern Asia (26.8%) and highest in Australia and New Zealand (78%). In these regions, the percentage of urban area served by public spaces is 19.5% and 65.5%, respectively.



Coverage of open public spaces and share of population with convenient access

9 Professionals (planner / engineer/ doctor per population)



- **There is a critical lack of capacity in the regions that are rapidly urbanizing.** While Europe has one planner for about 3000 people, Asia and Africa have one planner for about 77,000 and 100,000 people, respectively. Similarly, whilst Europe has one architect for about 1500 people, Asia and Africa have one architect for about 17,000 and 30,000 people, respectively.³⁰
- In terms of healthcare professionals, the disparities among regions (and between countries as defined by their level of income) remain. For example, **most low- and lower-middle income countries have less than one (0.35 and 0.66, respectively) physicians per 1000 people whilst high-income countries have 3.7 physicians per 1000 people.**³¹ Significant gaps are notable in Sub-Saharan Africa where there is one physician for over 4000 population as compared to Europe which has one physician for less than 300 people.
- **Most of professional capacity across various fields is located in large cities, leaving major gaps in smaller cities** (particularly in low-income countries) where the World Cities Report 2022 notes a significant share of future expansion will emanate. The report calls for enhanced planning capacities in low-income countries, especially for smaller cities. Small cities cover almost half of city land (about 45 %) in low-income countries, a trend that will persist over the coming decades.

²⁸ WHO and UNICEF, 2021.

²⁹ UN-Habitat Data Analytics Unit database.

³⁰ Town Planners per thousand head of population: Africa, 0.01; Asia, 0.13; Europe, 0.327. Architects per thousand head of population: Africa, 0.033; 0.058; Europe 0.654.[Oborn and Walters, 2021]

³¹ World Bank (2022), World Development Indicators database

2 Poverty

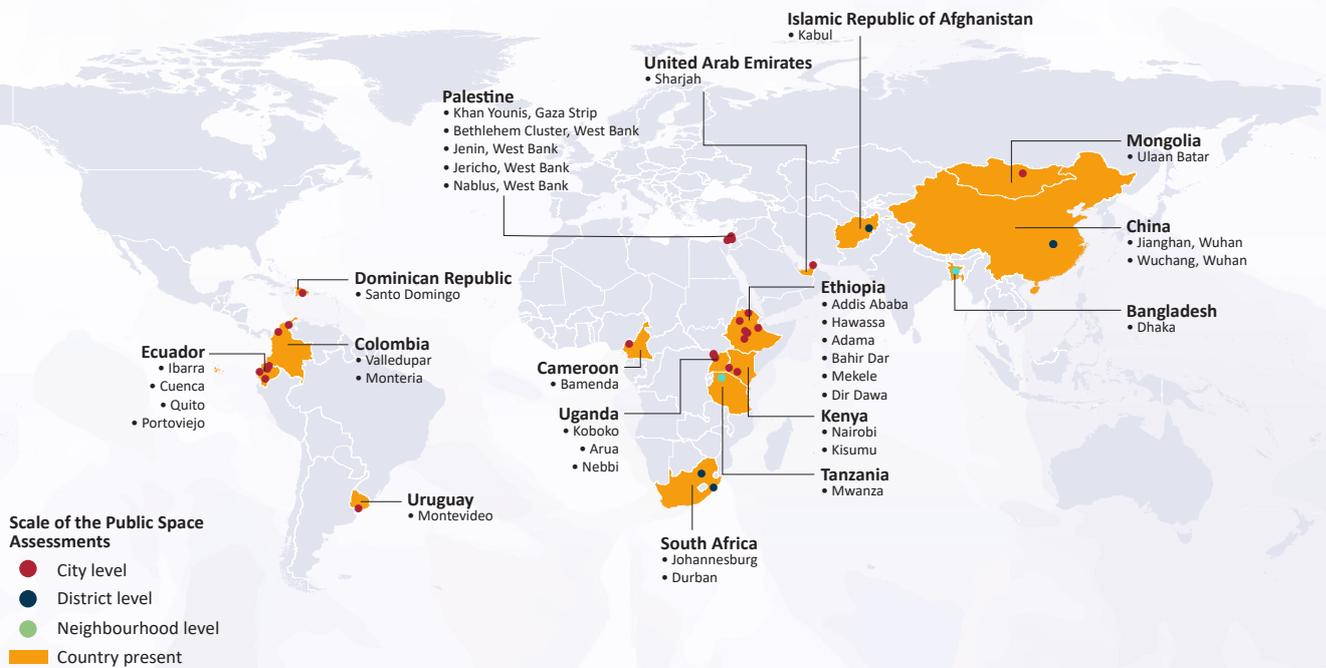


- Inventory of informal and precarious neighbourhoods in Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Belize, Panama and Dominican Republic.
- Support to communities to promote neighbourhood transformation in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica.
- Support to delivery of social policies to the poorest communities in Rio de Janeiro and Maceio, Brazil.

3 Climate



- UN-Habitat supports cities, local governments and their stakeholders in creating and promoting socially inclusive, integrated, connected, environmentally sustainable and safe streets and public spaces especially for the most vulnerable by providing policy advice, capacity building, knowledge sharing and guidance for inclusive and safe public space development, regeneration and improvement.
- Public space and urban planning programmes in Iraq; Palestine; Cartagena, Colombia; San Nicolas de los Garza, Mexico.
- Climate mitigation and climate adaptation work: Go Blue Economy project on the coastline of Kenya, regeneration and climate adaptation projects in Penang in Malaysia.
- Through the strategic intervention in Kuwait, Iraq and other Gulf countries, **UN-Habitat is working to support the resilience to transboundary sand and dust storms by identifying main causes and providing solutions** in the areas suffering from these storms.



4 Conflict



- Supporting IDPs and refugees in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Sudan and Yemen by providing adequate housing, housing and basic infrastructure and facilities rehabilitation and addressing land and property rights violations.
- Developing an urban crisis programme to support cities in Ukraine. Urban Crisis Response track at the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland.
- Supporting integration of Venezuelan migrants with hosting communities in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama and Dominican Republic through neighbourhood improvement integrated actions.

Way forward

1

UN-Habitat shares the concern of the participants at the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum on the lack of progress towards the SDGs and the Paris Agreement and call for urgent transformative action. More and more people and places are at risk of being left behind. The climate and biodiversity emergencies, pandemics, violence and conflicts, and other natural and man-made disasters, all converge in cities and surrounding territories. Being prepared for and overcoming these crises becomes a pre-condition to transform towards a better urban future.

2

UN-Habitat has set up a Council on Urban Initiatives to focus on pathways to transformative change and investigate examples of cities that have reached a tipping point and turned the corner by instituting innovative and progressive policies and planning regimes. Incremental action is no longer enough. COVID-19 has shown that substantial change is possible in the short term, but the challenge is in delivering long-term and sustainable change.

3

UN-Habitat's World Cities Report 2022 on Envisioning the Future of Cities and Cities and Pandemics Report provide concrete policy recommendations to induce the necessary change. Participants at the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum have declared their own commitment and actions.



For more information on Urban October, please visit our website on: <https://urbanoctober.unhabitat.org/>, or send us an email on: unhabitat-events@un.org for Urban October, unhabitat-whd@un.org for World Habitat Day, and unhabitat-wcd@un.org for World Cities Day.



www.unhabitat.org

