

## V. THE URBAN HIERARCHY

Over the past two centuries a major change has been taking place in the distribution of the world population in the form of increasing concentrations of people in highly urbanized areas known as urban agglomerations. During the twentieth century, the population of urban agglomerations grew to levels unprecedented in human history. Thus, it is estimated that by 2000 a total of 16 urban agglomerations had at least 10 million inhabitants, the population of each surpassing that of many countries, such as Hungary, Portugal or Sweden. For that reason, such populous urban agglomerations have become known as mega-cities. Yet, despite their size and importance, mega-cities still account for only a small share of both the world population and the world's urban population. In 2000 the total population in the 16 mega-cities constituted 3.7 per cent of the world population and 7.9 per cent of the world's urban population (tables 48 and 49). Although the number of mega-cities is expected to rise to 21 by 2015, they will still jointly account for only 4.7 per cent of the world population and 8.8 per cent of the urban population.

### A. THE URBAN HIERARCHY OF LESS DEVELOPED AND MORE DEVELOPED REGIONS

Between 1975 and 2000, the number of people living in mega-cities rose at an annual rate of 4.8 per cent, rising from 68 million to 225 million (table 48). Most of that increase resulted from the addition of urban agglomerations that had less than 10 million inhabitants in 1975 but crossed that threshold in 1975-2000. Thus, the number of mega-cities increased from 5 to 16, mostly in less developed regions where the number rose from 3 to 12, and the population living in those mega-cities rose from 32 million to 158 million. In the more developed regions, the number of mega-cities doubled from 2 to 4, and the population living in them rose from 36 million to 67 million. It is noteworthy that as late as 1995 there were no mega-cities in the least developed countries, but by 2000 one urban agglomeration in those coun-

tries—Dhaka in Bangladesh—has passed the 10 million mark.

Over the next 15 years, the number of mega-cities in the more developed regions will remain unchanged as will that in the least developed countries, but five additional mega-cities are expected to emerge in the less developed regions (table 50). As a result, the population living in the mega-cities of less developed regions is expected to increase at an average annual rate of 3.6 per cent per year during 2000-2015, reaching 270 million persons by the end of the period. In contrast, the number of persons living in the four mega-cities of the more developed regions will hardly change, rising only from 67 million in 2000 to 71 million in 2015.

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of people living in very large cities (those with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants) in the less developed regions. Between 1975 and 2000 that number more than doubled, passing from 60 million to 130 million. As a consequence, their share of the total population of the less developed regions rose from 2 per cent to 2.7 per cent between 1975 and 2000, and will likely reach 3.6 per cent by 2015, not much below the corresponding share in the more developed regions (3.7 per cent). This convergence represents a major change since 1975 when the large cities of the developed world accounted for 5.9 per cent of the population in the more developed regions, nearly three times the proportion accounted for by large cities in the less developed regions (2 per cent).

Despite the rapid growth in both the number and population of large cities and mega-cities, an analysis of the distribution of the world population by type of settlement indicates that rural areas are still the home for the majority of the world population (table 48). In 2000, 52.8 of the world population lived in rural areas and, although it is expected that less than half of the world population will be rural after 2007, rural settlements will continue to be those in which the largest share of

TABLE 48. DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORLD POPULATION AND THAT OF MORE AND LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS  
BY TYPE OF SETTLEMENT AND SIZE OF URBAN SETTLEMENT, 1975, 2000 AND 2015

Development group	Type of settlement and number of inhabitants of urban settlement	Total population (in millions)			Percentage distribution			Growth rate (percent- age)	
		1975	2000	2015	1975	2000	2015	1975-2000	2000-2015
World.....	Total population	4 066	6 057	7 207	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.6	1.2
	Urban population	1 543	2 862	3 869	37.9	47.2	53.7	2.5	2.0
	10 million or more	68	225	340	1.7	3.7	4.7	4.8	2.8
	5 million to 10 million	122	169	264	3.0	2.8	3.7	1.3	3.0
	1 million to 5 million	332	675	960	8.2	11.1	13.3	2.8	2.4
	500,000 to 1 million	176	290	354	4.3	4.8	4.9	2.0	1.3
	Fewer than 500,000	844	1 503	1 950	20.8	24.8	27.1	2.3	1.7
	Rural areas	2 523	3 195	3 338	62.1	52.8	46.3	0.9	0.3
More developed regions .....	Total population	1 048	1 191	1 214	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.5	0.1
	Urban population	734	898	954	70.0	75.4	78.6	0.8	0.4
	10 million or more	36	67	71	3.4	5.7	5.8	2.5	0.3
	5 million to 10 million	62	39	45	5.9	3.3	3.7	-1.8	1.0
	1 million to 5 million	145	216	243	13.9	18.1	20.0	1.6	0.8
	500,000 to 1 million	69	77	74	6.5	6.5	6.1	0.5	-0.3
	Fewer than 500,000	422	498	522	40.3	41.8	43.0	0.7	0.3
	Rural areas	314	294	259	30.0	24.6	21.4	-0.3	-0.8
Less developed regions.....	Total population	3 017	4 865	5 994	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.9	1.4
	Urban population	809	1 964	2 915	26.8	40.4	48.6	3.6	2.6
	10 million or more	32	158	270	1.1	3.2	4.5	6.3	3.6
	5 million to 10 million	60	130	218	2.0	2.7	3.6	3.1	3.5
	1 million to 5 million	186	458	718	6.2	9.4	12.0	3.6	3.0
	500,000 to 1 million	108	213	280	3.6	4.4	4.7	2.7	1.8
	Fewer than 500,000	422	1 005	1 429	14.0	20.7	23.8	3.5	2.3
	Rural areas	2 209	2 901	3 078	73.2	59.6	51.4	1.1	0.4
Least developed countries...	Total population	353	668	963	100.0	100.0	100.0	2.6	2.4
	Urban population	52	171	332	14.7	25.6	34.5	8.0	4.4
	10 million or more	0	13	23	0.0	1.9	2.4	..	4.0
	5 million to 10 million	0	5	33	0.0	0.8	3.4	..	12.5
	1 million to 5 million	6	39	71	1.6	5.8	7.4	7.7	4.0
	500,000 to 1 million	7	14	23	1.9	2.1	2.4	3.1	3.2
	Fewer than 500,000	39	101	183	11.2	15.1	19.0	3.7	4.0
	Rural areas	301	496	631	85.3	74.4	65.5	2.0	1.6

TABLE 49. DISTRIBUTION OF THE URBAN POPULATION OF THE WORLD, THE MORE DEVELOPED REGIONS, AND THE LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS BY SIZE OF URBAN SETTLEMENT, 1975, 2000 AND 2015

<i>Development grouping</i>	<i>Size class of urban settlement (number of inhabitants)</i>	1975	2000	2015
World.....	10 million or more	4.4	7.9	8.8
	5 million to 10 million	7.9	5.9	6.8
	1 million to 5 million	21.5	23.6	24.8
	500,000 to 1 million	11.4	10.1	9.2
	Fewer than 500,000	54.7	52.5	50.4
More developed regions .....	10 million or more	4.9	7.5	7.4
	5 million to 10 million	8.5	4.4	4.8
	1 million to 5 million	19.8	24.1	25.4
	500,000 to 1 million	9.3	8.6	7.8
	Fewer than 500,000	57.5	55.4	54.6
Less developed regions.....	10 million or more	4.0	8.0	9.3
	5 million to 10 million	7.4	6.6	7.5
	1 million to 5 million	23.0	23.3	24.6
	500,000 to 1 million	13.3	10.8	9.6
	Fewer than 500,000	52.2	51.2	49.0
Least developed countries.....	10 million or more	0.0	7.3	6.9
	5 million to 10 million	0.0	3.0	9.9
	1 million to 5 million	10.9	22.6	21.3
	500,000 to 1 million	12.9	8.4	6.9
	Fewer than 500,000	76.2	58.8	55.0

TABLE 50. NUMBER OF LARGE URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS IN THE WORLD, THE MORE DEVELOPED REGIONS, THE LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS AND THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, 1975 TO 2015

<i>Size class of urban settlement (number of inhabitants)</i>	<i>Development group</i>	1975	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
10 million or more .....	World	5	14	16	19	20	21
	More developed regions	2	4	4	4	4	4
	Less developed regions	3	10	12	15	16	17
	Least developed countries	0	0	1	1	1	1
5 million to 10 million .....	World	16	20	23	26	31	37
	More developed regions	8	5	5	6	6	6
	Less developed regions	8	15	18	20	25	31
	Least developed countries	0	1	1	1	3	5
1 million to 5 million.....	World	174	311	348	392	442	496
	More developed regions	75	101	104	112	115	118
	Less developed regions	99	210	244	280	327	378
	Least developed countries	3	14	20	24	31	34

the world population lives. In addition, small cities and towns with populations that do not surpass 500,000 inhabitants have been and will continue to be the places of residence of the majority of the world's urban population. In both the more developed and the less developed regions, the percentage of the population living in such cities has been rising, reaching 42 per cent in the more developed regions and half that level (21 per cent) in the less developed regions by 2000. Because these trends are expected to continue, by 2015 the percentage of the world population living in urban settlements with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants will inch up from 25 per cent to 27 per cent.

In the highly urbanized regions of the more developed world, such small cities have accounted for the largest proportion of the population since 1975, surpassing the proportion living in rural areas by a wide margin (40 per cent versus 30 per cent). By 2000, the divergence in the attractiveness of those two types of settlements had become more accentuated, with small cities accounting for 42 per cent of the population and rural areas for 25 per cent. Since such a trend is expected to continue, by 2015 twice as many people are projected to live in the small cities of the developed world as in its rural areas (522 million versus 259 million). In contrast, in the less developed regions, rural areas will likely remain the main type of settlement for the population until 2015, accounting for 51 per cent of all inhabitants of the less developed regions in 2015. However, the ratio of the rural population to that living in urban places with fewer than half million inhabitants will fall from more than 5 in 1975 to 3 in 2000 and not much above 2 in 2015, so that at that time, 1.4 billion persons will live in the small cities of the developing world and 3.1 billion in its rural areas.

There have been important differences in the rates of population growth of the various types of settlements by major development group during 1975-2015 (table 48). For the world as a whole, the highest annual rate of population growth during 1975-2000 was recorded among the mega-cities, at 4.8 per cent, followed by that of medium-sized cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants (2.8 per cent). In contrast large cities with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants recorded the lowest population growth rate among all types of urban

settlements (1.3 per cent). However, the high growth of the population of mega-cities is partly responsible for the slow growth of that of large cities, since over the 1975-2000 period the latter group lost several members as they crossed the 10 million threshold. During 2015, population growth rates are expected to be similar for both groups of cities, with the large cities growing slightly faster than the mega-cities (3 per cent versus 2.8 per cent).

In the more developed regions as in the world as a whole, mega-cities displayed the highest rate of population growth in 1975-2000 whereas large cities with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants had the lowest, even lower than that of rural settlements (2.5 per cent versus -1.8 per cent). The reduction of the population in the large cities was mostly due to the reduction in the number of cities in that category, from 8 in 1975 to 5 in 2000. Between 2000 and 2015 the number of large cities in the more developed regions is expected to rise from 5 to 6, while the number of mega-cities is expected to remain constant. Consequently, the population growth rate of large cities will be considerably higher than that of the mega-cities (1 per cent versus 0.3 per cent).

Between 1975 and 2000, the population of mega-cities in the less developed regions also grew the fastest, at 6.3 per cent per year, mostly because the number of mega-cities rose from 3 to 12 over that period. The increase in the number of mega-cities dampened the rate of population growth of large cities, whose numbers nevertheless increased substantially, passing from 8 in 1975 to 18 in 2000. Consequently, the growth rate of their populations considered jointly remained robust at 3.1 per cent per year during 1975-2000. Faster still was the growth of the population of cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants (3.6 per cent per year) and that of cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants (3.5 per cent per year). That is, being less advanced in the path to universal urbanization than the more developed regions, the different types of urban settlements of the less developed regions all have grown at moderate to high rates since 1975. Those trends are expected to continue though at a more moderate pace. During 2000-2015, the mega-cities and large cities of the less developed regions are projected

to see their populations grow at rates of 3.6 per cent per year and 3.5 per cent per year respectively, the highest rates among all types of urban settlements. The slowest rate of growth is expected for the population of cities with 500,000 to 1 million inhabitants and it will still amount to 1.8 per cent per year, nearly double the highest rate of population growth expected for the various types of urban settlements in the more developed regions.

Because of the higher level of urbanization characterizing more developed regions, the proportions of their population living in urban settlements of any size class are larger than the equivalent proportions in the less developed regions (table 48). Consequently, to compare the population distributions of the two across the urban hierarchy it is useful to consider the urban population by itself (table 49). In the world as a whole and in both the more developed and the less developed regions, the majority of the urban population has lived in and will continue to live in smaller urban places of under 500,000 inhabitants. However, at the world level, the proportion of the urban population living in small cities has been declining, passing from 55 per cent in 1975 to 53 per cent in 2000 and being projected to be just above 50 per cent in 2015. In contrast, the proportion of the urban population living in the two largest size classes of cities (that is, those with 5 million inhabitants or more) has risen from 12.3 per cent in 1975 to 13.8 per cent in 2000 and is projected to reach 15.6 per cent in 2015. Most of that increase is attributable to the rise in the share of the urban population of cities with more than 5 million inhabitants in the less developed regions, which has increased from 11.4 per cent in 1975 to 14.6 per cent in 2000 and will likely rise further to 16.8 per cent by 2015. There is therefore a clear trend toward a greater concentration of the urban population of the less developed regions in very populous cities, a trend that is not so clear in the more developed regions where the proportion of the urban population living in cities of 5 million inhabitants or more declined between 1975 to 2000: from 13.3 per cent to 11.9 per cent. In 2015, 12.2 per cent of the urban population of the more developed regions is expected to live in urban agglomerations with five million inhabitants or more, only a slight increase with respect to the

equivalent proportion in 2000 and a considerably lower proportion than the equivalent expected in the less developed regions (16.8 per cent).

In addition, the more developed regions have had and are expected to have a higher proportion of their urban population living in small cities of less than 500,000 inhabitants than less developed regions do (table 49). In 1975 the respective shares of small cities were 57.5 per cent in the more developed regions and 52.2 per cent in the less developed regions. By 2000 the difference between the two had declined somewhat, but more developed regions still had a higher proportion of the urban population in small cities than less developed regions (55.4 per cent versus 51.2 per cent). Projections to 2015 show an increasing differential with 54.6 per cent of the urban population of the more developed regions living in small cities and just 49 per cent doing so in the less developed regions.

The more developed regions have tended to have a lower proportion of their urban population living in cities with populations of 500,000 to 5 million inhabitants than the less developed regions. In 1975 that proportion was 29.2 per cent in more developed regions and 36.4 per cent in less developed regions. But by 2000 the difference between the two had declined significantly (32.7 per cent versus 34.2 per cent) as more cities crossed the 500,000 threshold and the difference is expected to become smaller by 2015 (33.2 per cent versus 34.2 per cent).

Overall, in both development groups and at the world level, there is a continuing process of concentration of the urban population in cities with more than 1 million inhabitants. This process has been more rapid in the less developed regions. Thus, in 1950, 33.8 per cent of the urban population of the world lived in cities with over 1 million inhabitants and the equivalent proportions were similar in the more developed and the less developed regions (33.1 per cent versus 34.5 per cent). In 2000, there was evidence of further concentration in both development groups but it was stronger for the less developed regions since the proportion of the urban population living in cities with 1 million inhabitants or more in the developing world had risen to 38 per cent whereas it was

just 35.9 per cent in the more developed regions. By 2015, the less developed regions are expected to have 41.4 per cent of their urban population in cities of 1 million inhabitants or more, whereas the equivalent proportion in the more developed regions is projected to be 37.6 per cent.

The case of the least developed countries, which are a subset of the less developed regions, illustrates in a more striking way the shifting distribution of the urban population across the urban hierarchy that the process of urbanization and development involves. In 1975, all the urban population of the least developed countries lived in cities with less than 5 million inhabitants. In fact, only 11 per cent lived in cities and towns with more than 1 million inhabitants. By 2000 the shift to higher size classes was clear: 10.3 per cent of the urban population of the least developed countries lived in urban agglomerations of 5 million inhabitants or more, and the proportion in small cities with less than half a million inhabitants had dropped from 76 per cent in 1975 to 59 per cent in 2000. This trend towards a higher concentration of the urban population in larger cities is expected to continue, so that by 2015 nearly 2 out of every 5 urban dwellers in the least developed countries are expected to live in cities with a million inhabitants or more.

In considering the redistribution of the population across the urban hierarchy it is necessary to bear in mind that the number of urban agglomerations with large populations is small, so their passage from one size class to another causes important discontinuities in the data on population by city size class. Such discontinuities affect all country groupings. Table 50 shows the number of mega-cities and urban agglomerations with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants and with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants at different points in time. It indicates that those numbers have risen substantially at the world level and also for the more and the less developed regions. Given the less advanced stage of urbanization in the less developed regions, changes have been greater in them and are expected to be more marked in them in the future. Thus, the number of urban agglomerations with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants in the less developed regions will likely increase from 18 in 2000 to 31 in 2015. Similarly, the number of cities

with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million in the less developed regions, which increased from 99 in 1950 to 244 in 2000, is expected to reach 378 by 2015, an increase of 55 per cent with respect to the 2000 figure.

#### B. THE URBAN HIERARCHY BY MAJOR AREA

Differences in the distribution of the population across the urban hierarchy in the more developed and the less developed regions are accentuated when those regions are subdivided into major areas. As table 51 shows, a major area such as Oceania, where the population of most countries or areas is small, is less likely to have large urban agglomerations than a major area such as Asia, which comprises the majority of the most populous countries in the world. In addition, the situation in Africa or Asia, major areas where the rural population still accounts for a large proportion of the total population, contrasts markedly with that of Europe or Northern America where the rural population constitutes at most a quarter of the total population.

However, mega-cities are no more likely to exist in the most highly urbanized major areas than in the less urbanized ones. Thus, only one of the five mega-cities that existed in 1975 was located in Northern America and there were none in Europe. At that time Asia and Latin America had two mega-cities each, and Asia had the largest number of inhabitants living in mega-cities (31 million in two mega-cities) of any major area. In 2000, Asia had more mega-cities than any other major area and the largest population living in mega-cities (136 million in 10 mega-cities). Latin America had four mega-cities and Northern America two. Whereas no additional mega-cities are expected in these two major areas, the number of mega-cities in Asia is expected to increase to 13 by 2015 and Africa is anticipated to have its first two mega-cities by 2005. Still, because of its enormous population, the relative concentration of population in mega-cities is and will continue to be lower in Asia than in other major areas. Thus, just 3.7 per cent of the population of Asia is estimated to live in mega-cities in 2000 compared to 11.3 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean and 9.5 per cent in Northern America.

TABLE 51. DISTRIBUTION OF THE TOTAL POPULATION OF MAJOR AREAS BY TYPE OF SETTLEMENT  
AND SIZE OF URBAN SETTLEMENT, 1975, 2000 AND 2015

Major area	Type of settlement and number of inhabitants of urban settlement	Total population (millions)			Percentage distribution			Growth rate (percentage)	
		1975	2000	2015	1975	2000	2015	1975-2000	2000-2015
Africa.....	Total population	406	794	1 110	100.0	100.0	100.0	2.68	2.24
	Urban Population	102	295	503	25.2	37.2	45.3	4.23	3.56
	10 million or more	0	0	27	0.0	0.0	2.5	..	..
	5 million to 10 million	6	23	21	1.5	2.9	1.9	5.35	-0.63
	1 million to 5 million	12	64	123	3.0	8.1	11.1	6.67	4.35
	500,000 to 1 million	14	26	43	3.5	3.3	3.9	2.50	3.31
	Fewer than 500,000	70	181	288	17.3	22.9	25.9	3.80	3.08
Rural areas	304	498	607	74.8	62.8	54.7	1.98	1.31	
Asia.....	Total population	2 397	3 672	4 371	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.71	1.16
	Urban Population	592	1 376	2 005	24.7	37.5	45.9	3.37	2.51
	10 million or more	31	136	214	1.3	3.7	4.9	5.90	3.01
	5 million to 10 million	47	87	162	1.9	2.4	3.7	2.50	4.12
	1 million to 5 million	147	318	466	6.2	8.7	10.7	3.08	2.55
	500,000 to 1 million	78	150	193	3.3	4.1	4.4	2.61	1.72
	Fewer than 500,000	289	684	969	12.0	18.6	22.2	3.45	2.32
Rural areas	1 805	2 297	2 366	75.3	62.5	54.1	0.96	0.20	
Europe .....	Total population	676	727	705	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.29	-0.21
	Urban Population	455	534	538	67.3	73.4	76.3	0.64	0.04
	10 million or more	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	..	..
	5 million to 10 million	37	32	32	5.4	4.4	4.6	-0.52	0.01
	1 million to 5 million	82	110	117	12.2	15.1	16.5	1.15	0.41
	500,000 to 1 million	46	49	48	6.8	6.7	6.8	0.22	-0.14
	Fewer than 500,000	290	344	341	42.9	47.2	48.4	0.67	-0.05
Rural areas	221	193	167	32.7	26.6	23.7	-0.54	-0.98	
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	Total population	322	519	630	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.91	1.30
	Urban Population	198	391	507	61.4	75.4	80.5	2.73	1.73
	10 million or more	21	59	66	6.5	11.3	10.5	4.11	0.82
	5 million to 10 million	17	20	36	5.3	3.8	5.6	0.56	3.94
	1 million to 5 million	32	86	139	10.1	16.5	22.1	3.90	3.23
	500,000 to 1 million	18	39	45	5.5	7.5	7.2	3.14	1.00
	Fewer than 500,000	109	188	221	34.0	36.3	35.0	2.17	1.07
Rural areas	124	127	123	38.6	24.6	19.5	0.10	-0.25	
Northern America.....	Total population	243	314	356	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.02	0.83
	Urban Population	180	243	288	73.8	77.4	81.1	1.21	1.14
	10 million or more	16	30	32	6.5	9.5	9.1	2.54	0.53
	5 million to 10 million	16	7	13	6.4	2.2	3.7	-3.23	4.28
	1 million to 5 million	52	85	100	21.3	27.0	28.2	1.96	1.14
	500,000 to 1 million	17	26	23	7.0	8.4	6.5	1.73	-0.81
	Fewer than 500,000	79	95	119	32.6	30.3	33.4	0.73	1.50
Rural areas	64	71	67	26.2	22.6	18.9	0.44	-0.37	

TABLE 51 (continued)

Major area	Type of settlement and number of inhabitants of urban settlement	Total population (millions)			Percentage distribution			Growth rate (percentage)	
		1975	2000	2015	1975	2000	2015	1975-2000	2000-2015
Oceania.....	Total population	21	31	36	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.44	1.16
	Urban Population	15	23	28	72.2	74.1	76.1	1.54	1.34
	10 million or more	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	..	..
	5 million to 10 million	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	..	..
	1 million to 5 million	6	12	14	25.9	40.2	39.3	3.19	1.02
	500,000 to 1 million	3	0	1	15.5	0.0	3.2	..	..
	Fewer than 500,000	7	10	12	30.7	33.9	33.6	1.83	1.10
	Rural areas	6	8	9	27.8	25.9	23.9	1.15	0.62

In all major areas, small cities and towns with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants have been the residence of the highest proportion of urban dwellers (table 52), with about two-thirds of all urban dwellers living in such places in 1975 in Africa and Europe and about half in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. The proportions living in such places are expected to fall over time in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, but remain about the same in Asia and Europe, and in Oceania after 2000. In Northern America the proportion of the urban population living in small cities or towns is projected to increase slightly between 2000 and 2015. For Europe, Northern America, Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of the total population living in small cities and towns is higher than that living in rural areas. In 2000, 47 per cent of the overall population of Europe lived in small cities, compared to 36 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 34 per cent in Oceania, and 30 per cent in Northern America (table 51). In Africa and Asia the proportion of the total population living in small cities has been considerably lower, being 23 per cent and 19 per cent respectively in 2000. By 2015 the proportion of the total population living in small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants is expected to increase in Africa and Asia and slightly in Europe and Northern America but it will remain virtually unchanged in Oceania and decline somewhat in Latin America and the Caribbean. The highest concentration of the total population in small cities will be in Europe, where nearly half the population will live in cities with less than half a million inhabitants by 2015. The lowest concen-

trations will continue to be in Asia and Africa where 22 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, of the population will live in small cities in 2015. Such low concentrations will continue despite the rapid growth of the population in small cities, projected at 2.3 per cent annually in Asia and 3.1 per cent per year in Africa. In both Africa and Asia, the proportion of the population living in rural areas and the number of inhabitants of rural areas will be more than double those of persons living in small cities by 2015. Such a situation contrasts markedly with that of other major areas where the population of small cities and towns is expected to surpass by wide margins the number of persons living in rural areas.

The distribution of the urban population by size class of urban settlement shows the varied profiles and trends experienced by the different major areas (table 52). Among the most urbanized major areas, Europe is characterized by an urban structure in which nearly two-thirds of the urban population lives in small cities and towns with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, and where cities of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants account for a growing share of the urban population to the detriment of larger cities. Furthermore, the number of large urban agglomerations (with more than 5 million inhabitants) in Europe has been small and actually dropped from 5 to 4 between 1975 and 2000, when Milan's population declined below the 5 million mark (table 53).

In contrast with Europe, both Northern America and Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced a reduction of the proportion of the ur-



TABLE 52. DISTRIBUTION OF THE URBAN POPULATION OF MAJOR AREAS  
BY SIZE OF URBAN SETTLEMENT, 1975, 2000 AND 2015

<i>Major area</i>	<i>Size class of urban settlement (number of inhabitants)</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2015</i>
Africa.....	10 million or more	0.0	0.0	5.5
	5 million to 10 million	5.9	7.9	4.2
	1 million to 5 million	11.8	21.8	24.5
	500,000 to 1 million	13.8	9.0	8.6
	Fewer than 500,000	68.4	61.4	57.2
Asia.....	10 million or more	5.3	9.9	10.7
	5 million to 10 million	7.9	6.3	8.1
	1 million to 5 million	24.9	23.1	23.3
	500,000 to 1 million	13.2	10.9	9.6
	Fewer than 500,000	48.8	49.8	48.4
Europe .....	10 million or more	0.0	0.0	0.0
	5 million to 10 million	8.1	6.0	6.0
	1 million to 5 million	18.1	20.5	21.7
	500,000 to 1 million	10.1	9.1	8.9
	Fewer than 500,000	63.8	64.3	63.5
Latin America and the Caribbean ...	10 million or more	10.6	15.0	13.1
	5 million to 10 million	8.7	5.0	7.0
	1 million to 5 million	16.4	21.9	27.5
	500,000 to 1 million	9.0	10.0	8.9
	Fewer than 500,000	55.3	48.1	43.5
Northern America .....	10 million or more	8.8	12.3	11.2
	5 million to 10 million	8.7	2.9	4.6
	1 million to 5 million	28.9	34.9	34.8
	500,000 to 1 million	9.5	10.8	8.1
	Fewer than 500,000	44.1	39.1	41.2
Oceania .....	10 million or more	0.0	0.0	0.0
	5 million to 10 million	0.0	0.0	0.0
	1 million to 5 million	35.9	54.2	51.7
	500,000 to 1 million	21.5	0.0	4.2
	Fewer than 500,000	42.6	45.8	44.2

ban population living in small cities accompanied by a higher concentration in medium-sized cities of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants. At the same time, between 1975 and 2000 the proportion of the urban population in urban agglomerations with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants declined markedly in both major areas, partly as a result of the transfer of one or two agglomerations in this cate-

gory to that of mega-cities. During 2000-2015, Northern America is expected to experience a slight increase in the proportion of the urban population living in small cities and a decline in the proportion living in cities of 500,000 to 1 million inhabitants. There will also be a rise in the proportion living in cities with populations of 5 million to 10 million inhabitants, restoring some

TABLE 53. NUMBER OF LARGE URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS BY MAJOR AREA, 1975 TO 2015

<i>Size class of urban settlement (number of inhabitants)</i>	<i>Major area</i>	1975	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
10 million or more .....	Asia	2	8	10	11	12	13
	Latin America and the Caribbean	2	4	4	4	4	4
	North America	1	2	2	2	2	2
	Africa	0	0	0	2	2	2
5 million to 10 million .....	Asia	6	10	12	16	19	23
	Europe	5	4	4	4	4	4
	Africa	1	2	3	1	2	3
	Latin America and the Caribbean	2	3	3	3	4	5
	North America	2	1	1	2	2	2
1 million to 5 million .....	Asia	78	150	173	193	220	258
	Europe	42	57	56	60	61	61
	Latin America and the Caribbean	17	36	43	54	61	69
	North America	28	35	38	41	43	46
	Africa	7	28	32	38	51	56
	Oceania	2	5	6	6	6	6

NOTE: Major areas are ordered according to the number of urban agglomerations in 2000.

of the decline in the previous period. Such a rise will also occur in Latin America and the Caribbean, where there will be a significant increase in the proportion of the urban population living in cities of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants and in cities of 5 million to 10 million inhabitants. These increases will be counterbalanced by future reductions in the proportions of urban dwellers living in cities with fewer than 1 million inhabitants and in mega-cities.

Asia has been experiencing a redistribution of the urban population towards greater concentration in larger urban agglomerations and particularly mega-cities. Thus, the proportion of the urban population living in mega-cities rose from 5.3 per cent in 1975 to 9.9 per cent in 2000 and is expected to reach 10.7 per cent in 2015. At the same time, the proportion of urban dwellers living in cities with fewer than one million inhabitants has been declining, a trend expected to continue in the future.

In Africa a similar trend toward more concentration in the largest cities is noticeable, with the proportion of the urban population in cities with

more than 5 million inhabitants rising from 5.9 per cent in 1975 to 7.9 per cent in 2000 and expected to reach 9.7 per cent in 2015. However, the proportion of urban dwellers living in urban agglomerations with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants has also increased markedly, from 11.8 per cent in 1975 to 21.8 per cent in 2000 and is projected to reach 24.5 per cent in 2015. These increases have been counterbalanced by a reduction of the proportion of the urban population living in cities with less than 1 million inhabitants, which has dropped from 82 per cent in 1975 to 70 per cent in 2000 and will likely fall further to 66 per cent by 2015.

For Oceania, the main change was an increase in the number of cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, from 2 to 6 during 1975-2000 (table 53). Such an increase made the proportion of the urban population living in cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants rise markedly between 1975 and 2000, from 36 per cent to 54 per cent, but it also resulted in a sharp decline in the proportion of the urban population living in cities with 500,000 to 1 million inhabitants, which dropped from 22 per cent in 1975 to zero in 2000.

Over the next 15 years the proportion of the urban population in cities with 500,000 to 1 million inhabitants will reach 4.2 per cent, indicating that a few cities will again be in that size class. Nevertheless, by 2015 more than half of the urban population of Oceania is expected to live in cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, indicating a high concentration of the urban population in larger urban settlements.

Table 53 shows that the number of cities with populations of 1 million to 5 million has increased markedly in all major areas since 1975, and that in 2000 all major areas except Oceania had moderate numbers of cities in that category. Asia had the largest number, 173, followed by 56 in Europe, 43 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 38 in Northern America and 32 in Africa. By 2015, Asia is expected to have 258 cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, followed by 69 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 61 in Europe, 56 in Africa and 46 in Northern America. The generality of the increase in the number of medium-sized cities across major areas contrasts with the increasing concentration of large cities in Asia. Thus among the 21 urban agglomerations with 5 million inhabitants or more that the world had in 1975, 8 were in Asia, but by 2000 Asia had 22 of the 39 cities of that size in the world. By 2015, the total number of cities with 5 million inhabitants or more is expected to rise to 58, 36 of which will be in Asia. At that time, 13 of the world's 21 mega-cities will be in Asia, a figure that contrasts markedly with just 2 mega-cities in Asia out of the 5 mega-cities that the world had in 1975. No other major area will experience a similar growth in the number of large cities and mega-cities. Latin American and the Caribbean, the major area expected to have the second largest number of large cities in 2015, will have only 9, of which 4 will be mega-cities. Africa will follow, with five large cities, two of which will be mega-cities. That is, despite the tendency for the urban population to become more concentrated in urban agglomerations with more than 5 million inhabitants, the number of such agglomerations remains limited in most major areas and there is a more even distribution among major areas of cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants. Consequently, as table 52 indicates, these medium-sized cities account for considerably higher proportions of the

urban population than agglomerations of a larger size. Consequently, both today and in the near future, the dominant groups in the urban hierarchy are small cities and towns with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and medium-sized cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants.

### C. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE URBAN INCREMENT BY CITY SIZE

Further proof of the importance of these two groups of urban settlements, namely, cities with fewer than 500,000 and those with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, is evident in the distribution of the average annual increment of the urban population among cities or urban agglomerations grouped by size class. Table 54 presents the average annual increment of the total population and that of the urban population for the world, the more developed regions, and the less developed regions. Also shown is the distribution or allocation of the annual increments in the urban population by size of urban settlement. Two types of distributions are presented. The first is the distribution of the urban increment for each development group (i.e., the percentages add to 100 for each development group). The second is the distribution of the total world urban increment among the urban agglomerations of the more developed regions and those of the less developed regions by size of urban settlement. Both distributions show the same overall traits: at the world level, small cities and towns with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants have absorbed in the past and are expected to continue to absorb in the future the largest share of the annual increment of the world's urban population: 50 per cent during 1975-2000 and 44 per cent during 2000-2015. They are followed by cities with populations of 1 million to 5 million, which accounted for 26 per cent of the annual urban increment during 1975-2000 and are expected to account for 28 per cent during 2000-2015. Mega-cities had the third largest share, absorbing between 11 per cent and 12 per cent in each period.

Since the vast majority of the urban increment is accounted for by the growth of urban centres in the less developed regions, it is not surprising that

TABLE 54. DISTRIBUTION OF THE ANNUAL INCREMENT OF THE URBAN POPULATION  
BY SIZE CLASS OF URBAN SETTLEMENT, 1975-2000 AND 2000-2015

Development grouping	Size class of urban settlement (number of inhabitants)	Annual population increment (millions)		Percentage of urban increment by development grouping		Percentage of overall urban increment	
		1975-2000	2000-2015	1975-2000	2000-2015	1975-2000	2000-2015
World .....	Total population	79.6	76.7	..	..	..	..
	Urban population	52.8	67.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Cities of 10 million or more	6.3	7.7	11.9	11.5	11.9	11.5
	Cities of 5 million to 10 million	1.9	6.3	3.6	9.4	3.6	9.4
	Cities of 1 million to 5 million	13.7	19.1	26.0	28.4	26.0	28.4
	Cities of 500,000 to 1 million	4.5	4.3	8.6	6.4	8.6	6.4
	Cities with fewer than 500,000	26.3	29.8	49.9	44.4	49.9	44.4
More developed regions ....	Total population	5.7	1.5	..	..	..	..
	Urban population	6.6	3.8	100.0	100.0	12.4	5.6
	Cities of 10 million or more	1.3	0.2	19.4	5.7	2.4	0.3
	Cities of 5 million to 10 million	-0.9	0.4	-14.1	11.2	-1.7	0.6
	Cities of 1 million to 5 million	2.8	1.8	43.1	46.7	5.4	2.6
	Cities of 500,000 to 1 million	0.4	-0.2	5.4	-5.8	0.7	-0.3
	Cities with fewer than 500,000	3.0	1.6	46.1	42.2	5.7	2.4
Less developed regions.....	Total population	73.9	75.2	..	..	..	..
	Urban population	46.2	63.4	100.0	100.0	87.6	94.4
	Cities of 10 million or more	5.0	7.5	10.8	11.8	9.5	11.1
	Cities of 5 million to 10 million	2.8	5.9	6.1	9.3	5.3	8.8
	Cities of 1 million to 5 million	10.9	17.3	23.6	27.3	20.6	25.7
	Cities of 500,000 to 1 million	4.2	4.5	9.1	7.1	7.9	6.7
	Cities with fewer than 500,000	23.3	28.2	50.5	44.5	44.2	42.0

the same pattern is found in the less developed regions. There, small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants have absorbed a considerably larger share of the urban increment than cities with populations of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, and the latter have had a larger share than mega-cities and other size categories. Thus in the less developed regions, the share in urban growth of small cities and towns was 50 per cent and is expected to be 45 per cent during 2000-2015, while the shares of the cities with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants are 24 per cent and 27 per cent respectively over each of the two periods. In the more developed regions, in contrast, the shares of cities with populations of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants are about the same as those of the

smaller cities with fewer than 500,000. Furthermore, whereas the mega-cities of the more developed regions had the third largest share of the annual urban increment during 1975-2000 (19.4 per cent), during 2000-2015 their share of the annual urban increment is expected to decline to less than a third of that, so that the third largest share will go to cities with populations of 5 million to 10 million persons.

The distribution of the overall urban increment among the more developed and the less developed regions shows that the latter have absorbed and are expected to absorb most of the increment of the urban population of the world: 88 per cent in 1975-2000 and 94 per cent in 2000-2015. Small

cities in the less developed regions have recorded the greatest gains in population among all groups of urban settlements, having absorbed 44 per cent of the world's urban increment during 1975-2000 and expected to absorb 42 per cent during 2000-2015 (figure 15). They are followed by cities with populations of 1 million to 5 million persons in the less developed regions, whose share of the overall annual urban increment was 21 per cent in 1975-2000 and is expected to rise to 26 per cent in 2000-2015. Lastly, the mega-cities of the less developed regions account for the third largest share, amounting to 9.5 per cent in 1975-2000 and 11 per cent during 2000-2015.

In comparison with the cities of the less developed regions, those of the more developed regions will record very low population increases because their overall share of the annual urban increment is expected to decline by half, from 12 per cent

during 1975-2000 to 6 per cent in 2000-2015. Most of their modest contribution to future world urban population growth will be in the two size classes of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants and fewer than 500,000 inhabitants.

These projections indicate that among all city-size classes, small cities and towns (with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants) in the less developed regions and the cities with populations of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants in the less developed regions are the two groups most likely to account for the major share of future world urban population growth (figure 15), amounting to about two-thirds of the total during 2000-2015. This finding underscores the importance of fostering the development of sustainable economic activities in small and medium-sized urban settlements in the less developed regions of the world.

**Figure 15. Distribution of overall annual urban increment by size class of urban settlement and development group, 1975-2000 and 2000-2015**

