

## V. THE URBAN HIERARCHY

Undoubtedly one of the major changes taking place in the distribution of the world population over the past two centuries is the concentration of large numbers of people in relatively small, highly urbanized areas known as urban agglomerations. Over the course of the twentieth century, the population of certain urban agglomerations grew to levels unprecedented in human history. Thus, it is estimated that by 2000 a total of 19 urban agglomerations had at least 10 million inhabitants each, so that the population of a single one of them surpassed the total population of 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 a relatively small share of both the world population and the world urban population. In 2000 the total population in the 19 mega-cities constituted 4.3 per cent of the world population and 9.2 per cent of the urban population (tables 48 and 49) and, although the number of mega-cities is expected to rise to 23 by 2015, they will jointly account for 5.2 per cent of the world total population and 9.8 per cent of the urban population at that time.

Between 1975 and 2000, the number of people living in mega-cities rose at an annual rate of 5.4 per cent, passing from 68 million to 263 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 during the subsequent 25 years. Thus, the number of mega-cities increased from 5 to 19 between 1975 and 2000. The most rapid growth occurred in less developed regions where the number of mega-cities increased from 3 to 15, and the population living in mega-cities rose from 33 million to 195 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 until 1995 there were no mega-cities in the least developed countries and that by 2000 only one urban agglomeration in those countries—Dhaka in Bangladesh—had passed the 10 million mark.

Over the next 15 years, the number of mega-cities in the more developed regions will remain unchanged and so will that in the least developed countries, but four 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 per cent per year during 2000-2015, reaching 306 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, passing from 67 million in 2000 to 69 million in 2015.

But despite the rapid growth of both the number of mega-cities and the population living in them, the distribution of the world population presented in table 48 makes plain that rural areas account today for the largest share of the world population and are expected to continue doing so over the foreseeable future. In addition, at the world level, cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants are the place of residence of the largest share of the urban population and are expected to account for a rising share of the world population. In both the more developed and the less developed regions, the proportion of persons living in cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants has been rising, reaching 40.5 per cent in the more developed regions and 19.4 per cent in the less developed regions by 2000. Because that trend is expected to continue, by 2015 a quarter of the world population is expected to live in small cities with populations that do not surpass 500,000 inhabitants. In the highly urbanized more developed regions, such small cities have accounted for the largest proportion of the population since 1975 and by 2015 nearly twice as many people are expected to live in the small cities of the more developed regions than in their rural areas (503 million versus 246 million). In contrast, rural areas will likely remain the main areas of residence of the inhabitants of the less developed regions, accounting for 52 per cent of the total population in developing countries in 2015 and having more than double the population of the small cities in the less developed regions (3,091 million versus 1,314 million).

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

Development grouping	Type of settlement and number of inhabitants of urban settlement	Total population (in millions)			Percentage distribution			Growth rate (percentage)	
		1975	2000	2015	1975	2000	2015	1975-2000	2000-2015
World	10 million or more .....	68	263	375	1.7	4.3	5.2	5.4	2.4
	5 million to 10 million.....	127	155	248	3.1	2.6	3.5	0.8	3.1
	1 million to 5 million.....	327	704	1 006	8.0	11.6	14.1	3.1	2.4
	500,000 to 1 million.....	175	300	373	4.3	5.0	5.2	2.2	1.4
	Fewer than 500,000.....	847	1 423	1 816	20.8	23.5	25.4	2.1	1.6
	Rural areas .....	2 531	3 210	3 337	62.1	53.0	46.6	1.0	0.3
	Total population.....	4 075	6 055	7 154	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.6	1.1
More developed regions	10 million or more .....	36	67	69	3.4	5.7	5.7	2.5	0.2
	5 million to 10 million.....	62	45	51	5.9	3.8	4.2	-1.3	0.8
	1 million to 5 million.....	145	219	250	13.9	18.5	20.6	1.6	0.9
	500,000 to 1 million.....	69	91	96	6.6	7.6	7.9	1.1	0.4
	Fewer than 500,000.....	422	481	503	40.2	40.5	41.4	0.5	0.3
	Rural areas .....	315	285	246	30.0	24.0	20.3	-0.4	-1.0
	Total population.....	1 048	1 188	1 214	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.5	0.1
Less developed regions	10 million or more .....	33	195	306	1.1	4.0	5.1	7.1	3.0
	5 million to 10 million.....	64	110	197	2.1	2.3	3.3	2.1	3.9
	1 million to 5 million.....	182	485	756	6.0	10.0	12.7	3.9	3.0
	500,000 to 1 million.....	106	209	277	3.5	4.3	4.7	2.7	1.9
	Fewer than 500,000.....	425	943	1 314	14.0	19.4	22.1	3.2	2.2
	Rural areas .....	2 217	2 925	3 091	73.2	60.1	52.0	1.1	0.4
	Total population.....	3 026	4 867	5 940	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.9	1.3
Least developed countries	10 million or more .....	0	12	21	0.0	1.9	2.3	--	3.6
	5 million to 10 million.....	0	5	32	0.0	0.8	3.5	--	12.2
	1 million to 5 million.....	6	44	84	1.6	6.8	9.3	8.2	4.3
	500,000 to 1 million.....	6	15	17	1.7	2.3	1.9	3.8	1.0
	Fewer than 500,000.....	39	91	162	11.1	14.1	18.0	3.4	3.9
	Rural areas .....	298	477	586	85.6	74.0	64.9	1.9	1.4
	Total population.....	348	645	902	100.0	100.0	100.0	2.5	2.2

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 group</i>	<i>Size class of urban settlement (number of inhabitants)</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2015</i>
World	10 million or more .....	4.4	9.2	9.8
	5 million to 10 million.....	8.2	5.4	6.5
	1 million to 5 million.....	21.2	24.7	26.3
	500,000 to 1 million.....	11.4	10.5	9.8
	Fewer than 500,000.....	54.8	50.0	47.6
More developed regions	10 million or more .....	4.9	7.4	7.1
	5 million to 10 million.....	8.5	5.0	5.3
	1 million to 5 million.....	19.8	24.3	25.8
	500,000 to 1 million.....	9.4	10.0	9.9
	Fewer than 500,000.....	57.4	53.2	51.9
Less developed regions	10 million or more .....	4.0	10.1	10.7
	5 million to 10 million.....	7.9	5.7	6.9
	1 million to 5 million.....	22.4	25.0	26.5
	500,000 to 1 million.....	13.1	10.8	9.7
	Fewer than 500,000.....	52.5	48.6	46.1
Least developed countries	10 million or more .....	0.0	7.4	6.7
	5 million to 10 million.....	0.0	3.0	10.0
	1 million to 5 million.....	11.3	26.2	26.5
	500,000 to 1 million.....	11.7	9.0	5.5
	Fewer than 500,000.....	77.0	54.3	51.3

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>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2015</i>
10 million or more	World.....	5	14	19	20	20	23
	More developed regions .....	2	4	4	4	4	4
	Less developed regions.....	3	10	15	16	16	19
	Least developed countries.....	0	0	1	1	1	1
5 million to 10 million	World.....	17	23	22	22	29	36
	More developed regions .....	8	6	6	6	7	7
	Less developed regions.....	9	17	16	16	22	29
	Least developed countries.....	0	1	1	1	3	5
1 million to 5 million	World.....	173	327	370	426	469	505
	More developed regions .....	75	104	109	120	121	127
	Less developed regions.....	98	223	261	306	348	378
	Least developed countries.....	3	15	23	30	35	38

Because of the higher level of urbanization characterizing more developed regions, the proportion of their population living in urban settlements of any size class is larger than the equivalent proportion in less developed regions (table 48). Consequently, to compare the population distribution of the two development groups across the urban hierarchy it is better to consider only the urban population (table 49). The distribution of the urban population by size class of urban settlement shows that an important change occurred between 1975 and 2000 in the less developed regions. Thus, whereas in 1975 the urban population of less developed regions was somewhat less concentrated in urban agglomerations with at least 5 million inhabitants than that of more developed regions, by 2000 the urban dwellers of the less developed regions were more likely to live in large urban agglomerations than their counterparts in the more developed regions. Specifically, in 1975, 13.4 per cent of the urban population of the more developed regions lived in urban agglomerations of 5 million inhabitants or more, compared to 11.9 per cent in the less developed regions. By 2000, the equivalent proportions were 12.4 per cent in the more developed regions and 15.8 per cent in the less developed regions; and the difference is likely to be accentuated further by 2015 when an expected 12.4 per cent of the urban population of the more developed regions will live in urban agglomerations with five million inhabitants or more and 17.6 per cent of that in the less developed regions will do so.

At the other end of the distribution, the urban population of the more developed regions has generally been more concentrated in small cities (with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants) than that of the less developed regions. In 2000, for instance, 53.2 per cent of the urban population of the more developed regions lived in small cities, compared with 48.6 per cent in the less developed regions (table 49). Furthermore, the more developed regions tended to have a lower proportion of the urban population living in cities with populations ranging from 500,000 to 5 million inhabitants than the less developed regions. That is, in comparison to 1975, when the urban population of the less developed regions tended to be somewhat more concentrated in urban settlements of smaller size

than that of the more developed regions, by 2000 the distribution of the urban population of the less developed regions had shifted in the direction of urban settlements of higher population size, a tendency that is likely to continue until 2015 when 44.1 per cent of the urban population of the less developed regions is projected to live in urban agglomerations of at least a million inhabitants and just 38.2 per cent of that of the more developed regions will do so.

The case of the least developed countries, which are part of the less developed regions, illustrates in a more striking way the shift of distribution of the urban population across the urban hierarchy that the process of urbanization entails. In 1975, all the urban population of the least developed countries lived in cities with less than 5 million inhabitants. In fact, 77 per cent of the urban population lived in cities of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants. By 2000 the shift to higher size classes was clear: 10.4 per cent of the urban population of the least developed countries lived in urban agglomerations of 5 million inhabitants or more, and the proportion living in small cities of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants had dropped to 54.3 per cent. The trend towards a higher concentration of the population in larger cities is expected to continue, though by 2015 still more than half of the urban population of the least developed countries is expected to live in small cities with fewer than half a million inhabitants.

In considering the redistribution of the population across the urban hierarchy it is important to bear in mind that urban agglomerations with large populations are relatively few and their passage from one size class to another causes important discontinuities in the total population allocated to each size class. Such discontinuities are particularly relevant in the case of the less developed regions since, as table 50 indicates, both the number of mega-cities and that of urban agglomerations with populations ranging from 5 million to 10 million inhabitants have changed and are expected to change substantially between 1975 and 2015 (table 50). The number of urban agglomerations with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants in the less developed regions, for instance, is not expected to rise steadily although, overall, their number will increase from 16 in 2000 to 29 in

2015. It is also worth noting that the number of cities with populations below 5 million grows rapidly and sharp discontinuities in population size in a given city-size class because of transfers of cities from one size class to the next are less likely.

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

The differences existing between the distribution of the population across the urban hierarchy in the more developed and the less developed regions are accentuated when major areas are considered. 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 one fourth of the total population and the overall level of urbanization is high.

Mega-cities, for instance, are not equally distributed among all major areas, nor are they more likely to exist in the most highly 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 among all major areas Asia had the largest number of inhabitants living in mega-cities (31 million in 2 mega-cities). In 2000, Asia has more mega-cities than any other major area and the largest population living in mega-cities (150 million in 11 mega-cities). In addition, Latin America has 4 mega-cities, Northern America 2 and Africa, with 2 mega-cities, has become the fourth major area having such populous cities. During 2000-2015 Asia is expected to continue having more mega-cities than any other major area and to have the largest population living in mega-cities. Yet the relative concentration of the population in mega-cities is and will continue to be considerably lower in Asia than in other major areas. Thus, just 4.1 per cent of the population of Asia is estimated to live in mega-cities in 2000, whereas 11.4 per

cent of that in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 9.6 per cent of the population of Northern America does so.

In all major areas small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants have been the residence of the highest proportion of urban dwellers (table 52) and for Europe, Northern America, Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean after 1975, the proportion of the total population living in small cities has been higher than that of persons living in rural areas. In 2000, 47.1 per cent of the population of Europe is estimated to live in small cities, 35.9 per cent of that of Latin America and the Caribbean, 31 per cent of that of Oceania and 29.9 per cent of that of Northern America (table 51). In Asia and Africa the proportion of the total population living in small cities has been considerably lower, amounting to 16.9 per cent and 21.5 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 all major areas except Oceania and the order of magnitude of that proportion for all major areas will be similar to that estimated for 2000. That is, the highest concentration of the total population in small cities will be found in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, while the lowest is expected in Asia. Nevertheless, Asia is expected to experience one of the fastest rates of population growth in the cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants (2 per cent per year during 2000-2015), second only to that expected for small cities in Africa (3 per cent per year). Despite such rapid growth in the population of small cities, 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 will contrast markedly with that of other major areas where the population of small cities will generally 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 where the majority of the urban population (at

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			Percentage distribution			Growth rate (percentage)	
		1975	2000	2015	1975	2000	2015	1975-2000	2000-2015
Africa	10 million or more .....	0	24	37	0.0	3.1	3.4	—	2.9
	5 million to 10 million.....	6	5	25	1.5	0.6	2.3	-0.7	10.7
	1 million to 5 million.....	13	75	135	3.2	9.6	12.5	7.0	3.9
	500,000 to 1 million.....	13	24	38	3.3	3.1	3.5	2.3	3.0
	Fewer than 500,000.....	69	169	266	17.1	21.5	24.7	3.6	3.0
	Rural areas .....	304	487	577	74.8	62.1	53.5	1.9	1.1
	Total population.....	406	784	1 078	100.0	100.0	100.0	2.6	2.1
Asia	10 million or more .....	31	150	241	1.3	4.1	5.5	6.3	3.2
	5 million to 10 million.....	51	86	137	2.1	2.3	3.2	2.1	3.2
	1 million to 5 million.....	142	333	510	5.9	9.0	11.7	3.4	2.8
	500,000 to 1 million.....	78	161	216	3.2	4.4	5.0	2.9	2.0
	Fewer than 500,000.....	291	623	839	12.1	16.9	19.3	3.0	2.0
	Rural areas .....	1 812	2 331	2 404	75.3	63.3	55.3	1.0	0.2
	Total population.....	2 406	3 683	4 347	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.7	1.1
Europe	10 million or more .....	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	—	—
	5 million to 10 million.....	37	38	38	5.4	5.2	5.3	0.2	0.0
	1 million to 5 million.....	82	111	118	12.2	15.2	16.5	1.2	0.4
	500,000 to 1 million.....	47	53	51	6.9	7.2	7.0	0.5	-0.3
	Fewer than 500,000.....	290	343	358	42.8	47.1	49.8	0.7	0.3
	Rural areas .....	221	184	154	32.7	25.2	21.4	-0.7	-1.2
	Total population.....	676	729	719	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.3	-0.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	10 million or more .....	21	59	66	6.6	11.4	10.4	4.1	0.7
	5 million to 10 million.....	17	19	34	5.3	3.7	5.4	0.5	3.8
	1 million to 5 million.....	32	89	133	9.9	17.1	21.1	4.1	2.7
	500,000 to 1 million.....	17	37	42	5.2	7.2	6.7	3.2	0.9
	Fewer than 500,000.....	110	187	229	34.2	35.9	36.3	2.1	1.4
	Rural areas .....	125	128	127	38.8	24.7	20.1	0.1	-0.1
	Total population.....	322	519	631	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.9	1.3
Northern America	10 million or more .....	16	30	32	6.5	9.6	9.2	2.5	0.4
	5 million to 10 million.....	16	7	13	6.4	2.2	3.7	-3.3	4.0
	1 million to 5 million.....	52	84	96	21.3	27.2	27.9	1.9	0.9
	500,000 to 1 million.....	17	26	25	7.0	8.3	7.2	1.6	-0.2
	Fewer than 500,000.....	79	92	113	32.6	29.9	32.9	0.6	1.3
	Rural areas .....	64	71	66	26.2	22.8	19.1	0.4	-0.5
	Total population.....	243	310	343	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.0	0.7
Oceania	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	13	25.8	39.2	36.6	3.1	0.7
	500,000 to 1 million.....	3	0	2	15.4	0.0	4.3	—	—
	Fewer than 500,000.....	7	9	11	30.6	31.0	30.2	1.4	1.0
	Rural areas .....	6	9	10	28.2	29.8	28.8	1.6	0.9
	Total population.....	21	30	36	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.4	1.1

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	8.1	7.4
	5 million to 10 million.....	5.9	1.7	5.0
	1 million to 5 million.....	12.9	25.3	27.0
	500,000 to 1 million.....	13.2	8.1	7.5
	Fewer than 500,000.....	68.0	56.9	53.2
Asia	10 million or more .....	5.3	11.1	12.4
	5 million to 10 million.....	8.6	6.3	7.1
	1 million to 5 million.....	24.0	24.6	26.2
	500,000 to 1 million.....	13.1	11.9	11.1
	Fewer than 500,000.....	49.1	46.1	43.2
Europe	10 million or more .....	0.0	0.0	0.0
	5 million to 10 million.....	8.1	7.0	6.8
	1 million to 5 million.....	18.1	20.3	20.9
	500,000 to 1 million.....	10.2	9.7	9.0
	Fewer than 500,000.....	63.6	63.0	63.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	10 million or more .....	10.8	15.1	13.0
	5 million to 10 million.....	8.6	4.9	6.8
	1 million to 5 million.....	16.1	22.7	26.4
	500,000 to 1 million.....	8.6	9.5	8.4
	Fewer than 500,000.....	55.9	47.7	45.4
Northern America	10 million or more .....	8.8	12.5	11.4
	5 million to 10 million.....	8.7	2.9	4.6
	1 million to 5 million.....	28.9	35.2	34.5
	500,000 to 1 million.....	9.5	10.7	9.0
	Fewer than 500,000.....	44.1	38.7	40.7
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	55.9	51.5
	500,000 to 1 million.....	21.5	0.0	6.1
	Fewer than 500,000.....	42.6	44.1	42.5

least 63 per cent) lives in small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and where there has been a tendency for cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants to attract 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 constant since 1975 (there are only 5 in the continent).

In comparison with Europe, both Northern America and Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced a reduction of the proportion of the urban population living in small cities that has been accompanied by a higher concentration of the population in medium-sized cities, particularly those with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, and in mega-cities. Furthermore, between 1975 and 2000 the proportion of the urban population in urban agglomerations

with populations ranging from 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 category to that of mega-cities (i.e. urban agglomerations with 10 million inhabitants or more). During 2000-2015, Northern America is expected to experience a slight increase in the proportion of the urban population living in small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and declines in the proportions living in cities with 500,000 to 5 million inhabitants and in mega-cities. There will also be a rise in the proportion living in cities with populations of 5 million to 10 million inhabitants. In Latin America and the Caribbean the distribution of the urban population will continue to shift towards a somewhat greater concentration in agglomerations with populations ranging from 1 million to 10 million inhabitants. Such increases will be counterbalanced by a reduction of the proportions of people 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 in mega-cities. Thus, the proportion of the urban population living in cities with fewer than one million inhabitants has been declining, while there has been a steady increase in the proportion living in urban agglomerations with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants and in those with more than 10 million inhabitants. The reduction in the proportion living in urban agglomerations with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants is likely to be reversed in the future as the shift towards a greater concentration of the urban population in large agglomerations continues.

In Africa a similar trend is noticeable, particularly if one considers jointly the proportions of the urban population living in urban agglomerations with 5 million to 10 million inhabitants and that living in mega-cities. The overall proportion of the urban population in those agglomerations has increased from 5 per cent in 1975 to 9.8 per cent in 2000 and is projected to reach 12.4 per cent in 2015. There will also be a significant increase in the proportion of persons living in urban agglomerations with 1 million to 5 million inhabitants,

whereas the proportion of people living in cities with less than 1 million inhabitants has been declining and is expected to experience further reductions by 2015.

For Oceania, the changes observed in the distribution of the urban population by size class are difficult to interpret because they are affected by the small number of cities in that major area and the discontinuities associated with the transfer of cities from one category to the next. As table 53 shows, in 1975 the two largest cities in Oceania had populations in the range of 1 million to 5 million inhabitants. By 2000 the number of cities in that category had increased to 6 and that number is expected to remain unchanged until 2015. Those six cities account today for 55.9 per cent of the urban population of Oceania and are expected to have 51.5 per cent of the corresponding population in 2015.

Table 53 shows that the number of cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants has increased markedly in all major areas since 1975 and that, except for Oceania, in 2000 all major areas have moderate numbers of cities in that category. Asia has the largest number (183), followed by Europe (59) and by the other major areas, each of which has between 38 and 44 cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants. By 2015, Asia is expected to have 267 cities of that size, followed by Europe, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, each with slightly more than 60 cities in that category, and then by Northern America with 44. These numbers contrast markedly with the number of urban agglomerations with 5 million inhabitants or more that either exist today or are expected in the near future. Asia, with the highest number of such large cities, has today 23 urban agglomerations with more than 5 million inhabitants, 11 of which are mega-cities. By 2015, it is expected to have 35 agglomerations of that size, 15 of which will be mega-cities. All other major areas have today and are expected to have in 2015 less than 10 large urban agglomerations each. Latin America and the Caribbean has 7 agglomerations with more than 5 million inhabitants today and is expected to have 9 by 2015; Northern America has 3 and is expected to have 4 in fifteen years; Africa also has 3 and will likely have 6 in



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>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2015</i>
10 million or more	Asia .....	2	7	11	12	12	15
	Latin America and the Caribbean .....	2	4	4	4	4	4
	Northern America .....	1	2	2	2	2	2
	Africa .....	0	1	2	2	2	2
5 million to 10 million	Asia .....	7	13	12	12	17	20
	Europe .....	5	5	5	5	5	5
	Latin America and the Caribbean .....	2	3	3	3	3	5
	Africa .....	1	1	1	1	2	4
	Northern America .....	2	1	1	1	2	2
1 million to 5 million	Asia .....	77	160	183	214	242	267
	Europe .....	42	58	59	64	64	64
	Latin America and the Caribbean .....	17	35	44	55	62	62
	Africa .....	7	33	40	47	55	62
	Northern America .....	28	36	38	40	40	44
	Oceania .....	2	5	6	6	6	6

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

2015; Europe has and will have five. That is, although there is a definite tendency for the urban population to become somewhat more concentrated in urban agglomerations with more than 5 million inhabitants and the number of such agglomerations is rising, their number remains small compared to that of cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants and, as table 53 indicates, these cities account for considerably higher proportions of the urban population than agglomerations of larger size. Consequently, both today and in the short-term future, the dominant groups in the urban hierarchy are small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants.

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

Further proof of the importance of those two groups of urban settlements, namely, cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants and those with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, can be obtained by considering 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 and the less developed regions. Also displayed is the distribution of the annual increment of 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, namely, the world, the more developed regions and the less developed regions). The second is the distribution of the world's 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 with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants have absorbed and are expected to absorb the largest share of the annual increment of the world urban population: 44.3 per cent during 1975-2000 and 40.3 per cent during 2000-2015. They are followed by cities with populations ranging between 1 million and 5 million inhabitants that accounted for 29 per cent of the annual urban increment during 1975-2000 and are ex-

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 (in 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.....	79.2	73.3	—	—	—	—
	Urban population .....	52.1	64.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Cities of 10 million or more.....	7.8	7.5	14.9	11.5	14.9	11.5
	Cities of 5 million to 10 million.....	1.1	6.2	2.2	9.5	2.2	9.5
	Cities of 1 million to 5 million.....	15.1	20.1	29.0	31.0	29.0	31.0
	Cities of 500,000 to 1 million.....	5.0	4.9	9.6	7.5	9.6	7.5
	Cities with fewer than 500,000.....	23.1	26.2	44.3	40.4	44.3	40.4
More developed regions	Total population.....	5.6	1.8	—	—	—	—
	Urban population .....	6.8	4.3	100.0	100.0	13.0	6.7
	Cities of 10 million or more.....	1.3	0.1	18.7	2.7	2.4	0.2
	Cities of 5 million to 10 million.....	-0.7	0.4	-10.0	8.9	-1.3	0.6
	Cities of 1 million to 5 million.....	3.0	2.0	43.7	46.8	5.7	3.1
	Cities of 500,000 to 1 million.....	0.9	0.3	12.7	7.9	1.7	0.5
	Cities with fewer than 500,000.....	2.4	1.5	34.9	33.7	4.5	2.3
Less developed regions	Total population.....	73.6	71.5	—	—	—	—
	Urban population .....	45.3	60.5	100.0	100.0	87.0	93.3
	Cities of 10 million or more.....	6.5	7.4	14.4	12.2	12.5	11.4
	Cities of 5 million to 10 million.....	1.8	5.8	4.0	9.6	3.5	8.9
	Cities of 1 million to 5 million.....	12.1	18.1	26.8	29.9	23.3	27.9
	Cities of 500,000 to 1 million.....	4.1	4.5	9.1	7.5	7.9	7.0
	Cities with fewer than 500,000.....	20.7	24.7	45.7	40.9	39.8	38.2

pected to account for 31 per cent during 2000-2015. Mega-cities had the third largest share, absorbing 14.9 per cent of the annual urban increment during 1975-2000 and 11.5 per cent during 2000-2015.

The same pattern in the distribution of the average annual urban increment is found in the less developed regions, where small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants have absorbed a considerably larger share of the urban increment than cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants and the latter have had a larger share than mega-cities. In the more developed regions, in contrast, cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants have absorbed and are expected to absorb a higher share of the average annual urban increment than small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants (43.7 per cent versus 34.9 per cent during 1975-2000 and 46.8 per cent versus 33.7 per cent during 2000-2015). Furthermore, whereas the mega-cities

of the more developed regions had the third largest share of the annual urban increment during 1975-2000 (18.7 per cent), over the next fifteen years their share of the annual urban increment is expected to decline markedly so that the third largest share will go to cities with populations ranging from 5 million to 10 million inhabitants.

The distribution of the overall urban increment among more developed and less developed regions shows that the latter have absorbed and are expected to absorb the major share of the urban increment of the world population, amounting to 87 per cent during 1975-2000 and 93.3 per cent during 2000-2015. Consequently, small cities in the less developed regions have recorded the greatest gains in population among all groups of urban settlements, having absorbed 39.8 per cent of the world urban increment during 1975-2000 and being expected to absorb 38.2 per cent during the next fifteen years (figure 15). They are followed by cities with populations ranging from

1 million to 5 million inhabitants in the less developed regions whose share of the overall annual urban increment was 23.3 per cent in 1975-2000 and is expected to rise to 27.9 per cent in 2000-2015. Lastly, the mega-cities of the less developed regions account for the third largest share of the overall urban increment, absorbing 12.5 per cent of it in 1975-2000 and an expected 11.4 per cent during 2000-2015. In fact, in the less developed regions the next fifteen years are expected to witness a greater concentration of urban growth in cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 10 million inhabitants than in cities with more than 10 million inhabitants.

In comparison with the cities of the less developed regions, those of the more developed regions will record very low population increases, especially because their overall share of the annual urban increment is expected to decline from 13 per cent during 1975-2000 to 6.7 per cent during 2000-2015. As already noted, the largest relative increases will be absorbed by cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 5 million inhabitants, but the magnitude of those gains will be small since they amount to 5.7 per cent of the

overall urban increment during 1975-2000 and to just 3.1 per cent of that increment during 2000-2015. Small cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, which have absorbed and are expected to absorb the second largest share of the overall urban increment among cities in the more developed regions, have recorded increases equivalent of 4.5 per cent of the global urban increment during 1975-2000 and will likely absorb just 2.3 per cent of the urban increment expected during 2000-2015.

These projections indicate that among all cities in the world, the small cities of developing countries (with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants) and the cities with populations ranging between 1 million and 5 million inhabitants in the less developed regions are the most likely to absorb the highest share of the annual increment of the world urban population (figure 15), amounting to nearly two-thirds of total urban growth during 2000-2015. This outcome underscores the importance of fostering the development of sustainable economic activity and improving the services available in small and medium-sized urban settlements in the less developed regions of the world.

**Figure 15. Percentage distribution of the overall annual urban increment among categories of urban settlements by size and development group, 1975-2000 and 2000-2015**

