



Sustainable Cities

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



“By 2030, 193 Heads of State and Governments agree to make all cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by –

- *ensuring access for all to safe and affordable housing*
- *upgrading slums and improving air quality*
- *providing access to safe and sustainable transport for all*
- *providing access to green spaces – and –*
- *strengthening national and regional development planning.”*

UN Sustainable Development Goal 11

Good News: 4.2 billion people worldwide live in cities which generate 80% of the world's wealth. The number of mega-cities (10m+ residents) rose from 10 in 1990 to 33 in 2019. By 2030, 60% of the world's population are expected to live in cities.

Bad News: Cities account for nearly 70% of all carbon emissions despite only occupying 3% of the Earth's land area.



Cities are major drivers of economic growth and employment opportunities, so ensuring they expand in a sustainable way, such that everyone has safe, affordable housing and public transport, is a vital aspect of sustainable development more broadly.

Many cities now focus on sustainability and polishing their green credentials: ICLEI – the organisation of local governments in over 100 countries promoting sustainability – now has 1,750 members: the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy now has 9,000 signatory partners in 131 countries.

The journey to 100% clean energy and zero carbon emissions may be easier to accomplish first in cities as everything is close and a green image helps a city's branding.



Balance Sheet

Achievements

Between 1990 and 2019, the number of mega-cities rose from 10 to 33. **4.2 billion people worldwide live in cities.** [1]

Cities generate around **80% of the world's total GDP.** [1]

In a study of 227 cities from 78 countries across the globe, **53% of people** had access to public transport. The use of public transport also **increased by 20%** from 2014-18, on average. [3]

From 2010-18, **81% of solid waste** was collected (but not necessarily disposed of sustainably). [3]

150 countries have developed urban planning policies (2015). Of these, around half have begun implementation. [2], [3]

People who live in cities can expect to live between 3 to 5 years longer than people who live in rural areas – chiefly because they live closer to good medical facilities.

Work Left to Do

In future, 90% of mega-cities will be in developing countries, and there are currently over 1 billion people living in slums - this figure will therefore likely rise. [3]

They also, however, account for nearly 70% of all carbon emissions in various ways, despite occupying only 3% of the Earth's land area. [3]

This is a long way off universal access to public transport for urban residents. In some regions, as few as 18% of people in cities have access to public transport (Sub-Saharan Africa). [3]

2 billion people in 2018 lacked access to waste collection and disposal services, and the amount of waste produced globally will be around 4 billion metric tons in 2050. Investment in waste management will need to increase. [3]

Urban areas are currently expanding faster than their populations - this means cities are becoming less dense. This could have significant negative effects on natural environments going forward. [2]

Globally, 90% of people living in urban areas are breathing unsafe air (according to WHO standards). This problem is worse in cities in developing countries, where over 90% of air pollution-related deaths worldwide occur. [3]



Sources

1. [UNDP - SDG11](#)
2. [SDGs Knowledge Platform - Goal 11](#)
3. [SDGs Report 2019 - Section 11](#)
4. [Our World in Data - Urbanisation](#)
5. [ICLEI](#)
6. [Agenda 2030](#)



Take Action

- If you live in a city – get to know your neighbours! Meet and figure out how you can campaign and take action to improve slum areas, build affordable housing (- think the Habitat for Humanity or Techo models)
- Campaign for more cycle lanes, more electric car charging points; better buses;
- Get involved in, or elected to, your town / city council: make better planning decisions.



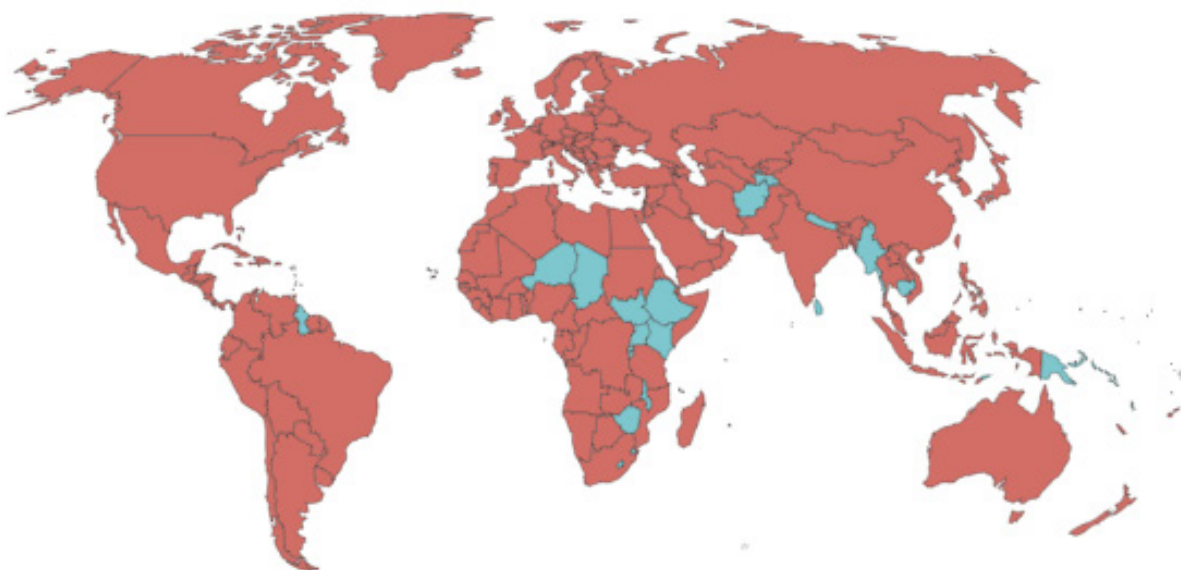
Points to Ponder

- Cities are essentially UN-sustainable: food and water for the people who live there has to be grown/harvested from outside the city – and brought in; the energy that they use has to be generated by materials brought in from outside. They are concentrations of consumption and their products are re-fashionings of materials grown / produced elsewhere. Can this change?
- Are vertical farms (tall buildings growing food hydro-ponically) part of the answer?
- Should governments do more to encourage urban to rural migration? HOW??
- Should governments place a limit to the growth of mega-cities? Or could a city of 100m people be viable?

Do more people live in urban or rural areas?, 2050

Share of the population which live in urban versus rural areas. Here, 'majority urban' indicates more than 50 percent of the population live in urban centres; 'majority rural' indicates less than 50 percent. Urban populations are defined based on the definition of urban areas by national statistical offices. This is based on estimates to 2016, combined with UN projections to 2050.

Our World
in Data



No data

Majority rural

Majority urban