

Water and Cities Facts and Figures



- Half of humanity now lives in cities and, within two decades, nearly 60% of the world's population -5 billion people- will be urban dwellers.
- Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month.
- The exploding urban population growth creates unprecedented challenges, among which provision for water and sanitation have been the most pressing and painfully felt when lacking.
- The relationship between water and cities is crucial. Cities require a very large input of freshwater and in turn have a huge impact on freshwater systems.
- Cities cannot be sustainable without ensuring reliable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

Coping with the growing needs of water and sanitation services within cities is one of the most pressing issues of this century. Sustainable, efficient and equitable urban water management has never been as important as in today's world.

Water and urban growth by numbers

- Every second, the urban population grows by **2 people**.
- **95%** of the urban expansion in the next decades will take place in the developing world.
- In Africa and Asia, the urban population is expected to **double** between 2000 and 2030.
- Between 1998 and 2008, **1052 million** urban dwellers gained access to improved drinking water and **813 million** to improved sanitation. However, the urban population in that period grew by **1089 million** people and thus undermined the progress.
- **One out of four** city residents worldwide, 789 million in total, lives without access to improved sanitation facilities.
- **497 million** people in cities rely on shared sanitation. In 1990, this number was 249 million.
- **27%** of the urban dwellers in the developing world do not have access to piped water at home.

What are the main challenges?

Poverty

- **828 million** people live in slums or informal settlements that are scattered around the world's cities; the biggest challenge is to provide these people with adequate water and sanitation facilities.
- The urban poor pay up to **50 times** more for a litre of water than their richer neighbours, since they often have to buy their water from private vendors.

Over-exploitation

- Due to rapid urbanization, cities face a growing demand for water and sanitation services. To meet this demand, cities are going **deeper and further**, which leads to over-exploitation of water resources.

Pollution

- Pollution typically refers to chemicals or other substances in concentrations greater than would occur under natural conditions.
- Every day, **2 million tons** of human waste are disposed of in water courses.
- In many cities, especially in the developing world, the lack of convenient wastewater treatment and drainage facilities lead to pollution of the ground-and surface water resources.

Health

Lack of convenient sanitation and safe water supply in cities leads to serious health problems.

- Inadequate sanitation facilities often cause contamination of drinking water.
- After heavy rain, stormwater washes human waste, mainly from informal settlements lacking minimum facilities, into the open drinking water sources of the poor.
- Contaminated drinking water results in **cholera** epidemics, faecal-oral diseases such as **diarrhoea**, and outbreaks of malaria.
- While **malaria** was often considered a rural disease, it is now among the main causes of illness and death in many urban areas.

Leakage

- Leakage -loss- rates of **50%** are not uncommon in urban distribution systems.
- Some **250 to 500 million m³** of drinking water gets lost in many mega cities each year.
- Saving this amount could provide an additional **10 to 20 million** people with drinking water in each mega city.



Water and cities around the world

Africa

- In Africa, **38%** of the population is urban. This rate is expected to increase to 50% in 2050.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, **44%** of the urban dwellers uses improved sanitation and **35%** has access to piped water in the household.
- In Ghana, **70%** of the urban population shares sanitation facilities.
- **62 %** of the sub-Saharan Africa urban population lives in slums.

Asia

- Asia holds half of the world's cities, including **6** of the world's 10 largest cities.
- **43%** of the urban population of south-central Asia lives in slums.
- The urban population in Asia will increase by **60%** before 2025.
- Many Asian cities are ill-equipped to provide their growing populations the safe water and sanitation they need.

Latin America

- **77%** of the Latin American population is urban and urbanization rates keep rising.
- In most Latin American countries, access to improved water and sanitation is quasi-universal. Still, lack of improved drinking water and sanitation is a problem in Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Bolivia, each of which has significant concentrations of slum households.
- Pollution of rivers and seas remains a big problem affecting coastal cities, where more than **60%** of the Latin American population lives.

Areas of concern

Mega cities

- Mega cities are cities with **10 or more million** inhabitants. They host **9%** of the world's urban population.
- Nearly all mega cities around the world were facing increasing **water scarcity** in 2010.

Slums or informal settlements

- Today, **828 million** people live in slum conditions, lacking basic services. This number grows by **6 million** each year.
- Many slum dwellers die each year as a result of inadequate drinking water and sanitation services.
- Many slums are built in **flood-prone areas** and thus vulnerable.

Looking forward

- Globally, **96%** of the urban world today uses improved drinking water resources.
- The 3rd United Nations World Water Development Report, published in 2009, indicates that the water problems of the world's cities are **manageable**. Most of the required knowledge, experience and technology is already available. However, it is essential to put these problems high on national, regional, and international agendas.
- New **solutions** for improving the sustainability of cities are being explored. Good urban water management is complex and requires not only water and wastewater infrastructure, but also pollution control and flood prevention. It requires coordination across many sectors and between different local authorities and changes in governance that lead to more sustainable and equitable use of the urban water resources.

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