Since about 2008 the majority of the world’s population has lived in urban areas. Only South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa remain more rural than urban.

Share of total population (%)

Despite increasing urbanization, many countries have reduced the share of urban dwellers living in slums.

Population living in slums, 2005 and 2014 (% of urban population)

But substantial slum populations still exist.

Population, by locale, 2014 (%)

Source: UN Population Division. WDI (SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS; SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS).

Source: UN-Habitat. World Development Indicators (EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS).
Reliable infrastructure helps cities to thrive: urban dwellers have better access to services and tend to be less poor than their rural counterparts.

Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines; and access to electricity, at least basic water and at least basic sanitation, countries with all four indicators available, 2014 (% of rural and urban populations)

Source: World Bank; WHO; and WHO/UNICEF JMP for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene. WDI (SI.POV.URHC; SI.POV.RUHC; EG.ELC.ACCS.UR.ZS; EG.ELC.ACCS.RU.ZS; SH.H2O.BASW.UR.ZS; SH.H2O.BASW.RU.ZS; SH.STA.BASS.UR.ZS; SH.STA.BASS.RU.ZS).

a. Poverty aggregate based on national poverty lines not available for world since these lines differ by country.
Most countries exceed safe levels of fine particulate matter (PM$_{2.5}$) pollution. Industry, transport, and household uses of solid fuels are among the sources.

Ambient air pollution, PM$_{2.5}$, annual mean exposure, 2016 (micrograms per cubic meter, μg/m$^3$)

But PM$_{2.5}$ measurements show local variation from the national means. PM$_{2.5}$, gridded by 0.1 degree, 2016 (μg/m$^3$)

And even in a specific location, PM$_{2.5}$ varies with seasons and weather. PM$_{2.5}$, daily mean, DTU* Delhi, 2017 (μg/m$^3$)

WHO guidelines set a single-day limit of PM$_{2.5}$ at 25 micrograms per cubic meter. Ground measurements in Delhi were within that limit on most days in summer 2017. But during the following winter, it exceeded this limit—often dramatically.
Ambient air pollution has many adverse consequences, including increased risk of premature death.

Deaths attributable to ambient air pollution, 2012 (per 100,000)

In addition to the human toll, premature deaths attributable to air pollution have an economic cost to countries.

Estimated annual labor income losses from deaths due to air pollution, by type, 2015 (% of GDP)

Source: WHO Global Health Observatory (database). http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.BODAMBIENTAIRDTHS

Household (indoor) pollution is also a serious problem, which can be reduced by adopting clean cooking fuels (SDG 7.1, see p. 27)

Air pollution disproportionately affects the elderly, so deaths attributable to it are especially high in countries with aging populations, such as the Russian Federation.

In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, labor income losses exceed the equivalent of 1 percent of GDP, and result mostly from high ambient PM$_{2.5}$ and household pollution.

In other regions, losses are lower—but still substantial—and almost entirely attributable to ambient PM$_{2.5}$ pollution.


a. Includes losses attributable to household PM$_{10}$, air pollution and ambient ozone.