

## Is Demography Destiny? Urban Population Change and Economic Vitality of Future Cities

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**ABSTRACT.** The growth of cities has attracted considerable scholarly attention during the last decade as it is becoming clear that powerful agglomeration forces are reinforcing the role of cities as the engines of economic growth. Close to 4 billion people live in cities, about 55 per cent of the world's population. While population growth rates are declining and the world's population is likely to level off from the middle of the 21st century, probably ending up around 10 billion, further urbanization is expected to continue. Another 3 billion people will become urban citizens this century. At the same time no corner of the world will be sheltered from sweeping demographic changes due to population ageing and increasing migration. Such changes will be amplified in cities. In this paper we combine UN population projections and migration data with our own assumptions to derive projections of age composition and birthplace composition of urban populations by continent. We also briefly address the consequences of these demographic trends for future urban economic vitality. Particular attention is paid to the impacts of demographic changes on urban creativity and innovation. We conclude that, with the right policies in place, such demographic changes enhance rather than impede the future prosperity of the urban world.

**KEYWORDS.** *World population projections, urbanization, ageing, migration, ethnic diversity*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world population reached the 7 billion mark sometime between late 2011 and early 2012. Population growth rates are declining in most parts of the world and already negative in some developed countries. From 2050, when the world population is expected reach 9.3 billion, growth will gradually diminish to zero. The midpoint of a range of projections for the end of the century suggests that world population may peak by then at around 10 billion (United Nations, 2011). However, the proportion of the world population that lives in cities has been steadily increasing and already reached 50 per cent in 2008. In the future, the population of urban areas is expected to increase further from 3.6 billion in 2011 to 6.3 billion in 2050 (United Nations, 2012). In fact, cities and towns are expected to absorb *all* population growth in the future by their own natural increase and by drawing in rural population. The total number of people living in the world's rural areas may start to decline in about a decade. By 2050 there are likely to be 0.3 billion fewer rural inhabitants than at present (United Nations, 2012).

There are major differences in these demographic changes between countries and continents. In 2011, 78 per cent of the population of the more developed regions lived in urban areas, compared with 47 per cent in less developed regions. Fuelled by powerful agglomeration forces (e.g., Glaeser and Gottlieb, 2009), further urbanization is expected to continue everywhere. By 2050, urban dwellers may account for 86 per cent of the population of more developed regions and 64 per cent of less developed regions. These urban populations live in cities that vary hugely in size. United Nations (2012) expects the number of mega cities of at least 10 million inhabitants to increase from 23 in 2011 to 37 by 2025. Even though the populations of megacities grow faster than those of smaller cities, they account for only a small proportion of all urban people (a projected 13.6 per cent in 2025). By 2025, it is estimated that about 1 billion (24.3 per cent of the urban population) will live in cities of 5 million to 10 million inhabitants and another 2 billion in cities with fewer than 500,000 people.

Besides this diversity between cities, there is also considerable demographic diversity within cities. Declining fertility and increasing life expectancy lead to structural ageing of urban populations. In the developed world, this is reinforced by the bulge of large 1945-1960 birth cohorts (the baby boomers) reaching retirement ages. At the same time, geographic mobility has been increasing sharply in recent decades and is leading to an ever larger proportion of the world population living at a location which is not their place of birth.

In this paper we project forward the age distribution of the population of cities and the share of foreign born people in cities. We also consider ethnic diversity among the foreign born. While the United Nations' Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides projections of urban and rural populations (by age and sex), official projections of

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