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Cities and Regions in South Asia

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INTRODUCTION

The ongoing global urban transition, led by cities in the Global South, particularly in Asian and African countries, presents one of the defining development opportunities of the twenty-first century. Rapid urbanisation over the next two to three decades will lead to an explosion in the demand for livelihoods, urban renewal, infrastructure and real estate development, food, water, energy, housing, and digital technology. A significant proportion of this transition will be played out in South Asian cities: between 2001 and 2011, 130 million people were added to South Asian cities and this number is set to rise by almost 250 million in the next 15 years.¹ This urban transition presents exceptional opportunities for sustainable development, but also presents difficult challenges. South Asia is home to some of the fastest growing economies in the world, but also faces critical questions around issues of inequality, poverty, health and social welfare, and environmental degradation.

South Asia's 'messy' and 'hidden' urbanisation (Ellis and Roberts, 2016) is evident in the large share of the population living in settlements that possess urban characteristics but do not satisfy the criteria required to be officially classified as urban (Denis et al., 2012). Rapidly growing cities are unable to cope with the increasing demand for urban services and are vulnerable to growing social and environmental factors that govern urban fabric. The inability of the cities to effectively address these obstacles provides the root cause for messy and hidden urbanisation (Ellis and

¹ Data from the *World Urbanization Prospects Report*, 2018 Revision, United Nations Population Division.