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Urban areas to see surge in residents

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UNITED NATIONS — Half the world's population will live in urban areas by the end of this year, and about 70 percent will be city dwellers by 2050, with cities and towns in Asia and Africa registering the biggest growth, a U.N. forecast said Tuesday.

The report predicted there will be 27 "megacities" with at least 10 million residents by midcentury, compared with 19 giant metropolitan areas today.

But it said at least half the urban growth in coming decades will be in smaller cities that now have fewer than 500,000 people.

According to the latest U.N. estimate last year, the world's population is expected to rise from 6.7 billion in 2007 to 9.2 billion in 2050. Over the same span, the new report said, the total population of urban areas is projected to rise from 3.3 billion to 6.4 billion.

"The urban areas of the world are expected to absorb all the population growth expected over the next four decades while, at the same time, drawing in some of the rural population," the report said. "As a result, the world rural population is projected to start decreasing in about a decade, and 600 million fewer rural inhabitants are expected in 2050 than today."