



# *Urbanization, Housing, and Families in the North American Context*

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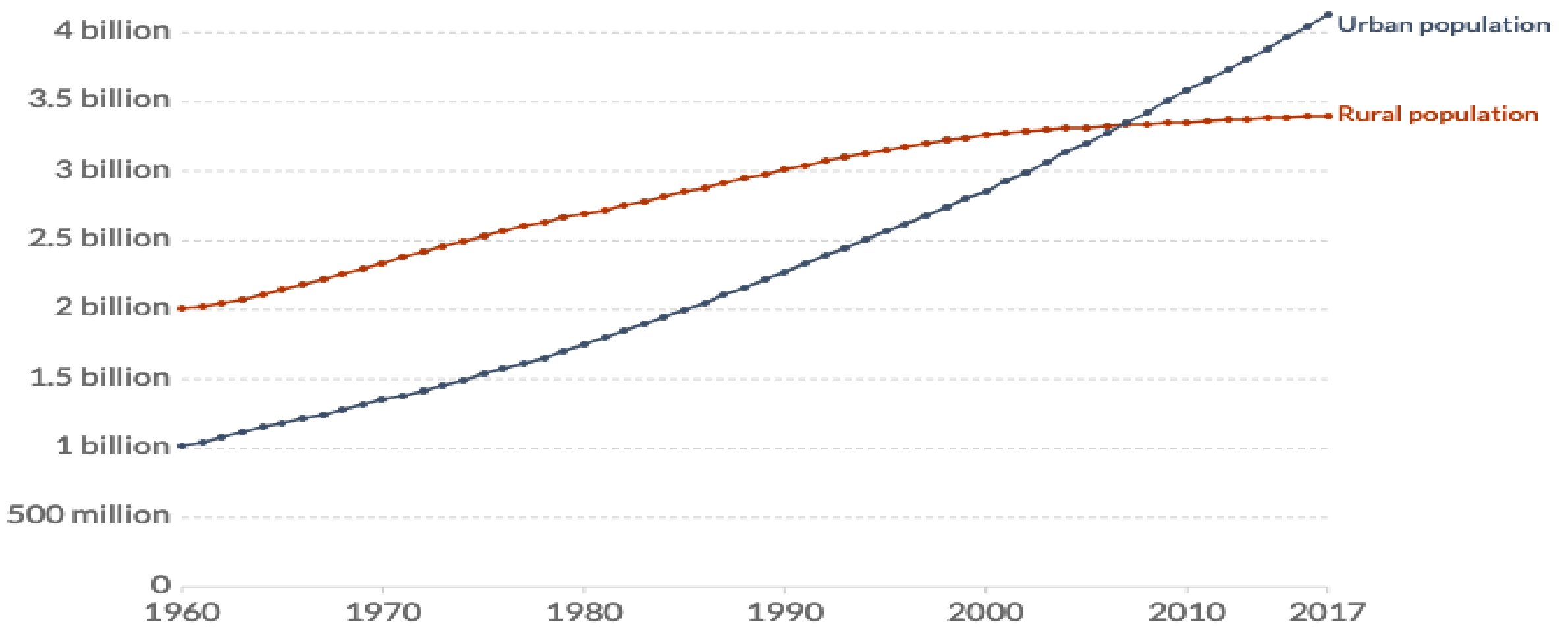
# The World Has Become Urban

- 4.4 billion people (out of approximately 8.045 billion), live in urban areas and by 2050, nearly 7 out of 10 individuals will live in cities
- 2022, the degree of global urbanization is about 57 percent;
- North America has the highest degree of urbanization in the world, at about 82 percent



# Number of people living in urban and rural areas, World, 1960 to 2017

⇌ Change country



Source: UN World Urbanization Prospects (2018)

OurWorldInData.org/urbanization • CC BY

Note: Urban populations are defined based on the definition of urban areas by national statistical offices.



# Why Does Urbanization Matter?



- Many social scientists consider urbanization as the most important contemporary global mega trend as it represents a crucial shift in how humans use the environment
- Process that alters the natural environment and is accompanied by changes in how individuals and families live
- Urbanization is driven by **demographic changes** (net population change as well as rural-urban migration, immigration, and changing age structures), economic opportunities and growth, and social factors such as the potential for a good quality of life and access to services



# No Standard Definition Of Urbanization

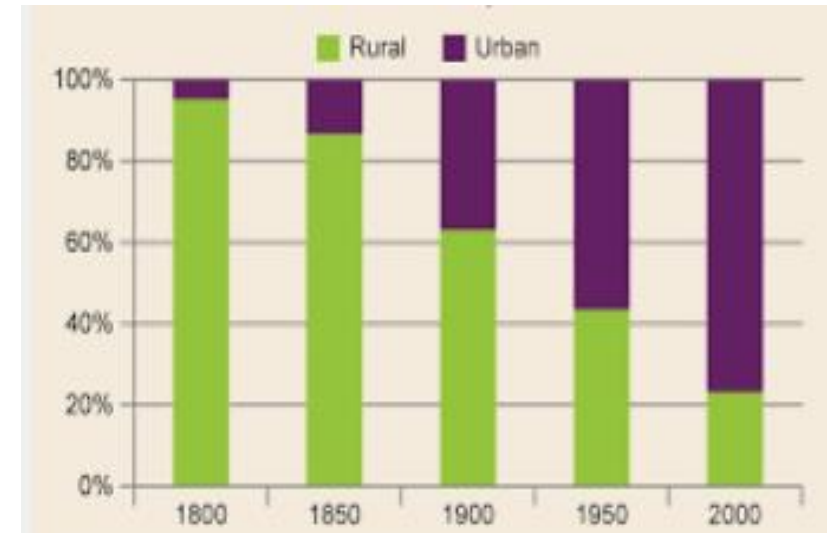
Most commonly, urbanization is associated with both the increase in the percentage of population living in a specific geographic area and the total area occupied by urban (defined by density) settlements

In the United States, Canada, and Mexico approximately 79 – 82 percent of the total population live in urban areas, though each country defines urbanization somewhat differently and has had a different trajectory with respect to urbanization due to varying historical, economic, and socio-cultural conditions



# The United States

- 2022 about 80 percent of the U.S. population of 334 million were living in urban areas of the United States and 20 percent in rural areas (Census, 2023).
- Urban growth has been expanding since the 1830s due to the early industrialization of the nation
- Northeast was first to industrialize and achieved an urban majority by the 1870s
- South did not achieve an urban majority until the 1950s.
- Changes in the 2020 census to definitions of urban vs rural areas
  - As of 2020 urban areas in the United States are now defined by having 5000 individuals (up from 2500) and all areas with the minimum population are now defined as urban





# U.S. Urbanization

- Largest major cities: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Phoenix
- Urban population is scattered over more than 300 areas of 100, 000 or more individuals
- New York City most highly populated - about 8.8 million inhabitants
- California has the greatest urban population rate of any state at 94.2 percent (Census, 2022)
- A small number of states are still characterized by a rural majority: Vermont, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, and West Virginia (Census, 2023; Statista, 2022).



# Distinctive Features of U.S. Urbanization

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- Unique due to the fact that urban growth is primarily occurring in suburban and small metropolitan areas
- Rural areas have seen a significant decrease in population over the last fifty years, however are characterized by the presence of a significant number of older persons
  - About 18 percent of individuals living in rural areas are over the age of 65 compared to 15 percent in the suburbs and 13 percent in cities
- History of racial segregation and gentrification efforts that have destroyed long-standing communities of lower-income families and frequently hollowed out city centers





# Canada

- Population about 40 million: about 83.4 percent live in an urban area.
- Canadian census definitions, smaller urban areas are defined as having from 1,000 to 99,900 inhabitants, while larger areas are measured by having over 100,000 inhabitants
- Rural areas have fewer than 1000 inhabitants and less than 400 people per square kilometer
- Majority of urban dwellers, 73.7 percent, live in Canada's larger urban centers which continue to grow primarily driven by immigration.
- Canada's rural population has seen a slight increase in growth over the last several years, however it remains at only 17.8 percent of its population



# Distinctive Features of Canadian Urbanization

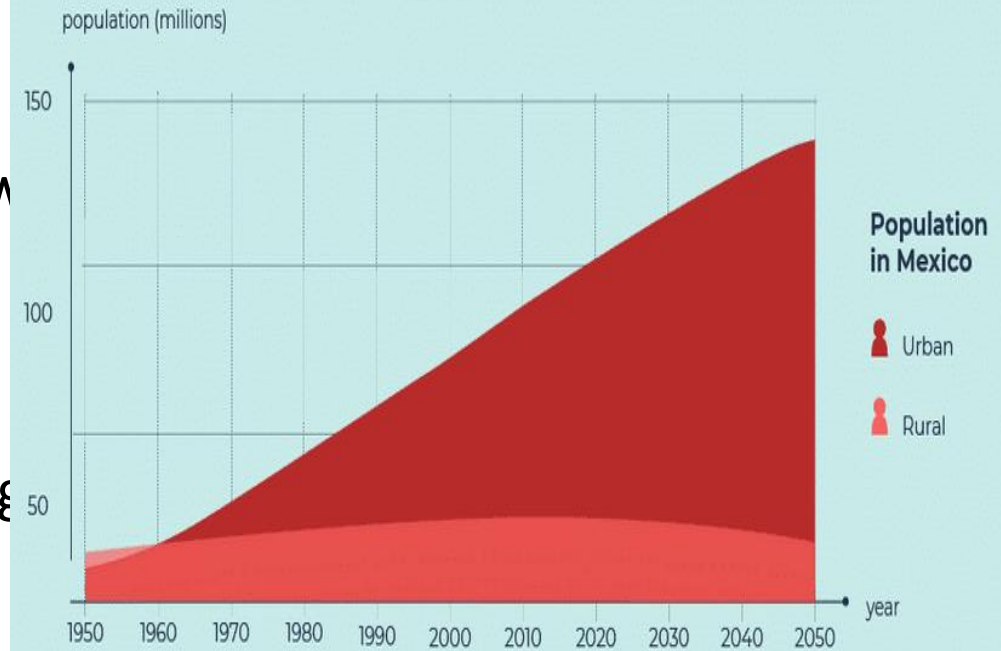
- Over one-third of Canada's whole population live in three distinctive urban areas
  - Different economic foundations: Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal.
  - Some smaller urban areas such as Edmonton, Calgary, and Halifax have seen a significant growth of their urban areas as well
- 90%, lives within 160 km of the U.S. border and eight out of ten of Canada's largest cities are located on just 5% of its land
- Lower-income migrants to the outer suburbs of cities
- More than half of all Canadian indigenous populations have relocated to cities from rural areas
  - Faced with severe poverty and discriminatory practices



# Mexico

- 129 million inhabitants with 79% of the population considered urban
- Urbanized more recently and in specific phases
  - In the period from 1940 – 1980 urbanization grew from 20 percent to 51.8 percent with a massive migration of rural workers seeking opportunities in urban areas
- No preparation for such a massive migration resulting in informal settlements, slums, and a lack of infrastructure and employment opportunities
- Next phase of urbanization, from 1980 – 2010 saw another rapid increase to 62.5 percent

## Urban and Rural Population in Mexico



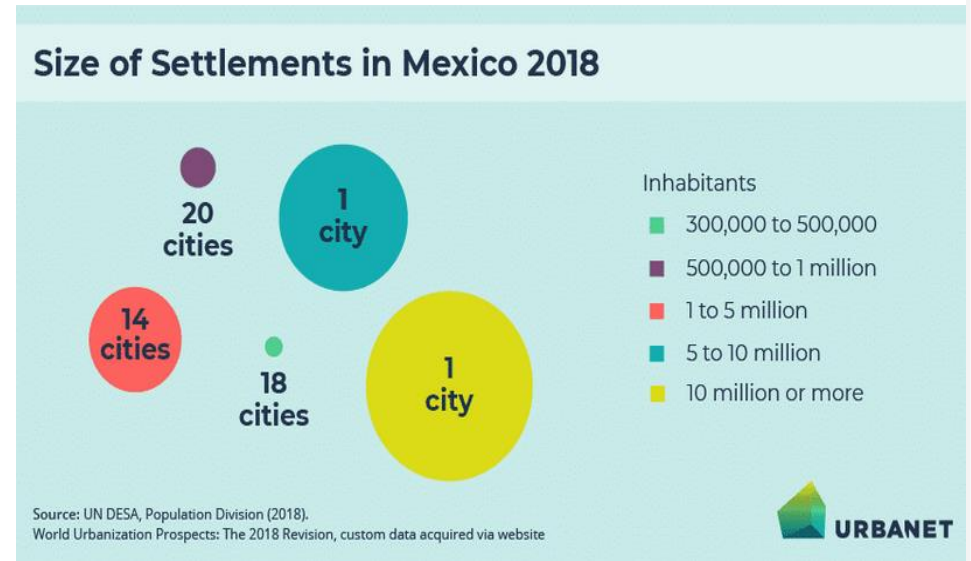
Source: UN DESA, Population Division (2018).  
World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, custom data acquired via website





# Distinctive Features of Mexican Urbanization

- 22 million inhabitants, greater Mexico City is now by far the largest city in North America
  - One of the top five mega cities of the world though medium-sized urban areas with 450,000 to 1 million inhabitants have grown the fastest over the last several decades
- Rapid urbanization has occurred primarily along city margins leading to major urban sprawl
- Poor land-use planning as well as inadequate land available for low-income residents,
  - Emergence of irregular settlements in risk prone areas that are devastated during earthquakes, floods, and tropical storms
  - One-fourth of urban households live in informal settlements
- 2013, the Ministry of Agrarian, Territorial and Urban development: focus on urban policy and housing issues
  - Aim was to create a more coordinated response



# Urbanization & Housing

- Closely linked with the creation and access to affordable housing.
- Fundamental human right is to have a safe and comfortable home
- Challenges in the U.S., Canada, & Mexico:
  - Unplanned urbanization
  - Stagnation of household incomes
  - Dominance of Airbnb and other types of short-term rental options
  - Control of housing markets by large commercial entities, are influencing housing patterns and housing availability
- Access to affordable housing has become a global problem including in high and low-income countries.



# Housing is Key

- U.S. National Housing Task Force (1988)
- “... a decent place for a family to live becomes a platform for dignity and self-respect and a base for hope and improvement. A decent home allows people to take advantage of opportunities in education, health and employment – the means to get ahead in our society. A decent home is the important beginning point for growth in the mainstream of American life”

## Physical attributes and availability of housing

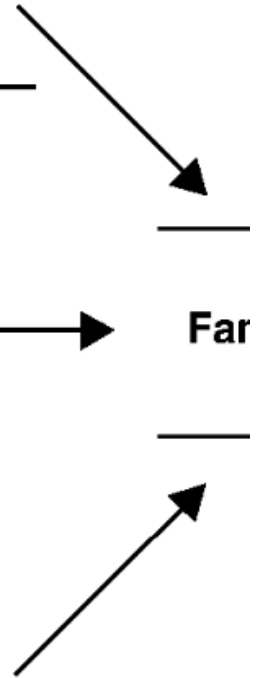
good quality and safety  
housing, not homelessness

## Relationship of housing to occupant

not overcrowded  
affordable  
opportunities to create positive sense  
of self and empowerment  
stable and secure  
tenure options

## Neighbourhood conditions

good quality and safety  
accessibility of housing to  
employment and education



**Figure 1.** Connections between housing and far



# The United States & Housing

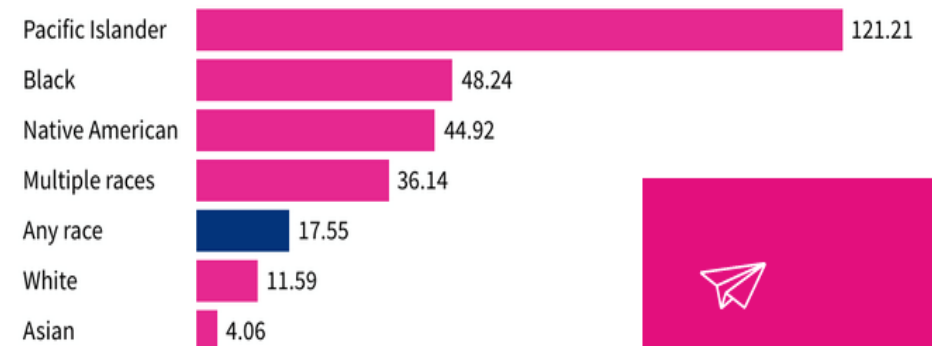
- 31.5 percent of households in the United States pay more than 30 percent of their incomes in housing
  - Under current guidelines, households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, are considered cost burdened

Housing costs and their accompanying housing insecurity issues are primarily experienced by low-income populations, individuals with disabilities, and families of color

- U.S. has a shortage of 7.3 million affordable rental homes available to those with extremely low incomes – which is defined as an income at or below either the federal poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income, whichever is greater
  - Approximately 33 affordable rental homes are available for every 100 extremely low-income renter households
  - Problem in every state and major metropolitan area
- Homelessness: 2022 (HUD) - 582,462 individuals were listed as being homeless
  - Equals about 18 out of every 10,000 people and includes individuals of all genders, every racial and ethnic group, and from every region of the country

## Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have the highest rate of homelessness in the US.

Rates of homelessness per 10,000 by race, 2022



# Canada & Housing

- Major affordable housing crisis with amongst the highest home prices in the G7 and the top OECD countries
- Between 2011 and 2021, households that rented grew by 21.5 percent while homeownership went up by 8.4 percent
  - Renters were more than twice as likely to be in homes that overstretched their budgets in comparison to homeowners (Statistics Canada, 2023)
- Young people are the ones who are most often faced by housing affordability issues as they move to metropolitan areas to study or work
- Rental demand in Canada is driven in great part by recent international migrants and the high influx of foreign students coming in to attend institutions of higher learning



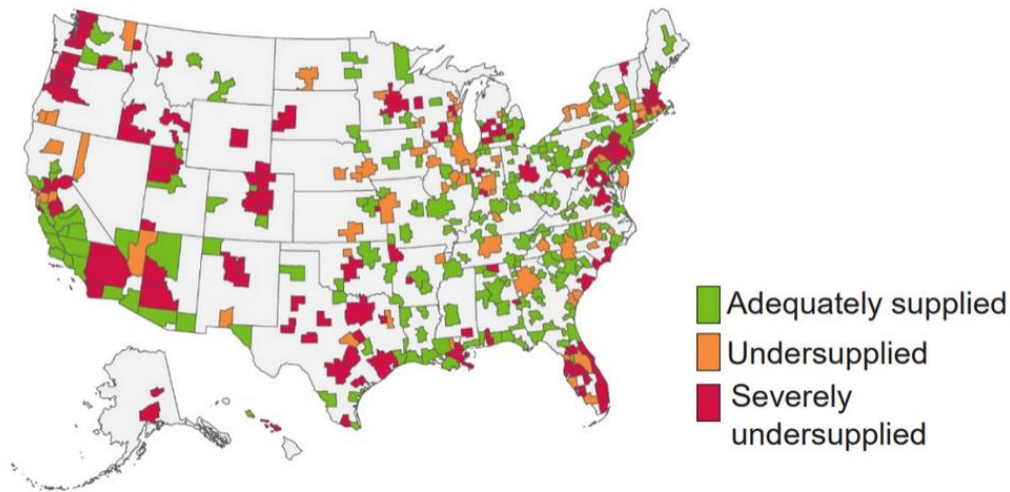
# Mexico & Housing

- In contrast to the United States where housing is primarily financed through private entities, in Mexico, a government agency, INFONAVIT, finances most mortgages
- Mission is to guarantee decent housing for all workers – a right that is enshrined in the Mexican constitution
- Members (formal, salaried employees – or approximately 40 percent of the workforce) are obligated to contribute 5% of their salaries to this fund for their housing needs. The fund is also subsidized by the government and businesses.
- Housing policy framework has contributed to an exponential housing expansion in urban margins as it encourages individual homes to be built where land is cheaper
  - Increase in vacant houses, especially on the periphery of urban areas
  - Multiple infra-structure challenges including high levels of pollution, poor water quality and inadequate waste-water treatment
- Mexico currently ranks among the bottom five countries on the OECD's Better Life index due to these issues



# A North American Housing Crisis

Chart 2: Shortages Plague Much of U.S.



Sources: Census Bureau, Moody's Analytics

Many states in the US have housing shortages. Image: Moody's Analytics

- All three North American countries face severe affordable housing crises
- Little public and policy attention
- Housing is not just important on an individual and familial level: housing can also play a key role in social integration for individuals across socio-economic classes and from varying backgrounds
- Access to safe homes, public spaces, civic buildings, and green spaces = more likely to interact with each other in a peaceful manner leading to social cohesion and greater potential for cultural and social understanding.

# Gender, Disabilities, & Urbanization

- Women & Individuals with disabilities face unique challenges:
  - Harassment or violence
  - Cannot access basic services such as health care
  - Get to their places of employment safely – may structure their work hours in order not to be out late
  - Public parks can be dangerous places
- Example of Vienna, Austria:
  - Initiated an involved process to make urban areas and transportation safer for women
  - Added street lights and widened side walks in large urban areas





# Urbanization And Green Spaces

In the U.S. these days it is common to allocate about 15 percent of land to streets in newly planned areas, which is considerably less than it was in the past. In unplanned regions, the average is about 2 percent of land

- Adequate public space crucial to increase accessibility of services and employment, as well as greater connectivity especially for women, older persons, and individuals with disabilities
- Example: Cleveland, Ohio, LAND studio formed in 2011
  - Brought together individuals from disadvantaged neighborhoods, artists, landscapers and developers to create inner city public spaces that are accessible to their residents
  - Partners with city officials, art foundations, the Trust for Public Land and conservancies to create multi-purpose projects
  - LAND exemplifies a public-private partnership that includes resident participation and support



# Urbanization And Green Spaces

- Growing focus in early childhood
- Nature-based play: facilitates early development and leads to positive youth outcomes
- Better mental health = healthier close relationships

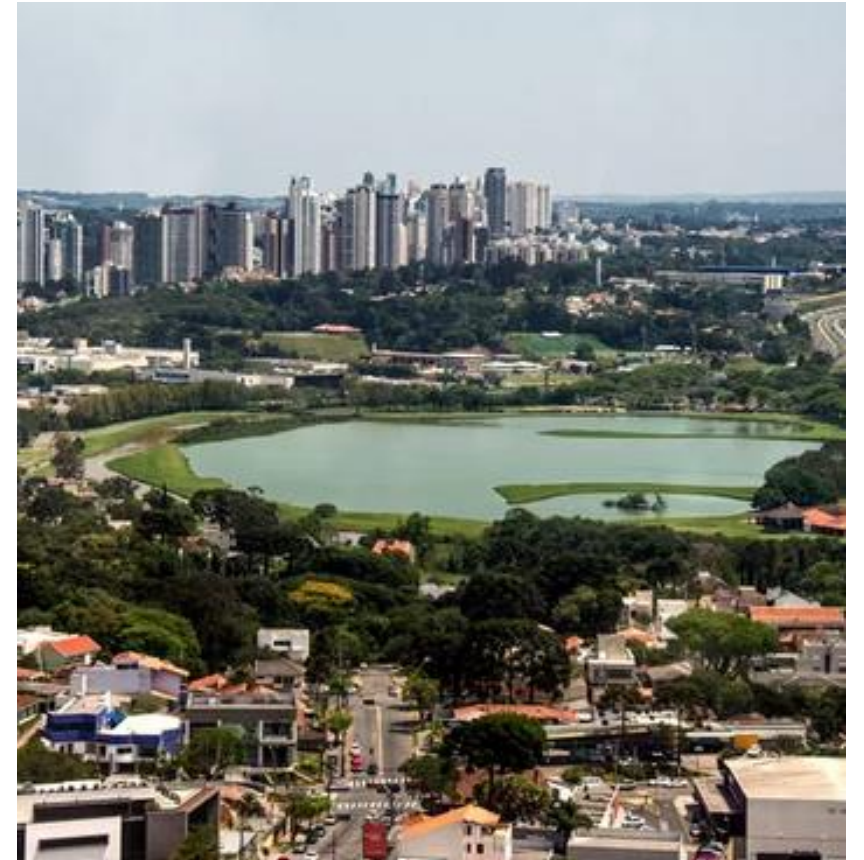




# Global Examples

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- Temple Univ. & Brookings
  - Partnering to integrate urban design and placemaking with the science of learning
  - Playful Learning Landscapes Action Network (PLLAN) is creating learning opportunities in everyday places such as bus stops, parks and supermarkets
- Curitiba, Brazil
  - Conscious planning process that expanded the amount of green space per resident
  - 1.5 million trees were planted and a complex network of pedestrian walkways were incorporated into the city design
  - Life expectancy in Curitiba is now two years longer for residents than in the rest of Brazil



# A Plan Forward for North America

- Urban Agenda emphasizes collaboration and supportive partnerships between smaller and larger urban areas in regional areas
- Partnerships support equitable development and incorporate cultural and regional differences to ensure that rural areas and marginalized populations are not left behind
- New paradigm that incorporates economic development with ecological protections and emphasizes social equity and social needs
- Sustainable Urbanization = Equity, access, social cohesion



# Recommendations

- *Standardize definitions*
- *Increase capacity for data collection*
- *Expand the training and incorporation of urban planners*
- *Create incentives for economic opportunities, mixed income and use development, and create linkages with transportation planning*
- *Design and retro-fit urban areas to be flexible use spaces*
- *Acknowledge and support the link between urbanization, physical and mental health, and access to nature / green spaces*
- *Provide safe and easily accessible public spaces that are accessible to all residents of urban areas including vulnerable populations*
- *Prioritize family, gender, and disability issues, rights, and concerns through formal and informal efforts in urban planning*

- Well-planned urban areas can decrease social inequalities and promote family life
- Families, in all their diversity of shapes and sizes, need to be supported through ***affordable housing, economic opportunities, reliable, safe transportation, and access to education, social services, and green spaces***
- Through mindful, sustainable urbanization, cities become the conduit for more peaceful equitable societies







*Thank you!!!*

