



ALGERIA

Cities were defined in 1998 as towns of at least 5 000 people, with a 25% maximum of agricultural workers, access to drinking water and electricity, a sanitation network and a reasonable quality of infrastructure. According to these criteria, the urbanisation level grew from 17% in 1950 to 70% in 2014, both as an effect of changes in definition, as well as of successive boundary changes in administrative divisions to produce an ever-more specific territorial delimitation. A pro-active housing policy has been implemented in the face of significant rural-urban migration induced by the country's industrialisation model, which required the development of peri-urban areas. The urban transition happened between 1987 and 1988, the year in which the population became urban in its majority across the country's 48 administrative divisions (*wilayas*), or provinces.

The regional-planning authorities have systematically integrated the concept of sustainability into the legislative texts and regional policy tools underpinning the government's management of specific development schemes, plans and programmes articulated around the three major Littoral, Highlands and Sahara areas.

The Littoral area is 4% of the national territory on a coastal strip 1 622 km long and 60 km wide that is home to 80% of the population. Its ecosystem is fragile, under constant threat of degradation because of the density of its population, economic activities and infrastructure. This high demographic concentration has led to rapidly growing urbanisation levels at the expense of farmland, and to concentrating 51% of national industrial capacity in this area, which features 5 242 production units, of which 60 are high-risk.

In the Highlands, the number of urban areas with more than 10 000 people was multiplied by a factor of 12 between 1954 and 1998. Important investments and public programmes were implemented, aiming to relieve the demographic pressure on the Littoral and to redistribute the population, activities and infrastructure to the mountain plateaux and Highlands.

In 2014, the Southern *wilayas* were home to nearly 10% of the population on an area of about 2 million km², or 80% of the territory. Before the discovery of oil in 1956, the Sahara had only ten towns whose populations were no more than 5 000 but by 2015, the majority of the Southern population was urban. However, this rapid urban growth was unsustainable because of interacting factors. In particular, the appeal of jobs in oil-and-gas-based activities, the development of cash-crop farming and administrative promotion policies led to some form of settlement of nomadic peoples.

The country has good road and motorway infrastructure, a railway network connecting the main cities, and airports with high flight frequency across the nation. The performance of the supply chain between cities and rural areas is well established. The rural hinterland supplies the urban areas with fruit and vegetables, while cereals are primarily sourced from international markets.

At the institutional level, urban-development policies are the responsibility of the Ministry of Regional Planning, Tourism and Craft Industry, and the Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and the City, illustrating the two priority dimensions of urbanisation. Most urban planning is integrated into the national regional-planning scheme (*Schéma national d'aménagement du territoire – SNAT*), which covers regional-programming areas, large cities and the *wilayas*. Urban networks are therefore managed through a number of regional planning tools (including SNAT) providing overall guidance. More specifically, SNAT aims to set up a polarised, hierarchical and articulated national urban system, with a view to promoting a balanced set-up of competitive regions. The SNAT is currently being evaluated and updated.



Urban planning is governed by the 1990 law on town planning and development, the 2002 law governing the conditions for the construction and development of new cities, as well as the 2006 law governing urban policy, which is a multidimensional set of regulations intended to promote the economic, social, cultural and institutional development of cities. In its implementation, urban planning falls under the urban development plan (*Plan de développement et d'aménagement urbain*) and the land-use plan (*Plan d'occupation des sols*) intended to equip towns with productive and social functions that will support endogenous development, as well as higher competitiveness and productivity. Since the 2000s, major infrastructural projects were launched, such as the Algiers underground and national motorways, as well as a number of programmes aiming to enhance housing supply, upgrade informal settlements and clear slums.

Four metropolitan areas (three of which are in the Littoral area) stand out as being of relatively stable importance: Algiers, Oran, Constantine and Annaba. These four cities alone are home to a little more than 37% of the urban population. Their growth has spread to their suburbs, where 8.5% of urban populations live. They drive the overall dynamics as places where human, technical and financial capital are concentrated, as service and activity hubs, vectors of economic opening and technological-innovation foci. Other urban hubs throughout the territory may be regional and administrative centres but they do not have sufficient economic foundations to diffuse growth. The urban system is thus unbalanced, between large over-endowed cities and an indistinct base of secondary towns with sparsely structured functions and relations. Urban growth, which has come at the expense of the rural world, has brought with it worsening living conditions in a spreading, badly equipped urban fabric, a rise in precarious housing, as well as transport and pollution problems. A process of catching-up and developing the potential of urbanisation is thus ongoing.

The great challenges cities are facing reflect the stakes at the national scale, but they also provide opportunities. The authorities see urbanisation as a major challenge, and have made its planning a priority.