

# Policy Brief No 10 of 2025

## Urbanization and Access to Essential Services

### Overview:

The world’s population will continue to concentrate in urban areas. It is projected that 62.5 percent of the world’s population will be residing in urban areas by the year 2035. The share of urban population in Kenya increased from 5.3 percent in 1948, to 9.8 percent in 1969, then to 19.3 percent in 1999, and to 31.2 percent in 2019. Mombasa (42%) and Nandi (42%) counties have the highest proportions of urban households using unimproved water sources, while Wajir (56%) has the highest proportion of households with unimproved sanitation systems. Article 184 of the 2010 CoK, the National Urban Development Policy (2016) and Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011) all respond to urbanization and related issues. However, there are regional disparities in access to these services across urban centres in different counties. It is recommended that County governments fully embrace and implement the Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011) and County Departments of Social Protection scale up interventions and programmes.

### Background:

The world’s population will continue to concentrate in urban areas. It is projected that 62.5 percent of the world’s population will be residing in urban areas by the year 2035. In East Africa, Tanzania and Kenya have more people living in urban areas with urbanisation levels of 35.2 percent and 31.2 percent, respectively.

**SDG 11** aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable and specifically, **Target 11.1** is on ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services. In Kenya, Article 184 of the 2010 CoK, the National Urban Development Policy (2016) and Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011) all respond to urbanization and related issues.

### Water Sources and Sanitation Systems

#### Water Sources

**Improved:** Protected well or spring; borehole or tube well; piped water, public tap or standpipe; and harvested rain water  
**Unimproved:** Unprotected well or spring; pond, dam, lake, stream or river; and water vendor

#### Human Waste Disposal Systems

**Improved:** Main sewer; septic tank or cess pool; VIP or covered pit latrine; and bio-septic tank or biodigester  
**Unimproved:** Uncovered pit latrine; bucket latrine; and open defecation

#### Solid Waste Disposal Systems

**Improved:** Collected by county government, private entity or company; and dumped in latrine, burnt in open or pit, buried, or composted in pit  
**Unimproved:** Dumped in compound, street, vacant plot, drain or waterway

### Key Findings:

The urban population in Kenya increased from 280,000 people in 1948, to 1 million in 1969, then to 5.4 million in 1999, then to 14.8 million in 2019, and is projected to increase to 27 million people by the year 2035

The share of urban population increased from 5.3 percent in 1948, to 9.8 percent in 1969, then to 19.3 percent in 1999, and to 31.2 percent in 2019 as shown in Figure 1.

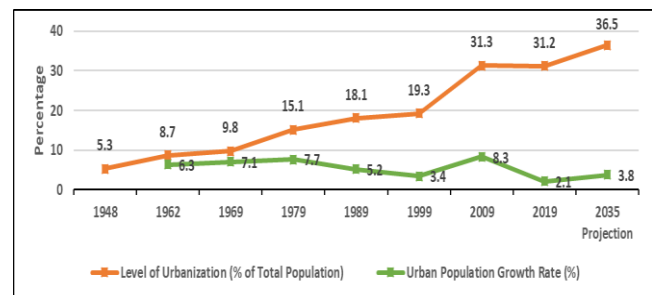


Figure 1: Levels and Rates of Urbanisation, 1948-2035  
Source: 2019 KPHC Analytical Report on Urbanisation, Vol. IX; World Cities Report, 2022

Figure 2 shows that Mombasa (42%) and Nandi (42%) counties have the highest proportions of urban households using unimproved water sources, while Wajir (56%) has the highest proportion of households with unimproved sanitation systems. Notably, Kisii, Turkana, Tana River, Nyamira and Nandi counties have a double burden of access to unimproved water sources and unimproved sanitation systems.

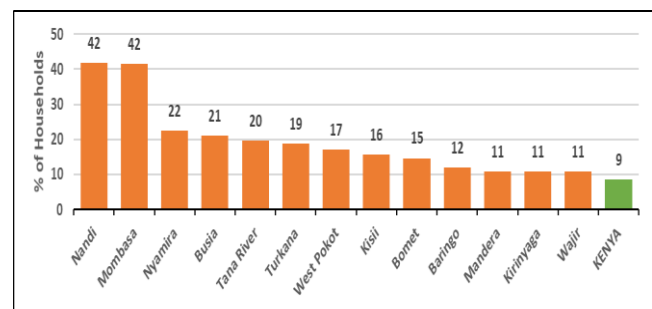
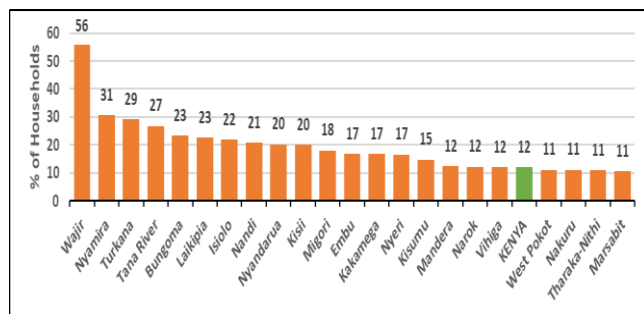


Figure 2: Counties with High Proportions of Urban Households Using Unimproved Water Sources  
Source: Kenya Demographic and Health Survey Dataset, 2022

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**Figure 2:** Counties with High Proportions of Urban Households Using Unimproved Water Sources

Source: Kenya Demographic and Health Survey Dataset, 2022

### Implications:

- Strengthening public facilities, regulating private providers in informal settlements, and implementing person-centered care principles will reduce disparities in quality and access that undermine Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- Strengthening local government capacity (counties), enhancing local revenue, and involving communities in decision-making for better alignment with needs will reduce political interference and weak accountability.

### Recommendations:

1. County governments to fully embrace and implement the Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011).
2. County governments and the Department of Social Protection to scale up interventions and programmes that target the lives and living conditions of the urban poor, vulnerable groups, and those living in informal settlements.
3. National and County governments to implement National Sanitation Policy (2024).

### Conclusion:

Full implementation of the Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011) and the National Sanitation Policy (2024) is required to ensure access to essential services increases, together with urbanisation.

### References

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This Policy Brief is based on the Kenya Population Situational Analysis Report 2025.

**Collaborating Organizations:** National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), Population Studies and Research Institute (PSRI) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

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NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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