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## Pakistan Cities Face Risks from Unplanned Urban Sprawl

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Uncontrolled urban expansion is threatening the long-term sustainability of Pakistan’s major cities, experts warn, as rapid population growth outpaces infrastructure and planning efforts.

Noman Ahmed, an urban planning advisor at GIZ Pakistan, told WealthPK that cities like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi are absorbing over 500,000 new residents each year due to rural migration. The World Bank reports that Pakistan’s urban population is growing at 2.7 percent annually, one of the fastest rates in South Asia.

Ahmed highlighted that the majority of this growth is informal and unregulated. In the absence of adequate zoning laws, housing regulations, and environmental safeguards, urban development is spreading horizontally, often replacing agricultural land, forests, and wetlands without proper environmental assessments.

This sprawl puts immense pressure on land, water, and air resources. Basic services such as clean drinking water, sewage management, waste collection, and affordable housing remain severely lacking in most expanding urban areas.

Recent monsoon rains have exposed the consequences of poor planning. Cities like Lahore and Rawalpindi have experienced severe flooding, with roads submerged and traffic brought to a standstill. Urban infrastructure, including drainage systems and roads, is unable to cope with the increasing population and erratic climate events.

Ahmed recommends a shift toward vertical growth to reduce the strain on urban land. He also advocates for the mandatory implementation of green building codes and the proper treatment of industrial waste. Strategic public-private partnerships, he said, could support low-income housing projects while promoting renewable energy and sustainable waste systems.

The World Bank has also raised concerns about outdated land-use policies, weak municipal governance, and overreliance on federal funding. These issues have slowed reforms that could make cities more resilient and livable.

As Pakistan's urban share approaches 40 percent and is projected to reach nearly 60 percent by 2050, experts urge immediate action. Without proper planning and investment in sustainable infrastructure, unplanned urban sprawl may undermine economic growth, environmental health, and public safety across the country.