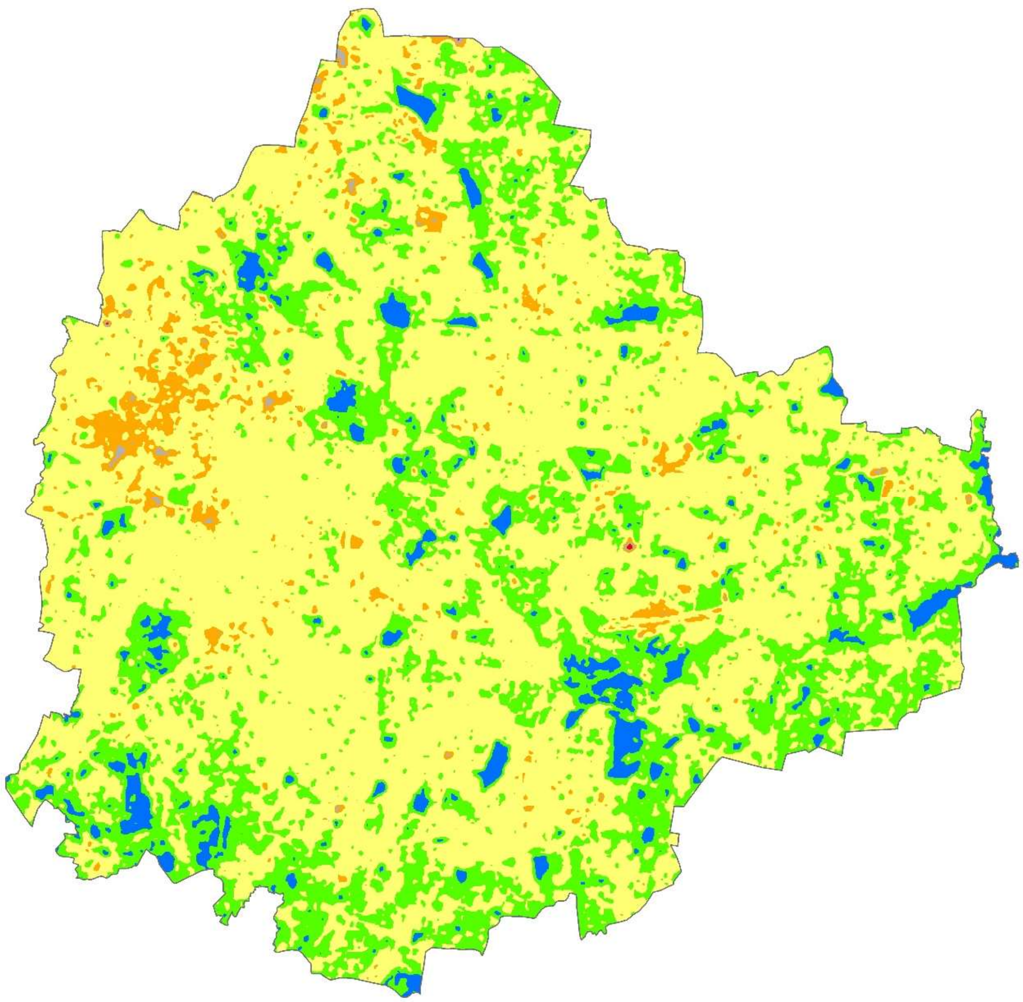
Urban Heat Stress Tracker



Bengaluru

Research direction: Anumita Roychowdhury

Authors: Avikal Somvanshi and Sharanjeet Kaur

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Centre for Science and Environment
41, Tughlakabad Institutional Area
New Bengaluru 110 062
Phones: 91-11-40616000
Fax: 91-11-29955879
E-mail: sales@cseinida.org
Website: www.cseindia.org

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Overview

Heatwaves have become a staple of Indian summer due to the climate change. No region of the country is immune to this worsening phenomenon. States and cities are publishing their heat action plans to safeguard their populations from the dangerous heat exposures during heatwaves. These plans, while outlining the measures for emergency response and preparedness, also define the responsibilities of stakeholder departments in the event of a heatwave. These policy interventions assume significance at a time when heat and temperature trends are expected to worsen due to climate change and growing urbanization.

The relevance of these policy actions need to be understood against the rapidly changing global climate. The technical summary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group-I, Sixth Assessment Report (AR6 WG-I) notes that it is almost certain that the frequency and intensity of heat extremes and duration of heat waves have increased since 1950 and this will keep increasing even if global warming is stabilized at 1.5°C.[1] Combining climate change projections with urban growth scenarios, it can be said with very high confidence that future urbanization will amplify the projected increase in local air temperature.

With reference to urban centres, the IPCC Working Group-II, in its assessment (AR6 WG-II), also notes with confidence that hot extremes, including heat waves, have intensified in cities. It further notes that urban areas experience air temperatures that are several degrees warmer than surrounding areas, especially during the night. The urban heat island effect can add 2°C to local warming, reducing the adaptive capacity of cities and increasing the aforementioned risks.[2] This is due to reduced ventilation, heat trapping by closely-spaced tall buildings, heat generated directly from human activities, heat-absorbing properties of concrete and urban building materials, and limited vegetation. Infrastructure related to transportation, water, sanitation, energy and others has been compromised by extreme and slow-onset events, resulting in economic losses and disruption of services, impacting the well-being of people.

This emerging scientific evidence of the adverse impact of rising heat on urban populations builds the case for a city-specific heat management regime and the urgent implementation of heat action plans in cities. Such planning approaches also need to go much deeper than the immediate emergency response to help cope with specific heat events during summer and prevent heat lock-in. This is not only about summer action for public health protection but more sustained action throughout the year to heat proof the city and undertake heat mitigation, along with monitoring, to improve the overall adaptive thermal comfort of built structures and reduce energy and carbon intensity of built environment.

Such planning and intervention are possible if cities develop a tracking mechanism for annual and diurnal trends in temperature, humidity and the overall heat index to inform planning and implementation. Understanding the trend in heat and humidity patterns over time as well as during the day and night is necessary.

It is often noted that health emergency action considers the high daytime temperatures and not the nighttime temperatures and relative humidity. This overall trend poses risks to both public health and the energy security of the city, underlying the need tointegrate this consideration into informing the heat action plan. The heat problem is not just about focusing on daily maximum temperatures crossing the 45°C benchmark—the standard focus during summer—but involves a much more complex set of indices.

Urban heat mitigation also requires more robust scientific tracking of key indicators—not just ambient heat and temperature, but also surface heat absorption and land surface temperatures, changing land-use, including vegetative cover and water bodies that are determinants to the heat island effect. This requires effective leveraging of the available satellite technology. Given advancements in technology, such data is available but needs policy integration.

It is equally important to track the various impacts of rising heat in the cities. The increasing heat is known to compromise the adaptive thermal comfort of people in cities and increase the demand for active cooling and use of mechanical cooling systems, including air conditioning which is an energy guzzler. This impacts the overall energy demand and energy security of the city and the region. Yet, this dilapidating aspect of heat on a city's natural cooling abilities, including the rising trend in electricity demand to keep cool, is never tracked and considered for the active thermal management of cities.

This deeper conversation has to begin now because Bengaluru and several other states and cities have started developing their respective heat action plans.

In view of this, the Centre for Science and Environment has carried out this case study of select metro cities of India to analyse the trends in heat, humidity, land surface temperature and change in land use patterns to bring out the complex nature of heat management in cities. This detailed analysis of the heat scape of Bengaluru considers the time frame from 2001 to 2023.

This analysis has focused on the trends in day and night time temperature, humidity levels, seasonal variations, heat trends during day and night, trend in land surface temperature and trend in built-up area in the six megacities. Analysing these trends have provided deep insight into what is needed to inform the heat management practice in the city.

Methodology and data

The study is based on comparative statistical analysis of temperature and the humidity condition observed in Bengaluru since 2001. The study's definition of summer is the period from March to August. It is further divided into pre-monsoon (March-May) and monsoon (June-August) as per IMD classification. This is based on publicly available datasets from various national and global agencies. Ambient temperature and humidity data have been sourced from Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) weather stations at Palam and Safdarjung. An average of the findings from these two weather stations is used to represent Bengaluru in this study. Heat Index computation has been done using the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) formula. Complex geospatial calculations have been done in python and ArcGIS.

Moreover, freely accessible MODIS Land Science data from NASA Earth Observations has been used for seasonal and long term analysis of land surface temperature. For more granular analysis of heat and land use conditions on extremely hot days, satellite imagery data from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Earth Explorer website has been used. Landsat 7 Enhanced Thematic Mapper Plus (ETM+) and Landsat 8 operational land imager/thermal infrared sensor (OLI/TIRS) satellite imagery were downloaded and used to analyse the land surface temperature, land use, land cover and Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (Green cover).

This city-level assessment focuses on changes in heat patterns over the years for the summer season, urban expansion over the years, and land surface temperature variation during the summer of 2003, 2013, and 2022. For Bengaluru, the later analysis is based on 10 May 2003, 29 May 2013, 14 May 2022, and 9 May 2023.

Highlights

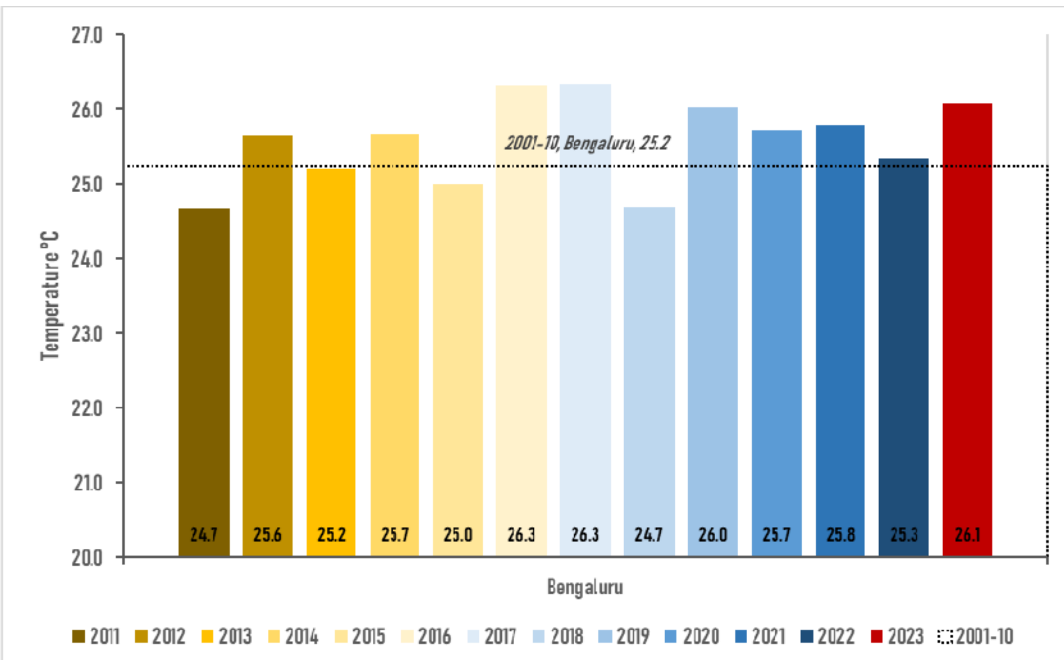
- **2024 March-April so far has been significantly hotter (about 3°C) compared to average of 2014-23.**
- **Bengaluru's summertime has registered 0.5°C increase in decadal average ambient air temperature while the relative humidity has remained stable over last two decades.**
- **Humidity is responsible for adding on average 0.6°C of heat stress to the city. Heat Index of the city has increased by 2 per cent.**
- **Pre-monsoon are more thermally unconformable than monsoon. Average heat index during pre-monsoon is 3°C more than monsoon.**
- **City is not cooling down at night. The diurnal cooling down of land surface temperature between daytime and nighttime is down by 15 per cent.**
- **Urban heat island phenomena is stronger at night than daytime in Bengaluru. During the daytime core of Bengaluru is 0.6°C cooler than its peripheries and peri-urban areas during the summer. But at night the core of Bengaluru is 2.5°C warmer than its peripheries and peri-urban areas**
- **There is direct co-relation between increase in built-up area and increase in urban heat stress.Built up area has increased from 37.5 per cent in 2003 to 71.5 per cent in 2023. Green cover has increased from 18.8 per cent in 2003 to 26.4 per cent in 2023. Increase in green cover shows impact on daytime temperatures but has no impact on nighttime temperature and increasing heat index in the city.**

Key findings

Decadal trend in summertime heat

Ambient air temperature in Bengaluruduring summertime shows little change: Recent few Bengaluru summers (March-August) have been hotter than the average of first decade of the 21st century (2001-10). Decadal summertime average for Bengaluru in 2001-10 used to be 25.2°C on average which has increased to 25.7°C in 2014-23; a rise of 0.5°C (see *Graph 1: Trend in summertime seasonal average ambient temperature in Bengaluru 2011-2023*).

Graph 1: Trend in summertime seasonal average ambient temperature in Bengaluru2011-2023

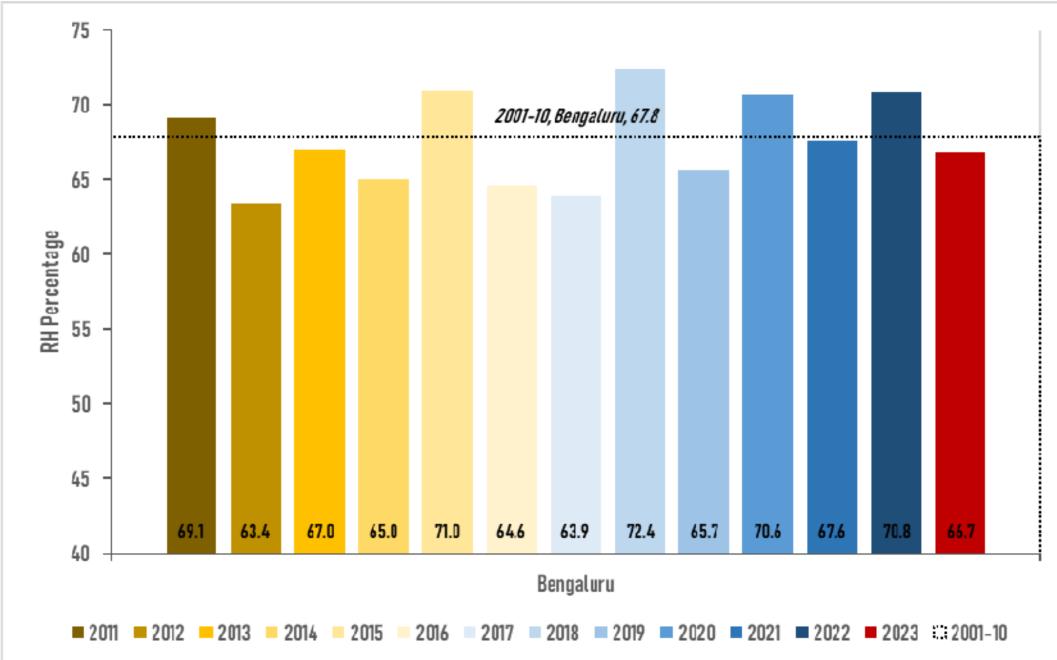


Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. A city's weather profile is based on average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Nature of heat in Bengaluruhas not changed in last two decades as relative humidity during summer is stable: Average Relative Humidity (RH) in Bengaluru has not significantly changed over last two decades. The average RH of last 10 summers same as the 2001-10 average, i.e. 67.8 per cent (see *Graph 2: Trend in summertime seasonal relative humidity in Chennai 2011-2023*).

This combination of high heat and humidity can compromise the human body's main cooling mechanism: sweating. The evaporation of sweat from skin cools our bodies, but higher humidity levels limit this natural cooling. As a result, people can suffer heat stress and illness, and the consequences can even be fatal even at much lower ambient temperatures. Impact of this increasing humidity can be measured on human thermal comfort via means of Heat Index (HI). According to the U.S. National Weather Service, the heat index is a measure of how hot it really feels when humidity is factored in with the actual temperature. It is considered that a heat index of 41°C is dangerous to human health.

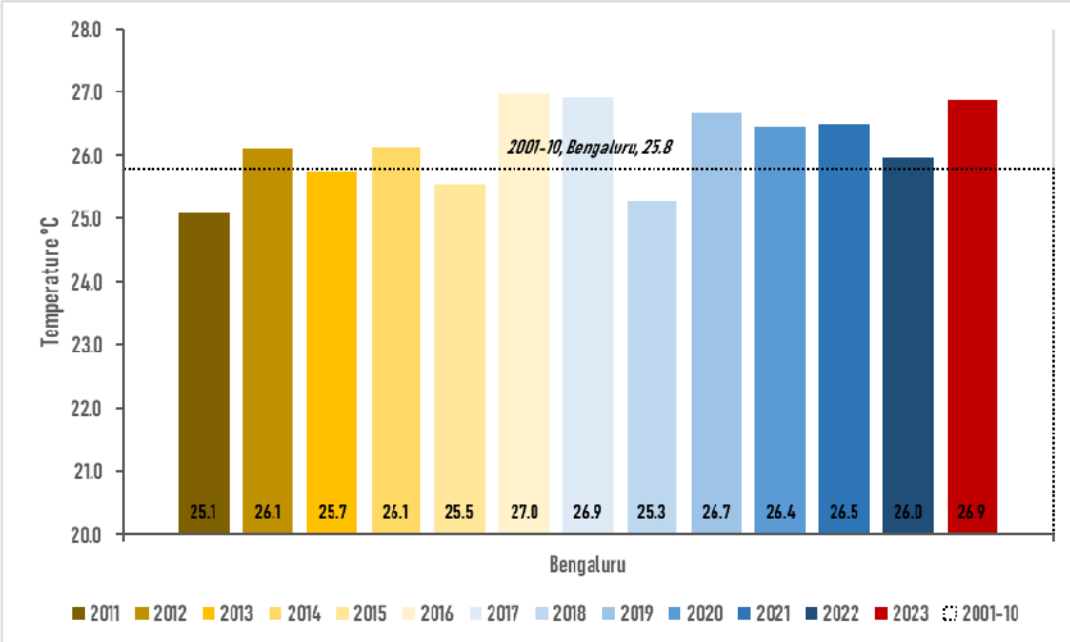
Graph 2: Trend in summertime seasonal relative humidity in Bengaluru 2011-2023



Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Heat Index rising at same rate as ambient temperature in Bengaluru: Heat Index (HI) which is a better measure of human thermal discomforthas risen in Bengaluru. Bengaluru's summer HI average during 2001-10 used to be 25.8°C (impact of humidity: 0.6°C) which has increased to 26.3°C (impact of humidity: 0.6°C) during 2014-23 (see *Graph 3: Trend in summertime seasonal average Heat Index in Bengaluru 2011-2023*).

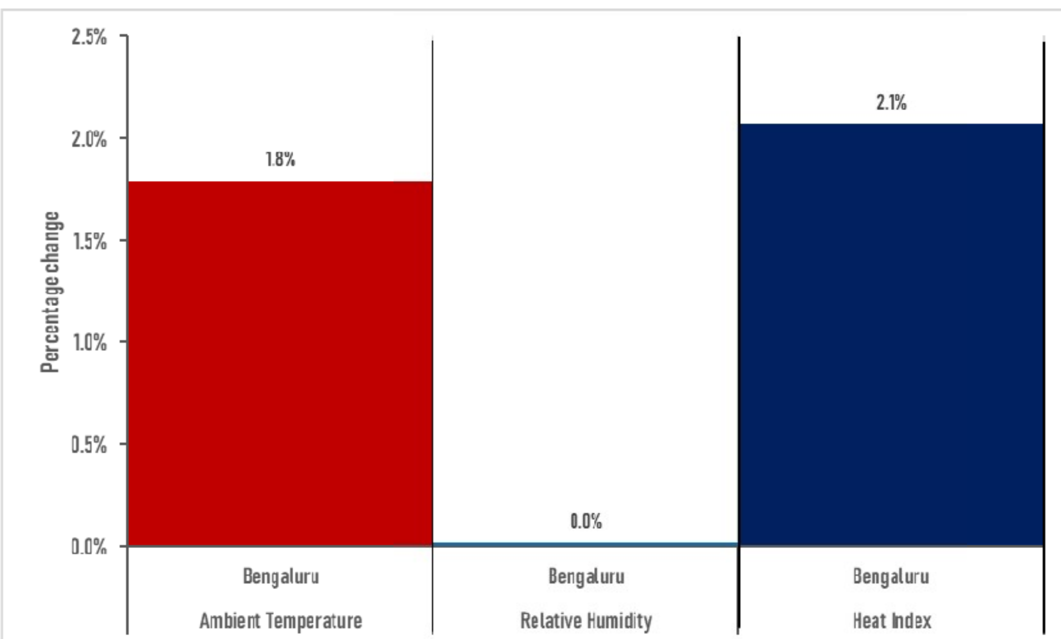
Graph 3: Trend in summertime seasonal average Heat Index in Bengaluru 2011-2023



Note:Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. A city's weather profile is based on average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. Heat index has been calculated using the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration formula. * Data uptill 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Bengaluru summer on average is about 2 per cent hotter than it was in the first decade of the century: Decadal RH average (2014-23) has not changed in Bengaluru compared to 2001-10 average but the 1.8 per cent increase in the decadal ambient air temperature has impacted the heat stress in the city. As a result,Bengaluru's decadal average HI is up by 2.1 per cent (see *Graph 4: Trend in decadal summertime heat in Bengaluru 2014-23 vs 2001-2010*).

Graph 4: Trend in decadal summertime heat in Bengaluru 2014-23 vs 2001-2010



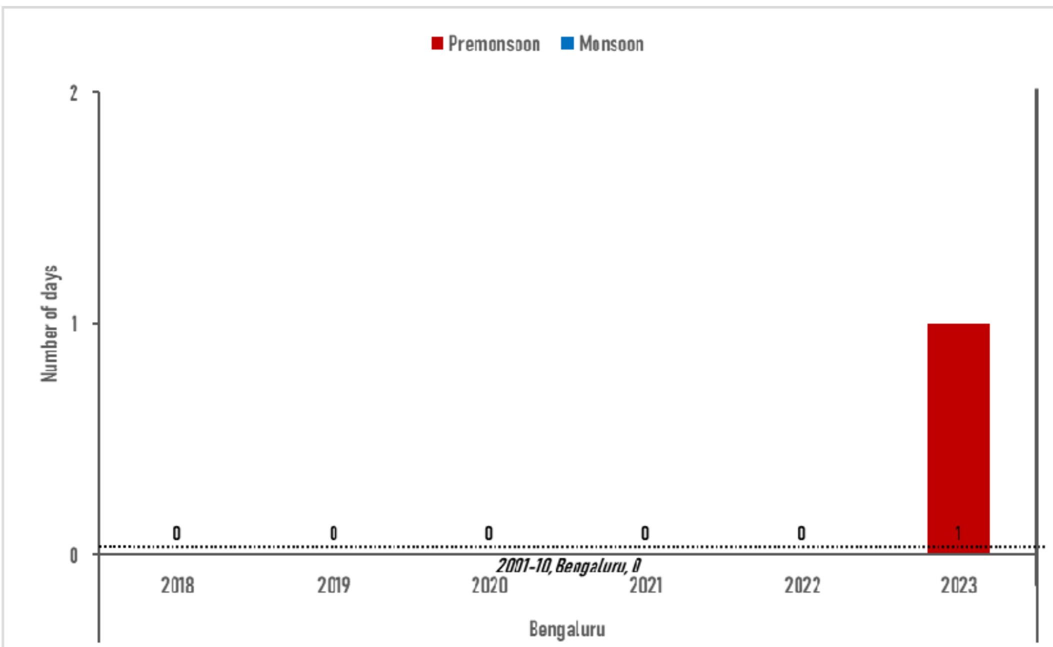
Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. Heat index has been calculated using the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration formula. * Data until 30 August 2023.

Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Bengaluru still doesn't get any days with high ambient temperatures or with dangerously high heat index: Bengalurudid not have any days in a summer with high ambient temperature (37°C+)during 2001-10 but it registered just one day with such high temperatures in 2023 summer (see *Graph 5: Trend in days with 37°C+ daily maximum temperature in Bengaluru 2018-2023*). This was the first such day noted in the study period of this analysis.

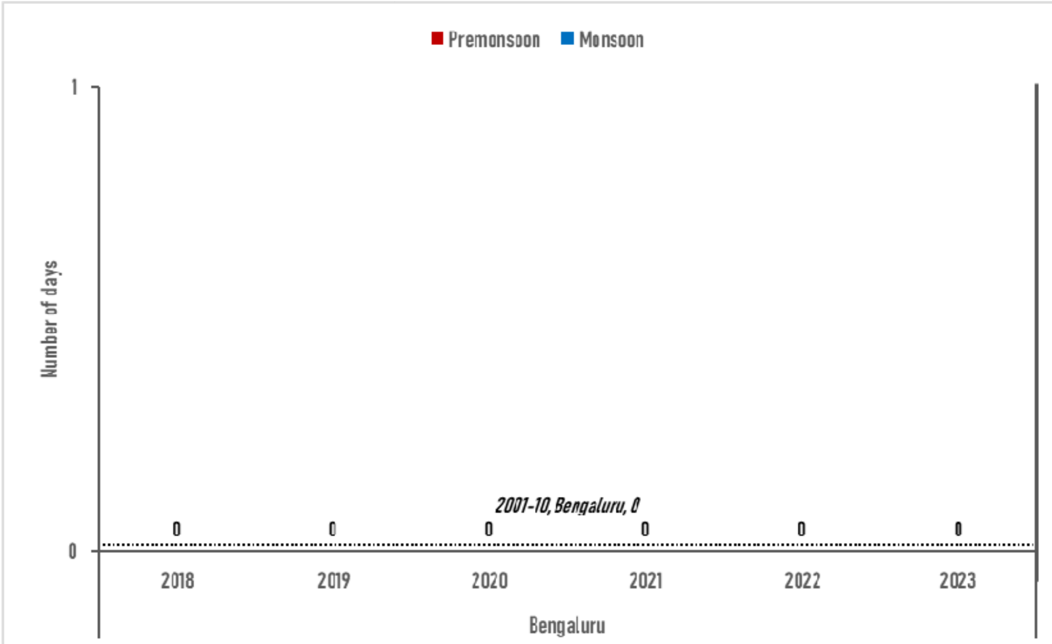
But just looking at the daily maximum temperature figure is not a good measure of thermal discomfort and heat stress on the population as daily average temperature and humidity are critical to parameters as well.Human body is worse at handling humid heat than dry heat. If the heat index crosses the 41°C mark it is considered dangerous to human beings. Bengaluruis yet to registered any day when the daily average heat index crossed the danger threshold of 41°C (see *Graph 6: Trend in days with 41°C+ daily heat index in Bengaluru 2018-2023*).

Graph 5: Trend in days with 37°C+ daily maximum temperature in Bengaluru 2018-2023



Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Graph 6: Trend in days with 41°C+ daily heat index in Bengaluru 2018-2023



Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. Heat index has been calculated using the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration formula. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

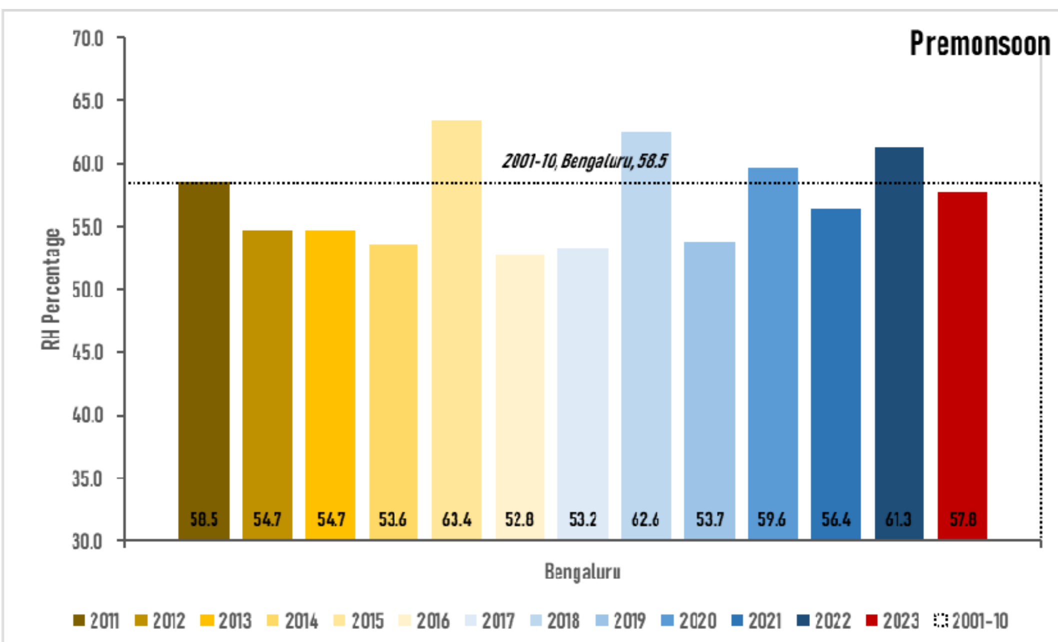
Pre-monsoon vs monsoon heat

The heat impact of humidity is near equal during both pre-monsoon and monsoon: Summer can be divided into two distinct periods, i.e. pre-monsoon or dry heat period and monsoon or humid heat period.IMD defines pre-monsoon as March to May, while monsoon is considered from June to August. Naturally relative humidity is much lower during pre-monsoon compared to monsoon period. The study has found that average Relative Humidity (RH) has not changed significantly for either pre-monsoon or monsoon period compared to 2001-10 average forBengaluru. Last ten pre-monsoons have been on average 2 per cent less humid compared to 2001-10 average. Meanwhile monsoon humidity levels have risen by 1 per cent (see *Graph 7: Trend in relative humidity in Bengaluru 2011-2023 a. Pre-monsoon; b. Monsoon*).

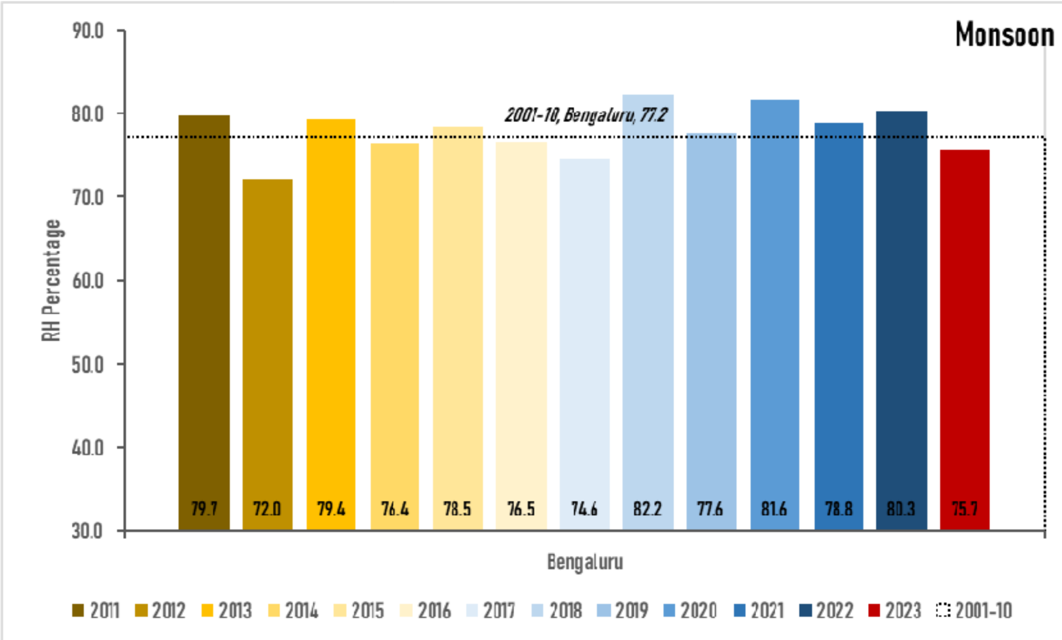
Humidity's impact on the pre-monsoon ambient heat conditions of Bengaluru used to be 0.6°C during 2001-10 which has increased to 0.7°C during 2014-23, a 10 per cent jump(see *Graph 8: Trend in impact of relative humidity on the ambient air temperature in Bengaluru 2011-2023 a. Pre-monsoon; b. Monsoon*).

During monsoon, the impact of humidity on Bengaluru's HI in 2001-10 used to be 0.5°C which has increased to 0.6°C during 2014-23. This is an increase of 21 per cent (see *Graph 8: Impact of relative humidity on the ambient air temperature in Bengaluru 2011-2023 a. Pre-monsoon; b. Monsoon*).

Graph 7: Trend in relative humidity in Bengaluru 2011-2023
a. Pre-monsoon

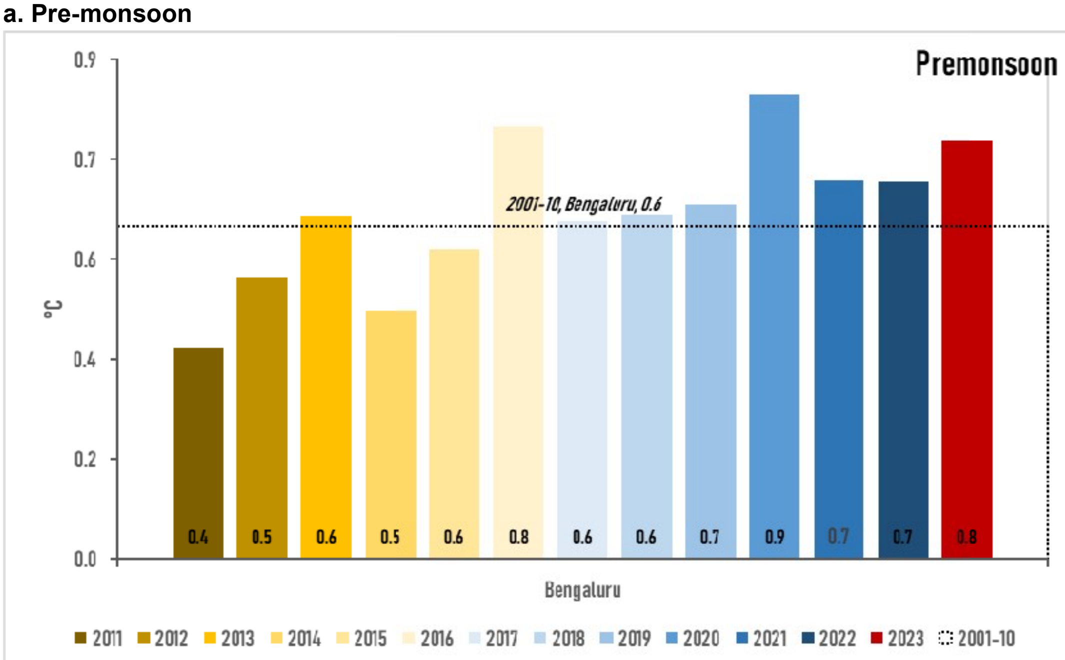


b. Monsoon

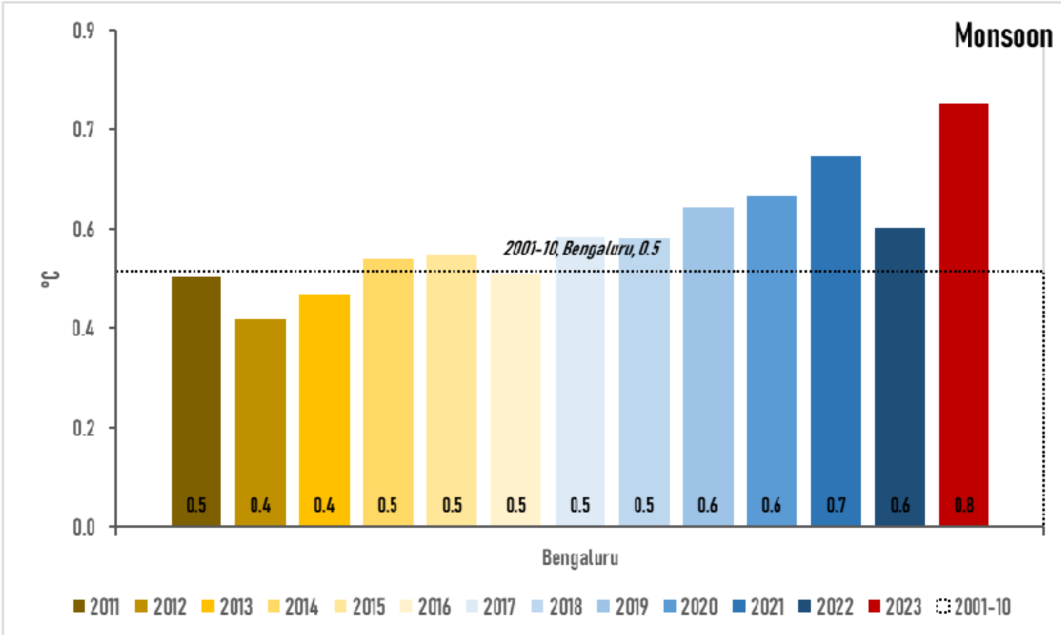


Note: Pre-monsoon refers to the months of March, April and June. Monsoon falls within June, July and August. A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Graph 8: Impact of relative humidity on the ambient air temperature in Bengaluru 2011-2023
a. Pre-monsoon



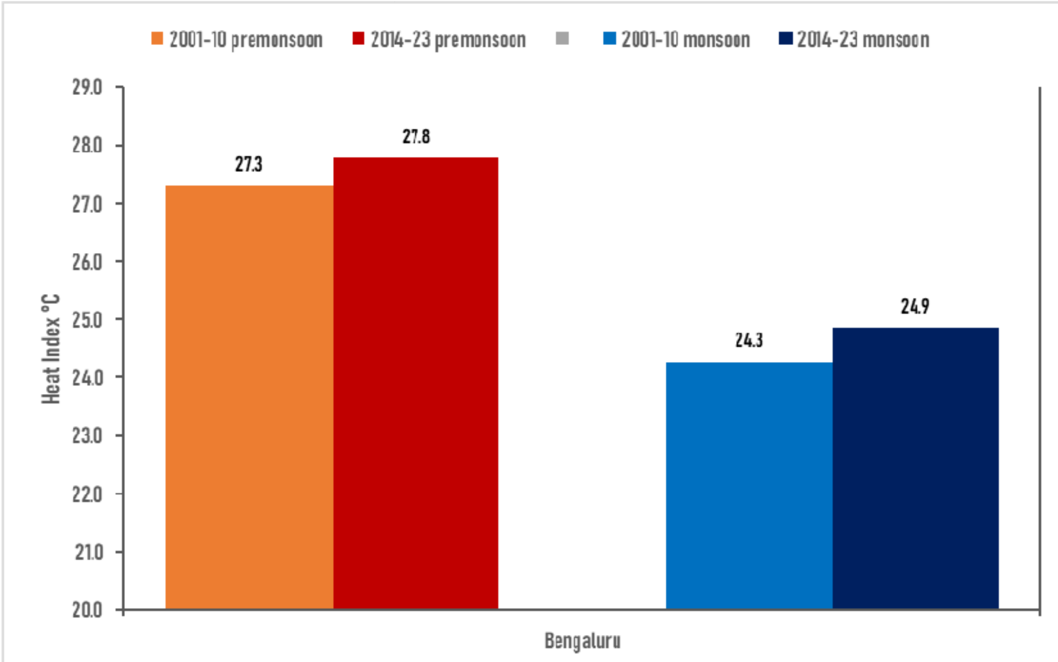
b. Monsoon



Note: Pre-monsoon refers to the months of March, April and June. Monsoon falls within June, July and August. Heat index has been calculated using the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration formula.A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Pre-monsoons are significantly more thermally discomfortable in Bengaluru; both pre-monsoon and monsoon are getting hotter: During 2001-10, the Heat Index used to fall between pre-monsoon and monsoon in Bengaluru by 3.0°C on average. This has marginally dropped to2.9°C during 2014-23. Both pre-monsoon and monsoon have gotten warmer by half a degree centigrade(see *Graph 9: Trend in number dangerously hot days in Bengaluru pre-monsoon vs monsoon 2011-2023*).

Graph 9: Trend in number dangerously hot days in Bengaluru pre-monsoon vs monsoon 2011-2023



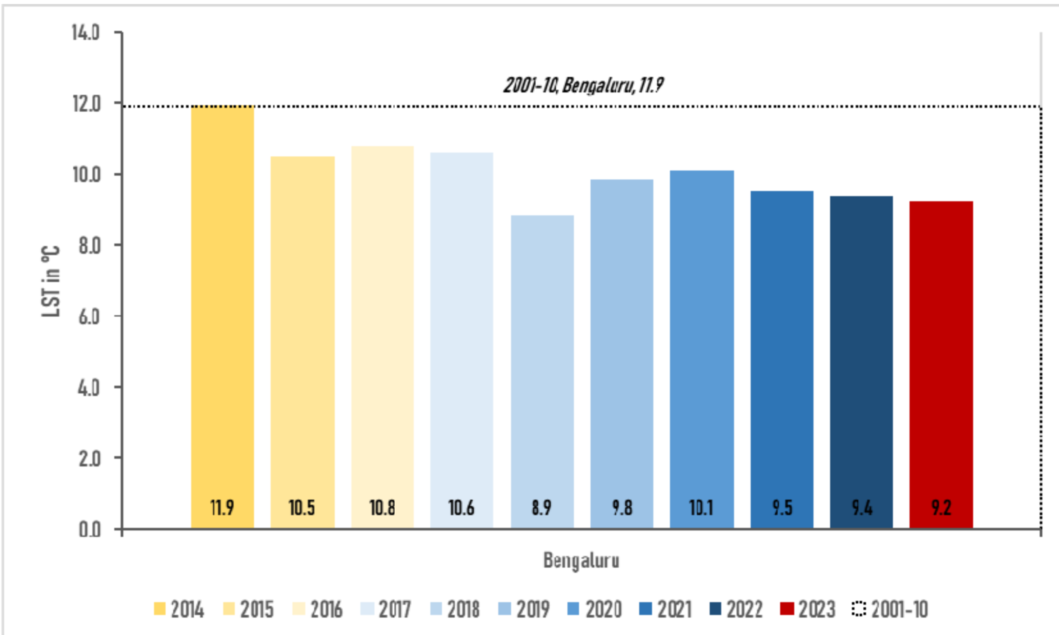
Note: Pre-monsoon refers to the months of March, April and June. Monsoon falls within June, July and August. Heat index has been calculated using the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration formula.A city's weather profile is based on the average of all IMD weather stations located in the city. * Data until 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of climatological data from IMD

Land surface heat and land use pattern

Bengaluru is not cooling down at night: During summers of 2001-10, the land surface temperature (LST) used to come down on average by 11.9°C from the daytime peak to nighttime low in Bengaluru. In the last ten summers (2014-23) the nighttime cooling has reduced to10.1°C. This translates to roughly 15 per cent reduction indiurnal cooling down (see *Graph 10: Trend in summertime diurnal land surface temperature changes in Bengaluru 2014-2023*). It must be noted that the nighttime cooling is getting even lesser in the last few years dropping below 10°C delta.

Hot nights are as dangerous as midday peak temperatures. People get little chance to recover from daytime heat slaughter if temperatures remain high overnight, exerting prolonged stress on the body. A study published in the Lancet Planetary Health by a group of scientists from China, South Korea, Japan, Germany and the U.S. noted that the risk of death from excessively hot nights would increase nearly six-fold.[1] This prediction is much higher than the mortality risk from daily average warming suggested by climate change models.

Graph 10: Trend in summertime diurnal land surface temperature changes in Bengaluru 2014-2023



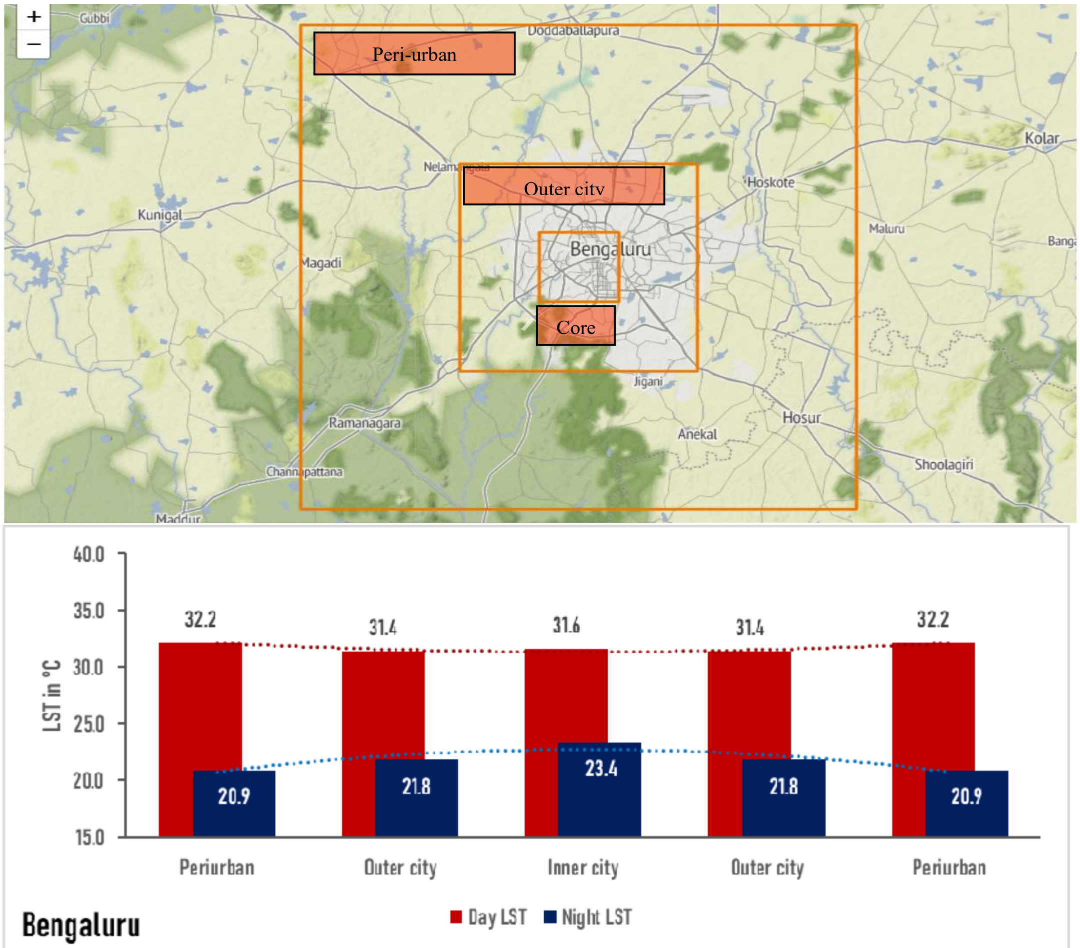
Note: Summer is defined as the period from March to August. * Data uptill 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of monthly MODIS Land Science data from NASA Earth Observations.

Analysis of Bengaluru's spatial heat-scape shows that its core is not cooling down at night at the same rate as its peri-urban region: City cores are usually hotter than their surrounding peri-urban and rural areas as high population and built-up density traps and retains heat for longer duration.It is called the urban heat island phenomenon. Analysis of NASA satellite images shows that Bengaluru's nighttime land surface temperature exhibit urban heat island formation. But Bengaluru's daytime land surface temperature exhibits inverse of an urban heat island, i.e. the core of the city is cooler than its peri-urban during the daytime.

During the daytime core of Bengaluru is 0.6°C cooler than its peripheries and peri-urban areas during the summer. But at night the core of Bengaluru is 2.5°C warmer than its peripheries and peri-urban areas (see *Graph 11: Spatial variation in land surface temperature among the core city, outer city and peri-urban region of Bengaluru*). At night the peri-urban area cools down 11.3°C while the city core cools down only 8.2°C. So the city core is cooling down 3.1°C less than its peri-urban.

[1] Cheng He et al 2022. "The effects of night-time warming on mortality burden under future climate change scenarios: a modelling study", The Lancet Planetary Health, Volume 6, Issue 8. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(22)00139-5

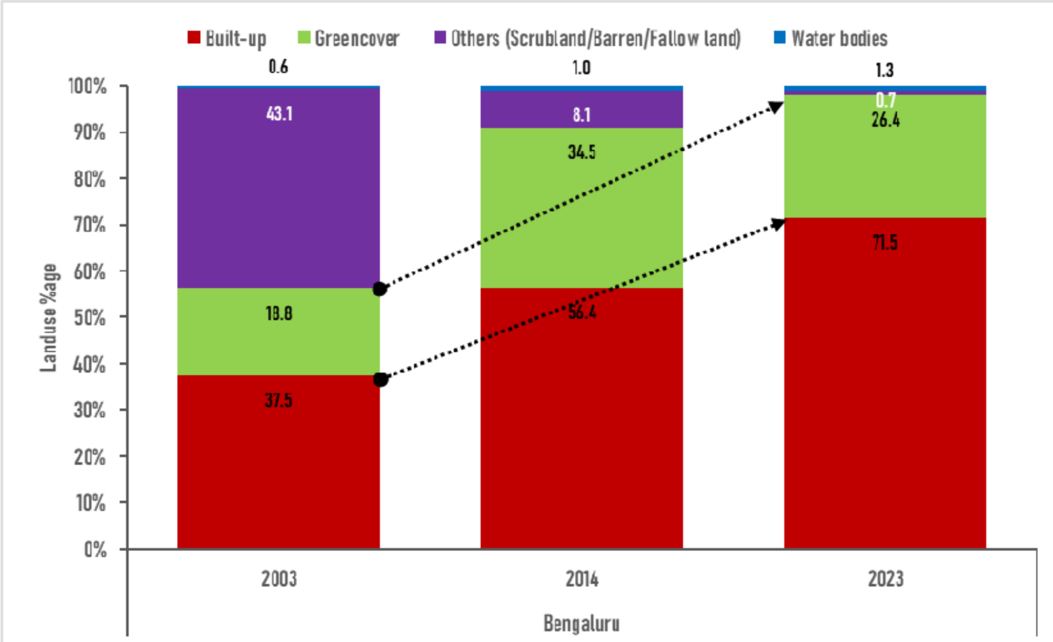
Graph 11: Spatial variation in LST among the core city, outer city and peri-urban region of Bengaluru



Note: Based on average of 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 data. Summer is defined as March to August. * Data uptill 30 August 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of monthly MODIS Land Science data from NASA Earth Observations.

Bengaluru have become more concertize in last two decades which has contributed to rise in urban heat stress: Built up area has increased from 37.5 per cent in 2003 to 71.5 per cent in 2023. Green cover has increased from 18.8 per cent in 2003 to 26.4 per cent in 2023.(See *Graph 12: Change in land use pattern in Bengaluru in last two decades*).

Graph 12: Change in land use pattern among megacities in last two decades

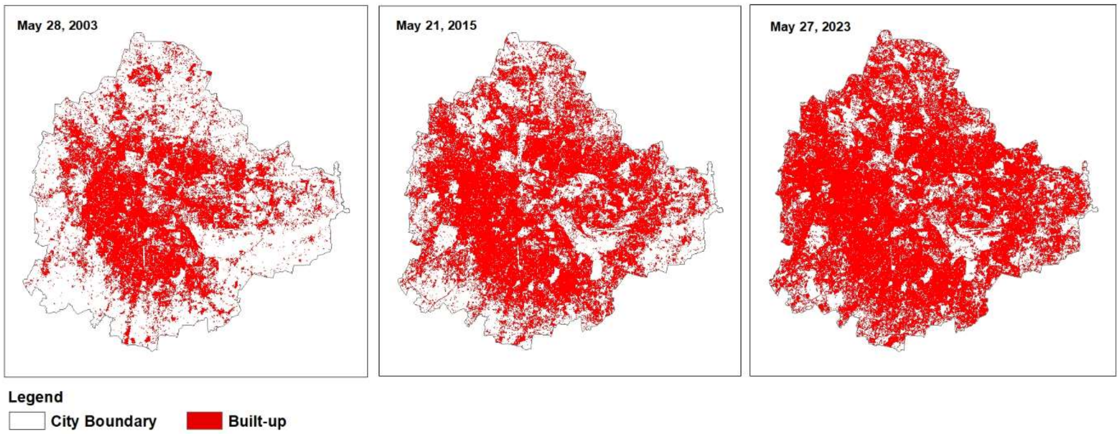


Note: Summer heat wave months (May-June) are chosen to analyse the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) and urban expansion for each year.
Source: CSE analysis of Landsat 7 and Landsat 8 satellite images from United States Geological Survey (USGS) Earth Explorer.

Land Use pattern change analysis: Bengaluru saw an increase in its builtup area, with an expansion from 266.65 sq. km in 2003 to 508.95 sq. km in 2023, which depicts a substantial rise in the percentage share of the city's geographical area from 37.5 per cent in 2003 to 71.5 per cent in 2023 (See *Map 1: Growth in Urban Built-up in Bengaluru during 2003, 2015 and 2023*). Significant and rapid urban expansion has happened in all directions.

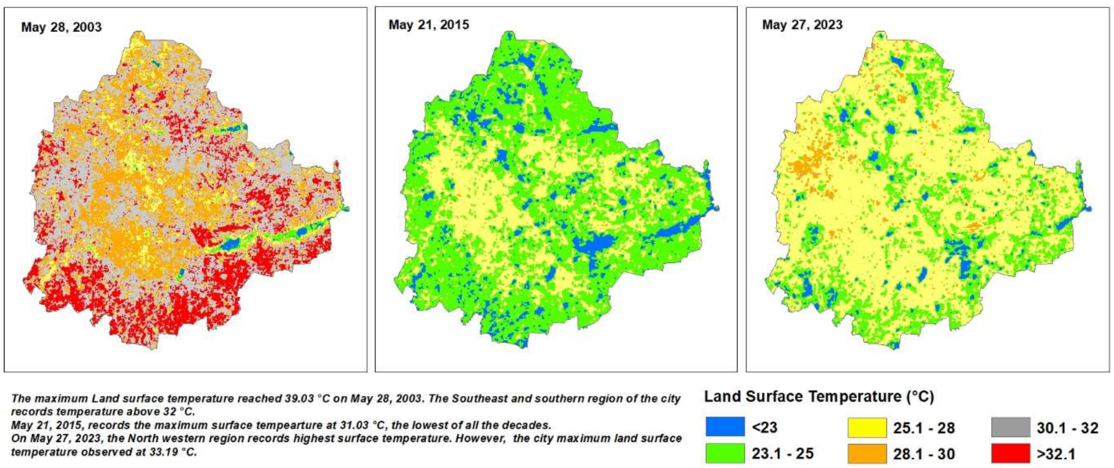
Impact of land surface changes on the distribution of land surface temperature: In 2003, the average LST of Bengaluru was 30.7 °C. The maximum LST was observed around the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited Airport in the southeast of the city and stood at 39 °C on 28 May, 2003. Water bodies and areas with dense green cover showed temperatures as low as 19°C even on an extreme heat day. In 2023, the average LST of Bengaluru was 25.7 °C, significantly cooler compared to 2003. On an extreme heat day (May 27, 2023), highest temperature were recorded at Hindustan Aeronautics Limited Airport where LST reached 33.2 °C. The lowest temperature recorded over water bodies and areas with dense green cover and it stood at 18.45 °C (See *Map 2: Variation in Land Surface Temperature over Bengaluru for 2003, 2015 and 2022*).

Map 1: Growth in Urban Built-up in Bengaluru during 2003, 2015, and 2023



Note: Urban expansion for each year – 2003, 2015, and 2023. The red color depicts the urban growth in the city.
Source: CSE analysis of Landsat 7 and Landsat 8 satellite images from United States Geological Survey (USGS) Earth Explorer.

Map 2: Variation in Land Surface Temperature over Bengaluru for 2003, 2015 and 2023



Note: Summer heat wave months (May- June) are chosen to analyze the Land Surface Temperature (LST). The respective dates of acquisition of the images are May 28, 2003, May 21, 2015, and May 27, 2023.
Source: CSE analysis of Landsat 7 and Landsat 8 satellite images from United States Geological Survey (USGS) Earth Explorer.