

may migrate and send back a message that gives others the idea of migrating. For example, many Europeans migrated to the United States in the nineteenth century because very favorable reports from early migrants led them to believe that the streets of American cities were paved with gold.

KEY ISSUE 1

Why Do People Migrate?

- Reasons for Migrating
- Distance of Migration
- Characteristics of Migrants

Geography has no comprehensive theory of migration, although a nineteenth-century outline of 11 migration “laws” written by E. G. Ravenstein is the basis for contemporary geographic migration studies. To understand where and why migration occurs, Ravenstein’s “laws” can be organized into three groups: the reasons why migrants move, the distance they typically move, and their characteristics. Each of these elements is addressed in this section of the chapter. ■

Reasons for Migrating

- Most people migrate for economic reasons.
- Cultural and environmental factors also induce migration, although not as frequently as economic factors.

People decide to migrate because of push factors and pull factors. A **push factor** induces people to move out of their present location, whereas a **pull factor** induces people to move into a new location. As migration for most people is a major step not taken lightly, both push and pull factors typically play a role. To migrate, people view their current place of residence so negatively that they feel pushed away, and they view another place so attractively that they feel pulled toward it.

We can identify three major kinds of push and pull factors: economic, cultural, and environmental. Usually, one of the three factors emerges as most important, although as will be discussed later in this chapter, ranking the relative importance of the three factors can be difficult and even controversial.

Economic Push and Pull Factors

Most people migrate for economic reasons. People think about emigrating from places that have few job opportunities, and they immigrate to places where jobs seem to be available. Because of economic restructuring, job prospects often vary from one country to another and within regions of the same country.



FIGURE 3-1 U.S. immigration. This mother and three children immigrated to the United States from Italy around 1900.

The United States and Canada have been especially prominent destinations for economic migrants (Figure 3-1). Many European immigrants to North America in the nineteenth century truly expected to find streets paved with gold. While not literally so gilded, the United States and Canada did offer Europeans prospects for economic advancement. This same perception of economic plenty now lures people to the United States and Canada from Latin America and Asia.

Cultural Push and Pull Factors

Cultural factors can be especially compelling push factors, forcing people to emigrate from a country. Forced international migration has historically occurred for two main cultural reasons: slavery and political instability.

Millions of people were shipped to other countries as slaves or as prisoners, especially from Africa to the Western Hemisphere, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see Chapter 7). Large groups of people are no longer forced to migrate as slaves, but forced international migration persists because of political instability resulting from cultural diversity.

According to the United Nations, **refugees** are people who have been forced to migrate from their homes and cannot

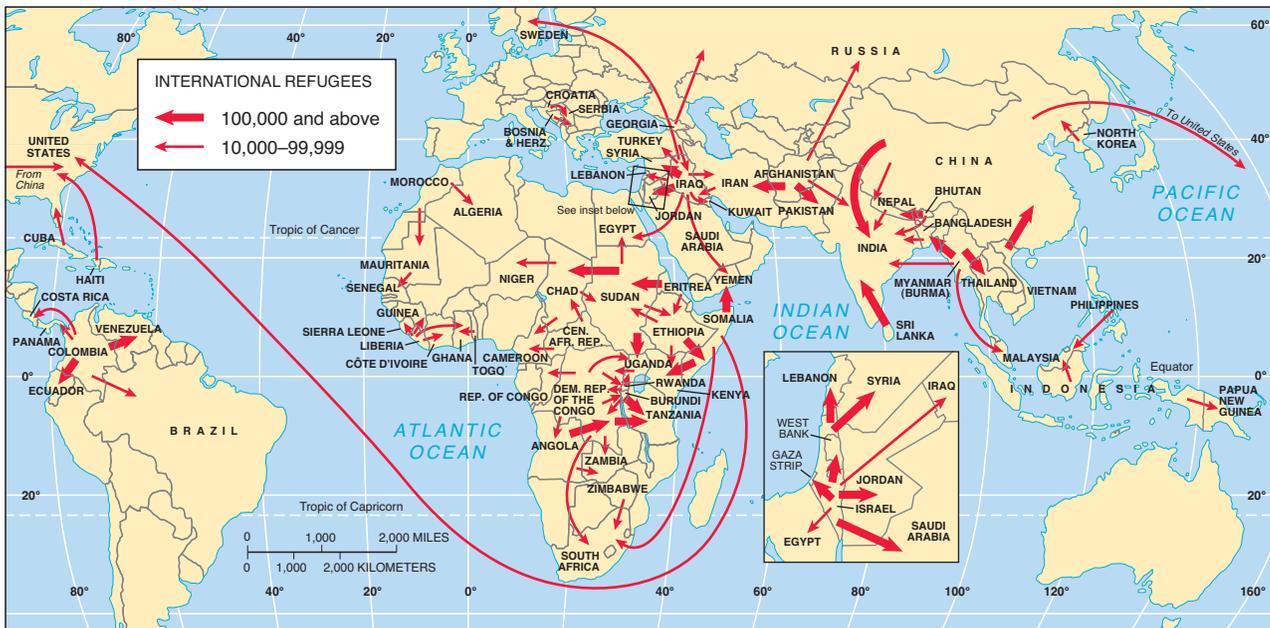


FIGURE 3-2 Major sources and destinations of refugees. A refugee is a person who is forced to migrate from a country, usually for political reasons. The U.S. Committee for Refugees estimates that the three largest groups of refugees are Afghans, Palestinians, and Iraqis. The large number of refugees from Afghanistan has resulted from more than three decades of civil war (see Chapter 8). Palestinians are people who left Israel after the country was created in 1948, or those who left territories captured by Israel in 1967 (see Chapter 6). The number of Iraqi refugees increased rapidly after the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 (see Chapter 8).

return for fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion. The U.S. Committee for Refugees, a nonprofit organization independent of the U.S. government (www.refugees.org), counted 14 million refugees in 2007 (Figure 3-2). Refugees have no home until another country agrees to allow them in, or improving conditions make possible a return to their former home. In the interim, they must camp out in tents, board in shelters, or lie down by the side of a road.

Political conditions can also operate as pull factors. People may be attracted to democratic countries that encourage individual choice in education, career, and place of residence. After Communists gained control of Eastern Europe in the late 1940s, many people in that region were pulled toward the democracies in Western Europe and North America. Communist governments in Eastern Europe clamped down on emigration for fear of losing their most able workers. The most dramatic symbol of restricted emigration was the Berlin Wall, which the Communists built to prevent emigration from Communist-controlled East Berlin into democratic West Berlin.

With the election of democratic governments in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, Western Europe's political pull disappeared as a migration factor. Eastern Europeans now can visit where they wish, although few have the money to pay for travel-related expenses beyond a round-trip bus ticket. However, Western Europe pulls an increasing number of migrants from Eastern Europe for economic reasons, as discussed later in this chapter.

Environmental Push and Pull Factors

People also migrate for environmental reasons, pulled toward physically attractive regions and pushed from hazardous ones. In an age of improved communications and transportation systems, people can live in environmentally attractive areas that are relatively remote and still not feel too isolated from employment, shopping, and entertainment opportunities.

Attractive environments for migrants include mountains, seashores, and warm climates. Proximity to the Rocky Mountains lures Americans to the state of Colorado, and the Alps pull French people to eastern France. Some migrants are shocked to find polluted air and congestion in these areas. The southern coast of England, the Mediterranean coast of France, and the coasts of Florida attract migrants, especially retirees, who enjoy swimming and lying on the beach. Of all elderly people who migrate from one U.S. state to another, one-third select Florida as their destination. Regions with warm winters, such as southern Spain and the southwestern United States, attract migrants from harsher climates.

Migrants are also pushed from their homes by adverse physical conditions. Water—either too much or too little—poses the most common environmental threat (Figure 3-3). Many people are forced to move by water-related disasters because they live in a vulnerable area, such as a floodplain. The **floodplain** of a river is the area subject to flooding during a specific number of years, based on historical trends. People living in the “100-year



FIGURE 3-3 Environmental push factor: Too much water. The widespread flooding in New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina caused around 1,400 deaths and forced several hundred thousand people from their homes. Americans watching on television were shocked by the plight of residents stranded by the flooding: the squalid conditions in the evacuation centers, the lawlessness in the streets of New Orleans, and above all the unsatisfactory response of emergency management officials.



FIGURE 3-4 Environmental push factor: Lack of water. People were pushed from their land in Oklahoma and adjacent states during the 1930s by severe drought, known as the Dust Bowl. Thousands of families, known as Okies, abandoned their farms and migrated 1,000 miles west to California, some on foot.

floodplain,” for example, can expect flooding on average once every century. Many people are unaware that they live in a floodplain, and even people who do know often choose to live there anyway.

A lack of water pushes others from their land (Figure 3-4). Hundreds of thousands have been forced to move from the Sahel region of northern Africa because of drought conditions. The people of the Sahel have traditionally been pastoral nomads, a form of agriculture adapted to dry lands but effective only at low population densities (see Chapter 10).

The capacity of the Sahel to sustain human life—never very high—has declined recently because of population growth and several years of unusually low rainfall. Consequently, many of these nomads have been forced to move into cities and rural camps, where they survive on food donated by the government and international relief organizations.

Intervening Obstacles

Where migrants go is not always their desired destination. The reason is that they may be blocked by an **intervening obstacle**, which is an environmental or cultural feature that hinders migration.

In the past, intervening obstacles were primarily environmental. Bodies of water have long been important intervening obstacles. The Atlantic Ocean proved a particularly significant intervening obstacle for most European immigrants to North America. Tens of millions of Europeans spent their life savings for the right to cross the rough and dangerous Atlantic in the hold of a ship shared with hundreds of other immigrants.

Before the invention of modern transportation, such as railroads and motor vehicles, people migrated across landmasses by horse or on foot. Such migration was frequently difficult because of hostile features in the physical environment, such as mountains and deserts. For example, many migrants lured to California during the nineteenth century by the economic pull factor of the Gold Rush failed to reach their destination because they could not cross such intervening obstacles as the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, or desert country.

Transportation improvements that have promoted globalization, such as motor vehicles and airplanes, have diminished the importance of environmental features

as intervening obstacles. However, today’s migrant faces intervening obstacles created by local diversity in government and politics. A migrant needs a passport to legally emigrate from a country and a visa to legally immigrate to a new country.

Distance of Migration

Ravenstein's theories made two main points about the distance that migrants travel to their new homes:

- Most migrants relocate a short distance and remain within the same country.
- Long-distance migrants to other countries head for major centers of economic activity.

Internal Migration

International migration is permanent movement from one country to another, whereas **internal migration** is permanent movement within the same country. Consistent with the distance-decay principle presented in Chapter 1, the farther away a place is located, the less likely that people will migrate to it. Thus, international migrants are much less numerous than internal migrants.

Most people find migration within a country less traumatic than international migration because they find familiar language, foods, broadcasts, literature, music, and other social customs after they move. Moves within a country also generally involve much shorter distances than those in international migration. However, internal migration can involve long-distance moves in large countries, such as in the United States and Russia.

Internal migration can be divided into two types: **Interregional migration** is movement from one region of a country to another; **intra-regional migration** is movement within one region. Historically, the main type of interregional migration has been from rural to urban areas in search of jobs. In recent years, some developed countries have seen migration from urban to environmentally attractive rural areas. The main type of intra-regional migration has been within urban areas, from older cities to newer suburbs.

International Migration

International migration is further divided into two types: forced and voluntary. **Voluntary migration** implies that the migrant has *chosen* to move for economic improvement, whereas **forced migration** means that the migrant has been *compelled* to move by cultural factors. Economic push and pull factors usually induce voluntary migration, and cultural factors normally compel forced migration. In one sense, migrants may also feel compelled by pressure inside themselves to migrate for economic reasons, such as to search for food or jobs, but they have not been explicitly compelled to migrate by the violent actions of other people.

Geographer Wilbur Zelinsky identified a **migration transition**, which consists of changes in a society comparable to those in the demographic transition. The migration transition is a change in the migration pattern in a society that results from the social and economic changes that also produce the demographic transition. According to the migration transition, international migration is primarily a phenomenon of countries in stage 2 of the demographic transition, whereas internal migration is more important in stages 3 and 4.

- A country in *stage 1* of the demographic transition (high CBR and CDR and low NIR) is characterized by high daily

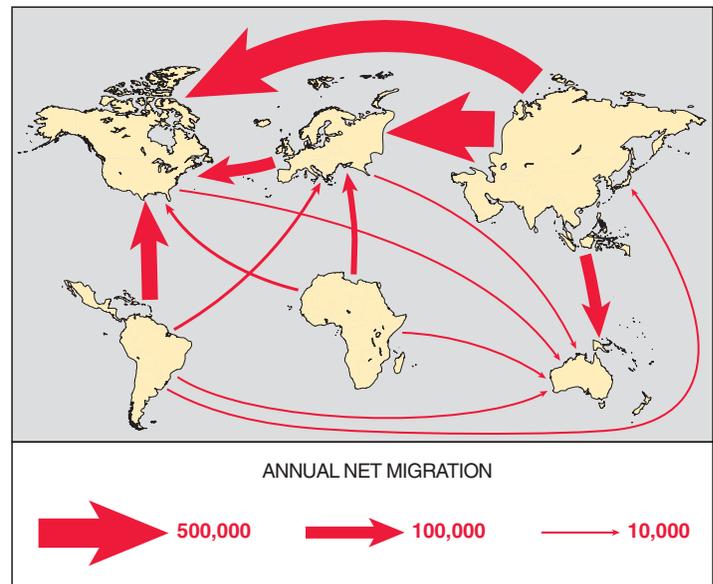


FIGURE 3-5 Global migration patterns. The major flows of international migrants are from LDCs to MDCs, especially from Asia and Latin America to North America and from Asia to Europe.

or seasonal mobility in search of food rather than permanent migration to a new location.

- A country in *stage 2* (high NIR because of rapidly declining CDR) is at the point when international migration becomes especially important, as does interregional migration from one country's rural areas to its cities. Like the sudden decline in the crude death rate, migration patterns in stage 2 societies are a consequence of technological change. Improvement in agricultural practices reduces the number of people needed in rural areas, and jobs in factories attract migrants to the cities in another region of the same country or in another country.
- Countries in *stages 3 and 4* (moderating NIR because of rapidly declining CBR) are the principal destinations of the international migrants leaving the stage 2 countries in search of economic opportunities (Figure 3-5). The principal form of internal migration within countries in stages 3 and 4 of the demographic transition is intra-regional, from cities to surrounding suburbs.

Characteristics of Migrants

Ravenstein noted distinctive gender and family-status patterns in his migration theories:

- Most long-distance migrants are male.
- Most long-distance migrants are adult individuals rather than families with children.

Gender of Migrants

Ravenstein theorized that males were more likely than females to migrate long distances to other countries because searching for work was the main reason for international migration and males

were much more likely than females to be employed. This held true for U.S. immigrants during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, when about 55 percent were male. But the gender pattern reversed in the 1990s, and in the twenty-first century women constitute about 55 percent of U.S. immigrants (Figure 3-6).

Mexicans who come to the United States without authorized immigration documents—currently the largest group of U.S. immigrants—show similar gender changes. As recently as the late 1980s, males constituted 85 percent of the Mexican migrants arriving in the United States without proper documents, according to U.S. census and immigration service estimates. But since the 1990s, women have accounted for about half of the unauthorized immigrants from Mexico.

The increased female migration to the United States partly reflects the changing role of women in Mexican society. In the past, rural Mexican women were obliged to marry at a young age and to remain in the village to care for children. Now some Mexican women are migrating to the United States to join husbands or brothers already in the United States, but most are seeking jobs. At the same time, women also feel increased pressure to get a job in the United States because of poor economic conditions in Mexico.

Family Status of Migrants

Ravenstein also believed that most long-distance migrants were young adults seeking work, rather than children or elderly people. For the most part, this pattern continues for the United States.

- About 40 percent of immigrants are young adults between the ages of 25 and 39, compared to about 23 percent of the entire U.S. population.
- Immigrants are less likely to be elderly people; only 5 percent of immigrants are over age 65, compared to 12 percent of the entire U.S. population.



FIGURE 3-6 Family status of migrants. A Mexican family crosses into the United States near Ciudad Juárez.

However, an increasing percentage of U.S. immigrants are children—16 percent of immigrants are under age 15, compared to 21 percent for the total U.S. population. With the increase in women migrating to the United States, more children are coming with their mothers.

Recent immigrants to the United States have attended school for fewer years and are less likely to have high school diplomas than are U.S. citizens. The typical unauthorized Mexican immigrant has attended school for four years, less than the average American but a year more than the average Mexican.

KEY ISSUE 2

Where Are Migrants Distributed?

- Global Migration Patterns
- U.S. Immigration Patterns
- Impact of Immigration on the United States

About 9 percent of the world's people are international migrants—that is, they currently live in countries other than the ones in which they were born. The country with by far the largest number of international migrants is the United States. ■

Global Migration Patterns

At a global scale, Asia, Latin America, and Africa have net out-migration, and North America, Europe, and Oceania have net in-migration. The three largest flows of migrants are to Europe from Asia and to North America from Asia and from Latin America. The global pattern reflects the importance of migration from LDCs to MDCs. Migrants from countries with relatively low incomes and high natural increase rates head for relatively wealthy countries, where job prospects are brighter.

The United States has more foreign-born residents than any other country, approximately 40 million as of 2010, and growing annually by around 1 million. Other MDCs have higher rates of net in-migration, including Australia and Canada, which are much less populous than the United States (Figure 3-7). The highest rates can be found in petroleum-exporting countries of the Middle East, which attract immigrants primarily from poorer Middle Eastern countries and from Asia to perform many of the dirty and dangerous functions in the oil fields.