

Across the **ecumene**, the living space of humans on the earth's surface, there are certain limits to how many people an environment can support in terms of the availability of food, water, and natural resources. Some regions support **human settlement** better than others. For instance, temperate grasslands support far more people than deserts. That seems obvious, but why then are so many people, in this day and age, moving in greater number into **arid regions**? Secondly, how long before dry regions are pushed to their limits, especially in terms of fresh water?

**Overpopulation** is a major concern both in resource-poor regions and across the globe. Several Neo-Malthusian warnings have been issued regarding the excessive consumption of natural resources worldwide. The message is that certain resources such as clean water, endangered plant and animal habitats, and nonrenewable energy sources like oil will be depleted if **conservation** efforts and **population control** methods are not mandated by governments. Some theorists have expressed a need for the goal of **zero population growth** worldwide to stem the tide of resource depletion. To do this, some have proposed large-scale family-planning and contraceptive programs. However, many have rejected these ideas based primarily on religious beliefs.

Another benefit arising from population control would be alleviating concerns over decreasing amounts of **personal space** as population densities increase. Some worry that too many people crammed into densely packed urban areas will lead to social unrest and, potentially, armed conflicts.

Other population theorists have examined the role of **conservation** in global population sustainability. To achieve sustainable resource use in coming decades, with an expected 10 billion person global population, massive and systematic global programs enforcing recycling, energy conservation, sustainable farming practices, and a wholesale reduction of **personal consumption** are believed to be necessary. Without conservation, many resources could be depleted before we have the chance to save them.

## MIGRATION

Migration is common and can take several different forms. **Inter-regional** or **internal migrants** move from one region of the country to another. This is the case with rural-to-urban migrants, who move from farmland to cities within the same country. There are intraregional migrants who move from one area to another within the same region, but they're not very interesting. There are also variations within international migration. **Transnational migration** occurs when migrants move from one country to another.

## WHO IS WHO?

Migrants are generally those who voluntarily move from location to location. However, there are forms of **forced migration**. Governments can order their citizens to move to another place. Other people forced to move by war, disasters, or fear of government repression are known as **refugees**. Certain countries have official programs to receive refugees from other countries and grant them **asylum**, either temporarily (until danger at home subsides) or permanently. For example, many countries had asylum programs in the 1990s for people escaping **ethnic cleansing** in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Burundi.

In most countries, people who come seeking refuge or employment opportunities but do not have government authorization (like a work visa or official refugee status) are considered illegal immigrants. Some countries have **amnesty programs** allowing illegal immigrants the opportunity to apply for official status or citizenship without facing arrest or deportation.

## STEPS TO A BETTER LIFE

There are a few particular patterns of migration and specific ways that people migrate. **Step migration** is when people move up in a hierarchy of locations, with each move to a more advantageous or economically prosperous place. For example, a family might move from a farm to a neighboring town; then from that town to a regional city; then to the outskirts of a larger metropolitan area; and from there closer to the center of the city, each time to take advantage of better work opportunities. They might then move again closer to the center of the city once they achieve economic stability and want to have full access to the central business district. Along the way, **intervening opportunities** for work and economic improvement will increase the further migrants travel.

## BUILDING THE CHAIN

**Chain migration** occurs when a pioneering individual or group settles in a new place, establishing a new migrant foothold. These people send information back to friends, family and business contacts. The pioneer provides information on employment opportunities, access to markets or social networks, and encourages others to migrate to the location. Over time, more and more people move in and a growing immigrant community is established.

## CYCLIC MOVEMENT AND REMITTANCES

Some who migrate purely for employment purposes have a pattern of **cyclic movement**. In the case of transnational labor migrants, foreign employees work for a limited period of time before returning to their home countries. Sometimes this is also called **periodic movement** if it is on an annual or seasonal basis; for instance, agricultural workers coming from Mexico to the United States for different harvest periods, then returning home to help out during harvest on their family farms. Cyclic movement can last several years and even span the career of an individual. In some cases, a foreign worker comes to a country to find a job that they work through to retirement, and then they return to their home country when they reach old age.

In most cases, **transnational migrants** are sending home **remittances** (transmittals of money) to their families in their home country. The overall volume of remittances from one country to another can be significant. In rural Mexico, hundreds of communities are supported purely by the remittances of the transnational labor migrants of their communities working in the United States.

## **FROSTBELT TO SUNBELT SHIFT**

Keep in mind that someone does not have to cross international borders to be considered a migrant. Many countries experience internal migrations that significantly change the country's population distribution. A common example is the Frostbelt to Sunbelt migration in the United States that has taken place over the past few decades. With declines in manufacturing employment, especially in the northeastern United States, many people left the colder, more populated regions of the northeastern upper Midwest for new service employment opportunities and better climates in the South and Southwestern United States.

If you examine the map of the United States population centroid on the previous pages, you'll notice that the average center of U.S. population has moved to the south and the west over the past 50 to 60 years. This is due to the growth of large Sunbelt cities such as Atlanta, Orlando, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Albuquerque, Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. We can even include places you wouldn't normally consider the Sunbelt, such as Denver, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Portland, and Seattle.

Look back at the Map of U.S. Population Centroids to see how this has affected population distribution.

## **PUSH AND PULL FACTORS**

Newly industrialized countries (NICs) experience rapid internal rural-to-urban migration. Employment at urban manufacturing locations appears to be the main intervening opportunity for these internal immigrants. However, research has shown that a number of both push and pull factors cause people to leave a rural agricultural lifestyle and move to a city. **Push factors** are specific things about the rural agricultural landscape and livelihood that force people off the farm. **Pull factors** are specific things about cities that draw people to the urban landscape. It is important to remember that the opposite of a pull factor is not a push factor. For example, a pull factor cannot be the lack of employment opportunities in rural regions.

### **Push Factor: Armed Conflicts**

Push factors include a number of issues related to the hardships faced in rural areas. One significant push factor is armed conflict. When rebel movements initiate military campaigns against governments, it is often in rural regions. When conflicts emerge in rural regions, many people flee and become refugees to the safety of cities. Terrorism and drug trafficking activity can have a similar effect and can frighten people off the land.

### **Push Factor: Environmental Hazards**

Environmental pollution is another push factor. Excessive use of agricultural chemicals can poison soils and water supplies. In addition, improper usage of pesticides could lead to birth defects in children, forcing parents to move to cities to seek constant medical care for their children. Natural disasters can also work as push factors. A flood or drought can destroy a whole year's income and cause people to leave farming as their primary source of income.

### **Push Factor: The High Cost of Land**

Increased land costs can also force people off the land. In newly industrialized countries, prices inflate, especially in markets for land. Farmers who own land may suddenly have the opportunity to sell their land and make far more money than they could in several years of farming. This money can then be used for migration to urban areas and pay for new city housing. In the cases where farmers are renting land, rents can increase significantly. Sometimes the farmers can no longer afford to pay rent or make enough money to support their families. Often these migrants arrive in cities homeless and are forced into squatter settlements (see chapter 10). Even though land and other commodity prices may increase over time, basic food crop prices tend to change very little over the long-term, making farming far less profitable for small family farms.

### **The Pull Factors**

The pull factors that draw people to cities are mainly employment related. The higher number of job opportunities, higher pay rates, or the regularity of pay can be influential factors that motivate migrants to move to the city. Keep in mind that farmers generally make money only at the end of the growing season, when crops are sold. Having regular paychecks creates better financial security for migrants.

### **The Pull of Services**

Other factors that pull workers into the city include access to services such as medical care or education, and service access to utilities such as electricity. Entertainment is often cited by migrants as a reason for moving from rural regions. Television, movies, festivals, and sporting events are all attractors to urban areas.

### **CLEAN WATER: DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE TRAP!**

The unfortunate reality for many Third World rural-to-urban migrants is that the water quality in rural regions may actually be better than the water quality found in cities. Even when there are municipal water systems in the Third World, water systems are often contaminated. The lesson here: If you are asked about access to service in Third World cities, clean water is not a valid answer, especially when talking about rural-to-urban migration factors.

### **MAKE THE LINK**

Make sure to read where and how people in the Third World live as new urban migrants in chapter 10.