POPULATION GEOGRAPHY: MIGRATION (Key Concepts)

1. KEY ISSUE 1: WHERE ARE MIGRANTS DISTRIBUTED?

A. GLOBAL MIGRATION PATTERNS. In the map below, the width of the arrows shows the amount of net migration between regions of the world. Countries with net in-migration are in red, and those with net out-migration are in blue.

**MIGRATION** is a permanent move to a new location. It is a form of relocation diffusion, which was earlier defined as the spread of a characteristic through the bodily movement of people from one place to another. **Emigration** is migration from a location; **immigration** (or in-migration) is migration to a location. The difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants is the **net migration**.
RAVENSTEIN’S PRINCIPLES. Most migrations share several characteristics, which were called the laws of migration when first proposed in 1885 by the British demographer E. G. Ravenstein. Today, we tend to think of these as principles built around the following six points:

1. Most migrations cover short distances and do not cross international boundaries.
2. Migration involves two opposite processes: dispersion (the departure of migrants from a place of origin) and absorption (the arrival of migrants in a place of destination).
3. Migration flows produce counterflows.
4. Urban areas are common destinations of long-distance migrants.
5. Urban residents tend to be less likely to migrate than rural residents.
6. Women migrate more than men within their country of birth, whereas men more frequently migrate beyond their country of birth.

INTERNATIONAL & INTERNAL MIGRATION. International migration is a permanent move from one country to another. Internal migration is a permanent move within the same country. Internal migration can be divided into interregional migration, which is movement from one region of a country to another, and intraregional migration, which is movement within one region. 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. On a global scale, the three largest flows of migrants are: from Latin America to North America; from Asia to Europe; and, from Asia to North America.

MIGRATION 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Demographic transition</th>
<th>Migration Transition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low NIR, high CBR, high CDR</td>
<td>High daily or seasonal mobility in search of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High NIR, high CBR, rapidly declining CDR</td>
<td>High international emigration and interregional migration from rural to urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Declining NIR, rapidly declining CBR, declining CDR</td>
<td>High international immigration and intraregional migration from cities to suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low NIR, low CBR, low CDR</td>
<td>Same as stage 3</td>
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2. KEY ISSUE 2: WHY DO PEOPLE MIGRATE WITHIN A COUNTRY?

INTERREGIONAL MIGRATION IN LARGE COUNTRIES. USA. Over the past 224 years, interregional migration in the USA has been westward across the continent. In the twenty-first century, Americans are still moving toward the west but increasingly now are moving southward. Canada. For more than a century, Canada has had significant interregional migration.
from east to west. The three westernmost provinces—Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan—are the destinations for most interregional migrants within Canada. China. An estimated 100 million people have emigrated from rural areas in the interior of the country. They are headed for the large urban areas along the east coast, where jobs are most plentiful, especially in factories. Brazil. Most Brazilians live in a string of large cities near the Atlantic Coast. In contrast, Brazil's tropical interior is very sparsely inhabited. Development of Brazil's interior has altered historic migration patterns. The coastal areas now have net out-migration, whereas the interior areas have net in-migration. Russia. The population of Russia is highly clustered in the western, or European, portion of the country. Soviet policy encouraged factory construction near raw materials rather than near existing population concentrations. To build up an adequate labor force, the Soviet government had to force people to undertake interregional migration.

INTRAREGIONAL MIGRATION. Intraregional migration is much more common than interregional or international migration. Most intraregional migration is from rural to urban areas in developing countries and from cities to suburbs in developed countries.

Migration from Rural to Urban Areas. Migration from rural areas to urban areas began in the 1800s in Europe and North America as part of the Industrial Revolution. In the U.S.A., for example, percentage of urban dwellers increased from 5% (1800s) to 50% (1920s) to 81% (2013). Elsewhere, in Latin America, between 1950 and 2013, percentage of urban dwellers increased from 40% to 78%; from 15% to 46% in Asia; and, from 10% to 37% in sub-Saharan Africa. As with interregional migrants, most people who move from rural to urban areas seek economic advancement. They are pushed from rural areas by declining opportunities in agriculture and are pulled to the cities by the prospect of work in factories or in service industries.

Migration from Urban to Suburban Areas. Most intraregional migration in developed countries is from cities out to surrounding suburbs. The population of most cities in developed countries has declined since the mid-twentieth century, while suburbs have grown rapidly. This trend has been observed in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. For most people, migration to suburbs does not coincide with changing jobs. Instead, people are pulled by a suburban lifestyle. Suburbs offer the opportunity to live in a detached house rather than an apartment, surrounded by a private yard where children can play safely. Cars and trains enable people to live in suburbs yet have access to jobs, shops, and recreational facilities throughout the urban area. To accommodate suburban growth, farms on the periphery of urban areas are converted to housing and commercial developments, where new roads, sewers, and other services must be built.

Migration from Urban to Rural Areas. Developed countries witnessed a new migration trend beginning in the late twentieth century. For the first time, more people immigrated into rural areas than emigrated out of them. Net migration from urban to rural areas is called counterurbanization. Counterurbanization results in part from very rapid expansion of suburbs. But most counterurbanization represents genuine migration from cities and suburbs to small towns and rural communities. People move from urban to rural areas for
lifestyle reasons. Some are lured to rural areas by the prospect of swapping the frantic pace of urban life for the opportunity to live on a farm, where they can own horses or grow vegetables. Others move to farms but do not earn their living from agriculture; instead, they work in nearby offices, small town shops, or other services.

3. **KEY ISSUE 3: WHY DO PEOPLE MIGRATE?**

Ravenstein’s laws help geographers explain the reasons why people migrate: Most people migrate for economic reasons; political and environmental reasons also induce migration, although not as frequently as economic reasons. People migrate because of push factors and pull factors: a **push factor** induces people to move out of their present location; and 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 positively that they feel pulled toward it.

3.1. **Political Reasons for Migrating.** Political migration occurs because of political conflict. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes three groups of people who are forced to migrate for political reasons:

- A **refugee** has been forced to migrate to another country to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or other disasters and cannot return for fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion.
- An **internally displaced person (IDP)** has been forced to migrate for similar political reasons as a refugee but has not migrated across an international border.
- An **asylum seeker** is someone who has migrated to another country in the hope of being recognized as a refugee.

The UN counted 16.7 million refugees, 33.3 million IDPs, and 1.2 million other politically forced migrants in 2013. At the middle of 2018, the number of refugees under UNHCR mandate reached 20.2 million. Turkey hosted 3.6 million refugees while the rest of Europe hosted about 2.7 million. There were 6.4 million hosted by sub-Saharan Africa, the majority in the East and Horn of Africa (4.1 million). The Asia and Pacific region hosted 4.2 million refugees followed by the Middle East and North Africa (2.8 million) and the Americas (664,800). The refugee population from Syria continued to be the largest, reaching 6.5 million and have increased by 180,300 in the first half of 2018 alone. Most other new displacements were due to conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. There were 111,700 new displacements from South Sudan, followed by 74,700 from Democratic Republic of Congo, 43,200 from Nigeria, 24,800 from the Central African Republic, 15,300 from Sudan and 11,700 from Eritrea.

During the first half of 2018, individuals of at least 191 nationalities submitted 879,600 new asylum applications in 156 asylum countries or territories. United States of America received the highest number of new asylum applications worldwide during the reporting period with 137,600 new asylum applications registered. About 55% of these applications came from
Central America (Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras). In Germany, applications for asylum peaked in 2016 when 387,700 applications were received in the first half of the year. By the first six month of 2018, Germany received 81,800 new applications for asylum seekers. Most of these applications originated from Syrian nationals.

Refugees, including persons in a refugee-like situation | mid-2018

The total number of people displaced within their own country due to armed conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations during the first half of 2018 increased to an estimated 39.7 million people, as reported by UNHCR offices in 32 countries. Colombia continued to remain the country with the largest number of internally displaced people. As reported by the Government of Colombia, 7.7 million IDPs were registered in the Victim’s Registry in mid-2018. Syria also continued to be the country with the second-highest IDP population, with 6.2 million IDPs reported in end-2017 and mid-2018.

3.2. Environmental Reasons for Migrating. People sometimes migrate for environmental reasons, pulled toward physically attractive regions and pushed from hazardous ones. Attractive environments for migrants include mountains, sea-sides, and warm 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. Many people are forced to move by water-related disasters because they live in a vulnerable area, such as a floodplain. 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.

An environmental or political feature that hinders migration is an intervening obstacle. The principal obstacle traditionally faced by migrants to other countries was environmental: the
long, arduous, and expensive passage over land or sea. Transportation improvements that have promoted globalization, such as motor vehicles and airplanes, have diminished the importance of environmental features as intervening obstacles. 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.

3.3. Migrating to find work. Most people migrate for economic reasons. People often emigrate from places that have few job opportunities and immigrate to places where jobs seem to be available. The United States and Canada have been especially prominent destinations for economic migrants. 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. Economic migrants in America and in Europe are generally not admitted unless they possess special skills or have a close relative already there, and even then they must compete with similar applicants from other countries.

Asia’s Migrant Workers. Asia is both a major source and a major destination for migrants in search of work: China. Approximately 35 million Chinese live in other countries. The United States is the leading receiving country, although most have emigrated to countries in Southeast Asia. Chinese comprise three fourths of the population in Singapore and one-fourth in Malaysia. China’s booming economy is now attracting immigrants from neighboring countries, especially Vietnamese, who are willing to work in China’s rapidly expanding factories. Immigration from abroad pales in comparison to internal migration within China.

Southwest Asia. The wealthy oil-producing countries of Southwest Asia have been major destinations for people from South and Southeast Asia, including India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. In addition, citizens of poorer countries in Southwest Asia have emigrated to the region’s wealthier countries. Working conditions for immigrants have been considered poor in some of these countries. The Philippine government determined in 2011 that only two countries in Southwest Asia—Israel and Oman—were “safe” for their Filipino migrants, and the others lacked adequate protection for workers’ rights. For their part, oil producing countries fear that the increasing numbers of immigrants will spark political unrest and abandonment of traditional Islamic customs.

Remittances. Migrants who find work in another country frequently send a portion of the wages they have earned to relatives back home. The transfer of money by workers to people in the country from which they emigrated is a remittance. The total amount of remittances worldwide was $550 billion in 2013. Global remittances, World Bank estimated, which include flows to high-income countries, were projected to grow by 10.3 percent to $689 billion in 2018. Remittances are an increasingly important source of wealth for people in developing countries, especially following cutbacks in official assistance from foreign governments and international aid agencies. In 2018, World Bank estimated that remittances to developing countries reached $528 billion.
The United States was the largest remittance source country, with an estimated $56 billion in outward flows in 2014, followed by Saudi Arabia ($37 billion), and Russia ($33 billion). India was the largest remittance receiving country, with an estimated $72 billion in 2015, followed by China ($64 billion), and the Philippines ($30 billion). As global growth is projected to moderate, future remittances to low- and middle-income countries are expected to grow moderately by 4 percent to reach $549 billion in 2019. Global remittances are expected to grow 3.7 percent to $715 billion in 2019.

3.4. Gender and Age of Migrants. Ravenstein noted distinctive gender and family status patterns in his migration theories: most long-distance migrants were 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.

Globally, women are on the move: they comprise slightly less than half of all international, global migrants. In fact, the share of women among global, international migrants has only fallen slightly during the last three decades, from 49 percent in 1990 to 47 percent in 2017. However, the proportion of women among all international migrants varies considerably across regions. Since 1990, the proportion of female migrants has increased in all regions except East Asia and Pacific (EAP), which registered a decrease of women migrants from 48.6% in 1990 to 41.7% in 2017. The increasing share of women among all migrants in a country may be partly explained by longer female life expectancy of women migrants compared with that of men. The declining share of female migrants in EAP may reflect an increase in the demand for migrant workers in male-dominated sectors in parts of the region.

While women migrate as much as men, some important issues need to be addressed: (a) Migration data must be disaggregated by sex and age, and migration policies must take account of how gender shapes different migrants’ needs; (b) Migration can increase women’s access to education and economic resources, and can improve their autonomy and status; (c) Female migrants and refugees are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking; (d) Highly skilled women have high rates of migration but many are employed in low-skilled jobs; (e) Unskilled female migrants work in less-regulated and less-visible sectors than male migrants. Most migrant domestic workers are women and adolescent girls; and, (f) Migration creates empowerment trade-offs for individual women and girls, and between different groups of women and girls.

Age 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; children under 15 comprise 16 percent of immigrants, which reveals
that with the increase in women migrating to the United States, more children are coming with their mothers.

In 2017, around three quarters (74%) of all international migrants were of working age, or between 20 and 64 years of age. There has been a global increase in the median age of migrants, from 38.0 years in 2000 to 39.2 years in 2017. However, in some regions, such as Asia, Oceania and especially Latin America and the Caribbean, the median age of migrants has decreased by about three years. According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) data, the estimated number of people aged 19 or under living in a country other than the one where they were born rose from 28.7 million in 1990 to 36 million in 2017. In 2017, child migrants (aged 19 years and under) accounted for 13.9% of the total migrant population and 5.7% of the total population (of all ages). The estimated number of young migrants (aged 15 to 24) also rose from 22.4 million in 1990 to 27.9 million in 2017. In 2017, young migrants accounted for 10.8% of the total migrant population.

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