
3.1 Reasons to Migrate

- A combination of push and pull factors influences migration decisions.
- Most people migrate for economic reasons.

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.

Ravenstein's "laws" can be organized into three groups:
- The reasons why migrants move (discussed in this section).
- The characteristics of migrants (see Section 3.2).
- The distance migrants typically move (see Section 3.3).

People 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. We can identify three major kinds of push and pull factors: economic, cultural, and environmental.

**ECONOMIC PUSH AND PULL FACTORS**

*International migration* is permanent movement from one country to another, whereas *internal migration* is permanent movement within the same country. Most people migrate from one country to another for economic reasons. People think about emigrating from places that have few job opportunities, and they immigrate to places where the 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.

An area that has valuable natural resources, such as petroleum or uranium, may attract miners and engineers. A new industry may lure factory workers, technicians, and scientists. Construction workers, restaurant employees, and public-service officials may move to areas where rapid population growth stimulates demand for additional services and facilities.

The United States and Canada have been especially prominent destinations for economic migrants. This same perception of economic plenty now lures people to the United States and Canada from Latin America and Asia.

The relative attractiveness of a region can shift with economic change. Similarly, Scotland and Ireland have attracted migrants in recent years after decades of net out-migration. Following the discovery of petroleum in the North Sea off the coast of northeast Scotland, thousands of people have been lured to jobs in the drilling or refining of petroleum or in supporting businesses.
CULTURAL PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Cultural factors can be especially compelling push factors, forcing people to emigrate from a country. Forced migration between countries 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.

Large groups of people were no longer forced to migrate as slaves in the twentieth century, but forced international migration increased because of political instability resulting from cultural diversity. Boundaries of newly independent states often have been drawn to segregate two ethnic groups. Because at least some intermingling among ethnicities inevitably occurs, members of an ethnic group caught on the “wrong” side of a boundary may be forced to migrate to the other side. Wars have also forced large-scale migration of ethnic groups in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially in Europe and Africa. Forced migration of ethnicities is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

According to the United Nations, refugees are people who have been forced to migrate from their homes and cannot return for fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion. 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 find other temporary homes.

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. Coastal regions with warm winters, such as southern Spain and southern 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. Many people are forced to move by water-related disasters because they live in a vulnerable area, such as a floodplain. More than 1 million people were forced to leave Gulf Coast states in 2005 because of Hurricane Katrina, the largest forced migration in U.S. history. Some soon returned to rebuild their homes, but several hundred thousand relocated permanently to other communities. Katrina also resulted in 1,836 confirmed fatalities and 705 missing.

A lack of water pushes others from their land. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to move from the Sahel region of northern Africa because of drought conditions. 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.
A century ago, Ravenstein noted distinctive gender and family-status patterns in his migration theories:

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

Since the late twentieth century, these characteristics have changed. Women and children now constitute a majority of migrants.

**GENDER OF MIGRANTS**

Males historically accounted for most migrants because most people migrate for economic reasons, and men once constituted the overwhelming majority of the labor force. During the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, for example, about 55 percent of immigrants to the United States were male. But the gender pattern reversed in the 1990s, and women now constitute about 55 percent of U.S. immigrants.

Mexicans who come to the United States without proper 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. Bureau of the Census and Department of Homeland Security estimates. But since the 1990s, women have accounted for about half of the undocumented 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 stated 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 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.

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 undocumented Mexican immigrant has attended school for 4 years, less than the average American, but a year more than the average Mexican.

Similarly, immigrants to Europe from Africa were once predominantly males, but now an increasing number of them are women and children.
3.4 Guest Workers

- Guest workers migrate from LDCs to Europe and the Middle East.
- They hold low-paying unskilled jobs that local citizens don't want.

People unable to migrate permanently to a new country for employment opportunities may be allowed to migrate temporarily. Prominent forms of temporary-work migrants include guest workers in Europe and the Middle East and, historically, time-contract workers in Asia.

**EUROPE’S GUEST WORKERS**

Citizens of poor countries who obtain jobs in Western Europe and the Middle East are known as guest workers. In Europe, guest workers are protected by minimum-wage laws, labor union contracts, and other support programs. Foreign-born workers comprise more than one-half of the labor force in Luxembourg; one-sixth in Switzerland; and one-tenth in Austria, Belgium, and Germany. About 700,000 immigrants enter Europe legally each year, plus an estimated 500,000 illegally.

Guest workers serve a useful role in Western Europe, because they take low-paying jobs that local residents won't accept. In cities such as Berlin, Brussels, Paris, and Zurich, guest workers provide essential services, such as driving buses, collecting garbage, repairing streets, and washing dishes.

Although relatively low paid by European standards, guest workers earn far more than they would at home. The economy of the guest worker's native country also gains from the arrangement. By letting their people work elsewhere, poorer countries reduce their own unemployment problems. Guest workers also help their native countries by sending a large percentage of their earnings back home to their families. The injection of foreign currency then stimulates the local economy.
The United Kingdom severely restricts the ability of foreigners to obtain work permits. However, British policy is complicated by the legacy of the country’s former worldwide empire. When some of the United Kingdom’s former colonies were granted independence, residents there could choose between remaining British citizens and becoming citizens of the new country. Millions of former colonials in India, Ireland, Pakistan, and the West Indies retained their British citizenship and eventually moved to the United Kingdom. However, spouses and other family members who are citizens of the new countries do not have the right to come to Britain.

Most guest workers in Europe come from North Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Distinctive migration routes have emerged among the exporting and importing countries. Turkey sends a large number of guest workers to Northern Europe, especially to Germany as a result of government agreements. Three-quarters of a million Turks are employed in Germany, by far the largest movement of guest workers from one country to another within Europe. Many guest workers in France come from former French colonies in North Africa, such as Algeria and Morocco.

**TIME-CONTRACT WORKERS**

Millions of Asians migrated in the nineteenth century as time-contract laborers, recruited for a fixed period to work in mines or on plantations. When their contracts expired, many would settle permanently in the new country. Indians went as time-contract workers to Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, British Guiana (present-day Guyana in South America), eastern and southern Africa, and the islands of Fiji, Mauritius, and Trinidad. Japanese and Filipinos went to Hawaii, and Japanese also went to Brazil. Chinese worked on the U.S. West Coast and helped build the first railroad to span the United States, completed in 1869.

More than 33 million ethnic Chinese currently live permanently in other countries, for the most part in Asia. Chinese comprise three-fourths of the population in Singapore, one-third in Malaysia, and one-tenth in Thailand. Most migrants were from southeastern China. Migration patterns vary among ethnic groups of Chinese. Chiu Chownese migrate to Cambodia, Laos, and Singapore; Hakka to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand; and Hokkien to Indonesia and the Philippines.

In recent years, people have immigrated illegally in Asia to find work in other countries. Estimates of the number of illegal foreign workers in Taiwan range from 20,000 to 70,000. Most are Filipinos, Thais, and Malaysians who are attracted by employment in textile manufacturing, construction, and other industries. These immigrants accept half the pay demanded by Taiwanese, for the level is much higher than what they are likely to get at home, if they could even find employment.