

KEY ISSUE 3

Why Do People Migrate?

- Reasons for Migrating
- Migrating to Find Work
- Characteristics of Migrants

Learning Outcome 3.3.1

Provide examples of political, environmental, and economic push and pull factors.

People decide to migrate because of push factors and pull factors:

- A **push factor** induces people to move out of their present location.
- 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, political, and environmental. Usually, one of the three factors emerges as most important, although ranking the relative importance of the three factors can be difficult and even controversial.

REASONS FOR MIGRATING

Ravenstein's laws help geographers make generalizations about where and how far people migrate. The laws also sum up the reasons why people migrate:

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

POLITICAL PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Political factors can be especially compelling push factors, forcing people to emigrate from a country. Slavery was once an important political push factor. Millions of people were shipped to other countries as slaves or as prisoners, especially from sub-Saharan Africa to North America and Latin America, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see Chapter 7).

Forced political migration now occurs because of political conflict. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes three groups of forced political migrants:

- 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 United Nations counted 10.6 million refugees, 14.7 million IDPs, and 838,000 asylum seekers in 2010 (Figure 3-25). The UNHCR also found that 198,000 refugees and 2.9 million IDPs had returned to their homes in 2010.

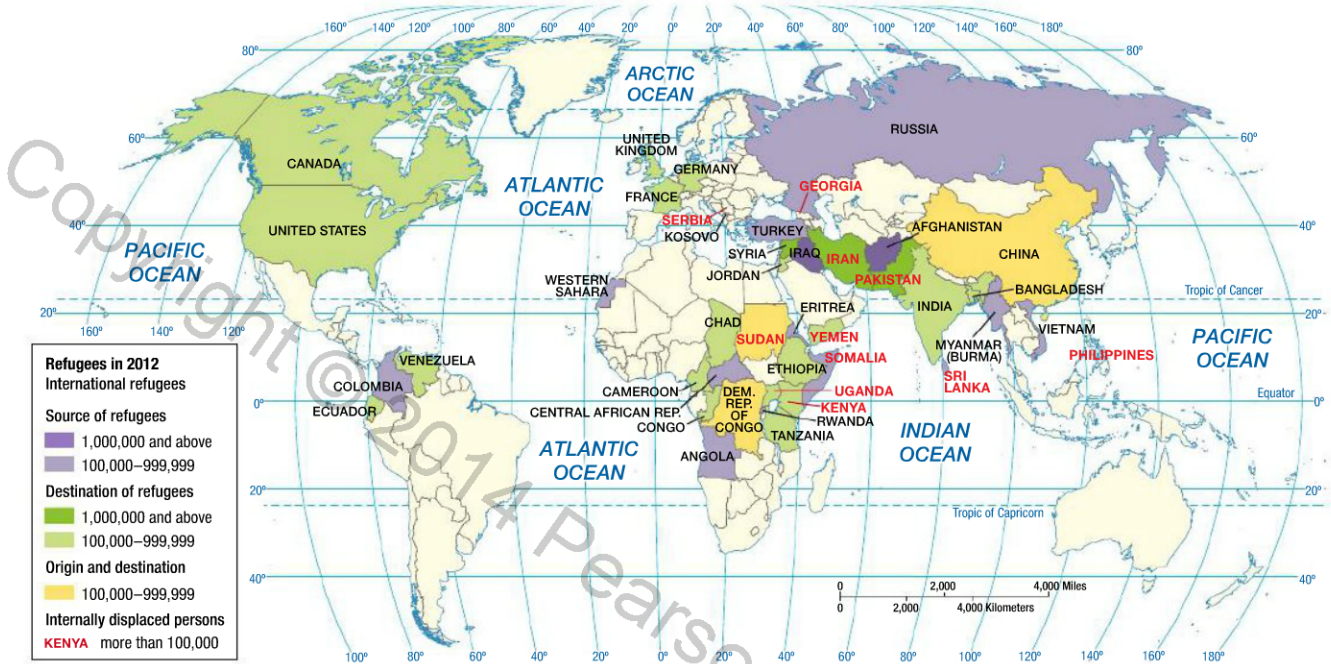
The largest number of refugees in 2010 was forced to migrate from Afghanistan and Iraq because of the continuing wars there. Countries bordering Afghanistan and Iraq, including Pakistan, Iran, and Syria, received the most refugees.

ENVIRONMENTAL PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

People sometimes migrate for environmental reasons, pulled toward physically attractive regions and pushed from hazardous ones. In this 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. Many people are forced to move by water-related disasters because they live in a vulnerable area, such as a floodplain (Figure 3-26). The **floodplain** of a river is the area subject to flooding during a specific number of years, based



▲ **FIGURE 3-25 POLITICAL FACTORS: REFUGEES AND IDPS** The largest numbers of refugees originated in Southwest Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

on historical trends. People living in the “100-year 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 3-27). 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.



▲ **FIGURE 3-26 FLOODING** Flooding of the Mississippi River in 2011 inundated farms in the floodplain.



▲ **FIGURE 3-27 DROUGHT** This man in Abala, Niger, is explaining that his animals have died because of drought.

Migrating to Find Work

Learning Outcome 3.3.2

Summarize the flows of migrant workers in Europe and Asia.

ECONOMIC PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

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. Because of economic restructuring, job prospects often vary from one country to another and within regions of the same country.

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.

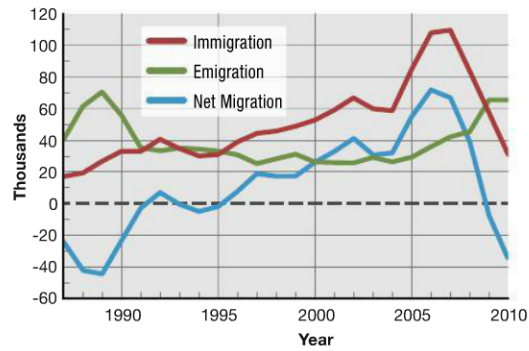
The relative attractiveness of a region can shift with economic change. Ireland was a place of net out-migration through most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dire economic conditions produced net out-migration in excess of 200,000 a year during the 1850s. The pattern reversed during the 1990s, as economic prosperity made Ireland a destination for immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe. However, the collapse of Ireland's economy as part of the severe global recession starting in 2008 brought a net out-migration to Europe (Figure 3-28).

Pause and Reflect 3.3.1

What would it take for Ireland to once again have net in-migration?

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between migrants seeking economic opportunities and refugees fleeing from government persecution. The distinction between economic migrants and refugees is important because the United States, Canada, and European countries treat the two groups differently. Economic migrants 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. However, refugees receive special priority in admission to other countries.

People unable to migrate permanently to a new country for employment opportunities may be allowed to migrate temporarily. Prominent forms of temporary work are found in Europe and Asia.



▲ **FIGURE 3-28 ECONOMIC MIGRATION: IRELAND** With few job prospects, Ireland historically had net out-migration until the 1990s. The severe recession of the early twenty-first century has brought net out-migration back to Ireland.

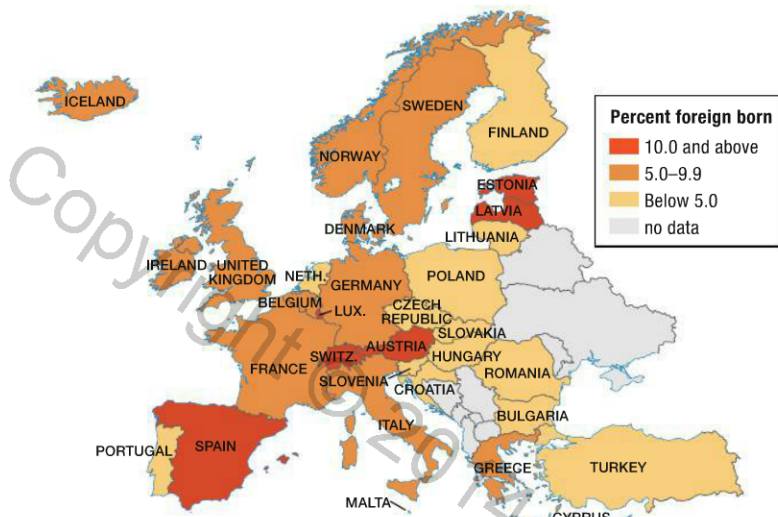
EUROPE'S MIGRANT WORKERS

Of the world's 16 countries with the highest per capita income, 14 are in Northern and Western Europe. As a result, the region attracts immigrants from poorer regions located the south and east. These immigrants serve a useful role in Europe, taking low-status and low-skill jobs that local residents won't accept. In cities such as Berlin, Brussels, Paris, and Zurich, immigrants provide essential services, such as driving buses, collecting garbage, repairing streets, and washing dishes (Figure 3-29).

Although relatively low paid by European standards, immigrants earn far more than they would at home. By letting their people work elsewhere, poorer countries reduce their own unemployment problems. Immigrants 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.



▲ **FIGURE 3-29 IMMIGRANTS IN EUROPE** Immigrant from North Africa cleans the streets in Paris.



Germany and other wealthy European countries operated a **guest worker** program mainly during the 1960s and 1970s. Immigrants from poorer countries were allowed to immigrate temporarily to obtain jobs. They were protected by minimum-wage laws, labor union contracts, and other support programs. The guest worker program was intended to be temporary. After a few years, the guest workers were expected to return home.

The first guest worker programs involved emigration from Southern European countries such as Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Northern European countries were then much wealthier and more economically developed and offered many more job opportunities. Turkey and North Africa replaced Southern Europe as the leading sources. Today, most immigrants in search of work in Europe come from Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Romania.

The term “guest worker” is no longer used in Europe, and the government programs no longer exist. Many immigrants who arrived originally under the guest worker program have remained permanently. They, along with their children and grandchildren, have become citizens of the host country. The foreign-born population exceeds 40 percent in Luxembourg and 20 percent in Switzerland. Among the most populous European countries, Spain has the highest share of foreign-born population (Figure 3-30). In Europe as a whole, though, the percentage of foreign-born residents is only one-half that of North America.

ASIA'S MIGRANT WORKERS

Asia is both a major source and a major destination for migrants in search of work:

- **China.** Approximately 40 million Chinese currently live in other countries, including 30 million in Southeast Asia, 5 million in North America, and 2 million in Europe. Chinese comprise three-fourths of the population in Singapore and one-fourth in Malaysia. Most migrants were from southeastern China. China's booming economy is now attracting immigrants from neighboring

◀ **FIGURE 3-30 PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANTS IN EUROPE** Luxembourg and Switzerland have the highest percentages of immigrants.

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 poorer countries in the region, such as Egypt and Yemen. During the late twentieth century, most immigrants arrived from South and Southeast Asia, including India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand (Figure 3-31). 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 guest workers will spark political unrest and abandonment of traditional Islamic customs.

Pause and Reflect 3.3.2

Why are street cleaning and construction jobs attractive for immigrants to Europe and Southwest Asia?

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 3

Why Do People Migrate?

- ✓ People migrate for a combination of political, environmental, and economic push and pull factors.
- ✓ Most people migrate in search of work.



▲ **FIGURE 3-31 IMMIGRANTS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA** These immigrants in Dubai have lined up to get construction jobs.