**Chapter 3: Migration**

**Introduction** Migration, the permanent movement of people to a new location, is central to the interest of geographers. Geographers study migration because it helps reveal changes in population in places and regions around the world. The cultural exchange that occurs when migrants arrive at new locations also bears significance to geographers.

**Key Issue 1: Where Are the World’s Migrants Distributed?**

**Migration** is a permanent move to a new location, and is a specific type of relocation diffusion. Geographers examine the migration of people across Earth and the basis for the migration.

**Introducing Migration** During the past 7,000 years, humans have diffused from a small portion of Earth’s land area to most of it by migration. Migration is a type of **mobility**, which is a broad term encapsulating all types of movements from one location to another. Movements that occur on a regular basis (daily, weekly, monthly, or annually), such as commuting from home to work, are called **circulation**. The flow of migration always involves two-way connections – **emigration** is migration *from* a location, while **immigration** is migration *to* a location.

The difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants is the **net migration**. If the number of immigrants is greater than the number of emigrants, the net migration is positive, and the region has net in-migration. If the number of emigrants is greater than the number of immigrants, the net migration is negative, and the region has net out-migration.

The reasons behind migration are a key interest to geographers, as migration generates profound changes for individuals and cultures at large. Migration to a new location disrupts traditional cultural connections and economic patterns in one region. Migrants bring their language, religion, ethnicity, and other cultural characteristics, as well as methods of farming and other economic practices to their new homes.

**International Net Migration** Nineteenth-century geographer E.G. Ravenstein’s “laws” are the foundation for contemporary geographic migration study. The “laws” are organized into three groups that help us understand where and why migration occurs:

* The distance that migrants typically move (discussed in Key Issues 1 and 2).
* The reasons migrants move (discussed in the first part of Key Issue 3)
* The characteristics of migrants (discussed in the second part of Key Issue 3).

**International Migration Flows** A permanent move from one country to another is **international migration**. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 214 million people (3 percent of the world’s population) are international migrants. At the regional scale, the three largest flows of migrants are:

* From Latin America to North America
* From South Asia to Europe
* From South Asia to Southwest Asia

Migration from Mexico to the United States represents the largest flow of people from a single country to another single country. The significance of the movement of people from developing countries to developed countries is emblematic of regional migration patterns. North America, Europe, Southwest Asia, and the South Pacific have net in-migration. Latin America, Africa, and all regions of Asia except for Southwest Asia have net out-migration. The United States is home to more foreign-born residents than any other country – roughly 42 million as of 2015, with approximately 1 million additional people arriving annually.

**International and Internal Migration** Geographer E.G. Ravenstein developed a set of laws that help describe human migration. According to Ravenstein:

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

**Distance of Migration** Migration can take two forms: international or internal.

**International Migration** International migration may be voluntary or forced. **Voluntary migration** is migration where a person has chosen to move (for economic or environmental reasons), while **forced migration** means a person was compelled to move (by cultural or environmental factors). This distinction is not always easily identifiable.

**Internal Migration** Internal migration is the permanent movement of a person or people within the same country. Internal migration can be divided into two types: interregional and intraregional. **Interregional migration** is the movement from one region of a country to another. The movement within the same region of a single country is called **intraregional migration**.

**Changing U.S. Immigration** The United States is situated in a unique position in the study of international migration, as it is inhabited overwhelmingly by direct descendants of immigrants. About 80 million people migrated to the United States between 1820 and 2015, including 42 million currently alive in 2015. Immigration in the United States can be conceptualized into three main eras:

* Colonial settlement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
* Mass European immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
* Asian and Latin American immigration in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

**U.S. Immigration at** **Independence** According to the first census in 1790, the U.S. population was   
3.9 million, including 950,000 who had immigrated to one of the colonies currently part of the United States. Immigration to the United States in this era primarily came from two key places: Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. Most Africans were forced to migrate to the United States as slaves, while most Europeans were voluntary migrants. All of the colonies in the United States were established on the Atlantic Coast.

**U.S. Immigration: Mid-Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries** From 1840 until the outbreak of World War I, the source regions for new migrants coincided with the Industrial Revolution diffusing from its hearth in Great Britain. The majority of the immigrants that came to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century came from Germany, Ireland, and Scandinavia. In the early twentieth century many of the immigrants came from Eastern and Southern Europe.

**U.S. Immigration: Late Twentieth to Early Twenty-first Centuries** After World War II most new migrants to the United States came from Asia and Latin America. Asians and Latin Americans have come to the United States in recent decades after many of their countries entered stage 2 of the demographic transition.

**Key Issue 2: Where Do People Migrate within a Country?**

**Interregional Migration in the United States** The expansion of the United States to the western reaches of North America allowed for large-scale internal migration. Through mass interregional migration, the interior of the continent was settled and developed.

**Changing Center of Population** The U.S. Census Bureau computes the population center of the United States every census. The population center is the average location of everyone in the country, the “center of population gravity.” Over the past 200 years, the center has reliably shifted westward, although the rate of this shift has fluctuated over time.

**1790: Hugging the Coast** Settlement was concentrated along the Atlantic Coast, as colonists depended on shipping links with Europe to receive provisions and to export raw materials. The Appalachian Mountains also presented a physiographic barrier to westward movement.

**1800-1840: Crossing the Appalachians** Transportation improvements, notably the construction of canals (especially the Erie Canal), encouraged westward settlement. The forested river valleys between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River provided cheap land for enterprising migrants.

**1850-1890: Rushing to the Gold** The population center drifted further west during the mid- to late nineteenth century. The Gold Rush of the late 1840s pulled people past western frontiers that were not heavily occupied. In fact, explorers such as Zebulon Pike thought of the Great Plains as unfit for agricultural activity, leading many in the United States to conceptualize the region as the Great American Desert.

**1900-1940: Filling in the Great Plains** Emigration from Europe to the United States offset most of the migration from the East Coast to the U.S. West, preventing a major westward shift of the population center. The Great Plains region was also beginning to pull more migrants, as advances in agricultural technology enabled people to cultivate the landscape.

**1950-2010: Moving South** The population center not only resumed its westward movement, but shifted southward as well, as Americans moved to the South for job opportunities and warmer climes. Interregional migration has diminished considerably, as regional differences in employment opportunities have receded.

**Interregional Migration in Other Large Countries** Long-distance interregional migration has played an important role in opening new regions for development in countries with large amounts of land area, such as China, Canada, and Russia.

**Interregional Migration in Canada** Mirroring migration patterns in the United States, population expanded westward in Canada over the past 200 years. The two westernmost provinces, Alberta and British Columbia, have had the vast majority of Canada’s current net in-migration, while Ontario has had the most net out-migration.

**Interregional Migration in Russia** The population of Russia is highly clustered in the western (European) portion of the country. In the past, eastward interregional migration was observed, as the Asian portion of Russia was sparsely populated and Communist policy dictated economic development in this region. The Soviet government sometimes forcibly moved people to these isolated areas to provide an adequate supply of labor for this industrial expansion.

**Interregional Migration in China** The predominant flow of interregional migration is from rural to urban areas, where job prospects are higher. More than 150 million people have emigrated from rural areas in the interior of the China. While interregional migration to the east coast was restricted in years past, limitations have been eased recently.

**Interregional Migration in Brazil** While the Brazilian east coast is more heavily populated than its densely forested interior areas, development of the interior region (along with the movement of the capital to Brasília) over the past half century has altered historic migration patterns. The coastal areas now have net out-migration, whereas the interior areas have net in-migration.

**Intraregional Migration** Intraregional migration is a more frequently observed phenomena than interregional or international migration. Most intraregional migration occurs from rural to urban areas in developing countries, while migrants are moving from cities to suburbs in developed countries.

**Migration from Rural to Urban Areas**  Beginning with the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s, migration patterns in Europe and North America saw people move from rural to urban areas. Developing countries are starting to see similar trends, with agricultural job opportunities disappearing and factory and service prospects in urban areas growing.

**Migration from Urban to Suburban Areas**  The majority of intraregional migration in developed countries is from cities to surrounding areas, or suburbs. The population of city-based urban populations in developed countries has decreased since the mid-twentieth century, while suburban areas have grown rapidly. Amenities such as private yards and garages have pulled people to the suburban lifestyle; however, this lifestyle is only possible with access to reliable transportation, such as a car or train. This transportation allows access to jobs, shopping, and recreational facilities.

**Migration from Urban to Rural Areas** The late twentieth century saw the development of a new migration trend: counterurbanization. **Counterurbanization** is the net migration from urban to rural areas, a phenomena that has results in part from the rapid growth of suburbs. Rocky Mountain states such as Colorado and Utah have specifically experienced counterurbanization in the United States. The development of communication and transportation systems have economically and socially connected once isolated areas, allowing for this trend to take place.

**Key Issue 3: Why Do People Migrate?**

Ravenstein’s laws help geographers contextualize the impetus of people who migrate:

* Most people migrate for economic reasons.
* Cultural and environmental reasons also induce migration, although not as often as economic reasons.

While one prevailing reason may be easily identifiable for migration, a mosaic of reasons generally prompts a move. People migrate due to push and pull factors. A **push factor** motivates people to move *from* their present location, while a **pull factor** encourages people to move *to* a new location. Push and pull factors typically work in tandem for people deciding (or being forced to) to migrate.

**Cultural Reasons for Migrating** 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 impacts of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or other disasters and cannot return for fear of persecution because race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political views.
* An **internally displaced person (IDP)** has been compelled to move for similar political reasons as a refugee but has not migrated to a different country.
* An **asylum seeker** is someone who has migrated to another country in the hope of being recognized as a refugee.

In 2014, The UN counted 19.5 million refugees, 38.2 million IDPs, and 1.8 million asylum seekers. The largest number of refugees in 2014 were forced to migrate from Afghanistan and from Syria due to prolonged civil wars in each respective country. Countries bordering Afghanistan and Syria took in the largest share of refugees – Pakistan and Iran from Afghanistan and Lebanon and Turkey from Syria.

**Trail of Tears** Under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Native Americans were forced to move from the lands they had historically occupied in the southeastern United States to Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma). The Choctaw were forced to emigrate from Mississippi in 1831, the Seminole from Florida in 1832, the Creek from Alabama in 1834, the Chickasaw from Mississippi in 1837, and the Cherokee from Georgia in 1838. 25 million acres of land were opened up for white settlement by these five removals. Many of the 46,000 Native Americans forced to move died on the journey to Indian Territory, with a dry climate unsuitable for agricultural activity awaiting them in the west. The route taken by these Native Americans is now known as the Trail of Tears; parts of it are preserved as a National Historic Trail.

**Environmental Reasons for Migrating** People will sometimes migrate for environmental reasons. They are pulled toward physically attractive regions and pushed from hazardous ones. Many people are forced to move by water-related disasters because they live in a vulnerable area like the **floodplain** of a river. A lack of water will often force people to migrate from an area. Deterioration of land to a desert like condition, typically due to human activity, is known as **desertification** (or more precisely, semiarid land degradation). For instance, the areas of Africa capable of sustaining human life has deteriorated due to population growth and persistent drought. An environmental or political feature that deters migration is an **intervening obstacle**. While long-distance passage over land or sea was the traditional environmental barrier to international migration, transportation improvements have diminished the prominence of environmental features as intervening obstacles.

**Migrating to Find Work** Most people migrate for economic reasons, often due to a lack of job opportunities. Economic restructuring impacts job prospects both internationally and intraregionally.

**Economic Reasons for Migrating** Throughout history, the United States and Canada have drawn economic migrants. While Europeans historically immigrated to the United States and Canada, today many people emigrate from Latin America and Asia, pulled by the economic prospects offered by these two North American countries. Sometimes, it is difficult to categorize migrants coming to the United States, Canada, and European countries – many move for economic reasons, while others flee government persecution. This distinction between the two is important because these destinations treat these two groups differently. Economic migrants are generally not admitted unless they possess special skills or have a close relative already in the new country, while refugees receive special priority in most cases.

**Asia’s Migrant Work** Some countries allow people to immigrate on a temporary basis for economic reasons, most notably in Asia and Europe.

**South and East Asia** The world’s largest sources of economic migrants emigrate from South and East Asia, with more than 2 million people emigrating from India, Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan every year. 50 million Chinese and 25 million Indians live abroad, with the United States and other Asian countries being prominent destinations.

**Southwest Asia** Economic migrants from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and other Southeastern Asian countries travel to the oil-rich countries of Southwest Asia for work. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia host these immigrants, although working conditions have been considered poor in some of these countries.

**Remittances** 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, with this figure rising by nearly 10 percent every year. In 2013, India was the biggest recipient of remittances, bringing in $71 billion, followed by China with $60 billion.

**Gender and Age of Migrants** Ravenstein detailed distinctive gender and family-status patterns in his laws:

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

**Gender of Migrants** Ravenstein theorized that males were more likely to migrate long distances to other countries than females because economic push and pull factors were the main reasons for international migration, and males were more likely than females to be employed. This theory held true for people immigrating to the United States during the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, when 55 percent were male. However, since 1970, female immigrants have outnumbered their male counterparts, comprising 55 percent of the total. This trend can also be observed in other developed countries. Ravenstein theorized two reasons for this shift:

* The high percentage of females in the workforce of developed countries attracts a high percentage of female immigrants.
* Some developed countries have allowed wives to join husbands who have already immigrated.

This pattern is not present in developing countries, where male immigrants still outnumber female ones.

**Age of Migrants** Ravenstein theorized that most long-distance migrants were young adults seeking job opportunities rather than children or elderly people. Recent migration trends in the United States mirror this theory in some aspects, but not in others:

* Most U.S. immigrants are young adults, reflecting Ravenstein’s laws. 49 percent of recent immigrants to the United States are between the ages of 20 and 39.
* Only 5 percent of recent U.S. immigrants are over the age of 65. However, in developing countries, the elderly are more likely to migrate, comprising 8 percent of immigrants.
* Children under the age of 20 make up 21 percent of immigrants to the United States, while in developing countries, 23 percent of the same cohort are migrants.

The number of unaccompanied minors attempting to enter the United States without proper documentation has skyrocketed in recent years, due to a mix of pull and push factors. 90 percent of the children between 12 and 17 trying to immigrate to the United States have been males – these teenage boys are pushed by increasing gang violence in their home countries (such as Honduras and El Salvador), and pulled to the United States because of rumors that deportation will not happen if they are caught.

**Key Issue 4: Why Do Migrants Face Challenges?**

**Government Immigration Policies** Most countries, including the United States, have instituted selective immigration policies that admit some types of immigrants while barring others. Visas are typically granted for specific employment placement and family reunification. The United Nations categorizes countries according to four types of immigration policies: (1) maintain the current level of immigration, (2) increase the level, (3) reduce the level, (4) no policy. Emigration policies are identified by the same four classes.

**Unauthorized Immigration** Migrants who enter the United States without proper documents are called **unauthorized immigrants**. More than half the unauthorized immigrants in the United States emigrated from Mexico. Academic observers favor the term “unauthorized immigrants” when referring to this group of immigrants, while “undocumented immigrant” is preferred by some of the groups that advocate for more rights for these individuals. An estimated 8 million unauthorized immigrants are employed in the United States, comprising 5 percent of the total U.S. civilian work force. They are most likely to be employed in construction and hospitality industries. The states with the largest number of unauthorized immigrants are California and Texas, while Nevada has the highest proportion of unauthorized immigrants. 61 percent of unauthorized adult immigrants have been in the United States for 10 years or more, 23 percent for 5 to 9 years, and 16 percent for less than 5 years.

**U.S. Quota Laws** The United States has long used **quota laws** to limit the source regions and numbers of new migrants. The Quota Act and the National Origins Act, passed in 1921 and 1924, respectively, limited the number of immigrants admitted to the United States during a one-year period. Quota laws were historically preferential to Europeans. Today’s quotas give preference to talented and skilled workers in wanted professions which in the long run harms the countries these professionals are emigrating from. This situation is called **brain drain**. Presently, many professionals from Asian countries are immigrating to the United States, contributing to brain drain in their native countries. Family members of these professionals are also given preference in quota laws, with chain migration drawing these family members to the destinations these professionals have moved to in the United States. **Chain migration** is the migration of people to a specific location because relatives or members of the same nationality previously migrated there.

**U.S.-Mexico Border Issues** The United States has constructed a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border that covers approximately one-fourth of the border’s length, but locating the border is difficult in sparsely inhabited, remote areas. Mexicans oftentimes urge understanding and sympathy for the plight of the immigrants trying to cross the border.

**Migration Policy Disputes** American citizens are divided concerning whether unauthorized migration helps or hurt the country. This ambivalence extends to certain elements of immigration law. While many Americans would like to see more effective border patrols and physical barriers, such as fences, constructed to prevent unauthorized border crossings, they cannot agree on the funding of these expenditures. Most Americans acknowledge that unauthorized immigrants take jobs that no American citizen will reliably take, so they support some type of temporary work visa to allow them to work in the United States. Americans also favor letting law enforcement officials stop and verify the legal status of anyone they suspect of being an unauthorized immigrant; however, citizens also fear civil rights may be violated in doing so. Additionally, Americans believe that enforcement of unauthorized immigrants is a federal, and not local, government responsibility. Arizona and Alabama are examples of states that have passed restrictive laws aiming to identify unauthorized immigrants, while more than 100 localities across the country have passed resolutions supporting more rights for these same immigrants – a movement known as “Sanctuary City.”

**Europe’s Immigration Crisis** Immigrants from the relatively poorer Southern and Eastern Europe are drawn to the economically more developed Northern and Western Europe. These immigrants are employed in industries that are typically eschewed by citizens in these Northern and Western Europeans countries.

**Migration Patterns in Europe** European countries collectively have around 40 million immigrants. This total includes 20 million who have migrated from one European country to another and 20 million who have emigrated from outside the continent. The flow of migrants within Europe is primarily from east to west. Prior to 2014, most immigrants coming to Europe came from neighboring countries, such as Morocco and Turkey. As a result of the prolonged conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and North Africa, the number of refugees entering Europe has grown tremendously. These refugees have confounded many governments across Europe, with many struggling to devise balanced policies that will accommodate refugees while protecting the interests of its citizens. The land and sea routes to Europe taken by these refugees are perilous, with more than 1,000 perishing by drowning in the Mediterranean or by suffocating in sealed trucks.

**Guest Workers** Germany and other wealthy European countries instituted **guest worker** programs, in which immigrants from poorer countries were permitted to immigrate temporarily to obtain employment. These guest worker programs (operated primarily during the 1960s and 1970s) were anticipated to be examples of **circular migration**, which is the temporary movement of a migrant worker between home and host counties to seek employment. Guest workers were anticipated to return to their home countries once their work was done. Most of these migrants have remained permanently in Europe, becoming citizens of the host country.

**Attitudes Toward Immigrants** In Europe, immigrants make up 8 percent of Europe’s population, including 4 percent who migrated from one European country to another, and 4 percent who emigrated from outside the continent. The immigrant population makes up 13 percent of the total population in the United States, and 21 percent of the total population in Canada. Many political parties in countries across Europe have adopted hostile positions toward immigrants, labeling them as the source of crime, unemployment, and high welfare costs. They also claim that these immigrants are eroding the long-standing cultural traditions of the host country. Demographic change has played a major role in the source of this hostility, with most European countries currently in the fourth stage of the demographic transition. With very low or negative NIR, immigrants are now the sole source of population growth.