Migration

Refer back to Figure 2-4 (ecumene) for a moment. Humans have spread across Earth during the past 7,000 years. This diffusion of human settlement from a small portion of Earth’s land area to most of it resulted from migration. To accomplish the spread across Earth, humans have permanently changed their place of residence—where they sleep, store their possessions, and receive legal documents. Geographers document from where people migrate and to where they migrate. They also study reasons why people migrate.

How many times has your family moved? In the United States, the average family moves once every six

KEY ISSUES
1 Why Do People Migrate?
2 Where Are Migrants Distributed?
3 Why Do Migrants Face Obstacles?
4 Why Do People Migrate Within a Country?
years. Was your last move traumatic or exciting? The loss of old friends and familiar settings can hurt, but the experiences awaiting you at a new location can be stimulating. Think about the multitude of Americans—maybe including yourself—who have migrated from other countries. Imagine the feelings of people migrating from another country when they arrive in a new land without a job, friends, or—for many—the ability to speak the local language.

Why would people make a perilous journey across thousands of kilometers of ocean? Why did the pioneers cross the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, or the Mojave Desert to reach the American West? Why do people continue to migrate by the millions today? The hazards that many migrants have faced are a measure of the strong lure of new locations and the desperate conditions in their former homelands. Most people migrate in search of three objectives: economic opportunity, cultural freedom, and environmental comfort. This chapter will study the reasons why people migrate.
**CASE STUDY / Migrating from Uruguay to Russia**

Vasily Kilin was born and raised in Uruguay, where his parents and grandparents live. Kilin is migrating to Vladivostok, a city of one-half million in the far east region of Russia. Kilin is migrating from Uruguay to Russia with the encouragement of the Russian government. Programs worth several thousand dollars have paid for Kilin’s relocation expenses and assisted in his job search.

In Chapter 2, we saw that Russia is in stage 4 of the demographic transition. Russia’s NIR is one of the world’s lowest at around −0.3. Contributing to the low NIR is a CBR of 12 per 1,000, one of the world’s lowest, and a CDR of 15, one of the world’s highest. Poor health practices, such as a high rate of alcoholism, have contributed to the high CDR. Family-planning practices and a deep pessimism about the future have contributed to the low CBR. As a result, Russia’s population is expected to decline sharply from 142 million in 2009 to 117 million in 2050. Yet Russia’s population decline would be even steeper were it not for immigration. More people have been migrating into Russia than leaving.

Like people on the move elsewhere in the world, Russia is attracting many immigrants for economic reasons. With the fall of communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russians have more opportunity to start businesses. Although economic conditions in Russia are difficult, they are worse in neighboring countries. Russia has also attracted immigrants for cultural reasons. When the Soviet Union was disbanded in 1991, many Russians suddenly found themselves living as minorities in newly created countries such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan (see Chapter 7), so they moved to Russia.

To reduce the anticipated population decline, Russia launched a program in 2006 to induce more immigration by people like Vasily Kilin. But in the first two years of the program, only 10,000 people participated. Response has been low in part because most Russians who have migrated to other countries have no interest in migrating back to Russia. Having migrated a generation ago to London or New York in search of economic gain and political freedom, few Russians are interested in returning to Russia. Further, the program is open only to ethnic Russians who speak fluent Russian.

 Barely 100 kilometers from Vladivostok is the border between Russia and China. Many Chinese would be willing to move the short distance into Russia in search of better economic prospects, but Russia doesn’t want them.

Diffusion was defined in Chapter 1 as a process by which a characteristic spreads from one area to another, and relocation diffusion was the spread of a characteristic through the bodily movement of people from one place to another. The subject of this chapter is a specific type of relocation diffusion called migration, which is a permanent move to a new location. Geographers document where people migrate to and from across the space of Earth.

The flow of migration always involves two-way connections. Given two locations, A and B, some people migrate from A to B, while at the same time others migrate from B to A. Emigration is migration from a location; 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 exceeds the number of emigrants, the net migration is positive, and the region has net in-migration. If the number of emigrants exceeds the number of immigrants, the net migration is negative, and the region has net out-migration.

Migration is a form of mobility, which is a more general term covering all types of movements from one place to another. People display mobility in a variety of ways, such as by journeying every weekday from their homes to places of work or education and once a week to shops, places of worship, or recreation areas. These types of short-term, repetitive, or cyclical movements that recur on a regular basis, such as daily, monthly, or annually, are called circulation. College students display another form of mobility—seasonal mobility—by moving to a dormitory each fall and returning home the following spring.

Geographers are especially interested in why people migrate, even though migration occurs much less frequently than other forms of mobility, because it produces profound changes for individuals and entire cultures. A permanent move to a new location disrupts traditional cultural ties and economic patterns in one region. At the same time, when people migrate, they take with them to their new home their language, religion, ethnicity, and other cultural traits, as well as their methods of farming and other economic practices.

The changing scale generated by modern transportation systems, especially motor vehicles and airplanes, makes relocation diffusion more feasible than in the past, when people had to rely on walking, animal power, or slow ships. However, thanks to modern communications systems, relocation diffusion is no longer essential for transmittal of ideas from one place to another. Culture and economy can diffuse rapidly around the world through forms of expansion diffusion.

If people can participate in the globalization of culture and economy regardless of place of residence, why do they still migrate in large numbers? The answer is that place is still important to an individual’s cultural identity and economic prospects. Within a global economy, an individual’s ability to earn a living varies by location. Within a global culture, people migrate to escape domination by other cultural groups or to be reunited with others of similar culture. Migration of people with similar cultural values creates pockets of local diversity.

Although migration is a form of relocation diffusion, reasons for migrating can be gained from expansion diffusion. Someone
may migrate and send back a message that gives others the idea of migrating. For example, many Europeans migrated to the United States in the nineteenth century because very favorable reports from early migrants led them to believe that the streets of American cities were paved with gold.

**KEY ISSUE 1**

**Why Do People Migrate?**

- **Reasons for Migrating**
- **Distance of Migration**
- **Characteristics of Migrants**

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. To understand where and why migration occurs, Ravenstein’s “laws” can be organized into three groups: the reasons why migrants move, the distance they typically move, and their characteristics. Each of these elements is addressed in this section of the chapter.

**Reasons for Migrating**

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

People decide to 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. 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, cultural, and environmental. Usually, one of the three factors emerges as most important, although as will be discussed later in this chapter, ranking the relative importance of the three factors can be difficult and even controversial.

**Economic Push and Pull Factors**

Most people migrate for economic reasons. People think about emigrating from places that have few job opportunities, and they 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 (Figure 3-1). 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.

**Cultural Push and Pull Factors**

Cultural factors can be especially compelling push factors, forcing people to emigrate from a country. Forced international migration 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 (see Chapter 7). Large groups of people are no longer forced to migrate as slaves, but forced international migration persists because of political instability resulting from cultural diversity.

According to the United Nations, **refugees** are people who have been forced to migrate from their homes and cannot