

MIGRATION STORIES

introduction

Population pressures throughout the world have encouraged **migration**, the movement of people from one place to another. While most people might prefer to stay in their homeland, they often feel compelled to leave in search of a better quality of life somewhere else. In 2024, 304 million people (or 3.7 percent of the global population) were living outside of their country of birth.¹ Many forces are at play causing this movement with reasons ranging from political and economic to environmental and social.

How people are organized geographically throughout the world has far-reaching implications, and when this shifts due to migration, it can reshape the cultural and physical landscape of an area. Changes can be seen in the size, composition, and distribution of population – both within the country from which migrants are **emigrating** and also within the country to which migrants are **immigrating**.

Vocabulary: brain drain, emigration, forced migration, immigration, intervening obstacle, migration, pull factor, push factor, refugee, remittance, voluntary migration

materials

- Migration Scenarios (provided)
- Assignment Sheet (provided)

procedure

1. Display the political cartoon on page two and facilitate a discussion on why people migrate. Review push/pull factors:

Push factor: induces people to move out of their current location

Pull factor: induces people to move into a new location

2. Divide students into groups of five and provide each group member with one of the Migration Scenarios. Each group member should have a different scenario. You may want to print the articles from the cards on page 6 prior to class, post page 6 on your class LMS, or students can type the URL directly into a computer or tablet.



Studies For Our Global Future

concept

People migrate for countless reasons and this causes populations to change, impacting both the country left behind and the destination country.

objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify push/pull factors from a real-world migration.
- Develop purposeful questions as a means of understanding a migration story.
- Interpret news articles and research sources to create a realistic migration story.
- Summarize similarities and differences among various migrations happening around the world.

subjects

AP Human Geography, Geography, English Language Arts

skills

Reading comprehension, researching, synthesizing research, critical thinking, developing questions, identifying trends, comparing and evaluating

method

In small groups, students take on the role of real-world migrants and take turns in the “hot seat” to answer questions about their unique journey.



You can either assign the scenarios below at random, or assign them based on difficulty level of the article (based on length, vocabulary, and complexity of the story).

Easiest Scenarios	Medium Scenarios	Hardest Scenarios
Afghanistan to Slovenia	DRC to Australia	Hong Kong to UK
Mexico to U.S.	Libya to Germany	Tuvalu to New Zealand
Venezuela to Ecuador	Syria to Germany	

- Distribute the Assignment Sheet to each student. Provide an overview of the assignment – each student will imagine themselves in the role of a migrant who has relocated from one part of the world to another. They will be given basic information regarding their specific Migration Scenario but must conduct research to build a more robust story, and be prepared to answer questions about their life and migration.
- Allow students time to conduct research on their migration story. This can be done in class or as homework. They will most likely need to record notes that can be referred to while in their small groups. You may want to share the following resources with your students to get them started.

Resources for country data:

- [UN Statistics Division Country Profiles](#)
- [CIA World Factbook](#)
- [Population Reference Bureau](#)
- [Sustainable Development Report Country Profiles](#)

Resources for migration information:

- [Migration Policy Institute](#)
- [UN Refugee Agency](#)
- [International Organization for Migration](#)
- [European Commission, Department on Migration and Home Affairs](#)

- Students gather in their original groups of five and take turns being in the “hot seat.” While in the hot seat, other group members ask that student questions about themselves and their migration story. The group members’ ability to ask thoughtful, probing questions is just as important as the “hot seat” student’s ability to provide thorough, thoughtful answers. They must cover the three primary questions but are encouraged to delve into further details.

Note: While in the “hot seat” and taking on the role of a migrant, all students should be respectful and act with dignity. No accents, costumes, or inappropriate behavior is allowed.

6. Once all five students have had a turn in the “hot seat,” each group should discuss similarities and differences among their five migration scenarios. Were there any patterns among the scenarios, or themes that kept coming up?

alternate procedure

Divide the class into eight groups, with each being responsible for one Migration Scenario. Groups work together to conduct research and create their unique migration story. Groups take turns being in the hot seat and as a panel, answer questions posed by classmates about their migration story.

discussion questions

Note: Answers provided are based on information found directly in the articles. Your students may have other answers based on the stories they created through their research and their hot seat experiences.

1. What pull factors came up in the migration stories? What push factors? Can you think of any push/pull factors that were not covered in the stories?

*Pull factors: In the Mexico to U.S. story, the opportunity to find day labor work and send **remittances**, the money being sent home to his family; in the Venezuela to Ecuador story, the availability of a necessary medication; in the Hong Kong to UK story, the availability of good schools for their daughter and a slower lifestyle.*

Push factors: The stories originating in Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria all have push factors around the dangers and violence of living in a war-torn country; in the Venezuela to Ecuador story, persecution of the gay community had created a dangerous situation; in the DRC to Australia story, the risk of political violence; in the Hong Kong to UK story, concerns about government censorship and “brainwashing;” in the Tuvalu to New Zealand story, the effects of climate change including sea level rise, coastal erosion, and difficulty growing crops were push factors.

Other factors include: Religious freedom, unbalanced sex ratios, overpopulation, natural disasters, and more.

2. Which factors – push or pull – are perceived as positive and which are negative?

Pull factors are often perceived as positive while push factors are often negative.

3. What intervening obstacles did people face while migrating?

*An **intervening obstacle** is an environmental or cultural feature that hinders migration. Some of the migrants in these stories faced legal obstacles such as the need for specific documentation, permits to work, or the grant of a certain asylum status to remain in a country. Others faced cultural barriers – many did not speak the language of their destination country or were not familiar with the food/traditions/etc. of the country. Physical obstacles included crossing large bodies of water or the need to be smuggled into a new country where entry was not legal.*

4. Which of the migration stories covered forced migration, rather than voluntary migration? How do you know?

***Voluntary migration** is when people moved due to a perceived opportunity; they choose to change locations. **Forced migration** is when people have no choice but to relocate and is often related to violence or environmental hazards at home. (Forced migration is not a legal term.) The migration stories starting in Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria all came*

about because of war and would therefore be considered forced. The stories originating in the DRC and Venezuela involve personal persecution, and the Tuvalu to New Zealand story could also be considered forced due to the environmental hazards associated with climate change.

The legal definition of a **refugee**, according to United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence.”

5. “Refugee” is a legal term but there are a variety of definitions. The only international legal definition at the global level is from the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which defines a refugee as: “A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” In which scenarios were the migrants refugees?

The stories originating in Afghanistan, the DRC, Libya, and Syria are those of refugees. The migrants in these stories fit the three conditions implied in the Convention – 1) they are outside of their home countries, 2) have a well-founded fear of persecution and are at risk of harm, and 3) would not be protected within their own country if they were to remain.

The story originating in Tuvalu is an interesting case because as the Washington Post article notes, “Victims of climate change are not recognized as refugees by the International Refugee Convention.” And while the family did claim to be refugees in order to stay in New Zealand, that was only one of their three claims. New Zealand granted the family residency not because of their refugee claim, but because of the claimed “exceptional humanitarian grounds” – wording that is somewhat unique to New Zealand’s immigration legislation.

6. In what ways were origin countries impacted by emigration? Were these outcomes positive, negative, or both?

Answers will vary based on the stories students created but typical consequences include:

Positive outcomes: If people see those with an education leaving, it might encourage more people to stay in school. As in the story of the man from Mexico in the U.S., it is not uncommon for migrants to send money to their families back home, which can have a significant impact on the origin country’s economy.

Negative outcomes: The origin country can suffer a loss of more educated/talented people (referred to as “**brain drain**” when it occurs at a high volume) or the loss of individuals that offer the country stability, leaving a larger percentage of the population uneducated or without competent leadership. Depending on the expertise of those leaving, the country may be left short on doctors, teachers, or other important professional roles.

In what ways were destination countries impacted by immigration? Were these outcomes positive, negative, or both?

Answers will vary based on the stories students created but typical consequences include:

Positive outcomes: Newcomers may bring needed job skills and expertise to their destination country, cultural diversity (such as the art created by the migrant in Australia from the DRC), greater variety of small businesses (restaurants, shops), and more consumers and taxpayers to help the economy.

Negative outcomes: There can be misunderstandings between the people already in the country and newcomers, due to language and cultural differences. It could also mean more competition for limited resources such as specific jobs. A large influx of people can also create crowding and congestion in neighborhoods and schools and the need for greater social programs and infrastructure (language classes, job training, etc.) to assimilate people coming from other places.

7. How can migration change the cultural and physical landscape of a region?

As large groups of new people settle into an area, they have the potential to change that area. New migrants might continue practicing their religion in their new homeland. This, in turn, can impact local architecture as religious structures are built. New migrants might speak a language, and use gestures, which are new to the area and this can impact radio, newspapers, signs, or television. They often continue eating foods that are familiar to them and might start restaurants that serve their native cuisine. New cultural characteristics relating to sports, music, etiquette, dance, fashion can all arrive as new people migrate to an area. Additionally, a large influx of people might require new infrastructure to accommodate them, or new energy sources or natural resource acquisition might be required to supply more people with their daily needs – both would require changes to the physical landscape of the area.

8. Do you see any themes in the reasons people migrate? Could you develop categories for the various reasons for migrating?

People often migrate to improve their own life and the lives of their family. At times this is by choice but other times it is necessary. The reasons people migrate can be categorized as political, social, economic, and environmental.

assessment

Monitor small group discussions to determine if students are asking/answering meaningful and accurate questions. Students write a reflection that includes three things they found surprising and one question they still have about global migration.

follow-up activities

1. Screen the short documentary film “[4.1 Miles](#)” for your students. It is a film about a coast guard captain on a small Greek island who is suddenly charged with saving thousands of refugees from drowning at sea.
2. Have students explore the UN's [International Migrant Stock](#) dataset and find statistics from the two countries (origin and destination) that were a part of their migration scenario.
3. While none of the Sustainable Development Goals focus directly on migration, it is specifically referenced in six goals and has entry points within four others. The International Organization for Migration has outlined a number of connections in the interactive visual [Migration Data and the Sustainable Development Goals](#). Have students select one of the migration references and write a paragraph explaining how it would ultimately lead to the associated goal being met.

Adapted with permission from Mr. Lucas Varley's Migration Research Activity. (Lincoln High School, Lincoln, NE).

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *International Migrant Stock 2024*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>

MIGRATION STORIES | migration scenarios

1. You are a refugee from Afghanistan who now lives in Slovenia.
<https://www.unhcr.org/europe/news/stories/afghan-refugee-family-finds-hope-slovenia-after-losing-everything-tuerkiye-earthquakes>
2. You are an artist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and moved to Australia to escape political violence.
<https://museums victoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/resources/immigrant-stories/nickel-mundabi-ngadwa/>
3. You moved from Venezuela to Ecuador to escape discrimination due to your sexual orientation.
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/gay-activist-strives-make-her-host-country-more-inclusive-all-refugees>
4. You spent five years living in Libya but are originally from Nigeria. You travelled to Europe on a boat across the Mediterranean and now live in Germany.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/20/lampedusa-refugee-fleeing-libya-boats-italy>
5. Originally from Hong Kong, you and your spouse moved to a town in England.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-62658669>

*Only read the first part of the article about Yowin and Eddie Wong. The last paragraph you should read begins with "Yowin want to work as a cashier..."
6. You are a Syrian refugee who now lives in Germany.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/8/27/a-syrian-familys-journey-to-a-new-life-in-germany>
7. You are from Oaxaca, Mexico and recently relocated to Seattle, Washington.
<https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Illegal-immigrants-live-life-in-the-shadows-1058907.php>
8. Your family arrived in New Zealand from the island nation of Tuvalu in 2007 and was recently granted legal residency.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/08/07/has-the-era-of-the-climate-change-refugee-begun/>

MIGRATION STORIES | assignment sheet

You are taking on the role of a migrant who has relocated from one part of the world to another.

The article linked on your Migration Scenario card offers some basic information regarding your specific migration. You are taking on the role of the person in that story. It is your job to conduct additional research to establish realistic demographic information for your scenario, details about the push/pull factors associated with your scenario, and any other pertinent details to establish a *realistic* migration story.

Primary Questions

1. Where are you moving from and where are you moving to?
2. How is your life in your new country similar to and different from your life in your old country?
3. How has emigration impacted the country you left, and how has immigration impacted the country you are in now?

Ultimately, your research must allow you to answer the primary questions above. Use the guiding questions below in order to provide as much detail as possible on your migration story and so you can adequately discuss your story with your group.

Guiding Questions

Use the following questions as a guide to the kind of information you should search for and be able to speak on. You do not need to answer every one of these questions, but be as thorough as possible. You might not find exact answers to all of the questions so be sure to put yourself in the shoes of a migrant – think and imagine what life would be like for you and your family given your scenario, and also how your move has impacted your origin and destination countries. Make your story as comprehensive as possible and have fun.

Background

- Where did you move from?
- Demographic information: What is the size of your family? What was your occupation in your home country and how much did you earn? What were your living conditions? Did you live in a house/apartment/etc.?
- What are the financial, political, and social conditions in your home country?
- Are many people emigrating from your country? What are the implications of people leaving?

Migration

- Why did you move? Describe the situation.
- Is your family moving with you?
- Was your move voluntary or involuntary?
- What are the push/pull factors associated with your move?
- How far did you migrate?
- Was your move legal or illegal?
- What, if any, intervening obstacles were there to your migration?

Destination

- Where did you move to?
- What is your occupation in your new home? How does it compare to your old occupation?
- Have there been any barriers in finding employment?
- What challenges (language/cultural/physical/etc.) do you face as an immigrant?
- How has your lifestyle changed since your move?
- How have your children adjusted to the move?
- Are there many other immigrants in your new country? Are they from the same origin country as you?
- How has an influx of immigrants impacted the country where you now live?
- What prevailing attitudes do you encounter from people in your new country? Do you think people in your new community view your relocation to their area as positive, negative or neutral?