

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

One of the most significant events affecting the geography of the developing world in the last 50 years has been the large-scale migration of people from the countryside to the towns and cities. **Rural-urban migration** has resulted in the rapid growth of large cities and the increased urbanisation of many LEDCs.

Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, had a population of 2 million in 1960; by 1990 there were 7 million people living there. The population of Mexico City has increased by 5 million in the last 10 years alone, while Lagos, in Nigeria, with a population of 8 million, is growing at a rate of 10% per year – an extra 2,000 people per day.

So far, rural-urban migration has been more significant in the Middle East and Asia, where there are stronger urban traditions, and in Latin America, where colonial influences have developed major urban centres. Until recently it has been less significant in most of Africa.

Who are the migrants?

Most migrants tend to be:

- single males, in Asia and Africa, where it is less common for single women to migrate, especially in Muslim areas where females have a more restricted lifestyle
- single women, in certain more developed parts of Asia and Latin America, where women have a greater social standing. Urban areas offer them a wide range of employment opportunities in domestic service, office cleaning jobs and the retail trade. Some of these women are trying to escape from the restrictions of family life in their home area
- between the ages of 16 and 35, as people in this age group generally have fewer family commitments
- more educated than other rural dwellers and more informed about the outside world.

Figure 1: World urbanisation by continent

	EUROPE		NORTH AMERICA		LATIN AMERICA		AFRICA		ASIA	
	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990
% of Population in urban areas	67	78	80	82	60	78	24	36	25	35
Average annual urban growth rates (%)	26	6	20	22	68	40	72	70	58	57

Why do people leave the countryside?

As with any major population movement, the reasons for the emigration can be divided into 'push' factors, i.e. those that encourage the migrants to leave the rural area, and 'pull' factors, i.e. the aspects of life in the city which are attractive to them.

Push factors

Many rural people in LEDCs are farmers. There are several factors linked with farming that have led to rural-urban migration.

(a) Farm size

Many subsistence farms are too small to support a farmer and his family. In Bangladesh 60% of the farms are under half a hectare in size, yet the recommended size for a family is one hectare. Often these small units are the result of systems of inheritance whereby on the death of a farmer his land is divided amongst his sons. In Mexico, where this sub-division has occurred over several generations, present-day families have insufficient land for their needs and so many people have moved to Mexico City.

(b) Farming methods

Most subsistence farmers are very poor and cannot afford machinery, pesticides or chemicals to improve their outputs. There is often over-cultivation and over-grazing, leading to problems of soil erosion and reduced crop yields.

(c) Shortage of land

In many parts of Latin America the farmland tends to be owned by a few wealthy people. Large units of land, called *latifundia*, are farmed by workers for the owner. There are high rates of emigration from such areas as the population increases. Latin America has experienced greater rural-urban migration than either Asia or Africa.

(d) Farming improvements

In some areas, improved agricultural methods – for example, increased use of machinery – have resulted in a loss of jobs. For example:

- In Ecuador, a large *hacienda* with many local workers was modernised by introducing new machinery and improved cultivation techniques. This resulted in a 50% decrease in the workforce required.
- In other parts of Latin America agricultural changes have released peasant farmers from a traditional system of tied labour. Those with no work tend to move to the cities.
- In Malaysia, a scheme to improve efficiency in rice growing by using more machinery and technology has replaced the traditional labour-intensive method. Money has been invested in major irrigation schemes and there has been consolidation of the fragmented paddy farms. The new scheme is far more efficient and productive, but thousands of workers are now redundant and have no

alternative but to move to the city to look for work.

Other push factors include:

(a) Lack of food

Migration from rural areas is necessary where the carrying capacity of the land is exceeded, i.e. where there are too many people for the amount of food available. This results from:

- too many people, due to a high natural growth rate; or
- too little food due to a crop failure one particular year.

(b) Natural disasters

Farmers in certain areas of the world have a very insecure way of life due to the frequent and regular occurrence of natural disasters. For instance, in Bangladesh the River Ganges floods annually and there are often tropical cyclones. People may thus move to the city for a more secure way of life.

(c) Poor living conditions

In many rural areas housing is dilapidated and living conditions are cramped. There are few of the facilities that people in the MEDCs take for granted, such as supplies of electricity and running water and sewage disposal systems.

(d) Social and welfare services

In most rural areas in LEDCs there

is a shortage of health care facilities, with few doctors. Primary schooling may be available in some villages but secondary schools are rare. There are limited social facilities for young people, and poor communications to towns and cities.

(e) Financial

Most governments do not invest money into rural areas to support activities other than farming that could provide alternative employment for the growing population.

Pull factors

(a) Employment

Most cities in LEDCs offer a greater range of employment opportunities than is available in the countryside. Most industries are situated in urban areas. Also, in the city, there are jobs available in the tertiary sector such as transport, retail and catering.

(b) Wages

The scale of rural-urban migration has been linked to wage differentials between town and country. Factory workers on average are said to earn three times as much as farm workers.

- In some African nations minimum wage legislation has increased wages in industry and the attraction of employment in the city.

- In Tanzania, in East Africa, it was found that migration to the cities matched rising urban income.
- In Egypt, rural-urban migration levels fell markedly when income levels in rural areas improved.
- In north-east Brazil wages in the commercial agricultural sector are higher than in the urban areas and so there is more rural-rural than rural-urban migration.

What are the effects of rural-urban migration?

Population movement on such a large scale affects both the countryside and the cities, in a variety of ways.

The countryside

(a) Negative effects

- Migrants are often the younger, more progressive and more enterprising workers. They are usually the most skilled and better educated, in fact the very people the economy of the rural areas needs to help it to survive and develop.
- The population structure of many rural villages where out-migration has taken place shows a disproportionate number of economically dependent people, with many elderly, women and children. This means that there are fewer people left to work and farm and to pay the taxes that might help to improve rural areas.
- There are fewer farmers, so the supply of food for both town and country may decrease.
- There are fewer customers for rural services and shops so that they decline or close, creating further joblessness and making life harder for those who remain.
- Poverty increases and standards of living fall even further than before.

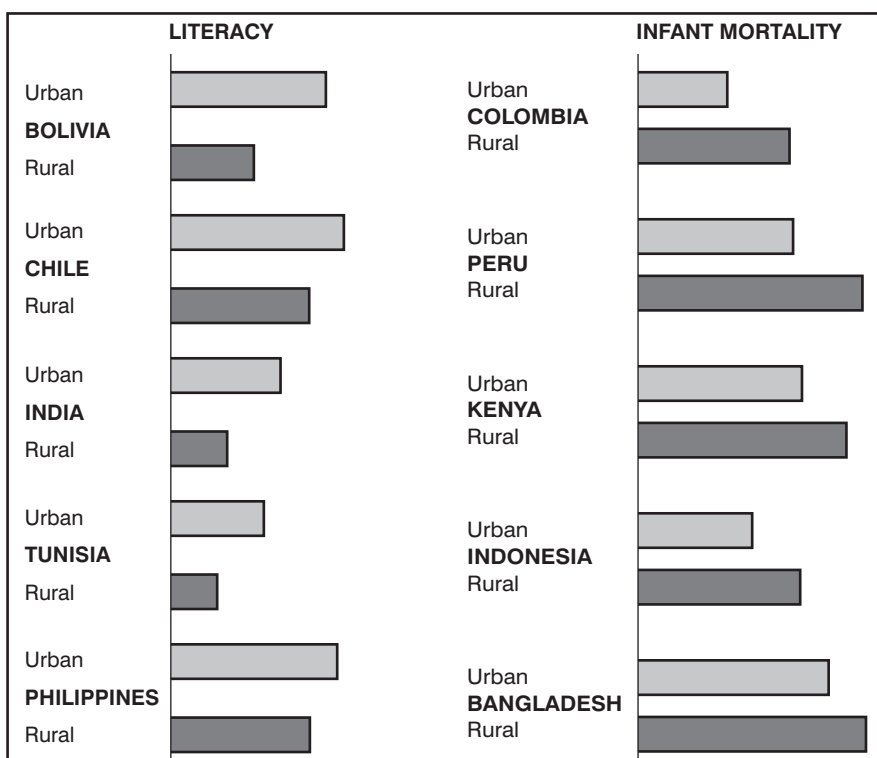
(b) Positive effects

- If it is mainly young people who migrate, the birth and natural growth rates will fall.
- With fewer mouths to feed, farmers do not need to work the land as intensively.
- Migrants send back money to their families.

Urban areas

Rural-urban migration brings little benefit to the cities, but many drawbacks.

Figure 2: Comparison of education and health in rural and urban areas, selected LEDCs



(a) Positive effects

Migrants provide a young, cheap source of unskilled labour for the industries and service activities.

(b) Negative effects

- The scale of migration may produce a labour surplus and high levels of unemployment in the city.

- Many LEDC city authorities are unable to cope with the increased demand for housing, services and other facilities for the large numbers of in-migrants.
- As arable land is used up for shanty developments, food shortages can follow – e.g. Egypt now has to import food because of the loss of land taken up

by the growth of Cairo.

- The influx of large numbers of young people often increases the fertility, birth and growth rates of cities, which causes further increases in population and added pressure and strain on the urban services and facilities.

CASE STUDY: rural-urban migration in China

- Between 1990 and 1995 China's urban population grew by 4.0%.
- 35% of the population currently live in urban centres – this figure has almost doubled in the last 20 years.

The scale of the movement from China's countryside to its cities is currently the largest and most significant in the world. It began in 1984 when the government started to allow people to move freely within the country. Over 100 million people, nearly twice the total population of the UK, have moved from the countryside to the cities in the last few years.

Beijing and Shanghai are popular destinations (see Figure 3). The population of Beijing increased by 17% between 1982 and 1990. Beijing now has 25 satellite towns. One suburb is known as 'Zhejiang village', as it houses over 400,000 people from that province, and another as 'Xinjiang village' because many Muslims from that province in western China now live there.

Shanghai grew by 12.5% between 1982 and 1990, and now in-migrants make up around 20% of its total population.

Who are the migrants?

Migrants are usually young, as can be seen in Figure 4. Young men go to work in the new heavy and construction industries, and young women find jobs in service industries or clothing sweatshops. Conditions may not be perfect, but they are usually better than in the rural areas.

Why do people migrate?

(a) Push factors

- Recent extensive reforms have occurred in China's countryside and the farmers have many problems.
- There has been a decrease in the amount of available farmland (from 110 million hectares in 1965 to only 95 million hectares in 1995). Despite China's well-known 'one-child' policy, the population is still growing, so there is increasing pressure on the land.

- Farm units are very small, often less than one hectare, and too small to grow enough to feed a farmer and his family.
- The modernisation of farming in some areas by the use of machines etc. has decreased the number of jobs in farming. Official estimates are that 140 million people in rural areas do not have enough work.
- Housing conditions and services are also poor in the rural areas.

(b) Pull factors

The pull factors mentioned above, such as increased employment opportunities in towns and cities, higher wages, better standard of living and lifestyle etc. operate in China as elsewhere.

A particular pull factor is government encouragement of industrial development in Special Economic Zones around such cities as Shanghai and Hong Kong. Several million jobs are being created each year in the construction, manufacturing and service industries.

Figure 3: Migration in China

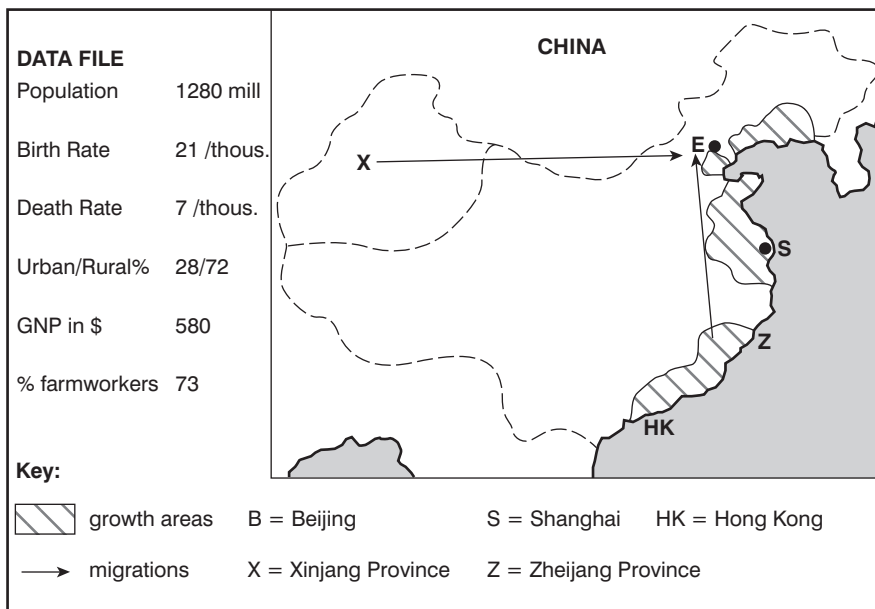
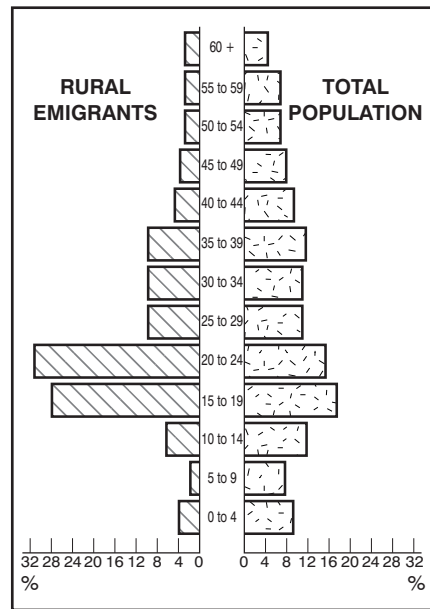


Figure 4: Population pyramid for China, 1990



CASE STUDY: Peru

Peru is about four times the size of the UK, with less than half the population. It is divided into three geographical zones:

- a coastal lowland desert strip where its capital, Lima, is situated (10% of total area)
- an interior mountainous zone (30%)
- a tropical rainforested lowland area which is part of the Amazon Basin (60%).

There are large differences between the standards of living and lifestyle of people living in the capital and the rest of the country. Large-scale migration has taken place from the countryside to Lima, one-third of whose 8 million population are migrants.

Figure 5: Growth of the population of Lima, 1900–1990

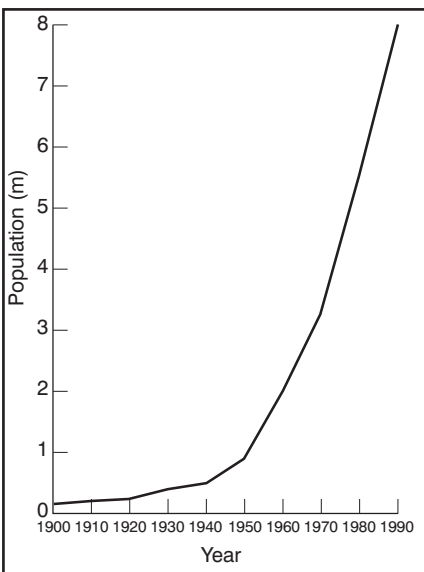


Figure 6: Lima and the countryside – a comparison

	Countryside	Lima
People with safe water supply	25%	60%
People with sewage disposal	17%	51%
Homes with electricity	3%	55%
Infant mortality (per thousand)	58	73
Weekly income (soles)	50	2,500

Most migrants are the younger, better-educated villagers from the mountainous area.

(a) Push factors

Much of Peru is difficult to farm and develop:

- only 5% of Peru is made up of fertile farmland
- 40% is tropical rainforest, some of which has been removed resulting in problems such as soil erosion and gullying on slopes
- 30% has steep slopes with thin, infertile soils
- 15% is too cold to grow crops and 10% is too dry.

Apart from a lack of suitable agricultural land, farms are often very small due to inheritance subdivision and scarcely big enough for subsistence farmers to grow enough potatoes and grain to feed their families.

- Houses are made of adobe (mud bricks) and are small and very basic.
- Many mountain villages have no water and electricity supply, no

sewage disposal system, and no roads. Animal dung is used as fuel.

- Education is limited to primary schooling. Secondary schools are very rare and fee-paying.
- The country is prone to many types of natural disaster, such as earthquakes, avalanches, mudslides, droughts, floods etc. which makes life difficult for people whose livelihood depends on farming.
- Most rural areas receive little financial investment – the country is poor, and most investment is concentrated on Lima.

(b) Pull factors

- Lima has 70% of the country's industry and offers migrants the prospects of employment with reasonable wages.
- Social and welfare services are much better in the city.
- There are 20% fewer patients per doctor in Lima than in rural areas.
- Life expectancy is 10 years longer in Lima.
- Schooling is twice as long and there is better access to higher education in the city – Lima has a university.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Using Figure 1, comment on the data given for Latin America, saying in what respects it is like an LEDC or an MEDC.
2. Referring to Figure 2, why is infant mortality a good indicator of the level of health care in an LEDC?
3. If you were given a sum of £100,000 by a charity to try to prevent rural emigration in an area with several villages, how would you use the money to be most effective?
4. Make a list of features which could be both push and pull factors in rural migration, e.g. housing (bad in rural areas so a push factor and good in urban so a pull factor) and then a list which can only be push or pull factors. Remember you will only gain credit for a feature once in an exam!