Chapter 2 Population and Migration

AP Enduring Understandings

- Knowledge of the geographic patterns and characteristics of human populations facilitates understanding of cultural, political, economic, and urban systems
- Populations grow and decline over time and space
- Causes and consequences of migration are influenced by cultural, demographic, economic, environmental, and political factors

Inquiry Questions

How and why do populations change?
Why do people migrate?
How does migration affect communities?
To what extent are current population trends sustainable?

2.1 Population

Geographers study where and why people live in particular locations. Neither people nor resources are distributed uniformly across Earth. In regards to population growth, geographers emphasize three elements: the population size; the rate of increase of world population; the unequal distribution of population growth. Geographers seek to explain why these patterns exist.

The subject of overpopulation can be highly divisive given the deep personal views that many people hold. Human geography emphasizes a geographic perspective on population growth as a relative concept. Human-environment interaction and overpopulation can be discussed in the contexts of carrying capacity, the availability of Earth’s resources, as well as the relationship between people and resources.

The study of population has never been more important than it is today. There are over 7 billion people on the planet, but the majority of this growth has occurred in the last 100 years, mostly in developing nations. Humans do not live uniformly around the planet, but rather in clusters because of earth's physical geography. Environments that are too dry, wet, cold or mountainous create a variety of limiting factors to humans. Two-thirds of the world’s population is located within three major clusters: East Asia (China), South Asia (India and Indonesia), and Europe, with the majority in East and South Asia.

Demographers, scientists that study population issues, and other scientists say there is more to the story than simple population growth. Ecologists believe that humans have outgrown the Earth’s carrying capacity. Simply put, there is just not enough of the world’s resources to give every human a standard of living expected by most Americans. In fact, if all the people on the planet lived the average American lifestyle, it would require over three Earths. At this level of consumption, the planet cannot sustain a population of 7 billion, though we are expected to reach 9 billion by 2100.