

Article – Exploring migration causes – why people migrate



The number of people residing in an EU country with the citizenship of a non-member country on 1 January 2019 was 21.8 million, representing 4.9% of the EU-27's population. A further 13.3 million people living in one of the EU27-countries on 1 January 2019 were citizens of another EU country.

Why do people migrate to Europe or to another EU country?

Push and pull factors

Push factors are the reasons people leave a country. Pull factors are the reason they move to a particular country. There are three major push and pull factors.

Socio-political factors

Persecution because of one's ethnicity, religion, race, politics or culture can push people to leave their country. A major factor is war, conflict, government persecution or there being a significant risk of them. Those fleeing armed conflict, human rights violations or persecution are more likely to be humanitarian refugees. This will affect where they settle as

some countries have more liberal approaches to humanitarian migrants than others. In the first instance, these individuals are likely to move to the nearest safe country that accepts asylum seekers.

In recent years, people have been fleeing to Europe in large numbers from conflict, terror and persecution at home. Of the 295,800 asylum seekers granted protection status in the EU in 2019, over a quarter came from war-torn Syria, with Afghanistan and Iraq in second and third place respectively.

Check out our [infographic on asylum applications numbers in the EU](#).

Demographic and economic factors

Demographic change determines how people move and migrate. A growing or shrinking, aging or youthful population has an impact on economic growth and employment opportunities in the countries of origin or migration policies in the destination countries.

Demographic and economic migration is related to labour standards, unemployment and the overall health of a country's economy. Pull factors include higher wages, better employment opportunities, a higher standard of living and educational opportunities. If economic conditions are not favourable and appear to be at risk of declining further, a greater number of individuals will probably migrate to countries with a better outlook.

According to the UN International Labour Organization, migrant workers – defined as people who migrate with a view to being employed – stood at roughly [164 million worldwide in 2017](#) and represented nearly two thirds of international migrants. Almost 70% were found in high-income countries, 18.6% in upper middle-income countries, 10.1% in lower middle-income countries and 3.4% in low-income countries.

Environmental factors

The environment has always been a driver of migration, as people flee natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes and earthquakes. However, climate change is expected to exacerbate extreme weather events, meaning more people could be on the move.

According to the [International Organization for Migration](#), “Environmental migrants are those who for reason of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”

It is hard to estimate how many environmental migrants there are globally due to factors such as population growth, poverty, governance, human security and conflict, which have an impact. Estimates vary from 25 million to one billion by the year 2050.

New EU migration pact

Managing migration effectively to deal with asylum seekers and protect external borders has been an EU priority for many years. The European Commission is set to propose a new pact on migration and asylum this year. The Parliament has been advocating [an overhaul of EU asylum rules](#) to ensure greater solidarity and fairer sharing of responsibility among EU countries.

Parliament's civil liberties committee is currently working on a report on [new avenues for legal labour migration](#). MEPs underline the need for legal paths to reduce irregular migration and fill labour market gaps and for a harmonised EU policy. The committee is also calling for the Common European Asylum System to be complemented by a European Union Resettlement Framework and humanitarian corridors.

Read more on migration in Europe