



Population Distribution and Its Consequences

LG LEARNING GOALS

- 7-1 Describe how population is distributed around the world.
- 7-2 Identify the factors that influence population distribution.
- 7-3 Explain the three methods for calculating population density.
- 7-4 Explain the consequences of population distribution and density.



When geographers study the human population, they are first and foremost interested in learning how humans are spread out on Earth's surface—that is, the pattern of **population distribution**. In this Module, we discuss the striking unevenness of this pattern at different geographic scales, the factors that have shaped it, and the three ways of measuring population density. We also examine the impact of population distribution on society, the economy, and the environment.

LG 7-1 How is population distributed around the world?

Earth is home to almost 7.8 billion people. Where do all these people live? In major metropolitan areas around the world such as New York, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Istanbul, Shanghai, and Dhaka, millions or even tens of millions of people are crowded into relatively small areas. Yet much of Earth's surface is sparsely populated.

This very uneven distribution of human population is one of Earth's most striking geographic features, and we see it at the global, regional, national, and local scales. Geographers seek to understand the unevenness in human population distribution and the reasons behind it.

Global Population Patterns

The global distribution of human population is highly uneven. Roughly 6.8 billion of the world's population lives in the northern hemisphere. The southern hemisphere, which has vast expanses of oceans but a limited amount of land surface, is home to only about 800 million people. Furthermore, about two-thirds of the world's population is found in the areas with middle latitudes, between 30 and 60° north and south, roughly corresponding to the subtropical and temperate areas on Earth, especially in the northern hemisphere. Overall, a whopping three-quarters of humanity lives on only 5 percent of Earth's surface.

Humans seem to universally prefer living in relatively flat, low-lying areas. About 80 percent of humans live in places that are less than 1640 feet (500 meters) above sea level. People worldwide also appear to enjoy ocean views or relatively easy access to a large body of water. Two out of every three people on Earth live within 310 miles (500 km) of an ocean.

TERMS TO KNOW . . .

population distribution: The pattern in which humans are spread out on Earth's surface