

Forced migration and internal displacement

Causes and consequences

Voluntary migration, which was considered in the previous chapter, occurs when people freely choose to move for reasons such as family reunions, to obtain a better job, or to improve their lifestyle.

Forced migration occurs when people have no effective choice but to relocate for reasons such as escaping from political conflict (including religious or ethnic persecution), fleeing from the consequences of so-called development projects, or because of the effects of environmental disasters.

People who flee from **political conflict** usually do so because the government, or the authorities that are in charge of the area where people who feel persecuted live, are unwilling or unable to offer protection. The threat may arise for many reasons, such as armed conflict, terrorist activity, widespread violence, a break-down in law and order, or persecution of certain groups on the basis of factors such as ethnic group, political alliance, religious affiliation, or activist campaigning.

People who flee from political conflict often feel they are forced to escape persecution by leaving their home country to settle in another country with a different regime. For this reason, much of the forced migration as a result of political conflict is cross-border, **international migration**. Some people apply for residence in another country by seeking asylum under international law, while others who are either more desperate or feel more threatened attempt to enter other countries without any official documents to verify their identity. The people in this latter group are often referred to as **undocumented refugees**.

When governments undertake large projects to promote **economic development**, such as construction of large dams, large-scale urban renewal, forestry operations, mining and establishment of national parks, significant numbers of people may be forced to relocate. Unlike those who fleeing from political conflict, people who are forced to move to make way for development projects are unlikely to move internationally, but rather relocate **within their own**

country. Sometimes the people who are forced to move are offered some compensation, but this does not always happen. Where people do receive compensation, it seldom covers the cost of relocating and re-establishing life in a new part of the country.

The third type of forced migration occurs as a response to three types of **disasters**:

- **natural disasters** such as earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions and hurricanes
- long-term **environmental changes** such as desertification, deforestation and land degradation
- **human-induced disasters** such as industrial accidents and leaks of radioactive or chemical contaminants.



2.67 Following the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine on 26th April 1986, 116,000 people within a radius of 30 kilometres were forcibly evacuated. The area is still radioactive so the residents have never returned, becoming internally displaced people. This view shows the largest of the abandoned settlements in the evacuation zone, Pripyat, which had 50,000 residents before the explosion. Today Pripyat is a ghost town where the contents of residences, schools and public buildings remain as they were on the day of the evacuation. Trees sprout through the concrete in the town centre, where the moss is especially dangerous because it retains high concentrations of radiation.

Sometimes, the causes of forced migration may **overlap**. For example, one of the consequences of the **Honshu earthquake** that occurred off the east coast of Japan on 11th March 2011 was a three to twelve metre high **tsunami** that covered 560 square kilometres of land. The tsunami penetrated the walls of the Fukushima Daiichi **nuclear power plant**, destroying diesel backup systems that were used to power the cooling system, leading to overheating of the nuclear core that in turn led to

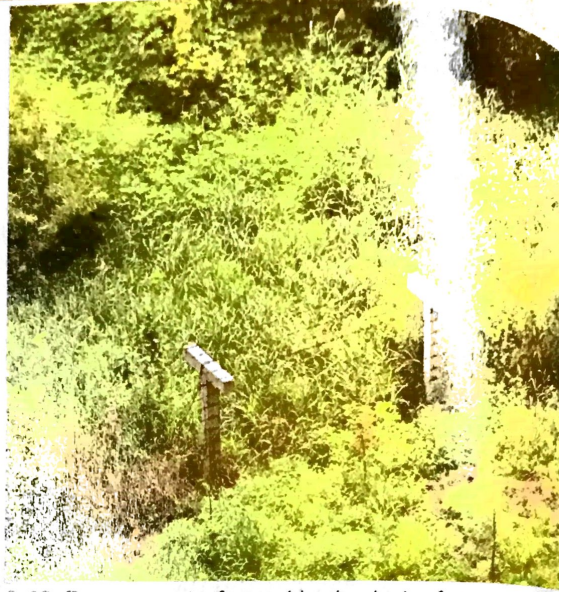
three large explosions and widespread radioactive leakage. Radiation levels within the power plant were 1,000 times greater than normal levels, and therefore 200,000 people from the surrounding area endured a **forced evacuation**. The destruction of infrastructure in northern Japan by the earthquake and tsunami resulted in a total of 340,000 people being displaced, requiring food, water, medicines, shelter and fuel.

In general, migration involves a mix of push factors and pull factors. **Push factors** repel a person from their place of residence, whereas **pull factors** attract a person to a new location. In cases of forced migration, push factors are overwhelmingly the **dominant** factor in the decision to migrate. The desperation and urgency to relocate mean that pull factors are usually a minor consideration as few options are normally available to a migrant who has been forced to move.

An exception to this generalisation was the forced migration that occurred in Indonesia under the **transmigration program** from 1949 to 2015. Under the transmigration program, landless people from densely populated islands such as Java, Bali and Madura were forcibly moved and resettled in sparsely populated areas such as Papua, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Sumatra. The idea was that sparsely settled areas required a larger workforce to develop their natural resources, which were seen as the 'pull factor' for migration. On the other hand, the transmigration program was widely criticised because local populations saw it as 'Javanisation' and 'Islamisation', a new form of colonising their territory and culture.



2.68 A transmigration settlement for Javanese settlers near Jayapura in the Indonesian province of Papua.



2.69 This concrete-framed barbed wire fence has been built by the Chinese Government near Dandong to prevent refugees from North Korea entering China without permission.

Forced migrants fit into six main groups: refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, development displacees, environmental displacees and victims of human trafficking.

Refugees are people who 'seek refuge' from a hazard or danger, or from persecution. The term usually refers to a person who has been forced to cross an international boundary and move to a different country. Article 1 in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines refugees as people who reside outside their country of nationality, and who are unable or unwilling to return because of a 'well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a political social group, or political opinion'.

Forced migrants who are recognised as legitimate refugees by a receiving country are granted legal rights, including residency and the right to work for wages, as well as protection by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees). Migrants who are denied refugee status by a receiving country may be held in detention or sent back to their country of origin.

As political conflicts have escalated around the world, the number of refugees has grown. In early 2017, the UNHCR stated that there were 65.3 million displaced people worldwide of whom 21.3 million were refugees. More than half the refugees were children and youths aged under 18 years of age. Almost half the refugees came from just three countries as a result of political conflict — Syria (4.

million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and Somalia (1.1 million). Countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees were those located near the source countries — Turkey (2.8 million), Pakistan (1.6 million), Lebanon (1.1 million), Iran (0.98 million), Ethiopia (0.74 million) and Jordan (0.66 million).

Asylum seekers are people who have crossed an international border in the hope of being recognised as a refugee, but their claim to be a refugee was still being considered. In the same way that refugee numbers have been increasing, the numbers of asylum seekers have also increased. According to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, in early 2017 there were almost one million asylum seekers worldwide, with the largest numbers being in South Africa (232,000), Germany (135,000), United States (84,000), Turkey (52,000), Kenya (52,000), France (51,000), Greece (50,000), Malaysia (43,000), Sweden (28,000), Uganda (24,000), Egypt (23,000), United Kingdom (23,000), Austria (23,000) and Canada (22,000).



2.70 On a per capita basis, Sweden has been one of the most generous countries in accepting refugees and asylum seekers from Syria. This Syrian family has been accepted and is now living in the southern Swedish city of Malmö.

The situation of asylum seekers has become controversial in parts of Western Europe, the United States, Australia and elsewhere in recent years as politicians and others question the legitimacy of some asylum seekers' claims for refugee status. In the heat of the controversy, some asylum seekers have been accused of seeking refugee status as a way of circumventing normal immigration processes in an attempt to relocate simply to improve their economic situation. Advocates of this position claim that many asylum



2.71 A small refugee camp between Baalbek and Riyad in a Hezbollah-controlled zone in Lebanon near the Syrian border.



2.72 Part of a camp on the Pacific island of Nauru that is used by the Australian Government to hold asylum seekers while their applications for refugee status are processed.

seekers head for wealthy but distant countries rather than seeking refuge in nearby countries that have more familiar cultures. On the other hand, as most asylum seekers come from countries with political turmoil or a history of human rights abuses rather than the world's most economically impoverished countries, refugee advocates reject the assertions that most asylum seekers are not genuine refugees.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people who have been forcibly relocated within their own country. They are sometimes referred to as 'internal refugees' or 'refugees within their own country'. Although IDPs do not face the challenge of securing foreign residency like refugees, they lack the legal protection that is offered to refugees through international law and organisations such as UNHCR.



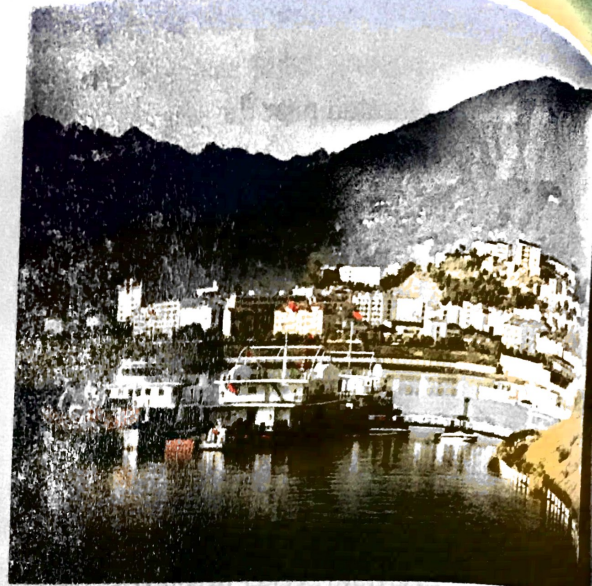
2.73 A camp used by internally displaced persons on the outskirts of Sana'a, the capital city of Yemen.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in early 2017 there were about 41 million IDPs around the world because of conflict and violence, the highest figure ever recorded. There were no official figures relating to the number of IDPs as a result of disasters.

Countries with significant numbers of IDPs due to conflict and violence were Syria (at least 6.6 million), Yemen (2.2 million people), Congo (1.5 million) and Honduras (175,000). Countries with significant numbers of IDPs due to disasters included Nepal (2.6 million in the aftermath of earthquakes), Ethiopia (250,000 people due to drought), Japan (100,000 in the aftermath of the Fukushima earthquake in 2011), and Haiti (60,000 in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake).

Development displacees are people who are forced to relocate as a consequence of large-scale development projects. Development displacees are usually a sub-group of IDPs as they are not usually forced to relocate to another country, and they are sometimes described using terms such as 'involuntarily displaced people', 'involuntarily resettled people' or 'oustees'. Examples of projects that have caused large numbers of development displacees include the Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, construction of the Three Gorges Dam in China and subsequent widespread flooding of the Yangtze River valley, and clearance of large areas of Ashgabat (Turkmenistan's capital city) for urban renewal.

Environmental displacees are people who are forcibly relocated because of environmental



2.74 Taipingxizhen, near Sandouping on the Yangtze River, one of many towns built to rehouse 1.3 million people who were forcibly relocated from towns and villages that were flooded by the rising waters of the dam's lake.



2.75 An example of environmental displacement. Rising sea waters attributed to global warming destroyed the house that used to stand in the foreground of this area in Bikenikora on Tawara Atoll, Kiribati, forcing the residents to relocate to a new location on higher land. A sea wall that was also destroyed by the rising waters can be seen in the right background.

problems. Like development displacees, environmental displacees are usually IDPs. However, some environmental displacees do move to other countries, examples being Pacific islanders whose low-lying countries are threatened by sea level rise due to climate change and pastoralists in the Sahel of Africa whose livelihoods are threatened by desertification.

Human trafficking occurs when people are forcibly moved as a result of deception or coercion in the false hope of financial gain. Usually considered a form of slavery because of the extreme levels of exploitation imposed on the migrant and the loss of freedom to escape from the situation, most human

trafficking occurs as a means of providing unwilling participants to the prostitution industries in countries away from the migrant's country of birth. Victims of human trafficking are prevented from escaping, either by physical restraints or by threats of violence and debts. Countries that are significant sources of human trafficking include Russia, China, Thailand, Nigeria, Ukraine, Belarus, Albania and Romania, while significant destination countries for human trafficking include Turkey, Germany, Japan, the United States, Italy and Greece.

QUESTION BANK 21

1. What is meant by the term 'forced migration'?
2. Briefly describe the three main causes of forced migration, and for each one, say whether it is more likely to lead to international migration or internal (domestic) migration.
3. Explain why push factors are usually more significant than pull factors for forced migrants.
4. Explain the differences between refugees and asylum seekers.
5. What is meant by the term 'internal displacement'?
6. Compare the relative numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons in the world today.
7. What is the difference between 'development displacees' and 'environmental displacees'?
8. Explain why human trafficking is a form of forced migration.
9. In about 500 words, compare and contrast the causes and consequences of forced migration for refugees and internally displaced persons.

CASE STUDY

Forced migration from Syria to Turkey to flee political conflict

In December 2010 a succession of protests began to spread across Arab countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Known as the **Arab Spring**, the protests began in Tunisia and extended quickly into Algeria, Iran, Bahrain, Egypt, and beyond. A major slogan of the protesters was "the people want to bring down the regime", and so the protests were met with fierce resistance by some governments, notably in Yemen, Syria, Libya and Iraq. In these countries, the protests escalated and major civil wars began.



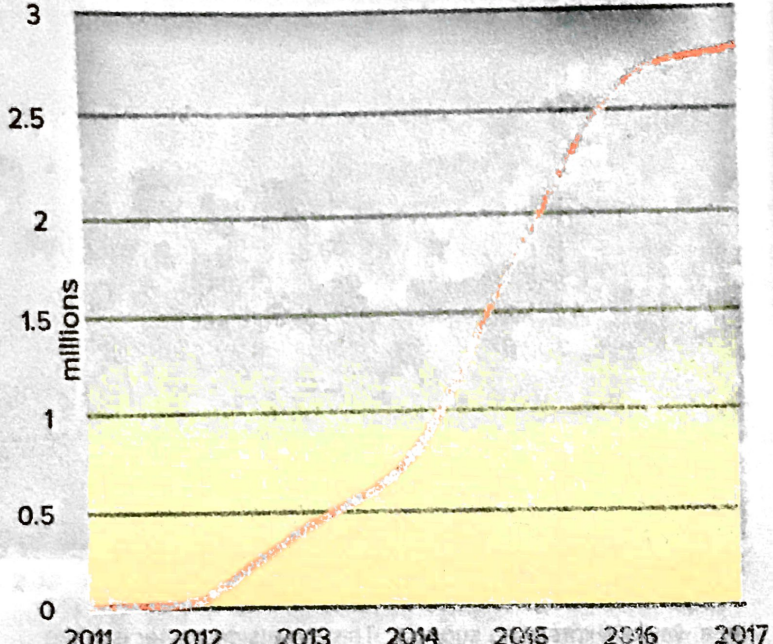
2.76 Areas in Syria that are controlled by the government always feature large portraits of the President, Bashar al-Assad as a way of expressing support. This streetside poster is in the city of Hama.

In the case of Syria, the President (Bashar al-Assad) had wielded authoritarian control with army support since he assumed the presidency in 2000, taking over from his father Hafez al-Assad who had been President from 1971 to 2000. The Arab Spring protests reached Syria's capital city, Damascus, in March 2011, and the calls for al-Assad's resignation were suppressed violently.

Conflict soon escalated between several armed forces and rebel groups, each fighting against the others for control of the country:

- the **Syrian Government** with the support of the Army (and external support from Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah)
- the **Islamic State** of Iraq and the Levant (also known as Islamic State, ISIS, ISIL and Daesh), a fundamentalist Shi'ite Islamic group
- the **Free Syrian Army** (an Sunni Islamic group, with external support from Turkey)
- the **Syrian Democratic Forces** (a loose alliance of Kurdish, Assyrian, Arab, Armenian, Turkmen and Circassian militias)
- the **al-Nusra Front** (also known as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, al-Qaeda in Syria, and al-Qaeda in the Levant), a fundamentalist Salafist Sunni Islamic jihadist group (with external support from Qatar and Saudi Arabia)

Before the civil war began, Syria's **population** was 20.7 million people (2010 figure). Since the civil war began, it has affected every part of Syria, destroying widespread areas of farmland and urban infrastructure, including houses, markets, mosques, roads, airfields and electricity and water



2.77 Number of registered Syrians in Turkey, 2011 to 2017. Most Syrians in Turkey live in provinces in the south adjoining the Syrian border, in Istanbul (Turkey's largest city) and in Izmir (a city on Turkey's west coast near several Greek islands).

distribution systems. By early 2017, it was estimated that almost 500,000 people had been killed (80% of them civilians), 7.6 million people had been internally displaced and almost 5 million others had left Syria as refugees or asylum seekers. Syria's population was thus thought to be fewer than 15 million people by early 2017, with the population size continuing to decline.

The destination for the largest number of asylum seekers from Syria has been the country's northern



2.79 A refugee camp for Syrian asylum seekers in Killis, a town in Turkey located about 3 kilometres from the Syrian border.

neighbor, Turkey. By early 2017, there were 2.8 million Syrians registered to live in Turkey, making up about 3.5% of Turkey's total population. Almost all of these Syrian settlers arrived after the start of Syria's civil war in 2011.

Understandably, this huge, rapid influx of destitute people has placed an enormous burden on Turkey's economy as well as adding pressure to the country's already complex ethnic diversity, increasing security threats and political polarisation (as shown by an attempted coup d'état in July 2016). Although the Turkish Government originally believed that the Syrian in-migration



2.78 Map of provinces in Turkey with the highest numbers of Syrian people. See table 2.10 for figures. Source: Crisis Group/DGMM

Table 2.10
Top ten provinces in Turkey with the highest numbers of Syrians

Province	Total population (excluding Syrians)	Number of registered Syrians	% of Syrians
1. Istanbul	14,657,434	413,406	2.7
2. Şanlıurfa	1,892,320	398,551	17.4
3. Hatay	1,533,507	377,731	19.8
4. Gaziantep	1,931,836	318,802	14.2
5. Adana	2,183,167	149,049	6.4
6. Mersin	1,745,221	135,921	7.2
7. Kilis	130,655	122,734	48.4
8. Bursa	2,342,547	100,665	3.4
9. Izmir	4,168,415	95,610	2.2
10. Mardin	796,591	93,071	10.5

Figures relate to the situation on 10th November 2016. Source: Turkish Directorate-General of Migration Management (DGMM).

would be small in scale and fairly brief, planning is now proceeding on the assumption that the asylum seeker settlers may become permanent, and thus some planning for their education and integration into Turkish society may be required. This is especially so as hostility to Syrian refugees increases in some European countries and elsewhere, making re-settlement there unlikely.

The situation poses significant **challenges** for Syrians who have been forced to migrate to Turkey. If they are to integrate into Turkish society, they will have to learn the Turkish language, find meaningful jobs, search for and pay for housing and arrange education for the children, all in a context of extreme vulnerability as asylum seekers. Meanwhile, Turkish residents in host communities **complain** about the impact of high-density asylum seeker camps on the availability of jobs and working conditions, the social benefits asylum seekers receive and the perceived potential for increased crime and terrorism. Although violence against asylum seekers is rare in Turkey, it tends to become amplified by alarmist media reports.

The overwhelming majority of Syrian asylum seekers to Turkey are Sunni Muslim Arabs, which raises **ethnic and sectarian issues** in the minds of some Turkish people. Minority groups in Turkey, such as the Kurds and some secularist groups,



2.80 This small tent city near the town of Osmaniye serves as a camp for Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey. Surrounded by barbed wire, it contains schools, a hospital, shops and sports facilities. Osmaniye is located about 10 kilometres from Turkey's border with Syria.

worry that the Turkish Government may use immigration from Syria as a device to transform Turkey's national identity, making Turkey more Arab, more Sunni and more hegemonic (i.e. powerful and dominant).

As at early 2017, Turkey was **refusing to grant refugee status** to Syrian asylum seekers. Arrivals from Syria were first classified as '**guests**' in 2011, and the classification has now transitioned to people under '**temporary protection**'. The temporary protection scheme gives Syrians living in Turkey access to unlimited free health care, free education in public schools and grants permission to undertake employment. Nonetheless, this status left the asylum seekers with little incentive to try and integrate into Turkish society because there was no clear prospect of long-term citizenship as there would be if they were granted official status as 'refugees'.



2.81 Daily life in a camp for Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey.

It is therefore understandable that 70% of Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey have said they wish to return to Syria when the conflict ends. The view among most Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey is that in the meantime, Turkey is a more desirable place to live than Europe because it is closer to their homeland, the cultures of Turkey and Syria are more similar, the Turkish people seem more tolerant of Syrians than many people in Europe, the Turkish Government has been welcoming, and there is no Islamophobia of the kind that is found in parts of Europe.

CASE STUDY

Forced migration in Niger to flee environmental problems

Niger is located in the centre of the **Sahel region** of West Africa, which is the semi-arid transition zone between the Sahara Desert to the north and the savanna grasslands to the south. With an area of 1.27 million square kilometres and a rapidly growing population of 20 million people, Niger is bordered by Mali and Burkina Faso to the west, Libya and Algeria to the north, Chad in the east and Nigeria and Benin to the south. Niger is one of the **world's poorest countries** with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of US\$390. It ranks last in the world (188th of 188 countries) on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a score of 0.348.

Overall, Niger is **sparsely populated**. The northern two-thirds of the country lies within the Sahara Desert, and is almost uninhabited. The most densely populated areas are in the south of the country where there is usually (just) enough water for cattle raising. The Nigerien economy relies on subsistence crops and livestock, with uranium from the country's political unstable north making up of the country's largest export earners. About half the government's annual budget is funded by foreign aid donations.

Environmental challenges in Niger

Niger experiences several **environmental problems** that have an impact on migration in the country. Among the environmental issues are droughts, desertification, soil degradation, the shrinking of Lake Chad, pollution of the Niger River, deforestation and sand intrusion. The **financial pressures** imposed upon many people in Niger by these environmental problems forces **large-scale migration** at a growing rate. In most cases, this migration takes the form of **internally displaced people** (within Niger), although it also occurs as **environmental refugees** flee to neighbouring countries such as Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Benin.

Rapidly growing population in Niger has placed strains on the fragile biophysical environment that is naturally vulnerable to drought and consequent



2.82 Soil degradation and erosion near a small village south-west of Niamey, Niger.



2.83 Cattle herding in Niger near the border with Burkina Faso. When farmers place too many cattle on their land, it is known as overgrazing. Common consequences of overgrazing include soil compaction and wind-blown soil erosion.

drying up of rivers. In recent decades, the land resources of Niger (grasslands and soils) have become severely **degraded** as a consequence of **human activities** such as over-grazing of animals, deforestation, agricultural mismanagement, fuelwood consumption and urbanisation.

These activities are leading to a range of types of land degradation including **desertification, soil compaction, erosion and salinisation**, as well as **water pollution and wind erosion**. Every year, thousands of hectares of arable land are destroyed and taken out of pastoral and agricultural use by erosion. Consequently, Niger is one of the few countries in the world where crop production is expanding at a slower rate than population growth, even though the area being farmed is expanding as more marginal land is brought into production. It has been estimated that land degradation in Niger is causing Niger's Gross Domestic product (GDP) to shrink by about 3% per annum.

The large inland water-body of **Lake Chad** used to be shared by four countries as the water spread across national borders into the four nations — Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria — providing fish and a valuable source of water for human, livestock and wildlife communities. Droughts and over-exploitation of the water in Lake Chad by extracting excessive quantities for irrigation have caused the lake to shrink in area from 22,276 square kilometres in 1966 to 15,400 km² in 1973, 2,276 km² in 1982, 1,756 km² in 1994 to about 1,350 km² today.

The shrinkage of Lake Chad led to severe food insecurity for 3.4 million people in the areas

surrounding the lake. Problems have grown since 2015 as **terrorist attacks and suicide bombings** by Boko Haram (also known as ISWAP — Islamic State's West Africa Province) have targeted civilians. Attacks have prevented farmers accessing their fields, damaged the system of traditional markets and destroyed essential infrastructure such as roads and irrigation channels.

As a result of the combination of the shrinkage of the lake and terrorist activity in the Lake Chad region, about 2.7 million people in the four countries (2.2 million in Nigeria) have been forced to flee from their homes and migrate to other parts of their country. In the early years of Lake Chad's shrinkage, local residents moved inwards to follow the edge of the shrinking lake, thus crossing national borders that were unmarked in the region at that time. As a result of recent shrinkage of Lake Chad, its waters are **no longer accessible** in Niger, making irrigation impossible for local farmers and aggravating food insecurity.



2.84 A fishing boat on the Niger River in Niamey.



2.85 The Niger River in Niamey. Note the siltation that is occurring as sediments wash into the river from the river bank to the right of the photo.

The **Niger River** flows through the south-west of Niger, providing a source of **fish, water and transport** for Nigeriens. With a length of more than 4,000 kilometres and a drainage basin of 2.1 million square kilometres, the Niger River is the largest river in West Africa, linking Niger with Mali and Guinea upstream, and with Nigeria downstream. The Niger River is suffering from increasing **pollution**, much of it from factory wastes that harm fish reproduction and threaten the livelihoods of those who make a living from catching fish. The situation is aggravated by the widespread growth of **water hyacinth**, a plant that spreads across the water surface, harming the fish and depriving plants at the bottom of river of sunlight. Fish production is further affected as **siltation** occurs and sand creeps into the river channel from the banks.



2.86 Fuelwood has been gathered in the remote semi-arid area shown in the background and brought to this roadside stop near Kouré for sale to passing drivers.

Another environmental threat in Niger is **deforestation**. Niger's woodlands are vulnerable to disturbance because of the country's dry environment, and gathering wood for **fuelwood** (which is the country's major source of energy) damages the forests, especially as the growing population makes increasing demands on the limited supplies of timber. The use of **fire** to clear land for agriculture also leads to deforestation, causing significant problems for people given the heavy reliance of the population on naturally growing trees and grasses. The United Nations reports that 210 naturally occurring plant species in Niger are used for human nutrition (especially during famines), 235 species are eaten by domestic livestock, 270 species are used for traditional



2.87 This typical small village near Kouré has been built from local raw materials, highlighting the dependence of Nigeriens on natural vegetation.

medical cures and 127 species are used for building and handicrafts. As deforestation occurs, soil erosion is exacerbated, further reducing the land available for agriculture and animal grazing.

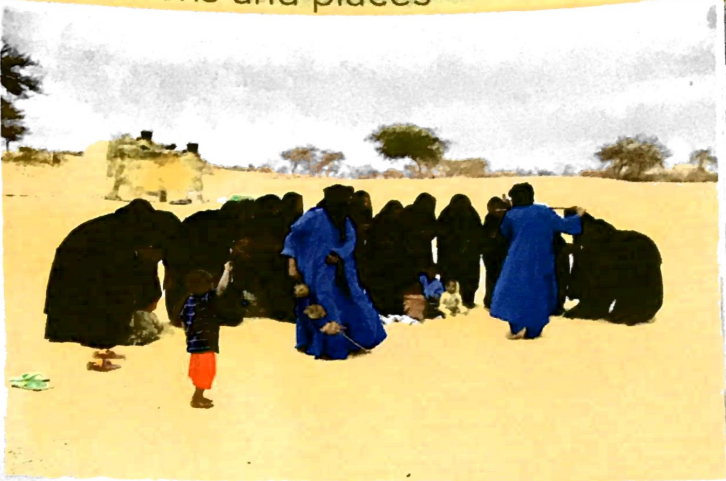
In northern Niger, **sand intrusion** is a significant and growing problem. Wind-blown sand from the Sahara Desert covers roads and other infrastructure, and covers farmlands, killing crops and making the land unsuitable for cultivation. Sand intrusion is aggravated by deforestation as trees play an important part in calming winds and blocking large-scale movements of sand.

Climate change increases the problem even more as droughts become more frequent, placing more stress on vegetation that is already being threatened by the effects of over-grazing and chopping for fuelwood. Thus a **vicious cycle** of environmental



2.88 Wind-blown sand covers the international highway between Dosso to Gaya that connects Niger with Benin.

impact occurs as farmers whose livelihoods are threatened look for new ways of preserving their incomes such as chopping more trees for fuelwood or over-grazing their cattle, thus further exposing the soil to increased aridity, compaction, erosion and sand intrusion.



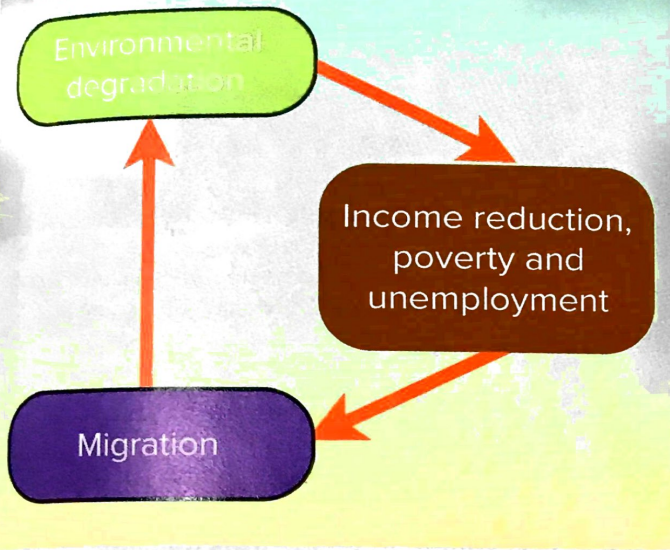
2.90 This Tuareg encampment in the Sahara Desert north of Timbuktu in Mali, accommodates the descendants of environmental refugees who migrated from Niger in the 1970s.

unemployment that they were forced to migrate. This situation continues today as the environmental problems worsen, causing **crop yields to decline** and **animals to die** due to droughts and water shortages. Many people in the fishing industry also migrate due to environmental reasons as droughts, shrinkage of Lake Chad and siltation of the Niger River cause **fishing yields to decline** to levels that are no longer viable.

Although many of the environmental displacees remain within Niger, usually becoming **rural-urban migrants** to the country's capital city (Niamey), some migrate internationally to nearby countries such as Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The pressures of environmental displacees in Niamey have been amplified by the arrival of another group — refugees who have fled political turmoil and conflict in neighbouring Libya by migrating to Niger.

Most of the people who migrate in Niger are **young men** who move in search of new ways to earn a living to send money home (remittances) to support their families. Women, children and elderly people usually remain behind, leading to a **distorted population structure** in their towns and villages. Migration is thus **one-way**, with few of the young men returning home, at least for many years.

The regions that have been deserted by the young men become more **environmentally vulnerable**, especially during the dry seasons, because there are so few men available to perform the heavy work that is often needed to restore environmental damage or maintain infrastructure such as water



2.89 The vicious cycle of environmentally induced migration in Niger.

Forced migration as a response to Niger's environmental challenges

Migration has emerged as a **widespread response** by many Nigeriens to the environmental problems they are encountering to an increasing degree.

Temporary and seasonal migration has been a long-standing response by Nigeriens to drought as cattle owners have moved their herds to follow the availability of water. For example, the Fulani ethnic group, who are traditional cattle herders, have moved their cattle from the dry north to the fertile lands of southern Niger seasonally for centuries to feed their cattle. This has become more difficult in recent decades as population growth in southern Niger has led to most of the land becoming occupied by another ethnic group, the Djerma, who use the land for crop cultivation.

In the early 1970s, when more severe droughts that are thought to have been caused by climate change first began to affect Niger, thousands of young men of the Tuareg ethnic group migrated to less affected areas in Libya, Algeria and northern Mali.

As more intense environmental problems emerged in Niger from the 1990s onwards, many farmers faced such severe problems of **poverty** and



2.91 These young men who have been environmentally displaced from northern Niger have migrated to Niamey and are attempting to earn income by selling cheap goods on the roadside.

wells. Consequently, the women have to re-plant trees, fix sand dunes, dig depressions to gather rainwater and move heavy rocks to prevent siltation of streams. Aside from the heavy nature of the work required, the women are also involved with taking care of the young and the elderly, so their overall workload is very intense. The situation for those left behind in rural areas becomes even more difficult if the male migrants do not send money home, as this forces the women to seek employment to obtain food, but employment opportunities are extremely scarce.

Some Nigeriens **resist the push to migrate** because of environmental pressures. Most of these farmers are located in the more fertile south-western areas of Niger. Even in these areas, however, life is becoming more difficult because of environmental issues, and some migration from these areas is starting to occur, usually in the form of rural-urban migration into Niamey.

Solutions to the ongoing environmental problems in Niger and the consequences of forced migration are not easy to find. This is especially the case given the poverty of the country as a whole, and thus forced migration is likely to be an ongoing issue for some time. Among the **policy solutions** that have been suggested to relieve the suffering of the people affected are the following:

- Development policies in Niger should aim to reduce further environmental degradation by **protecting natural resources** (tree wood and



2.92 Women from families that have resisted the pressure to migrate fill water bottles from a communal well in the relatively well-watered, fertile zone between Niamey and Kouré in southern Niger.

water) and **controlling over-exploitation** of the land.

- Efforts should be made to attract local and foreign **investment to create jobs** that are **environmentally friendly**.
- Introduce **education campaigns** to inform farmers, cattle herders and fishers about more sustainable methods for their work.
- **Traditional or indigenous knowledge** should be promoted as a way to help people **adapt** and **respond** to environmental degradation.
- People who remain behind in towns and villages when the men leave should receive **humanitarian aid** and financial support to **restore** their degraded environment.

QUESTION BANK 2J

1. Write about 500 words to compare the push factors that cause forced migration in Syria and Niger.
2. Describe the consequences of forced migration from Syria to Turkey (a) for the migrants, and (b) for Turkey.
3. Describe the consequences of forced migration due to environmental forces in Niger (a) for the migrants, (b) for the communities the migrants have left behind, and (c) for places such as Niamey that are destinations for migrants.
4. Suggest solutions to ease the consequences of forced migration (a) for Syrian migration to Turkey, and (b) for environmentally forced migration in Niger.