Disparities of wealth within countries can be significant and even greater between countries. This disparity can drive migration. Seen here: a Mumbai cityscape with a big contrast between poverty and wealth; Getty/Adrian Catalin Laza

“The migratory flows of our times are the expression of a complex and varied phenomenon that, to be properly understood, requires a careful analysis of every aspect of its different stages, from departure to arrival, including the possibility of return.”

- Pope Francis, 2023 World Day of Migrants and Refugees

Pope Leo XIII observed in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* that “men would cling to the country in which they were born, for no one would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life.” While it is true that in our global world people choose to migrate for a variety of reasons – for love, adventure, and job opportunities in distant lands – Pope Leo XIII’s point is that most people are predisposed to remain where things are familiar if given the opportunity to do so. The familiarity of local customs and language provide a sense of belonging and identity that can be difficult to replicate elsewhere. It is difficult to pick up and emigrate to a country where the language is absent different, might inspire the desire to emigrate, access to gainful employment is hard to come by, and social mores different. But we live in a world where the choice to remain is not always a realistic one.

To understand global migration, it is thus important to understand the root causes that motivate people to migrate, often against their own desires. Within a migration context, both push and pull factors play off one another; push factors being the reason(s) why people would want to leave their home country and pull factors being the reason(s) why people would want to come to a new country. So, for example, in a country or region where endemic poverty is pronounced and economic opportunities severely limited, the promise of gainful employment elsewhere can
function as the pull factor for a person to migrate to a particular place. A myriad of other push and pull factors can also play into the decision to leave:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUSH</th>
<th>PULL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Persecution, Violence, War</td>
<td>Safety and Stability, Freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor Wages, Lack of Jobs</td>
<td>Higher Wages, Job Prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop Failure, Famine, Natural Disaster</td>
<td>Food Availability, Better Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Opportunities, Family Separation</td>
<td>Better Quality of Life, Family Reunification</td>
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**Persecution, Violence, and War**

Safety factors can cause danger to individuals, prompting them to migrate. Persecution and discrimination based on nationality, race, religion, political beliefs, or membership status in a particular social group will prompt people to move large distances in search of living conditions where safety can reign over their lives. Danger can be imposed upon individuals by something formal, like war, or informal, such as internal strife or widespread organized national criminal activity. For example, the turbulent Northern Triangle of Central America, composed of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, was described in 2018 by the U.S. Department of State as a region that "suffers from high rates of violence and crime with weak judicial systems to prosecute criminals and protect those affected." Countless thousands of people have left a multitude of war-torn or unsafe countries, some of whom receive little coverage in international news. Very many of those leaving their home countries have travelled through irregular means seeking safety and security in other regions of the world.

**Economics and Related Social Factors**

Economic migration, whether permanent or seasonal, is a commonly cited reason for migration. In general, it is believed that in economic migration people move from poorer developing areas into richer areas where wages are higher and more jobs are available. Immigration from Brazil in the last decade of the 20th century provides an example of the way in which economic factors contributed to migration patterns in the case of Brazilian immigrants in the U.S., who have cited economic reasons for leaving their home in search of prosperity elsewhere. Many sought to escape the hyperinflations that plagued Brazil up until 1994. Yet even since the late 1990s, when inflation subsided and prices stabilized, middle and lower-class Brazilians experienced an average loss of a third of purchasing power in their salaries, resulting in a wave of migrants to the United States knowing that they can earn as much as four times what they earned in Brazil working the same jobs. Declining or stagnant wealth, paired with the promise of economic prosperity elsewhere, can function as a significant impetus to migrate.
Endnotes