

What is Population Distribution?

The world's population, or total number of people, is spread unevenly over the Earth's surface. Some places have large numbers of people. In other places, the population is very small. Population distribution describes the way the population is spread out over the Earth.

The reasons population is distributed as it is may seem unclear. Scientists called demographers try to figure it out. Demographers study the populations of the world. They examine such things as rates of birth, marriage, and death. And they look at the reasons why people choose to live in certain areas.

Why is Population Distribution Uneven?

To answer this question, demographers start with the idea that people are choosy. Recall an important fact about the Earth's surface. Many of the Earth's landforms are rugged mountains, hot deserts, and dry land with little vegetation. Few people can live in these places.

Many factors make a location a good place for people to live. Most major civilizations of world history began along bodies of water. Rivers and lakes form natural "roads" for trade and travel. Also, rivers and lakes supply fresh water for drinking and farming. People also prefer areas of flat, fertile soil. There they can grow food and build easily. Therefore, plains and valleys are easy to settle. Flat coastal areas make it easy for people to trade by ship with other countries.

Other factors affect where people live. People prefer areas where the climate is not too hot or too cold, and where there is adequate rainfall. These places make it easier to raise food crops and animals. People also prefer places with natural resources to build houses and make products. For instance, few trees grew on the America's Great Plains. Few people settled there at first. They went to other regions.

COMPARE DISTRIBUTION MAPS

What? Distribution maps are maps that show where something, such as people or natural resources, is distributed, or spread, across the area shown on the map. The world population distribution map shows where people are distributed around the world.

Distribution maps often use dots to show population density, or where people live.

Why? Distribution maps are useful because they are very flexible. You can make distribution maps to show how anything is distributed. Do you want to know where certain animals live? Look at the wildlife distribution map. How about where certain kinds of industries are located? Use an economic distribution map.

Meteorologists, or people who study Earth's atmosphere and weather patterns, use distribution maps to see where rain has fallen.

Environmentalists use distribution maps to determine where pollution is found. Businesses use them to show where their offices are located.