Chapter 1: Population distribution and density

Key questions

- What is population distribution?
- What is population density?
- What is the world's population density and distribution?

Unit 1: World population density and population distribution

In 2000, the world's population reached six billion people. By the end of 2011, this figure had risen to 7 billion people.

Population geography is the study of the size, distribution, composition, migration and growth of population. **Demography** deals with the statistics of human populations, such as the size, development and structure of these populations.

1.1 The world's population density

Population density is the number of people relative to the space that they occupy. To calculate population density, we divide the total population by the area in which they live. We then express this as the number of people/km^2. The higher a country's population density, the more crowded that country is. Figure 4.2 shows the world's population density.

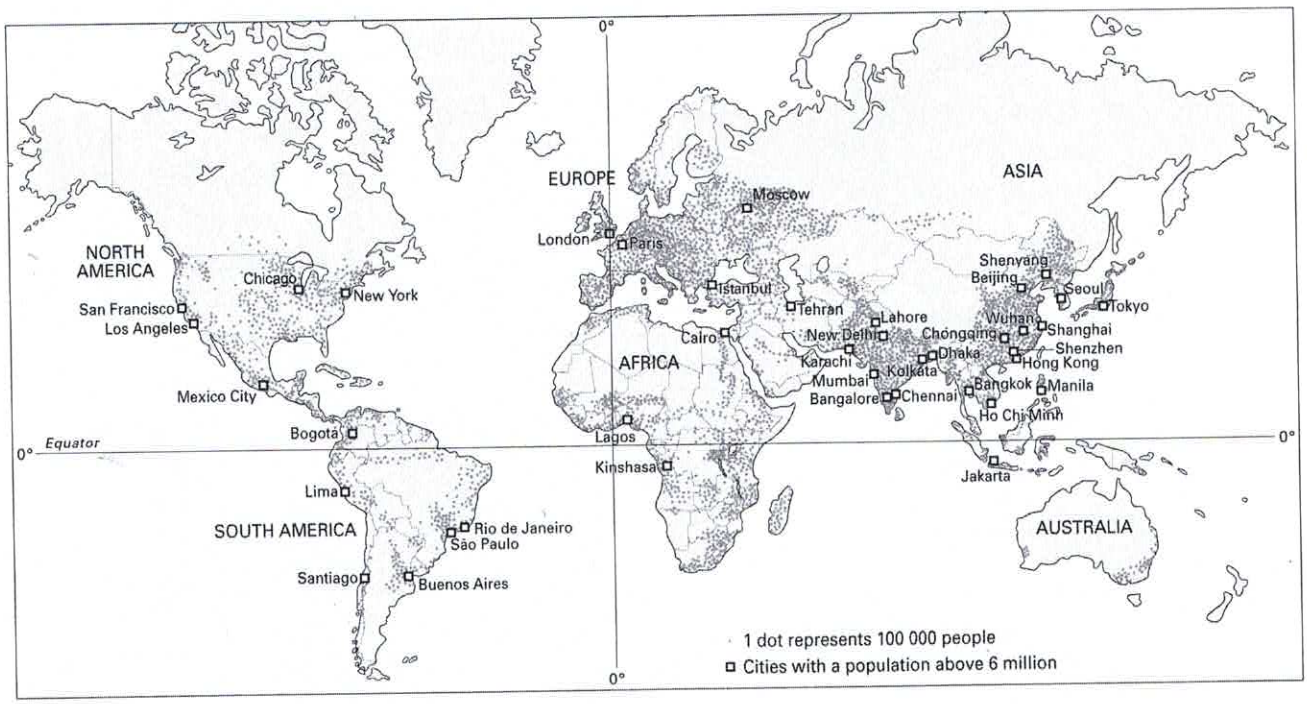

Figure 4.2 Global population density.

Key words

population geography – the study of the size, distribution, composition, migration and growth of the world population

demography – the study of population statistics

population density – the number of people occupying an area of land

1.2 The world's population distribution

The world's population is not evenly spread across the Earth. About half the world's total population lives on only 5% of the Earth's land. In addition, about 60% of the world's population lives on one continent, Asia. Even within a country, certain places have lots of people, and other parts have few people.

Figure 4.3 shows the world's **population distribution**. In other words, it shows where people live, such as along the coastline or mainly in the Northern Hemisphere.

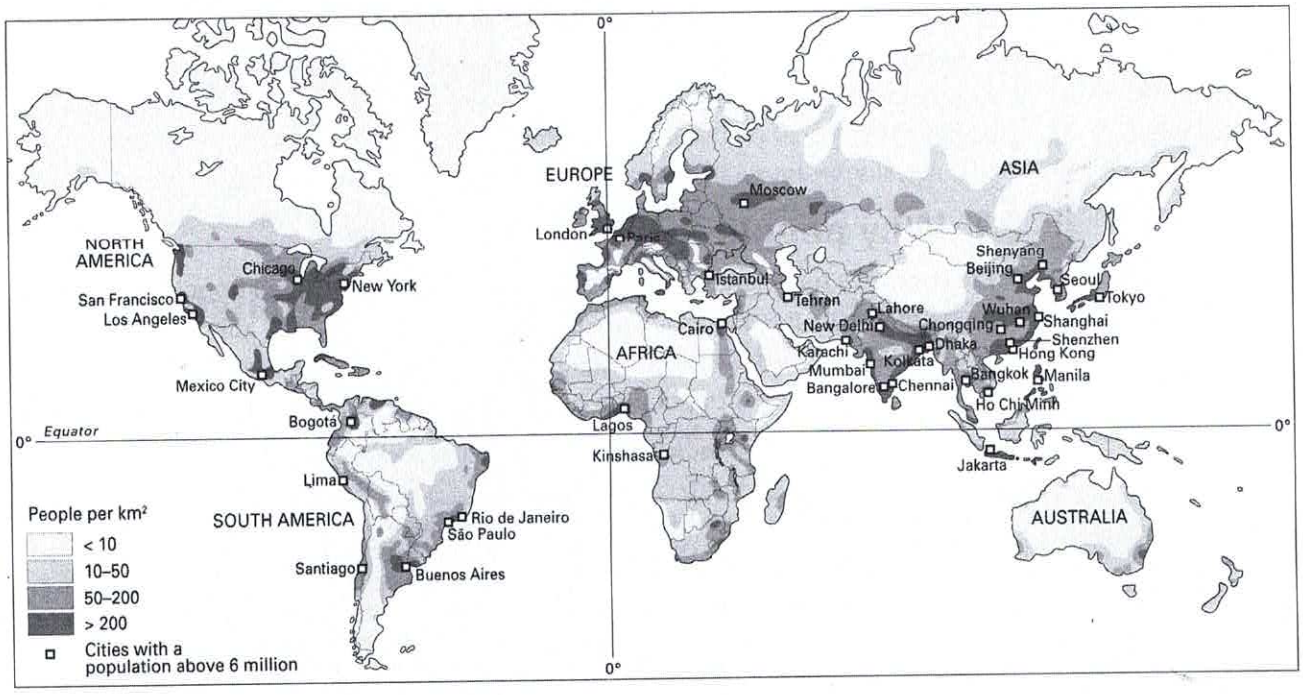

Figure 4.3 Global population distribution.

Activity 2: Compare population densities and distribution

Use an atlas and the maps in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 to help you with this activity. Look at the data in the table. It shows population density for eight countries.

Country	People per km²
Australia	2,8
Canada	4
USA	34
China	144
United Kingdom	253
Japan	339
Bangladesh	1 165
Netherlands	1 278

1. Say whether the following statements are true or false:
   - 1.1 Australia is a large country with relatively few people. (1)
   - 1.2 The Netherlands is a small country with a relatively large population. (1)
   - 1.3 Canada has a high population density. (1)
   - 1.4 Bangladesh has a low population density. (1)
2. Calculate the average population density for South Africa. Use these figures: Area: 1 219 090 km²; Population: 50 000 000 (2012) (3)
3. How does South Africa's population density compare with the other countries in the table? (2)
4. Estimate in which hemispheres most of the world's population lives: in the Nothern or Southern Hemisphere and the Western or Eastern Hemisphere? (2)
5. Suggest three possible reasons to explain the world's population distribution. (3)

Key word

population distribution – where people live on Earth

Geo fact

China has the world's largest population, with 1,3 billion people. One in every five people on Earth lives in China.

Key questions

- Why are certain parts of the world densely populated?
- Why are certain parts of the world sparsely populated?

Unit 2: Factors that affect the distribution and density of the world's population

Geographers use the word **ecumene** to describe parts of Earth that are suitable for permanent human settlement. **Nonecumene** are places that are not suitable for humans to live in.

2.1 Why people live where they do

Some countries have large populations, while others have small populations. Also, millions of people live in certain areas, while other places have almost no people. There are several reasons for this. The following table shows the physical and social factors that affect population distribution and density:

Physical factors: linked to the natural environment	Social factors: linked to humans
Climate: A suitable climate for large human settlements is not too hot, too cold, too wet or too dry. **Water:** Settlements need a reliable source of water. **Soil:** Soils should be fertile enough to support agriculture. **Relief:** Large human settlements usually develop on flat land, rather than in mountainous areas. **Natural environment:** Polar areas, deserts and forests are not suitable for large human settlements. However, natural harbours are good for settlements on the coast. **Resources:** Settlements usually develop where there are enough resources, such as coal, fish and minerals to support large populations.	**Economy:** Places with large, developed economies attract people and can support large populations. **Politics:** Most people prefer to live in places with a stable political system. **Cultural or social factors:** Some places have a very old tradition of human settlements. **Transport and communication:** A good system of transport and communication attracts people to an area. **Infrastructure:** Areas with a good infrastructure, such as water supply, electricity, sewage, waste removal and Internet links can support large populations.

Geo fact

Only 10% of Earth is really suitable for human settlement.

Key words

ecumene – parts of Earth that are suitable for people to live in

nonecumene – parts of Earth that are not suitable for people to live in

Activity 3: Locate Earth's most crowded places

Use an atlas and the maps in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 on pages 198 and 199 to do this activity.

1. Identify four areas on Earth that are the most densely populated. (4)
2. Name one country from each of these four densely populated clusters. (4)
3. Explain why you think each of these areas is so densely populated. (4)
4. The following table shows the five most densely populated and the five least densely populated countries in the world. For each country, write down one possible reason for its population density.

Most densely populated countries	Most sparsely populated countries
1. Monaco (16 905 persons per km^2)	1. Mongolia (2,0 persons per km^2)
2. Singapore (6 779 persons per km^2)	2. Namibia (2,6 persons per km^2)
3. Vatican City (1 877 persons per km^2)	3. Australia (2,8 persons per km^2)
4. Maldives (1 321 persons per km^2)	4. Suriname (3,0 persons per km^2)
5. Malta (1 282 persons per km^2)	5. Mauritania (3,0 persons per km^2)

(10)