

transferring ideas

The Middle East

Why do regions change?

While the natural and human environments of the Asia-Pacific region are undergoing rapid change so too are other regions of the world. One such region is the Middle East, which lies at the junction of three continents: Africa, Europe and Asia. Within this region there is a great variety of natural environments—from hot deserts to freezing mountain tops. There is also huge diversity in human environments—from 5 million people living in mega-cities to small nomadic tribes who follow ancient trading routes across the deserts and mountain ranges. This is a region that is often in the news for the conflicts that take place there.

Source 7.72
Kurdish refugees.



7.3 How do people respond to change?

These people are Kurdish refugees. Kurds are an ethnic group that live in the area bordered by Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey but they have no country of their own. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Kurds living in Iraq were persecuted and, in 1991, about 1.5 million Kurds fled from their homes towards Turkey and Iran. Thousands died because of the cold climate in this region and a lack of food. The United Nations issued a resolution demanding that the Iraqi Government stop persecuting the Kurds but this had only limited success. The Kurds generally welcomed the UN coalition forces who arrived in 2003 to overthrow the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, and they now control some areas in the north of the country. The United Nations estimates that more than 1.7 million Iraqis live as refugees in other countries, while another 1.5 million are referred to as 'Internally Displaced Persons'. This means that they have left the place in which they usually live but still remain within Iraq. Many of these people are the Kurds of northern Iraq.

- 1 How have the people in the image responded to change in Iraq?
- 2 What difficulties await them when they arrive at their destination?
- 3 Many Kurds are involved in a struggle for their own country. This would be called Kurdistan which means 'Land of the Kurds'. Other ethnic groups in the Middle East have their own homelands. Using a map of the region, list those countries that have the suffix 'stan' in their name.
- 4 Why do you think the Kurds do not have their own homeland? Why might this cause conflict and change in the region?

Source 7.70 The Dead Sea lies in a desert basin between low mountain ranges.



7.1 What different environments are there?

There are many natural and human landscapes in the Middle East. This feature is the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the Earth's surface on dry land, which lies on the border between Jordan and Israel. The shore of the lake is 400 metres below sea level. The rivers and streams that drain into the Dead Sea carry small amounts of salt. The hot desert sun evaporates much of the water, leaving behind the salt. Over thousands of years, the salt in the water has built up so much that the Dead Sea is now six times saltier than sea water. Because nothing can survive in water this salty, the lake is called the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea has been shrinking because water from the Jordan River, which feeds the lake, has been taken out for irrigating crops and drinking water.

- 1 Sketch the image of the Dead Sea and label the mountains, desert and Dead Sea. What do you think the climate would be like here?
- 2 On your sketch, use labelled arrows to show the movement of water and salt.
- 3 Why is the water from the Jordan River suitable to irrigate crops and yet the water from the lake is too salty?

7.2 How and why do environments change?

These spectacular circles are circular fields in the Saudi Arabian desert. The satellite that took this image uses the colour red to show healthy growing vegetation. Because this region of Saudi Arabia receives little rainfall, farmers use underground water. They drill wells to a depth of about 750 metres to access a layer of water that is trapped between layers of rocks and clay. This water fell as rain more than 10 000 years ago and has slowly trickled into these deep aquifers. Elsewhere in the Middle East, other deep wells access the largest known reserves of oil on Earth. The oil, like the water, has brought enormous changes to the Middle East in the last fifty years or so.

- 1 Why do you think these crop fields are circular?
- 2 Explain how this feature of the human environment is a response to features of the natural environment.
- 3 As well as the circular fields, there are also some rectangular shapes in the centre right of the satellite image. What do you think these shapes are?
- 4 How might these farming activities affect the natural environment of this region?



Source 7.71
Satellite image of Buraida irrigated fields.