

KEY ISSUE 4

Why Do Migrants Face Obstacles?

- Controlling Migration
- Unauthorized Immigration
- Attitudes toward Immigrants

Learning Outcome 3.4.1

Identify the types of immigrants who are given preference to enter the United States.

An environmental or political feature that hinders migration is an **intervening obstacle**. The principal obstacle traditionally faced by migrants to other countries was environmental: the long, arduous, and expensive passage over land or by sea. Think of the cramped and unsanitary conditions endured by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States who had to sail across the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean in tiny ships. Or the mountains and deserts that European pioneers and displaced Native Americans were forced to cross in their westward migration across the North American continent.

Transportation improvements that have promoted globalization, such as motor vehicles and airplanes, have diminished the importance of environmental features as intervening obstacles. Today, the major obstacles faced by most immigrants are political. A migrant needs a passport to legally emigrate from a country and a visa to legally immigrate to a new country (Figure 3-32).



▲ FIGURE 3-32 PASSPORT CONTROL Backup at the border from Tijuana, Mexico (right) into the United States at San Diego.

Controlling Migration

Most countries have adopted selective immigration policies that admit some types of immigrants but not others. The two reasons that most visas are granted are for specific employment placement and family reunification.

U.S. QUOTA LAWS

The era of unrestricted immigration to the United States ended when Congress passed the Quota Act in 1921 and the National Origins Act in 1924. These laws established **quotas**, or maximum limits on the number of people who could immigrate to the United States during a one-year period. Key modifications in the U.S. quotas have included:

- **1924:** For each country that had native-born persons already living in the United States, 2 percent of their number (based on the 1910 census) could immigrate each year. This ensured that most immigrants would come from Europe.
- **1965:** Quotas for individual countries were replaced with hemisphere quotas (170,000 from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere).
- **1978:** A global quota of 290,000 was set, including a maximum of 20,000 per country.
- **1990:** The global quota was raised to 700,000.

Because the number of applicants for admission to the United States far exceeds the quotas, Congress has set preferences:

- **Family reunification.** Approximately three-fourths of immigrants are admitted to reunify families, primarily spouses or unmarried children of people already living in the United States. The typical wait for a spouse to gain entry is currently about five years.
- **Skilled workers.** Exceptionally talented professionals receive most of the remainder of the quota.
- **Diversity.** A few immigrants are admitted by lottery under a diversity category for people from countries that historically sent few people to the United States.

The quota does not apply to refugees, who are admitted if they are judged genuine refugees. Also admitted without limit are spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizens. The number of immigrants can vary sharply from year to year, primarily because numbers in these two groups are unpredictable.

Other countries charge that by giving preference to skilled workers, immigration policies in the United States and Europe contribute to a **brain drain**, which is a large-scale emigration by talented people. Scientists, researchers, doctors, and other professionals migrate to countries where they can make better use of their abilities.

Asians have made especially good use of the priorities set by the U.S. quota laws. Many well-educated Asians enter the United States under the preference for skilled workers. Once admitted, they can bring in relatives under the family-reunification provisions of the quota. Eventually, these

immigrants can bring in a wider range of other relatives from Asia, through a process of **chain migration**, which is the migration of people to a specific location because

relatives or members of the same nationality previously migrated there.

CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC TOOLS

Claiming Ellis Island

Twelve million immigrants to the United States between 1892 and 1954 were processed at Ellis Island, situated in New York Harbor (Figure 3-33). Incorporated as part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965, Ellis Island was restored and reopened in 1990 as a museum of immigration. Before building the immigration center, the U.S. government used Ellis Island as a fort and powder magazine beginning in 1808.

An 1834 agreement approved by the U.S. Congress gave Ellis Island to New York State and gave the submerged lands surrounding the island to New Jersey. When the agreement was signed, Ellis Island was only 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres), but beginning in the 1890s, the U.S. government enlarged the island, eventually to 10.6 hectares (27.5 acres).

New Jersey state officials claimed that the 10.6-hectare Ellis Island was

part of their state, not New York. The claim was partly a matter of pride on the part of New Jersey officials to stand up to their more glamorous neighbor. After all, Ellis Island was only 400 meters (1,300 feet) from the New Jersey shoreline, yet tourists—like immigrants a century ago—are transported by ferry to Lower Manhattan more than a mile away. More practically, the sales tax collected by the Ellis Island museum gift shop was going to New York rather than to New Jersey.

After decades of dispute, New Jersey took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1998, the Supreme Court ruled 6–3 that New York owned the original island but that New Jersey owned the rest. New York's jurisdiction was set as the low waterline of the original island. Critical evidence in the decision was a series of maps prepared by New Jersey Department

of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) officials using Geographic Information System (GIS). NJDEP officials scanned into an image file an 1857 U.S. coast map that was considered to be the most reliable map from that era. The image file of the old map was brought into ArcView, and then the low waterline shown on the 1857 map was edited and depicted using a series of dots. The perimeter of the current island was mapped using global positioning system (GPS) surveying.

After ruling in favor of New Jersey's claim, the Supreme Court directed the NJDEP to delineate the precise boundary between the two states, again using GIS. Overlaying the 1857 low waterline onto the current map identified New York's territory, and the rest of the current island was determined to belong to New Jersey.



▲ **FIGURE 3-33 ELLIS ISLAND** Ellis Island is in the foreground, Jersey City, New Jersey, is to the left, and Manhattan, New York is to the rear.

Unauthorized Immigration

Learning Outcome 3.4.2

Describe the population characteristics of unauthorized immigrants to the United States.

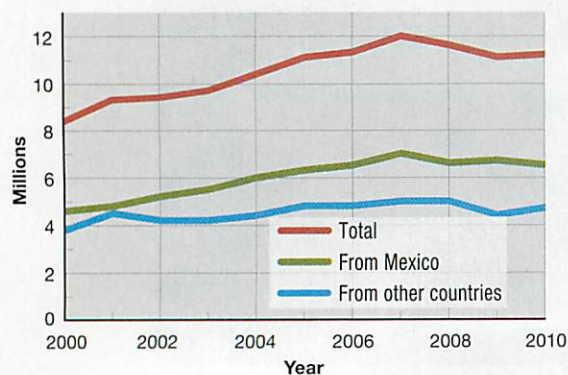
The number of people allowed to immigrate into the United States is at a historically high level, but the number who wish to come is even higher. Many who cannot legally enter the United States immigrate illegally. Those who do so are entering without proper documents and thus are called **unauthorized immigrants**.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS

The Pew Hispanic Center estimated that there were 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in 2010. The number increased rapidly during the first years of the twenty-first century (Figure 3-34). After hitting a peak in 2007, the figure declined because the severe recession that started in 2008 reduced job opportunities in the United States.

Other information about unauthorized immigrants, according to Pew Hispanic Center:

- **Source country.** Approximately 58 percent of unauthorized immigrants emigrate from Mexico. The remainder are about evenly divided between other Latin American countries and other regions of the world.
- **Children.** The 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants included 1 million children. In addition, while living in the United States, unauthorized immigrants have given birth to approximately 4.5 million babies, who are legal citizens of the United States.
- **Years in the United States.** The duration of residency in the United States has been increasing for unauthorized immigrants. In a 2010 Pew survey, 35 percent of unauthorized adult immigrants had resided in the United States for 15 years or more, 28 percent for 10 to 14 years, 22 percent for 5 to 9 years, and 15 percent for



▲ FIGURE 3-34 NUMBER OF UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES Most unauthorized immigrants in the United States are from Mexico.

less than 5 years. A similar survey in 2000 showed a reverse distribution: 32 percent had been in the United States for less than 5 years, compared to only 16 percent for more than 15 years.

- **Labor force.** Approximately 8 million unauthorized immigrants are employed in the United States, accounting for around 5 percent of the total U.S. civilian labor force. Unauthorized immigrants were much more likely than the average American to be employed in construction and hospitality (food service and lodging) jobs and less likely to be in white-collar jobs such as education, health care, and finance.
- **Distribution.** California and Texas have the largest number of unauthorized immigrants. Nevada has the largest percentage.

MEXICO'S BORDER WITH THE UNITED STATES

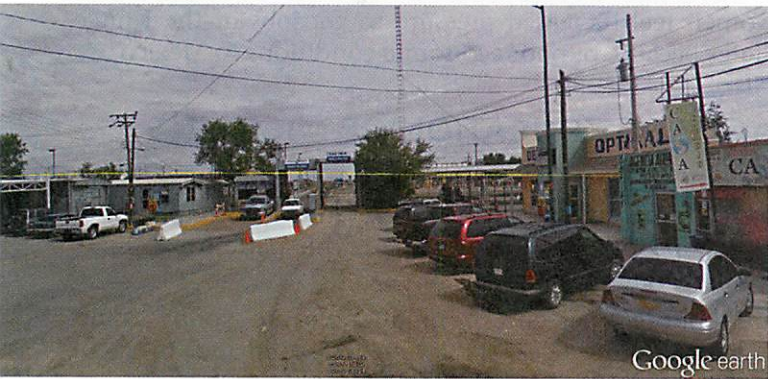
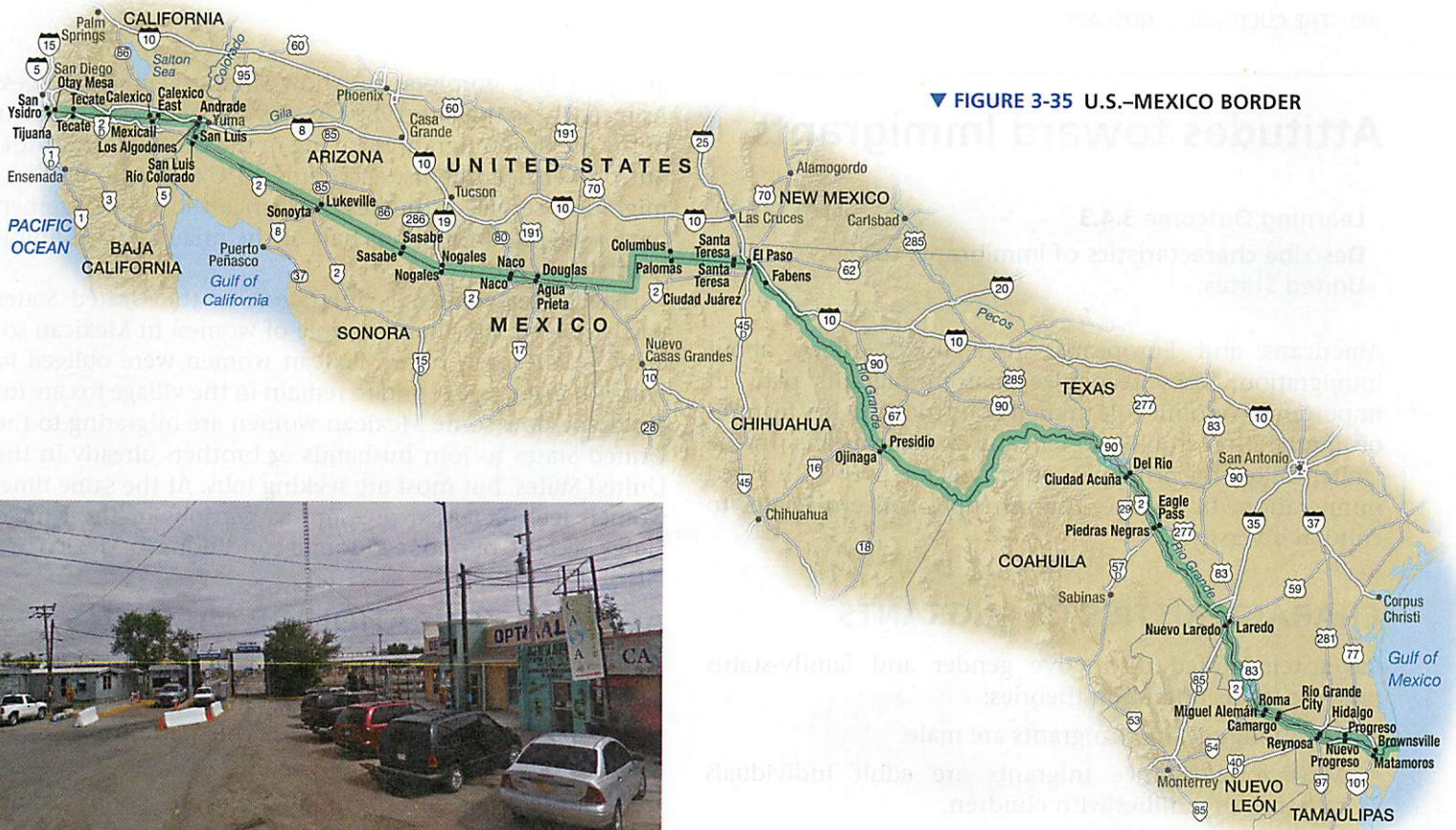
The U.S.–Mexico border is 3,141 kilometers (1,951 miles) long (Figure 3-35). Rural areas and small towns are guarded by only a handful of agents (Figure 3-36). Crossing the border on foot legally is possible in several places (Figure 3-37). Elsewhere, the border runs mostly through sparsely inhabited regions. The United States has constructed a barrier covering approximately one-fourth of the border (Figure 3-38). Several large urban areas are situated on the border, including San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, at the western end, and Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Mexico, at the eastern end. Driving across the border in the urban areas can be fraught with heavy traffic and delays (Figures 3-32 and 3-39).

A joint U.S.–Mexican International Boundary and Water Commission is responsible for keeping official maps, on the basis of a series of nineteenth-century treaties. The commission is also responsible for marking the border by maintaining 276 six-foot-tall iron monuments erected in the late nineteenth century, as well as 440 fifteen-inch-tall markers added in the 1970s. Actually locating the border is difficult in some remote areas.

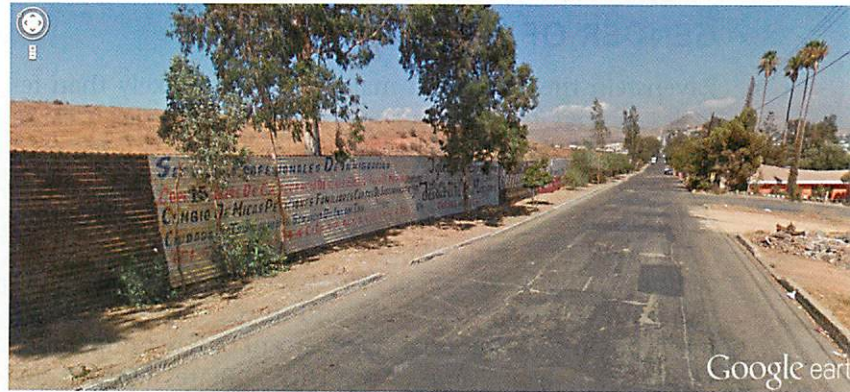
From the United States, the view to the south may seem straightforward. Millions of Mexicans are trying to cross the border by any means, legal or otherwise, in search of employment, family reunification, and a better way of life in the United States.

The view from Mexico is more complex. Along its northern border with the United States, Mexico is the source for unauthorized emigrants. At the same time, along its southern border with Guatemala, Mexico is the destination for unauthorized immigrants. When talking with its neighbor to the north, Mexicans urge understanding and sympathy for the plight of the immigrants. When talking with its neighbor to the south, Mexicans urge stronger security along the border.

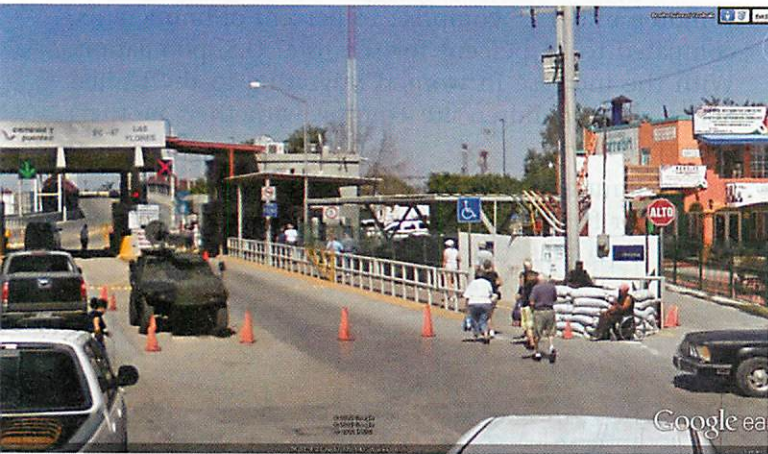
Along the Mexican–Guatemalan border, the Suchiate River is sometimes only ankle deep. Immigrants from other Latin American countries, especially El Salvador and Honduras, travel through Guatemala without need of a passport in order to cross into Mexico. Although a passport is needed



▲ FIGURE 3-36 U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: SMALL TOWN CROSSING
There is no congestion crossing between Palomas, Mexico (foreground), and Columbus, New Mexico.



▲ FIGURE 3-38 U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: FENCE A fence separates Tecate, Mexico (right), from Tecate, California.



▲ FIGURE 3-37 U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: PEDESTRIAN CROSSING
Pedestrians cross from Nueva Progreso, Mexico (foreground), to Progreso, Texas.

to cross the border from Guatemala into Mexico, the Mexican government estimates that 2 million people a year do so illegally. Some migrate illegally from Guatemala to Mexico for higher-paying jobs in tropical fruit plantations. For most, the ultimate destination is the United States.

Pause and Reflect 3.4.2

Which border crossing between Mexico and the United States shown here does the border crossing between Mexico and Guatemala most resemble?



▲ FIGURE 3-39 U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: URBAN CONGESTION Vehicles are backed up trying to move from Matamoros, Mexico (right), to Brownsville, Texas.

Attitudes toward Immigrants

Learning Outcome 3.4.3

Describe characteristics of immigrants to the United States.

Americans and Europeans share mixed views about immigration. They recognize that immigrants play an important economic role in their countries, but key features of immigration trouble Americans and Europeans. In the United States, the principal concern relates to unauthorized immigration. In Europe, the principal concern relates to cultural diversity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS

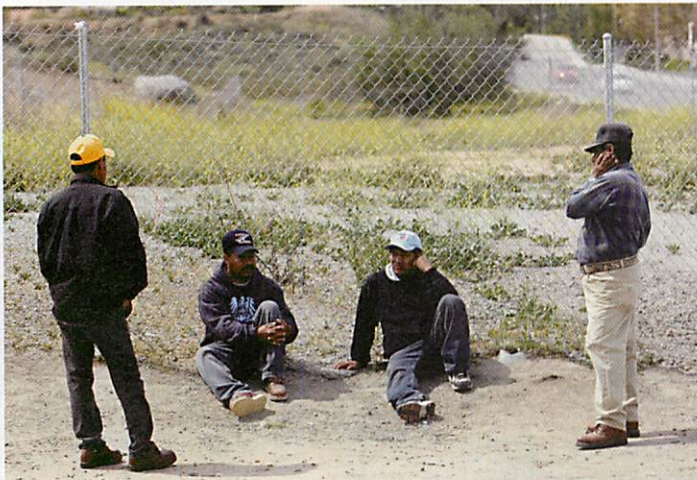
Ravenstein noted distinctive gender and family-status patterns in his migration theories:

- Most long-distance migrants are male.
- Most long-distance migrants are adult individuals rather than families with children.

GENDER OF MIGRANTS

Ravenstein theorized that males were more likely than females to migrate long distances to other countries because searching for work was the main reason for international migration, and males were much more likely than females to be employed (Figure 3-40). This held true for U.S. immigrants during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, when about 55 percent were male. But the gender pattern reversed in the 1990s, and in the twenty-first century women constitute about 55 percent of U.S. immigrants.

Mexicans who come to the United States without authorized immigration documents—currently the largest



▲ **FIGURE 3-40** EMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO: MALE DAY LABORERS
Day laborers from Mexico have crossed the border into San Diego, California, to look for temporary work.

group of U.S. immigrants—show similar gender changes. As recently as the late 1980s, males constituted 85 percent of the Mexican migrants arriving in the United States without proper documents, according to U.S. census and immigration service estimates. But since the 1990s, women have accounted for about half of the unauthorized immigrants from Mexico.

The increased female migration to the United States partly reflects the changing role of women in Mexican society. In the past, rural Mexican women were obliged to marry at a young age and to remain in the village to care for children. Now some Mexican women are migrating to the United States to join husbands or brothers already in the United States, but most are seeking jobs. At the same time, women feel increased pressure to get jobs in the United States because of poor economic conditions in Mexico.

AGE AND EDUCATION OF MIGRANTS

Ravenstein also believed that most long-distance migrants were young adults seeking work rather than children or elderly people. For the most part, this pattern continues for the United States:

- About 40 percent of immigrants are young adults between the ages of 25 and 39, compared to about 23 percent of the entire U.S. population.
- Immigrants are less likely to be elderly people; only 5 percent of immigrants are over age 65, compared to 12 percent of the entire U.S. population.
- Children under 15 comprise 16 percent of immigrants, compared to 21 percent for the total U.S. population. With the increase in women migrating to the United States, more children are coming with their mothers (Figure 3-41).
- Recent immigrants to the United States have attended school for fewer years and are less likely to have high school diplomas than are U.S. citizens. The typical



▲ **FIGURE 3-41** EMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO: WOMEN AND CHILDREN
AT A PARADE IN NEW YORK Children who have emigrated from Mexico display the Mexican flag at a Latinos Unidos parade in Brooklyn, New York.

unauthorized Mexican immigrant has attended school for four years, less than the average American but a year more than the average Mexican.

IMMIGRATION CONCERNS IN THE UNITED STATES

Americans are divided concerning whether unauthorized migration helps or hurts the country (Figure 3-42). This ambivalence extends to specific elements of immigration law:

- **Border patrols.** Americans would like more effective border patrols so that fewer unauthorized immigrants can get into the country, but they don't want to see money spent to build more fences along the border. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has stepped up enforcement, including deportation of a record 390,000 unauthorized immigrants in 2010.
- **Workplace.** Most Americans recognize that unauthorized immigrants take jobs that no one else wants, so they support some type of work-related program to make them legal, and they oppose raids on workplaces in attempts to round up unauthorized immigrants. Most Americans support a path to U.S. citizenship for unauthorized immigrants.
- **Civil rights.** Americans favor letting law enforcement officials stop and verify the legal status of anyone they suspect of being an unauthorized immigrant. On the other hand, they fear that enforcement efforts that identify and deport unauthorized immigrants could violate the civil rights of U.S. citizens.
- **Local initiatives.** Polls show that most Americans believe that enforcement of unauthorized immigration is a federal government responsibility and do not support the use of local law enforcement officials to find unauthorized immigrants. On the other hand, residents of some states along the Mexican border favor stronger enforcement of authorized immigration.

The strongest state initiative has been Arizona's 2010 law that obligated local law enforcement officials, when practicable, to determine a person's immigration status. Under the Arizona law, foreigners are required to carry at all times documents proving they are in the country legally and to produce those documents upon request of a local law enforcement official. In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down several provisions of the law.

Although it does not share a border with Mexico, Alabama enacted a similar measure in 2011. The Alabama law also prohibited or restricted unauthorized immigrants from attending public schools and colleges. On the other hand, Texas, which has the longest border with Mexico, has not enacted harsh anti-immigrant laws, and more than 100 localities across the country have passed resolutions supporting more rights for unauthorized immigrants—a movement known as “Sanctuary City.”

Controversy even extends to what to call the group of immigrants:

- *Unauthorized immigrant* is the term preferred by academic observers, including the authoritative Pew Hispanic Center, as a neutral term.
- *Undocumented immigrant* is the term preferred by groups that advocate for more rights for these individuals.
- *Illegal alien* is the term preferred by groups who favor tougher restrictions and enforcement of immigration laws.

Opposition to immigration into the United States predates the current era of most immigrants coming from Latin America and Asia. Hostility intensified when Italians, Russians, Poles, and other Southern and Eastern Europeans poured into the United States beginning in the late nineteenth century. Earlier European immigrants, mostly from Northern and Western Europe, had converted the forests and prairies of the vast North American interior into productive farms and had helped to extend U.S. control across the continent. By the early twentieth century, most Americans saw the frontier as closed and thought that therefore entry into the country should be closed as well.

A government study in 1911 reflected popular attitudes when it concluded that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were racially inferior, “inclined toward violent crime,” resisted assimilation, and “drove old-stock citizens out of some lines of work.” A century later, many Americans have similar reactions to the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

Pause and Reflect 3.4.3

In what ways are reactions to immigrants today similar to those of a century ago?

▼ FIGURE 3-42 IMMIGRATION CONTROVERSY IN THE UNITED STATES Demonstrations supporting (left) tighter immigration controls and (right) more rights for immigrants.



IMMIGRATION CONCERNS IN EUROPE

Learning Outcome 3.4.4

Compare American and European attitudes toward immigrants.

Attitudes toward immigration are also ambivalent in Europe. Europeans have more rights than ever before to migrate elsewhere within Europe, whereas non-Europeans face more restrictions than in the past.

SOURCES OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION. Agreements among European countries, especially the 1985 Schengen Treaty, give a citizen of one European country the right to hold a job, live permanently, and own property elsewhere. The removal of migration restrictions for Europeans has set off large-scale migration flows within the region. The principal flows are from the poorer countries of Europe to the richer ones, where job opportunities have been greater.

In recent years the largest flows within Europe have included (Figure 3-43):

- From Southeastern Europe, especially Romania, as well as Bulgaria, Albania, and Serbia, especially to Italy and Spain.
- From Eastern Europe, especially Poland, as well as Russia and Ukraine, especially to Germany, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.

- From Northern Europe, especially the United Kingdom and Germany, to attractive climates in Southern Europe, especially in Spain.

During the twentieth century, the largest flows within Europe were south to north, especially from Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain to France and Germany.

While migration within Europe has become easier and more common, it has become more difficult for non-Europeans to immigrate to a European country. During the twentieth century, large numbers of Turks and North Africans migrated to Europe. Germany's Turkish population remains the largest group of non-Europeans in Europe.

OPPONENTS OF IMMIGRATION. Most European countries are now in stage 4 of the demographic transition (very low or negative NIR) and have economies capable of meeting the needs of their people. The safety valve of emigration is no longer needed. To the contrary, population growth in Europe is fueled by immigration from other regions, a trend that many Europeans dislike.

Hostility to immigrants has become a central plank in the platform of political parties in many European countries. These parties blame immigrants for crime, unemployment, and high welfare costs. Above all, the anti-immigration parties fear that long-standing cultural traditions of the host country are threatened by immigrants who adhere to different religions, speak different languages, and practice different food and other cultural habits. From the standpoint of these parties, immigrants represent a threat

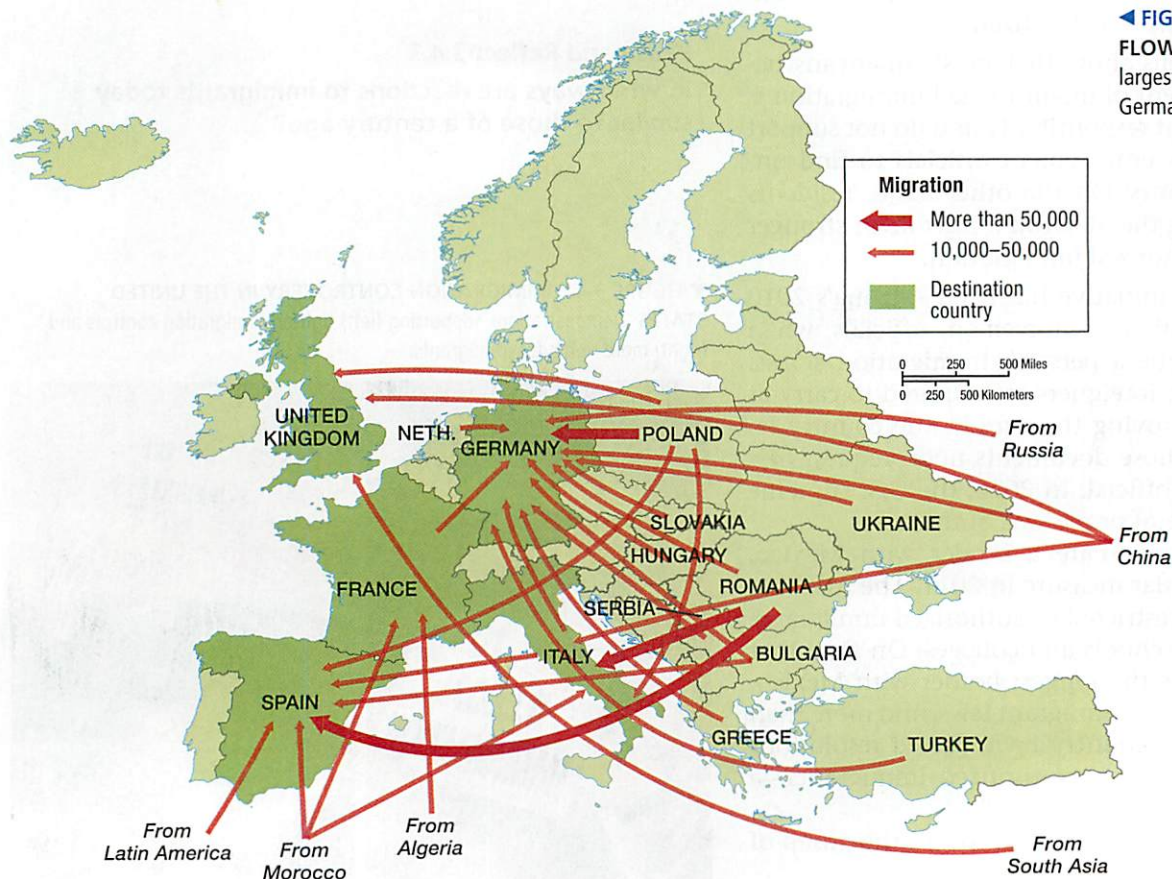


FIGURE 3-43 MIGRATION FLOWS WITHIN EUROPE The largest flows are from Poland to Germany and from Romania to Spain.

to the centuries-old cultural traditions of the host country (Figure 3-44).

The severe global recession of the early twenty-first century has reduced the number of immigrants to the United States and Europe. With high unemployment and limited job opportunities in the principal destination countries, potential migrants have much less incentive to risk the uncertainties and expenses of international migration. Countries such as Ireland, Portugal, and Spain that had become destinations during the late twentieth century once again have net out-migration.

Pause and Reflect 3.4.4

How are attitudes towards immigrants similar in the United States and Europe?

EUROPEANS AS EMIGRANTS. The inhospitable climate for immigrants in Europe is especially ironic because Europe was the source of most of the world's emigrants, especially during the nineteenth century. Application of new technologies spawned by the Industrial Revolution—in areas such as public health, medicine, and food—produced a rapid decline in the CDR and pushed much of Europe into stage 2 of the demographic transition (high NIR). As the population increased, many Europeans found limited opportunities for economic advancement. Migration to the United States, Canada, Australia, and other regions of the world served as a safety valve, draining off some of that increase.

The emigration of 65 million Europeans has profoundly changed world culture. As do all migrants, Europeans brought their cultural heritage to their new homes. Because of migration, Indo-European languages are now spoken by half of the world's people (as discussed in Chapter 5), and Europe's most prevalent religion, Christianity, has the world's largest number of adherents (see Chapter 6). European art, music, literature, philosophy, and ethics have also diffused throughout the world.

Regions that were sparsely inhabited prior to European immigration, such as North America and Australia, have become closely integrated into Europe's cultural traditions. Distinctive European political structures and economic systems have also diffused to these regions. Europeans also planted the seeds of conflict by migrating to regions with large indigenous populations, especially in Africa and Asia. They frequently imposed political domination on existing populations and injected their cultural values with little regard for local traditions. Economies in Africa and Asia became based on raising crops and extracting resources for export to Europe rather than on growing crops for local consumption and using resources to build local industry. Many of today's conflicts in former European colonies result from past practices by European immigrants, such as drawing arbitrary boundary lines and discriminating among different local ethnic groups.



▲ FIGURE 3-44 IMMIGRATION CONTROVERSY IN FRANCE Demonstrations supporting (top) more rights for immigrants and (bottom) tighter immigration controls.

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 4

Why Do Migrants Face Obstacles?

- ✓ Immigration is tightly controlled by most countries.
- ✓ The United States has more than 11 million unauthorized immigrants, mostly from Mexico.
- ✓ Americans and Europeans are divided on how to regard immigrants, especially unauthorized ones.