GLOBAL FORCES, LOCAL IMPACTS
Undocumented Immigration Viewed from the Mexican Side

From the United States, the view to the south may seem straightforward. Millions of Mexicans are trying to cross the border by whatever 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 of the undocumented immigrants. At the same time, along its southern border with Guatemala, Mexico is the destination for undocumented 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 U.S.–Mexican border, the contrast in wealth between the two countries is apparent, even in satellite imagery. Small houses packed close together on the Mexican side face large houses with wooded lots and swimming pools on the American side. Contrasts also exist along Mexico’s southern border. Some cross into Mexico from Guatemala because they can get higher-paying jobs in tropical fruit plantations. The Suchiate River, which marks the border between Hidalgo, Mexico, and Tecum Uman, Guatemala, 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 to cross the border from Guatemala into Mexico, hundreds of thousands do so illegally.

The ultimate destination for most undocumented immigrants into Mexico is the U.S. border. Ironically, it is easier for undocumented immigrants in the United States if they are not Mexican. Undocumented Mexicans apprehended in the United States are usually bused back across the border into Mexico and released, but those from other countries who are apprehended in the United States are usually arrested and released with orders to appear at a court hearing. Once released, they are free to travel within the United States, blending in with other immigrants, and few show up at scheduled court hearings several months later.

Meanwhile, the millions of Mexicans living legally and illegally in the United States have constituted a powerful political and economic force back in Mexico. The Inter-American Development Bank estimated that immigrants in the United States sent $17 billion back to Mexico in 2005, and $28 million to other Latin American countries. Most of these remittances were used by relatives for food, clothing, and shelter, but government officials have tried to channel some of the money into development projects. The Mexican government has also faced pressure to make it easier for the millions of its citizens living in the United States to vote in elections back home.

![Map of undocumented immigrants by U.S. states. California, Texas, and Florida are the leading destinations for undocumented immigrants.](image)

**KEY ISSUE 3**

**Why Do Migrants Face Obstacles?**

- Immigration policies of host countries
- Cultural problems faced while living in other countries

The principal obstacle traditionally faced by migrants to other countries was the long, arduous, and expensive passage over land or by sea. Think of the cramped and unsanitary conditions endured by nineteenth-century immi-
grants to the United States who had to sail across the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean in tiny ships.

Today, motor vehicles and airplanes bring most immigrants speedily and reasonably comfortably to the United States and other countries. The major obstacles faced by most immigrants now begin only after they arrive at their desired destination. Immigrants face two major difficulties—gaining permission to enter a new country in the first place and hostile attitudes of citizens once they have entered the new country.

**Immigration Policies of Host Countries**

Countries to which immigrants wish to migrate have adopted two policies to control the arrival of foreigners seeking work. The United States uses a quota system to limit the number of foreign citizens who can migrate permanently to the country and obtain work. Other major recipients of immigrants, especially in Western Europe and the Middle East, permit guest workers to work temporarily but not stay permanently.

**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 from each country during a 1-year period. According to the quota, 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 limited the number of immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere to 150,000 per year, virtually all of whom had to be from Europe. The system continued with minor modifications until the 1960s.

Quota laws were designed to ensure that most immigrants to the United States continued to be Europeans. Although Asians never accounted for more than 5 percent of immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Americans were, nevertheless, alarmed at the prospect of millions of Asians flooding into the country, especially to states along the Pacific Coast.

Following passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, quotas for individual countries were eliminated in 1968 and replaced with hemisphere quotas. The annual number of U.S. immigrants was restricted to 170,000 from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere. In 1978, the hemisphere quotas were replaced by a global quota of 290,000, including a maximum of 20,000 per country. The current law has a global quota of 620,000, with no more than 7 percent from one country, but numerous qualifications and exceptions can alter the limit considerably.

Because the number of applicants for admission to the United States far exceeds the quotas, Congress has set preferences. The current law permits up to 480,000 family-sponsored immigrants plus 140,000 employment-related immigrants, again with numerous exceptions. About three-fourths of the 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 5 years. A handful of brothers and sisters or other relatives of noncitizens are also admitted, although the chance of being selected is as slim as winning the lottery. Skilled workers and exceptionally talented professionals receive most of the remaining one-fourth of the visas. Others are admitted by lottery under a diversity category to 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.

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.
BRAIN DRAIN. Some of today’s immigrants to the United States and Canada are poor people pushed from their homes by economic desperation, but most are young, well-educated people lured to economically growing countries. Scientists, researchers, doctors, and other professionals migrate to countries where they can make better use of their abilities. After earning Ph.D.s, young scholars find more teaching positions available at American universities than at home.

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. The World Bank found that the percentage of citizens with a college education who lived abroad in 2005 was 84 percent in Haiti; 47 percent in Ghana; 45 percent in Mozambique; and 30-some percent in Kenya, Laos, Uganda, Angola, Somalia, El Salvador, and Sri Lanka.

Temporary Migration for Work

People unable to migrate permanently to a new country for employment opportunities may be allowed to migrate temporarily. Prominent forms of temporary-work migrants include guest workers in Europe and the Middle East and, historically, time-contract workers in Asia.

Citizens of poor countries who obtain jobs in Western Europe and the Middle East are known as guest workers. In Europe, guest workers are protected by minimum-wage laws, labor union contracts, and other support programs. Foreign-born workers comprise more than one-half of the labor force in Luxembourg; one-sixth in Switzerland; and one-tenth in Austria, Belgium, and Germany. About 700,000 immigrants enter Europe legally each year, plus an estimated 500,000 illegally.

Guest workers serve a useful role in Western Europe, because they take low-status and low-skilled jobs that local residents won’t accept. In cities such as Berlin, Brussels, Paris, and Zurich, guest workers provide essential services, such as driving buses, collecting garbage, repairing streets, and washing dishes.

Although relatively low paid by European standards, guest workers earn far more than they would at home. The economy of the guest worker’s native country also gains from the arrangement. By letting their people work elsewhere, poorer countries reduce their own unemployment problems. Guest workers also help their native countries by sending a large percentage of their earnings back home to their families. The injection of foreign currency then stimulates the local economy.

The United Kingdom severely restricts the ability of foreigners to obtain work permits. However, British policy is complicated by the legacy of the country’s former worldwide empire. When some of the United Kingdom’s former colonies were granted independence, residents there could choose between remaining British citizens and becoming citizens of the new country. Millions of former colonials in India, Ireland, Pakistan, and the West Indies retained their British citizenship and eventually moved to the United Kingdom. However, spouses and other family members who are citizens of the new countries do not have the right to come to Britain.

Most guest workers in Europe come from North Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Distinctive migration routes have emerged among the exporting and importing countries. Turkey sends a large number of guest workers to Northern Europe, especially to Germany as a result of government agreements. Three-quarters of a million Turks are employed in Germany, by far the largest movement of guest workers from one country to another within Europe. Many guest workers in France come from former French colonies in North Africa, such as Algeria and Morocco (Figure 3–9).

Time-Contract Workers

Millions of Asians migrated in the nineteenth century as time-contract laborers, recruited for a fixed period to work in mines or on plantations. When their contracts expired, many would settle permanently in the new country. Indians went as time-contract workers to Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, British Guiana (present-day Guyana in South America), eastern and southern Africa, and the islands of Fiji, Mauritius, and Trinidad. Japanese and Filipinos went to Hawaii, and Japanese also went to Brazil. Chinese worked on the U.S. West Coast and helped build the first railroad to span the United States, completed in 1869.

More than 33 million ethnic Chinese currently live permanently in other countries, for the most part in Asia. Chinese comprise three-fourths of the population in Singapore, one-third in Malaysia, and one-tenth in Thailand. Most migrants were from southeastern China. Migration patterns vary among ethnic
groups of Chinese. Chiu Chownese migrate to Cambodia, Laos, and Singapore; Hakka to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand; and Hokkien to Indonesia and the Philippines (Figure 3-10).

In recent years, people have immigrated illegally in Asia to find work in other countries. Estimates of the number of illegal foreign workers in Taiwan range from 20,000 to 70,000. Most are Filipinos, Thais, and Malaysians who are attracted by employment in textile manufacturing, construction, and other industries. These immigrants accept half the pay demanded by Taiwanese, for the level is much higher than what they are likely to get at home, if they could even find employment.

Distinguishing Between Economic Migrants and Refugees

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between migrants seeking economic opportunities and refugees fleeing from the persecution of an undemocratic government. Distinguishing between the two reasons has been especially difficult for emigrants from Cuba, Haiti, and Vietnam.

The distinction between economic migrants and refugees is important, because the United States, Canada, and Western European countries treat the two groups differently. Economic migrants are generally not admitted to these countries unless they possess special skills or have a close relative already there, and even then they must compete with similar applicants from other countries. However, refugees receive special priority in admission to other countries.

EMIGRANTS FROM CUBA. The U.S. government has regarded emigrants from Cuba as political refugees since the 1959 revolution that brought the Communist government of Fidel Castro to power. Under Castro’s leadership, the Cuban government took control of privately owned banks, factories, and farms, and political opponents of the government were jailed. The U.S. government has prevented companies from buying and selling in Cuba, and Cuba has been excluded from cooperative organizations of Western Hemisphere countries.

In the years immediately following the revolution, more than 600,000 Cubans were admitted to the United States. The largest number settled in southern Florida, where they have become prominent in the region’s economy and politics.

A second flood of Cuban emigrants reached the United States in 1980, when Fidel Castro suddenly decided to permit political prisoners, criminals, and mental patients to leave the country. More than 125,000 Cubans left within a few weeks to seek political asylum in the United States, a migration stream that became known as the “Mariel boatlift,” named for the port from which the Cubans were allowed to embark.

To reach the United States, most crossed the 200-kilometer (125-mile) Straits of Florida in small boats, many of which were unseaworthy and capsized. When they learned about Castro’s
new policy, many Cubans already living in Florida sailed from the United States to Cuba, found their relatives, and returned to Florida with them.

U.S. officials were unprepared for the sudden influx of Cuban immigrants. Most Cubans were processed at Key West, Florida, and transferred to camps. Officials identified families or social service agencies willing to sponsor the refugees. Sponsors were expected to provide food and shelter and help the people secure jobs. Most refugees quickly found sponsors, but several thousand who did not lived in army camps and temporary settlements. Approximately 1,000 inhabited Miami's Orange Bowl stadium until the start of the football season, when they were transferred to tents pitched under Interstate 95 in downtown Miami.

Beginning in 1987, the United States agreed to permit 20,000 Cubans per year to migrate to the United States. Cuba also agreed to the return of 2,500 criminals or mental patients who had come in the 1980 Mariel boatlift.

**EMIGRANTS FROM HAITI.** Shortly after the 1980 Mariel boatlift from Cuba, several thousand Haitians also sailed in small vessels for the United States. Under the dictatorship of François (Papa Doc) Duvalier (1957–71) and his son Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier (1971–86), the Haitian government persecuted its political opponents at least as harshly as did the Cuban government. But the U.S. government drew a distinction between the governments of the two neighboring Caribbean countries, because Castro was an ally of the Soviet Union.

Claiming that they had migrated for economic advancement rather than political asylum, U.S. immigration officials would not let the Haitians aboard the boats stay in the United States. However, the Haitians brought a lawsuit against the U.S. government, arguing that if the Cubans were admitted, they should be too. The government settled the case by agreeing to admit the Haitians.

After a 1991 coup that replaced Haiti’s elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, with military leaders, thousands of Haitians fled their country. In boats that were often overcrowded and unseaworthy, they headed for the U.S. Guantánamo Bay naval base in southeastern Cuba, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) across the Windward Passage from Haiti. Although situated on Cuba, Guantánamo Bay naval base has been controlled by the United States for years.

Once safely ashore at Guantánamo, the Haitians could apply as refugees for migration to the U.S. mainland. Similarly, Haitians picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard from boats drifting in the Windward Passage were eligible to claim political asylum in the United States. U.S. Immigration officials recognized the claim of political persecution made by many of the Haitians, but the U.S. State Department decided that most left Haiti for economic rather than political reasons.

The United States invaded Haiti in 1994 to reinstate Aristide as president, and a year later, a United Nations peacekeeping force ensured democratic elections. Although political persecution has subsided, many Haitians still try to migrate to the United States, reinforcing the view that economic factors may always have been important in emigration from the Western Hemisphere’s poorest country.

**EMIGRANTS FROM VIETNAM.** The Vietnam War ended in 1975 when Communist-controlled North Vietnam captured South Vietnam's capital city of Saigon (since renamed Ho Chi Minh City). The United States, which had supported the government of South Vietnam, evacuated from Saigon several thousand people who had been closely identified with the American position during the war and who were, therefore, vulnerable to persecution after the Communist victory.

Thousands of other pro-U.S. South Vietnamese who were not politically prominent enough to get space on an American evacuation helicopter tried to leave by boat. Fleeing overland to neighboring Cambodia, China, and Laos was unattractive because of Communist domination or political unrest in those countries. The so-called boat people drifted into the South China Sea, hoping they would be saved by the U.S. Navy.

U.S. naval officers wished to save the boat people but hesitated because of U.S. law. Once taken on board, the boat people would technically be on U.S. territory and could apply for admission to the United States as refugees. This would be unfair to the large numbers of people elsewhere in the world, as well as those still in Vietnam, who had been waiting a long time for the U.S. government to consider their claims for admission as refugees. Consequently, some boat people were not allowed to board U.S. vessels.

A second surge of Vietnamese boat people began in the late 1980s. Their most popular destinations were Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Thailand, with smaller numbers sailing to Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore (Figure 3-11). As memories of the Vietnam War faded, officials in these countries no longer

![Map of Southeast Asia and the South China Sea](https://example.com/map.png)

**FIGURE 3-11** Destinations of Vietnamese boat people. During the 1970s, Vietnamese boat people were regarded as political refugees following the end of a long war. In recent years, neighboring countries have severely restricted the number of Vietnamese permitted to stay. Other countries have argued that the boat people can no longer make legitimate claims to be refugees from a war that ended back in 1975.
considered boat people as refugees, except for a handful who could prove that they had been victims of specific incidents of political persecution. Thailand, in particular, pushed Vietnamese boats back out to sea, even though some of them capsized and many boat people drowned.

According to an international agreement, most of the Vietnamese boat people who were judged refugees were transferred to other places, especially the United States, Canada, Australia, and France. However, the majority of the boat people, who were considered economic migrants, were placed in detention camps surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by armed soldiers. The United Nations helped to fund the camps and monitor living conditions in them until 1996, when the camps were closed, and the remaining boat people were sent back to Vietnam.

In all, 800,000 Vietnamese people have reached the United States since the end of the Vietnam War, another 1 million in other countries. Vietnam remains a major source of immigrants to the United States, but the pull of economic opportunity in the United States is a greater incentive than the push of political persecution.

Cultural Problems Faced While Living in Other Countries

For many immigrants, admission to another country does not end their problems. Citizens of the host country may dislike the newcomers' cultural differences. More significantly, politicians exploit immigrants as scapegoats for local economic problems.

U.S. Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Americans have always regarded new arrivals with suspicion but tempered their dislike during the nineteenth century, because immigrants helped to settle the frontier and extend U.S. control across the continent. European immigrants converted the forests and prairies of the vast North American interior into productive farms. By the early twentieth century, though, most Americans believed that the frontier had closed. When the U.S. frontier closed, the gates to the country partially closed as well.

Opposition to immigration intensified when the majority of immigrants ceased to come from Northern and Western Europe. German and Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century suffered some prejudice from so-called native Americans, who had in reality arrived only a few years earlier from Britain. However, Italians, Russians, Poles, and other Southern and Eastern Europeans who poured into the United States in about 1900 faced much more hostility.

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." (There is nothing new about racism, prejudice, fear of unknown groups, suspicion of different cultures, economic fears, and anti-immigration sentiment; only the players on the stage change.)

More recently, hostile citizens in California and other states have voted to deny undocumented immigrants access to most public services, such as schools, day-care centers, and health clinics.

The laws have been difficult to enforce and of dubious constitutionality, but their enactment reflects the unwillingness on the part of many Americans to help out needy immigrants. Whether children of recent immigrants should be entitled to attend school and receive social services is much debated in the United States.

Attitudes Toward Guest Workers

In Europe, many guest workers suffer from poor social conditions. The guest worker is typically a young man who arrives alone in a city. He has little money for food, housing, or entertainment, because his primary objective is to send home as much money as possible. He is likely to use any surplus money for a railway ticket home for the weekend.

Far from his family and friends, the guest worker can lead a lonely life. His isolation may be heightened by unfamiliarity with the host country's language and distinctive cultural activities. Many guest workers pass their leisure time at the local railway station. There they can buy native-language newspapers, mingle with other guest workers, and meet people who have just arrived by train from home.

Both guest workers and their host countries regard the arrangement as temporary. In reality, however, many guest workers remain indefinitely, especially if they are joined by other family members. Some guest workers apply their savings to starting a grocery store, restaurant, or other small shop. These businesses

Anti-immigration protest in El Ejido, Spain. Spanish youths attacked Moroccan immigrants and burned their homes and cars after three Moroccan immigrants allegedly killed three Spaniards.
can fill a need in European cities by remaining open on weekends and evenings when most locally owned establishments are closed.

Many Western Europeans dislike the guest workers and oppose government programs to improve their living conditions. Political parties that support restrictions on immigration have gained support in France, Germany, and other European countries, and attacks by local citizens on immigrants have increased.

In the Middle East, petroleum-exporting countries fear that the increasing numbers of guest workers will spark political unrest and abandonment of traditional Islamic customs. After the 1991 Gulf War, Kuwaiti officials expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinian guest workers who had sympathized with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. To minimize long-term stays, other host countries in the Middle East force migrants to return home if they wish to marry and prevent them from returning once they have wives and children.

As a result of lower economic growth rates, Middle Eastern and Western European countries have reduced the number of guest workers in recent years. Several Western European governments pay guest workers to return home, but some of these countries have their own unemployment problems and sometimes refuse to take back their own nationals.

Migration by Asians nearly a century ago is producing contemporary problems in several countries. For example, between 1879 and 1920, the British brought Indians as indentured laborers to the Fiji Islands in the South Pacific. Today, Fiji includes slightly more Indians than native Fijians. For many decades, Fiji was a model of how two culturally diverse groups could live together peacefully under a democratically elected government. Indians controlled most of the country’s businesses, whereas Fijians dominated the government and army. However, after an Indian party won the elections in 1987, rioting broke out between the two groups, and Fijian army officers seized temporary control of the government. A new constitution in 1990 ensured that Fijians would hold a majority of seats in the parliament.

The argument of anti-immigrant politicians is seductive to many voters in Western Europe, as well as in the United States: if all of the immigrants were thrown out of the country, then the unemployment rate would drop, and if all of the immigrants were cut off from public programs, then taxes would drop. In an economically integrated world, such arguments have little scientific basis, and in a culturally diverse world, these arguments have racist overtones.

**KEY ISSUE 4**

**Why Do People Migrate Within a Country?**

- Migration between regions of a country
- Migration within one region

Internal migration for most people is less disruptive than international migration. International migration involves movement to a country with different cultural traditions, such as language and religion. Even migration among culturally similar countries can be disorienting in less profound ways, such as major sports and popular television programs.

Two main types of internal migration are interregional and intraregional. The principal type of interregional migration is between rural and urban areas, whereas the main type of intraregional migration is from older cities to suburbs.

### Migration Between Regions of a Country

In the United States, interregional migration was more prevalent in the past, when most people were farmers. Lack of farmland pushed many people from the more densely settled regions of the country and lured them to the frontier, where land was abundant. Today, most people move to new regions for better jobs, although many also move for noneconomic reasons.

### Migration Between Regions Within the United States

The most famous example of large-scale internal migration is the opening of the American West. Two hundred years ago, the United States consisted of a collection of settlements concentrated on the Atlantic Coast. Through mass interregional migration, the interior of the continent was settled and developed.

**CHANGING CENTER OF POPULATION.** The U.S. Census Bureau computes the country’s population center at the time of each census. The population center is the average location of everyone in the country, the “center of population gravity.” If the United States were a flat plane placed on top of a pin, and each individual weighed the same, the population center would be the point where the population distribution causes the flat plane to balance on the pin.

The changing location of the population center graphically demonstrates the march of the American people across the North American continent over the past 200 years. When the first U.S. census was taken, in 1790, the population center was located in the Chesapeake Bay, east of Baltimore, Maryland. Throughout the Colonial period, the population center remained roughly in the same place. This location reflects the fact that virtually all settlements were near the Atlantic Coast (Figure 3-12).

Few colonists ventured far from coastal locations because they depended on shipping links with Europe to receive products and to export raw materials. Settlement in the interior was also hindered by an intervening obstacle, the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians blocked western development because of their steep slopes, thick forests, and few gaps that allowed easy passage. Hostile indigenous residents, commonly called “Indians,” also retarded western settlement.

**EARLY SETTLEMENT IN THE INTERIOR.** Settlement of the interior began after 1790. By 1830, the center of population
moved west of Moorefield, West Virginia. Encouraged by the opportunity to obtain a large amount of land at a low price, people moved into river valleys and fertile level lowlands as far west as the Mississippi River.

Transportation improvements helped to open the interior in the early 1800s, especially the building of canals. Most important was the Erie Canal, which enabled people to travel inexpensively by boat between New York City and the Great Lakes. When the Erie Canal opened in 1825, the fare from New York to Detroit was only $10, yet traffic was so heavy on the canal that tolls paid for construction costs within 9 years. Between 1816 and 1840, the network of new canals dug in the United States totaled 5,352 kilometers (3,326 miles). The diffusion of steam-powered boats further speeded water travel.

After 1830, the U.S. population center moved west more rapidly, to just west of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1880. The population center moved 11 kilometers (7 miles) per year during that period, compared to only 7 kilometers (4 miles) per year during the previous 40 years. The population center shifted west rapidly, because most western pioneers during the mid-nineteenth century passed through the interior of the country on their way to California.

For much of the nineteenth century, the continuous westward advance of settlement stopped at the 98th meridian (which runs north-south through North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas). Large numbers of migrants passed through the interior without stopping, in part because they were pulled to California, especially by the Gold Rush beginning in the late 1840s. At the same time, the interior of the country confronted early settlers with a physical environment that was unsuited to familiar agricultural practices.

Early nineteenth-century Americans preferred to start farms in forested areas that receive 100 centimeters (40 inches) or more precipitation a year. They cut down the trees and used the wood to build homes, barns, and fences. But when they crossed west of the 98th meridian, pioneers found few trees. Instead, they saw vast rolling grasslands that average less than 50 centimeters (20 inches) of precipitation annually.

Without the technology to overcome this dry climate, lack of trees, and tough grassland sod, early explorers such as Zebulon Pike declared the region unfit for farming. Maps at the time labeled the region west of the 98th meridian as the Great American Desert. Ironically, with today’s agricultural practices, the region west of the 98th meridian to the Rocky Mountains, which we call the Great Plains, is one of the world’s richest farming areas.

**SETTLEMENT OF THE GREAT PLAINS.** The U.S. population center continued to migrate westward at a much slower pace after 1880. The center moved approximately 5 kilometers (3 miles) per year between 1880 and 1950, less than half the rate of the previous half-century. The rate slowed, in part, because large-scale migration to the East Coast from Europe offset some of the migration from the East Coast to the U.S. West.

The westward movement of the U.S. population center also slowed after 1880, because people began to fill in the area between the 98th meridian and California that earlier generations had bypassed. The Dakota Territory, for example, grew from 14,000 inhabitants in 1870 to 135,000 in 1880 and 539,000 by 1890. Advances in agricultural technology in the late nineteenth century enabled people to cultivate the Great Plains. Farmers used barbed wire to reduce dependence on wood fencing, the steel plow to cut the thick sod, and windmills and well-drilling equipment to pump more water.

The expansion of the railroads encouraged western settlement beginning in the 1840s. By the 1880s, an extensive rail network permitted settlers on the Great Plains to transport their products to the large concentrations of customers in East Coast cities. The railroad companies also promoted western settlement by selling land to farmers. Companies that built the railroad lines received large land grants from the federal government, not just narrow right-of-way strips to lay tracks. The railroad companies, in turn, financed construction of their lines by selling small parcels of the adjacent land to farmers. Rail companies established offices in major East Coast and European cities to sell land.

Between 1950 and 1980, the population center moved west faster, at 10 kilometers (6 miles) per year. For the first time in U.S. history, the population center in 1980 jumped west of the Mississippi River. By 2000, the center had migrated 140 kilometers (88 miles) west of the Mississippi River, into south-central Missouri’s Phelps County.

**RECENT GROWTH OF THE SOUTH.** The population center moved southward more sharply during the late twentieth century. Between 1790 and 1920, the center moved almost due...
west. Beginning in the 1920s, the center moved southward, at first slowly, but after 1950 at 4 kilometers (2 miles) per year.

The population center drifted southward because of net migration into southern states. During the 1980s and 1990s, 5 million people a year moved into the South from the Northeast, Midwest, and West, compared to only 2 million who moved out of the South (Figure 3–13 left). Americans migrated to the South primarily for job opportunities. New jobs created each year since 1960 have averaged about 3 percent in the United States as a whole, 5 percent in the South, but only 2 percent in the rest of the country.

People have also migrated to the South for environmental reasons. Americans commonly refer to the South as the “sunbelt,” because of its more temperate climate, whereas the Northeast and Midwest are labeled the “rustbelt,” because of the regions’ dependency on declining steel and other manufacturing industries (as well as the ability of the regions’ climate to rust out cars relatively quickly). As people gain more leisure time, they are lured to the sunbelt for outdoor recreation throughout the year.

The rapid growth in population and employment of the South has aggravated interregional antagonism. Some people in the Northeast and Midwest believe that southern states have stolen industries from them. In reality, some industries have relocated from the Northeast and Midwest, but most of the South’s industrial growth comes from newly established companies.

To some extent, the regional difference in economic growth reduces a historical imbalance, because in the past, people in the Northeast enjoyed higher incomes than residents of the South. Average incomes in the South are currently one-fifth lower than those in the Northeast. By comparison, as recently as 1960, average incomes were one-third lower in the South than in the Northeast, and in 1929, at the outset of the Great Depression, average incomes were two-thirds lower in the South.

Net migration of African Americans historically followed a different pattern. A century ago, most African Americans lived in the South, because their ancestors had been forced to migrate to the region from Africa. During the twentieth century, large numbers of African Americans migrated from the South to take jobs in the large cities of the Northeast, Midwest, and West (see Chapter 7). During the 1990s, African Americans migrated from North to South and from South to North in about equal numbers, whereas North-to-South migration was much higher for whites. Other interregional migration patterns for African Americans, as well as for Hispanics, now differ little from those of whites.

Interregional migration has slowed considerably in the United States into the twenty-first century (Figure 3–13 right). Net migration between each pair of regions is now close to zero. Regional differences in employment prospects have become less dramatic within the United States. With most new jobs in the service sector of the economy, jobs are expanding and contracting at similar rates around the country (see Chapter 12).

Migration Between Regions in Other Countries

As in the United States, long-distance interregional migration has been an important means of opening new regions for economic development in other large countries. Incentives have been used to stimulate migration to other regions.

RUSSIA. Interregional migration was important in developing the former Soviet Union. Soviet policy encouraged factory construction near raw materials rather than near existing population concentrations (see Chapter 11). Not enough workers lived nearby to fill all the jobs at the mines, factories, and construction sites established in these remote, resource-rich regions. To build up an adequate labor force, the Soviet government had to stimulate interregional migration.

Soviet officials were especially eager to develop Russia’s Far North, which included much of Siberia, because it is rich in natural resources—fossil fuels, minerals, and forests. The Far North encompassed 45 percent of the Soviet Union’s land area but contained less than 2 percent of its people. During the twentieth century, the Soviet government had forced people to migrate to the Far North to construct and operate steel mills, hydroelectric power stations, mines, and other enterprises. In later years, the Soviet government reduced the use of forced migration and instead provided incentives, including higher wages, more paid holidays, and earlier retirement, to induce voluntary migration to the Far North.
However, the incentives failed to pull as many migrants to the Far North as Soviet officials desired. People were reluctant because of the region’s harsh climate and remoteness from population clusters. Each year, as many as half of the people in the Far North migrated back to other regions of the country and had to be replaced by other immigrants, especially young males willing to work in the region for a short period. One method the Soviet government used was to send a brigade of young volunteers, known as Komsomol, during school vacations to help construct projects. An example is the Baikal-Amur Railroad, which runs for 3,145 kilometers (1,955 miles) from Taishet to Sovetskaia Gavan.

The collapse of the Soviet Union ended policies that encouraged interregional migration. In the transition to a market-based economy, Russian government officials no longer dictate “optimal” locations for factories.

**BRAZIL.** Another large country, Brazil, has encouraged interregional migration. Most Brazilians live in a string of large cities near the Atlantic Coast, including Recife, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Porto Alegre. São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have become two of the world’s largest cities. In contrast, Brazil’s tropical interior is very sparsely inhabited.

To increase the attractiveness of the interior, the government moved its capital in 1960 from Rio to a newly built city called Brasília, situated 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from the Atlantic Coast. From above, Brasília’s design resembles an airplane, with government buildings located at the center of the city and housing arranged along the “wings.”

At first, Brasília’s population grew slowly, because government workers and foreign embassy officials resented the forced move from Rio, one of the world’s most animated cities. In recent years, thousands of people have migrated to Brasília in search of jobs. In a country with rapid population growth, many people will migrate where they think they can find employment. Many of these workers could not afford housing in Brasília and were living instead in hastily erected shacks on the outskirts of the city.

**INDONESIA.** Since 1969, the Indonesian government has paid for the migration of more than 5 million people, primarily from the island of Java, where nearly two-thirds of its people live, to less populated islands. Under the government program, families receive 2 hectares (5 acres) of land, materials to build a house, seeds and pesticides, and food to tide them over until the crops are ready.

The number of participants has declined in recent years, primarily because of environmental concerns. Some families moved to land that could not support intensive agriculture, whereas others disrupted the habitats of indigenous peoples. The program siphoned off only a very small percentage of Java’s population growth during the past quarter-century.

**EUROPE.** The pattern of interregional migration throughout Western Europe is reflected in differences in per capita income and unemployment in different regions. The regions with net immigration are also the ones with the highest per capita incomes.

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Even countries that occupy relatively small land areas have important interregional migration trends. People in Italy migrate from the south, known as the Mezzogiorno, to the north in search of job opportunities. Compared to the Mezzogiorno, Italy’s north benefits from relatively rich agricultural land and a strong industrial base. The Mezzogiorno comprises 40 percent of Italy’s land area and contains 35 percent of the population but only 24 percent of the national income. Per capita income is nearly twice as high in the north as in the south, and unemployment rates are less than 5 percent in the north, compared to more than 20 percent in the south.

Similarly, people in the United Kingdom are migrating because of regional differences in job opportunities, although the pattern is the opposite of Italy’s: economic growth is in the south, whereas the north is declining. The northern regions of the United Kingdom were the first in the world to enter the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century. Today, many of the region’s industries are no longer competitive in the global economy. On the other hand, industries in the south and east—especially the region around London—are relatively healthy.

Regional differences in economic conditions within European countries may become greater with increased integration of the continent’s economy. Regions closer to European markets, such as the south of Britain and the north of Italy, may hold a competitive advantage over more peripheral regions.

**INDIA.** A number of governments limit the ability of people to migrate from one region to another. For example, Indians require a permit to migrate—or even to visit—the State of Assam in the northeastern part of the country. The restrictions, which date from the British colonial era, are designed to protect the ethnic identity of Assamese by limiting the ability of outsiders to compete for jobs and purchase land. Because Assam is situated on the border with Bangladesh, the restrictions also limit international migration.
Migration Within One Region

Although interregional migration attracts considerable attention, far more people move within the same region, which is *intragregional* migration. Since 1800, the most prominent type of intraregional migration in the world has been from rural to urban areas. Less than 5 percent of the world’s people lived in urban areas in 1800, compared to nearly half today.

Migration from Rural to Urban Areas

Urbanization began in the 1800s in the countries of Europe and North America, which were undergoing rapid industrial development. The percentage of people living in urban areas in the United States, for example, increased from 5 percent in 1800 to 50 percent in 1920. Today, approximately three-fourths of the people in the United States and other more developed countries live in urban areas.

Migration from rural to urban areas has skyrocketed in recent years in the less developed countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Studies conducted in a variety of less developed countries show that migration from rural areas accounts for nearly half of the population increase in urban areas, and the natural increase (excess of births over deaths) accounts for the remainder. Worldwide, more than 20 million people are estimated to migrate each year from rural to urban areas.

Migration to one of the world’s largest cities, São Paulo, Brazil, has reached 300,000 people per year. Many of these migrants cannot find housing in the city and must live in squatter settlements, known in Brazil as *favelas*. The favelas may lack electricity, running water, and paved streets (see Chapter 13).

Like interregional migrants, most people who move from rural to urban areas seek economic advancement. They are pushed from rural areas by declining opportunities in agriculture and are pulled to the cities by the prospect of work in factories or in service industries.

Migration from Urban to Suburban Areas

In more developed countries, most intraregional migration is from central cities out to the suburbs. Twice as many Americans migrate from central cities to suburbs each year than migrate from suburbs to central cities (Figure 3–14). Comparable rates of suburbanization are found in Canada, the United Kingdom, and other Western European countries. The population of most central cities has declined in North America and Western Europe, whereas suburbs have grown rapidly.

The major reason for the large-scale migration to the suburbs is not related to employment, as was the case with other forms of migration. For most people, migration to suburbs does not coincide with changing jobs. Instead, people are pulled by a suburban lifestyle.

Suburbs offer the opportunity to live in a detached house rather than an apartment, surrounded by a private yard where children can play safely. A garage or driveway on the property guarantees space to park automobiles at no charge. Suburban schools tend to be more modern, better equipped, and safer than those in cities. Automobiles and trains enable people to live in suburbs yet have access to jobs, shops, and recreational facilities throughout the urban area (see Chapter 13).

As a result of suburbanization, the territory occupied by urban areas has rapidly expanded (see Chapter 13). To accommodate

![Figure 3-14](image-url) U.S. intraregional migration. Figures show average annual migration (in millions) during the 1990s. The largest flow by far was from central cities to suburbs. Slightly more people migrated from urban to rural areas than from rural to urban areas.
suburban growth, farms on the periphery of urban areas are converted to housing developments, where new roads, sewers, and other services must be built.

Migration from Metropolitan to Nonmetropolitan Areas

During the late twentieth century, the more developed countries of North America and Western Europe witnessed a new trend. For the first time, more people in these regions immigrated into rural areas than emigrated out of them. Net migration from urban to rural areas is called counterurbanization.

Counterurbanization results in part from very rapid expansion of suburbs. The boundary where suburbs end and the countryside begins cannot be precisely defined. However, most counterurbanization represents genuine migration from cities and suburbs to small towns and rural communities.

Like suburbanization, people move from urban to rural areas for lifestyle reasons. People are lured to rural areas by the prospect of swapping the frantic pace of urban life for the opportunity to live on a farm where they can own horses or grow vegetables. However, most people who move to farms do not earn their living from agriculture. Instead, they work in nearby factories, small-town shops, or other services. Counterurbanization can be seen in much of the United States. Nonmetropolitan counties in the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West have net immigration (Figure 3-15).

With modern communications and transportation systems, no location in a more developed country is truly isolated, either economically or socially. Computers enable us to work anywhere and still have access to an international network. We can obtain money at any time from a conveniently located electronic transfer machine rather than by going to a bank building. We can select clothing from a mail-order catalog, place the order by telephone, pay by credit card, and have the desired items delivered within a few days. We can follow the fortunes of our favorite baseball teams on television anywhere in the country, thanks to satellite dishes and computer webcasts.

Many migrants from urban to rural areas are retired people who are attracted by access to leisure activities, such as fishing and hiking. Retirement communities—in reality, small towns restricted to older people, typically over age 50—appeal to retired people who like to participate in recreational activities. In France, some older people migrate from Paris to the rural villages where they were born, whereas others are attracted to the mild climate in the south of the country along the Mediterranean coast.

Overall, counterurbanization has stopped in the United States, as roughly the same number of people migrate from metropolitan to nonmetropolitan areas as from nonmetropolitan to metropolitan areas. Modest levels of in-migration into rural areas in much of the United States have been offset by strong out-migration from rural areas in a tier extending through North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and the western parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas (refer to Figure 3-15). The economy of this region has been hurt by poor agricultural conditions. The price of farm products has declined, and many farmers have gone bankrupt. Although farmers constitute a small percentage of the labor force, they play an important role in the economy of rural areas. For example, the typical farmer borrows large sums of money from local banks and buys expensive equipment from local stores.

Future migration trends are unpredictable in more developed countries, because future economic conditions are difficult to forecast. Have these countries reached long-term equilibrium, in which approximately three-fourths of the people live in urban areas and one-fourth in rural areas? Will counterurbanization resume in the future because people prefer to live in rural areas? Is the decline of the rural economy reversible?

FIGURE 3-15 U.S. net migration by county. Rural counties in the Great Plains states between North Dakota and West Texas have experienced substantial net out-migration, primarily because of perceived lack of job opportunities in agricultural-based communities. On the other hand, rural counties in the Southwest and Florida have had substantial net immigration, because these areas have been perceived as attractive environments.
SUMMARY

Migration will play an increasing role in determining population growth of the countries in stages 3 and 4 of the demographic transition. In the United States, the crude birth rate is approximately 14, the crude death rate is approximately 8, and the natural increase rate is approximately 0.6 percent per year. These rates translate into approximately 4.2 million births and 2.4 million deaths annually, and a natural increase of 1.8 million people each year. However, the annual population increase in the United States is approximately 3.0 million. The difference between actual growth and natural increase is due to net in-migration.

In a couple of decades, the crude birth and crude death rates will be roughly equal in the United States. At that time, virtually all population growth will be attributable to net in-migration rather than to natural increase. Here again are the key issues we have raised about migration:

1. **Why do people migrate?** We can group the reasons into push and pull factors. People feel compelled (pushed) to emigrate from a location for political, economic, and environmental reasons. Similarly, people are induced (pulled) to immigrate because of the political, economic, or environmental attractiveness of a new location. We can also distinguish between international and internal migration.

2. **Where are migrants distributed?** At a global scale, the largest flows of migrants are from Asia to Europe and from Asia and Latin America to the United States. The United States receives by far the largest number of migrants, although countries in the Middle East contain the largest percentage of migrants.

3. **Why do migrants face obstacles?** Migrants have difficulty getting permission to enter other countries, and they face hostility from local citizens once they arrive. Immigration laws restrict the number who can legally enter the United States. In Europe and the Middle East, guest workers migrate temporarily to perform menial jobs.

4. **Why do people migrate within a country?** We can distinguish between interregional and intraregional migration within the same country. Historically, interregional migration was especially important in settling the frontier of large countries such as the United States, Russia, and Brazil. Today, interregional migration persists because of differences among regions of a country in economic conditions, climate, and other environmental factors. The most important intraregional migration trends are from rural to urban areas within less developed countries and from cities to suburbs within more developed countries.

CASE STUDY REVISITED

Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor...

The most famous symbol of migration in the world is surely the Statue of Liberty. Its inscription, written by Emma Lazarus, includes the famous words, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." The statue stands at the mouth of New York Harbor, near Ellis Island, which was for many years the initial landing and processing point for millions of immigrants from Europe. The Statue of Liberty was the first landmark seen by many European immigrants when they sailed into the United States.

European countries like Ireland no longer supply most of the migrants to the United States, and Irish people are being lured back to Ireland by an improving economy. Desire to migrate to the United States has shifted to less developed countries in Asia and Latin America.

Latin American countries in stage 2 of the demographic transition export a large percentage of their population growth to the United States. For example, Jamaica has a population of 2.7 million, a crude birth rate of 19 (per 1,000), a crude death rate of 6, and a natural increase rate of 1.3 percent per year (calculated as crude birth rate minus crude death rate). Otherwise stated, in 1 year, Jamaica has approximately 51,000 births, approximately 16,000 deaths, and, therefore, a natural increase of approximately 35,000. However, 14,000 Jamaicans have migrated to the United States annually in recent years. As a result of this emigration, Jamaica's annual population increase is actually only about 20,000, or 0.7 percent, just over one-half of the natural increase rate.

(Continued)
CASE STUDY REVISITED (Continued)

Jamaicans claim that the large-scale emigration subsidizes the U.S. economy because most of those migrants are nurses, teachers, doctors, and other professionals who have been trained at the expense of the Jamaican government. However, many of these migrants send their savings earned in the United States back to Jamaica to help out relatives who remain in the country. In addition, Jamaicans who have immigrated to the United States often return to Jamaica for visits, taking money and goods back with them. More important, they bring back to Jamaica cultural values acquired through living in a more developed society.

Residents of the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not greet European immigrants with open arms. However, immigrants were given the opportunity to enter the country and make new lives. Some of them were successful. Even recently arrived undocumented immigrants stand a good chance of success if given the chance.

For many people, the only way to enter the United States or Canada is illegally. In the twenty-first century, the tradition of universal ability to migrate to North America no longer exists. Paradoxically, in an era when human beings have invented easy means of long-distance transport, the right of free migration has been replaced by human barriers. The United States no longer asks for immigration of the world’s tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to be free.

KEY TERMS

Brain drain (p. 98)  
Chain migration (p. 96)  
Circulation (p. 82)  
Counterurbanization (p. 107)  
Emigration (p. 82)  
Floodplain (p. 85)  
Forced migration (p. 87)  
Guest workers (p. 98)  
Immigration (p. 82)  
Internal migration (p. 86)  
International migration (p. 86)  
Interregional migration (p. 86)  
Intervening obstacle (p. 86)  
Intraregional migration (p. 86)  
Migration (p. 82)  
Migration transition (p. 87)  
Mobility (p. 82)  
Net migration (p. 82)  
Pull factor (p. 83)  
Push factor (p. 83)  
Quotas (p. 97)  
Refugees (p. 84)  
Undocumented immigrants (p. 94)  
Voluntary migration (p. 86)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

1. Should preference for immigrating to the United States and Canada be given to individuals with special job skills, or should priority be given to reunification of family members? Should quotas be raised to meet increasing demand for both types of immigrants? Why or why not?

2. What is the impact of large-scale emigration on the places from which migrants depart? On balance, do these places suffer because of the loss of young, upwardly mobile workers, or do these places benefit from the draining away of surplus labor? In the communities from which migrants depart, is the quality of life improved overall through reduced pressures on local resources, or is it damaged overall through the deterioration of social structures and institutions? Explain.

3. According to the concept of chain migration, current migrants tend to follow the paths of relatives and friends who have moved earlier. Can you find evidence of chain migration in your community? Does chain migration apply primarily to the relocation of people from one community in a less developed country to one community in a more developed country, or is chain migration more applicable to movement within a more developed country? Explain.

4. Which demographic characteristics (such as rates of natural increase, crude birth, and crude death) prevail in the two regions with the largest numbers of refugees—Afghanistan and the Middle East? Is large-scale forced migration alleviating or exacerbating population growth in these regions? Explain.

5. At the same time that some people are migrating from less developed countries to more developed countries in search of employment, transnational corporations have relocated some low-skilled jobs to less developed countries to take advantage of low wage rates. Should less developed countries care whether their surplus workers emigrate or remain as employees of foreign companies? Why?

FURTHER READING


Also consult the following journals: Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, International Migration, Migration World Magazine.