were much more likely than females to be employed. 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 (Figure 3-6).

Mexicans who come to the United States without authorized immigration documents—currently the largest 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 also feel increased pressure to get a job in the United States because of poor economic conditions in Mexico.

**Family Status 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.

However, an increasing percentage of U.S. immigrants are children—16 percent of immigrants are under age 15, 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.

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

**KEY ISSUE 2**

**Where Are Migrants Distributed?**

- **Global Migration Patterns**
- **U.S. Immigration Patterns**
- **Impact of Immigration on the United States**

About 9 percent of the world’s people are international migrants—that is, they currently live in countries other than the ones in which they were born. The country with by far the largest number of international migrants is the United States.

**Global Migration Patterns**

At a global scale, Asia, Latin America, and Africa have net out-migration, and North America, Europe, and Oceania have net in-migration. The three largest flows of migrants are to Europe from Asia and to North America from Asia and from Latin America. The global pattern reflects the importance of migration from LDCs to MDCs. Migrants from countries with relatively low incomes and high natural increase rates head for relatively wealthy countries, where job prospects are brighter.

The United States has more foreign-born residents than any other country, approximately 40 million as of 2010, and growing annually by around 1 million. Other MDCs have higher rates of net in-migration, including Australia and Canada, which are much less populous than the United States (Figure 3-7). The highest rates can be found in petroleum-exporting countries of the Middle East, which attract immigrants primarily from poorer Middle Eastern countries and from Asia to perform many of the dirty and dangerous functions in the oil fields.
The United States plays a special role in the study of international migration. The world’s third most populous country is inhabited overwhelmingly by direct descendants of immigrants. About 75 million people migrated to the United States between 1820 and 2010, including 40 million who were alive in 2010.

The United States has had three main eras of immigration (Figure 3-8). The first era was the initial settlement of colonies. The second era began in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated in the early twentieth century. The third era began in the 1970s and continues today.

The three eras have drawn migrants from different regions. Most immigrants were English or African slaves during the first era, nearly all were European during the second era, and more than three-fourths were from Latin America and Asia during the third era.

Although the origins vary, the reason for migrating has remained essentially the same. Rapid population growth limited prospects for economic advancement at home. Europeans left when their countries entered stage 2 of the demographic transition in the nineteenth century, and Latin Americans and Asians began to leave in large numbers in recent years after their countries entered stage 2. But Europeans arriving in the United States in the nineteenth century found a very different country than Latin Americans and Asians who have recently arrived.

**Colonial Immigration from England and Africa**

Immigration to the American colonies and the newly independent United States came from two principal sources: Europe and Africa. Most of the Africans were forced to migrate to the United States as slaves, whereas most Europeans were voluntary migrants—although harsh economic conditions and persecution in Europe blurred the distinction between forced and voluntary migration for many Europeans.

About 1 million Europeans migrated to the American colonies prior to independence, and another million from the late 1700s until 1840. From the first permanent English settlers to arrive at the Virginia colony’s Jamestown, in 1607, until 1840, a steady stream of Europeans migrated to the American colonies (and after 1776 to the newly independent United States of America). Ninety percent of European immigrants to the United States prior to 1840 came from Great Britain.

Most African Americans are descended from Africans forced to migrate to the Western Hemisphere as slaves. During the eighteenth century, about 400,000 Africans were shipped as slaves to the 13 colonies that later formed the United States, primarily by the British. The importation of Africans as slaves was made illegal in 1808, but another 250,000 Africans were brought to the United States during the next half-century (see Chapter 7).
Chapter 3: Migration

FIGURE 3-8 Migration to the United States by region of origin. Europeans comprised more than 90 percent of immigrants to the United States during the nineteenth century, and even as recently as the 1950s still accounted for more than 50 percent. Latin America and Asia are now the dominant sources of immigrants to the United States.

Nineteenth-Century Immigration from Europe

In the 500-plus years since Christopher Columbus sailed from Spain to the Western Hemisphere, about 65 million Europeans have migrated to other continents. For 40 million of them, the destination was the United States. The remainder went primarily to the temperate climates of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, and southern South America, where farming methods used in Europe could be most easily transplanted. For European migrants, the United States offered the greatest opportunity for economic success. Early migrants extolled the virtues of the country to friends and relatives back in Europe, which encouraged still others to come.

Among European countries, Germany has sent the largest number of immigrants to the United States, 7.2 million. Other major European sources include Italy, 5.4 million; the United Kingdom, 5.3 million; Ireland, 4.8 million; and Russia and the former Soviet Union, 4.1 million. About one-fourth of Americans trace their ancestry to German immigrants, and one-eighth each to Irish and English immigrants.

Note that frequent boundary changes in Europe make precise national counts impossible. For example, most Poles migrated to the United States at a time when Poland did not exist as an independent country. Therefore, most were counted as immigrants from Germany, Russia, or Austria.

Migration from Europe to the United States peaked at several points during the nineteenth century.

- **1840s and 1850s.** Annual immigration jumped from 20,000 to more than 200,000. Three-fourths of all U.S. immigrants during those two decades came from Ireland and Germany. Desperate economic push factors compelled the Irish and Germans to cross the Atlantic. Germans also emigrated to escape from political unrest.
- **1870s.** Emigration from Western Europe resumed following a temporary decline during the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865).
- **1880s.** Immigration increased to one-half million per year. Increasing numbers of Scandinavians, especially Swedes and Norwegians, joined Western Europeans in migrating to the United States. The Industrial Revolution had diffused to Scandinavia, triggering a rapid population increase.
- **1900–1914.** Nearly a million people a year immigrated to the United States. Two-thirds of all immigrants during this period came from Southern and Eastern Europe, especially Italy, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. (Austria-Hungary encompassed portions of present-day Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina,
Recent Immigration from Less Developed Regions

Immigration to the United States dropped sharply in the 1930s and 1940s during the Great Depression and World War II. The number of immigrants steadily increased beginning in the 1950s, and then surged to historically high levels during the first decade of the twenty-first century. More than three-quarters of the recent U.S. immigrants have originated in two regions:

- **Asia.** The three leading sources of U.S. immigrants from Asia are China, India, and the Philippines.
- **Latin America.** Nearly one-half million emigrate to the United States annually from Latin America, more than twice as many as during the entire nineteenth century (Figure 3-9).

Officially, Mexico passed Germany in 2006 as the country that has sent to the United States the most immigrants ever. Unofficially, because of the large number of unauthorized immigrants, Mexico probably became the leading source during the 1980s. In the early 1990s, an unusually large number of immigrants came from Mexico and other Latin American countries as a result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which issued visas to several hundred thousand people who had entered the United States in previous years without legal documents.

Although the pattern of immigration to the United States has changed from predominantly European to Asian and Latin American, the reason for immigration remains the same. People are pushed by poor conditions at home and lured by economic opportunity and social advancement in the United States. Europeans came in the nineteenth century because they saw the United States as a place to escape from the pressures of land shortage and rapid population increase. Similar motives exist today for people in Asia and Latin America.

The motives for immigrating to the country may be similar, but the United States has changed over time. The United States is no longer a sparsely settled, economically booming country with a large supply of unclaimed land. In 1912, New Mexico and Arizona were admitted as the forty-seventh and forty-eighth states. Thus, for the first time in its history, all the contiguous territory of the country was a “united” state (other than the District of Columbia). This symbolic closing of the frontier coincided with the end of the peak period of immigration from Europe to the United States.

Impact of Immigration on the United States

The U.S. population has been built up through a combination of emigration from Africa and England primarily during the eighteenth century, from Europe primarily during the nineteenth century, and from Latin America and Asia primarily during the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, the impact of immigration varies around the country.

Legacy of European Migration

The era of massive European migration to the United States ended with the start of World War I in 1914, because the war involved the most important source countries, such as Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia, as well as the United States. The level of European emigration has steadily declined since that time.

EUROPE’S DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION. Rapid population growth in Europe fueled emigration, 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 served as a safety valve, draining off some of that increase. People remaining in Europe enjoyed more of the economic and social benefits from the Industrial Revolution.

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. Countries such as Germany, Italy, and Ireland, which once sent several hundred thousand people annually to the United States, now send only a few thousand. The safety valve is no longer needed.

DIFFUSION OF EUROPEAN CULTURE. The emigration of 65 million Europeans has profoundly changed world culture. As do all migrants, Europeans brought their cultural heritage to
Twelve million immigrants to the United States between 1892 and 1954 were processed at Ellis Island, situated in New York Harbor (Figure 3-10). 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 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 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 (Figure 3-11). 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 GIS. NJDEP officials scanned into an image file an 1857 U.S. coast map that was considered to be the most reliable 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 by 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 belonged to New Jersey. ■
their new homes. Because of migration, Indo-European languages now are 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 numbers 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.

Unauthorized Immigration to the United States

The number of people allowed to immigrate into the United States is at a historically high level, yet 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 (or undocumented) immigrants.

The Pew Hispanic Center estimated that there were 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in 2008, and around 500,000 arrived that year without documentation. Around 59 percent of unauthorized immigrants came from Mexico, 22 percent from elsewhere in Latin America, and 12 percent from Asia. The Pew Hispanic Center’s 2008 estimate of unauthorized immigrants included 6.3 million adult males, 4.1 million adult females, and 1.5 million children. In addition, 4 million children who were born in the United States—and therefore U.S. citizens—were living in families with an unauthorized immigrant.

People are in the United States without authorization primarily because they wish to work but do not have permission to do so from the government. About 8.3 million of the 11.9 unauthorized immigrants were employed, according to the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2008 estimate, accounting for 5.4 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.

Crossing the U.S.–Mexican border illegally has not been difficult. The border is 3,141 kilometers (1,951 miles) long and runs mostly through sparsely inhabited regions. The United States has constructed a barrier covering approximately one-fourth of the border. Guards heavily patrol border crossings in urban areas such as El Paso, Texas, and San Diego, California, or along highways, but rural areas are guarded by only a handful of agents.

Americans are divided concerning whether unauthorized migration helps or hurts the country. Most Americans recognize that unauthorized immigrants take jobs that no one else wants, and a majority would support some type of work-related program to make them legal. At the same time, Americans would like more effective border patrols so that fewer unauthorized immigrants can get into the country.

Destination of Immigrants within the United States

Recent immigrants are not distributed uniformly throughout the United States. One-fifth are in California and one-sixth in the New York metropolitan area. One-fourth of unauthorized immigrants are in California (Figure 3-12).

Individual states attract immigrants from different countries. In 2008, more than 50,000 migrated from Mexico to California. Between 10,000 and 50,000 migrated from China to California, from China to New York, from Colombia to Florida, from Cuba to Florida, from the Dominican Republic to New York, from Haiti to Florida, from India to California, from Mexico to Texas, from the Philippines to California, and from Vietnam to California.

Proximity clearly influences some decisions, such as Mexicans preferring California or Texas and Cubans preferring Florida. But proximity is not a factor in Poles heading for Illinois or Iranians for California. Immigrants cluster in communities where people from the same country previously settled. Chain migration is the migration of people to a specific location because relatives or members of the same nationality previously migrated there.

![Figure 3-12](https://example.com/figure3-12.png) Destination of unauthorized immigrants by U.S. states. California, Texas, and Florida are the leading destinations for unauthorized immigrants.
GLOBAL FORCES, LOCAL IMPACTS
Unauthorized 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 unauthorized immigrants. 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–U.S. 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 parks and open space on the American side (Figure 3-13). 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 to cross the border from Guatemala into Mexico, the Mexican government estimates that 2 million 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.

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 $14 billion back to Mexico in 2007. 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.

FIGURE 3-13 U.S.–Mexico border at Tijuana. Poorly constructed houses for low-income people are built adjacent to the fence on the Mexican side (right), but the U.S. side (left) is uninhabited. The irregular shape of the fence was designed to create a park for people on one side of the border to meet and talk with people on the other side. But the U.S. Department of Homeland Security claimed that the parks were being used for illegal activity, so it installed additional fences to make face-to-face meetings impossible.
Job prospects affect the states to which immigrants head. The South and West have attracted a large percentage of immigrants because the regions have had more rapid growth in jobs than the Northeast or Midwest (see Key Issue 4). In recent years, though, many immigrants—especially Mexicans—have migrated to the Midwest to take industrial jobs, such as in meatpacking and related food processing.

**KEY ISSUE 3**

Why Do Migrants Face Obstacles?

- Immigration Policies of Host Countries
- Cultural Challenges Faced While Living in Other Countries

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 nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States who had to sail across the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean in tiny ships.

Today, the major obstacles faced by most immigrants are cultural. Motor vehicles and airplanes bring most immigrants speedily and reasonably comfortably to the United States and other countries. But once they arrive, 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 one-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. 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 five years. 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 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.

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.

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. 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.

**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 (Figure 3-14).