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Migration to the United States: The Impact on People and Places

8.1 Introduction

Has your family moved recently? If so, was the move a big change or a small change? Many families change their neighborhood when they move to a new place, while others change their city or state. Some families change the country in which they live.

Making the decision to **emigrate**, or move away from one's home country, is never easy. It means leaving behind family and friends, and familiar places and customs. And yet millions of people around the world make this decision every year. Many come to the United States. Since the beginning of the country's history, the U.S. population has been made up of families who have come from other countries.

When people **immigrate**, or move to a new country, they experience many changes. They leave familiar things behind and arrive in a place where most things are new to them. Often they need to learn a new language and how to make a living in a strange place. These changes can be difficult to adjust to at first. People also bring their culture and traditions with them. Their different ways can sometimes be hard for their new neighbors to adjust to.

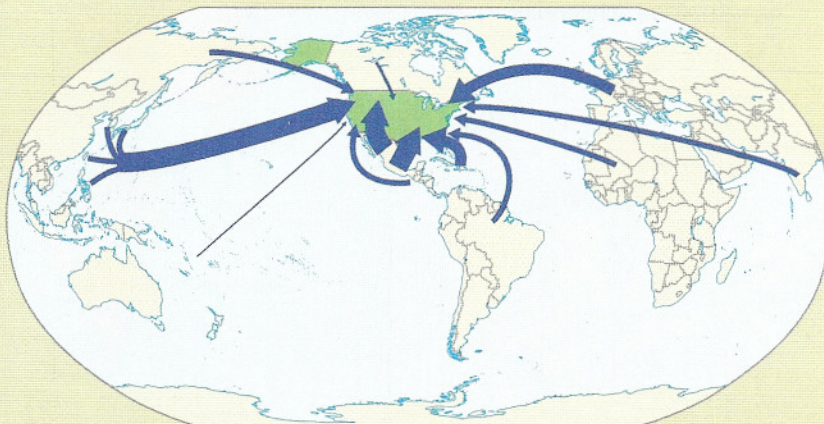
In this chapter, you will learn why people decide to emigrate from their home countries, and you will find out why people immigrate to the United States. You will also learn about the impact that different **migration streams**, or flows of immigrants, have had on this country. And you will see how migration affects the countries that people leave behind.

Essential Question

How does migration affect the lives of people and the character of places?

This map shows the migration of people from around the world to the United States in 1998. Each arrow represents a migration stream. Each arrow's thickness reflects the number of people in that migration stream. Keep this map in mind as you try to answer the Essential Question.

Graphic Organizer



Top Ten Countries of Origin of U.S. Immigrants, 2002

Country	Number of Immigrants	Percentage of All U.S. Immigrants
Mexico	115,864	16.4%
India	50,372	7.1%
Philippines	45,397	6.4%
China	40,659	5.8%
El Salvador	28,296	4.0%
Dominican Republic	26,205	3.7%
Vietnam	22,133	3.1%
Colombia	14,777	2.1%
Guatemala	14,415	2.0%
Russia	13,951	2.0%

Source: 2002 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, 2003.

Immigrants to the United States

The table shows where many migrants to the United States came from in 2002. Note that the largest numbers of people came from countries in Latin America and Asia.

A World of Immigrants

The map shows which countries attract the most immigrants. The United States leads the world, with more than 20 million immigrants.

8.2 The Geographic Setting

Both **push factors** and **pull factors** drive people to move to a new country. Push factors give people good reason to leave unpleasant circumstances in their home country. Such factors include war and poverty, **discrimination**, and **famine**. Pull factors attract people to a new place and encourage them to immigrate there. These factors include freedom and opportunities for a better life.

Push and pull factors have helped to drive one of the most dramatic migrations in history. Since 1820, more than 65 million people have come to the United States. This enormous migration came in three great waves.

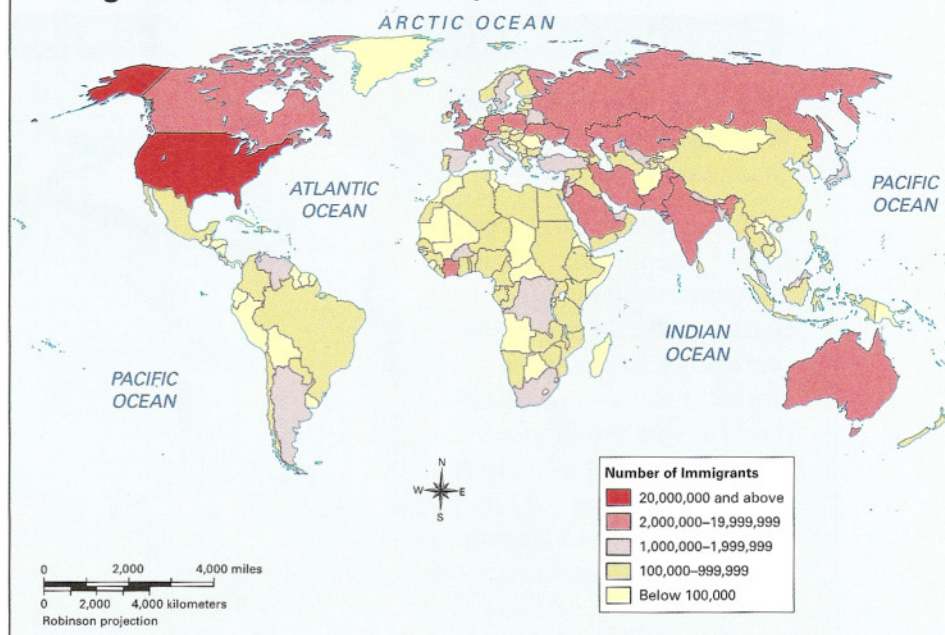
Three Waves of Immigrants The first great wave of immigration began with the founding of the United States. These early immigrants came mostly from northern and western Europe. Many were escaping from poverty or hunger. Some settled in cities, and others found land to farm as the nation expanded westward.

In the late 1800s, a second wave of immigrants began to arrive from eastern and southern Europe. Many were **refugees** fleeing war or **persecution** because of their religious beliefs. Most found work in the growing cities of the United States and settled in neighborhoods with other immigrants from their home countries.

A third great wave of immigration began in the late 1960s and is still going on today. In 1965, the United States changed its immigration laws, allowing many more newcomers to enter. Between 1970 and 2003, about 24 million people moved to the United States. About 75 percent of them came from Latin America and Asia.

Many Asians found new homes on the West Coast. Most Mexican immigrants settled in the Southwest. Cubans flocked to Florida. New York City attracted people from other Caribbean islands. Over time, these immigrants have moved to communities throughout the country. Like earlier immigrants, they are both adjusting to and changing life in the United States.

Immigrants Around the World, 2000



Source: United Nations Population Division, *International Migration 2002*, New York: United Nations, 2003.

► Geoterms

emigrate to move from a country. People who leave a country are called *emigrants*.

immigrate to move to a country. People who move to another country are called *immigrants*.

migration stream the constant flow of migrants from one country into another country. The largest migration stream into the United States today is from Mexico.

pull factor something that encourages people to move to a new place

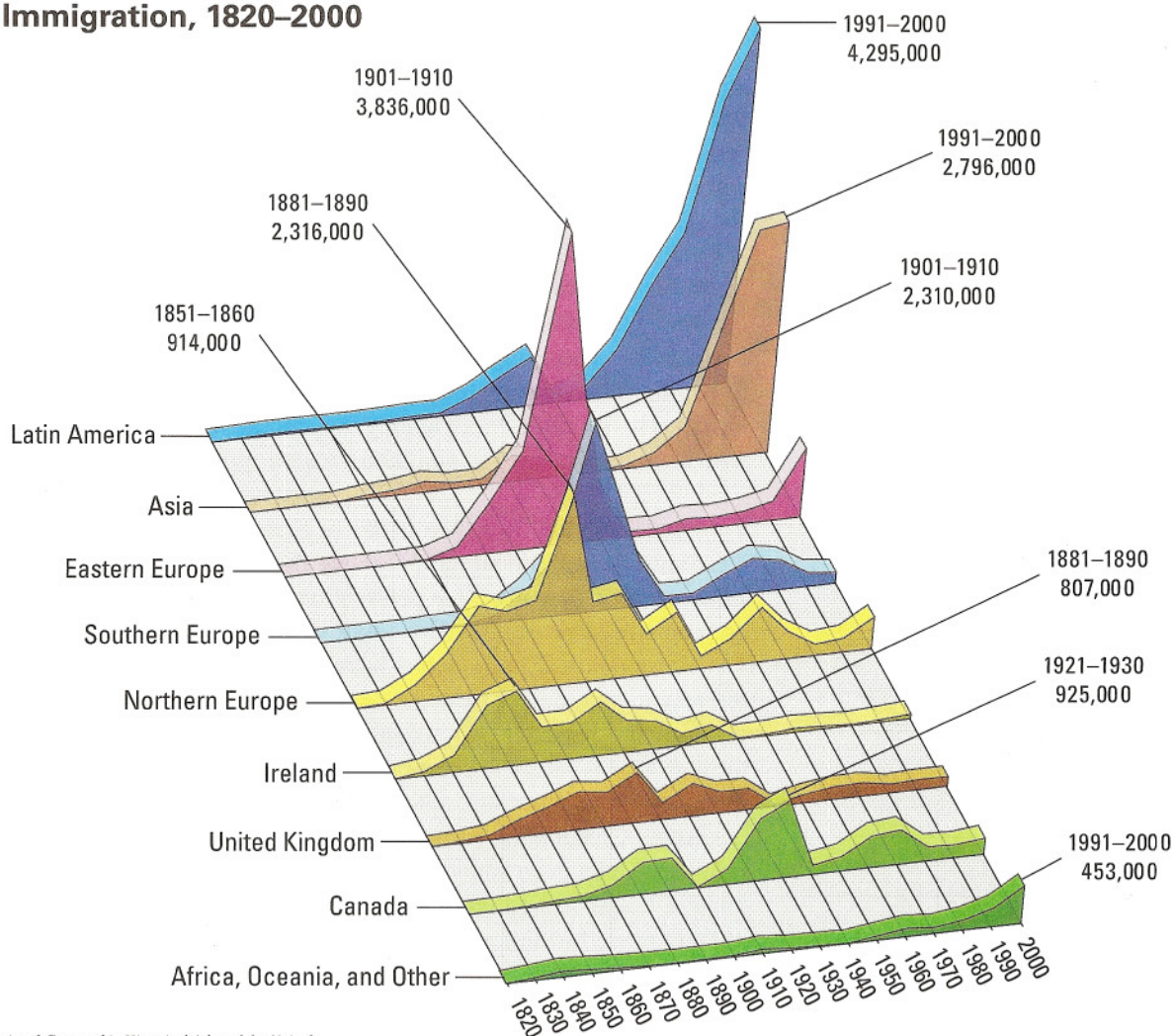
push factor something that encourages people to leave a place behind

refugee someone who seeks safety by going to another country. Refugees may be escaping political unrest or war. Or they may fear being attacked because of their beliefs.

Origins of Immigrants

Since 1820, the United States census, or official count of the population, has tracked immigration to this country. The early waves came from Europe. More recently, most immigrants have come from Asia and Latin America. By the early 2000s, the United States was taking in about 1.5 million immigrants each year.

U.S. Immigration, 1820–2000



Source: *National Geographic Historical Atlas of the United States*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004.



The Push Factor of War

These refugees are fleeing a war in the country of Bosnia in 1996. Recent wars have caused millions of people to leave their homelands. Sometimes the refugees return home when the conflict ends. But often they stay in their new country.

8.3 What Push Factors Drive Emigration?

One night in the late 1980s, John Deng James awoke to the sound of gunfire. The terrified child ran barefoot into the nearby woods. There he found other frightened children. They were too young to know why their homeland, the African country of Sudan, was at war. But they did know that they had to escape the horror, even though they had no means of transportation. And so they began to walk.

John Deng James is part of a group of political refugees known as the “Lost Boys of Sudan.” The Lost Boys, and other children who lost their parents in the war, walked for hundreds of miles in search of a safe place. Many died along the way of hunger and thirst. Those who survived finally reached a camp set up for refugees in the neighboring country of Kenya. The survivors were among the countless people around the world who have been pushed to emigrate because of war or violence.

Political Push Factors War is one of many political factors that can create refugees. Political refugees may flee a country because they fear its leaders. Or they may fear persecution. Persecution is unfair treatment of people because of who they are or what they believe.

These political push factors have one thing in common. They involve the way a government treats its people. People are not likely to flee a government that treats its citizens fairly. But a government that rules through fear is likely to create discontent among its people. Many of these people may become political refugees.

Many Cuban immigrants have come to the United States as political refugees. Cuba is an island in the Caribbean Sea, south of Florida. In 1959, a leader named Fidel Castro took over Cuba’s government and quickly made himself a dictator. If Cubans spoke out against Castro or the way he ran Cuba, they risked being jailed. Faced with that threat, thousands of Cubans have fled to the United States.

Environmental Push Factors Changes in the environment, such as a long-term **drought**, can push people to emigrate. In the 1840s, a devastating plant disease struck Ireland. A fungus destroyed Ireland's most important crop, the potato. Potatoes had been the main food of the Irish. Without enough potatoes, people faced starvation. In response to this crisis, 1.5 million people left Ireland. A great many of these Irish emigrants came to the United States.

Other changes in the environment are the result of human activity. In 1986, an explosion rocked the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in what is now Ukraine. This accident left a large area of poisoned soil, air, and water around the power plant. Tens of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes and move to safer areas. You will read more about the Chernobyl accident in Chapter 16.

Economic Push Factors The most common push factors are economic. Most of the early immigrants to the United States were poor farmers or working people. They saw no way to improve their lives in Europe, so they chose to try their luck in a new country. In the United States, they found many kinds of economic opportunities.

These same economic push factors are still at work today. Many people around the world want a better future than they can see in their homeland. Some of them will seek that future in another country. Often that country is the United States.

8.4 What Pull Factors Draw Immigration?

In 2001, some of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” began another long journey. This one took them from a refugee camp in Africa to a new life in the United States. They arrived in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, in winter. “I was wearing very light clothes, and we’d never seen snow before,” recalled John Deng James. “When we went outside, we couldn’t feel our hands and our ears.”

Like many refugees, the Sudanese teenagers looked forward to feeling safe, going to school, and getting jobs. These are just some of the “pull factors” that attract immigrants to the United States.

Family Pull Factors Another powerful pull factor is the desire to unite divided families. Often young men are the first members of a family to immigrate to another country. Once they find jobs and a place to live, they send for their wives, children, and parents. Between 1965 and 1975, more than 142,000 Greeks came to the United States. Almost all of them were joining relatives who were already living here.

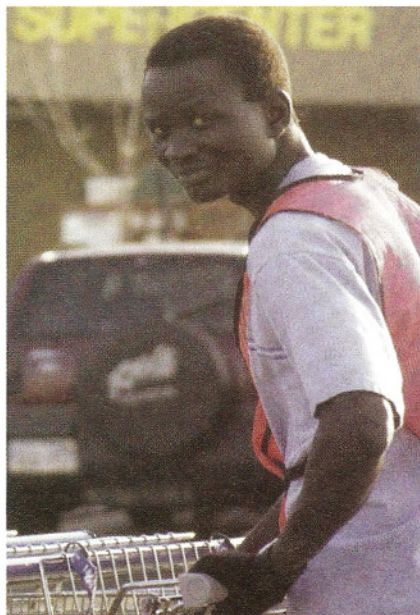
Education Pull Factors Education is a strong pull factor in immigration. Many families migrate so that their children can attend good schools. One of every 15 students in this country’s schools was born in another country. Older students come to attend colleges and universities. In the 2003–2004 school year, there were more than 572,000 foreign college students in the United States. Many of these students will later decide to make the United States their permanent home.



The Pull of Education

Free public schools are a strong pull factor for many immigrant families.

This student from Mexico is taking a computer class in her middle school in Texas. Few Mexican schools are well equipped with computers.



A Refugee Finds Work

Peter "Nyarol" Dut, one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan," is seen here working at a new job in the United States. Like other U.S. workers, he pays taxes out of his earnings.

Workers in the U.S., 2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, *Immigrant Statistics*, "Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement," 2003.

Immigrants in the Workforce

Today, about 14 percent of all U.S. workers are immigrants. Some hold low-paying jobs as farmworkers or household help. But others hold well-paid jobs as doctors, nurses, and engineers.

Quality-of-Life Pull Factors Most people, however, move hoping to improve the quality of their lives. In the United States, this hope is called the "American Dream." This is the belief that people here can create better lives for themselves and their children, thanks to the greater economic opportunity and political freedom this nation enjoys.

For many refugees, a better life begins with a sense of safety. For much of their history, Jews have been persecuted for their religious beliefs. In the United States, Jewish immigrants found freedom to worship without fear.

For other immigrants, a better life usually starts with a better job. Even low-wage jobs in the United States usually pay more than most immigrants could earn back home. With more money, immigrant families can afford better food, housing, and health care. They can also save up to bring other relatives to this country.

8.5 How Does Immigration Affect the U.S.?

For John Deng James and other "Lost Boys," adjusting to life in a new land was hard. At first they were terribly homesick. They were also hungry. They did not know how to shop for food in supermarkets. Nor did they know how to cook. They had never seen a stove or a microwave before. They had never even used a telephone.

Like millions of other immigrants, the Sudanese refugees found their way. Within six months, James had two jobs and was studying for college. These changes affected how James thought about life. "In the United States, you determine who you are," he told a reporter. "Now I have a vision of my future. I can go to school, I can work, and I can do what I want." At the same time, he and the other "Lost Boys" were starting to have an impact on their adopted country.

Economic Impacts: Jobs The United States has long depended on immigrants for labor. Early immigrants cleared large tracts of forests for farms. Later immigrants built roads and railroads across the continent. They filled jobs in mines and factories. And they helped fight this country's wars. Immigrants needed no special skills to do these types of work. They were determined to succeed in their new land and became important builders of the nation.

Some of the immigrants entering the United States today arrive with few skills. As a result, they are often limited to low-paying jobs. Some work as farm laborers, planting and harvesting crops on large farms. Others find jobs as cab drivers, house cleaners, restaurant workers, or nannies. The work that these immigrants do helps to keep the economy of the United States going.

Not all immigrants take low-paying jobs. Some newcomers are highly educated and skilled. They contribute to the economy in many ways. They work as doctors, professors, and computer programmers. Some become famous athletes, musicians, or artists, while still others start new businesses. Those who succeed thus create jobs for immigrants and native-born workers alike.

Some native-born Americans resent having to compete with immigrants for work. They complain that immigrants are "taking our jobs." Often, however, the jobs that immigrants find are ones that native-born workers are not eager to fill.

Economic Impacts: Taxes Like native-born workers, immigrants who work pay taxes. Their taxes help support public schools, libraries, and health clinics. These public services are important to immigrants and native-born Americans alike.

At the same time, many immigrants also need services that are paid for with tax money. For example, immigrants who don't speak English may need language classes. Those who can't work may need public assistance or free health care.

In states with many immigrants, such as California and Texas, the cost of providing such welfare services is high. Some taxpayers resent these costs. Others believe the benefits that immigrants bring to their state outweigh the cost to taxpayers.

Cultural Impacts: Neighborhoods, Foods, and Holidays Immigrants create cultural as well as economic change. They introduce Americans to different ways of life from all over the world. This mixing of cultures sometimes leads to conflict. But it can also make life more varied and interesting.

Newcomers to the United States often live close to other people from their homeland. These immigrant neighborhoods sometimes have names like Chinatown or Little Italy. Here immigrants can speak their native language. They can find familiar foods and eat in restaurants that serve dishes they grew up eating. And they can hear news from their homeland. Such immigrant neighborhoods have made American cities more exciting places as immigrants share languages, foods, and customs with native-born residents.

Immigrants bring new foods to the United States. Some of these foods, such as potstickers, sushi, bagels, and tacos, have become very popular. They now seem almost as American as apple pie.

Immigrants have introduced new holidays to American life. Today people from many different backgrounds in cities all over the United States enjoy celebrating St. Patrick's Day, Chinese New Year, and Cinco de Mayo.

Newcomers to the United States bring their music, art forms, and stories with them as well. The result is a rich mixture of ideas, sights, and sounds.

Finally, immigrants help their new neighbors to learn more about the world. Many Americans knew very little about the country of Sudan before seeing news stories about John Deng James and his fellow Sudanese refugees. But once people read about the "Lost Boys," they could no longer ignore Sudan and its problems.

Chinese New Year Celebration

The dragon dance is a colorful part of Chinese New Year celebrations. Once such events were limited to immigrant communities. Today they are enjoyed by Americans from many backgrounds.



Top Countries with Brain Drain to the U.S., 2002

Country	Number of Immigrants
India	64,980
China	18,841
Canada	11,760
Philippines	9,295
United Kingdom	7,171
Korea	5,941
Japan	4,937
Taiwan	4,025
Pakistan	3,810
Columbia	3,320

Source: 2002 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, 2003.

Skilled Immigrants

A brain drain occurs when a country loses its most talented people to emigration. The table shows the number of highly skilled people coming to the United States from 10 countries in 2002. These people came to work for American companies that wanted their skills.

A Money Office in Mexico

The sign in this money office says “We send and receive money orders to and from the USA.” Payments sent home by immigrants help support families left behind. By 2004, one of every 10 people in the world was either sending or receiving such payments.

8.6 How Does Emigration Affect the Homelands People Leave Behind?

When the “Lost Boys of Sudan” left their homeland, Sudan lost their talents and energy. Still, it may not have lost them forever. “I have a vision that I may be going back to Sudan,” John Deng James told a reporter. “I want to make the economy stronger.”

Economic Impacts: Brain Drain and Gain When people emigrate, they take with them whatever they might have contributed to life in their homeland. The economy of that country loses productive workers and consumers. When doctors or engineers leave, the homeland loses their skills and training as well. Experts call the loss of such well-educated people a **brain drain**. A country suffers from brain drain when its most talented people leave for better jobs in other countries.

As painful as these losses are, they may benefit the home country in some ways. The first is by bringing in needed money. Many immigrants send money back to their families. These payments are called **remittances**. In many countries, money sent by emigrants to their families is a very important source of income. Mexico, for example, receives more money from remittances than from anything else except tourism and the sale of its oil.

Brain drain can also turn into “brain gain.” Not all emigrants permanently stay in their new countries. Sometimes people leave to attend school or to work and then return. The result is a gain in skills and experience for the home country.



Social Impacts: Divided Families and Community

Improvements Emigration can have mixed social impacts as well. On the minus side, when young people leave to find jobs in another country, families are splintered. Family members may remain separated for years. Emigrants sometimes never return to their homelands.

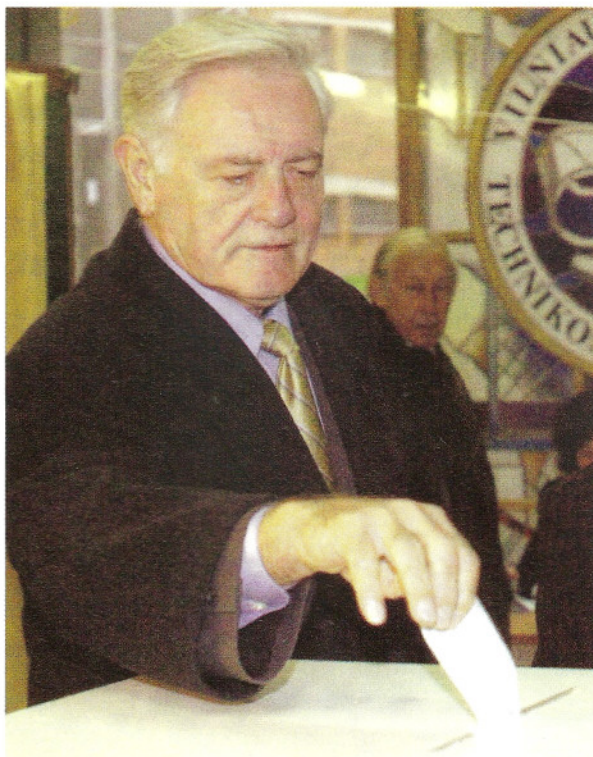
On the plus side, the money that emigrants send home can have positive effects. Families may use remittances to care for aging parents or to send children to school. Some emigrants have sent enough money to help their home village build a well or a school. These improvements can make life better for the entire community.

Political Impacts: Working for Better Government

Emigration can also have political impacts on the home country. Many refugees have come to the United States to flee political unrest. Once here, some refugees work hard to bring democracy to their homeland.

Valdas Adamkus is a good example of the difference that one person can make in society. He was born in Lithuania, a small country in northeastern Europe. He came to the United States after the Soviet Union took over Lithuania in the 1940s. Adamkus went to college in Illinois. Later he led efforts to clean up the Great Lakes. He also led an organization that worked to free Lithuania from Soviet rule.

Adamkus saw his dream of a free Lithuania come true in 1991. He then returned to his homeland to help shape its new government. In 1998, Adamkus was elected president of Lithuania. "Growing up in a western democracy you have a different outlook," he said on taking office. Lithuanians liked that outlook—so much so that they elected Adamkus to a second term in 2004.



From Refugee to President

Here you see U.S. immigrant Valdas Adamkus voting in Lithuania. Adamkus left this small European country in the 1940s. He came to the United States as a political refugee. Adamkus returned in the 1990s to become president of Lithuania.

8.7 Beginning to Think Globally

In this chapter, you learned about migration. You explored some of the push factors, such as war, famine, and changes in the environment, that drive people to emigrate from their home countries. You also looked at some of the pull factors, such as opportunity, freedom, and the desire to reunite with family members, that lead people to immigrate to the United States. Combinations of these factors help to explain the growth of immigration.

Since its founding, the United States has attracted migration streams from around the world. Some immigrants have come as refugees. Others have come in search of better job and education opportunities. Many have come to join family members who emigrated earlier. Of course, the United States is not the only country with many immigrants. As you read in Chapter 3, Canada has also attracted large numbers of people from other countries.

Today countries in other **regions** are also attracting immigrants. Two examples are Spain in Europe and Australia in Oceania. Think about why people might be moving to these places as you examine migration streams around the world in the next section.

8.8 Global Connections

The map shows migration streams around the world. The color of each country reflects its wealth in terms of income per person. This is an average number. Some people make more than this, and some people make less. The starbursts show areas of armed conflict, or warfare, between 1990 and 2005.

Why might some regions “push” more migrants than they “pull”?

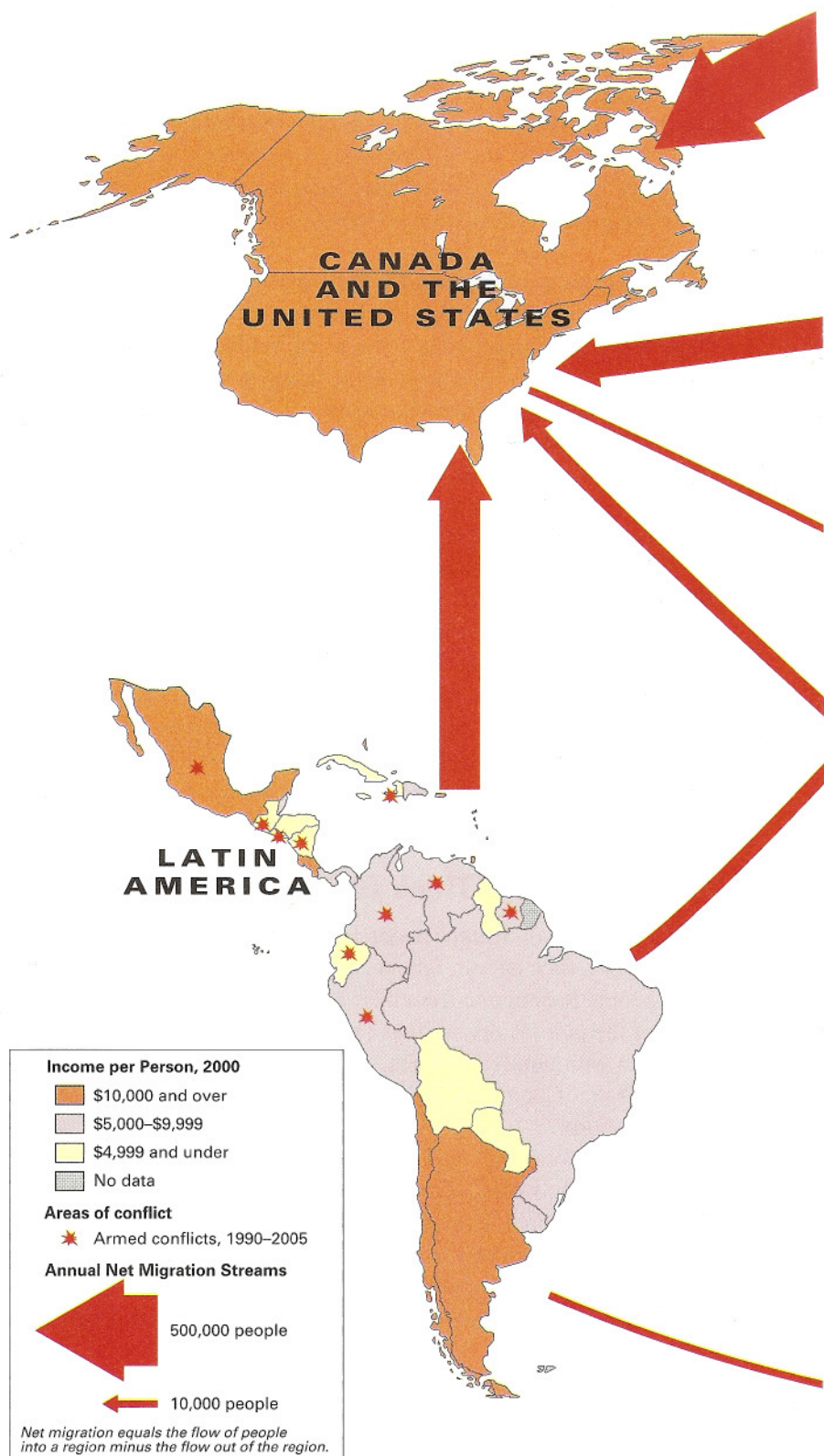
Two big push factors driving migration streams today are poverty and conflict. Both come together in Africa. In most of the world, poverty has decreased since 1990. However, in parts of Africa, it has grown worse. Africa has also experienced many wars in that time. These conditions have forced many Africans to flee their homeland. Some make their way to nearby refugee camps, where they stay until they can return home. Others emigrate to more peaceful countries.

Why might other regions “pull” more migrants than they “push”?

Migrants generally are attracted to developed regions. Here they can hope to find jobs, schools, health care, and safety. Often emigrants move to the developed region nearest their homeland. For North Africans, this is Europe. For Latin Americans, it is the United States or Canada. For Southeast Asians, the journey is to Australia.

How does migration change the places people leave and those they come to? The effects of migration are mixed. If too many people leave a place, its economy may suffer. Its traditional customs may fade away. It may even become abandoned. If too many people come to a place, it can become overcrowded. On the other hand, newcomers may enrich a place’s social and cultural life. Either way, places will continue to change as long as people are on the move.

Migration Streams Around the World



Source: *The State of the World Atlas* by Dan Smith, London: Penguin Group, 1999.

