Demographic and Employment Trends in Immigration:

- Mexico is the largest single country source of both authorized and unauthorized immigrants.
- The U.S. Border Patrol estimated that the number of unauthorized immigrants entering the U.S. rose from 250,000 to 375,000 per year from 1998 to 2002.
- Contrary to popular belief, migrants contribute more to the U.S. economy than they consume in services (e.g., 66% of Mexican adult migrants pay into Social Security funds from which they are unable to collect, only 9.8 percent of the same migrants living in the United States 10 years or less visited an emergency room in 2004).


Evolution of U.S. Immigration Policy:

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) authorized legal amnesty for approximately 3 million unauthorized immigrants; mandated greater security along the U.S.-Mexican border; and required greater regulation of U.S. employers. Concentrated border enforcement programs were initiated in the 1990s: e.g., Operation Hold the Line (Texas), Operation Gatekeeper (San Diego). Workplace enforcement declined from 14,311 employer fines in 1990 to less than 178 in 2000. Meanwhile, rising apprehensions in the 1990s provided a sign of the large volume of continued crossings, and were accompanied by the deaths of over 3,500 migrants crossing under much more dangerous conditions in less enforced desert and mountain areas.
Pull Factors: Migrants find U.S. Employment in Large-Growth and Low-Skilled Occupations

Mexican migrants comprise:
- Over 25% of foreign born workers
- 30% of agricultural, fishing & forestry workers
- 20% of manufacturing workers and groundskeepers
- 14% of food preparation workers
- 11% of janitors
- 10% of heavy and 5% of light truck drivers
- 8% of waitess and waiter aides
- 5% of general repairers
- 4% of teacher aides

Mexican-Born Population in the United States by Type of Occupation, 2000

Push Factors: Migration in Response to Destabilizing Conditions

- Migration is caused less by poverty than by economic volatility; for example, immigration increased significantly after the 1994 peso devaluation.
- When Mexico’s real wages decrease by 10%, border patrol apprehensions increase by over 7.5%.

Development Options: What Can Be Done to Create Opportunities in Mexico?

- Declining wages: Since 1982, debt crises and monetary instability have reduced real wages in Mexico by approximately 40%, while real minimum wages have declined nearly 60%.
- NAFTA trade: From 1993-2001, international trade between all three NAFTA countries more than doubled, from nearly 300 to 622 billion U.S. dollars.
- Destabilization: Yet Mexico’s economic opening also brought political instability in Chiapas, economic volatility in 1994-95 (and a corresponding surge in crime and violence), and slower growth (less than 3%, compared to 3.7-6.7% GDP growth in the 1970s and 1980s).

Sources: