

## Immigration Fact Sheet

- ❖ There are more than 125 million displaced people in the world today;<sup>10</sup> every day, another 10,000 people have to move because of war and violence. Economic pressures also force people to migrate, from rural areas to cities, from one neighboring country to another, and from poorer Southern countries to richer Northern ones. This kind of economic migration has quadrupled since the 1960s.
- ❖ While the U.S. government is encouraging the unrestricted mobility of goods, information and money across borders in the economic process called “globalization,” it is attempting to restrict the movement of people. As avenues for legal migration are curtailed, many people in poor, third-world countries are left with few choices but to migrate illegally.
- ❖ Within the United States, median hourly wages have steadily fallen as corporations export production and jobs to poorer countries. In a “race to the bottom,” these countries compete among themselves to offer the most attractive business climate to foreign capital in the form of low wages, suppression of union organizing, lax environmental controls, and unsustainable export-based economies. Oftentimes, these measures are forced on countries by the terms of their loans and economic “development” plans from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and international trade treaties, even if the result is widespread poverty and crises in education, health and infrastructure. These measures drive desperate workers to seek the possibility of living wages in the more affluent countries of “el Norte,” where their often-undocumented status makes them vulnerable to exploitation by employers.
- ❖ Although critics may characterize recent immigration to the U.S. as an “invasion,” the number of foreign-born people in the United States today is less than 10 percent of the total population. In 1900, a century ago, that percentage was 15 percent. The number of immigrants coming to the United States each year is just 2 percent of the total number for the world.
- ❖ An immigrant’s eligibility for public benefits depends on her immigration status, whether she entered the U.S. before the 1996 Welfare Reform Law was enacted, and whether she was already receiving assistance when the welfare law went into effect. Access to certain benefits also varies based on which state the immigrant lives in.
- ❖ While “not qualified” aliens are ineligible for nearly all federal benefits, they are still eligible for certain very basic kinds of assistance, including: emergency Medicaid; immunizations; testing and treatment for the symptoms of communicable diseases; short-term non-cash disaster relief; school lunches and breakfasts; and certain other programs essential to public health and safety specified by the Attorney General.

- ❖ According to the National Academy of Sciences, the average immigrant contributes \$1,800 more in taxes than he or she receives in benefits. However, the federal government reaps the lion’s share of immigrant tax dollars (approximately two-thirds). States and localities provide the bulk services immigrants use—most notably education, health, and public assistance. As a result, states and localities often find themselves “shortchanged”—forced to provide services without sufficient revenue. The 1996 Welfare Reform Law which barred or restricted legal immigrants’ access to most federal public benefits, exacerbated this dilemma by withholding even more federal funds for immigrants.
- ❖ In a growing anti-immigrant environment, the U.S. Congress passed three major bills in 1996 limiting the rights of immigrants:
  - The Anti-Terrorism and Effect the Death Penalty Act grouped provisions impacting immigrants with those designed to curb terrorism. Among other measures, it established a new court charged solely with hearing cases in which the government seeks to deport aliens based on secret evidence submitted in the form of classified information. Though the secret evidence court has not yet heard a case, the INS already has moved in other proceedings to use secret evidence against immigrants.
  - The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) expanded and cut down on avenues for immigrants to legalize their status.
  - The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (popularly know as “welfare reform”) ended many forms of cash and medical assistance for most legal immigrants and other low-income individuals.

Since 1996, state and local governments have added measures that limit immigrants’ rights by ending affirmative action, limiting access to social services, and curtailing bilingual education.

- ❖ A number of recent legislative and legal decisions have also made it more difficult to enter this country legally and acquire and maintain permanent residency status. Most resources have been devoted to immigration as a “law enforcement” issue: constructing new detention spaces, training and deploying border patrol and other agents, and using high-technology equipment, despite their impact on the human and civil rights of immigrants as well as many border communities.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations estimate