

People on the Move



- Why did they move?
- What the experience of those who moved?
- How did others respond?
- What were the consequences?
- What is the legacy?
- How does this fit into the bigger picture?

Travellers and Explorers – Conquest and Colonies – Post-Imperial Migration – Economic Migration –
Forced Migration – Refugees – Children on the Move

Today we take travel for granted. Now it is unusual for people to be born, go to school, get a job, marry, live their entire lives and die in the same place. Once upon a time this was the norm. Only the privileged few travelled.

Nowadays, most people live in one place and work in another. They go to another city or even another country for their university education or their vocational training. They will probably spend some part of their adult lives working in another country. We fly long distances to go on holiday or for business reasons, and we tend to forget how difficult this used to be, even in the recent past when Europe and the world as a whole was divided by the Cold War.

The countries people choose to go to often reflect long-standing historical ties. People from former colonies often want to live and work in the former colonial power. They share a language and there may be strong cultural ties between the two countries. However, for most of us the reasons we choose to leave our homeland and settle in another country are usually very complex. Historians and social scientists talk about the push and pull factors – the factors, which push us into leaving our homelands, and the factors, which pull us towards another country.

People often leave a country because they have very little choice. The push factors are very strong. They may belong to a community which is resented or mistrusted by those in power. They may be trying to escape persecution because of who they are or what they believe in. Or perhaps years of economic hardship have forced them to look elsewhere. Often it is a combination of these factors.



Immigrants waiting to go ashore, Quebec, Canada, approx. 1911

At the same time they may be attracted to another country because of the economic opportunities and the shortage of labour there or because of its reputation for religious and political tolerance. These are the pull factors and they can be just as complex when it comes to trying to understand population migrations at any particular time in history.

There are two main results of this inward and outward migration: First, if you look at the populations of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries that were once described as the “New World” you will find large numbers of people whose ancestors came from Europe in the 19th or 20th centuries. You only have to pick up a telephone directory and look at all the Italian, German, French, Dutch, Irish, Russian, Polish, Greek and Scandinavian names, indeed names from every country in Europe. In some cases the émigré populations are now far larger than the populations in their countries of origin.



**Douglas Corrigan
visiting the Wright
Flyer in London,**

The people of Europe have played an important part in shaping the history and development of the countries to which they emigrated. At the same time we must also recognise the role played in the development of these countries by those peoples who were transported there as slaves or prisoners and had no choice in the matter.

The second result of the population movements of the 19th and 20th centuries has been that most of us, particularly if we live in the larger European cities, now live in multicultural communities. Some of the smallest states of Europe, such as Luxembourg, Lichtenstein and Monaco, have very large populations of people who were born in other countries. Many other countries have around 10%-15% of their populations who are 1st or 2nd generation immigrants.

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It is important to understand that how people living in multicultural communities perceive each other is historically conditioned. People’s perceptions change over time because the push and pull factors that encouraged migration also change. Countries where some people now complain that immigrants are “taking their jobs” invited the immigrants to come and do the jobs that local people were unwilling to do. Similarly, countries that now turn away political refugees, and prefer to regard most of them as economic migrants, once had a proud record for offering protection from persecution and torture.

To understand many of the contemporary issues around the migration of people we need a historical perspective and we need to look at these issues comparatively and not just from a national perspective.



The ambitious goal of the Exploring European History and Heritage is to build an educational online tool on history and heritage from a European perspective. A European perspective on history and heritage help us to look at our own past through the eyes of the “other” and to understand differences in order to overcome divisions. The thematic approach makes it possible to trace back long term developments, see and analyze turning points in history and see similarities and difference between events and locations. Multiple perspectives on the past and inter- and intra state comparison help, with respect for diversity, to show what people share