

Module 06: A European Crisis? Demographics and Immigration

Introduction

One of the most important political issues facing Europe over the past half century has been immigration. The economic expansion of the fifties and sixties led European countries to import labor for booming industries. As economies cooled in the mid-seventies, politicians began to identify immigration as a problem. Right-wing attacks against immigrants became frequent. Many Europeans worried that their cultures would be "swamped" by a "flood" of immigrants who shared neither their traditions nor their values. As a result, European countries that had once actively imported labor began to tighten their immigration policies.

Yet, with the establishment of the European Union, countries became more integrated and borders within Europe more fluid. Europeans themselves began constructing "Fortress Europe" by reducing the importance of internal borders and focusing on borders at the boundaries of the EU. While Germany, among others, still denied, until very recently, that it was a "land of immigration," Europe has been transformed by the immigration of the last fifty years. Continued immigration over the next fifty years will alter it further.

This module asks you to think about demographics, one of the primary tools historians use. It also asks you to consider the ways in which the diverse histories of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have shaped the immigration patterns of their respective nations. The central question to think about as you read through the evidence is, How do demographic patterns effect social and economic change?