

# Observer-Reporter

## EDITORIAL 'Chain migration' benefits America

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Every family that is at least a couple of generations removed from Ellis Island has stories to tell about the quaint habits their forebears brought with them from the old country, whether it's sisters who spoke to each other in German when they didn't want their children to know what they were talking about, or the Italian great-grandfather who cultivated his own vineyard for winemaking.

Nowadays, immigration hardliners are likely to assert that newcomers who hold on to even the most harmless traditions of their homeland don't want to assimilate into American society, even though they offer no evidence to back up their claims. Nor do they offer any tangible proof that 21st century immigrants are assimilating any less adequately than those who arrived here 50, 100 or 150 years ago.

To stem what they see as legions of immigrants coming to the United States who, in the words of President Trump's chief of staff John Kelly, "don't integrate well," they are proposing an end to so-called "chain migration." This would prevent freshly minted U.S. citizens from sponsoring their brothers and sisters, adult children or parents from coming to the United States. They argue that our immigration system should be entirely "merit-based," and let in only the best and the brightest. Some even maintain that ending chain migration would make us safer, despite a dearth of evidence that such immigrants are perpetrators of crime or terrorism.

Such arguments are, let's be honest, tinged with racism, considering that the lion's share of immigrants who come to the United States today hail not from Europe, but from places like India, Mexico, Vietnam and Guatemala. But, more to the point, ending chain migration would almost certainly be more detrimental than beneficial.

First, imagine if you were young, energetic and talented, and thinking about moving to a country many time zones from your home. The folkways of this country are confounding and unfamiliar. How motivated would you be to stay if you were informed that you would have absolutely no chance of reuniting with family members who could help ease the stresses and strains of life? Chances are, you'd consider taking your talents and energy elsewhere.

And even if you did decide to go there, how long would you be inclined to stay? Maybe you would just make a pile of money and leave.

As the National Immigration Forum points out, families help immigrants assimilate, and can be invaluable when it comes to establishing businesses and finding employment. They can also provide child care, and assistance when sickness or disability strikes.

Dara Lind, a reporter who covers immigration for the website Vox, summed it up: "The dynamic underlying 'chain migration' is so simple that it sounds like common sense: People are more likely to move to where people they know live, and each new immigrant makes people *they* know more likely to move there in turn."

Despite the contention by Kelly and others that immigrants who come through chain migration are largely unskilled, nearly half of adults among family-sponsored immigrants have college degrees. David Bier of the Cato Institute has also noted that native-born Americans are three times more likely to be in jail than their immigrant counterparts in the same age cohort. And the odds that a legal permanent resident will kill you? About 1 in 1.2 billion.

It should also be emphasized that the process of sponsoring a family member to come here is long and exacting. The wait can be as long as 15 or 20 years.

The debate over chain migration – and much of American immigration policy – is rife with misinformation and fearmongering. The reality is this: Immigrants make this a richer, stronger, better nation. They did in days gone by, and still do.