Job prospects affect the states to which immigrants head. The South and West have attracted a large percentage of immigrants because the regions have had more rapid growth in jobs than the Northeast or Midwest (see Key Issue 4). In recent years, though, many immigrants—especially Mexicans—have migrated to the Midwest to take industrial jobs, such as in meatpacking and related food processing.

KEY ISSUE 3
Why Do Migrants Face Obstacles?

- Immigration Policies of Host Countries
- Cultural Challenges Faced While Living in Other Countries

The principal obstacle traditionally faced by migrants to other countries was environmental: the long, arduous, and expensive passage over land or by sea. Think of the cramped and unsanitary conditions endured by nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States who had to sail across the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean in tiny ships.

Today, the major obstacles faced by most immigrants are cultural. Motor vehicles and airplanes bring most immigrants speedily and reasonably comfortably to the United States and other countries. But once they arrive, immigrants face two major difficulties—gaining permission to enter a new country in the first place and hostile attitudes of citizens once they have entered the new country.

Immigration Policies of Host Countries

Countries to which immigrants wish to migrate have adopted two policies to control the arrival of foreigners seeking work. The United States uses a quota system to limit the number of foreign citizens who can migrate permanently to the country and obtain work. Other major recipients of immigrants, especially in Western Europe and the Middle East, permit guest workers to work temporarily but not stay permanently.

U.S. Quota Laws

The era of unrestricted immigration to the United States ended when Congress passed the Quota Act in 1921 and the National Origins Act in 1924. These laws established quotas, or maximum limits on the number of people who could immigrate to the United States from each country during a one-year period. According to the quota, for each country that had native-born persons already living in the United States, 2 percent of their number (based on the 1910 census) could immigrate each year. This limited the number of immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere to 150,000 per year, virtually all of whom had to be from Europe. The system continued with minor modifications until the 1960s.

Quota laws were designed to ensure that most immigrants to the United States continued to be Europeans. Although Asians never accounted for more than 5 percent of immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Americans were, nevertheless, alarmed at the prospect of millions of Asians flooding into the country, especially to states along the Pacific Coast.

Following passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, quotas for individual countries were eliminated in 1968 and replaced with hemisphere quotas. The annual number of U.S. immigrants was restricted to 170,000 from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere. In 1978, the hemisphere quotas were replaced by a global quota of 290,000, including a maximum of 20,000 per country. The current law has a global quota of 620,000, with no more than 7 percent from one country, but numerous qualifications and exceptions can alter the limit considerably.

Because the number of applicants for admission to the United States far exceeds the quotas, Congress has set preferences. About three-fourths of the immigrants are admitted to reunify families, primarily spouses or unmarried children of people already living in the United States. The typical wait for a spouse to gain entry is currently about five years. Skilled workers and exceptionally talented professionals receive most of the remaining one-fourth of the visas. Others are admitted by lottery under a diversity category for people from countries that historically sent few people to the United States.

The quota does not apply to refugees, who are admitted if they are judged genuine refugees. Also admitted without limit are spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizens. The number of immigrants can vary sharply from year to year, primarily because numbers in these two groups are unpredictable.

Asians have made especially good use of the priorities set by the U.S. quota laws. Many well-educated Asians enter the United States under the preference for skilled workers. Once admitted, they can bring in relatives under the family-reunification provisions of the quota. Eventually, these immigrants can bring in a wider range of other relatives from Asia, through a process of chain migration.

Some of today’s immigrants to the United States and Canada are poor people pushed from their homes by economic desperation, but most are young, well-educated people lured to economically growing countries. Other countries charge that by giving preference to skilled workers, immigration policies in the United States and Europe contribute to a brain drain, which is a large-scale emigration by talented people. Scientists, researchers, doctors, and other professionals migrate to countries where they can make better use of their abilities.

Temporary Migration for Work

People unable to migrate permanently to a new country for employment opportunities may be allowed to migrate temporarily. Prominent forms of temporary-work migrants include guest workers in Europe and the Middle East and, historically, time-contract workers in Asia (Figure 3-14).
Citizens of poor countries who obtain jobs in Western Europe and the Middle East are known as guest workers. In Europe, guest workers are protected by minimum-wage laws, labor union contracts, and other support programs. Foreign-born workers comprise more than one-half of the labor force in Luxembourg; one-sixth in Switzerland; and one-tenth in Austria, Belgium, and Germany. The influx of migrants has reached Western European countries that had previously experienced net out-migration. For example, between 1999 and 2008, the foreign-born population rose in Spain from around ¾ million to 5% million, and in Ireland from ½ million to around ¾ million.

Guest workers serve a useful role in Western Europe because they take low-status and low-skilled jobs that local residents won't accept. In cities such as Berlin, Brussels, Paris, and Zurich, guest workers provide essential services, such as driving buses, collecting garbage, repairing streets, and washing dishes. Although relatively low paid by European standards, guest workers earn far more than they would at home. The economy of the guest worker's native country also gains from the arrangement. By letting their people work elsewhere, poorer countries reduce their own unemployment problems. Guest workers also help their native countries by sending a large percentage of their earnings back home to their families. The injection of foreign currency then stimulates the local economy.

Most guest workers in Europe come from North Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Distinctive migration routes have emerged among the exporting and importing countries. Millions of Asians migrated in the nineteenth century as time-contract laborers, recruited for a fixed period to work in mines or on plantations. When their contracts expired, many would settle permanently in the new country. For example, Chinese worked on the U.S. West Coast and helped build the first railroad to span the United States, completed in 1869. More than 33 million ethnic Chinese currently live permanently in other countries, for the most part in Asia.

Distinguishing Between Economic Migrants and Refugees

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between migrants seeking economic opportunities and refugees fleeing from government persecution. The distinction between economic migrants and refugees is important because the United States, Canada, and Western European countries treat the two groups differently. Economic migrants are generally not admitted unless they possess special skills or have a close relative already there, and even then they must compete with similar applicants from other countries. However, refugees receive special priority in admission to other countries.

Cuba, Haiti, and Vietnam have each sent around 25,000 emigrants a year to the United States in recent decades. Distinguishing between economic migrants and refugees has been especially difficult for people trying to get to the United States from these three countries.

- **Emigrants from Cuba.** The U.S. government regarded emigrants from Cuba as political refugees after the 1959 revolution that brought the Communist government of Fidel Castro to power. Under Castro's leadership, the Cuban government took control of privately owned banks, factories, and farms, and political opponents of the government were jailed. The U.S. government closed its embassy and prevented companies from buying and selling in Cuba.

  In the years immediately following the revolution, more than 600,000 Cubans were admitted to the United States. The largest number settled in southern Florida, where they became prominent in the region's economy and politics. A second flood of Cuban emigrants reached the United States in 1980, when Castro suddenly decided to permit political prisoners, criminals, and mental patients to leave the country (Figure 3-15). More than 125,000 Cubans left within a few weeks to seek political asylum in the United States, a migration stream that became known as the “Mariel
boatlift,” named for the port from which the Cubans were allowed to embark. Beginning in 1987, the United States agreed to permit 20,000 Cubans per year to migrate to the United States.

- Emigrants from Haiti. Shortly after the 1980 Mariel boatlift from Cuba, several thousand Haitians also sailed in small vessels for the United States. Claiming that they had migrated for economic advancement rather than political asylum, U.S. immigration officials would not let the Haitians aboard the boats stay in the United States.

  Under the dictatorship of Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier (1957–1971) and his son Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier (1971–1986), the Haitian government persecuted its political opponents at least as harshly as did the Cuban government. But the U.S. government drew a distinction between the governments of the two neighboring Caribbean countries because Castro was allied with the Soviet Union and the Duvaliers were not. Haitians brought a lawsuit against the U.S. government, arguing that if the Cubans were admitted, they should be too. The government settled the case by agreeing to admit some Haitians.

  After a 1991 coup that replaced Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, with military leaders, thousands of Haitians fled their country in small boats. Although political persecution has subsided, many Haitians still try to migrate to the United States, reinforcing the view that economic factors may always have been important in emigration from the Western Hemisphere's poorest country.

- Emigrants from Vietnam. The Vietnam War ended in 1975 when Communist-controlled North Vietnam captured South Vietnam's capital city of Saigon (since renamed Ho Chi Minh City). The United States, which had supported the government of South Vietnam, evacuated from Saigon several thousand people who had been closely identified with the American position during the war and who were, therefore, vulnerable to persecution after the Communist victory. Thousands of other pro-U.S. South Vietnamese who were not politically prominent enough to get space on an American evacuation helicopter tried to leave by boat.

  A second surge of Vietnamese boat people came in the late 1980s. As memories of the Vietnam War faded, officials in other countries no longer considered Vietnamese boat people as refugees. Most of the boat people were now judged economic migrants, so they were placed in detention camps monitored by the United Nations until they could be sent back to Vietnam. Vietnam remains a major source of immigrants to the United States, but the pull of economic opportunity is a greater incentive than the push of political persecution.

**Cultural Challenges While Living in Other Countries**

For many immigrants, admission to another country does not end the challenges. Citizens of the host country may dislike the newcomers' cultural differences. More significantly, politicians exploit immigrants as scapegoats for local economic problems.

**U.S. Attitudes Toward Immigrants**

Americans have always regarded new arrivals with suspicion but tempered their dislike during the nineteenth century because immigrants helped to settle the frontier and extend U.S. control across the continent. European immigrants converted the forests and prairies of the vast North American interior into productive farms. By the early twentieth century, most Americans saw the frontier as closed and thought that therefore entry into the country should be closed as well.

Opposition to immigration also intensified into the twentieth century when the majority of immigrants no longer came from Northern and Western Europe. Italians, Russians, Poles, and other Southern and Eastern Europeans who poured into the United States after 1900 faced much more hostility than did British,
German, and Irish immigrants a half-century earlier. A government study in 1911 reflected popular attitudes when it concluded that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were racially inferior, “inclined toward violent crime,” resisted assimilation, and “drove old-stock citizens out of some lines of work.”

More recently, hostile citizens in California and other states have voted to deny unauthorized immigrants access to most public services, such as schools, day-care centers, and health clinics. The laws have been difficult to enforce and of dubious constitutionality, but their enactment reflects the unwillingness on the part of many Americans to help out needy immigrants. Whether children of recent immigrants should be entitled to attend school and receive social services is much debated in the United States.

**Attitudes Toward Guest Workers**

In Europe, many guest workers suffer from poor social conditions. The guest worker is typically a young man who arrives alone in a city. He has little money for food, housing, or entertainment because his primary objective is to send home as much money as possible. He is likely to use any surplus money for a railway ticket home for the weekend.

Far from his family and friends, the guest worker can lead a lonely life. His isolation may be heightened by unfamiliarity with the host country’s language and distinctive cultural activities. Many guest workers pass their leisure time at the local railway station. There they can buy native-language newspapers, mingle with other guest workers, and meet people who have just arrived by train from home.

Both guest workers and their host countries regard the arrangement as temporary. In reality, however, many guest workers remain indefinitely, especially if they are joined by other family members. Some guest workers apply their savings to starting a grocery store, restaurant, or other small shop. These businesses can fill a need in European cities by remaining open on weekends and evenings when most locally owned establishments are closed.

Many Western Europeans dislike the guest workers and oppose government programs to improve their living conditions. Political parties that support restrictions on immigration have gained support in France, Germany, and other European countries, and attacks by local citizens on immigrants have increased. In the Middle East, petroleum-exporting countries fear that the increasing numbers of guest workers will spark political unrest and abandonment of traditional Islamic customs. After the 1991 Gulf War, Kuwaiti officials expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinian guest workers who had sympathized with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. To minimize long-term stays, other host countries in the Middle East force migrants to return home if they wish to marry and prevent them from returning once they have wives and children.

The severe global recession of the early twenty-first century has sharply reduced the number of guest workers and economic migrants. With high unemployment and limited job opportunities in the principal destination countries, potential migrants have much less incentive to risk the uncertainties and expenses of international migration.

**KEY ISSUE 4**

**Why Do People Migrate Within a Country?**

- **Migration Between Regions of a Country**
- **Migration Within One Region**

Internal migration for most people is less disruptive than international migration. Two main types of internal migration are interregional (between regions of a country) and intraregional (within a region).

**Migration Between Regions of a Country**

In the past, people migrated from one region of a country to another in search of better farmland. Lack of farmland pushed many people from the more densely settled regions of the country and lured them to the frontier, where land was abundant. Today, the principal type of interregional migration is from rural areas to urban areas. Most jobs, especially in services, are clustered in urban areas (see Chapter 12).

**Migration Between Regions Within the United States**

An especially prominent example of large-scale internal migration is the opening of the American West. Two hundred years ago, the United States consisted of a collection of settlements concentrated on the Atlantic Coast. Through mass interregional migration, the interior of the continent was settled and developed.

The U.S. Census Bureau computes the country’s population center at the time of each census. The changing location of the population center graphically demonstrates the march of the American people across the North American continent over the past 200 years (Figure 3-16).

- **Colonial Settlement.** When the first U.S. census was taken, in 1790, the population center was located in the Chesapeake Bay, near Chestertown, Maryland. This location reflects the fact that virtually all colonial-era settlements were near the Atlantic Coast.

  Few colonists ventured far from coastal locations because they depended on shipping links with Europe to receive products and to export raw materials. Settlement in the interior was also hindered by an intervening obstacle, the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians blocked western development because of their steep slopes, thick forests, and few gaps that allowed easy passage. Hostile indigenous residents, commonly called “Indians,” also retarded western settlement.

**Migration Between Regions Within the United States**

- **Colonial Settlement.** When the first U.S. census was taken, in 1790, the population center was located in the Chesapeake Bay, near Chestertown, Maryland. This location reflects the fact that virtually all colonial-era settlements were near the Atlantic Coast.

  Few colonists ventured far from coastal locations because they depended on shipping links with Europe to receive products and to export raw materials. Settlement in the interior was also hindered by an intervening obstacle, the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians blocked western development because of their steep slopes, thick forests, and few gaps that allowed easy passage. Hostile indigenous residents, commonly called “Indians,” also retarded western settlement.

**Migration Between Regions Within the United States**

- **Colonial Settlement.** When the first U.S. census was taken, in 1790, the population center was located in the Chesapeake Bay, near Chestertown, Maryland. This location reflects the fact that virtually all colonial-era settlements were near the Atlantic Coast.

  Few colonists ventured far from coastal locations because they depended on shipping links with Europe to receive products and to export raw materials. Settlement in the interior was also hindered by an intervening obstacle, the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians blocked western development because of their steep slopes, thick forests, and few gaps that allowed easy passage. Hostile indigenous residents, commonly called “Indians,” also retarded western settlement.