

Geographical Mobility, 1999-2000

Migration is a basic component of population growth and decline.

People move into better housing and away from high-crime neighborhoods. Some seek greater economic opportunity and others want to start a whole new life. The U.S. Census Bureau studies the patterns of relocation in hopes of finding clues about future population growth and decline.

Forty-three million people or 16 percent of the population aged 1 and older living in the United States moved between March 1999 and March 2000.

Recent moving rates have changed only moderately from one year to the next, but there has been an overall drop of about 4 percentage points since the 1950s and 1960s, according to the Current Population Survey (CPS).¹

Fifty-six percent of the 43 million people who moved between March 1999 and March 2000 moved from one residence to a different residence in that same county. The next largest share of movers (20 percent) stayed within a state, but moved to a different county. An additional 19 percent moved between states and 4 percent moved into the United States from abroad.

Young adults, with their relatively higher rates of marriage, childbirth, and job changes, were more likely to move than older adults. Between March 1999 and March 2000, one-third of 20- to 29-year-olds moved, a little more than twice the rate for all movers. Among those aged 65 to 84, only 4 percent relocated.

Marital status also had some bearing on moving rates. Singles and divorced people were more likely to move than married people. However, people who were widowed were the least likely to move.

¹ Estimates in this chapter are calculated using sample data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. The population universe for the March CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population plus armed forces living off base or with their families on post. As a result, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program, or the 2000 decennial census.

Words That Count

- **Movers** are all people aged 1 and older who were living in a different residence at the time of the March Current Population Survey than they were 1 year earlier.

Differences in age distribution may account for some of the differences in moving rates among the racial and ethnic groups. White non-Hispanics, the oldest group, had the lowest moving rate, 14 percent. The rate for Blacks was 19 percent, and the rate for both Asians and Pacific Islanders and Hispanics² was 20 percent. However, standardized overall moving rates indicate that even if the Hispanic population had the same age distribution as White non-Hispanics, the moving rate would still have been higher for Hispanics.

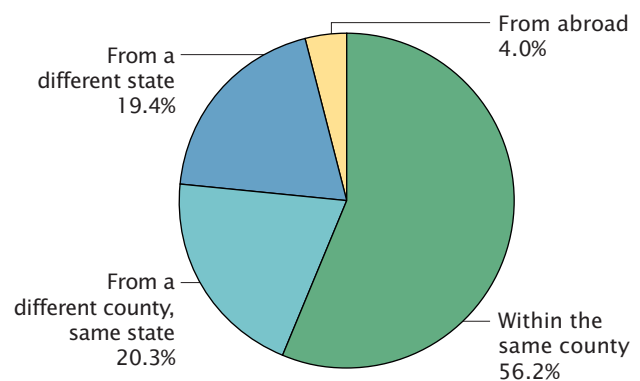
Renters have vastly higher mobility rates than homeowners. Between 1999 and 2000, almost 1 in

² Hispanics may be of any race.

Figure 3-1.
Movers by Type of Move: 1999 to 2000

(Percent distribution of movers aged 1 and older)

Total movers = 43.3 million

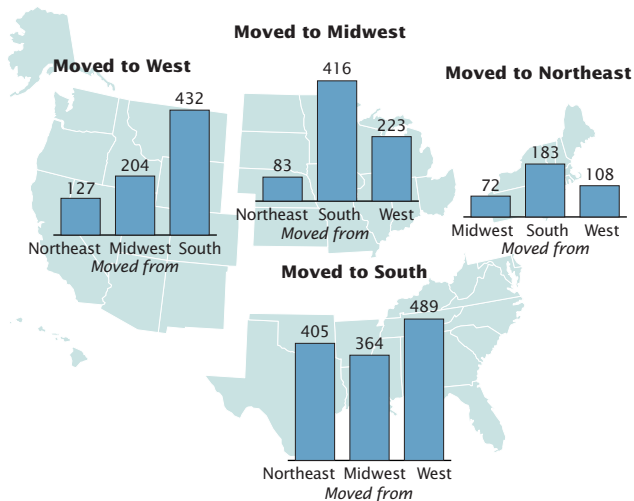


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 3-2.

Region-to-Region Migration: March 1999 to 2000

(Numbers in thousands)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

every 3 people living in a rental unit made a move, compared with 1 in every 11 people living in an owner-occupied dwelling. Housing tenure is closely related to age, race, Hispanic origin, and income — other factors that influence moving rates.

People living in lower income households were more likely to move than those living in higher-income households. Twenty-one percent of people living in households with incomes of less than \$25,000 moved, compared with only 12 percent of those living in households with incomes of \$100,000 or more.

Even though moving rates varied by educational attainment, these differences were small. While 12 percent of people with only a high school diploma moved, 15 percent of those with a bachelor's degree did. However, movers with a high school diploma were much less likely than those with a bachelor's degree to move outside their 1999 county of residence, 34 percent compared with 47 percent.

Migrants swell the population of some areas while diminishing the population of others.

Region-to-region migration favored the South and drained the Northeast. Throughout the 1990s, more people moved out of the Northeast than into it. Between March 1999 and March 2000, the Northeast experienced a net loss due to migration of 252,000 people. Among

the remaining regions, only the South had a significant net gain, with 227,000 more people moving in than moving out.

Between March 1999 and 2000, 1.7 million people moved into the United States from abroad. Two-thirds of these movers were foreign-born and not U.S. citizens. And most (1.2 million) moved into the South and West. Although the CPS does not collect data on the number of people who move away from the United States, it is possible to estimate net international migration using data from other sources. These estimates indicate that 852,000 more people came into the United States than left between July 1, 1998, and July 1, 1999, the latest year for which these estimates are available.

When estimates of net international migration are applied to regional migration, they indicate that all regions except the Northeast showed significant population gains from migration. Although the Northeast still experienced population loss, this loss was mitigated by net international migration. And even though the West did not experience a significant population gain from domestic migration, it did grow when international migrants are taken into account.

SPOTLIGHT ON WHY PEOPLE MOVE

Reasons for moving differ for people making a long haul and those just moving down the block.

Between 1999 and 2000, the majority of movers (52 percent) moved for housing-related reasons. Almost one in every five moved into a new or better house or apartment. More than one in ten moved out of a rented home and into a home of their own. And more than one in twenty wanted cheaper housing.

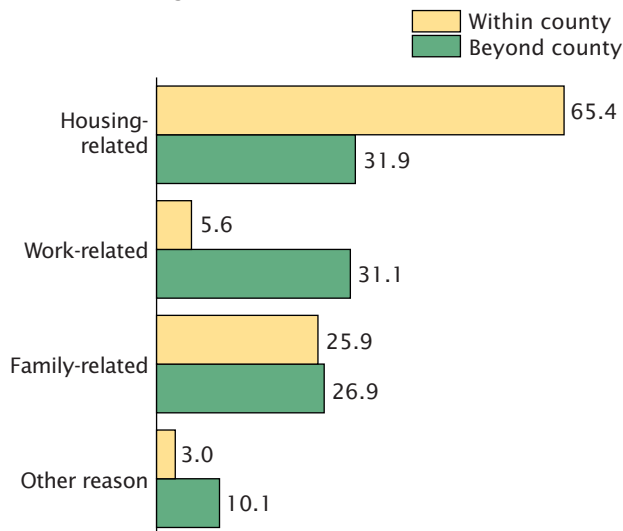
More than one in four movers (26 percent) made the change for family-related reasons. Establishing a new household (7 percent) and a change in marital status (6 percent) were the primary motivators for this type of move. Work-related reasons were given by about 16 percent of movers. Ten percent had a new job or a job transfer and about 4 percent expected an easier commute to work from their new location.

However, work-related reasons were more important for long-distance movers than those moving within a

Figure 3-3.

Reasons for Moving by Type of Move: March 1999 - 2000

(Percent distribution of movers within the United States, aged 1 and older)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

county. While only 6 percent of those who moved within a county said they moved for a work-related reason, 31 percent of those who went further gave this response. Almost two-thirds of people who moved within a county relocated for housing-related reasons while less than one-third of people who went beyond the county limits did.

Education is an important factor in the decision to move.

The greater a householder's education, the more likely that the move was made for work-related reasons. In 2000, only 14 percent of high school graduates moved for work-related reasons, compared with 25 percent of those with a bachelor's degree and 28 percent of those with a master's degree or higher. Most of this difference can be attributed to people relocating for a new job or job transfer.

Householders with higher educational attainment were less likely than others to move for family-related reasons. Only 22 percent of those with a bachelor's degree moved for family-related reasons, compared with 31 percent of those with only a high school diploma. Regardless of educational attainment, the largest share of people said they moved for housing-related reasons, including 47 percent of those holding a bachelor's

degree and 49 percent of those with only a high school diploma.³

Classical economic theory suggests that geographical mobility is a mechanism to redistribute people and wealth.⁴ Workers move from areas where jobs are dwindling to areas where workers are needed. Human capital economists see longer distance moves as economic investments to achieve higher wages.⁵ These theories imply that the poor and unemployed should be particularly drawn to areas of economic opportunity — even though they may face barriers, such as moving costs. However, the 2000 Current Population Survey found that unemployed and poor respondents were somewhat less likely than employed and higher income respondents to make a move for a work-related reason. Fourteen percent of unemployed movers and 17 percent of employed movers gave a work-related reason for relocating, as did 12 percent of the poor movers and 17 percent of nonpoor movers. These findings suggest that work-related reasons for moving may not be as strong as economic theory suggests or that barriers, such as moving costs, are higher for the unemployed than the employed.

³ The share of people moving for housing-related reasons is not statistically different for those holding bachelor's degrees and those holding a high school diploma.

⁴ Michael Greenwood. 1986. "Human Migration: Theory, Models, and Empirical Studies," *Journal of Regional Science*, 25:521-44.

⁵ Kathryn L. Shaw. 1991. "The Influence of Human Capital Investment on Migration and Industry Change," *Journal of Regional Science*, 31: 397-416.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports: *Geographical Mobility: March 1999 to March 2000* and *Why People Move: Exploring the March 2000 Current Population Survey*, both by Jason Schachter.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "G" and select "Geographic Mobility."
- Contact the Journey to Work and Migration Statistics Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2454 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.