

Geographical Mobility

Population Characteristics

Issued January 2000

P20-520

Geographical mobility has long been a prominent feature of American life. This report highlights some of the important changes that have occurred in recent years, including changes in the volume and rates of movement, changes in the types of movement, differences in the characteristics of movers compared with nonmovers, and changes in how the population is distributed. These changes are important to federal, state, and local governments as they plan for needed services and facilities such as schools and hospitals. These data are also used by private industry as they expand and locate businesses and other services.

About 43 million Americans moved.

Between March 1997 and March 1998, 42.5 million Americans moved. Most of them, 27.1 million, moved from one residence to another within the same county; another 7.9 million moved between counties within the same state; and 6.4 million changed states. Additionally, during that 1-year period, about 1.2 million people moved to the United States from abroad.

Moving rate has never been lower since the series began.

Despite the large number of moves that occurred between March 1997 and March 1998, the percentage of Americans who moved was only 16.0 percent—a small but significant decline from the rate for the previous 1-year period (16.5 percent). Table A shows the annual mobility rates for the past 7 years. While recent moving rates have changed only moderately from

All respondents in the March 1998 CPS sample were asked whether they lived at the same residence one year earlier. Nonmovers were living in the same home at both dates. Movers were asked for the location of their previous residence. When the current and previous residences are compared, movers can be categorized by whether they were living in the same or different county, state, and region, or were movers from abroad. They can also be categorized by whether they moved within or between metropolitan areas inside central cities, outside central cities, and nonmetropolitan areas of the United States.

one year to the next and have not been significant in some years, the overall drop since the 1950s and 1960s has been about 4 percentage points.

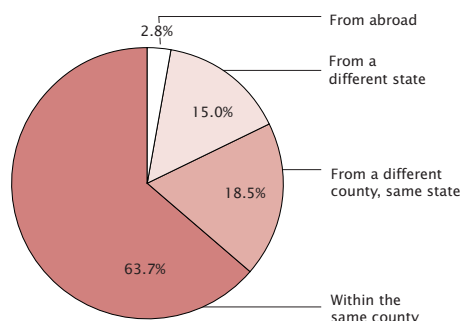
Most moves are local.

Most movers stay in the same county. In fact, nearly two-thirds (63.7 percent) of the movers between March 1997 and March 1998 made this type of local move. Moves that cross state lines or cross county

Current Population Reports

By Carol S. Faber

Figure 1.
Percentage of Movers by Type of Move: 1998



Demographic Programs



Figure 2.
Moving Rates by Age: 1998
 (Percent moving)

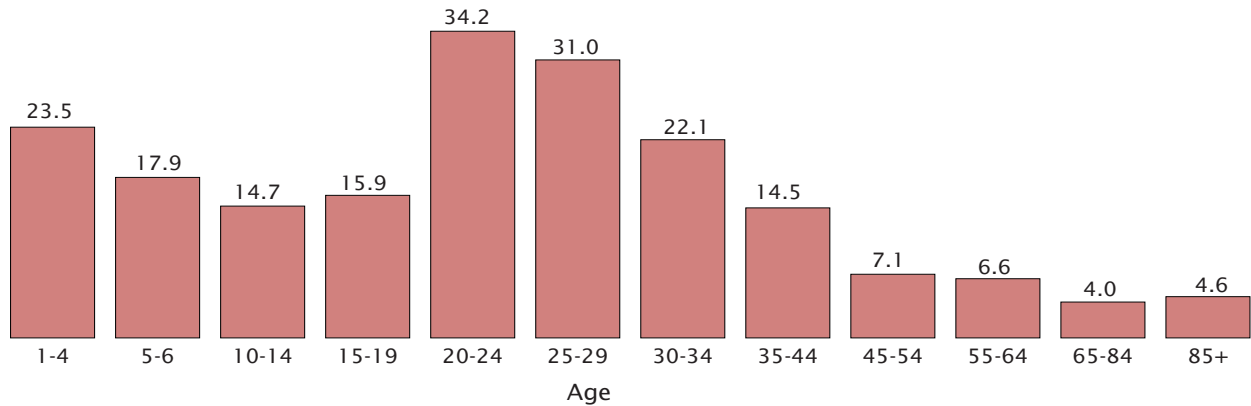


Table A.
Annual Geographical Mobility by Type of Move: 1991 to 1998

[Numbers in thousands]

Mobility period	Total, age 1 and older	Same residence (non-movers)	Total movers	Different residence in the United States					Movers from abroad
				Total	Same county	Different county			
						Total	Same state	Different state	
Number									
1997-98	265,209	222,702	42,507	41,304	27,082	14,222	7,867	6,355	1,203
1996-97	262,976	219,585	43,391	42,088	27,740	14,348	7,960	6,389	1,303
1995-96	260,406	217,868	42,537	41,176	26,696	14,480	8,009	6,471	1,361
1994-95 ¹	258,248	215,931	42,317	41,539	27,908	13,631	7,888	5,743	778
1993-94	255,774	212,939	42,835	41,590	26,638	14,952	8,226	6,726	1,245
1992-93 ²	252,799	209,700	43,099	41,704	26,932	14,772	7,855	6,916	1,395
1991-92	247,380	204,580	42,800	41,545	26,587	14,957	7,853	7,105	1,255
Percent									
1997-98	100.0	84.0	16.0	15.6	10.2	5.4	3.0	2.4	0.5
1996-97	100.0	83.5	16.5	16.0	10.5	5.5	3.0	2.4	0.5
1995-96	100.0	83.7	16.3	15.8	10.3	5.6	3.1	2.5	0.5
1994-95	100.0	83.6	16.4	16.1	10.8	5.3	3.1	2.2	0.3
1993-94	100.0	83.3	16.7	16.3	10.4	5.8	3.2	2.6	0.5
1992-93	100.0	83.0	17.0	16.5	10.7	5.8	3.1	2.7	0.6
1991-92	100.0	82.7	17.3	16.8	10.7	6.0	3.2	2.9	0.5

¹The primary mobility question in the 1995 survey asked about residence 5 years earlier, not 1 year earlier as in the other survey years. There was also an additional question on residence 1 year earlier, but the resulting 1-year data for the 1994-95 period are not comparable with the other surveys.

²Beginning with data shown for the 1992-93 period and for all subsequent years, the estimates reflect the use of population controls based on the 1990 Census and adjusted to correct for the undercount. For the prior 10 years of the survey, the data are weighted to reflect control totals based on the 1980 Census.

boundaries within the same state could be considered local moves if they are within the same commuting area. In this report, however, all inter-county moves are considered long-distance moves. Movers are somewhat more likely to move between counties in the same state

(18.5 percent) than to move between states (15.0 percent).

Young adults move the most.

The highest rates of moving are for people in their twenties. About one-third of 20 to 29 year olds moved in the previous year, twice

the rate for all people 1 year and older (16.0 percent). Moving rates continue to decline as age increases: 22.1 percent for people 30 to 34 years old, 14.5 percent for those 35 to 44 years old, 7.1 percent for those 45 to 54 years old, 6.6 percent for those 55 to 64 years

Table B.
Geographical Mobility by Selected Characteristics: 1998

[Numbers in thousands]

Selected characteristics	Total, age 1 and older	Percentages							Movers from abroad
		Same residence (non-movers)	Total movers	Different residence in the United States					
				Different county			Different state	Movers from abroad	
				Total	Same county	Total			
Age									
Total	265,209	84.0	16.0	15.6	10.2	5.4	3.0	2.4	0.5
1 to 4 years	15,802	76.5	23.5	23.0	15.7	7.3	4.1	3.2	0.5
5 to 9 years	20,453	82.1	17.9	17.6	12.1	5.4	3.2	2.3	0.3
10 to 14 years	19,663	85.3	14.7	14.4	9.8	4.5	2.3	2.2	0.3
15 to 19 years	19,466	84.1	15.9	15.3	10.5	4.8	2.8	2.0	0.6
20 to 24 years	17,613	65.8	34.2	33.0	21.7	11.4	6.7	4.6	1.2
25 to 29 years	18,996	69.0	31.0	29.8	19.0	10.8	5.7	5.0	1.2
30 to 34 years	20,358	77.9	22.1	21.5	14.1	7.4	4.0	3.4	0.6
35 to 44 years	44,462	85.5	14.5	14.2	9.3	4.8	2.7	2.1	0.4
45 to 54 years	34,058	90.5	7.1	6.9	3.4	3.4	1.9	1.6	0.3
55 to 64 years	22,255	92.9	6.6	6.4	3.2	3.2	1.5	1.7	0.2
65 to 74 years	17,873	95.1	3.9	3.7	1.9	1.9	1.0	0.9	0.1
75 to 84 years	11,281	95.8	4.2	4.2	2.6	1.6	0.9	0.6	0.1
85 years and over	2,928	95.4	4.6	4.5	3.1	1.5	0.9	0.6	0.1
Median age (years)	35.1	37.3	26.6	26.6	26.1	27.5	27.1	28.0	26.4
Sex									
Male	129,726	83.7	16.3	15.8	10.3	5.5	3.1	2.4	0.5
Female	135,483	84.2	15.8	15.4	10.1	5.3	2.9	2.4	0.4
Race and Hispanic Origin									
White, not Hispanic	189,731	85.5	14.5	14.2	8.7	5.5	3.0	2.5	0.3
Black	33,999	81.1	18.9	18.7	13.1	5.5	3.4	2.2	0.2
Asian and Pacific Islander	10,351	81.1	18.9	16.5	11.1	5.4	2.6	2.8	2.5
Hispanic origin (of any race)	30,098	78.8	21.2	20.0	15.8	4.1	2.3	1.8	1.2
Tenure									
In owner-occupied units	183,157	91.8	8.2	8.1	5.1	3.0	1.8	1.3	0.2
In renter-occupied units	82,052	66.6	33.4	32.3	21.7	10.6	5.7	4.9	1.1
Regions									
Northeast	50,703	88.5	11.5	11.0	7.3	3.7	2.0	1.7	0.5
Midwest	61,646	85.3	14.7	14.4	9.0	5.4	3.1	2.3	0.3
South	93,064	82.8	17.2	16.8	10.3	6.5	3.7	2.8	0.4
West	59,796	80.6	19.4	18.8	13.8	5.0	2.5	2.5	0.6

old, and only 4.1 percent for those 65 years old or over. The apparent differences in the moving rates between age groups 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 and for those age groups over 65 years are not significant.

Rates of moving vary with race and ethnicity.

Rates of moving are lower for non-Hispanic Whites (14.5 percent) than for Blacks or for Asians and Pacific Islanders (18.9 percent for both

groups). People of Hispanic origin¹ have the highest rates of moving (21.2 percent) as shown in Table B.

¹ Hispanics may be of any race, but almost all Hispanics interviewed in the March 1998 Current Population Survey (96 percent) reported their race as White. Since race and Hispanic origin are not mutually exclusive concepts, comparisons of estimates for Whites with estimates for Hispanics are not recommended. For this reason, this report uses the racial category "White, not Hispanic," and compares data for that group with other racial categories and with Hispanics. Although in future reports, the Hispanic population will be separated from the other racial categories as well, the current report does not do so. The overlap of Hispanics with Blacks, and with Asians and Pacific Islanders, is about 2 percent each.

These differences in rates of moving by race and ethnicity may be partly the result of the differences in age structure among the different racial groups. For example, the median age of the least mobile group, non-Hispanic Whites, is 36.7 years, compared with 29.6 years for Blacks, and just over 26 years for Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders.

A similar pattern is observed for local movers. Rates of moving within the same county are lowest for non-Hispanic Whites (8.7 percent)

and highest for Hispanics (15.8 percent). The rate for Blacks is higher than the rate for non-Hispanic Whites and for Asians and Pacific Islanders, but lower than the rate for Hispanics.

It is difficult to discern patterns in mobility rates among race and Hispanic origin groups for longer distance moves. There is no statistically significant difference in the rates of moving between counties within the same state for Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites, and non-Hispanic Whites were no more likely to move to a different state than Blacks. Hispanics have much higher rates of moving from abroad (1.2 percent) than Blacks or non-Hispanic Whites, although not as high as Asians and Pacific Islanders (2.5 percent).

Westerners move the most.

Rates of moving were higher in the West (19.4 percent) than in the other three regions in 1998 (Table B). Rates were lowest in the Northeast; its 11.5 percent figure was well below the national rate of 16.0 percent. People living in the Midwest were also below the national average, 14.7 percent of those living there had moved in the previous year. In contrast, Southerners joined Westerners with moving rates higher than the national average, 17.2 percent.

Regions differ by type of move as well. The West had a higher percentage of local movers (13.8 percent moved within the same county) than found nationally, while the Northeast and the Midwest had lower rates (7.3 percent and 9.0 percent, respectively, compared with 10.2 percent nationally). The rate of local moving in the South was no different than the national average.

Table C.
Selected Characteristics of the Total Population and Movers From Abroad: 1998

Characteristics	Total, age 1 and older	Movers from abroad
Number (thousands)	265,209	1,203
Percent:		
Native born	90.1	33.7
Foreign born	9.9	66.3
Naturalized citizen	3.7	6.0
Not a citizen	6.2	60.3
Under 20 years old	28.4	27.3
20 to 29 years old	13.8	35.8
30 to 44 years old	24.4	22.9
45 to 64 years old	21.2	11.3
65 years old and over	12.1	2.8
Hispanic	11.3	31.1

Long distance moves are much less common than local moves regardless of region, but like local moves, their frequency varies by region. For example, the Northeast rate of moving between counties within the same state (2.0 percent) was lower than that found in the South (3.7 percent). Interstate moving rates were smaller than intercounty moves within the same state for the Midwest and the South. The Northeast had the lowest interstate moving rate (1.7 percent). The rate found in the Midwest (2.3 percent) was lower than the rate for the South (2.8 percent), but not significantly different than the West (2.5 percent)—the South and West were not significantly different.

About 1.2 million people moved from abroad.

The majority of people moving from abroad were immigrants and temporary residents such as foreign college students. As shown in Table C, 60.3 percent of all movers from abroad were not U.S. citizens. Native-born movers from abroad include people coming into the country from Puerto Rico or outlying areas of the United States such as the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Marianas, or American

Samoa; members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their dependents returning from assignment overseas; and other U.S. citizens returning from foreign countries. Most movers from abroad were between 20 and 64 years old (70.0 percent); few were over 65 years of age (2.8 percent). The remainder was children and teens (27.3 percent). About 31 percent of migrants from abroad were of Hispanic origin, although Hispanics make up only 11.3 percent of the total population. Just 6.6 percent of the movers from abroad were Black, while 43.1 percent were non-Hispanic White, and 21.1 percent were Asians and Pacific Islanders.

One-third of renters moved.

One-third of people living in renter-occupied housing units in March 1998 moved in the previous year (33.4 percent).² In contrast, only 1 in 12 people in owner-occupied housing units moved during the same period (8.2 percent). Renters have vastly higher

² Owner/renter status (shown in Table B) refers to the time of the survey in March 1998; the Current Population Survey does not ask about owner/renter status before the move.

Figure 3.
Region-to-Region Migration: 1998
(Numbers in thousands)

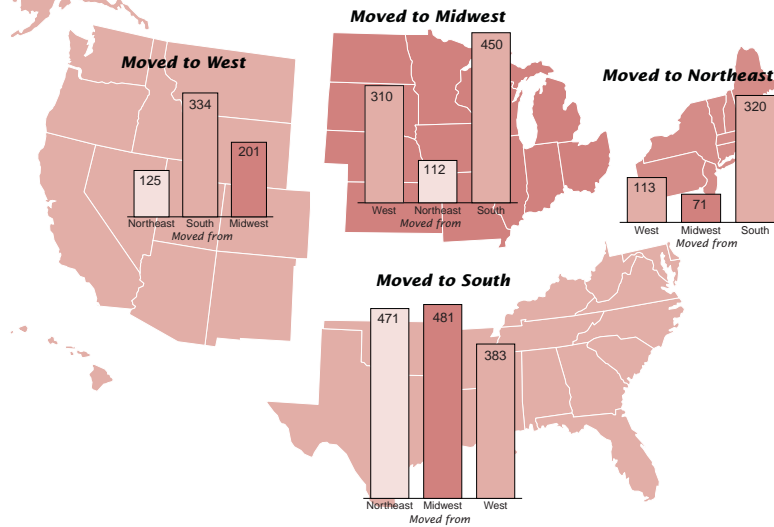


Table D.
Annual Immigration, Outmigration, Net Migration, and Movers From Abroad by Region: 1998

[Numbers in thousands]

Type of migration	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Within the United States				
Immigrants	504	873	1,335	660
Outmigrants	708	753	1,105	806
Net internal migration	-203*	120	230*	-146
Movers from abroad	247	170	416	370
Net migration (Including from abroad)	44	290*	646*	224*

*Net flow significantly different from zero at the 90-percent confidence level.

rates of moving than owners for all types of moves.

Owner/renter status (or tenure) is closely related to age, race, and Hispanic origin. Renters are, on average, younger than homeowners. The median age of all people living in renter-occupied housing units was 28.2 years, compared with 38.3 years for those living in owner-occupied housing units. While more than three-quarters of non-Hispanic Whites (76.4 percent) and about 60 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders lived in owner-occupied units, only about half of Blacks and Hispanics did so.

Interregional movement redistributes the population.

In recent decades, more people have moved from North to South than in the opposite direction and this trend continues.³ Although westward migration has long been a factor in the settlement of the United States, between 1997 and 1998, significantly more people moved from the West to the Midwest than vice versa. Flows of migrants among the four major regions of the United States between 1997 and 1998 are illustrated in Figure 3.

³ Larry Long, "Migration and Residential Mobility in the United States," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, NY, 1988.

Only the Northeast has a net internal loss.

Table D shows internal immigration, outmigration, and net migration for each of the four major regions between 1997 and 1998. Only the net loss of 203,000 people shown for the Northeast and the net gain of 230,000 people for the South are statistically significant. The net internal migration figures for the Midwest and West are not significantly different from zero.

When movers from abroad are included in the net migration figures for each region, all regions except the Northeast had significant net population gains. The majority of immigrants moved to the South and West. The Northeast had just enough movers from abroad to offset its net loss domestically.

Metropolitan areas neither increase nor decrease in population.

Metropolitan areas as a whole had about equal numbers of internal immigrants and outmigrants during the year.⁴ As shown in Table E, 1.7 million people moved into metropolitan areas from nonmetropolitan areas, and 1.9 million moved out. These numbers are not significantly different. This balance has been standard for most of the last decade, with the exception of 1995-96 and 1992-93 when metropolitan areas experienced net losses. Metropolitan areas have not had a net gain since

⁴ The boundaries of metropolitan areas are redrawn following each decennial census. They were revised in 1993 using data from the 1990 Decennial Census. Some areas that were categorized as nonmetropolitan prior to the 1993 revision are now classified as metropolitan. The Current Population Survey began using these new boundaries in 1995. Because of this change, the metropolitan data in this report are not strictly comparable with data from the 1994 or earlier reports.

Table E.
Annual Immigration, Outmigration, Net Migration for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Areas: 1998

[Numbers in thousands]

Type of migration	Metropolitan areas			Nonmetropolitan areas
	Total	Central cities	Outside central cities	
Within the United States				
Immigrants	1,685	3,294	6,173	1,867
Outmigrants	1,867	5,899	3,750	1,685
Net internal migration	-182	-2,605*	2,423*	182
Movers from abroad	1,083	465	618	121
Net migration (including from abroad)	901*	-2,140*	3,041*	303*

*Net flow significantly different from zero at the 90-percent confidence level.

Table F.
Movers Within and Between Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Areas: 1998

[Numbers in thousands]

Type of migration	Number	Percent
Total movers	42,507	100.0
Within same MSAs	24,243	57.0
Between MSAs	7,781	18.3
Metropolitan to nonmetropolitan	1,867	4.4
Nonmetropolitan to metropolitan	1,685	4.0
Nonmetropolitan at both dates	5,727	13.5
Within same county	4,491	10.6
Movers from abroad	1,203	2.8

the 1986-87 survey period, when the figure was nearly half a million people. Between 1987 and 1992, metropolitan areas had no significant net gains or losses.

The estimated number of legal emigrants from the United States in 1998 was 278,000⁵—a small number compared with the 1.2 million gain. When movers from abroad are included in the calculation of net migration, metropolitan areas had a significant net gain of 901,000 people.

⁵Unpublished Census Bureau estimate.

Within metropolitan areas, central cities lost population while the population outside central cities gained.

Metropolitan areas outside central cities were the most popular destination among movers within and between metropolitan areas. Although metropolitan areas as a whole had about equal numbers of immigrants and outmigrants, the metropolitan areas inside central cities had totally different migration patterns than outside central cities. Between 1997 and 1998, 5.9 million people moved out of central cities while 3.3 million moved in, resulting in a net loss due to migration of

2.6 million people. At the same time, 6.2 million people moved into areas outside central cities and 3.8 million people moved out—a net gain of 2.4 million movers.

Movers from abroad select metropolitan locations.

Only 121,000 movers from abroad went to nonmetropolitan areas. Movers from abroad were more likely to end up outside central cities (618,000 people) than inside (465,000 people). The same was true in the 1993-94 period, but for most years during the late 1980s and early 1990s, movers from abroad were most likely found living in central cities. For the 1996-97 period, about equal numbers of people from abroad moved to metropolitan areas inside and outside central cities. This was also true for the 1995-96 period.

Movers stay close to home.

Over half of all movers (24.2 million) stayed in the same metropolitan area, as shown in Table F. In contrast, only 7.8 million people moved between metropolitan areas. Most movers within nonmetropolitan parts of the country also stayed close to home. Over three-quarters of the 5.7 million people who moved from one nonmetropolitan location to another stayed within the same county.

Metropolitan areas outside central cities are chosen more than central cities.

Most movers maintained their metropolitan status, but more chose outside central cities than inside as their destination. While 11.5 million people moved within or between central cities of metropolitan areas,

12.8 million moved from one location outside central cities to another. In contrast, 5.1 million left the central cities for outside central cities, while 2.7 million chose city life.

Source of Data

Most estimates in this report come from data collected in March 1998 by the Current Population Survey (CPS). Some estimates are based on data collected by the CPS in earlier years. The Census Bureau conducts the CPS every month but collects the data on residential migration only in March.

Accuracy and Reliability of the Data

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and non-sampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet the Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. Non-sampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately answers are coded and classified. The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process—including the overall design of surveys, testing the wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports. The CPS employs ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates

of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources. For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, contact Alfred Meier, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4220 or on the Internet at Alfred.G.Meier@cmail.census.gov.

More Information

A package of tables showing more detailed characteristics of movers and nonmovers by type of move for the United States and regions is available from the Census Bureau. Characteristics include age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, educational attainment, marital status, household relationship, family type, ages of own children by type of family, labor force status, occupation, industry, and income. This set of detailed tables (PPL-118) is identical to those produced in previous years (165 pages) and is available on paper for \$38. To receive a copy, send a request for "PPL-118, Geographical Mobility: March 1997 to March 1998," along with a check or money order in amount of \$38 payable to Commerce-Census, to

U. S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, P.O. Box 277943, Atlanta, GA 30384-7943, or call the Population Division's Statistical Information Office on 301-457-2422. A copy of these tabulations will be made available to any existing Current Population Report P20 subscriber without charge, provided that the request is made within three months of the issue date of this report. Contact the Statistical Information Office on 301-457-2422.

The electronic version of these tables is available on the Internet (<http://www.census.gov>). Once on the site, click on "Subjects A to Z," then click on "M", and finally on "Migration." There is other migration information at that location including data from the 1990 Census and a few time series tables with data from past CPS reports.

Contacts

Statistical Information Staff:
pop@census.gov 301-457-2422
Carol S. Faber
Carol.S.Faber@cmail.census.gov
301-457-2454

User Comments

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of our data and reports. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

Chief, Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233

or send e-mail to
pop@census.gov