

Current Population Reports

Population Characteristics

Geographical Mobility: March 1995 to March 1996

By Kristin A. Hansen

C E N S U S B U R E A U

P20-497

Issued November 1997

Geographical mobility has long been one of the predominant factors in 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 the patterns of population distribution attributable to residential migration. 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 to plan expansion and location of businesses and other services.

All persons in the March CPS sample were asked whether or not they lived in the same house or apartment one year earlier. Nonmovers were living in the same house at both dates. Movers were asked for the location of their previous residence. When current and previous residence are compared, movers can be categorized as to whether they were living in the same or different county, state, region, or were movers from abroad. They can also be categorized by whether they moved within or between central cities, suburbs, and nonmetropolitan areas of the United States.

About 43 million Americans moved

Between March 1995 and March 1996, 42.5 million Americans moved. Most of them, 26.7 million, moved from one residence to another within the same county; another 8 million moved between counties within the same state; and 6.5 million changed states. Additionally, during that one-year period, about 1.4 million persons moved into the United States from abroad.

Moving rates continue to decline

Despite the large number of moves that occurred between March 1995 and March 1996, the percentage of Americans who moved was only 16.3 percent — a decline from the rates in earlier decades. Table A shows the annual mobility rates for the past 5 years. While the apparent changes in the moving rates from one year to the next are not statistically significant, over time they add up to an important decline in the overall

moving rate. The annual mobility rate was around 20 percent for most years during the 1950s and 1960s and then gradually declined to a low of 16.6 percent in 1983. Following a short-term increase in mobility rates during the mid-1980s (peaking at 20.2 percent between March 1984 and March 1985), rates again fell to the 1983 levels. The 1996 and 1983 rates are not statistically different.

Most moves are local

Most movers stay in the same county. In fact, nearly two-thirds of the movers between March 1995 and March 1996 made this type of "local" move. Moves which cross state lines or cross county 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 (18.8 percent) than to move between states (15.2 percent).

Figure 1.

Percentage of Movers by Type of Move: 1996

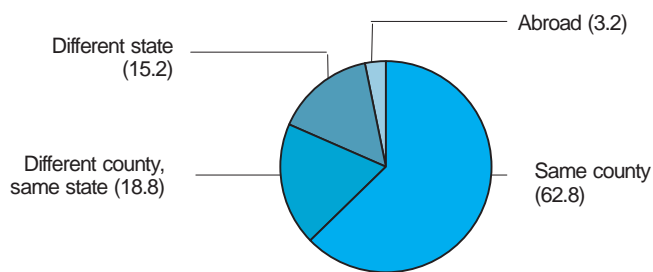


Table A.
Annual Geographical Mobility Rates, by Type of Move: 1996
 (Numbers in thousands)

Mobility period	Total, 1 year old and over	Same house (non-movers)	Total movers	Different house in the United States					Movers from abroad
				Total	Same county	Different county			
						Total	Same state	Different state	
Number									
1995-96	260,406	217,868	42,537	41,176	26,696	14,480	8,009	6,471	1,361
1994-95	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	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									
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

Note: The 1992-93 data are the 1993 Survey data re-weighted to reflect the 1990-based adjusted controls; 1991-92 data use 1980-based controls. The 1995 data are based on a different question design and are not totally comparable.

Young adults move the most

The highest moving rates are for people in their twenties as shown in Figure 2. About one-third of people 20 to 29 years old moved in the previous year. This is twice the rate for all persons 1 year and older (16.3 percent). Moving rates continue to decline as age increases to 21.9 percent for people 30 to 34 years old, 14.1 percent for those 35 to 44 years old, 9.8 percent for those 45 to 54 years old, and 6.6 percent for people 55 to 64 years

old. The apparent differences in the moving rates for age groups over 65 years are not significant.

Whites move less

Whites have lower overall rates of moving (15.7 percent) than either Blacks or Asian and Pacific Islanders — about 20 percent for both groups. Persons of Hispanic origin¹ have the highest rates of moving (23.0 percent). These differences in rates of moving by race and

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race, but 95.6 percent of Hispanics in the 1996 CPS reported their race as White.

ethnicity are partly the result of the differences in age structure among the different racial groups. The median age of all Whites is 35.4 years, compared with about 30 years for both Blacks and for Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 26.3 years for Hispanics.

A similar pattern is observed for local movers; the only difference is where Asian and Pacific Islanders rank. Whites and Asian and Pacific Islanders have the lowest rates of moving within the same county, while Hispanics have the highest rate. The rate for Blacks is higher than the rate for Whites and Asian and Pacific Islanders but lower than the rate for Hispanics.

It is difficult to discern patterns of differences in mobility rates among race and/or Hispanic origin groups for longer distance moves. While there is no statistically significant difference in the rates of moving between counties within the same state for Blacks and Whites, Whites are more likely to move to a different state. Hispanics have much higher rates of moving from abroad (1.8 percent) than Blacks or Whites, although not as high as Asian and Pacific Islanders (3.0 percent).

Figure 2.
Moving Rates by Age: 1996

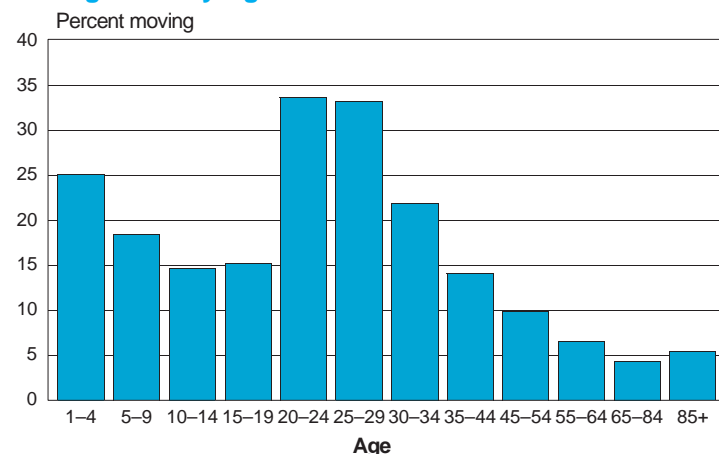
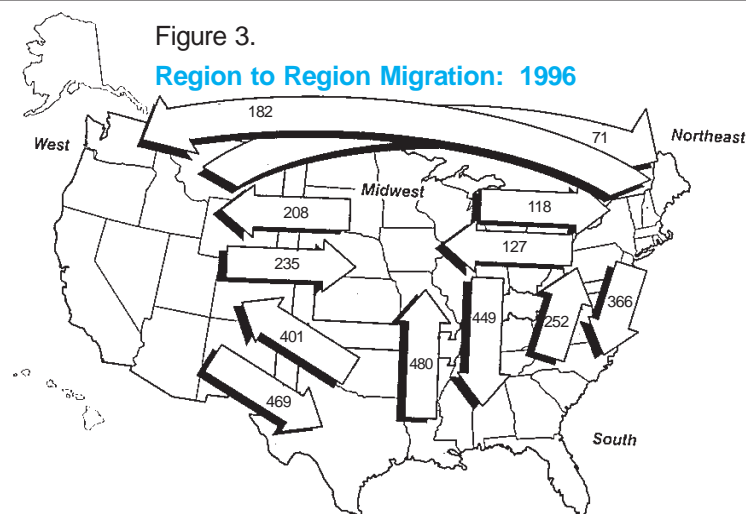


Table B.
Selected Characteristics of the
Total Population and Movers
From Abroad: 1996
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristics	Total population	Movers from abroad
Number	260,406	1,361
Percent:		
Native born	90.6	31.4
Foreign born	9.4	68.5
Naturalized citizen	3.0	1.8
Not a citizen	6.4	66.6
Under 20 years old	28.6	32.7
20 to 64 years old	59.4	66.0
65 years old or older	12.2	1.4
Hispanic	10.6	37.5

Figure 3.
Region to Region Migration: 1996



About 1.4 million moved from abroad

The majority of people moving from abroad were immigrants from foreign countries and temporary residents such as foreign college students. As shown in Table B, two-thirds 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 (66.0 percent); few were over 65 (1.4 percent). The remainder were children and teens under the age of 20 (32.7 percent). Over one-third (37.5 percent) were of Hispanic origin, although Hispanics make up only 10.6 percent of the total population. While 70.5 percent of the movers from abroad (including most of the Hispanics) were White, one-fifth were Asian or Pacific Islanders (21.2 percent).

One-third of renters moved

One-third of persons living in renter-occupied housing units in March 1996 moved in the

previous year (33.5 percent).² In contrast, only one in twelve persons in owner-occupied housing units moved in the same period (8.2 percent). Renters have vastly higher rates of moving than owners for all types of moves.

Tenure (owner/renter status) is closely related to age, race, and Hispanic origin. Renters are, on average, younger than homeowners. The median age of all persons living in renter-occupied housing units was 27.9 years, compared with 38.4 years for all persons living in owner-occupied housing units. There are also differences by race and Hispanic origin. While nearly three-quarters of Whites (71.7 percent) and more than half of Asian and Pacific Islanders (56.8 percent) lived in owner-occupied units, more than half of Blacks and Hispanics were living in rental units (52.5 and 56.1 percent, respectively).

Regional movement

Interstate migration acts to redistribute the population among the regions of the country, and westward migration, which has long been a factor in the settlement of this country, continues.

² Tenure (whether the person is living in a housing unit occupied by owners or renters) has a very strong correlation with mobility rates. Tenure (as shown in Table D) is owner/renter status at the time of the survey in March 1996; tenure before the move is not available from the Current Population Survey.

In addition, population flowed from the more rural south to the more industrialized north following the Civil War and throughout the first half of this century. However, the direction of interregional migration has shifted, and in recent decades more people have moved from north to south than in the opposite direction.³ Flows of migrants among the four major regions of the United States between 1995 and 1996 are illustrated in Figure 3.

Northeast has net loss

Table C shows immigration, outmigration, and net internal migration for each of the four major regions between 1995 and 1996. Only the net loss of 234,000 shown for the Northeast is statistically significant. For each of the other three regions, net migration is not significantly different from zero.

When the movers from abroad are included in the net migration figures for each region, all regions except the Northeast had significant net population gains.⁴ The Northeast had enough movers from abroad to offset its net loss domestically.

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

⁴The number of people moving out of the United States is not available but the Census Bureau estimates it as only about 222,000 annually. See Kevin Deardorff and Frederick Holman, "U.S. Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin", PPL-57, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington DC 20233, March 1997.

Table C.
Annual Immigration, Outmigration, Net Migration, and Movers From Abroad for Regions: 1996

(Numbers in thousands)

Type of migration	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Inmigrants	441	842	1,284	792
Outmigrants	675	775	1,134	775
Net internal migration	-234*	68	150	16
Movers from abroad	285	130	470	476
Net migration (including abroad)	51	198*	620*	492*

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

Westerners move the most

Westerners had the highest rates of moving (20.9 percent) compared with people living in the other four regions in 1996. (See Table D for the numbers of movers and type of move by region.) The Northeast had the lowest overall moving rate; its rate of 11.6 percent was well below the national rate of 16.3 percent. People living in the Midwest also had lower than average moving rates — 14.3

percent of those living there had moved in the previous year. In contrast, Southerners joined Westerners with higher overall moving rates than the national average — 17.4 percent.

Regional differences exist by type of move as well. The West had a higher percentage of local movers (13.9 percent moved within the same county) than found nationally, while the Northeast and the Midwest had lower

rates than average (7.5 and 8.9 percent, respectively, compared with 10.3 percent nationally). The rate of local moving in the South was no different than the national average.

Long distance moves are much less common than local moves regardless of region but, as with local moves, there are differences from region to region. The Northeast, the Midwest, and the South all had rates of moving between counties within the same state (2.1, 2.8, and 3.6 percent, respectively) that were statistically different from the national rate (3.1 percent). Interstate moving rates were smaller than inter-county moves within states for all regions except the West. The Northeast had the lowest interstate moving rate (1.5 percent), but the rate found in the Midwest (2.3 percent) was also lower than the rates for the other two regions (2.9 percent).

Table D.
Geographical Mobility by Selected Characteristics: 1996
(Numbers in thousands)

Selected characteristics	Total population	Same house (non-movers)	Total movers	Different house in the United States					Movers from abroad
				Total	Same county	Different county			
						Total	Same state	Different state	
Age									
Total, 1 year and over	260,406	217,868	42,537	41,176	26,696	14,480	8,009	6,471	1,361
1 to 4 years	16,160	12,098	4,063	3,923	2,759	1,164	656	508	140
5 to 9 years	20,171	16,443	3,729	3,603	2,432	1,171	618	553	126
10 to 14 years	19,449	16,606	2,843	2,766	1,871	895	463	431	77
15 to 19 years	18,649	15,796	2,853	2,751	1,855	895	521	374	102
20 to 24 years	17,653	11,698	5,955	5,730	3,752	1,978	1,135	842	225
25 to 29 years	19,462	13,009	6,453	6,245	3,912	2,333	1,283	1,051	208
30 to 34 years	21,457	16,767	4,690	4,496	2,800	1,695	873	822	194
35 to 44 years	43,077	37,013	6,064	5,870	3,861	2,009	1,156	853	194
45 to 54 years	31,584	28,499	3,085	3,028	1,866	1,162	647	515	57
55 to 64 years	21,084	19,690	1,394	1,374	769	604	354	251	20
65 to 74 years	18,270	17,460	811	801	488	313	168	145	10
75 to 84 years	10,568	10,120	448	439	249	190	92	98	9
85 years and over	2,819	2,669	151	151	81	69	42	28	0
Median age (years)	34.4	36.7	26.4	26.5	25.9	27.4	27.4	27.5	25.3
Sex									
Male	127,161	105,989	21,172	20,412	13,288	7,123	3,982	3,142	760
Female	133,245	111,879	21,365	20,764	13,408	7,357	4,027	3,330	601
Race and Hispanic Origin									
White	215,344	181,477	33,866	32,906	20,775	12,131	6,615	5,516	960
Black	33,294	27,040	6,255	6,149	4,511	1,637	987	651	106
Asian or Pacific Islander	9,490	7,627	1,864	1,576	1,034	542	331	211	288
Hispanic origin (of any race)	27,729	21,340	6,389	5,878	4,713	1,165	594	571	511
Tenure									
In owner-occupied units	176,773	162,230	14,543	14,247	9,102	5,144	3,178	1,966	296
In renter-occupied units	83,633	55,638	27,995	26,930	17,594	9,336	4,831	4,505	1,065
Regions									
Northeast	50,832	44,915	5,917	5,632	3,787	1,846	1,059	786	285
Midwest	61,044	52,340	8,703	8,573	5,440	3,133	1,713	1,420	130
South	90,909	75,050	15,858	15,388	9,475	5,912	3,315	2,598	470
West	57,621	45,562	12,059	11,583	7,994	3,589	1,922	1,667	476

Metropolitan areas had a net loss of movers

The movement between cities, suburbs,⁵ and nonmetropolitan areas during the year was substantial. While 1.5 million people moved into metropolitan areas from the nonmetropolitan parts of the country, 1.8 million moved out. As a result of this movement, metropolitan areas⁶ as a whole had a significant net loss. During the last ten years, metropolitan areas in the aggregate have had about equal numbers of immigrants and outmigrants, with the exception of 1992 to 1993 when metropolitan areas had a net loss of 317,000 people. During the mid-1980s, metropolitan areas had net gains of 300,000 to nearly half a million. Between 1987 and 1992, metropolitan areas had no significant net gains or losses.

Central cities lost while the suburbs gained

The suburbs were the most popular destinations among movers within and between metropolitan areas. While metropolitan areas as a whole had a small net loss, the cities and suburbs that comprise the metropolitan areas had totally different migration patterns. Between 1995 and 1996, 6,328,000 people moved out of central cities while 3,893,000 moved in, resulting in a net loss due to migration of 2,436,000 people. At the same time, 6,435,000 people moved into the suburbs and 4,275,000 moved out. This gave the suburbs a net gain of 2,160,000 movers.⁷

⁵In this report, the suburbs include all territory within an MSA but outside of a central city.

⁶Metropolitan areas are redefined following each decennial census. The individual metropolitan areas were redefined in 1993 using data from the 1990 decennial census. The Current Population Survey began using these new definitions in 1995. Because of this change, the metropolitan data in this report are not strictly comparable with data from the 1994 or earlier reports.

⁷The net change and the flows for the central cities are not significantly different than those for the suburbs.

Table E.

Annual Immigration, Outmigration, Net Migration for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Areas: 1996

(Numbers in thousands)

Type of migration	Metropolitan areas			Non-metropolitan areas
	Total	Central cities	Suburbs	
Immigrants	1,529	3,893	6,435	1,805
Outmigrants	1,805	6,328	4,275	1,529
Net internal migration	-275*	-2,436*	2,160*	275*
Movers from abroad	1,256	563	693	105
Net including movers from abroad	981*	-1,873*	2,853*	380*

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

Movers to nonmetropolitan areas were no more likely to come from central cities than from the suburbs.

Movers from abroad prefer metropolitan locations

Only 105,000 movers from abroad went to nonmetropolitan areas while 1,256,000 went to metropolitan areas. Movers from abroad were no more likely to end up in the suburbs (693,000 persons) than in central cities (563,000 persons). This was also true in the 1993-94 period, but for most years during the late 1980s and 1990s movers from abroad were most likely found living in central cities.

The estimated number of emigrants from the United States each year of 222,000 is a very small number compared to the 1.4 million gain. When movers from abroad are included in the calculation of net migration, metropolitan areas had a net gain of 981,000 people compared with a net loss of 275,000 due to migration within the United States.

Movers stay close to home

Over half of all movers (24 million) stayed in the same metropolitan area. In contrast, only 8 million people moved between metropolitan areas.

Most movers within nonmetropolitan America also stayed close to home. Three quarters of the 5.6 million people who moved from one nonmetropolitan location to another stayed within the same county.

City or suburb?

Three quarters of all movers stayed in metropolitan areas, and more chose suburbia than the central cities as their destination. While 10.8 million people moved within or between central cities of metropolitan areas, 12.7 million moved from one suburban location to another. At the same time 5.5 million left the cities for suburbia but only 3.3 million abandoned the suburbs for city life.

Source of data

Most estimates in this report come from data collected in March 1996 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 of the estimates

All statistics are subject to sampling error, as well as nonsampling error such as survey design flaws, respondent

classification and reporting errors, data processing mistakes, and undercoverage. The Census Bureau attempts to reduce errors made by respondents, coders and interviewers through the use of quality control and editing procedures. Ratio estimation to independent age-race-sex-Hispanic origin population controls partially corrects for bias attributable to survey undercoverage. However, biases exist in the estimates when missed persons have characteristics different from those of interviewed persons in the same age-race-sex-Hispanic origin group.

Analytical statements in this report have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources. Contact Don Keathley, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4182 or on the Internet at dkeathley@census.gov for information on the source of the data, the accuracy of the estimates, the use of standard errors, and the computation of standard errors.

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. These tables are available on paper for \$38 (PPL-69) from the Population Division's Statistical Information Staff at 301-457-2422.

The detailed tables are also on the Internet: (<http://www.census.gov>). Look for "Migration" in the "Subjects A to Z" index. 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. Data on net migration for states and counties calculated as a residual from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates program are also on the Internet; see "Estimates" in the "Subjects A to Z" index.

More geographically detailed migration data from the 1990 Census are also available. See data on "Residence in 1985" for states, counties, and cities, and metropolitan areas in CP-2, "Social and Economic Characteristics" and CP-3,

"Census Tracts". Public use microdata files (PUMS) and data on CD-ROM's are available from Customer Services at 301-457-4100. The special migration files on CD-ROM include SP-312, "County to County Migration Flow Files" and SSTF-15, "Geographic Mobility in the United States" (data for states and metropolitan areas).

Contacts

Statistical Information Staff
pop@census.gov
 301-457-2422

Kristin A. Hansen
kahansen@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. Bureau of the Census
 Washington, DC 20233

or send E-mail to:
pop@census.gov

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
 POSTAGE & FEES PAID
 Bureau of the Census
 Permit No. G-58

U.S. Department of Commerce
 Economics and Statistics Administration
 BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
 Washington, DC 20233
 OFFICIAL BUSINESS
 Penalty for Private Use \$300