



## Age Influenced Who Moved Where in the 2010s

Richelle L. Winkler, Katherine J. Curtis, Kenneth M. Johnson, and David Egan-Robertson

Where people move to and from has a lot to do with their age, and places differ in their mix of age-specific migration. Migration shapes the age structure of the population, its growth trajectories, community and economic development (i.e., the local tax base and social connections), and local needs for services. For example, a community where young people leave and older people move in has different needs (e.g. health care, accessibility, elder care) than a community where early career adults move (e.g. childcare, schools, recreation).

### KEY FINDINGS

- Early career adults moved towards cities, natural amenities, and jobs.
- Mid-career adults moved towards suburban areas and rural counties with better economies.
- Retirees moved towards sun and shores, rural outdoor recreation, lakes, hills, and mountains.

Each county is different in its mix of age-specific migration. This brief introduces a new dataset and interactive website that anyone can easily use to map or chart age-specific net migration in each decade from 1950-2020 for the places they care about. We use data from the [Net Migration Patterns for US Counties website](#) to summarize migration patterns for early, mid-, and late- career (or retirement age) adults between 2010 and 2020.

### Age Differences in Migration

Figure 1 shows net migration by age for three very different counties. Davidson, Tennessee (Nashville) grew in the 2010s, attracting large numbers of early-career adults, but generally lost population to out-migration at other ages. Dallas, Iowa (a rapidly expanding Des Moines suburb) attracted people at all ages, especially mid-career adults and children. Mohave, Arizona (Lake Havasu) was a retirement destination, but lost young adults to out-migration. Each pattern has different implications for services.

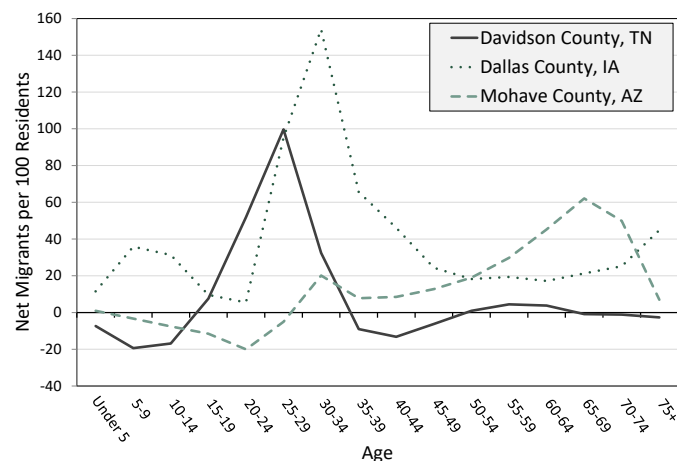


Figure 1: Net Migration by Age and County, 2010-2020  
Data Source: Egan-Robertson, et al. 2024. <https://netmigration.wisc.edu>.

## Early Career (Age 25-29) Move Towards Cities and Jobs, and Also Amenities

Early-career adults favored trendy cities with popular restaurants and entertainment, outdoor recreation and resort areas in the West (including the Colorado front range, the Lake Tahoe area, Bend, Oregon, and western Montana), and coastal areas in the Florida panhandle and Carolinas. They also moved towards places with jobs, like the North Dakota oil fields. These migrants were age 15-19 in 2010 and then age 25-29 in 2020. Top county destinations in the 2010s included: Arlington and Alexandria, VA; Washington DC; McKenzie and Williams, ND; San Francisco, CA; Summit (Breckenridge), Denver, and San Miguel (Telluride), CO; New York, NY; Nantucket, MA; Davidson (Nashville), TN; Teton (Jackson), WY; Hudson (Jersey City), NJ; and Travis (Austin), TX. People at these ages tended to leave more remote rural areas and areas with contracting or slow growing economies.

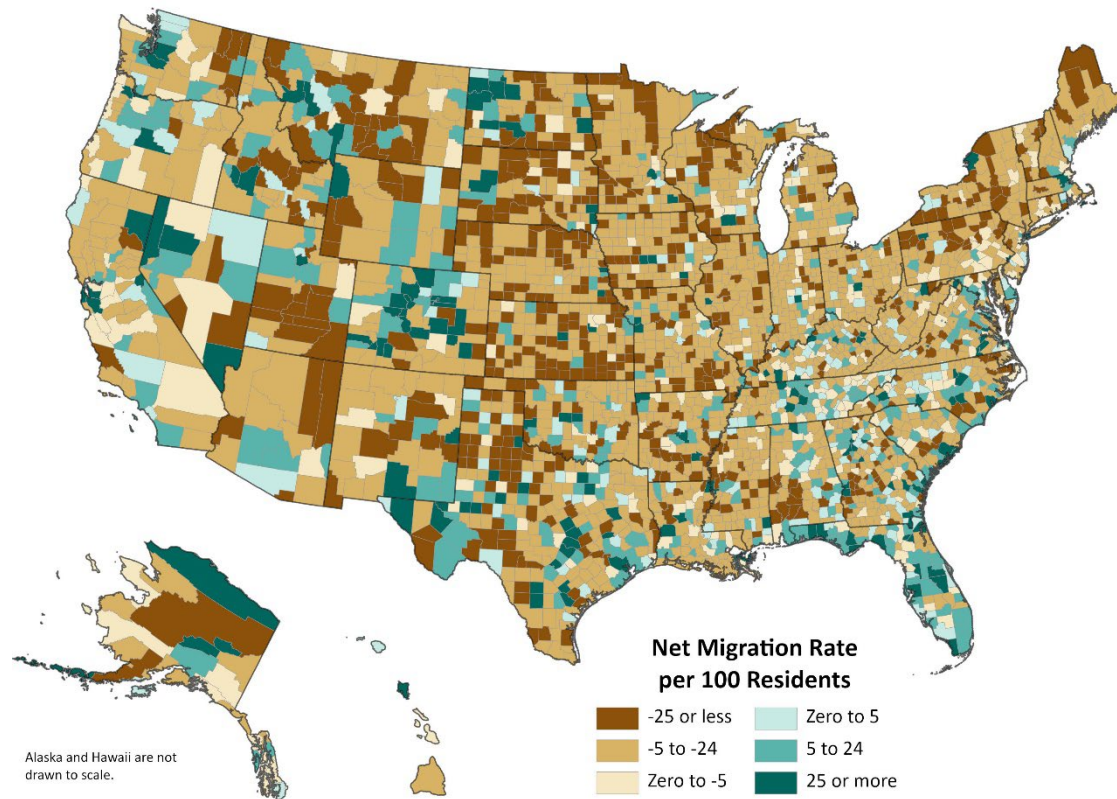
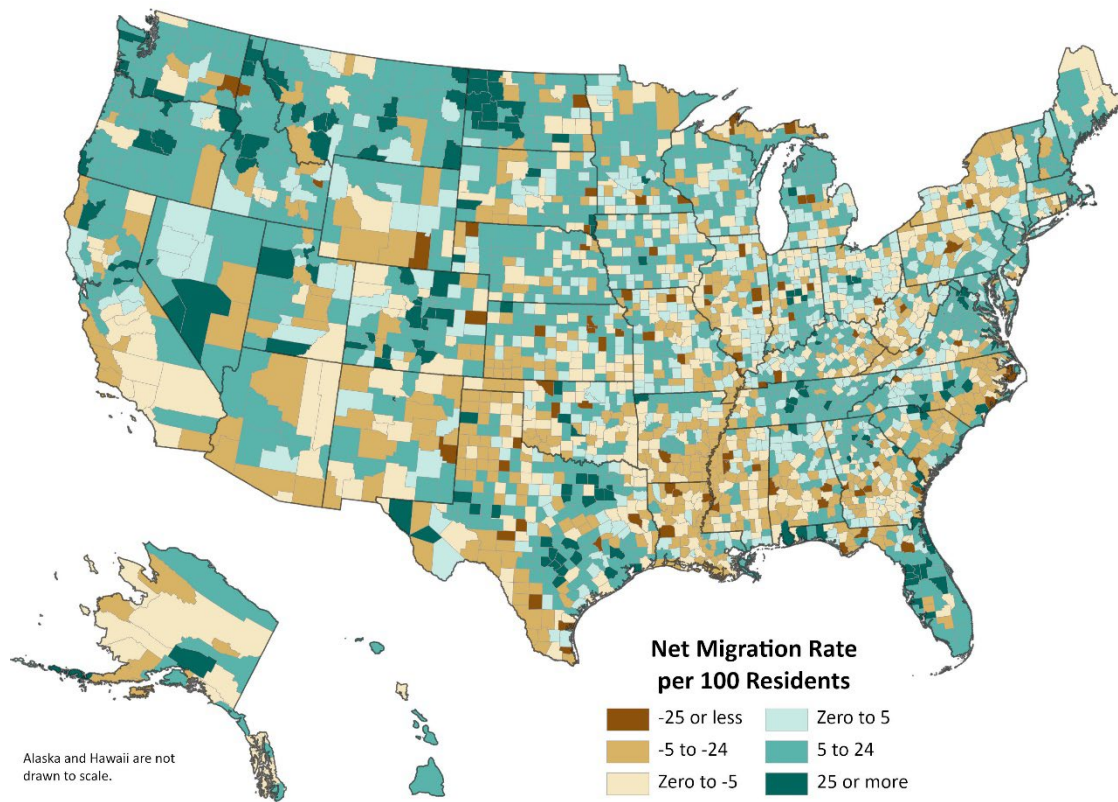


Figure 2. Net Migration Rates for Early-Career Adults (Age 25-29), 2010-2020

Data Source: Egan-Robertson, et al. 2024. <https://netmigration.wisc.edu>.

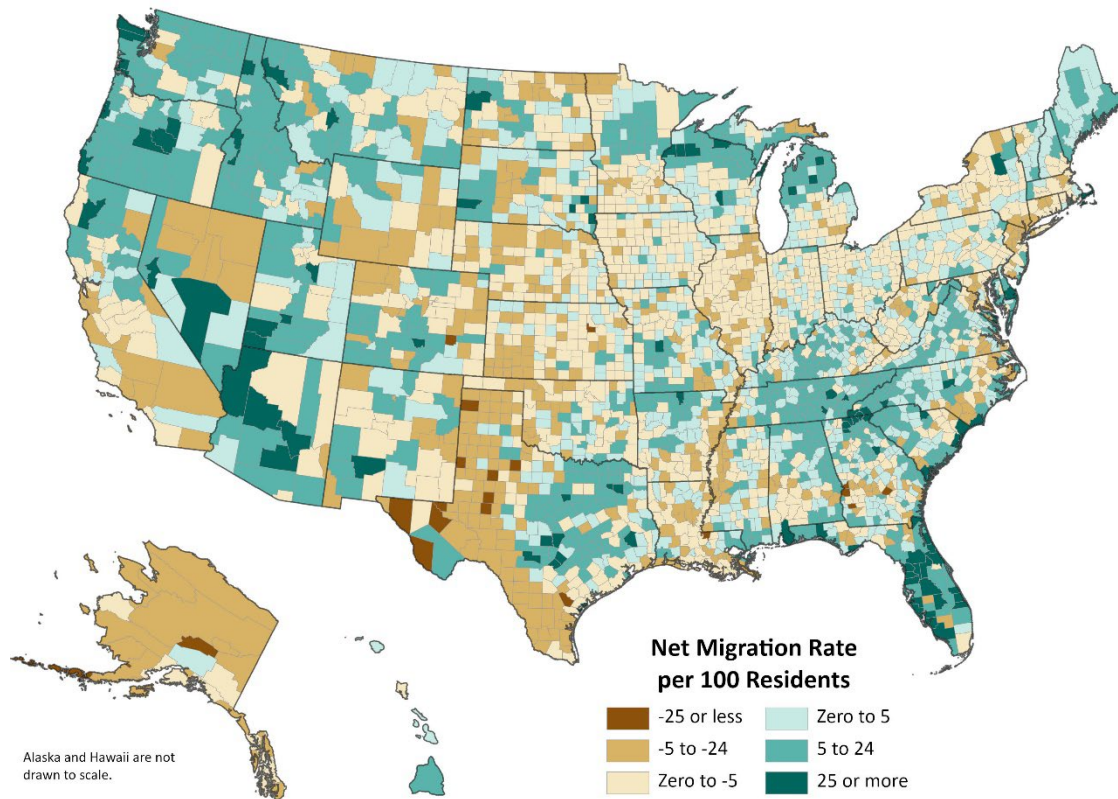
## Mid-Career (age 30-54) Move Towards Suburbs and Growing Rural Economies

Mid-career adults were age 20-44 in 2010 and then age 30-54 in 2020. They moved towards suburban counties in growing metropolitan areas, especially in the South, and to a lesser extent rural counties with stable economies and generally good schools and affordable housing. The western North Dakota region was a particularly notable destination. Top county destinations included: McKenzie, Williams, and Billings, ND; Comal and Kendall (suburban San Antonio) and Rockwall and Kaufman (suburban Dallas), TX; Bryan (suburban Savannah) and Forsyth and Oconee (suburban Atlanta), GA; St. John's (suburban Jacksonville) and Osceola (suburban Orlando), FL; Williamson and Wilson (suburban Nashville), TN; Dallas (suburban Des Moines), IA; Boone (exurban Indianapolis), IN; Boise in rural Idaho; Broadwater in rural Montana; and Wasatch in rural Utah. Mid-career adults tended to leave rural places with slower economies and some university towns.



**Figure 3. Net Migration Rates for Mid-Career Adults (age 30-54), 2010-2020**

*Data Source:* Egan-Robertson, et al. 2024. <https://netmigration.wisc.edu>.



**Figure 4. Net Migration Rates for Retirement-Age Adults (age 55-74), 2010-2020**

*Data Source:* Egan-Robertson, et al. 2024. <https://netmigration.wisc.edu>.

## Retirees (age 55-74) Move Towards Sun, Shores, and Scenery

Top county destinations for people at typical retirement ages included: much of Florida, especially Sumter, Charlotte, Flagler, Indian River, Lake, and Citrus counties; Brunswick (Wilmington), NC; Jasper (Hilton Head) and Beaufort, SC; Towns and Union (Blairsville), GA; Washington (St. George), UT; Nye (Pahrump), NV; Sussex (Rehoboth), DE; Cumberland, TN; Mohave (Lake Havasu) and Yavapai (Prescott), AZ; Pacific and Jefferson in coastal Washington; and Vilas, Burnett, and Sawyer in the Wisconsin lake country Northwoods. Retirees often favored more rural counties with natural amenities such as good weather, scenic vistas, and outdoor recreation, especially in Florida, South Carolina, Arizona, and Texas, southern Appalachia, and the Upper Great Lakes Northwoods. People at these ages tended to leave the rural and suburban Northeast and Midwest, the Great Plains, and southern California.

## What does this mean?

As these new data demonstrate, age is an important dimension of migration that has implications for the composition and wellbeing of communities across the nation. The data document the complex patterns of migration that are reshaping the population regionally and along the rural-urban continuum. They inform local planning and policy, outline needs for education and health care, and help local businesses and civic groups chart their future.

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### Data and Methods

These migration estimates were generated by the authors using data from the US Census Bureau Population Estimates Program for 2010 and 2020, and birth and death records from the National Center for Health Statistics. The 2010 population was aged forward adding the number of births and subtracting deaths by age to produce an expected population in 2020, assuming no migration. The difference between this expected 2020 population and the actual Census 2020 base population reflects net migration by age. See “Data Details” tab at <https://netmigration.wisc.edu>.

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### References

Egan-Robertson, D., K.J. Curtis, R.L. Winkler, K.M. Johnson, and C. Bourbeau. Age-Specific Net Migration Estimates for US Counties, 1950-2020. Applied Population Laboratory, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2024. Web. Accessed 1/19/2024. <https://netmigration.wisc.edu/>.

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