Age and Lifecycle Patterns Are Driving U.S. Migration Shifts

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DURHAM, N.H. – Migration to and from different parts of the United States has become a driving force underlying population redistribution in the United States. New research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire on age-related migration patterns provides a fuller understanding of the complex patterns of demographic change in the United States.

The new research is summarized in the Carsey Institute brief “Age and Lifecycle Patterns Driving U.S. Migration Shifts,” coauthored by Kenneth Johnson, senior demographer at the Carsey Institute and professor of sociology at UNH, and his colleagues Richelle Winkler, assistant professor of sociology and demography at Michigan Technological University, and Luke Rogers, a research assistant at the Carsey Institute and a doctoral student in sociology at UNH.

“These migration patterns have important implications for people, institutions, and communities of both rural and urban America, as well as for the design of policies and practices that foster the development of sustainable communities,” Johnson said.

The researchers looked at four age groups: emerging adults (ages 15 to 24), young adults (ages 25 to 29), family age (adults 30 to 49, and children ages 5 to 14), and older adults (ages 50 to 74) over the period of 2000 to 2010.

Emerging and young adults were the most mobile groups of the U.S. population during this decade, attracted to large urban areas that offered social, lifestyle, and economic opportunities. These large urban cores had a net migration gain of 2.7 million emerging and young adults, while the suburbs gained only 370,000 from these two groups during this period.

In contrast, migration for family-age adults and their dependent children generally reflected a life-cycle transition from independent living to family life associated with marriage, children, and home purchases. This group was most likely to move to suburban areas where they could find larger homes, open space, and high-quality K-12 schools. Large urban core areas lost 1.4 million family-age individuals from 2000 to 2010 while suburban areas of these large urban areas gained 3.9 million family-age residents.

Although older adults were the least mobile of these age groups, they tended to migrate to locations rich in scenic and built amenities or to relocate closer to their own adult children. These older adults were attracted to recreational areas in Florida and coastal areas of the Southeast, the foothills of the Ozarks and the Great Smokey Mountains, the lake areas in the Upper Great Lakes, and Arizona, New Mexico and parts of the Northwest and Intermountain region.
In contrast, virtually the entire urban area stretching from Boston to Washington, urban regions centered on Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland, and the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas were hotspots of net out-migration for older adults.

Rural areas dependent on agriculture saw a loss of emerging and young adults. Although these farm-dependent areas saw gains in family-age and older adults, the gains were not enough to offset the losses of out-migration of younger adults.

However, of all of the rural areas, those with extensive recreational amenities experienced the fastest growth from migration. These areas are particularly appealing to older adults, but also attract family-age adults.

“Family-age population is likely to be attracted by the economic and employment opportunities occasioned by the influx of often affluent older adults and/or the natural and built amenities in the area. The continuing influx of retirement-age adults to recreational counties has significant implications given that the ranks of those in their 50s and 60s is already swelling as the 70 million baby boomers continue to age,” Johnson said.

The Carsey Institute brief about this research is available at http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publication/731. The data are available to the public for download and interactive mapping and chart-building at www.netmigration.wisc.edu.

This research is supported by the National Institutes of Health, Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center of Child Health and Human Development (Grant Number 7R03HD069737-02.) Additional support was provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Joint Agreement 58-60000-0-0055.

This brief summarizes research presented by Johnson, Winkler, and Cheng, “Migration Signatures through the Decades: Continuity and Change in Age-Specific Net Migration in U.S. Counties.” The paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, New Orleans, on April 11, 2013.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development. The institute gives policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

**GRAPHICS**

Net Migration Trends for Selected Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties, 2000 to 2010

Migration Patterns for Older Adults, 1990 to 2010

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