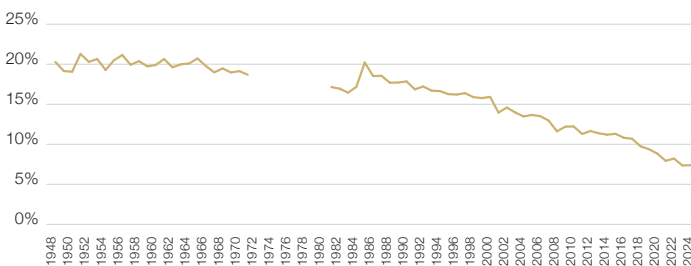


## HISTORICAL DOMESTIC MIGRATION PATTERNS: PUTTING MASSACHUSETTS IN CONTEXT

In previous editions of this newsletter, and through other Pioneer publications, we’ve discussed migration mostly through the lens of Massachusetts during and immediately following the pandemic. In this piece, however, we will seek to understand how the exodus of residents and wealth from Massachusetts fits into a historical narrative of domestic migration in the U.S.

The most important fact to note is that national migration rates have been slowing for decades, dropping precipitously beginning in the 1980s and 90s following their relative highs surrounding the post-WWII period. As can be seen in Figure 1, in 1948 over 20 percent of all U.S. residents moved primary residences, by 2024 that had dropped by more than half to just under 8 percent.

**Figure 1: Percentage of U.S. Population Moving Annually, 1948-2024**



Note: Data sourced from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 1948-2024. The years from 1972-1975 and from 1977-1980 are unavailable.

While all types of migration declined during this period, local migration experienced the largest shift. Particularly migration within the same county. In 1981 the percentage of all U.S. residents who chose to migrate within the same county was just over 10.4 percent—in 2024 it was 4.3 percent. Other

While new or better housing was the top reason of those aged 20 to 29 moving in 2024, that demographic was among the least likely to report a housing related reason overall (36.7 percent). Those aged 35 to 39 (49.7 percent) and 50 to 54 (51.5 percent) were the most likely to list a housing-related reason for moving.

**FAST FACT**

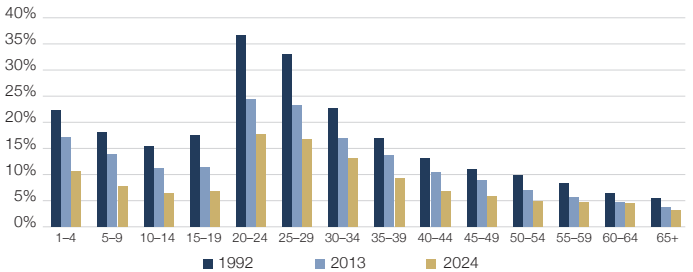
According to the CPS, nationally the top three reasons in 2024 for those aged 20 to 29 to move primary residences were: they wanted new or better housing (13.2 percent), a new job or job transfer (12.7 percent), or to establish their own household (12.3 percent).

**FAST FACT**

types of migration also fell, but not to the same extent. Migration to another state, for example, dropped from 2.8 percent to 1.3 percent. However, most of this decline occurred before 2007, after which migration to a different state held steady at around 1.5 percent, even including the small surge during the pandemic and the years that followed it. The percentage of movers to a different county within the same state fell from 2.8 percent in 1981 to 1.9 percent in 2024.

Younger demographics have historically led the way among those deciding to move. In 1992, of the individuals aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29, 36.6 and 33.1 percent moved. This compared to just 5.4 percent of those 65 or older. However, while rates of migration among older demographics have declined along with national trends, the migration of younger individuals has declined more significantly in scale. By 2024 only 17.7 percent of 20-to-24-year-olds and 16.8 percent of 20-to-29-year-olds moved—far lower than in 1992.

**Figure 3: Percent Migrating by Age in 1992, 2013, and 2024**



Note: Data sourced from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 1992; 2013; and 2024.

**IN THE NEWS**

**Brief: Humanitarian Migrants Drove Mass. Population Surge**

**Studies: Touted Mass Growth Mostly Refugees; Out-Migration Highly Motivated**

## THE MACRO FACTORS LEADING TO THE SHIFT

In addition to asking whether they had moved, respondents to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey are also asked about their reasons for moving. Nearly 20 different responses are recorded, including proximity to work, wanting to own a home rather than rent, and health reasons. For brevity we will refer to four main categories: housing, family, employment, and other.

Housing has long been the dominant reason for moves. In 1999 it made up nearly half of the reasons given, in 2024 it accounted for a smaller but still significant share (41 percent). The primary response under that umbrella in both years was "wanted new or better house/apartment." Family reasons were the second most chosen, making up 25.8 percent of responses in 1999 and 21.9 percent in 2024. Employment-related reasons also grew during that period, from 16.7 percent to 18.3 percent. Although, the largest growth in response was "other reason," which made up only 8 percent of responses in 1999 but 19.3 percent in 2024—creating greater ambiguity in recent shifts.

[Economists](#) point to several explanations for the sea change in migration patterns since WWII. They include:

- The U.S. has become older and individuals are more likely to be homeowners (younger people and renters are more mobile and have higher migration rates)
- There are fewer single-earner households, making it more difficult for an entire household to relocate
- Local and regional labor markets have become less distinct in the kinds of jobs they offer
- The Great Recession
- Changing housing markets and reduced affordability
- Homeowners in expensive urban states have become less responsive to local home prices

Whatever the exact reasons for these trends, one fact remains clear: Massachusetts is an outlier. Even in the context of slowing domestic migration—the country now has the lowest migration rates since at least the 1940's—the Bay State continues to show elevated domestic migration numbers. Some of this can be attributed to the circumstances surrounding the pandemic, especially remote work. But according to the CPS data shown in Figure 1, those increases amounted to only a small bump nationally. Since 2023 national migration rates have continued their long decline. In comparison, the number of Massachusetts residents moving out of the state each year remains elevated.

### DATA NOTE

**Data is from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC). ASEC data is released every March, each year in the data refers to a span from March of the previous year to March of the year specified. CPS state level data has too great a margin of error (smaller sample size), thus our analysis has a national focus only. Changes were made to the CPS migration question in 2004. The Census advises that "caution should be used when comparing numbers/rates of movers within the same county and from a different county between the 2000 to 2005 period with other periods."**

## IF YOU MISSED IT

Previous editions of the newsletter covered:

- [State-to-State Migration Trends 2005-2023](#)
- [International Inflows into Massachusetts](#)
- [Migration trends for remote workers](#)
- [County population change in New England, 2020-2023](#)
- [2024 Census population estimates](#)

## STAY TUNED!

Upcoming editions of Mapping Mass Migration will utilize the American Community Survey and include analyses of:

- Migration by educational attainment and income
- Migration by occupation
- Migration by race and age