

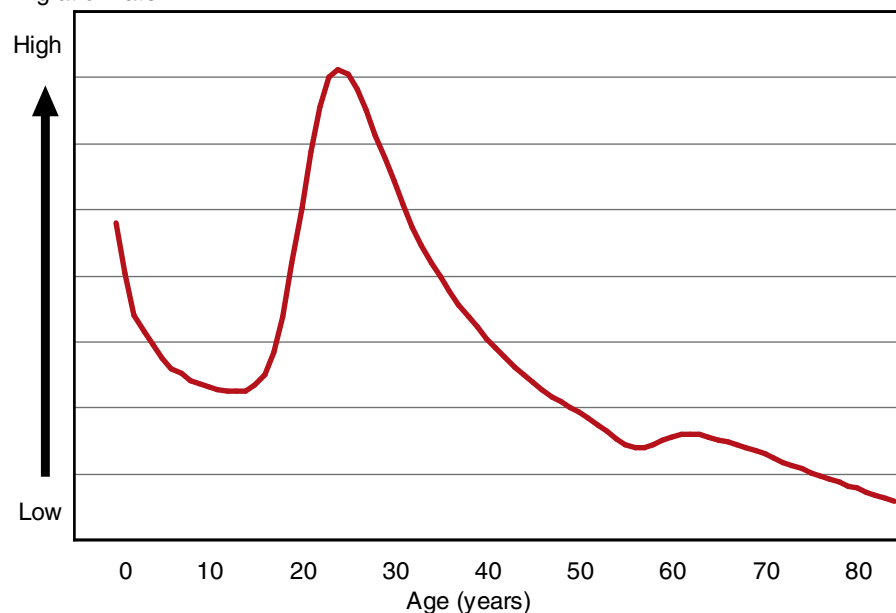
## Migration as a Life-Cycle Event

Each individual or family makes unique migration decisions, but commonalities exist at different life stages that affect the number of people moving and their destination choices (Taeuber, 1966; Stapleton, 1980; McHugh and Mings, 1996). Migration rates for children (who mostly follow parental decisions) decline from birth to very low levels during high school and then rise precipitously (fig. 2). Most migration occurs when people are in their twenties as they finish college, make initial career decisions, serve in the military, form families, or simply act out of a sense of restlessness. Nonmetro population loss from net migration is heavily concentrated among young adults, beginning with high school graduation (fig. 3). Urban destinations dominate among young singles seeking jobs, affordable rental housing, social opportunities, and creative cultural environments.

Figure 2

### Percent migrating by age

Migration rate



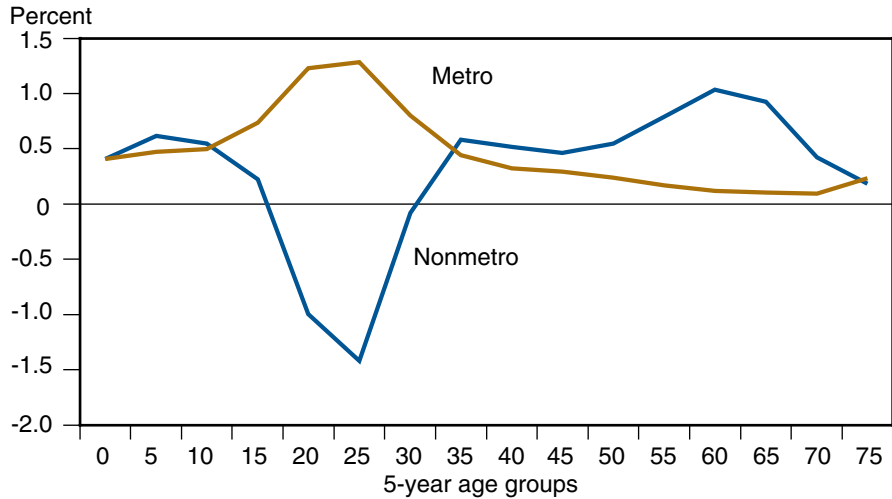
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, using Pandit (1997a).

Migration rates decrease steadily and shift geographically through the working-age years. People in their midforties are half as likely to move as people in their early thirties. Individuals and families settle down as career decisions become more firm and children enter teenage years. Married couples with children place a higher premium on residential space, better schools, feelings of personal safety, and other qualities associated with suburban settings. Since 1960, nonmetro population loss from net outmigration has dropped to near zero after age 30 and even switched to gains in the 1970s and 1990s (Johnson et al., 2005). As families settle down, a significant proportion of return migration to nonmetro counties occurs and fewer people choose to leave rural and small towns.

For about 15-20 years after people reach their midfifties, the propensity to migrate stops decreasing and, in some cases, increases slightly. At the same time, the direction of migration shifts markedly toward lower density

Figure 3

**Average annual net migration rates by age, 1980-2000**



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from USDA-funded cooperative agreements (Fuguitt and Beale, 1996; Voss et al., 2004).

settings. Many suburban, “empty-nest” couples downsize and move closer to city centers to take advantage of cultural amenities, while others seek recreational opportunities, lower housing costs, increased feelings of personal safety, or a perceived slower pace of life by moving to the countryside (Glasgow and Brown, 2006; Litwak and Longino, 1987). As they age toward retirement, Americans are still much less prone to move than they are in their twenties, but they are much more prone to choose rural and small-town destinations when they do move.

Rural migration is highest early in the retirement process and declines sharply as physical activity becomes more limited and health care needs increase. The oldest baby boomers turn 74 years old in 2020 and, if long-term migration patterns persist, will be less likely to make moves to rural settings, will be more likely to move back to metro areas, and often will move to be closer to caretaker relatives.

Many people develop strong ties to particular places over an extended period while vacationing or visiting family and friends (Johnson and Rasker, 1995). Thus, retirement-related migration may begin long before retirement and progress slowly over several years rather than occur as a discrete, one-time event. Couples often purchase a second home or simply visit the same location annually or on weekends with their children, then visit more often and for longer stretches as children leave home. The Internet has greatly facilitated work from more remote locations and contributed to a notable increase in permanent moves to second-home destinations in the 1990s (Beyers and Lindahl, 1996; Beyers and Nelson, 2000).

Age patterns of migration are quite stable across diverse geographic settings, but the strong influence of employment change and other economic trends makes it difficult to predict all aspects of future population trends. Business cycles and industrial restructuring affect the size and direction of migration streams more than they affect patterns of fertility or mortality—the other two components of population change. Economy-driven migration volatility

tends to concentrate in younger age groups rather than in the life-cycle stages the baby boom cohort is currently entering. However, boomers have demonstrated a marked affinity for pioneering new migration paths that differ from those of preceding generations. Their migration history will undoubtedly influence their future decisions.