

**Millennial Migration:
How has the Great Recession affected the migration of a generation as it came of age?**

Megan J. Benetsky and Alison Fields

*Journey to Work and Migration Statistics Branch
Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division
U.S. Census Bureau*

Introduction

The most common reasons for moving in the U.S. are generally job or housing related and usually, when economic conditions are good, we see a stable rate of migration. However, with the Great Recession¹ spurred by a housing and credit crisis an associated rise in unemployment, migration in the U.S. slowed (Frey 2009). This dip is seen in the Current Population Survey's annual mover rate (Ihrke, Faber, and Koerber 2011).

Young adults aged 20-29 have the highest migration rate of any age group² and may also be hardest hit by the Great Recession. Given the bleak job outlook, constrained college funds, and housing crisis, their migration numbers may have declined and demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic migration patterns may have changed. This paper will draw on life course theory to examine migration patterns of young adults that may be distinct with respect to normative adulthood transitions. It will focus on potential gender and race and origin differences that impact the relationship of norms of transition to internal migration. This paper carries this a step further to better understand the demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic forces behind potential new migration patterns and relationships brought on by the Great Recession. We will address the following specific questions:

- 1) Did the migration rate for young adults change?
- 2) Was the change in migration rate greater for young adults than for others?
- 3) Was this change different across demographic groups?
- 4) Was this difference associated with changes in other reasons for migration (school, work, marriage, children)?
- 5) Was this change due to the Great Recession?

Background

The U.S. has a relatively stable rate of migration, fluctuating between 17 and 14 percent from 1981 to 2005.³ The most common reasons for moving are job or housing related. When these economic conditions deteriorate, the migration rate declines. The most recent and disastrous

¹ The Great Recession officially began in December of 2007 and ended in June of 2009 according to the National Bureau of Economic Research: <http://www.nber.org/cycles.html>

² Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2012 Table 1
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/migration/data/cps/cps2012.html>

³ www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-567.pdf

economic watershed moment, the Great Recession,⁴ was spurred by both a credit and housing crisis. As expected, the migration rate dipped (Ihrke, Faber, and Koerber 2011; Frey 2009) as unemployment increased and money became tight.

Young adults are the most mobile population in the U.S. As Schachter (2004) notes, in 2003 the migration rate of 20-24 year olds was more than double that of the national average (30.1 percent versus 14.2 percent).

Millennials may be among the hardest hit by the Great Recession. An analysis by Benetsky and Koerber (2012) showed that over half (50.4%) of all county-to-county migrants were young, between the ages of 15 and 34. Those who are young may be especially vulnerable during the recession and may have changed their migration behavior as they are more likely to be on the job market or are prospective first-time homeowners.

Historically, the U.S. Census Bureau has previously reported on the migration of the young, single, and college-educated rather than just the young (see Franklin 2003, Goworowska and Gardner 2012). However, Franklin (2003) noted that marital status was not associated with a different migration rate than other young adults. The young are much more likely to move in general, regardless of education or marital status.

“Young” was defined in these previous reports as those aged 25 to 39. This decision was likely made to maximize the number of migrants who completed a bachelor’s degree in their sample. However, as our paper does not focus on movers with college degrees, we have set our minimum age at the onset of adulthood. We also decreased the minimum age to 34 because 39 seems to approximate middle age rather than young adulthood; many life course transitions are completed by age 39 as well. We believe our age range captures those who are approaching or have recently completed at least some life course transitions (graduating from high school, getting a job, going to college, graduating from college, getting married, or having children) rather than capturing those who have likely completed these milestones.

This paper analyzes demographic, economic, household, and geographic changes among young adults who moved, and where they move from the years during the recession to the years after the recession. Soon the U.S. Census Bureau will release a report that provides a descriptive framework of the migration patterns of young adults across these years. This paper continues this work, and uses logistic regressions to better understand which Millennials were more likely to move during or after the recession and where, and also what effects the recession had on this highly mobile population.

Data and methodology

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationally representative, ongoing survey that produces annual estimates of socioeconomic, demographic, and housing characteristics at the national and subnational level. The ACS 3-Year Estimates are a multiyear dataset, collected over

⁴ The Great Recession officially began in December of 2007 and ended in June of 2009 according to the National Bureau of Economic Research: <http://www.nber.org/cycles.html>

a 36-month period, that allow for more detailed analysis of smaller populations across smaller levels of geography. Multiyear ACS datasets are an aggregate of years of data, that represent an average across these years. To measure migration, respondents are asked where they lived one year ago.

This analysis will use two different sets of ACS 3-Year Estimates, first limiting the age to 18-34. The 2007-2009 ACS is used to approximate the years of the Great Recession. The second, 2010-2012, is used to analyze the most recent data in the years after the recession. The Census Bureau recommends the comparison of multiyear estimates only when the data years are not overlapping, as the 2007-2009 and 2010-2012 datasets are not.⁵

First, using the 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 3-Year Estimates, the paper will examine the predictors of moving during post-recession years using demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables. This provides the most recent data at the metro level. Then, using the 2007-2009 ACS 3-Year Estimates and the same predictor variables as the first model, we will examine what was associated with moving during the recession years.

As discussed earlier, the most common reasons for moving for young adults is job or education related. This analysis also aims to look at household composition, as well as group quarters. Who Millennials are living with, whether it is alone, with roommates (on campus, off campus, or while they are not enrolled in school), with a spouse or partner, have been discussed a great deal in the news. Most of the interest in who Millennials are living with comes from the fact that the choice to live with roommates, to cohabit with a partner, or to move back with mom and dad is largely economically driven.

Finally, we will model the predictors of migration for those older than 35 and compare them to Millennials. The Great Recession affected overall migration patterns, but there is reason to believe that a period effect like the Great Recession will influence the migration of a cohort in the middle of life course transitions more so, and/or in different ways, than older cohorts who have already completed many traditional markers of adulthood. We think this may cause age to act as a migratory buffer for older cohorts, both during and after the recession.

Proposed analysis

Question One: Did the migration rate for young adults change?

To answer our first research question, we will present some descriptive data to show migration rate time trends for young adults using 2007-2009 and 2010-2012 ACS data.

Question Two: Was the change in migration rate greater for young adults than for others?

Migration rates across age groups will be shown using the 2007-2009 and 2010-2012 ACS and compared to young adults' migration rates. This will be presented in both raw and relative terms.

⁵ http://www.census.gov/acs/www/guidance_for_data_users/comparing_data/

Question Three: Was this change different across demographic groups?

Additional descriptive data will be used to show migration differences by sex, race, and Hispanic origin, nativity, and citizenship using the 2007-2009 and 2010-2012 ACS data. Then, using logistic regression, we will predict the likelihood of migration using these standard demographic variables.

Question Four: Was the change in migration associated with changes in other reasons for migration (poverty, school, work, marriage, children)?

The second model will then include demographic controls as well as poverty status, educational attainment, school enrollment status, employment status, marital status, household type, presence of children.⁶ Again, the models will be run for both the 2007-2009 and 2010-2012 datasets to compare the predictors during and after the recession.

Question Five: Was this change due to the Great Recession?

As discussed above, coefficients of predictors of migration will be compared across time, between recession years and post-recession years. A chi-square analysis will be used to determine if the coefficients are significantly different from one another, implying the Great Recession impacted the decision to move.

Preliminary results⁷

The figures below show the percentage point change in migration rates from the years during the recession to the years following the recession. Figure one shows though migration rates for both males and females declined between time periods, males had steeper declines in their migration rates across all young ages compared to females. Millennials aged 18-24 experienced the largest decline compared to their 25-29 and 30-34 year old peers. Those 30-34 had a very small decline in migration relative to their peers.

Figure two illustrates the percentage point change in migration rates by race. Every race experienced declines in migration except for Asians and Other in the 30-34 age group. American Indian/Alaskan Natives experienced the largest declines in every age group. Asians had small declines in their migration rates, while Whites, Blacks, and Other experienced large declines, especially among 18-24 year olds.

Figure three shows the decline in non-Hispanic and Hispanic migration rates. Hispanic or Latino migration rates declined less than the rates of non-Hispanic for all age groups, but the difference is apparent for the 25-34 age group.

⁶ We acknowledge that listing the independent variables this way appears to be an order of life transitions. ACS data are not longitudinal, and we are not implying that we have researched an order or causality to these life events. Rather, we are looking at these life events concurrently.

⁷ No statistical testing has been done on these figures. Differences mentioned in the text or implied in the charts may or may not be significant.

Figure 1. Percentage point difference in migration rates from postrecession to recession, by age groups and sex

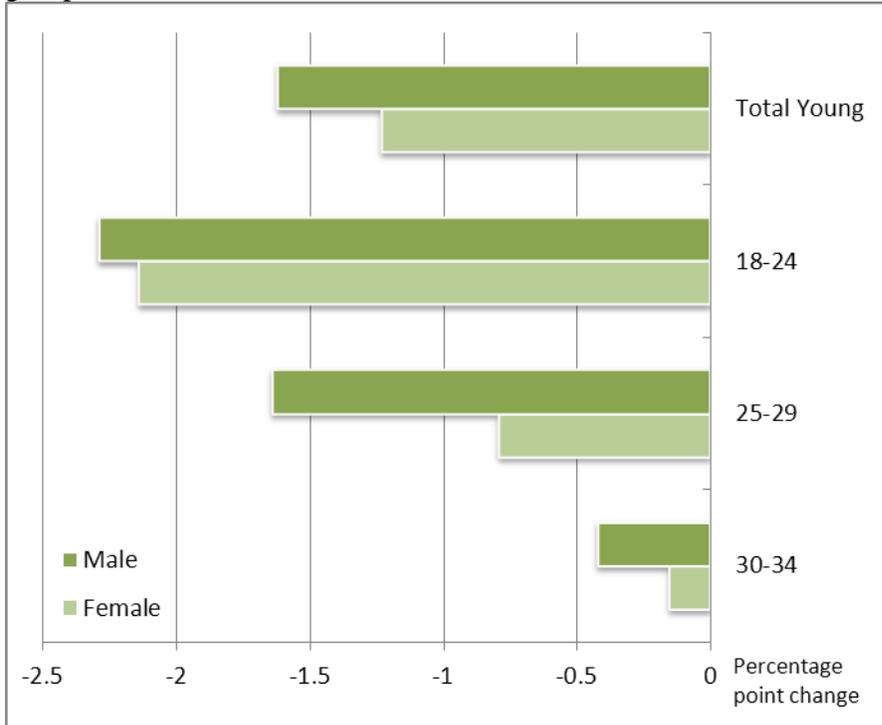


Figure 2. Percentage point difference in migration rates from postrecession to recession, by age groups and race

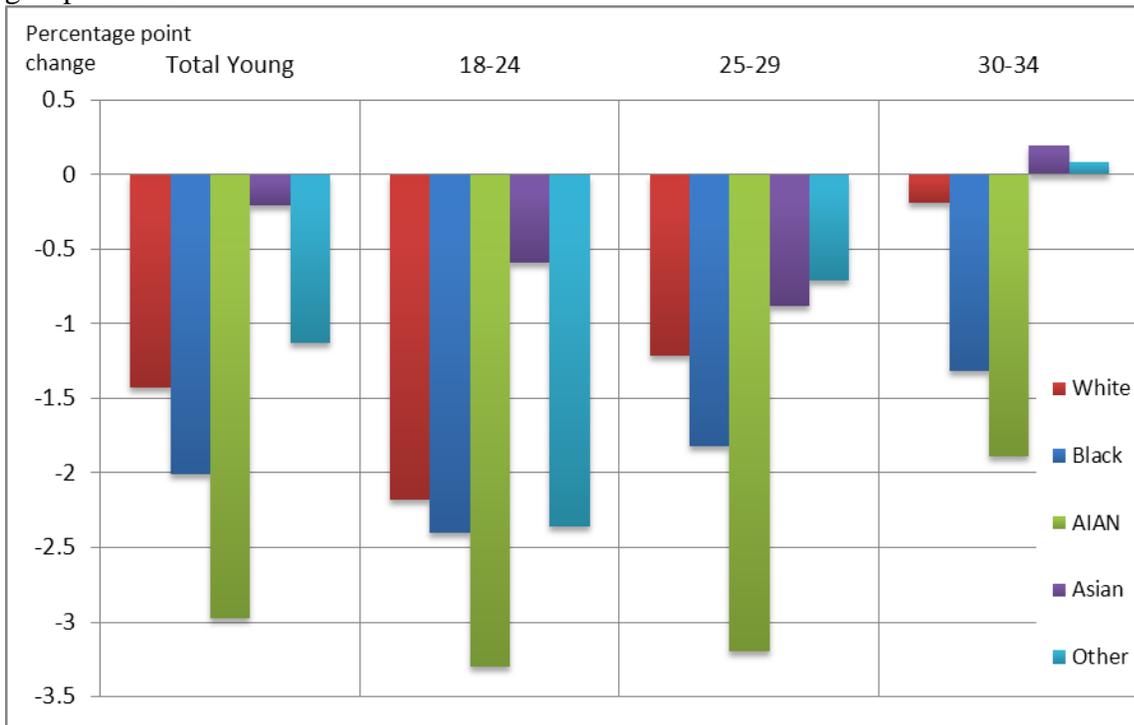
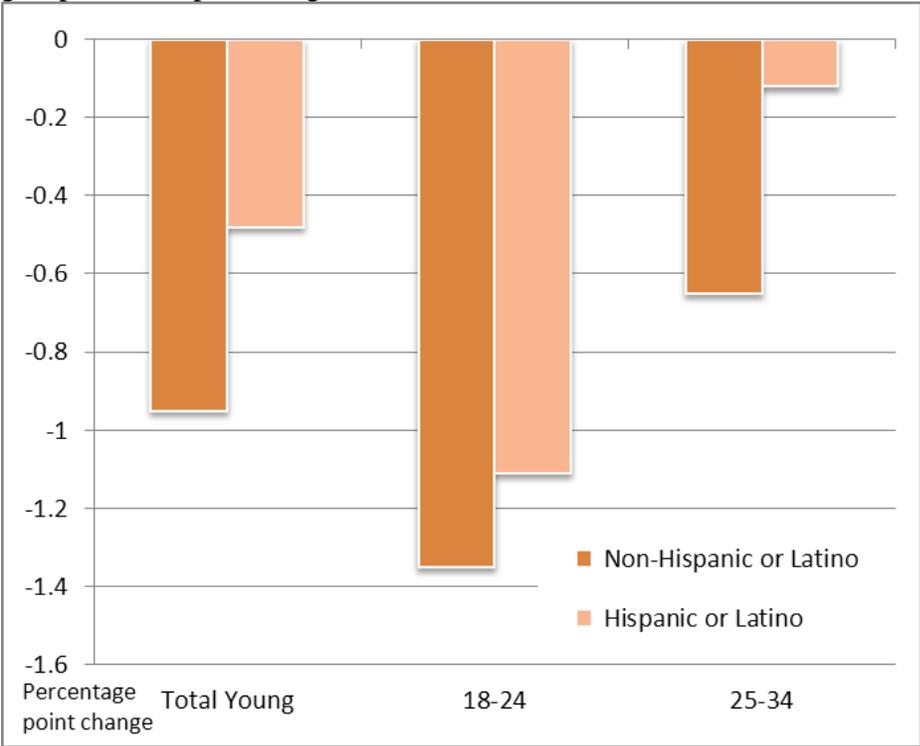


Figure 3. Percentage point difference in migration rates from postrecession to recession, by age groups and Hispanic origin



Works Cited

- Benetsky, M. and W. Koerber. 2012. *How do the ACS five-year migration data compare to the 2000 Census migration data?* U.S. Census Bureau; Social, Economic and Housing Statistics Division Working Paper 2012-13.
- Franklin, R. S. 2003. *Migration of the Young, Single, and College Educated: 1995-2000*. U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000 Special Reports, CENSR-12.
- Frey, W. 2009. *The Great American Migration Slowdown: Regional and Metropolitan Dimensions*. Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings Institution.
- Goworowska, J. and T. K. Gardner. 2012. *Historical Migration of the Young, Single, and College Educated: 1965-2000*. U.S. Census Bureau: Population Division Working Paper, No. 94.
- Ihrke, D., Faber, C., and W. Koerber. 2011. *Geographic Mobility 2008 to 2009*. U.S. Census Bureau; Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division Report P20-565.