Moving into Alabama

Migration Aids Recent Population Growth

Between 1990 and 2000, Alabama experienced a larger influx of new residents than during any prior decade of the 20th century. In fact, only in the 1970s had more people moved into the state than moved out. A net gain of 209,792 in-migrants from both other states and abroad accounted for 51.6 percent of Alabama’s population increase of 406,513. The remaining population growth came from natural increase, with an estimated 616,510 intercensal births exceeding 419,789 deaths for a net gain of 196,721 residents.

Forty-seven of the state’s 67 counties saw their populations boosted by in-migration during the 1990s. Suburban counties of large metro areas were among the biggest gainers from migration—Autauga, Baldwin, Blount, Elmore, St. Clair, and Shelby counties all netted more than 5,000 residents. Smaller metropolitan areas, including Auburn, Decatur, Florence, Huntsville, and Tuscaloosa, and several newly-defined micropolitan area counties—Cullman, Jackson, and Marshall—were also popular destinations for those moving in from out-of-state or from another Alabama county.

However, 20 Alabama counties had more residents move out than in between 1990 and 2000. Many of these counties are economically distressed; over half faced unemployment rates substantially above the state average throughout the decade. Most are in or adjacent to the historically depressed Black Belt region. In addition, the central urban counties of the three largest metros—Jefferson, Mobile, and Montgomery—all experienced net out-migration. And two counties, Calhoun and Dale, saw their residents dwindle due to military base closings and reductions. Rates of net migration vary widely, as shown on the map. In Baldwin County about 38 people moved in during the decade for every 100 residents, while in Sumter County almost 14 of every 100 residents moved out.

The 1990s was the only decade when migration added to both the state’s white and nonwhite populations. An estimated net gain of 93,525 white residents amounted to 44.6 percent of the migration stream. The 116,267 nonwhite net in-migrants accounted for 55.4 percent of the total. This category encompasses all racial groups except white; in particular, individuals who marked black alone and those who selected more than one race or some other race on their census form. Hispanics figure prominently in the later group, as they tended to regard their ethnicity as a race. Counties including Blount, Cullman, DeKalb, Franklin, Marshall, and Winston that saw nonwhite rates of net migration in excess of 100 all showed rapidly growing Hispanic populations between 1990 and 2000. Migration by race also reveals that the three urban metropolitan counties of Jefferson, Mobile, and Montgomery saw a net gain of nonwhite migrants, although it was not enough to offset the loss of white residents.

Most Age Groups Draw New Residents

Almost every age group saw its numbers grow from migration during the 1990s. Alabama’s steady employment gains between 1990 and 1998 likely helped bring in work-
ing-aged adults and their children. Sizeable additions were seen in the adult population aged 35 to 54 in 2000. Estimates show that over 87,000 more individuals in this age range moved in than moved out during the 1990s. And net migration added over 60,000 children and teens aged 10 to 19. With migration gains continuing among 20 to 24 year olds, Alabama does not appear to be experiencing an outflow of recent high school and college graduates.

The only significant out-migration of Alabama residents occurred among 25 to 29 year olds, while net migration was essentially flat for the 30 to 34 age group. And the number of children aged 0 to 9 added by migration was well below the number of older children, suggesting that adults establishing their careers and beginning families are the group most likely to seek opportunities outside the state, perhaps later returning to work and raise their children in Alabama.

**Migration Trends Follow Jobs**

Migration was not evenly distributed throughout the 1990s. Estimates based on Internal Revenue Service address change data, Medicare enrollments, and information on immigration from abroad show migration into Alabama beginning the decade positively but peaking between July 1992 and July 1993. Although tapering off, migration held up fairly well through July 1998. But as jobs in Alabama fell from 1998 to 1999, so did the net influx of residents. Migration turned negative for the two years from 1999 to 2001 before rebounding to a slight gain of about 1,500 from 2001 to 2002. An increased inflow of foreign immigrants is keeping the numbers from looking worse. States, including Florida and Texas, that sent Alabama residents in the first half of the 1990s are now net recipients of Alabama out-migrants. Since interstate moves are often work-related, in-migration trends should strengthen when the state’s employment prospects pick up.

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