

CHARRED: A firefighter battled a blaze in New South Wales, Australia, as the heat wave that has gripped the country began to move north toward Brisbane, where temperatures are expected to hit 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

Americans on Move Amid Torpid Recove

By JOSH MITCHELL

Americans began striking out for greener pastures at a pace not seen since before the recession crippled job prospects, hobbled home sales and kept many stuck in place.

About 3.9% of the population, or 11.8 million people, moved to a different county in 2011, new Census figures show. That was the highest level since before the recession, and up from 3.5% in 2010 and 2009—the lowest level since the government began the

tally in 1948.

Movement between counties largely reflects people moving because of jobs, demographers said. Overall, the increase signals both a healthier economy and future growth because it means more workers are being matched with jobs that suit their skills.

However, the 3.9% rate remains low historically, fueling debate about the implications for the economy. The census data don't indicate whether it rose again in 2012.

Anecdotal reports from mov-

ing companies suggest may have held steady from 2011.

It is too soon to tell between counties will to rise. The increase is fleeting, reflecting demand among young and retirees frozen in place by the recession, said Kenneth J. Frawley, a demographer at the University of New Hampshire.

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◆ California's birthrate tumbled, a report fin

Americans Get Moving Despite

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Moreover, the rate of moves between counties had generally declined for many years before the recent recession.

Still, the 2011 increase is "one of the many indicators showing that the worst of the recession is probably over and we're starting to inch back," said William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.

Among those moving more were 25-to-29-year-olds, indicating that many young people who were stymied by the weak labor market of recent years were finding jobs and moving on with their lives, said Mr. Frey.

Daniel Stein, 26 years old, moved to Washington early last year, taking a job as a purchasing manager for a federal agency and pocketing a substantial raise. Before then, the Detroit native worked for an accounting firm and lived mostly with his parents after graduating from Michigan State University in 2008.

"It seemed like a good opportunity to grow, whether it's the private sector or the public sector," Mr. Stein said of the move.

Retirees also began to move

more in 2011, Mr. Johnson said.

Among the states that gained population in 2011 from domestic moves—rather than from immigration or births—were Florida and Nevada, according to a separate Census survey of moves in and out of states. Both Florida and Nevada are recovering from the housing bust. Oil-boom states like North Dakota, also saw gains, Census said.

It's too soon to tell if moves between counties will continue to rise.

One of the strengths of the U.S. economy after World War II was the relative willingness and ease with which workers relocated for brighter employment opportunities. Economists say the better match between skills and jobs has helped make U.S. workers more productive. The U.S. rate of movement between counties peaked at 7.1% in 1950 and stayed above 6% through 1991.

The U.S. rate drifted lower in the 1990s and fell steeply through the 2000s. The 2011 increase in inter-county moves was the first in a decade.

The U.S. mobility rate—a broader measure that includes movement of any distance—also declined during the 2000s. It is still about twice the level of countries such as Greece, Italy, Poland and the Czech Republic, according to a 2011 paper in the Journal of Economic Perspectives. But it is now roughly on par with levels in Great Britain and France.

"The U.S. is almost alone among developed countries in experiencing this decline," said Abigail Wozniak, a University of Notre Dame economist who wrote the paper along with Federal Reserve economists Raven Molloy and Christopher L. Smith. "That makes us a little bit concerned."

Several factors could be contributing to the long-term decline in U.S. movement between counties. It could be partly due to the aging of the population, with middle-aged workers and retirees less likely to move than people in their 20s, some economists say. In addition, the increase in two-earner households has made it harder for some families to relocate.

Ms. Wozniak said the long-term trend appears to be linked to a decline in pay increases that workers receive when they switch employers. Smaller raises give workers less incentive to switch jobs and move house.

The rate of moves between states has fallen across the U.S. population since the 1980s, and the differences between demographic groups have persisted over time. For example, people ages 18 through 24 move around more than people in other age groups. People born in the U.S. move at a slightly higher rate than foreign-born residents. The rate is lower for households with two earners than one, and for those with children than those

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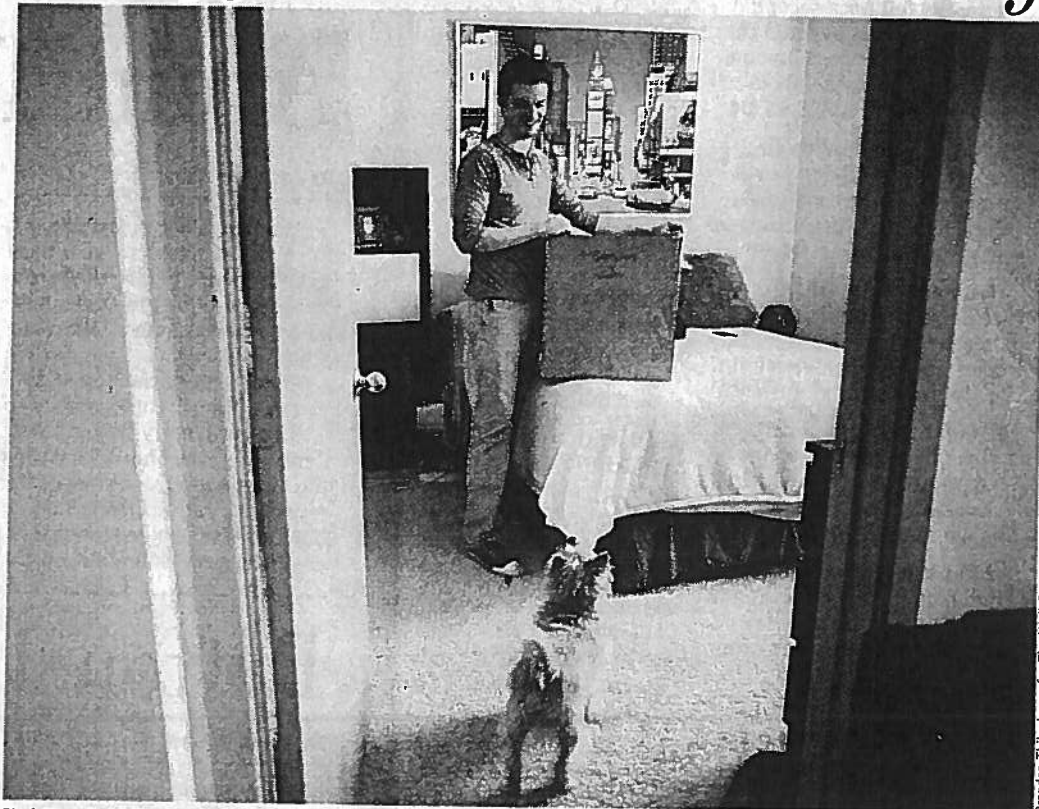
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te Sluggish Economic Recovery



Brandon Thibodeaux for The Wall Street Journal

Ted Stanfield III sorted through items recently at his home in Dallas. He moved from Austin for a new job.

without.

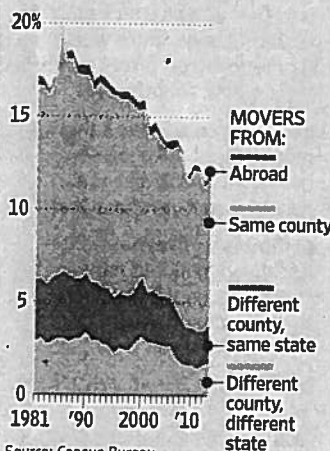
Ted Stanfield III, a financial analyst in the public health-care system, recently moved to Dallas from Austin, landing a 25% raise with a new employer. Mr. Stanfield, 29, has a bachelor's degree. He isn't married and has no children.

Mr. Stanfield said he would have preferred to stay in Austin, mainly for the vibrant music scene and relaxed pace of life. But, he said the Austin job market for people his age is very competitive. "It just seemed like more opportunities were here," in Dallas, said Mr. Stanfield.

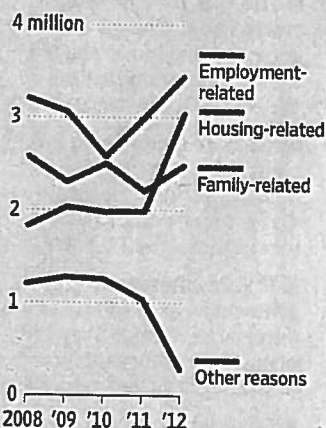
Some analysts say the long-term decline in mobility isn't necessarily bad for the economy. Research in 2012 by Sam Schulhofer-Wohl, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, and Princeton University economist Greg Kaplan concluded the long-term drop was driven primarily by two factors. First, regional economies have become diverse, offering more variety in employment and taking away the incentive for many

Fresh Start

Share of U.S. residents one year or older who made each type of move



Broad reasons why Americans 16 years or older moved to a different county



The Wall Street Journal

Americans to move. Second, thanks to the Internet and less-expensive travel, people have become better informed about different parts of the country and can research possible moves, ac-

cording to their National Bureau of Economic Research working paper. That prevents workers from making repeat moves to find a better fit with their job, the economists concluded.