

How Many People Move Each Year – and Who Are They?

By David Bancroft Avrck

Over the past quarter century I've heard dozens of different statistics about the percentage of people that move every year. These guesstimates have varied from a low of 10 percent to a high of 25 percent. When people move, your database takes a hit. So let's look at who moves and why.

Using the information provided by the U. S. Census Bureau, let's clear up the confusion and misinformation. Out of a population of 282,556,000 people, 40,093,000 moved. That's an overall percentage of 14.19 percent annually.

These 40-plus-million people break down as follows:

23,468,000 moved within the same county,
7,728,000 moved to a different county within the same state,
7,628,000 moved to a different state, and
1,269,000 moved to a different country.

The percentage of population that moves, when broken down by age, varies considerably – from a low of 1.55 percent to a high of 17.84 percent. Not only does the number of moves vary by age, so does the distance of the move.

Around 4 percent of those over the age of 65 will move to a new county, yet approximately 30 percent of those aged 20-29 will move to a new county.

Because there are so many Americans, even a small percentage represents a large quantity of people. If you consider a move outside of the same county a "long-distance" move – there are 17 million annual long-distance moves, with over a million of these moves outside the country.

The major new move activity takes place within the 18-34 year olds, with people in their 20s representing the highest concentration. Once people reach their 50s, their move rate is minimal. And in people over the age of 70, the move percentages are below 2 percent annually.

Couples with young children are the most likely to move a long distance. As people get older, the percentage who move decreases consistently. There are two exceptions to this trend. When people reach age 65, there is an increase in both the percentage of moves, and distance of the move – this is likely due to retirement. When people reach age 85-plus, there is an increase in the percentage of moves, and a decrease in the distance of the move. This is possibly due to a move to an assisted living facility.

There is also a difference between the sexes. In the 20-24 age group, 32 percent of females will move each year, yet only 28 percent of males. By the age of 30-34, the percentages are almost identical: 20.3 for females and 19.3 for males. By age 40 this reverses, with 11.28 percent for females and 12.26 percent for males.

It is critical for a list owner to understand these statistics. You can see how quickly a mailing list becomes stale. Nearly 33 percent of the people who move do not report their new address to the U.S. Postal Service, the compiler of the National Change of Address (NCOA^{Link}) file. Because of narrow restrictions regarding the use of the NCOA^{Link} file, and the unreported moves, that list updating process probably catches only 50 percent of the new moves.

Some of the "new move" lists on the market combine multiple sources and can be used to identify a majority of new movers.

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