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Moving Past Net Migration: Demographic Characteristics of Utah's Recent Migrants

Migration is becoming a more reliable component of Utah's population growth. Migrants are demographically different from the rest of Utah, contributing to the changing demographics of the state.

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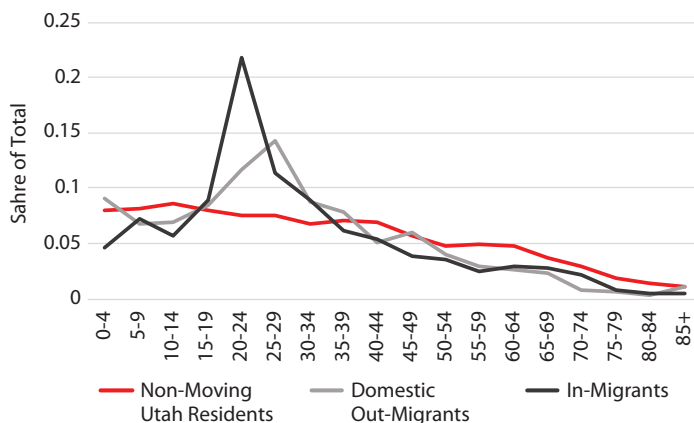
Moving Past Net Migration: Demographic Characteristics of Utah's Recent Migrants

Analysis in Brief

Migration is becoming a more consistent component of Utah's population growth as births decline. Most standard population estimation work focuses on net migration, the difference between in and out migration. However, net migration estimates cannot provide detail about gross in and out migration flows, or identify demographic characteristics of these migrants. Analysis of American Community Survey Public Use Microdata highlights key characteristics of recent movers to and from Utah, providing insights into their contributions to the changing demographics of the state.

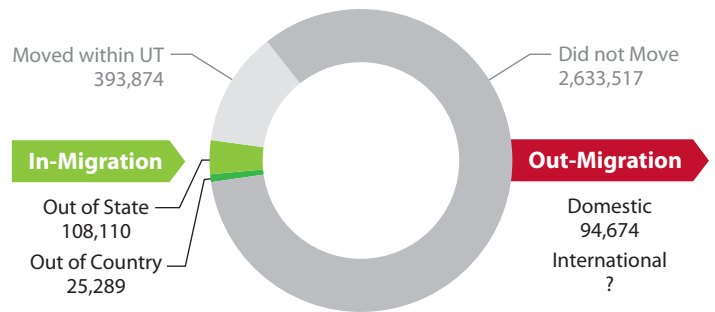
Utah's in and out-migrants differ demographically from non-movers, who are the majority of the resident population. Utah's migrants are younger, more racially/ethnically diverse, and more likely to have an undergraduate degree than non-moving Utah residents. The age discrepancy between migrants and the general Utah population drives much of the differences we see in these demographic characteristics. Migration became a steadier contributor to Utah's population growth in the 1990's and the current patterns are consistent with, and a continuation of, what was seen then. Utah's demographics will undoubtedly continue to change and evolve as migrants from all over the country and world leave their imprint on the state.

Age Distribution by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Utah Resident Population by Migration Status and Domestic Out-Migrants, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Key Findings:

- In-migrants make up 4% of Utah's population, or 133,000 people, and 25,000 of those in-migrants moved from abroad. There are almost 95,000 domestic out-migrants.
- A quarter of in-migrants were originally born in Utah, and 35% of domestic out-migrants were born in Utah.
- At least half of Utah's in and domestic out-migrants originated from or departed to other Western states or Texas.
- Utah is not even in the top 10 recipient states of California's out-migrants.
- In-migrants are 71% White alone, non-Hispanic or Latino, while non-moving Utah residents are 78% White alone, non-Hispanic or Latino.
 - Additionally, both in-migrants and domestic out-migrants not born in Utah are much more racially and ethnically diverse than their Utah-born counterparts.
- In-migrants have a median age of 25 years and domestic out-migrants have a median age of 27, compared to the non-moving Utah resident median age of 31.
- Utah in-migrants and domestic out-migrants are more likely to have a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to non-moving Utah residents.

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Introduction

Utah's modern migration patterns and migrant characteristics are dynamically evolving. Net in-migration is becoming a more prominent component of population growth in Utah. Gaining a better understanding of who is coming and going provides essential insights to Utah's changing population.

Nationally, Utah is recognized for its young population, rapid population growth, and high fertility rate. While these signature demographics have remained, the last decade has ushered in a marked demographic change for the state. Utah was the fastest-growing state in the nation from 2010-2020, but saw a sharp drop in its fertility rate and a steady decline in natural increase.^{1,2} Robust in-migration to Utah has become a much more significant driver of its growth.

There is no comprehensive migration tracking system as exists for births and deaths. Instead, researchers piece together an understanding of migration flows by interrelating multiple, partial data sources. These data limitations make measuring gross migration flows notoriously difficult. As a result, the most common metric is net migration, the difference between in-migration and out-migration. Direct observation of net migration is impossible because it is an analytical concept, and a "net migrant" is the result of a computation. Most estimates focus on the number of people Utah nets every year from migration, meaning the difference between gross in and out flows.³

As migration becomes a more consistent contributor to Utah's population growth, more questions are surfacing about who these recent migrants are and how their demographics compare to current Utah residents. Utilizing the 5-year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata, the report identifies migration flows, highlights key characteristics of recent movers to and from Utah, and provides insights into their contributions to the changing demographics of the state.

Moving past net migration

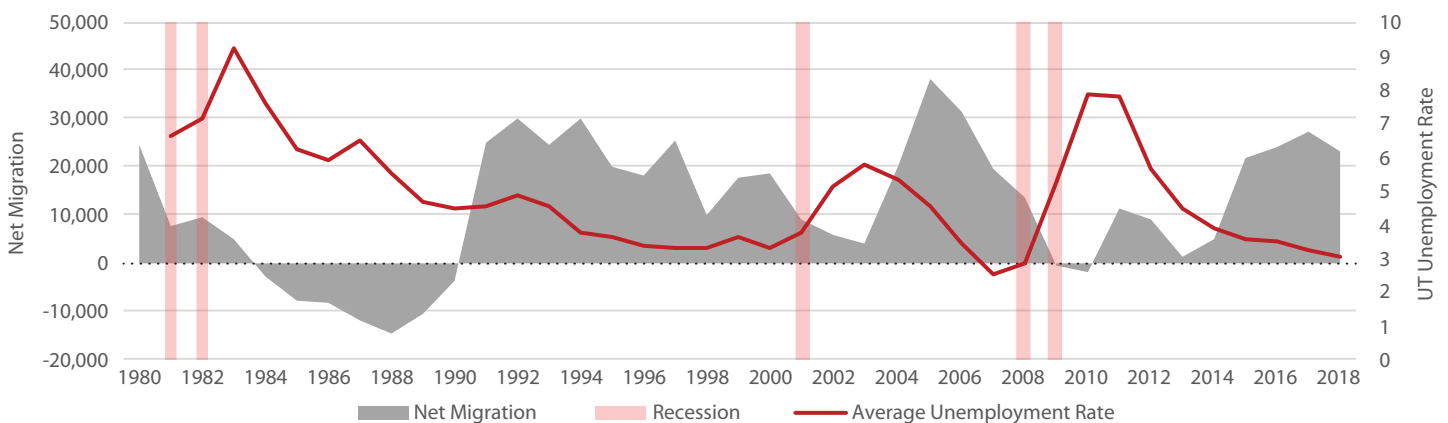
Utah's net migration varies over time and is heavily influenced by economic conditions. Net migration in Utah generally increases with economic prosperity, and slows or reverses with economic slowdowns or recessions. People move for other reasons, such as for educational or recreational opportunities, family reunification, or retirement. These migration motives tend to be more likely during specific life periods.^{4,5}

Economic conditions tend to be the dominant driver of migration in Utah, attracting job seekers during expansions. In contrast, recessions and loss of economic opportunity add a layer of uncertainty, and domestic migration may stall completely until conditions become stable or improve. As shown in Figure 1, when unemployment rates are low in Utah, net in-migration tends to be high. Inversely, when state unemployment rates are high, net migration to Utah is low or negative.

Between 2000 and 2010, Utah attracted two main age groups: young adults between the ages of 15-24 and retirement age adults over the age of 60.⁶ Generally, young adults are a highly mobile age group. Utah attracts young adults seeking educational, economic, and recreational opportunities, along with steady flows of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints missionaries.⁷ Figure 2 shows age specific net migration rates for all decades back to the 1950s. The basic patterns persist over time, while the steady upward shift in the schedule shows increasing rates at all ages in more recent years.

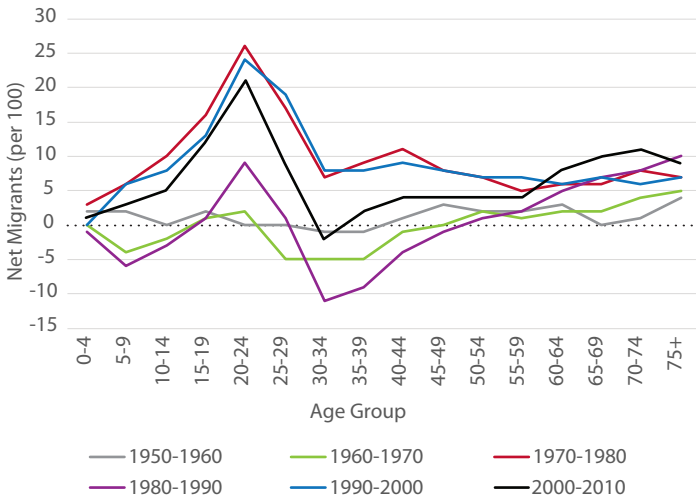
These age patterns of Utah's decadal net migration hide the variation between in and out-migrants. There are different migratory patterns and propensities between in-migrants and out-migrants in any given age group. If the age rates of in and out-migrants were identical, Utah's net migration rates would

Figure 1. Utah Net Migration and Annual Average Unemployment Rates, 1980–2018



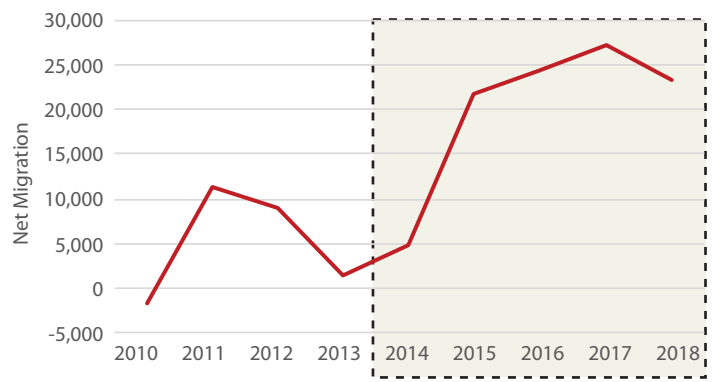
Source: Utah Population Estimates Committee, Utah Population Committee, Federal Reserve of St. Louis, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 2. Utah Age-Specific Net Migration Rates, 1950–2010



Source: Winkler et al., 2013

Figure 3. Utah Net Migration, 2010–2018



Source: Utah Population Committee

be close to zero across all ages, as the magnitudes would cancel each other out. Both in and out-migrants differ demographically from non-moving Utah residents, who are the majority of the resident population. Otherwise, Utah’s age and racial/ethnic characteristics would continue to remain similar.⁸

This research utilizes the 5-year ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) for the 2014-2018 period. Understanding the overall Utah context during this period is essential to an accurate interpretation of the migration patterns and characteristics shown in this report. Throughout the five-year period of this analysis, Utah maintained high growth with sustained net in-migration.⁹ From 2014 through 2018, Utah was in the middle of one of the longest economic expansions in the state’s history.¹⁰ In the national context, Utah ranked fastest growing in housing units from 2016 through 2019 and fastest growing population in 2016. Consequently, this data and its trends represent Utah’s migrant characteristics and volume during a period of prosperity and growth (see Figure 3).

How do we measure in and out-migration?

This report utilizes American Community Survey (ACS) microdata, known as the Public-Use Micro-Data Sample (PUMS).¹¹ The PUMS data allows researchers to create customized tabulations from ACS responses.

The PUMS is available for both the 1-year or 5-year ACS. These are considered period estimates rather than point in time estimates.¹² Data is collected almost daily, meaning estimates are interpreted as an average over the period rather than an exact estimate of a given day or year. The benefit of using 5-year data is the ability to utilize more data points, providing a more reliable estimate, especially for small populations. Assuming there has not been a significant shift or event in that period, the five-year estimates offer reliable results.

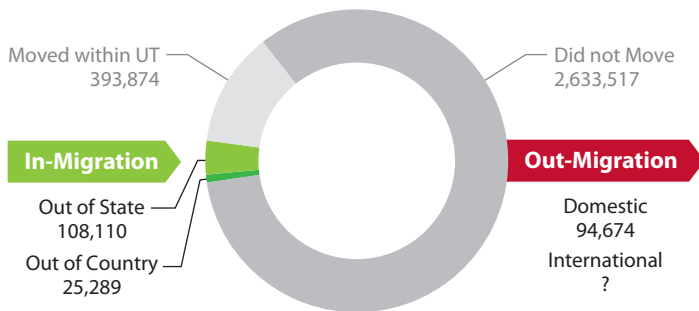
This report utilizes responses to a question that asks where the person lived one year ago. If their address last year was different from their current residence, they are asked to record their previous address. The resulting data set reports if the respondent did not move, moved within the same state, moved from out of state, or moved from another country. This data allows us to capture both international and domestic inflows, but only domestic outflows.

The Magnitude of Utah's Migrants

Approximately 133,000 migrants, 4% of Utah's population, moved into Utah in the previous 12 months during the 2014-2018 period. Roughly 25,000 of those in-migrants moved from abroad. However, most of Utah's population did not move; around 83% or 2.6 million people stayed in the same home, and 13% of residents, roughly 394,000, moved within Utah. Alternatively, at least 95,000 people decided to leave Utah over a single year for another state. This data does not capture those moving to international destinations from Utah.

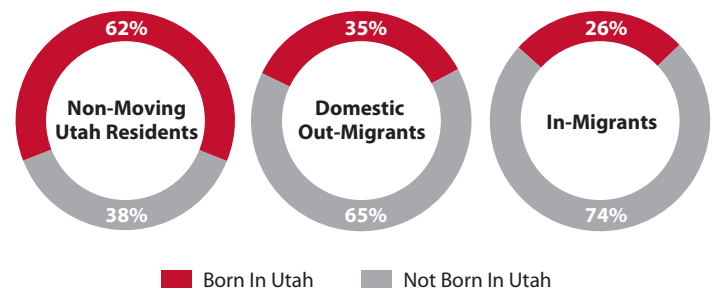
Out of the 133,000 in-migrants, about 25% or 35,000 are returning to their birth state. These Utah-born in-migrants left the state at some point (possibly more than once), and have now returned (see Figure 5). About one-third of domestic out-migrants were born in Utah meaning two-thirds of domestic out-migrants were born somewhere else, moved to Utah, and later moved elsewhere. Lastly, a little less than two-thirds of Utahns who stayed within the state since last year were born in Utah, meaning 38% of non-movers were born in a different state or country during this period.

Figure 4. Utah Resident Population by Migration Status and Domestic Out-Migrants, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 5. Utah In-Migrant, Domestic Out-Migrant, and Non-Moving Resident Place of Birth, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Migrant Geographic Characteristics

Where are Utah's migrants coming from?

Consistent with historic migration patterns, the western region provides almost 50% of Utah's in-migrants: California, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Arizona are key source states. The Southern region accounts for nearly a third of Utah's in-migrants, with Texas and Florida supplying the most in-migrants. Of those that moved from abroad, the largest shares come from South and Central America.¹³ Figure 6 displays the origin states for Utah's domestic in-migrants from 2014-2018.

California is the largest single source of domestic in-migrants for Utah. This is not surprising since it is the most populated state in the nation and has had significant domestic net out-migration since 1990.^{14, 15} However, Utah is not even in the top 10 recipient states of California's out-migrants. In 2018, Utah received approximately 18,000 Californians, while Arizona, Texas, Nevada, and Washington each received over 50,000 Californians.¹⁶

Figure 7 shows the in-migration rates to Utah from each state. This calculation adjusts for population size and provides the

propensity of each state to supply migrants to Utah.¹⁷ Exploring the migration rates reveals Idaho sent the most population-adjusted in-migrants to Utah, 5.3 migrants per 1,000 residents, followed by Wyoming, Hawaii, Nevada, Montana, and Washington.

Where are Utah's migrants going?

Utah exports about half of its domestic out-migrants either to other states in the western region or to Texas, which also experienced the largest absolute population growth from 2010-2020.¹⁸ Utah's largest share of out-migrants went to California, followed by Texas, Washington, and Idaho (see Figure 8). It is typical for most moves to happen between neighboring states, with less frequent moves to more distant destinations.¹⁹ Long distance moves occur more frequently when the destination state is larger. As an example, Utah had greater out-migration to Texas than New Mexico.

Figure 6. Utah In-Migrant Domestic Origins, 2014–2018

Note: Does not include international in-migration
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

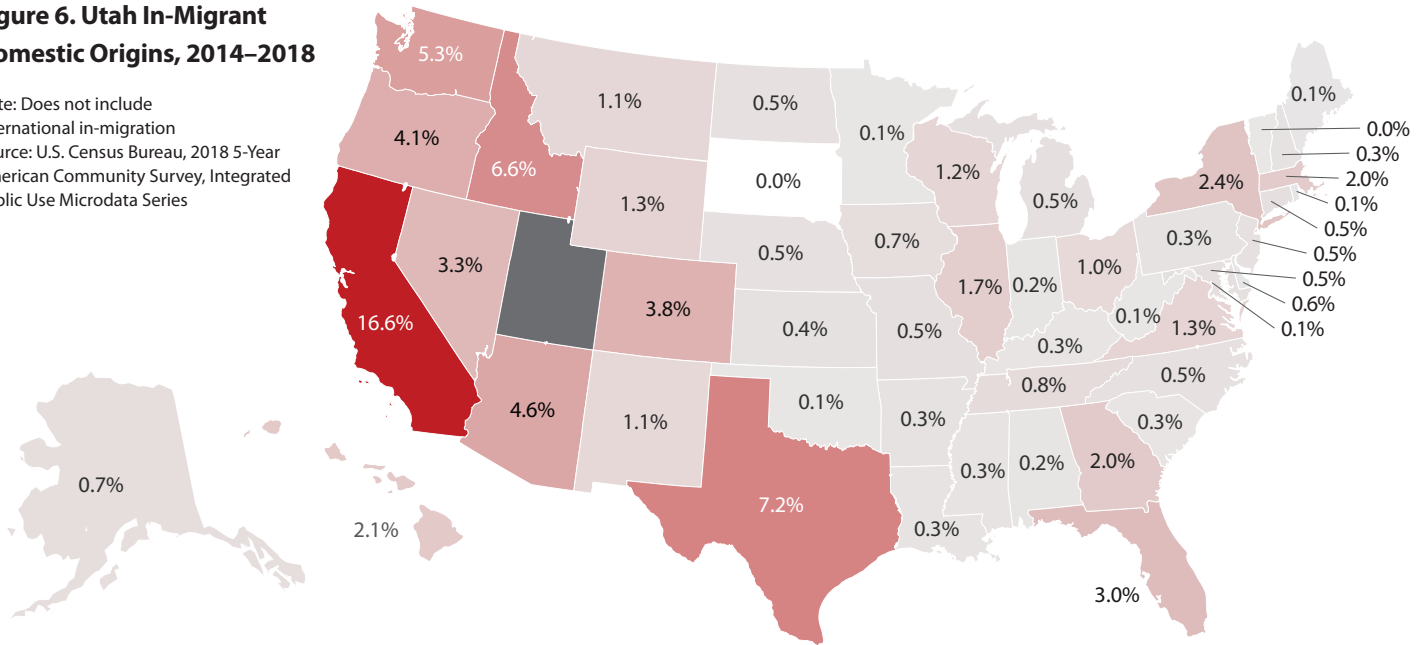
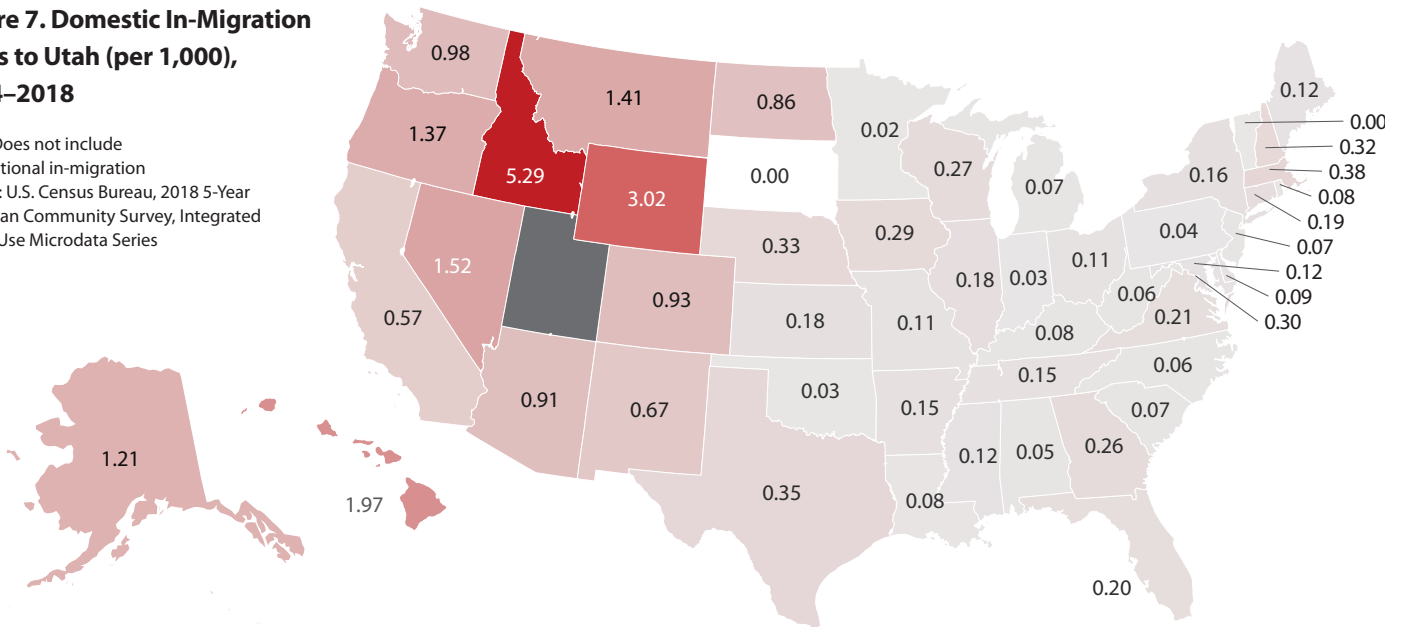


Figure 7. Domestic In-Migration Rates to Utah (per 1,000), 2014–2018

Note: Does not include international in-migration
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series



Where were in-migrants born?

The birthplaces of Utah in-migrants can differ from the origin state or nation they moved from. We can estimate how many of the in-migrants coming from certain states and countries were born in Utah by identifying their birth state.

The vast majority (82%) of Utah in-migrants were born in the United States. Approximately a quarter of in-migrants, the largest share from a single state, were born in Utah and have returned (see Figure 9).²⁰ Regionally, the west supplies the most in-migrants, with the largest share (13%) born in California. All other states contribute 3% or less of their native-born population. Internationally, the most prominent places of birth were Mexico and Brazil and other South and Central American countries.

A small share of in-migrants are not U.S. citizens

Utah’s in-migrants are overwhelmingly U.S. born, or born as U.S. citizens abroad to U.S. parents. A small share of Utah’s in-migrants, 17%, were born in another country, and of those, 4% are naturalized citizens while the other 13% are not U.S. citizens (see Figure 10). This includes both documented (e.g., refugees, those here on work or school visas, and others²¹), and undocumented immigrants.

Figure 8. Utah Domestic Out-Migrant Destinations, 2014–2018

Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

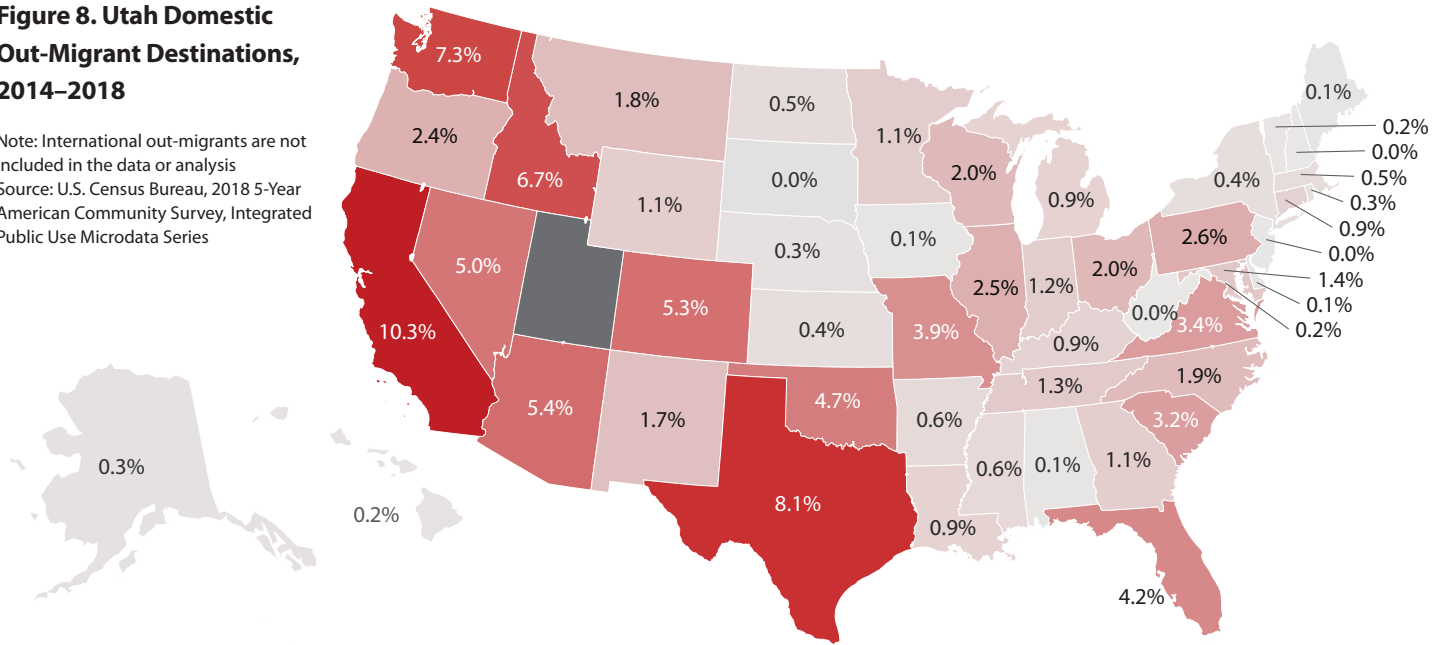


Figure 9. Utah In-Migrant Place of Birth, 2014–2018

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

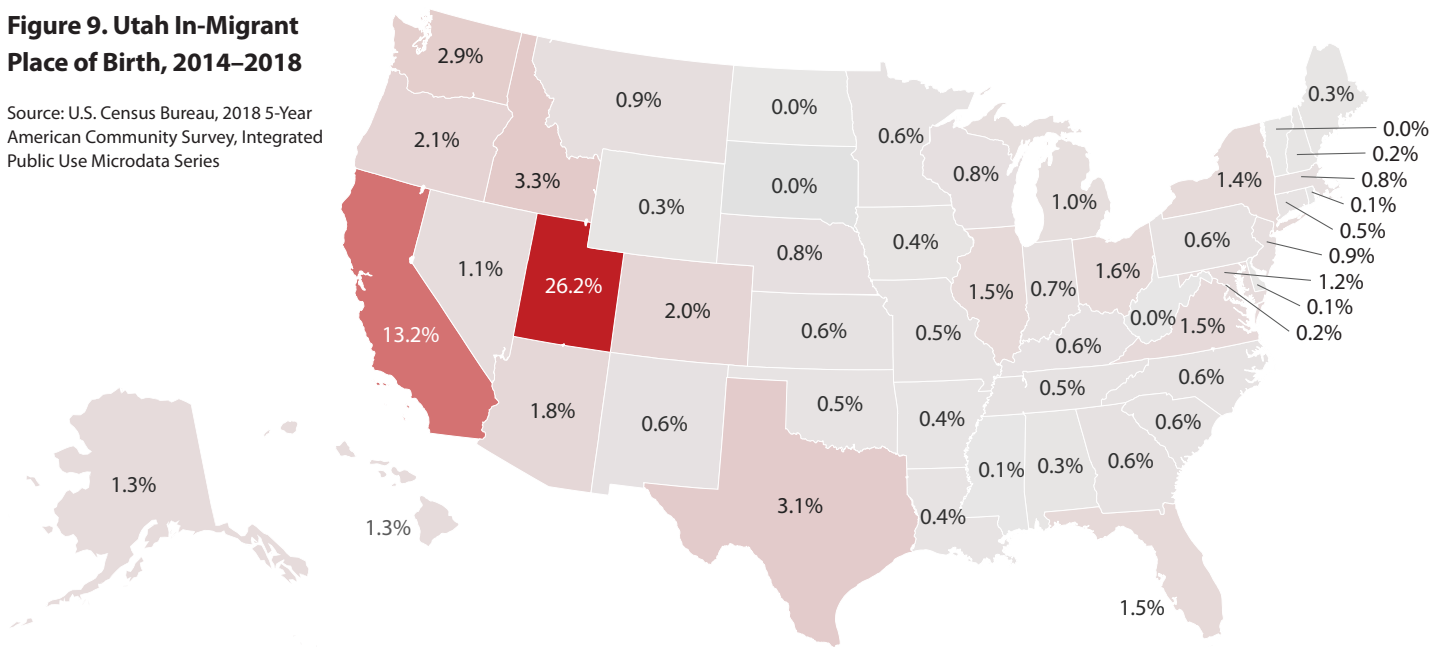
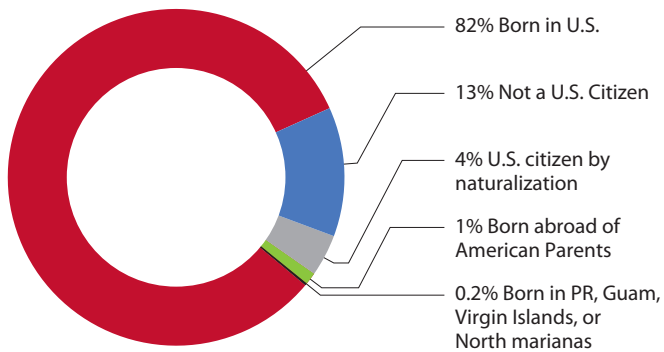


Figure 10. Utah In-Migrant Citizenship Status, 2014–2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

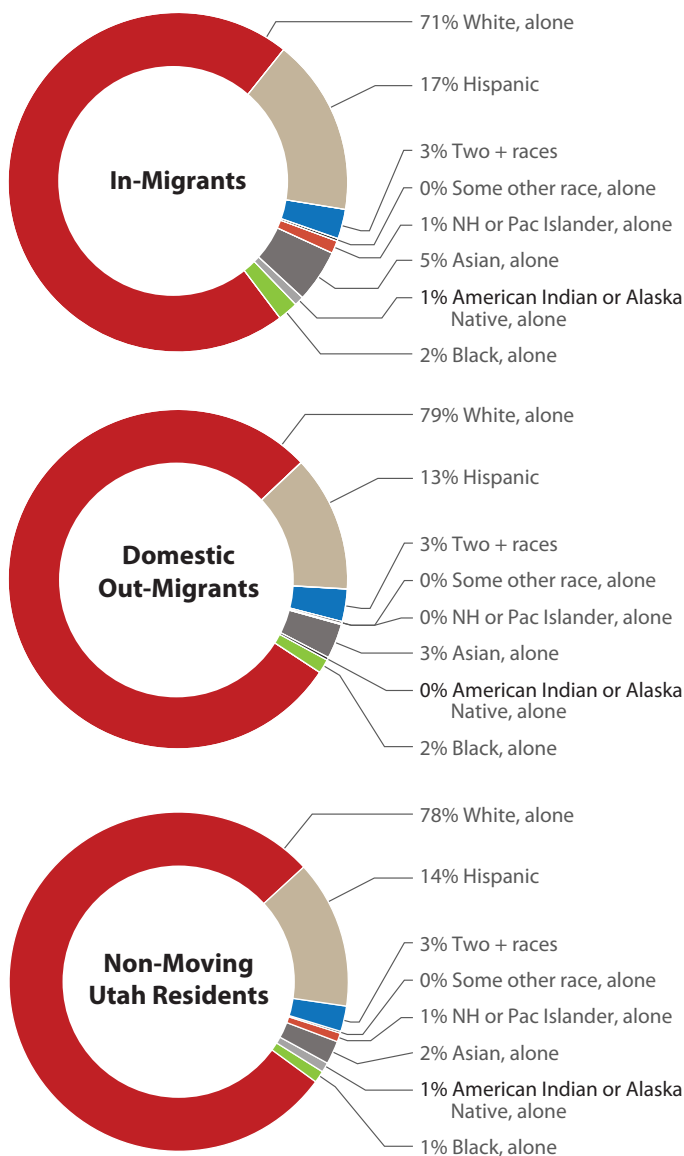
Migrant Demographic Characteristics

Utah's in-migrants are more racially/ethnically diverse than domestic out-migrants and non-movers

Utah's in-migrant population is younger and more racially/ethnically diverse than the state as a whole. The total Utah population is 78% White alone, non-Hispanic, and in-migrants are 71% White alone, non-Hispanic.²² The most significant difference in the minority shares is the Hispanic or Latino population, accounting for 17% of the in-migrant population rather than 14% of non-moving Utah residents.

The racial makeup of Utah's out-migrants closely mirrors the state's overall racial and ethnic demographics. Whereas in-migrants are more racially diverse than the state, those leaving Utah mimic the state's general demographics even though only

Figure 11. Race and Ethnicity by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



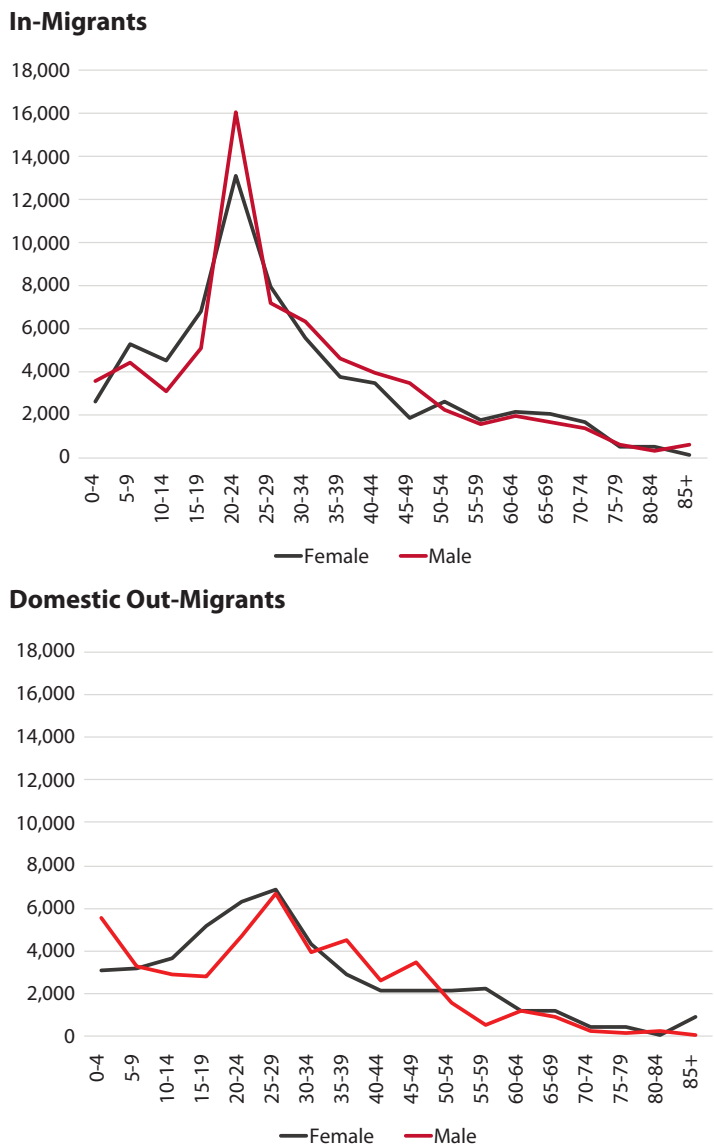
Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

one-third of out-migrants were born in Utah. Similar to the Utah-born in-migrant analysis, out-migrants originally born in Utah are much less diverse than the out-migrants not born in Utah.

Utah's migrants are younger than the rest of Utah

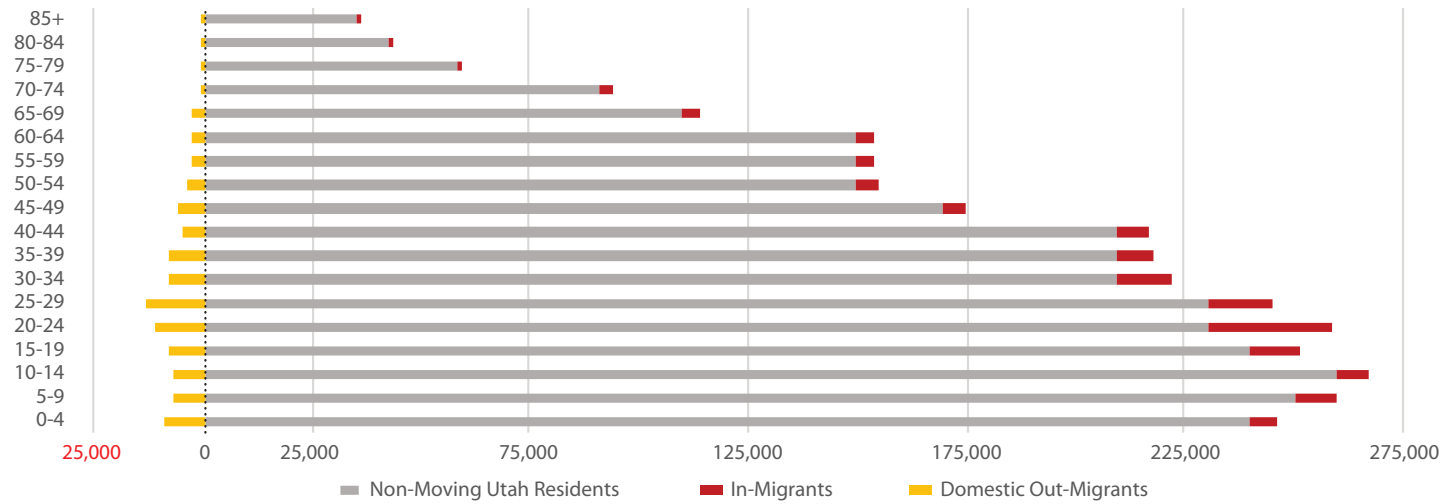
Utah's in-migrant age structure peaks in young adulthood, with the most significant share clustering between ages 15-29, sharply spiking in the 20-24 age group. These results suggest that Utah's young population is not just a result of sustained and high fertility but also due to its young in-migrant population. As noted, young adults have the highest migration rates in general. For Utah, migrants are coming for economic opportunity, higher education, and returning missionaries of the Church of

Figure 12. Age and Sex of Utah's Migrants, 2014–2018



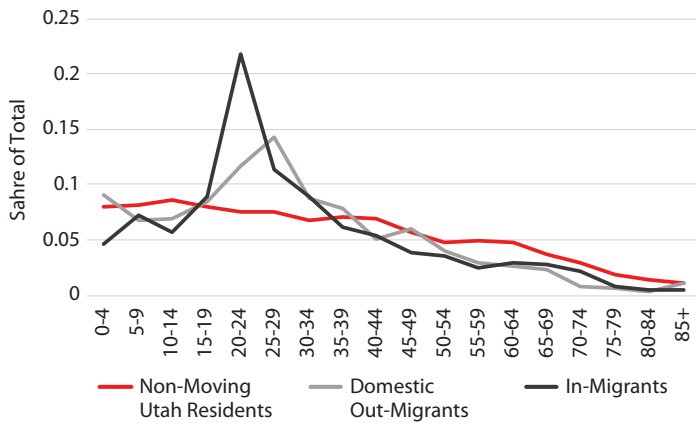
Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 13. Mobility Status Population Pyramid, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 14. Age Distribution by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Table 1. Median Age by Mobility Status, 2014–2018

	Median Age
State of Utah	30.7
Non-Moving Utah Residents	31
Domestic Out-Migrants	27
In-Migrants	25

Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²³ It is also important to note that Utah attracts a steady amount of retirement migration in ages 55 through 74, though it is dwarfed by the surge of education and labor-related migration.²⁴ Figure 12 shows Utah’s migrant population broken down by age and sex.

Utah’s domestic out-migrant age structure is also young, with the most significant number clustering around ages 25-29, with another uptick in the 0-4 age group. This suggests Utah exports recent graduates of higher education and those early in their careers but still old enough to have started a family. Female out-migrants tend to leave more evenly spread out across ages 15-29, whereas males sharply leave around the 25-29 age group.²⁵

There are dramatic differences between the age distributions of in-migrants, domestic out-migrants, and everyone else in Utah (see Figure 14). In-migrants are overwhelmingly young, with a considerable share belonging to the 20-24 age group; domestic out-migrants are similar but clustered around the 25-29 age group. Additionally, out-migrants have more preschoolers than in-migrants. At the same time, Utah’s non-movers have a more equal distribution across all ages that slowly declines as the population ages.

Median age identifies the exact center of the population age distribution, with half the population older and half the population younger. Overall, Utah’s median age in the study period was 30.7 years. In-migrants had a median age of 25 years, and domestic out-migrants had a median age of 27 years. If we removed the in-migrants from the Utah population, the median age of 30.7 years would increase to 31 years. This indicates that in-migrants while still much younger than the rest of Utah, barely affect the overall median age.

Migrants are highly educated

A little over 60% of Utah in-migrants are not attending school, but of the 40% who are, about half of them are attending either undergraduate programs or graduate/professional programs. Both non-moving Utah residents and domestic out-migrants have a larger share of those who are not attending school compared to in-migrants. Alternatively, in-migrants have a significantly higher share of undergraduate college attendance compared to the other two groups. The higher median ages of both non-moving Utahns and domestic out-migrants (31 years and 27 years respectively) are past the traditional age of higher education students, helping to explain this difference in school attendance.

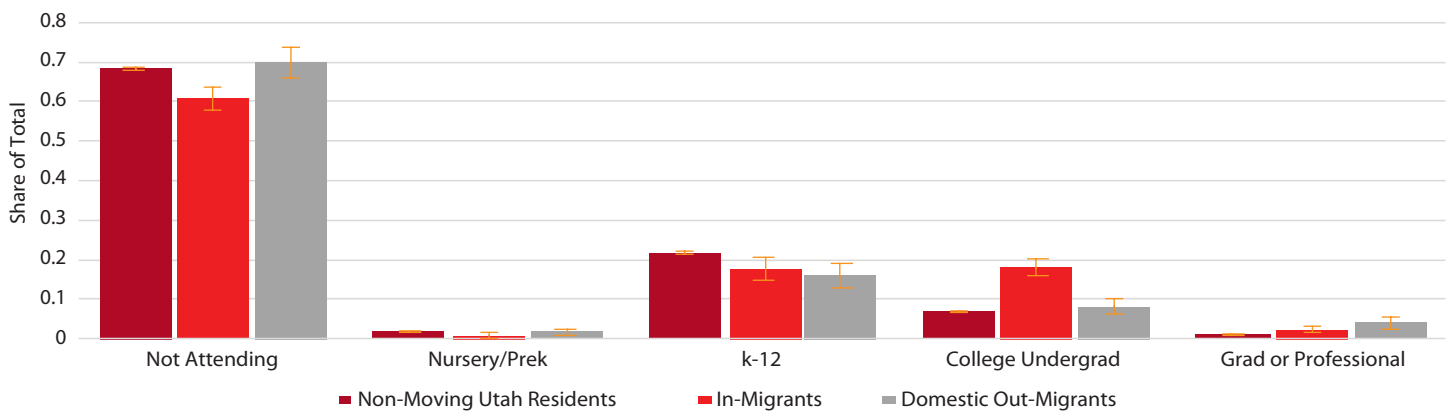
For the in-migrant population aged 25 years and older, the most common educational attainment is a bachelor's degree, followed by some college but no degree. Most of the individuals migrating into Utah are highly educated, suggesting a move for employment or college attendance. Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) universities and Brigham Young University

(BYU) reliably attract tens of thousands of individuals from out of state, and likely accounts for a good share of those in the "some college, but no degree" category.^{26, 27}

In the domestic out-migrant population aged 25 years and over, the most common educational attainment is a Bachelor's degree, and a little less than half of domestic out-migrants have a Bachelor's degree or higher. Another 35% of those domestic out-migrants over the age of 25 have at least a high school degree but less than an Associate's degree.

The data clearly shows that Utah in-migrants and out-migrants have higher shares of those with a Bachelor's degree or higher than non-movers. Non-movers have higher percentages of those with less than an associate's degree than migrants. In-migrants and out-migrants are generally more highly educated since most people or households who move to another state need enough income or a prospect of good income to make a move. Usually, movements in the young adult age group are due to school or a job.^{28, 29, 30}

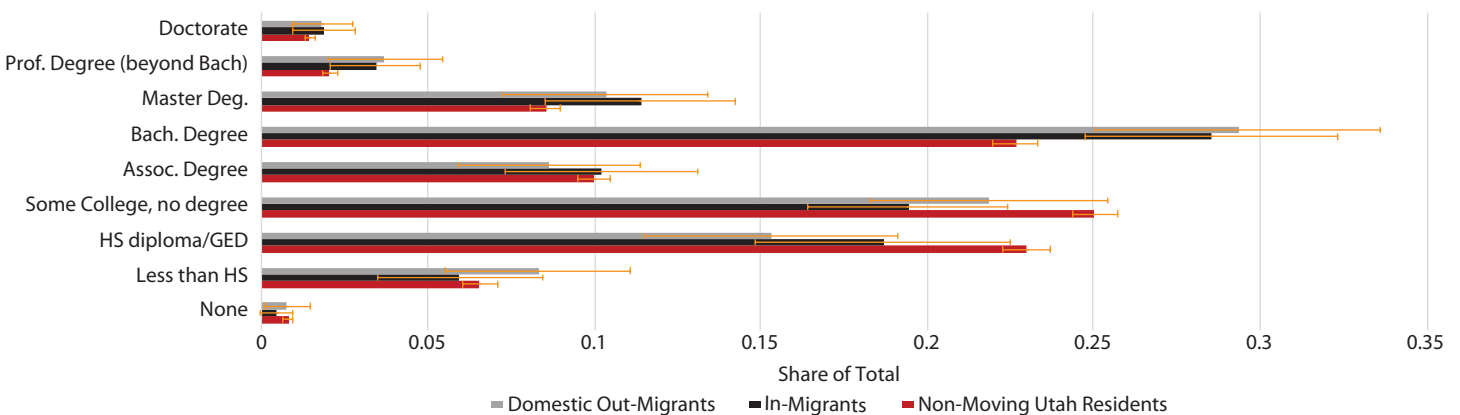
Figure 15. School Grade Attending by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis. Note: Estimate is shown with its 90% confidence interval. This interval represents a range of population values that are plausible in light of information in the sample, with a 90% degree of confidence. Reported values for groups with non-overlapping error bars are statistically different to the same degree of confidence.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 16. Educational Attainment (Ages 25+) by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis. Estimate is shown with its 90% confidence interval. This interval represents a range of population values that are plausible in light of information in the sample, with a 90% degree of confidence. Reported values for groups with non-overlapping error bars are statistically different to the same degree of confidence.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Labor force participation is similar across all groups

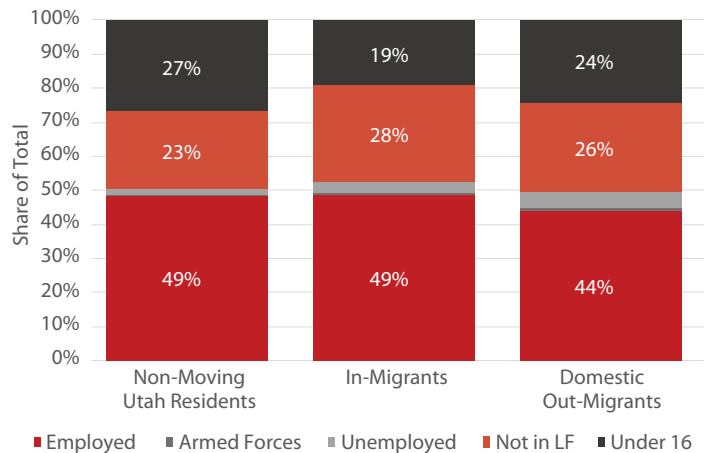
A little more than half of in-migrants are in the labor force (working or actively seeking work). The majority of those in the labor force are actively employed, while 4% are unemployed and looking for work. The relatively low unemployment rate is a reflection of the strong economic conditions at the time. The other half are either not in the labor force (28%) or under age 16 (19%). These figures match the overall state’s employment patterns.

Utah’s out-migrants have a different age structure, particularly more children, which results in slightly different employment patterns. Domestic out-migrants have approximately 5% more individuals under the age of 16 than in-migrants, contributing to a slightly smaller share of employed out-migrants. The percentage of out-migrants not in the labor force is about the same as in-migrants.

Migrants are less likely to be married

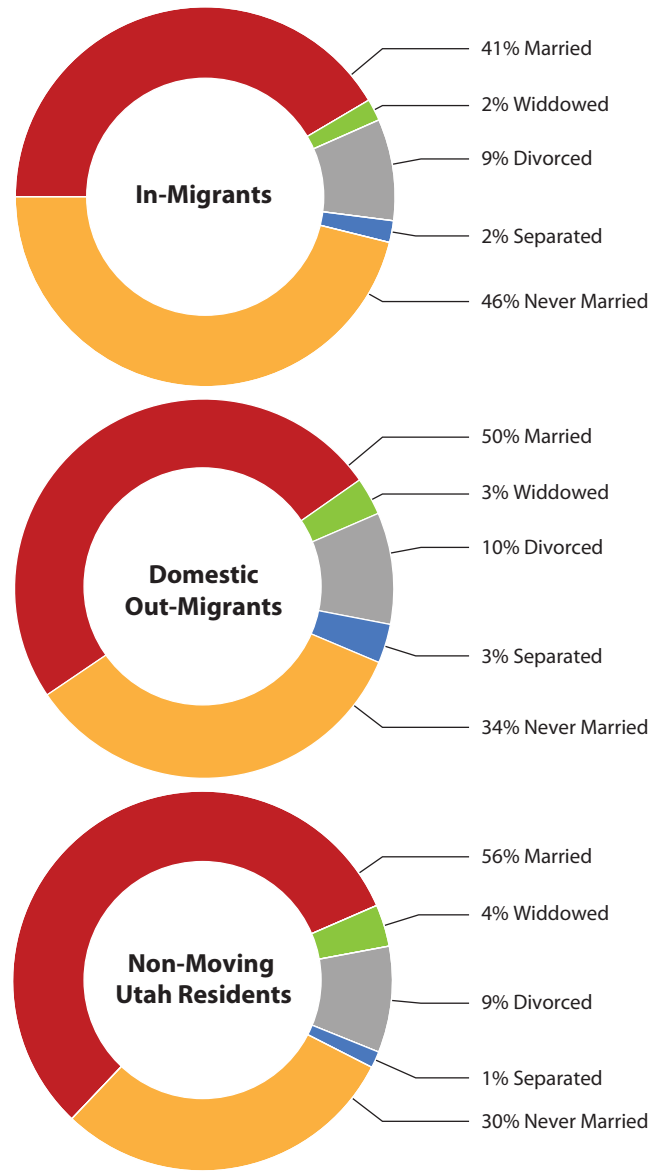
In and out-migrants have a younger age structure than non-movers, and this can affect marital status. Consistent with research findings, this data shows that those who have never been married are more likely to move.³¹ More than half of non-movers are married, the largest percentage out of the three subgroups, with only 30% having never been married. A little less than half of in-migrants over the age of 14 have never been married. Around 40% of in-migrants are currently married, while about 10% are either separated, divorced, or widowed. About half of out-migrants (over the age of 14) are currently married, and 15% are either separated, divorced, or widowed. About one-third of out-migrants have never been married. Compared to in-migrants, out-migrants are more likely to be or have been married, while in-migrants are more likely to have never been married.

Figure 17. Employment Status by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 18. Marital Status (Ages 15+) by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

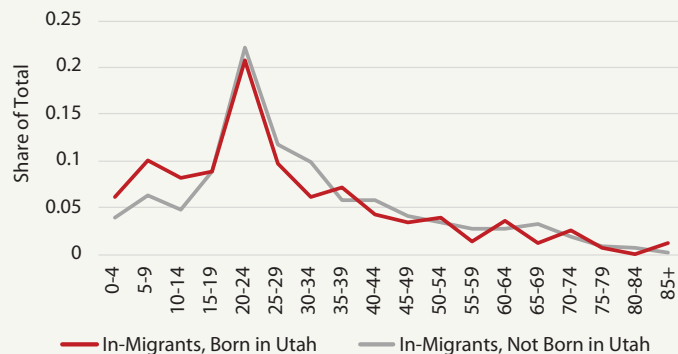
Comparing these two migrant groups to those who did not move provides a comprehensive view of differences in marital status. Non-movers are more likely to be married or have been married before, about 70% of those 15 or older, confirming the notion that those who are not married are more likely to move. The non-mover group has an older population, contributing to a higher likelihood of marriage due to corresponding life course expectations and motivations.

Utah Born In-Migrants are Less Racially Diverse and Have More Children than Remaining In-Migrants

In a twelve-month period, there are approximately 35,000 in-migrants to the state who were also born in Utah, a quarter of all in-migrants. There are a few notable differences between these Utah-born in-migrants and the rest of the in-migrants born elsewhere. While the age distribution, racial and ethnic composition, and employment status differs between these two groups, schooling and educational attainment are very similar.

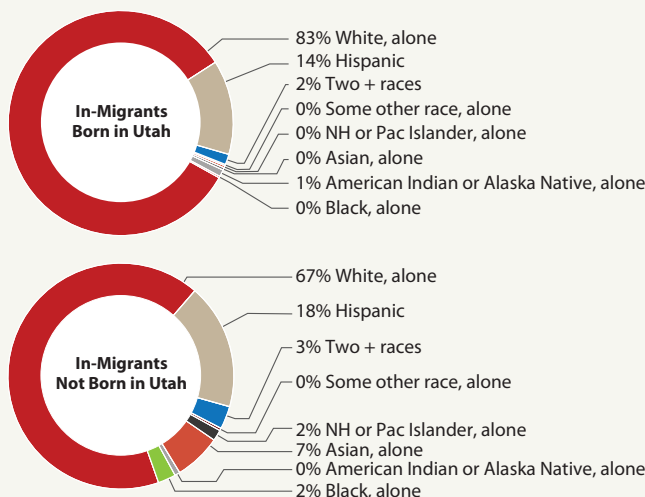
Utah-born in-migrants have a younger age distribution especially in ages 0-14, indicating that these households have more children compared to the rest of in-migrants.³⁵ These age differences influence the employment status differences because children under the age of 16 cannot, by Census Bureau definition, be members of the labor force. They are also much less racially and ethnically diverse than the other in-migrants. 83% of the Utah born in-migrants are White alone, non-Hispanic, while the rest of in-migrants are 67% white, non-Hispanic.

Figure 19. Age Distributions, In-Migrant Subset, 2014-2018



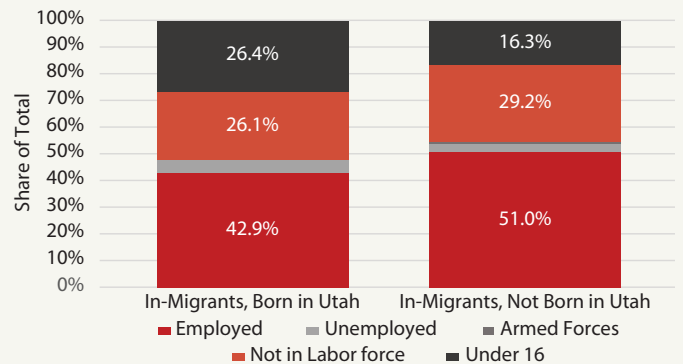
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 20. Race and Ethnicity, In-Migrant Subsets, 2014-2018



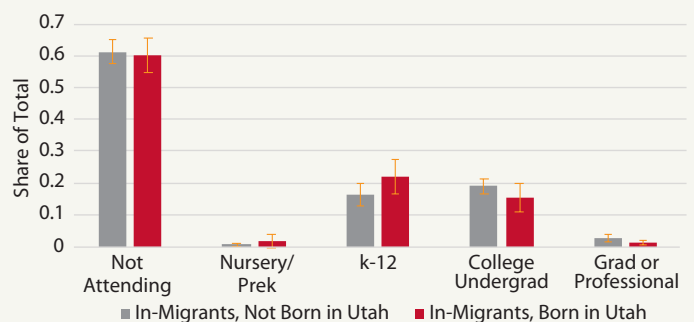
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 21. Employment Status, In-Migrant Subsets, 2014-2018



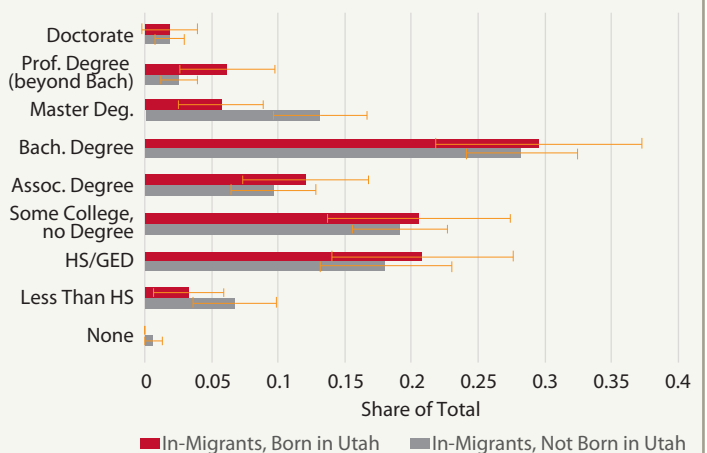
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 22. School Attending, In-Migrant Subsets, 2014-2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 23. Educational Attainment (Ages 25+), Migrant Subsets, 2014-2018



Note: Estimate is shown with its 90% confidence interval. This interval represents a range of population values that are plausible in light of information in the sample, with a 90% degree of confidence. Reported values for groups with non-overlapping error bars are statistically different to the same degree of confidence.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

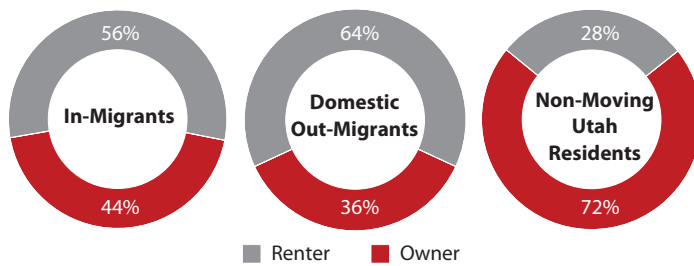
Migrant Household Characteristics

Migrants need housing

In-migrants living in housing units make up about 60,000 households, or 6% of households statewide. More than half of in-migrants rent (56%), with the remaining 44% owning a home. Domestic out-migrants have an even larger share of renters, signaling they were probably renters in Utah as well; however, the destination's housing market and conditions also impact one's ability to rent or own. This is dramatically different than the 72% of non-mover households who own their home. Again, age plays a factor in these numbers. People under the age of 35 are more likely to rent in Utah (48% of renter-occupied householders are under 35, and only 16% of owner-occupied are under 35), and the young age distribution of in-migrants means they are more likely to rent than own.³²

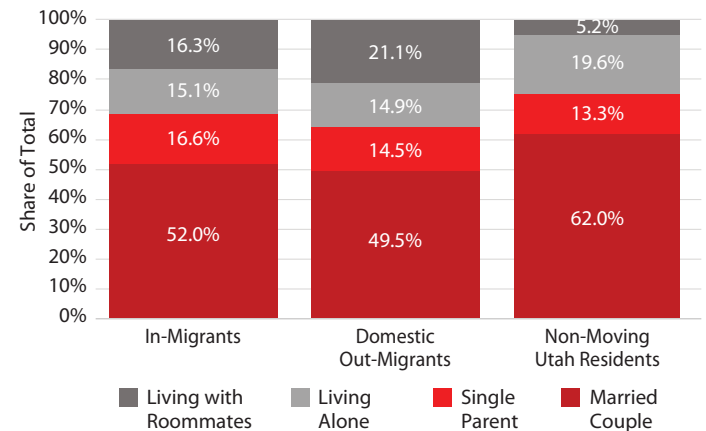
This reality, coupled with the fact that out-migrants only make up 41,000 households, indicates there will be increasing housing demand for both renters and owners if these migration patterns persist. If Utah continues to struggle to keep up with housing demands and housing affordability, that could affect Utah's ability to attract out-of-state workers in the future.³³

Figure 24. Housing Tenure by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Figure 25. Household Type by Mobility Status, 2014–2018



Note: International out-migrants are not included in the data or analysis
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

Migrants have more non-family households than the rest of Utah

Within these households, there is a variety of different household types, and the distribution of these types are quite similar between out-migrants and in-migrants. A little over half of in-migrant households are married-couple households, and a third are non-family households (meaning that they are neither married nor with children in their home). About half of out-migrant households are married couples, with an additional 15% as single parents. The remaining 35% are non-family households. However, non-moving Utah residents have a much larger share of married couple households. This pattern closely mirrors household data and trends for the overall state.³⁴

This data set does not include housing unit analysis of those living in group quarters, such as college dormitories, prisons, and nursing homes.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research indicates that, since 1950, Utah has consistently had net in-migration of young adults between ages 20 and 29, while net migration in the other age groups is much lower.³⁶ This research goes a step further by identifying the basic demographic characteristics of recent in and out-migrants.

Utah's in-migrants are younger, more racially/ethnically diverse, and have higher educational attainment than those already living in Utah. Utah's overall median age is 30.7 years, but median age varies by mobility status. Domestic out-migrants have a median age of 27 years. In-migrants have a median age of 25 years, and non-moving Utah residents have a median age of 31. The non-moving Utahns' slightly higher median age indicates that if in-migrants were removed from the Utah population, the median age of 30.7 years would increase to 31 years.

The age discrepancy between migrants and the general Utah population drives much of the differences we see in race/ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, and labor force participation. Not only is Utah less diverse than other states who are sending in-migrants, but recent racial/ethnic projections for Utah point out that racial/ethnic minorities typically have higher fertility rates, contributing to the more diverse young population within Utah and across the country.³⁷ These recent migration patterns are consistent with and a continuation of migration patterns that became well-established in Utah in the 1990s.³⁸ Migration propensities, motives, and patterns differ over a person's lifetime and generation. Younger people, particularly younger than 25, will prioritize different aspects of life than those who are older and more established.

The data indicate that only 4% of Utahns moved from out of state or country in the last year. That may sound small, but that equals roughly 130,000 people. About a quarter of in-migrants were born in Utah and returned after a previous move. However, if we look at the bigger picture, almost 40% of those currently living in Utah were not born in Utah, indicating a sustained, longer term trend of in-migration.

Additionally, only one-third of out-migrants were born in Utah, meaning two-thirds of the out-migrants were born somewhere else, moved to Utah, and then left again. A gap in this data is the absence of those moving from Utah to an overseas location. Examination of changes in stocks of the foreign-born population in Utah over time can partially shed light on these flows. Other methods estimating net migration can potentially address this data gap as well.

Recent in-migrants, having moved within the last year and measured from 2014 to 2018, make up 60,000 households, with more than half renting and 44% owning a home. This does not account for group quarters populations. While there is bound to be an exchange of households from out-migrants leaving, there are still more in-migrants than out-migrants, which might exacerbate Utah's housing shortage. This issue compounded this year as Utah continued to attract in-migrants, yet fewer houses were on the market due to COVID-19 induced uncertainty.³⁹

Migration adds an unpredictable and sometimes volatile dynamic to Utah's population and growth and has a lasting impact on the state's demographics. Utah was the fastest-growing state in the nation over the last decade. In strict accounting terms, between 2010 and 2020, a

third of population growth was due to net in-migration. Because in-migrants tend to be young, in peak childbearing ages, they also contribute to natural increase as they establish families and have native-born Utah children.

As fertility rates decline in the U.S. and Utah, it is reasonable to assume that if regional and state growth continues at high levels, growth will become more reliably fueled by the movement of people and less from natural increase.

Migration will continue to fluctuate based on local and national conditions, and the demographic characteristics of migrants will shift in the future. However, Utah's demographics will undoubtedly continue to change and evolve as migrants from all over the country and world leave their imprint on the state.

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