

POLICY BRIEF

How Texas Migration Patterns Changed during the Pandemic

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STATEMENT OF ISSUE

The Covid-19 pandemic led to changes in where Americans work and live. The rapid rise of work from home, for example, prompted some people to move to areas with more affordable housing, desirable amenities, or closer to family members. Layoffs and business closures early in the pandemic led others to move for job opportunities. These changes had implications for Texas, a state that has traditionally experienced large-scale domestic and international migration. Several factors positioned Texas to benefit from pandemic-induced changes in domestic migration patterns, such as low housing costs, relatively early easing of pandemic restrictions, and robust economic growth. While some measures indicate an initial drop in domestic moves to Texas, this report shows the state quickly regained its momentum and saw its domestic migration inflows rise by 2021. International migration to Texas also slowed during the early phases of the pandemic due to the closing of borders and slow visa processing before rebounding by 2022.

KEY FINDINGS

- Texas' net domestic migration – the difference between people moving to Texas from other states and people moving to other states – continued its upward trend during the pandemic.
- Together, domestic and international net migration accounted for almost three-quarters of Texas' population growth in 2022, up from only half during the previous decade.
- Texas' sharp rebound in international net inflows in 2022 was shared by other large states.
- Texas recorded 20 interstate arrivals per 1,000 total population in the 2021 survey, well above its rate of 18 per 1,000 people in the 2020 survey.
- As was the case before the pandemic, Texas was the “stickiest” state – it had the lowest domestic out-migration rate in the 2021 survey.
- Texas movers continued to head to the state's largest metropolitan areas even during the pandemic; however, movers settling in central cities declined notably in 2021, with movers settling instead into suburban areas.
- The largest Texas cities – Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio – were an outlier among major metro areas in the nation not losing residents between July 2020 and June 2021.
- The growing gap in work from home between interstate migrants and non-movers suggests that being able to work remotely increases interstate mobility, consistent with surveys indicating that being able to work remotely encouraged some people to move during the pandemic.
- Interstate migrants to Texas were more likely than other interstate migrants to be working from home in the 2021 survey, suggesting that Texas was particularly attractive to people who work remotely.
- The share of interstate migrants to Texas who reported housing- and family-related reasons for moving to the state rose substantially in 2021.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Migration is an important mechanism for market economies. The movement of workers, whether within a country or across international borders, helps ease labor shortages in booming areas and fill critical skill gaps that otherwise would slow economic growth.
- Texas' large workforce means the state does not need to rely as much as many other parts of the country on migration in order to grow, but the state nonetheless is better off when it attracts workers with in-demand skills.
- Rising housing costs across much of the country due to higher interest rates may continue to encourage domestic movers to consider Texas, where housing costs are relatively low.
- A “return to office” among some remote workers may slow in-migration to the state over the next few years.
- Continued international migration is likely to ensure that Texas sees robust population growth that helps the state continue its economic development.

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