

To Stay or Go? New Insights into Northeast Rural Households' Intention to Move

Data from the NER-Stat Baseline Survey 2024

Overview

The Baseline Survey 2024 is a nationwide household survey conducted jointly by the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs). It is designed to better understand the conditions, issues, and challenges facing residents of both rural and urban communities across the United States.

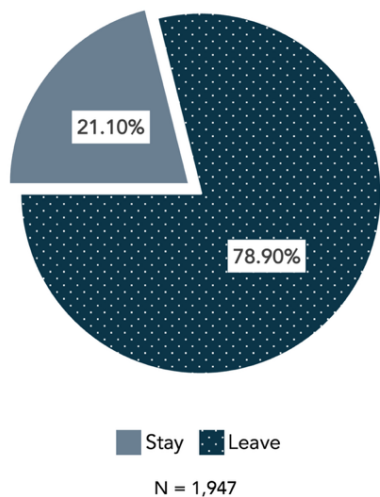
The Northeast segment of the survey (NER-Stat) includes about 2,000 rural households located in the 12 states and the District of Columbia served by the [Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development](#) (NERCRD). In this data brief, findings from the survey shed light on which rural households are more likely to move and their reasons for wanting to do so.



Key Insights

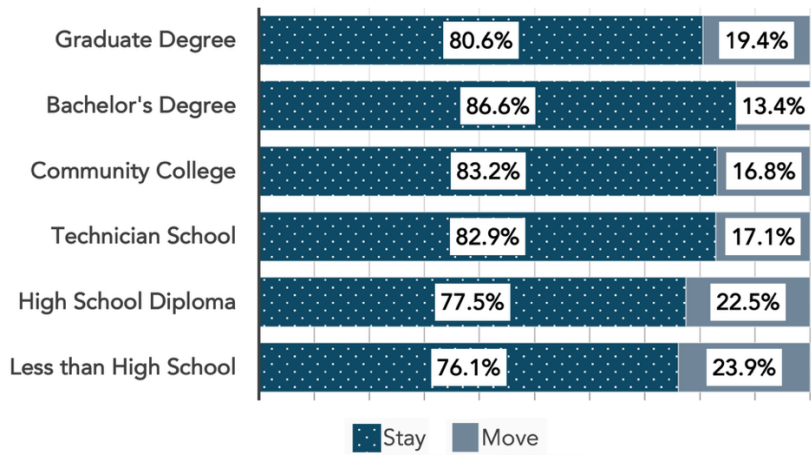
- About one in five households surveyed intended to leave the current place of residence in the next 12 months.
- Northeast households with younger age, lower level of educational attainment, larger household size, and lower income per household member are generally more likely to move.
- The top 3 sectors of employment whose employees intend to *stay* are **arts and recreation**, **sciences and technology**, and **manufacturing**.
- The top 3 sectors of employment whose employees intend to *leave* are **enterprise management**, **accommodation and food services**, and **administrative support**.
- The top reasons for moving include (unaffordable) **cost of living**, (lack of) **socializing**, and (lack of) **community ties**.

Figure 1. Intention to move in the next 12 months.



Among the 1,947 valid respondents in the Northeast U.S., 21.1% reported an intention to move, while the remaining 78.9% intended to remain in their current place of residence.

Figure 2. Intention to move by level of educational attainment.



Respondents with a high school diploma or less were more likely to report an intention to move (more than one-fifth indicated that they were willing to relocate) than respondents with higher levels of educational attainment. Those with bachelor’s degrees showed the strongest attachment to their current place of residence. Notably, respondents with graduate or professional degrees reported greater willingness to move than those with associate or bachelor’s degrees, suggesting that the relationship between education and migration intentions may be nonlinear.

Younger respondents reported a greater willingness to relocate, whereas older respondents appeared more attached to their current places of residence. Respondents aged 55 and younger were more likely than the overall sample average to indicate an intention to move, while those aged 55 and older were less likely than average to do so. Approximately one in three respondents under 35 reported that they were willing to move within the next 12 months, while this share declined to fewer than one in ten among respondents aged 65 or older.

Figure 3. Intention to move by age

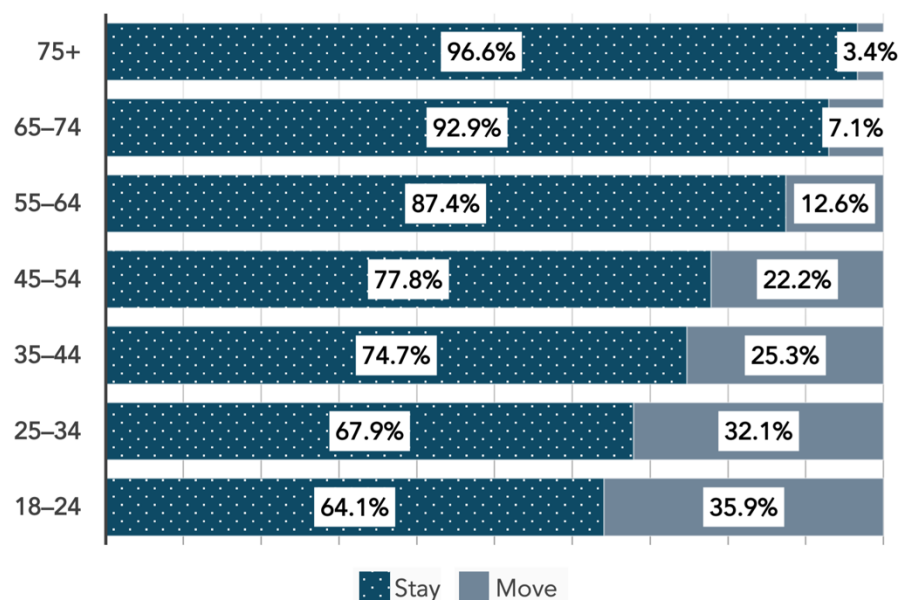
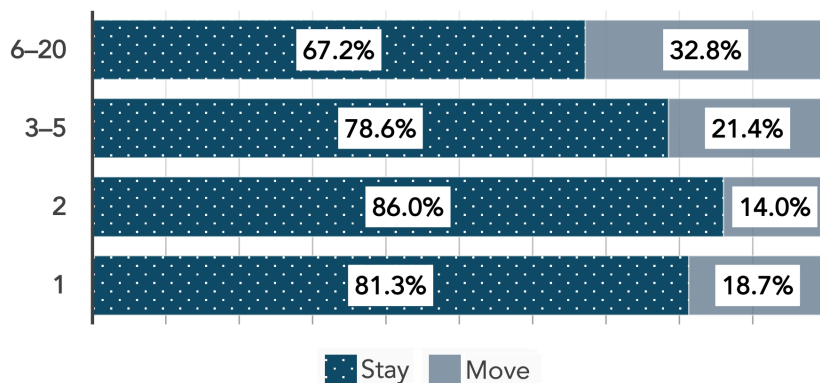
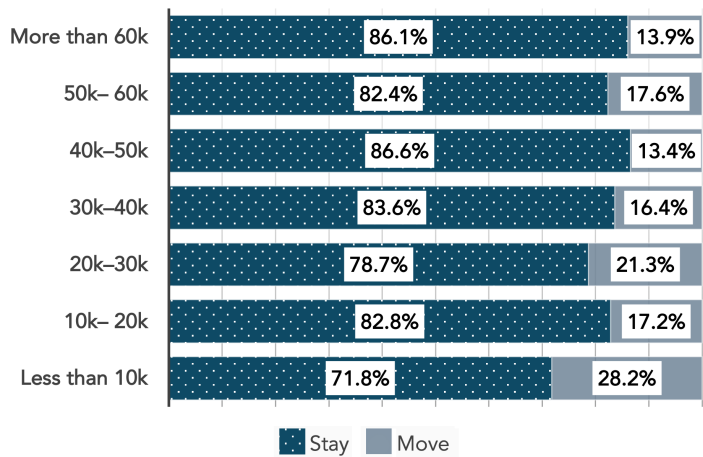


Figure 4. Intention to move by household size



Respondents living in households with 6 or more members were more likely to report an intention to move within the 12 months following the survey, whereas those living in smaller households were less likely to do so. One possible explanation, consistent with economic theories of household migration, is that larger households, particularly those with children, may be more likely to relocate in search of improved educational opportunities and other family-oriented amenities.

Figure 5. Intention to move by income per capita.



Individuals living in households with lower income per household member appear more likely to report an intention to move, although the overall relationship is not strongly linear or uniform across income groups. More than one in four respondents in households with less than \$10,000 in income per household member indicated that they were willing to move in the near future, compared with fewer than one in five respondents in households with more than \$30,000 in income per household member.

Figure 6. Intention to move by sector of employment. Levels of Significance Different from the Weighted Average: ***0.01; **0.05, *0.1

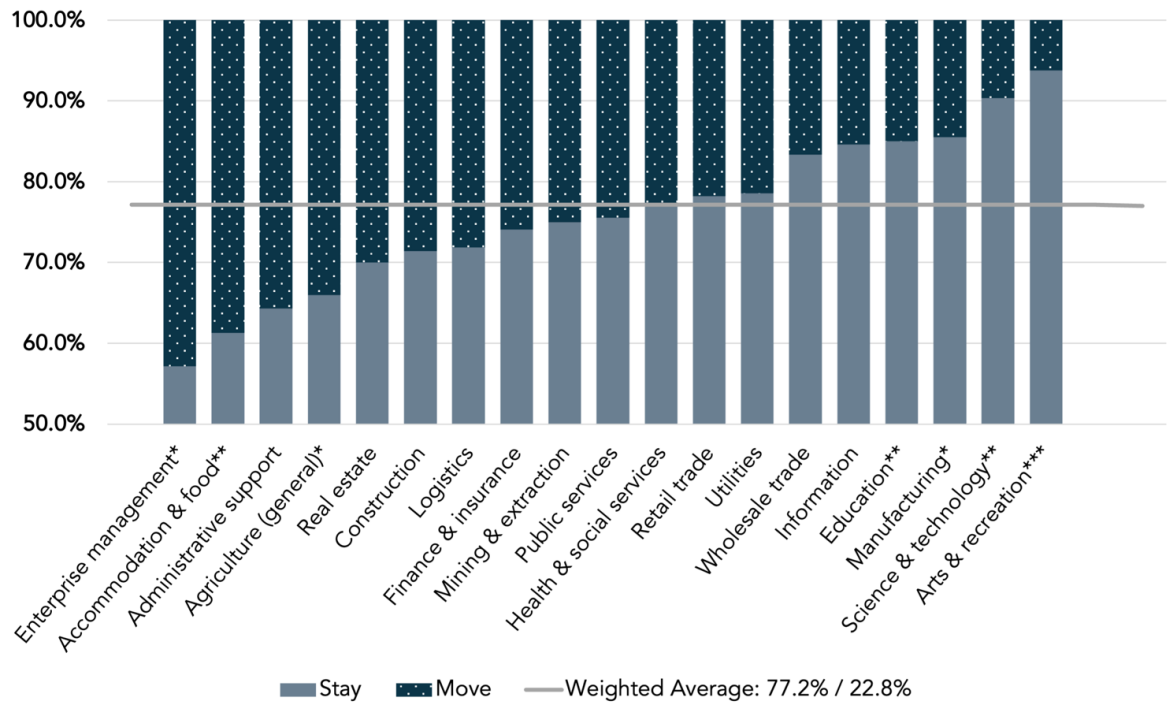


Figure 6 presents migration intentions by employment sector in the Northeast. Employees in *enterprise management*, *accommodation and food services*, and *administrative support services* reported the highest willingness to move. In contrast, workers in *arts and recreation*, *professional, scientific, and technical services*, and *manufacturing* showed the strongest attachment to their current places of residence. Notably, employees in sectors often considered highly geographically mobile (such as *mining and extraction* or *construction*) were not substantially more likely to report an intention to move higher than the overall working-class average of 22.8

Figure 7. Top four reasons for moving from one rural area to another

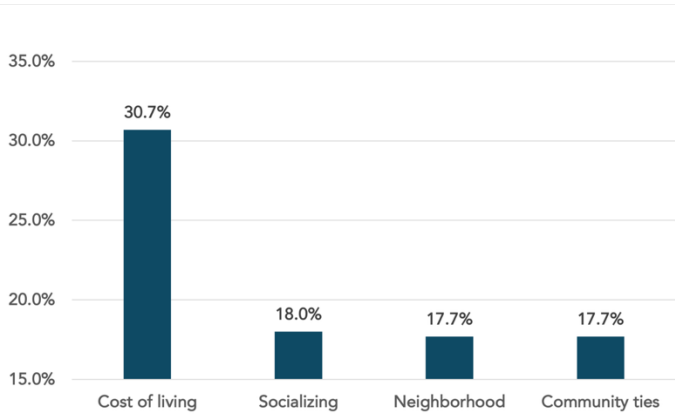


Figure 9. Top four reasons for moving from an urban area to a rural area.

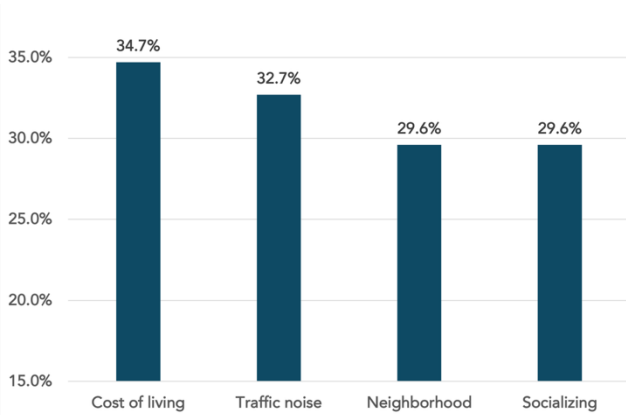


Figure 8. Top four reasons for moving from a rural area to an urban area.

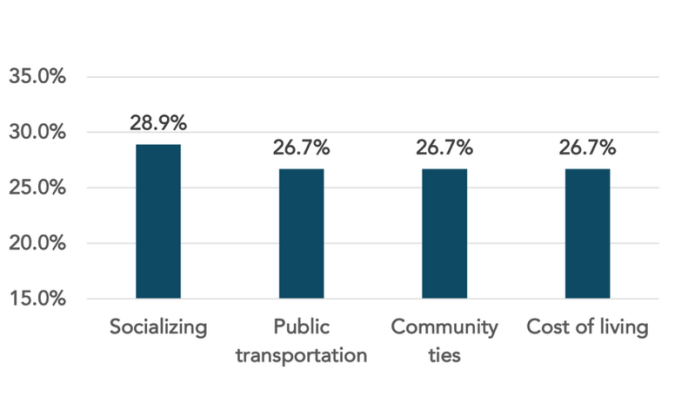
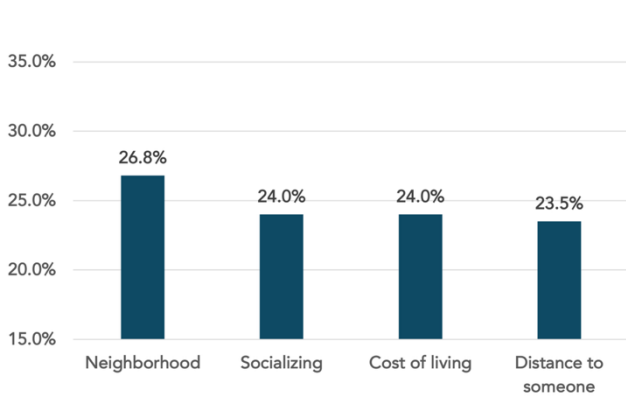


Figure 10. Top four reasons for moving from one urban area to another.



Among respondents willing to move between rural locations, the four most frequently cited reasons were **cost of living** (30.7%), opportunities for **socializing** (18.0%), **neighborhood** characteristics (17.7%), and **community ties** (17.7%). For respondents considering a move from a rural to an urban area, the leading reasons were opportunities for **socializing** (28.9%), access to **public transportation** (26.7%), **community ties** (26.7%), and **cost of living** (26.7%). Among respondents considering a move from an urban to a rural area, the most common reasons were **cost of living** (34.7%), **traffic noise** (32.7%), **neighborhood** characteristics (29.6%), and opportunities for **socializing** (29.6%). Finally, among those willing to move between urban locations, **neighborhood** characteristics (26.8%), opportunities for **socializing** (24.0%), **cost of living** (24.0%), and **distance to someone important** to them (23.5%) were the leading motivations.

Across all four potential migration directions in the Northeast U.S., **cost of living** and opportunities for **socializing** consistently emerged as leading reasons for considering relocation. These findings suggest that rural development practitioners seeking to stem population loss should prioritize affordable housing while also investing in the social infrastructure that supports interaction, belonging, and durable community ties.

About this Research

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Methods and dataset: The NER-Stat: Baseline Survey 2024 is a collaborative initiative developed by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, the Southern Rural Development Center, and Auburn University. The survey explores essential topics related to household, business, and community well-being. It aims to learn more about the conditions, issues, and challenges faced by rural and urban communities and their residents in the Northeast Region. Conducted as a 20-minute online survey through the Qualtrics platform, it covers a broad spectrum of topics, including household demographics, income, workforce participation, entrepreneurship, caregiving, housing, broadband access, migration and staying behavior, civic engagement, community belonging, health, food security, well-being, and environmental concerns. The survey was designed to maximize participation across a diverse range of household types, geographic locations, genders, ages, and racial and ethnic groups, ensuring comprehensive and balanced representation.

The survey was conducted in 2024 with 1,947 responses from the Northeast Region through a Qualtrics online panel. The technical documentation, survey codebook, and the open access dataset are available for download:

- Bednarik, Z.; Green, J. J.; Marshall, M. I.; Russell, K. J.; Wiatt, R. D.; Wilcox Jr, M. D. (2026). [Northeast Region Household Data. NER-Stat: Baseline Survey 2024](https://doi.org/10.4231/SZNO-GS46). Purdue University Research Repository. [doi:10.4231/SZNO-GS46](https://doi.org/10.4231/SZNO-GS46)

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