



Economic Review

Population Turnover and the Growth of Urban Areas

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More people are moving to and from large urban areas, leading to faster population growth over time.

People in the United States are relocating nearly half as much they did in the early 1980s. Lower population turnover—the propensity of people to move into or out of a given location—may mean a decline in labor market adjustment across industries and occupations; when people move across regions for job-related reasons, they may help smooth out changes that hit certain labor markets harder than others. Population turnover may also lead to better matches between employer and employee, an important factor in the growth of urban areas.

Jason P. Brown and Colton Tousey examine the relationship between population turnover and overall population growth across urban areas of various sizes from 2000 to 2017. They find that larger urban areas tend to have higher population turnover and that higher initial levels of turnover are correlated with faster population growth over subsequent decades. Their findings, which are consistent with other studies showing economic activity increasingly concentrating in larger urban areas, suggest that areas with small populations and lower levels of labor market adjustment face greater economic challenges.

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