**Where immigrant growth matters most.**

**By William H. Frey**

While public discussion of immigration seems to be dominated by President Trump’s proposed border wall or the defunding of sanctuary cities, ongoing immigration from abroad continues to contribute substantially to in-movement and population gains for much of America. This is especially the case for areas that are losing domestic migrants to other parts of the country. This analysis of recently released census estimates (link https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-44.html ) shows that there is a clear distinction between domestic migration and international migration patterns across the US, and points up where immigrants are making the biggest contributions so far this decade.

**International and domestic migrant “magnet areas” are different**

In any given year, immigrants are drawn to different “magnet areas” than domestic migrants. Historically, immigrants have gravitated to port-of-entry regions like New York, Los Angeles, and Miami- places where same origin relatives and friends could assist them in finding jobs and becoming acculturated to their new surroundings. At the same time, domestic migrants –those making within US moves -- tend to follow jobs more directly, often in growing parts of the Sun Belt.

As Table 1 shows, the top 5 net international migrant gainers barely overlap with the top 5 net domestic migrant gainers for each of the three periods shown, 1990-2000, 2000-2010 and 2010-2016. New York ranks first as an international migrant magnet for all three periods, with Los Angeles and Miami remaining among the top three.

As indicated in Table 2, there is far more change in ranks among the domestic migrant magnets, led by Atlanta, Phoenix and Dallas over the three periods. The current decade is the only one where three Texas areas, including Houston and Austin, rank among the top domestic migrant gainers -reflecting a period when other parts of the Sun Belt were still recovering from the Great Recession.

Tables 1 and 2 here

Yet, despite the relative stability of immigrant magnet regions, these areas are losing some of their grip as major destinations. While the top five destination areas attracted nearly half of immigrants during the 1990s, this share fell to a third of all immigrants in 2010-2016. This is part of a more widespread dispersion of immigrants, allowing them to make greater contributions to population growth in more areas.

**Most of the nation’s major metropolises are losing domestic migrants**

Domestic migration within the US is a zero-sum game: when some areas gain domestic migrants, other areas have to lose. One thing several of the nation’s major metropolitan areas have in common is a net out migration of domestic migrants. Thus, many of these rely on immigration to blunt or overturn what would be an overall migration loss.

As Table 3 shows, 8 of the nation’s 12 largest metropolitan areas lost domestic migrants since 2010. These areas are either pricey coastal areas or are located in the industrial Midwest. New York, Los Angeles and Chicago have led the nation in domestic out migration for more than three decades. However because each also receives substantial numbers of international migrants, their overall migration loss for 2010-2016 is minimized. This is also true for other domestic migration losers on the list.

Table 3 here

In Washington DC, Miami and Boston, immigration gains were large enough to negate domestic migration losses. San Francisco, another expensive coastal region, did register minimal domestic migration gains, but its overall migration in-flow was dominated by immigration

In contrast to the other major metropolises, Sun Belt growth powerhouses, Dallas, Houston and Atlanta registered large domestic migration gains. However, each also benefitted from substantial immigration.

**Immigration exceeds domestic migration gains in 59 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas**

The spreading out of immigration to more parts of the country, coupled with a renewed domestic migration from the Snow Belt to the Sun Belt (link https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2016/12/23/u-s-growth-rate-hits-new-low-as-migration-to-the-sun-belt-continues/), has given immigration a bigger role in contributing to migration gains or reduced losses among the 100 largest metropolitan areas.

Nearly half (47) of the 100 areas registered immigration gains *and* domestic migration losses. (See Map 1) These not only include major metropolises discussed above, but also smaller metropolitan areas in the Northeast, Midwest, interior California, as well as a few in the slower growing parts of the South.

Map 1 here

Among these 47 areas, 19 showed overall migration gains because their immigration exceeded their losses in domestic migration. Among these are New England areas, Providence, Bridgeport, Springfield and Worcester; Pennsylvania areas, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Allentown and Scranton; as well as several in other regions such as Baltimore, Minneapolis-St Paul and San Jose (link to linked Table 1) The remaining 28 “immigrant gain-domestic migration loss” areas are dominated by migration losses with heavy representation by areas in the upstate New York (e.g. Buffalo, Syracuse) and the Midwest (e.g. St. Louis, Cleveland). Many of these areas have sustained domestic out migration for some time, so that the increased dispersion of immigrants may be their best source of future gains.

There are 12 areas that experienced both immigration and domestic migration gains but where immigration dominates. In addition to likely areas such as Seattle and Tucson, this list also includes “middle of the country” places like Indianapolis, Kansas City and Omaha.

Still, in 2010-2016, there are only 41 areas where domestic migration gains out-pace international migration- down from 52 areas in the 1990s and 48 in the early 2000s. Many are areas with high employment growth like Dallas and Houston and others are places where retirees congregate like Charleston and Sarasota. All of these areas, except state capitals Madison, WI and Des Moines, IA, are located in the South and West. These areas aside, it is important to remember that immigration is an increasingly dominant migration component of population growth in most metropolitan areas.

**Immigration provides for more steady growth than domestic migration**

While immigration levels can change over time, their impact on individual metropolitan areas is more steady than that of domestic migration- which can be more volatile in responding to economic shifts. An example was the shifting domestic migration patterns in response to the 2007-2009 recession and its aftermath.

As the recession and accompanying mortgage meltdown hit the country, the healthy domestic migration flows from Snow Belt to Sun Belt areas were sharply reduced, only to return modestly as the economy picked up during the past three years.(link https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2017/03/30/census-shows-a-revival-of-pre-recession-migration-flows/ ) This pattern is exemplified in the domestic migration trends for Snow Belt areas, New York and Chicago, and Sun Belt areas, Orlando and Phoenix, displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 1 here

The two former areas showed a sharp curtailment in their domestic losses as the recession began- only to resume more out-migration recently. Orlando and Phoenix display almost mirror images of those patterns as their domestic in-migration slowed down during the recession period.

In contrast to these domestic migration patterns, international migration for each of these areas changed much more gradually. This is especially important in areas like New York where immigration serves as a demographic “cushion” to soften the blow of sharp turns in domestic out-migration. Even in Chicago where immigration levels have drawn down recently, there is less volatility than with its domestic migration flows.

**Recent immigrants are more highly educated than those of the past**

The human capital attributes that immigrants bring to their destination areas can differ from place to place based on the type of employment opportunities made available. It has often been the case that immigrant flows are “bimodal” with respect to their educational attainment. That is, compared to the resident population, new immigrants are more likely to be overrepresented at both the upper tiers and lower tiers of educational attainment.

This is currently the case as is shown in Figure 2. However, this analysis of the most recent American Community Survey data (link https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html) indicates that foreign born arrivals between 2011-2015 are more highly educated than those who entered earlier. That is, nearly half (48 percent) of recently arrived immigrants are college graduates, compared with only 28 percent of those who arrived before. Moreover fewer have not received a high school education (19 percent) than among those who arrived previously (30 percent).

Figure 2 here

Some of this shift in immigrant education may be attributable to changed national origin trends favoring more Asian foreign born. Nonetheless, the higher education attainment of recent immigrants presents new opportunities for workers and employers in immigrant destinations. In fact, college graduates are more prevalent among recent immigrant adults than among all adults in 90 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas.

In sum, the trends examined here suggest than the annual immigration of foreign born workers and families will be an increasingly significant component of growth as the nation’s population gets older and fertility remains low. It will become an especially important contributor to population growth in parts of the country that are aging rapidly and sustaining long term domestic migration declines. Immigration has long been the demographic and economic lifeblood in port-of-entry metropolises like New York, Los Angeles and Miami. The fact that, now, well over half of the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas are receiving more of their growth from immigration than from migrants within the US dictates that communities across the country will need to prioritize accommodating new foreign born residents as an integral part of their planning for the future.