



Internal Migration of Puerto Ricans in the United States

Research Brief

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Migration for Puerto Ricans entails not only migration from the island, but also across state lines within the U. S., often away from traditional settlement sites. This migration is mostly taking place from the region with long-established Puerto Rican populations, such as the Northeast, to other regions across the country.

The data used in this analysis are drawn from all the one-year samples of the American Community Surveys (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau between 2001 and 2011 and packaged by the Minnesota Population Center as the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPMUS) (Ruggles et al 2010). The data analyzed only include migrants who moved across state lines in the previous year and who self-identified as Puerto Rican. The results were calculated using the person weights available with the dataset, as employed by Foulkes and Newbold (2000).

During the past decade, more than 1.2 million Puerto Ricans migrated across state lines. The preferred destinations were the South and Northeast, with close to 48 percent settling in the South; only 12 percent migrating to the West and 8 percent to the Midwest (Table 1).

The most popular state for relocation was Florida which received 23 percent of Puerto Rican internal migrants, followed by New York and, Pennsylvania, both with 9 percent, and Texas and New Jersey, both with 6 percent. These 5 states received 51 percent of Puerto Rican internal migration between 2001 and 2011 (Table 2).

Table 1: Region of destination of all Puerto Rican domestic migrants, 2001-2011

Region	Migrants	Percent
Northeast	407,320	32.6
South	599,359	47.9
Midwest	97,466	7.8
West	146,045	11.7
Total	1,250,190	100

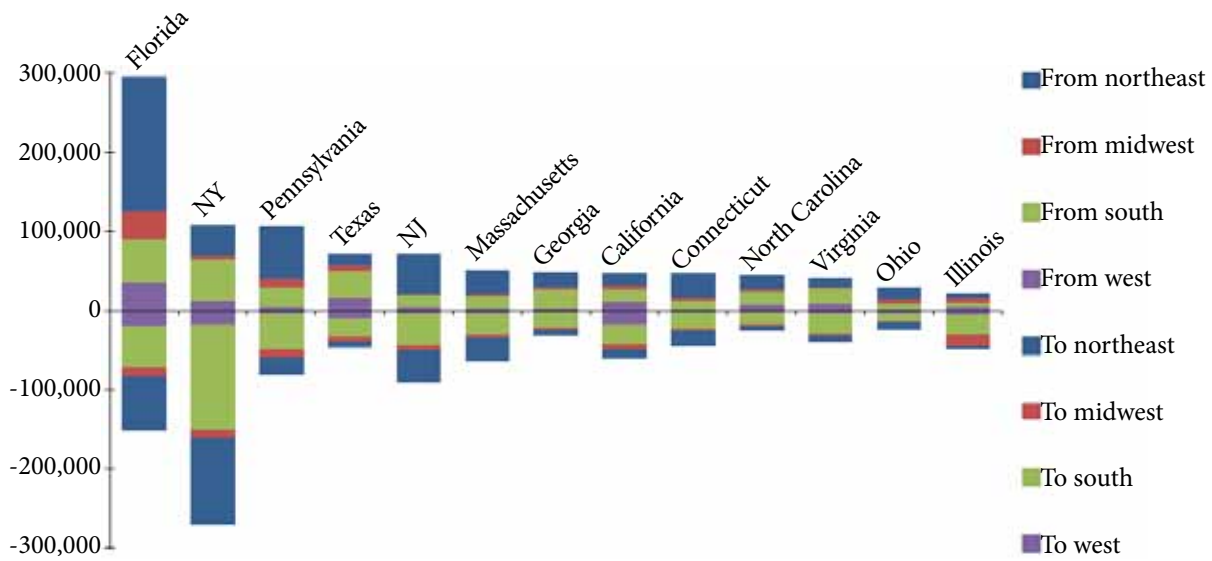
Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

Table 2: Preferred state of destination of Puerto Rican domestic migrants, 2001-2011

State	Migrants	Percent
Florida	283,045	22.6
New York	107,601	8.6
Pennsylvania	106,562	8.5
Texas	71,692	5.7
New Jersey	71,198	5.7
Top 5 total	640,098	51.2

Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

Figure 1: States with highest number of Puerto Ricans migrating within the U.S., 2001-2011



Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

This does not mean that states that received a higher number of internal migrants showed net gains of Puerto Ricans. While Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia had net increase, other states, including New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, California and Illinois (Figure 1) show net losses.

Men comprised 51 percent of internal migrants, balanced in terms of sex composition, but men were overrepresented compared to the total Puerto Rican population in the U.S., in which men comprise 49 percent. Only 37 percent were married. This gap is similar to the entire Puerto Rican population living in the U.S. according to the 2010 decennial census.

The 846,347 Puerto Ricans over the age of 18 who migrated across state boundaries were used to analyze educational attainment. Only 21 percent had not graduated from high school; for 31 percent their highest educational degree was a high school diploma; 32 percent had some college or an associate degree; 11 percent had a bachelor’s degree; and 5 percent had a graduate or professional degree (Table 3). Compared to the Puerto Rican population as a whole, the migrant population was slightly better educated. The number of people who did not finish high school was significantly lower for the migrant group (21% vs. 27%) than the Puerto Rican population as a whole, while the proportion of people who only finished high school was slightly higher (31% to 30%). In terms of college experience, the number who has some college experience is higher for the migrant population (32% vs. 28%) but the proportion of college graduates is virtually the same (16% to 15.9%).

Table 3: Educational attainment of Puerto Rican domestic migrants at least 18-years-old, 2001-2011

Education	Migrants	Percent
Less than HS	176,206	20.8
High School	261,450	30.9
Some college	273,554	32.3
Bachelors	94,682	11.2
Graduate Degree	40,455	4.8
Total	846,347	100

Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

Most of the domestic migrants were actually born in the U.S.: 62 percent. Another 20 percent were born outside the U.S. (mostly in Puerto Rico) and lived in the U.S. for at least 20 years. A smaller portion, 9 percent, was born outside of the U.S. and lived at least 10 years in the U.S.; 9 percent were born outside the U.S. and lived in the U.S. for less than 10 years. (Table 4)

Table 4: Puerto Rican domestic migrants by years living in the U.S., 2001-2011

Years	Migrants	Percent
US born	868,227	69.4
0 to 9	123,676	9.9
10 to 19	90,704	7.3
20+	167,583	13.4
Total	1,250,190	100

Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

In terms of state-to-state migration flows, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Florida acted as both sending and receiving states (Figure 2). Of the larger migration flows, there are six migration flows between five Northeastern states. New York is the origin in four of those migration streams (to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts); while New Jersey is the origin for the other two streams (to New York and Pennsylvania). These flows reflect the process of relocation across the region that has been prevalent since the 1970s (McHugh 1989).

Figure 2: Largest state-to-state migration flows of Puerto Ricans, 2001-2011



Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

There are five migration flows between four Northeastern states (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut) and Florida. Four flows are Puerto Ricans migrating from these states to Florida, while the fifth is Puerto Ricans migrating from Florida to New York. These migration flows show a continuation of settlement patterns. Also, the flows suggest that the Puerto Rican community has created enough networks (family members, community organizations, etc.) for Florida to be commonly thought of as a viable Puerto Rican migration destination across the 1990s and 2000s. During the past two decades the state of Florida was both a sending and a receiving state of Puerto Rican domestic migrants.

Illinois continues to be an important destination for migration from Puerto Rico, but now figures as a sending state to Florida (Table 5). Since the 1990s it has become a relevant origin of internal migration. Florida is receiving migrants from both the Northeast and the Midwest, a continuation of a pattern of increased migration to southern states detected during the 1980s (Foulkes and Newbold 2000). Texas has also emerged as an important destination for Puerto Ricans. For the first time since domestic migration has been analyzed, Texas has become more relevant. That this flow originates in Florida is also relevant because it adds a dimension to the role of this state in the dispersion patterns of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. Now, besides its well-established role as a destination for Puerto Rican migrants, it is also one of the most important places of origin of internal migration.

Table 5: Largest state-to-state migration flows of Puerto Ricans, 2001-2011

Rank	Flow	Migrants
1	NY to FL	92,888
2	NY to PA	41,280
3	NY to NJ	33,500
4	FL to NY	28,565
5	PA to FL	26,792
6	NJ to FL	19,502
7	IL to FL	18,911
8	NJ to NY	17,240
9	NJ to PA	17,073
10	NY to CT	16,732
11	NY to MA	16,459
12	FL to TX	15,415

Source: ACS 1-year samples 2001-2011

To conclude, from 2001 to 2011, the South gained more Puerto Ricans than any other region in the United States. These changes are highlighted by the net gains in the Puerto Rican population of Florida, Georgia, Texas and North Carolina via internal migration. Although arrivals from Puerto Rico account for a large portion of the growth of Puerto Ricans in the South, this change has been aided by internal migration. Finally, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts are experiencing net losses of Puerto Ricans because of migration to other states.

References

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