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In-Migrants to North Dakota: A Socioeconomic Profile

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Population dynamics is a major issue for decision makers at both state and local levels, as well as a long-term interest for scholars concerned with the future of rural America. Migration is one of the fundamental processes of population change, and net migration is arguably the most difficult component of local population change to predict (Wardwell and Copp 1997, Leistritz and Murdock 1981). The relocation of individuals and families leads to changes in public infrastructure and service needs, labor availability, and housing requirements in both origin and destination communities. During the decade of the 1980s, North Dakota experienced high rates of out-migration with attendant strains on rural communities (Hamm et al. 1992). However, recent employment growth associated with successful economic development efforts has led to in-migration to some rural areas of North Dakota, as well as to the state's larger cities. Understanding the characteristics of these in-migrants, their motivations for moving, and their expectations regarding and satisfaction with their new community is critical to sustain North Dakota's momentum in economic development (Goss 1998).

This study identifies the prominent characteristics of North Dakota's new residents and compares their attributes with those of existing residents. The specific objectives included:

1. What is the basic socioeconomic and demographic profile of North Dakota's new residents, and how does this profile compare to existing residents?
2. What factors motivate individuals to move to North Dakota?
3. How satisfied are these new residents once they are living in North Dakota communities?
4. What are the employment and workforce characteristics of the new residents, including the role that new telecommunications technologies may be playing in their work?
5. How do the answers to questions 1 - 4 differ between North Dakota's urban centers, regional trade centers, and rural communities.

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METHODS

Results reported here were generated by an approach that was patterned after similar studies in Nebraska and Washington State (Cordes et al. 1996). A questionnaire was mailed to individuals who had moved to North Dakota from some other state or country, and had subsequently surrendered their previous driver's license for a North Dakota license. In North Dakota, new residents are to obtain a North Dakota driver's license within 90 days of establishing residence.

The sample frame for the study included the names and addresses of individuals who had surrendered their out-of-state/country license for a North Dakota license between January 1 and May 15, 1997. A total of 2,640 persons had surrendered their licenses during this period. Questionnaires were mailed to all persons on the list. After two mailings, a total of 726 usable surveys was obtained, a response rate of 27.5 percent.

The survey analysis included comparisons of many respondent attributes and observations by place of residence. The counties where respondents resided were separated into three categories (Figure 1):

1. Urban centers -- five counties that include the state's four major urban centers (Bismarck-Mandan, Fargo, Grand Forks, and Minot). These communities are all classified as wholesale-retail centers and serve as dominant trade and service centers for extensive trade areas (Bangsund et al. 1991).
2. Regional trade centers -- six counties that contain regional trade centers (Dickinson, Devils Lake, Jamestown, Valley City, Wahpeton, and Williston) with city populations of 7,000 or more. These towns are all classified as complete shopping centers and serve as trade and service centers for multi-county trade areas (Bangsund et al. 1991).
3. Rural communities -- the state's remaining 42 counties. In 1990, none of these counties had a town with a population of 5,000 or greater.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The new residents who responded to the survey were generally younger than North Dakota's population overall. The average respondent age was 36 years (Table 1). About 68 percent of the respondents were married, 18.5 percent had never been married, and 13 percent were divorced, separated, or widowed. The educational level of the new residents was also higher than that of the state's population overall. About 47 percent of the new residents were college graduates, and 35 percent reported some college or vocational/trade school attendance. Only 3 percent had not completed high school. The education of the respondents' spouses or partners was quite similar, with 44.5 percent college graduates, 37 percent having some college or post-secondary vocational training, and only 4 percent not completing high school. About 61 percent of the new residents lived in the state's four largest urban centers (Bismarck-Mandan, Fargo, Grand Forks, and Minot), about 16 percent lived in or near one of the six regional trade centers, and 23 percent lived in the state's remaining counties. About 42 percent of the new North Dakota residents came from adjacent states

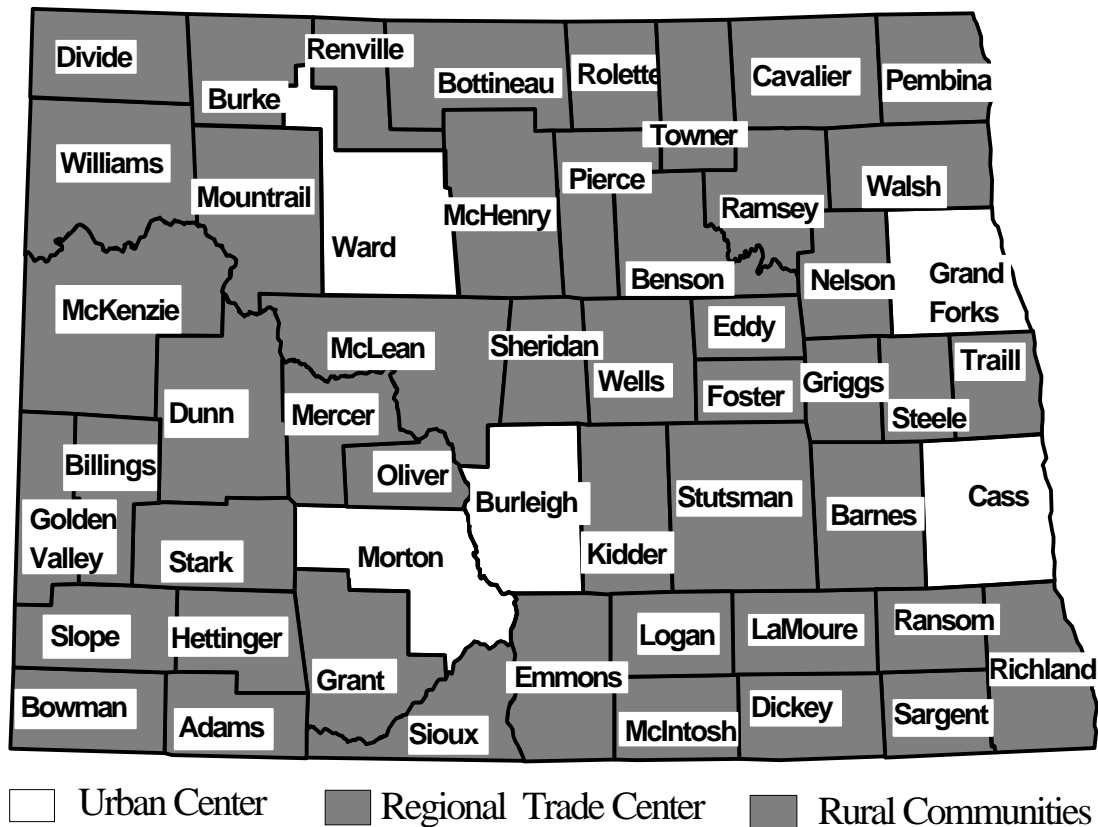


Figure 1. Classification of North Dakota Counties by Urban, Regional Trade Center, and Rural

or provinces, 24 percent of whom came from Minnesota. The other 58 percent came from a number of states with no geographic region predominating. States which were the previous residential location of a number of new residents included California (4.6%), Washington (4.5%), Texas (3.4%), Nebraska (3.2%), Wisconsin (3.0%), Colorado (2.9%), Illinois (2.7%), and Arizona (2.6%).

Past and Planned Moves

More than 90 percent of the new residents responding to the survey had moved to North Dakota between 1994 and 1997. More than 70 percent had moved in 1996 and 1997. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63%) were first-time residents of North Dakota, while 37 percent had lived in the state at some time in the past (Table 1). When asked when they had left North Dakota to live elsewhere, about 45 percent of these return migrants indicated they had left earlier in the 1990s, 38 percent had left during the 1980s, and 17 percent had left prior to 1980. About 29 percent of the new residents indicated that they had parents or grandparents living in North Dakota, and of those whose parents or grandparents do not currently reside in North Dakota, about 22 percent indicated that their parents or grandparents had lived here at some time. Overall, 48 percent of the respondents can be said to have previous ties to North Dakota (i.e., they lived here at some time in the past or their parents or grandparents live here or did at one time).

When asked whether they would move to North Dakota if they had it to do over again, more

than two-thirds of the respondents (67%) said definitely or probably yes, while 14 percent were undecided and less than 19 percent replied probably or definitely no. The percentage of respondents who would not move to North Dakota again ranged from almost 22 percent in the urban centers to only 12 percent in the rural communities.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of New Residents Responding to 1997 Survey

Characteristic	Value
Average Respondent Age:	36.0 Years
Gender:	
Male	45.0
Female	55.0
Marital Status:	
Married	68.4
Never married	18.5
Divorced/separated/widowed	13.1
Education--highest level completed by respondent:	
Less than high school	3.2
High school graduate	14.5
Trade or vocational school	9.2
Some college	25.9
College graduate	31.2
Professional or graduate degree	16.1
Current Residence Location:	
Urban center	61.1
Regional trade center	15.9
Rural community	23.0
Was respondent a first time North Dakota resident?	
Yes	62.6
No	37.3

The percentage of respondents who would not move to North Dakota again was highest in the under 25 age group (24%) and lowest in the over 60 age group (11%). Likewise, the percentage who would not move if they had it to do again was much higher for nonwhites (33%) than for whites (18%). The percentage who would move to North Dakota again was higher for college graduates (70%) and those with a high school education or less (68%), compared to those with some college or other post-secondary education (63%). The percentage who would move to North Dakota again was higher for the previous residents (75%) than for first-time residents (62%). It was also substantially higher for those who were out of the labor force (75%) and those who were employed full-time (69%) than for those who were employed part-time (59%) or unemployed (45%). Finally, the percentage who would not move to North Dakota again was more than twice as high (37%) among residents of Grand Forks County than for other residents (17%). (The survey was conducted only a few months after Grand Forks suffered a devastating flood.)

Reasons for Moving to North Dakota

When asked about reasons for moving to North Dakota, the new residents most often indicated that they were looking for a safer place to live (59.5%), that they wished to be closer to relatives (50%), that they were attracted by the quality of the natural environment (49%), and that they were seeking a

lower cost of living (48%) (Table 2). When responses are compared by the respondents' place of residence, these reasons were all mentioned more frequently by residents of rural communities than by those living in larger communities.

Table 2. In-migrant Reasons for Moving to North Dakota, Would Repeat Decision to Move to North Dakota, and Family Income by Place of Residence

Item	Place of Residence			Overall
	Urban Centers	Regional Trade Centers	Rural Commun- ities	
Reasons for Moving to North Dakota	--Percent who said reason was <i>very</i> or <i>somewhat</i> important --			
Looking for a safer place to live	57.5	60.0	64.3	59.5
To be closer to relatives	47.0	53.2	56.5	50.1
Quality of the natural environment	45.2	51.4	59.2	49.4
To lower cost of living	43.5	57.7	53.5	48.0
If You Had It To Do Over Again, Would You Move to North Dakota?	----- Percent -----			
Definitely Yes	31.3	29.5	38.3	32.6
Probably Yes	35.3	35.7	32.1	34.6
Don't Know	11.6	17.9	17.3	13.9
Probably No	11.1	8.9	8.6	10.2
Definitely No	10.7	8.0	3.7	8.7
Family Income the first year after Moving:				
Less than \$10,000	9.0	17.9	12.1	11.1
\$10,000 -- \$19,999	16.0	22.1	24.3	18.8
\$20,000 -- \$29,999	22.2	14.7	22.1	21.1
\$30,000 -- \$39,999	17.1	15.8	13.6	16.1
\$40,000 -- \$49,999	10.1	10.5	11.4	10.5
\$50,000 -- \$74,999	14.0	12.6	13.6	13.7
\$75,000 or more	11.6	6.3	2.9	8.8
Family Income the year before Moving:				
Less than \$10,000	8.6	15.8	11.6	10.4
\$10,000 -- \$19,999	19.3	16.8	18.4	18.7
\$20,000 -- \$29,999	20.1	14.7	17.7	18.7
\$30,000 -- \$39,999	15.9	13.7	15.7	15.5
\$40,000 -- \$49,999	8.3	14.7	13.6	10.5
\$50,000 -- \$74,999	14.1	13.7	15.7	14.4
\$75,000 or more	13.8	10.5	7.5	11.8

When the reasons for moving were compared for first-time residents versus return migrants, most of the reasons were viewed as more important by the return migrants (Table 3). For example, safer place to live was cited by 68 percent of return migrants compared to 53 percent of first-time residents. Similarly, quality of the natural environment and outdoor recreational opportunities were cited substantially more often by previous residents returning to the state than by first-time residents, whose moves were more frequently linked to employment.

Table 3. Reasons for Moving To North Dakota by Return Migrant or First-Time Resident

	Return Migrants	First-Time Residents	Overall
--Percent who said reason was <i>very</i> or <i>somewhat</i> important --			
Looking for a safer place to live	68.4	53.3	58.9
Quality of the natural environment	62.7	41.3	49.1
To be closer to relatives	77.9	31.2	48.8
To lower cost of living	51.8	45.7	48.0

Employment of New Residents

For some households, job-related considerations are central to the decision to relocate. Among the new North Dakota residents responding to the survey, 12 percent indicated that they had been transferred by their current employer, almost 10 percent had experienced a military transfer, 26 percent had accepted employment by a new employer, and 6 percent had moved to start or take over a business. In addition, among those who moved with a spouse or partner, almost 11 percent indicated that their spouse/partner had been transferred by their current employer, 17 percent had received a military transfer, 23 percent had accepted employment by a new employer, and 7 percent moved to start/take over a business. Taking these job-related motivations together, about 65 percent of the households reported one or more of these job-related considerations as influencing their move. The percentage was slightly higher for first-time residents -- 69 percent of these households reported one or more job-related considerations. In particular, the percentages of military transfers were higher for this group (13.6% of respondents and 23.6% for spouses).

Job-related factors also influenced some households in their decision to leave their previous location. About 4.5 percent of respondents reported that they left in part because they had been laid off from their job, and 5 percent indicated that their spouse had been laid off. About 4.8 percent of the respondents indicated that a decision to retire had been important in deciding to leave their previous residence, while 5.2 percent indicated their spouse's retirement had been a factor. About 4.5 percent of the respondents indicated that a consideration in leaving was that they could continue to work "long-distance" for the same employer or clients, while 3.1 percent of the spouses were able to continue working long-distance.

About 67 percent of the survey respondents were employed full-time (35 hours or more per week) after moving to North Dakota (i.e., at the time of the survey), while another 12 percent were employed part-time, 6 percent were not employed but were looking for work, and 14 percent were not employed and were not looking for work. The percentage of respondents who were not employed was greater after their move (20.7%) than before moving (16.6%). For spouses, the percentage who were not employed was similar before and after moving (20% after vs. 19.6% before).

About 67 percent of the respondents were employed full-time, and this ranged from 69 percent in the regional trade centers to 65 percent in rural communities. Among spouses, 69 percent overall were employed full-time, ranging from 73 percent in urban centers to 59 percent in rural communities. In addition, 12 percent of respondents and 11 percent of spouses were employed part-time, with slightly higher percentages in rural communities. About 6 percent of the respondents were not employed but were looking for work, a situation generally referred to as being *unemployed*, as were 5 percent of the spouses. The percentages who were unemployed did not appear to vary substantially by

place of residence. About 14 percent of the respondents and 15 percent of the spouses were not employed and were not looking for work, a situation usually referred to as being *out of the labor force*. The percentage of respondents who were out of the labor force ranged from 14.1 percent in urban centers to 15.6 percent in rural communities, while the corresponding percentages for spouses were 11.7 percent in urban centers and 22.1 percent in rural counties.

Equipment and Services Used at Work

The new residents also were queried concerning types of equipment and services they use at work. About 81 percent of respondents and 80 percent of their spouses use a computer with keyboard at work. Other equipment used by a majority of respondents and spouses included fax machine or modem (67% of respondents and 64% of spouses), telephone answering machine or voice mail (61% of both respondents and spouses), and computer modem (55% of respondents and 60% of spouses).

The rates of use reported for most of the equipment or services listed were lower for those living in rural communities. For instance, only 66 percent of respondents in rural communities reported using a computer with keyboard, compared to 86 percent in urban centers. Similarly, only 52 percent of rural residents reported using a fax machine, compared to 71 percent of those who live in or near urban centers. Electronic mail was a service that is used more than twice as frequently by residents of urban centers than by those in rural communities. On the other hand, there was relatively little difference in use of telephone answering service/voice mail or cellular telephone. The use of overnight or courier delivery service was substantially higher for those who live in or near regional trade centers than for residents of either urban centers or rural communities.

Living Arrangements

About 30 percent of the new residents reported that they moved to North Dakota alone, while 70 percent moved with others. About 66 percent moved with a spouse or partner, and 40 percent moved with children. The percentage who moved alone was substantially higher among those who live in urban centers (32%) than for those who live in rural communities (22%). About 13 percent of the respondents reported that they had relocated since initially moving to North Dakota.

More than 82 percent of the respondents reported living within the city limits of a town or city, while about 13 percent lived outside of town but within 15 minutes travel time, and 5 percent lived more than 15 minutes from town. Interestingly, even for residents of rural counties, only 6 percent lived more than 15 minutes from the nearest town.

Family Income

New residents were asked to estimate their total family income for the first year after moving and the last year before moving. Income for the first year after moving covered a broad range, with 11 percent of respondents reporting a total income of \$10,000 or less and 19 percent reporting \$10,000 to \$19,999, while 14 percent had incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,999 and about 9 percent reported incomes of \$75,000 or more (Table 2).

The percentage of respondents in the lowest income groups was slightly greater after moving;

29.9 percent of respondents had incomes less than \$20,000 after moving compared to 29.1 percent before moving. The percentage of respondents in the highest income categories was somewhat lower after moving; 22.5 percent of respondents reported incomes of \$50,000 or more after moving compared to 26.2 percent before moving. Not surprisingly, a substantially greater share (more than 70 %) of those North Dakota in-migrants with household income levels of more than \$50,000 were college graduates, were married, and resided in urban areas of the state. Slightly more than one-half of the respondents who made more than \$50,000 in annual income were less than 40 years of age.

Telecommunications and Computer Equipment in Home

New residents were asked about telecommunications and computer-related equipment and services that were available in their homes. Almost 99 percent had touch tone telephones, and 96 percent had VCR players, while about 85 percent had a telephone answering machine. About 75 percent of respondents had cable TV while 11 percent had TV satellite dishes. About 58 percent of the respondents had personal computers, and 45 percent had computer modems. Equipment and services reported by smaller percentages of respondents included fax machine (19%), non-local electronic mail service (16.7%), local electronic mail service (17.3%), multiple phone lines (14.4%), and incoming toll-free 800 number (9.9%).

The prevalence of some types of equipment or services in homes appeared to be related to the respondents' place of residence, while others were relatively uniform in their distribution. For example, touch tone phones were reported by more than 98 percent of homes in rural communities as well as 99 percent of those in urban centers. Likewise, VCR players were reported in nearly 95 percent of the homes in regional trade centers, 96 percent of those in rural communities, and 97 percent of those in urban centers. Items found more often in urban centers included telephone answering machines, cable TV, personal computers and modems, fax machines, and electronic mail service. On the other hand, TV satellite dishes and incoming toll-free 800 numbers were more often reported in rural communities. In many cases, the differences between urban centers and rural communities were relatively small. For example, 54 percent of homes in rural communities reported personal computers (compared to 62% in urban centers), 39 percent had computer modems (49.5% in urban centers), and 78 percent had telephone answering machines (compared to 89% in urban centers).

Public Services and Community Amenities

Survey respondents evaluated a variety of public services and community amenities. For each item that is available in their community, the respondents indicated their degree of satisfaction, ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. The services that were most often reported as being unavailable were public transportation (12.5% said it was unavailable in their community), nursing home care (5.3%), mental health services (5.2%), Head Start programs (5.1%), retail shopping (3.7%), library services (3.6%), senior centers (3.2%), and solid waste disposal (3.0%). Each of these services was most frequently reported as unavailable by respondents residing in rural communities. For example, public transportation was reported as unavailable by 32.5 percent of respondents from rural communities, compared to 4.2 percent of those in urban centers. Similarly, nursing home care was reported as unavailable by 15.6 percent of rural community respondents, compared to 2.4 percent of those in urban centers; Head Start programs were unavailable to 16.6 percent of rural community

respondents (compared to 2.2% in urban centers), and mental health services were unavailable to 14.9 percent of rural residents (compared to 2.6% in urban centers).

Among the respondents for whom the various services were available, more than 96 percent of those expressing an opinion were either satisfied or very satisfied with fire protection. Other services with which 90 percent or more of the residents were somewhat or very satisfied included sewage disposal, water, solid waste disposal, senior centers, nursing home care, emergency medical services, and church or civic activities. The services with which the lowest percentages of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied were entertainment (59% were somewhat or very satisfied), streets and highways (60%), retail shopping (65.5%), and public transportation (67.6%).

The percentages of respondents who were somewhat or very satisfied with these services was generally higher in the urban centers than in rural communities, although this was not always the case. About 68 percent of urban center residents were somewhat or very satisfied with entertainment, for instance, compared to only 39 percent of rural community residents. Similarly, 77.5 percent of urban center dwellers were satisfied with the retail shopping available in the community, compared to 42 percent of those who lived in rural communities, and 75.5 percent of urban center residents were satisfied with public transportation, compared to 50 percent of those living in rural communities. On the other hand, rural community residents were more satisfied with roads and streets than their counterparts who lived in or near larger communities. About 73 percent of rural community residents were satisfied or very satisfied with streets and highways, compared to 35 percent of those who live in or near regional trade centers and 62 percent of those who live in or near urban centers.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Recent employment growth appears to be stimulating increased in-migration to some of North Dakota's rural communities, as well as to the state's larger cities, and additional in-migration is likely to be critical to sustain the state's momentum in economic development. Understanding the characteristics of the new residents, their motivations for moving, and their expectations regarding and satisfaction with their new community is important for state and local decision makers. This study addresses these needs by describing basic socioeconomic characteristics of new residents to North Dakota, the factors motivating their move, and their satisfaction with the North Dakota communities where they live.

The new residents who responded to the survey were generally younger than the North Dakota population overall. About two-thirds were between 21 and 40 years old. The educational level of the migrants was also higher than that of the state's population overall, as 47 percent of the new residents were college graduates and an additional 35 percent reported some college or post-secondary vocational/trade school attendance. Thus, these new residents are augmenting population strata that were severely depleted by the out-migration of the 1980s.

While 42 percent of the new residents came from adjacent states (24 percent from Minnesota alone), the other 58 percent came from a broad cross-section of states, with no single region predominating. An implication appears to be that North Dakota can attract new residents from many parts of the country.

The new residents generally appeared happy with their new communities and their reception there. About 90 percent indicated that they felt welcome or very welcome, and about two-thirds said that, if they had it to do over again, they would probably or definitely move to North Dakota. When asked to rate their communities based on whether they are friendly, trusting, and supportive, the respondents gave relatively favorable ratings on each dimension. New residents in both rural communities and urban centers gave their respective communities higher ratings on each attribute than did those living in or near regional trade centers.

When asked about their reasons for moving to North Dakota, the new residents most often mentioned: looking for a safer place to live (59.5%), closer to relatives (50%), quality of the natural environment (49.5%), lower cost of living (48%), outdoor recreational opportunities (38%), and quality of local grade/high schools (35%). These factors could be emphasized by those seeking to encourage individuals or businesses to relocate to North Dakota.

New job opportunities or transfers were central to many new residents' decisions to relocate. About 65 percent of the new resident households indicated that a new job or business opportunity, a transfer by a current employer, or a military transfer had been a key factor influencing their decision to move.

Following their move to North Dakota, about 67 percent of respondents and 69 percent of their spouses or partners were employed full-time, while 12 percent of respondents and 11 percent of spouses were employed part-time. About 10 percent of respondents and 11 percent of spouses were self-employed, with the percentages of self-employment being highest in rural communities. About 9 percent of each respondents and spouses overall reported holding more than one job, with the percentages of multiple job holding being highest in rural communities. About 9 percent of

respondents and 8 percent of spouses reported that they normally work at home, whereas 79 percent of respondents and 77 percent of spouses work at a fixed location elsewhere. The remainder (roughly 12% of respondents and 15% of spouses) reported that their work is done at no single location.

The new residents reported using a variety of telecommunications capabilities at work. The most commonly reported items were computer with keyboard (81% of respondents and 80% of spouses), fax machine or modem (67% of respondents and 64% of spouses), answering machine or voice mail (61% of both), and computer modem (55% of respondents and 60% of spouses).

About 30 percent of the new residents moved to North Dakota alone, while 70 percent moved with others. About 66 percent moved with a spouse or partner and 40 percent moved with children. About 41 percent owned their current home, 45 percent rented, and 14 percent reported other housing arrangements. Household incomes covered a broad range, with about 30 percent reporting an income of \$20,000 or less the first year after moving while 23 percent had incomes over \$50,000. The percentage of households with incomes less than \$20,000 was slightly higher after moving than before, and the percentage with incomes over \$50,000 was slightly lower.

Most of the new residents had a number of telecommunications and computer-related capabilities available in their homes. Almost 99 percent had touch tone telephones, 96 percent had VCR players, 85 percent had telephone answering machines, 58 percent had personal computers, and 45 percent had computer modems. About 9 percent reported that the telephone service available to their home would limit the use of some telecommunications services or capabilities, and this percentage was more than twice as high in rural communities (15.5%) compared to urban centers (7%).

The new residents were asked to evaluate a variety of public services and community amenities. Some services were unavailable to a substantial number of respondents. For example, public transportation was unavailable to 12.5 percent of respondents overall (32.5% in rural communities), nursing home care was viewed as unavailable by 5.3 percent (15.6% in rural communities), mental health care was unavailable to 5.2 percent overall (14.9% in rural communities), and Head Start programs were unavailable to 5.1 percent (16.6% in rural communities). Among those to whom services were available, satisfaction with the various services varied. Of those who expressed an opinion, more than 96 percent were satisfied with fire protection, and more than 90 percent were satisfied with water, sewer, solid waste disposal, emergency medical services, church or civic activities, senior centers, and nursing home care. On the other hand, the respondents were less satisfied with entertainment (only 59% were very or somewhat satisfied), streets and highways (60%), retail shopping (66%), and public transportation (68%). These may be areas for attention by state and local decision makers.

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