THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
WSJ.com

February 20, 2013, 7:30 AM ET

Recession Prompted Big Spike in Short-Distance Moves

ByNeil Shah

The recession forced a surprisingly high number of Americans to make short-distance moves, new research shows.

In 2010, a year after the recession technically ended, nearly 1 in 10 Americans moved locally—defined as moving within your county—in part because they were losing homes to foreclosure or voluntarily downsizing in the face of lean times, according to a study released Wednesday. The percentage of Americans moving locally was the highest in a decade, says **UCLA** public-policy professor **Michael Stoll**, who authored the study.

"This was a big shock to communities and it will be interesting to see how this plays out," Mr. Stoll says.

Short-distance moves have since dropped back down to more normal levels, Mr. Stoll said. The "local-move rate"—the proportion of people age five and older who say they moved within their home county over the past year—fell from 2010 to 2011 by one percentage point and is now where it was in the middle of the 2000s, before the housing boom, Mr. Stoll says, citing data from the **Labor Department's** Current Population Survey. Other data from the **U.S. Census** show that a slightly higher proportion of Americans are moving to different counties—a sign that Americans are finding more jobs.

Americans are a relatively mobile bunch, but they've been moving less over the past 15 years and economists are wondering why. Some say technological advances are making it easier for people to search for jobs remotely, or even work remotely, reducing unnecessary moves. The U.S. may also be growing more homogenous in terms of the kinds of jobs on offer. The recession that began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009 exacerbated this trend: Fewer Americans crossed county and state lines for jobs since there weren't really any "greener pastures" to seek out.

But that slowdown in long-distance moving masked a sharp spike in short-distance moves—one that affected some Americans much more than others. Local movers tend to be younger, single, renters, foreign-born and lower-earners, Mr. Stoll said. Those more likely to move locally were also those in metropolitan areas with high unemployment and foreclosures, especially in the West and South. In Las Vegas, for example, which was hard hit by the real-estate crash, some 20% of people moved locally in 2010. In Austin, Texas, 16% moved locally, same for Phoenix; in Nashville, Tennessee, and Birmingham, Alabama, around 12% moved. Black Americans were more likely to move locally as a result of job losses than white Americans. Before the recession, around 16% of local movers were black. During the recession, this picked up to 19%.