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## Scotland's Rural College

### International Case Studies on Demographic Change in Remote Rural Areas: What can Scotland learn from elsewhere?

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## **International Case Studies on Demographic Change in Remote Rural Areas: What can Scotland learn from elsewhere?**

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## 1. Background and objectives

This working paper is an output of a project funded by the Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) division's 2016-2020 Strategic Research Programme<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, this work has been carried out under Research Deliverable 3.4.1 'Demographic Change in Remote Areas'. The underpinning research question addressed by this project is *"How do changes in the population of remote rural areas of Scotland affect the social, economic and ecological resilience of these areas?"* Previous working papers have specifically addressed the definition of sparsely populated areas and the demographic and economic structures and policy approaches in these areas (Copus and Hopkins; 2017 and Mc Morran; Copus and Atterton 2017). This paper focuses on the selection of a small number of case study regions from outwith Scotland, which have comparable degrees of remoteness and sparsity (or "population potential"), with the aim of investigating these cases as potential sources of good practice ideas and alternative policy approaches in tackling demographic stagnation or decline which are of relevance to Scotland.

## 2. Approach to developing the case studies

To identify appropriate case study areas, the researchers approached a small number of relevant contacts for their input as well as conducting a narrow review of literature relating to sparsely populated areas in Europe and further afield. This included outputs from Nordregio and from the REGINA project<sup>2</sup> and wider material relating to non-European countries. The aim was to include both small-scale (i.e. community-level) case studies as well as large-scale (i.e. regional-level) case studies. Case studies were sought where population decline had occurred but had either been reversed or slowed through the development of specific localised approaches, including promotion of the in-migration of foreign nationals or of returnee migration, the latter in particular encouraged through promoting economic diversification.

Following initial discussion with relevant key contacts and a focused review of relevant studies, a number of regional and more localised (e.g. municipality scale) case studies were selected. These were set within three specific national contexts (Canada, Norway and Sweden), with the final case studies comprised of:

- Kalmar County (Sweden)
- Storuman municipality (Sweden)
- Nordland County (Norway)
- Southern Manitoba, in Manitoba Province (Canada)
- Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia (Canada)
- Valemount, British Columbia (Canada)

In each case, key respondents were identified and contacted and a snowballing approach was taken to identifying additional relevant contacts and sources of information (e.g. local level reports, websites etc.). Phone interviews were conducted with a small number of relevant contacts in each case (see Appendix 1 for a full list of phone interviewees). Anonymised

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Research/About/EBAR/StrategicResearch/strategicresearch2016-21/srp2016-21> [accessed 31st January 2017]

<sup>2</sup> See outputs from the REGINA project: <http://www.reginaproject.eu/resourcecentre/>

quotes from these interviews are used in this report to illustrate the points made, and are shown in italics. In the case of Canada and Sweden some face to face discussions were also possible through attendance at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Conference<sup>3</sup> in Saskatchewan, Canada in October 2018 and discussions in Edinburgh with a group of visiting Swedish community development workers from Kalmar County.

In each case the key questions which were addressed with the interviewees included:

- Existing population and demographic trends and previous and current levels of in- and out-migration and the impacts of this on the age structure of the population;
- The role (past/current/future) of in-migration within the case study areas and related impacts, including additional skillsets and increased capacity;
- The existence of any perceived critical population thresholds within the case study area for endogenous development;
- Key current and future challenges for local/regional development e.g. population decline and population ageing, reduced capacity and employment opportunities etc.
- Examples of specific initiatives and policy measures being implemented to mediate/address demographic challenges including in-migration initiatives, regional attractiveness measures, training and employment opportunities etc.

The case studies are presented following a brief summary of their national context, with each case outlining the key relevant challenges (with a focus on demographic factors) and examples of actions and initiatives being undertaken to address them. These case studies were also presented at a workshop held at Scottish Government in September 2019, and key points of feedback from that workshop are incorporated here.

Following on from the case study information, a short section is included which is based on discussion of these issues at a meeting of the Rural Communities Liaison Group in March 2019. This Group includes many key stakeholders and provided an excellent opportunity to gather some additional input to the work undertaken.

The final section of the report presents a summary of key over-arching themes and lessons for what can be learned of greatest relevance to sparsely populated areas in Scotland.

## **3. International Case Studies**

### **3.1 Sweden**

#### **3.1.1 Introduction**

Overall, 54.6% of Sweden is classified as sparsely populated – with these areas home to 9.1% of the population and providing 8.6% of national economic output (OECD, 2017a). Sparsely populated regions are given a high level of priority nationally and a high level of investment. The accessibility of Sweden's sparsely populated areas and the costs of road maintenance, combined with distance to markets and travel times (exacerbated by the climate), represent

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/event/2018/10/09/canadian-rural-revitalization-foundation-conference-health>

key regional challenges (OECD, 2017a). The population of many of the country's sparsely populated areas is in decline as a result of out-migration and more rapid ageing than for Sweden as a whole; with implications for the size of the labour force, with access to services and housing also challenging in some areas (Lindqvist, 2010). Since 1985, while Swedish cities have grown, more than half of Sweden's municipalities have experienced significant population decline, with northern Sweden having experienced considerable sustained decline since the 1960s, and these regions remaining particularly vulnerable to ongoing population and demographic challenges.

Despite improvements in broadband access and good access to educational opportunities, the rural economy in these areas remains heavily dependent on primary production, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, reindeer husbandry, mining, hydropower and SMEs (Knoblock and Ikonen, 2007). These aspects are often profitable and dominant aspects of rural economies, which in some cases can result in conflicts within local communities. In addition to supporting primary production, policy approaches to SPAs areas<sup>4</sup> have incorporated an emphasis on maintaining high quality public services, infrastructure (including ICT) and transport, the development of an innovative business sector and eco-efficient green energy sector, and a diverse tourism industry (Hedström and Littke, 2011). For the 2014-2020 period 45% of total EU Regional Development funding in Sweden is targeted at sparsely populated regions, with funding under the European Social Fund focused on employment and labour mobility, education and training and social inclusion and poverty, with 9% of total ESF funding targeting sparsely populated regions (OECD, 2017a).

A shift towards territorial and local (municipality-level) approaches to rural development (e.g. community agencies) is apparent in Sweden, reflecting EU Policy and an underlying emphasis on bottom-up governance in Nordic countries; nevertheless, some policy areas remain sectoral and nationally led. Sweden has placed considerable emphasis on investing in third level education in peripheral regions based on a networked model to facilitate access to tertiary education for a geographically larger share of the population (Davies and Michie, 2012). Such approaches encourage retention of younger people and act as hubs of learning and innovation, thereby enhancing established economic activities and fostering entrepreneurship (Hedström and Littke, 2011).

Specific approaches to addressing demographic decline in Sweden have included encouraging/fostering in-migration (including of international migrants), promotion of social mobility and inclusion, cross-border health care, distance health care, improving educational opportunities and improving regional attractiveness. The Swedish Government has also placed emphasis on the placement of refugees in sparsely populated regions of Sweden in recent years, which has dramatically altered the population structure in some municipalities, although these initiatives have not resulted in a sustained reversal of population decline in most areas. In recent years, in-migration and the provision of asylum for refugees has become an increasingly high profile debate and conflict at political levels in Sweden. A number of specific 'attractiveness' initiatives have also been undertaken at regional levels in Sweden, to

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<sup>4</sup> See the final report of the Parliamentary Rural Committee on remote rural areas (including an English summary) [http://www.sou.gov.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SOU-2017\\_1\\_tryck.pdf](http://www.sou.gov.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SOU-2017_1_tryck.pdf)

market regions to potential in-migrants in relation to their employment opportunities, living standards and natural environments. In recent years a shift has occurred in relation to sparsely populated areas in Sweden, away from a singular focus on arresting population decline towards ensuring the sustainability of high quality public services in these regions despite a negative population curve.

### 3.1.2 Sweden Case Study I - Kalmar County

#### *Background*

Kalmar County in the South-West of Sweden has a population of 243,000, spread across twelve municipalities, with an average population density of 22 per sq/km. Kalmar varies in character, with parts of the region known for the natural heritage features, with tourism an important economic sector in these areas. Within the county some regions are experiencing population growth while others are declining, with population decline having been reversed across the region as a whole in recent years, due to in-migration, particularly of international migrants and/or refugees, and growth in the regions larger towns and cities. Syrian and Iraqi refugees have been an important component of the in-migration to the region in recent years, with relatively high numbers of refugees placed in schools by some municipalities, with the aim of increasing the overall level of service for schools. In 2017, the Kalmar region hosted just over 6,000 refugees, less than some of the more populated regions in Sweden, but the highest level of refugees as a proportion (2.7%) of the regional population<sup>5</sup>.

#### *Key demographic challenges*

Kalmar County faces severe demographic challenges, in relation to the relatively large proportion of elderly and the low numbers of children and young people, with some municipalities facing particularly severe challenges in relation to youth out-migration. Based on the demographic vulnerabilities analysis conducted by Nordregio<sup>6</sup>, the municipality of Kalmar (within Kalmar County) is vulnerable in only two indicators, while three municipalities are vulnerable in six or more indicators and three are vulnerable across all ten indicators. The low numbers of young people can make filling skilled employment roles challenging, with social isolation also a challenge for younger people remaining in sparsely populated municipalities. Despite the short-term positive effect of in-migration for remote areas, longer term many in-migrants often move out of remote rural regions into the region's cities to seek employment or to move closer to friends and family. This movement of recent in-migrants back out of rural areas is further compounded by the on-going migration of Swedish nationals into Swedish cities.

A further factor which can limit the beneficial effects of in-migration of refugees relates to the time period (commonly two years) required for asylum applications to be processed, during which time refugees are often not eligible for employment and all housing, educational, social

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<sup>5</sup> Data presented in: OECD (2018), Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Gothenburg, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264299603-en>

<sup>6</sup> See analysis of Nordic-Baltic demographic vulnerabilities at municipal level for 2015: <http://www.nordregio.org/maps/nordic-baltic-demographic-vulnerabilities-2015/>

and health care costs are covered by the Swedish state. In addition, some foreign migrants have educational qualifications that are not recognised as eligible qualifications in Sweden. In some municipalities the accommodation provided for refugees was recognised as being of low quality or located in isolated areas: *'often the refugees are homed in abandoned hotels or schools in remote areas which are not of a very high standard and a bit isolated, which doesn't help encourage these people to stay in the area'*. In-migrants are also recognised as being at risk of social exclusion, due to language barriers, the time lag in entering the workforce and cultural differences. Notably, the uptake of in-migration initiatives and refugees varies across municipalities, with uptake usually higher in areas suffering greater demographic decline, with municipalities receiving greater financial support in line with uptake.

### *Responses and solutions*

A variety of initiatives have been undertaken at regional and municipality level in Kalmar County, including a focus on social inclusion and mobility, including support for in-migrants in learning Swedish. To reduce social isolation and increase integration opportunities for foreign migrants and refugees, free bus passes have been provided to all asylum seekers across the county, through a collaboration between the Swedish Migration Board, the County Council and Kalmar County Transport. Kalmar County Council has also developed a 'fast track' pathway to employment for refugees with professional training in healthcare (e.g. doctors, nurses etc.), with the council responsible for public health care provision in the region. New arrivals with relevant healthcare qualifications are identified at an early stage and supported with training, internships and other aspects to speed up the legal processes related to their application. In Emmaboda municipality (in Kalmar County), a project entitled 'New Resource' has also been undertaken to support refugees and other newly arrived in-migrants in undertaking training, including undertaking a university degree. Kalmar Council also monitors services provision/availability and the distance/travel time for residents to key services, to ensure sufficient access to services at local level and to allow for early identification of emerging services gaps for people living in remote areas.

In an effort to address the region's challenging demographics the council has also placed specific emphasis on youth initiatives and ensuring youth are retained as a *'resource for sustainable regional development'* within the regional development strategy. This has included involving younger community members within policy processes and local government through the establishment of youth councils and a youth priorities survey, engagement of youth through school-based initiatives and the creation of national and international initiatives for young people to travel and gain personal experience. Specific measures have also been undertaken to address youth unemployment and provide opportunities for young people to engage with the labour market. In practice, these efforts have encountered bureaucratic challenges and administrative challenges. Nevertheless, co-operative approaches (and collaboration between the council and municipalities) have resulted in highly effective shared learning and youth initiatives and youth action plans being developed by municipalities across the region, including establishing youth affairs posts in a number of municipalities and joint working on youth agendas with wider stakeholders (e.g. NGOs).

### 3.1.3 Sweden Case Study II - Storuman municipality

#### *Background*

Storuman is a municipality in the far North of Sweden in Västerbotten County with a population of around 6,000. It is one of the largest municipalities in Sweden, but with one of the lowest population densities of less than one person per sq/km. Storuman is a scenic mountainous municipality, characterised by fjords and forest landscapes, with tourism a key industry in the western part of the municipality. The local economy is diversified, with several large scale industries operating in the area, including the timber and forestry products industry, eight hydroelectric power stations, one operational mine, a windfarm and several additional mining (prospecting and remediation) and small-scale engineering projects, with these industries (together with the tourism sector) acting as key local employers.

#### *Key demographic challenges*

The population of Storuman has declined in recent decades (by around 10% between 2001 and 2015), with an increase in the number of people of retirement age, whereas the working age population (particularly those in the 30-34 age group) and number of children has decreased as a proportion of the total population<sup>7</sup>. This has resulted in a shrinking labour force and a reduced local tax base, contrasting with the increasing cost of social services due to the increasing number of pensioners in the municipality. In-migration of labour-migrants and refugees (including a significant influx of refugees in recent years) has had a positive impact on the municipalities' demographics, although the overall decline is continuing. Population projections developed as part of the REGINA project<sup>8</sup> predict the population of Storuman as declining from 6,000 currently to 5,200 by 2040 and 4,800 by 2050. These projections also predict an increase in the proportion of the population in the 45-70 cohort and further decline in the numbers of children and people of working age, indicative of increasing dependency rates and severe long term challenges for the sustainability of the community.

The economic activity (81.3%) and employment (73.8%) rates for Storuman are lower than the national average (85.6% and 77.7%) in both cases, although the overall unemployment rate is not particularly high (7.5% compared to 7.9% nationally) and unemployment is actually lower in the municipality than in many other parts of Sweden. However, the youth unemployment rate (28.3%) is considerably higher than the regional (21.6%) and national (23.5%) rates for youth unemployment and this represents a key challenge for the area. Additionally, despite a reasonably diversified economy, younger people often migrate out of the area, often for educational or job-related reasons, although the drivers for youth-migration have not been researched at local-level and are not well understood. This contributes to the number of recent graduates in the area being lower than in other parts of Sweden, although the numbers of people with vocational and university qualifications in the area has increased somewhat in recent years.

Employment and training opportunities have (to some extent) improved in the local area in recent years, although in a community survey for the REGINA project<sup>9</sup> 29% of respondents

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<sup>7</sup> Data on employment rates and municipality demographics taken from the report for the REGINA project: [Demographic change and labour market challenges](#)

<sup>8</sup> REGINA project foresight model: <http://www.reginaproject.eu/dfm/>

<sup>9</sup> See the report from the REGINA project: [Social Impacts of Mining in Storuman Municipality](#)



indicated they were dissatisfied with education, work and career related opportunities in the local area. The nature of some local industries (e.g. energy, mining) results in requirements for both unskilled labour and some highly specialised skills, with industries often facing particular challenges in attracting and recruiting for both highly skilled (specialist) and unskilled roles. Relatively small shifts in the local labour market for specialised jobs can have a dramatic effect locally, with the planned closure of the local operation centre for wind power potentially resulting in the loss of eleven specialist jobs. This has the potential to have a major effect locally, due to the difficulty in replacing these types of specialist positions for the staff concerned. A further challenge for the municipality relates to ensuring that the partners of new employees are also able to find employment in the local area, which is suited to their previous qualifications and experience (to successfully facilitate young couple moving into the area). This can be further compounded (particularly for young families) by the limited availability of housing and the relatively high costs of building new housing in the area (with houses often costing more to build than what they can be sold for). Despite relatively high numbers of younger workers entering the area as seasonal labour migrants working in the ski industry, this group are generally not retained to fill other job roles in the off-season.

A further challenge facing refugees and labour migrants relates to the difficulties of becoming integrated in a remote community with limited community meeting spaces: *'we spoke to people in adult education locally and they said it is very difficult to become integrated, especially if you are a woman, yes you can get a job and a good career but finding a partner and a social life is not easy and you can become a bit isolated here'*. Newer community members can also face challenges in sourcing information on relevant services or *'accessing the local society'*, due to a lack of central points for information dissemination and a lack of effective coordinated communication by organisations and groups within the municipality. A failure at local level to effectively market the area and recognise the municipalities strengths can compound difficulties in attracting new labour migrants: *'Some people here have negative perceptions of the area, which are incorrect, but lead to local people failing to recognise and promote the areas key strengths and really selling the place as a good place to live'*. Some potential for local-level social impacts and conflicts is also apparent in the area in relation to the importance of the mining industry in the municipality which can create strong opinions about its economic, social and environmental impacts, and potentially drive people into opposing camps.

### *Responses and solutions*

Approaches to addressing demographic challenges, youth unemployment and skills shortages in Storuman include educational initiatives, employment support measures for in-migrants and support measures for the integration of in-migrants and refugees with the local community. Educational aspects include a number of specific programmes designed to develop skills and competencies relevant to employment in local industries, including: i) a programme of pre-university and vocational study options in the college; ii) vocational programmes on geology and wind energy provision in cold climates in the community learning centre; and iii) distance learning options through the Northern Academy. The local employment office provides opportunities for unemployed residents to attend relevant labour market training.

To provide specific support for in-migrants (labour migrants and refugees) the municipality has established an 'in-migrant service', with one staff member employed at 50% capacity (funded by a hydropower company as part of a community reimbursement scheme) to act as a bridge

between new in-migrants and local industries, associations and the community as a whole, to allow for more rapid networking following their arrival into the area. The in-migrant service works with the local employment office to identify suitable upskilling and employment opportunities for in-migrants, including identifying opportunities for the partners/spouses of labour migrants. This has included placing in-migrants into teacher training programmes to allow them to become trained as assistant teachers over time and develop a career locally. These initiatives are largely locally (as opposed to policy) driven, often resulting from the actions of a small group of driven individuals and have resulted in increased integration and retention of in-migrants locally. A key part of supporting integration relates to the provision of Swedish language training by the municipality; language can represent a key barrier to integration in the short-medium term.

It is recognised that scope exists for improving cooperation and governance and specifically the transfer and dispersal of knowledge between the range of organisations, industries and associations across the municipality, as local knowledge (e.g. relating to services or job opportunities) is often communicated in an ad-hoc way and by word of mouth. This could include the development of a more effective community hub for both socialising and knowledge exchange across the municipality. Additionally, opportunities exist in the future for harnessing local assets and skillsets (e.g. the Centre for Rural Medicine, which is based locally) more effectively for the benefit of the municipality. This could include carrying out social research to determine the key motivations behind decisions relating to people migrating into or out of the area or to assess the types of employment activities most attractive to younger community members and to seasonal migrants (for the remaining part of the year).

## 3.2 Norway

### 3.2.1 Introduction

Norway is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Europe, with an average population density of 16.5 persons per sq/km. This is much lower in certain parts of Norway, including the central mountainous regions and the far north and east of the country, where some areas have less than 1 person per sq/km. The majority of the land has very limited capability for productive agriculture with only 3% used for arable crops. The three northern counties (Nordland, Finnmark and Troms) account for 35% of the total land area of Norway but less than 10% of the population and less than 8% of GDP, and experience higher costs for delivering services and maintaining infrastructure (OECD, 2017a). Despite these constraints, Norway is outperforming other Nordic countries (including in peripheral areas) and in the 2000-2015 period it achieved strong population and income growth in many regions. This growth can be attributed to changes in international trade arrangements, growth in key industries (e.g. renewables, tourism) on the west coast and increased labour availability following the 2004 enlargement of the European Union (OECD, 2017a). Nevertheless, Norway faces a number of potential future challenges, including a projected decline in employment in the oil and gas industries, a weaker currency, and an increasing need for innovation (OECD, 2017a).

The more northerly and mountainous regions of Norway face specific disadvantages due to their climate and location (i.e. distance to markets). Despite relatively high levels of prosperity and wellbeing relative to many countries, Norway's more northern and peripheral regions

exhibit levels of economic growth which are lower than the national average. Additionally, the populations in some of these regions are ageing faster than for Norway as a whole, with dependency rates increasing and projected to increase further over the next twenty years. Peripheral regions commonly rely on natural resources and landscape/amenity factors as the basis for economic growth (including fisheries, renewables and tourism). Sparsely populated and peripheral regions receive considerable support through the Norwegian tax system and specific economic and community development programmes (OECD, 2017a). Despite this, sectoral policies are not always well integrated with regional development plans and while local municipalities play a strong role in development, their small size can often lead to complexity in services delivery at regional and national levels (OECD, 2017a).

Immigration has had significant impacts in Norway, with in-migrants representing a diverse group and a key source of labour, particularly for certain sectors (e.g. fishing, construction and health care). In the 1990-2016 period, over 788,000 non-Nordic foreigners immigrated to Norway, 35% of which were family members of residents, 33% came as labour migrants, with 20% admitted on humanitarian grounds (asylum seekers) and 10% for educational purposes<sup>10</sup>. The relative number of asylum seekers (30% of a total of 50,500 new immigrants in 2016, the majority of which were Syrian) has increased in recent years, while the share of labour migrants has decreased (to 28% of total in-migrants in 2016). Nearly 90% of all labour migrants since 1990 have been from European countries (with Polish citizens making up the largest contingent), with Syrians constituting the majority of refugees in recent years. In-migration and particularly the intake of asylum seekers has become more politicised in recent years, with an increasing level of political conflict around in-migration at national level in Norway.

Asylum seekers are placed across Norway, according to the level of uptake by municipalities, with additional support provided in line with the numbers of refugees placed in any given municipality. A key objective of national policy is to ensure immigrants coming to Norway experience a sense of belonging through participation in Norwegian life and prioritising the availability of language skills training. Refugees receive specific support over a two year period, including housing and educational support as well as 200 hours of language training (Jungsberg, 2017). In contrast, labour migrants receive considerably less support, despite contributing more to the economy. In-migrants play a key role in the Norwegian labour market; however, the majority are in lower skilled jobs, with salaries below the national average and a higher frequency of seasonal, part-time or temporary contracts (Jungsberg, 2017). Significant numbers of in-migrants (refugees and labour migrants) are placed in rural areas, with the aim of addressing labour shortages and addressing negative demographic trends in certain regions and municipalities. This has been successful to some extent, although long term retention of in-migrants in rural regions is challenging, with in-migrants in these areas potentially facing difficulties in relation to developing social networks and integrating into small communities. Discussion is ongoing in Norway in relation to improving the approach to integrating in-migrants and increasing settlement rates to address demographic challenges in some regions. Specific measures with potential for future development include: i) increasing opportunities for in-migrants to obtain further qualifications and/or make use of their existing qualifications; ii) an obligatory mentor programme for all in-migrants to increase social

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<sup>10</sup> Norwegian immigration figures taken from the [Norwegian Ministries report](#) (Immigration and Integration 2016-2017).

networking; iii) a shift towards a more work oriented introductory programme for refugees (particularly for women with care responsibilities and limited education) (Jungsberg, 2017).

### 3.2.2 Norway Case Study – Nordland

#### *Background*

Located in northern Norway, Nordland is the second largest county in the country, with a population of 240,000 across 44 municipalities, with the main city of Bodo home to some 50,000 people. The economy is particularly dependent on the region's natural resources, including minerals, oil, gas and renewable energy exports and a substantial fishing and aquaculture industry, as well as a growing tourism sector. Nevertheless, the region's economic growth (GDP) lags behind the rate of economic growth at national level, with this gap having widened since 2007 (OECD, 2017b). Additionally, transport infrastructure and services within the region are under increasing cost pressures, with an increasing need to add value to outputs within the region/at local level, diversify the regions natural resource base, and foster greater innovation and networking between regional actors and SMEs, including in relation to diversification of the tourism sector (OECD 2017b).

#### *Key demographic challenges*

As a region Nordland faces a number of demographic challenges, including an ageing population, high levels of youth out-migration, and a rate of population growth below the national average, with demographic challenges varying in their severity across the regions municipalities. Due to a predominantly declining or static population growth rate the current population of Nordland is similar to the 1970s. This low population growth rate has resulted in Nordland's share of the total Norwegian population having fallen from 6.3% in 1970 to 4.7% currently (and projected as 4.4% for 2030) (OECD 2017b). This proportional decline has implications for the region in relation to the finances allocated to the region, representation in parliament and the regional economy. Due to the low birth rate (1.6), high elderly dependency ratio (29.30, relative to 24.33 nationally) and youth out-migration, Nordland faces a long term trend of declining human capital and workforce shrinkage, with skills shortages affecting the public and private sectors. These challenges are exacerbated in more remote areas due to their relative inaccessibility and low population densities, limited existing housing stock and high building costs (with building values often lower than total building costs following completion of a build). Additionally the region has a lower skills base, with the average completion rate for upper secondary college (64%) lower than the national average (74%), with girls out achieving boys which results in more women leaving the region and a corresponding gender imbalance among those remaining (OECD, 2017b).

The unfavourable demographic trends are likely to result in further skills and labour shortages in key industries (e.g. healthcare, construction and fisheries) in the future. In-migration is playing an increasingly key role in providing labour to key industries and the primary sector, including migrants from Europe (e.g. Poland, Lithuania) and further afield (e.g. Somalia). Some 10% of the region's population currently consists of in-migrants (including refugees and labour migrants) and these people have played a key role in addressing labour shortages and in contributing to a reversal in population decline post-2009. Longer term, the retention and

integration of in-migrants represents a major challenge for the region to ensure the sustainability of the regions municipal communities.

### *Responses and solutions*

A key response to addressing youth out-migration and existing and projected labour shortages in Nordland has been a proactive approach to encouraging and facilitating in-migration (foreign and domestic) of people in the 20-60 age bracket. Attracting in-migrants represents a key component of the regional development strategy and increased in-migration in recent years has resulted in low levels of population growth post 2009 (reversing a long term trend of decline). Additionally the region has placed an increasing emphasis on the development of increased educational activities to facilitate upskilling of existing residents and new in-migrants, and to lift existing levels of skills attainment and participation in education regionally. Nordland council has also undertaken specific measures to effectively 'market' the region to potential new in-migrants (i.e. regional attractiveness and homecoming initiatives), through highlighting the potential employment opportunities and quality of life benefits associated with living in the region.

### *The Nordland In-Migration Project<sup>11</sup>*

In 2013 Nordland County Council established the In-Migration Project, which ran until 2017, to address labour shortages in both the public and private sectors in many of the region's smaller municipalities. The aim of the Project was to attract 10,000 new residents to Nordland in 2013-2018 and to establish Nordland as an attractive place for employment, business development, research and entrepreneurship from an international perspective. Increased immigration (primarily from abroad) was targeted as a mechanism for re-balancing the regions demographics, through supporting in-migrants in bringing their families and settling in the region and ensuring migrants were qualified for work and able to participate in Norwegian society. In practice, the majority of in-migrants represent labour-migrants, although some 20% of all in-migrants in Nordland are asylum seekers (or originally arrived as asylum seekers). Additionally the Project targeted existing in-migrants in relation to improving their educational opportunities and employment situations. The Project worked across six main areas: i) improving opportunities for Norwegian tuition through diversifying learning formats and providing workplace based training; ii) improving opportunities for education and training including the development of careers centres and more rapid approval of existing qualifications; iii) targeted recruitment from abroad (e.g. a pilot scheme to recruit healthcare workers from Spain due to the similarities in the Spanish healthcare system), recruitment for couples and specific induction arrangements; iv) support in relation to finding housing including National Housing Bank schemes and a Home Building School for in-migrants; v) supporting in-migrant integration including through a mentor scheme, supporting voluntary organisations, training and Norwegian tuition and involvement in local democratic processes; and vi) collating information on skills and labour gaps and providing knowledge and information to in-migrants through municipal reception desks, welcome centres and career centres.

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<sup>11</sup> This section draws on an interview with a representative of Nordland Council (Daniel Granello) as well as a review of the In-Migration project within a Nordregio Working Paper (Johnsen and Perjo, 2014): <http://www.nordregio.org/publications/local-and-regional-approaches-to-demographic-change/>

The In-Migration Project represents a systemic approach to attracting, integrating and retaining migrants, with implementation often occurring at municipality level or through civil society organisations/associations (with 30 separate public and private authorities/organisations funded through the project). This work has been centred on efforts to support the integration of in-migrants through inclusion and engagement activities (e.g. funding local sports associations to make sports activities/facilities available to newcomers and providing employment opportunities for couples).

The objectives of the Project have been achieved with varying degrees of success, with a total of 6,000 new in-migrants coming to Nordland during the Project, with higher numbers in the earlier years and a drop off after 2016 linked to a slowing of inward migration from the EU due to improvements in the home economies of key member states and the returning home of some EU migrants during this period (e.g. Polish). The Project has also resulted in the development of improved educational activities for in-migrants and has increased the knowledge and competence (particularly through increased networking and knowledge sharing) of municipal actors in relation to in-migration and integration of in-migrants. The provision of affordable housing has been a specific focus for some municipalities to facilitate people moving to the area to explore the option of living and working there. Additionally, trainee programmes resulting from the in-migration project have been recognised as key to in-migrant retention, with 80% of those completing a work-based trainee programme staying in Nordland on a longer term basis.

Despite these successes, the Project has highlighted the existing low levels of awareness and competence within businesses and municipalities across the county in relation to recruitment of foreign labour and the related opportunities. In practice, many companies use recruitment agencies to source workers; however, this results in a higher overall recruitment cost per worker and often results in workers staying on a relatively short term basis (i.e. pure short term labour migrants as opposed to potential new residents). Uptake of the related support and initiatives also depends on the level of interest at municipality level, resulting in considerable variability in implementation of the In-Migration Project across Nordland. This can relate to a lack of awareness or interest at local level, or in some cases social barriers to in-migration within communities (although most conflict relating to in-migration was perceived to be occurring at national political levels rather than at local levels in Norway). In Herøy municipality for example, where a high level of interest in the In-Migration Project was evident, the municipality developed specific initiatives in three main areas:

- **Norwegian language training:** Recognising the key role of language skills in opening up the wider job market and the low level of language skills among new in-migrants, the municipality developed a three tier language training system (based on existing education levels) for in-migrants (the implementation of which has led to career progression for a number of in-migrants). A local volunteer organisation was supported to deliver training and other social opportunities were organised at local level (e.g. cultural evenings) to facilitate integration and language exposure. Libraries within the local area have been utilised effectively as spaces for learning language skills and building social networks.
- **House building support:** To address housing costs and shortages at local level a Housing Building School was established by the municipality, with the aim of leading

self-builders through the process of applying for planning permission, financial support/loan funding and working with an architect to implement a self-build.

- **Mentoring:** To facilitate effective integration and counteract isolation and cultural differences, the municipality has established a mentor programme focused specifically on women, with female in-migrants partnered with local Norwegian women to facilitate the development of support networks. This approach is seen as critical to ensuring in-migrants can successfully integrate into Norwegian society, with the municipality having learned over time that in-migrants who do not successfully integrate will often leave and move to urban areas.

There remains a need to develop and engage enterprises and develop further expertise, shared systems and co-operation, to facilitate effective recruitment. Critically, despite an increase in in-migration, retention of in-migrants longer term within Nordland remains a challenge, with in-migrants often staying 3-5yrs, following which time many move to a (often more urban) part of Norway (e.g. refugees commonly obtain a permanent licence after 3yrs, after which many move elsewhere). Competition can occur for unskilled jobs between labour migrants and refugees reaching the end of their induction period, with municipalities also facing challenges in successfully providing attractive employment opportunities for couples, without disadvantaging other in-migrants or existing residents. Further lessons identified from the experience of the In-Migration Project include: i) language skills are fundamental for career progression and retention of in-migrants and require greater prioritisation at local levels; ii) a region-wide focus on in-migration can significantly increase the focus on the challenges linked to recruiting foreign labour, with a key benefit being the development of a comprehensive long term strategy for recruitment and integration to drive the process forward; iii) a collaborative (inter-municipal) approach can result in the development of new solutions to tackling the challenges of attracting and integrating in-migrants (e.g. reducing bureaucratic hurdles and increasing housing availability); and iv) local-level initiatives which link in-migrants and Norwegians in meaningful ways are critical for long term retention of in-migrants in rural areas.

## 3.3 Canada

### 3.3.1 Introduction

Overall, 81.4% of the total population of Canada is considered urban (36.7million people) (World Bank, 2018). The country's overall population density is low - 4 people per square km of land - and the vast majority of Canadians are situated in a discontinuous band within approximately 300km of the southern border with the US (CIA, 2019). The most populated province is Ontario, followed by Quebec and British Columbia (BC). By approximately 2030, there will be fewer births than deaths in Canada, at which point population growth will only occur via international migration (Bollman and Ashton, 2014). Therefore communities that wish to increase their population growth need to attract migrants either from elsewhere in Canada, or immigrants from the rest of the world (Bollman and Ashton, 2014). Canada has a relatively long history of attempting to fulfil multiple short-term and longer term economic goals by encouraging immigration (Picot and Sweetman, 2012).

New arrivals to Canada are not always distributed evenly across the country, and the majority since 1996 settling in four main provinces; Ontario, Quebec, BC and Alberta (Carter, 2009). In Canada, jurisdiction over immigration is a shared responsibility between the federal government, the provinces and territories (Carter, Moorish and Amoyaw, 2008). In Quebec, Manitoba and BC, the delivery of settlement services has become an entirely provincial responsibility (Carter, Moorish and Amoyaw, 2008).

Three short case study examples from Canada are presented here. The first is the Southern part of Manitoba province where the focus has been to encourage overseas immigration in a province where out-migration rates are high and there is an ageing population trend particularly in rural and small town communities. The second and third examples are case study rural communities in BC, where the focus has not been on encouraging international immigration, but rather on encouraging economic growth/diversity in order to reduce (youth) outmigration and encourage in- and return-migrants from elsewhere in Canada.

### 3.3.2 Case Study – Manitoba Province

#### *Background – Manitoba*

Manitoba is one of Canada's prairie provinces, covering approximately 552,370km<sup>2</sup> (Statistics Canada, 2016a). It contains more than 100,000 lakes, including Lake Winnipeg, one of the world's largest bodies of freshwater.

Manitoba has a population of 1.28million people (McNeely et al., 2018), with 38% (0.5million people) living in rural regions and communities, thereby distinguishing Manitoba as a rural province. The population density of Manitoba is 2.3 people per square km (Statistics Canada, 2016a). The common perception is that Manitoba is a province of slow economic growth and slow population growth and that it has a considerably larger share of older individuals than other provinces, although this is slowly changing, and there has been a marked change in population growth since the late 1990s (Manitoba Bureau of statistics, 2016).

Rates of natural population increase are generally higher in Manitoba than other provinces. However out-migration is greater than net births and is a significant component of population dynamics (Aston et al., 2015). Net international migration continues to be a major contributor to population growth in the province, which has increased almost eight-fold since 1998/1999 (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, 2018), with the rise mainly attributed to immigration. Manitoba's net population growth is expected to remain positive for the 2018 to 2038 period at 1.3% (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Manitoba is often seen as an example of successful immigrant attraction strategies, as the province has exceeded its ambitious targets in recent years (Bucklaschuk, 2008). Immigration policy in Manitoba has been shaped by the demographic and economic circumstances of the province (Carter, Moorish and Amoyaw, 2008) and the province's success is mainly attributed to its Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).

#### *Key demographic challenges*

One key dynamic of population change in Manitoba is that there is both growth and decline across the province. Population growth is uneven and often depends on the proximity to urban areas or natural resources (Aston et al., 2015). For example, growth is occurring in rural areas



adjacent to Winnipeg and Brandon, whilst there is population decline in the Parkland and several municipalities in the southwest (Aston et al., 2015).

The rural communities in the province are faced with the challenge of an ageing population and consequent ageing workforce, which can potentially lead to labour shortages (Ashton et al., 2015). Within agriculture, family farms in the region that still heavily engage in traditional agriculture are contending with an ageing generation of owners, who may not have their operations taken over by their children (McNeely et al., 2018). In order to address population challenges in rural areas, communities have been encouraged to focus on population growth strategies, such as immigration or youth retention, and to target growth opportunities in sectors outside of agriculture, such as agri-processing and service industries (Aston et al., 2015). As a result of this, the sectors primarily driving the rural economy in Manitoba have shifted from primary agriculture to retail and wholesale, manufacturing and natural resource development (Aston et al., 2015).

### *Responses and solutions*

As mentioned, Manitoba owes much of its success in overcoming demographic challenges to the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). The PNP is designed as a provincial population growth and distribution mechanism, which can address issues such as labour shortages, the retention of immigrants, and other local policy issues (Carter 2009). Interprovincial migrants have a negative impact on Manitoba's population growth; however high immigration levels more than offset this.

Manitoba was the first province to sign a Provincial Nominee Program Agreement with Citizen and Immigration Canada (CIC) in 1996, and began operating PNPs in 1999 (Government of Canada, 2011). The PNP seeks to attract skilled workers and their families to Canada, by giving provinces a mechanism to respond to local and economic development needs. The PNP is consistent with the CIC strategic outcomes, and works alongside federal programs that offer permanent residency. The PNP has four main objectives: to increase the economic benefits of immigration for the province; to distribute the benefits of immigration across the province; to enhance Federal-Provincial/Territorial (FPT) collaboration; and to encourage development of official language minority communities.

Whilst some objectives for the PNP are similar to Federal Programs, the programs do not necessarily overlap as the applicants they attract differ, and there are additional elements that allow for the PNP to meet specific provincial needs. Across Canada, eleven provinces participate in the PNP, and this allows them to nominate potential immigrants who they believe will meet the particular needs of the province (Government of Canada, 2011). A recent evaluation of the PNP completed by the Canadian Government concluded that the stakeholder groups they consulted with reported a need for the continuation of the PNP. The program had benefitted stakeholders through being able to respond to specific labour market needs, and the provinces wished to continue to have control over the selection of immigrants.

Since the introduction of the PNP, the number of new immigrants to Manitoba has increased by more than 250% (Carter, 2009) and this has been the main immigration initiative to attract new arrivals to the province (Carter, Moorish and Amoyaw, 2008). In 2016, Manitoba received 5.7% of the total immigration to Canada, and 21.5% of the total provincial nominees to Canada. Manitoba is regarded as having an excellent settlement service approach, resulting in the province having some of the highest immigrant retention rates in Canada at 88.59%,

the fourth highest among Canadian Provinces outside of Quebec (Province of Manitoba, 2017), with many of them settling in rural Manitoba (Ashton et al., 2015). In 2016, out of the 16,821 people that entered Manitoba, 9,958 were in the Provincial Nominee category (93.2%) (Province of Manitoba, 2017). Out of these immigrants, 83.3% intended to settle in the Winnipeg economic region, with 13% settling in the Southwest, South Central and South east economic areas. For some rural areas, immigration from outside of Canada has driven growth, with immigrants being attracted to rural areas where jobs and services are available (Ashton and McCulloch, 2015). It should be noted however that immigration in rural areas peaked in 2008-2009, and has since declined and the arrival of immigrants is now trending down (Ashton & McCulloch, 2015). Reflecting briefly on the agriculture sector in southern Manitoba particularly, it is worth noting that agricultural innovation and a shift towards value-adding enterprises is reshaping agriculture in southern Manitoba (McNeely et al., 2018) and therefore has helped moderate rural depopulation in some communities (although this is not uniform across the province).

Two examples of value-added enterprises are Maple Leaf Foods and Hylife, specialising in pork processing operations, which have helped to boost population growth in Brandon and Neepaw (McNeely et al., 2018). Neepaw saw decline in population for three decades until the re-establishment of the pork processing plant in the late 1980s, which resulted in a need for a larger workforce (Ashton et al., 2015). The Maple Leaf Foods pork processing plant opened in Brandon, a small rural city with a population of approximately 41,000 people, in 1999, where it became evident within two years of operation that the local labour pool was not large enough to fulfil the employment needs of the plant (Bucklaschuk, 2008). In 2001, Maple Leaf Foods began their first foreign recruitment campaign for workers from Mexico, hiring labour temporarily from overseas. In 2008, the total number of employees at the plant was approximately 1700, 60% of which were foreign workers.

### 3.3.3 Case Study - British Columbia Province

#### *3.3.3.1 Background*

British Columbia (BC) is the westernmost province in Canada, covering 922,503km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 4.65 million people (Statistics Canada, 2016b). The most populous city in the province is Vancouver, with a population of 2.5million, the third largest city in Canada. The population density of the province is 5.0 people per square km. Approximately 40,000 immigrants arrive in BC every year, making up a high proportion of BC's population. Most immigrants settle in metropolitan Vancouver. Resource dependent communities are characteristic of the hinterland areas of BC (Gill, 2002).

Below are two specific case studies of how small, rural locations in BC have worked to stabilise and grow their populations through a strategy of promoting local economic diversification.

### 3.3.3.2 Valemount, British Columbia, Canada<sup>12</sup>

#### *Background*

The small town of Valemount is located to the southwest of BC province, within close proximity of the Rocky, Monashee and Cariboo Mountains. Whilst historically not considered a tourist destination, the area is close to the highest peak in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, Mount Robson, and to Mount Robson Provincial Park and Jasper National Park World Heritage Sites, making the high quality surrounding environment a unique selling point (Nesbit, Thibeault and Borgstrom, n.d.).

In order to address demographic challenges, the town of Valemount has attempted to diversify its economic base from a dependence on logging, to grow its tourism sector.

#### *Key demographic challenges*

Valemount has long experienced the out-migration of young people. In the 1980s, although the town's population was not in overall decline (standing at approximately 1,000 in the town and 800 in the surrounding hinterland), local people were committed and keen to see the out-migration slowed if not stopped such that the Valemount community would be more sustainable.

At the time, the town was home to a large mill and logging was the dominant industry. Many employees in this sector had well paid jobs, but did not develop strong ties to the area, and stayed in the town for a few years before moving on. Locals referred to this as a 'colonial approach to development' (somewhat reminiscent of the exogenous approach to development described in the academic literature on rural development approaches), and were keen to see the area's economy diversified away from logging to create a more sustainable and secure future.

The town is a stop on the major Highway 5 but was not a major tourism destination back in the 1980s, despite this strategic location. When tourism was suggested as a potential driver for local demographic and economic growth there was some local resistance as it was regarded as providing lower skilled, lower paid jobs in comparison to many of the jobs in the logging industry. Attitudes changed and became more positive, however, when the town's mill closed in 2007 and tourism became more widely accepted as being critical to the area's future sustainability.

#### *Responses and solutions*

The transformation of Valemount's economy has focused on developing its tourism offer, based on its landscape, nature and mountains. Much of the initial work focused on developing the town as a winter destination but more recent work has focused on expanding its offer as an all year round destination through the promotion of mountain biking trails in the summer.

The work of Valemount's (provincial government-funded) Regional Economic Development Officer (REDO) has been critical in the transformation of the area's economy. Provincial governments provided funding for these full- or part-time posts to work with communities by

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<sup>12</sup> The information on which this section is based came largely from an interview with Silvio Gislimberti, Economic Development Officer, Valemount, Canada. Thanks also to Professor Greg Halseth and Laura Murphy (from the University of Northern British Columbia) who provided additional insight for this case study work.

supporting local strategic planning, designing workable local economic development projects (often based on ideas generated by local community members), hosting community meetings, etc. The REDOs support local strategic planning, aiding the design of workable economic development projects. Alongside this, the federal government of Canada launched a series of new initiatives, including the Community Futures program, funding locally generated projects. So 'matching' provincial and federal government finances with future aspirations in the local community and an openness amongst local people to not be fearful and bring in appropriate external support was key to driving development in Valemount.

As well as the federal and provincial government support and funding, the community also benefited from having a supportive local mayor, municipality (with its own reasonably significant annual budget) and significant community and voluntary sector support. The role of the REDO was critical in providing a link between the different governance levels, including the local community and the provincial/federal government, as a means of sharing with the extra-local government the aspirations and ideas of the local community, feeding relevant information, resources, etc. back to the local area, and generating and improving trust between the different individuals/organisations involved. This conduit role is arguably especially important for remote, isolated communities and while digital connectivity can facilitate this communication, it cannot replace face-to-face contact.

Individuals and groups within the community have also been effective at seeing and grasping the business opportunities from voluntary/community-based activities. For example, a group of individuals was initially responsible for grooming the forest roads on which the snowmobiling takes place on an informal, unpaid basis. However, with appropriate support, the group has managed to transform itself into a professional, commercial enterprise which now charges visitors for day passes to fund their trail grooming activities.

It is also true to say that factors outwith Valemount have also been important, including rising house prices and declining affordability in Canada's urban areas (including Vancouver) in the late 1990s/2000s, which encouraged more young people to return to rural areas like Valemount to access more affordable housing. Also, particularly critical in a Canadian context, the town of Valemount has been explicit in including First Nations people in its plans and they have been largely supportive. They are recognised as being key to the future development of the area and therefore are fully engaged in development projects.

The town has experienced challenges during the course of its development. For example, local organisations have had to have the foresight to adapt and change rules and regulations in order to not hold back initiative and development. One specific example relates to the group who transformed themselves into a business to undertake the forest road grooming mentioned above. Access to Crown-owned land in Canada had always been free but this rule was changed in order to allow the group to make the commercial enterprise work. This kind of flexible and forward-thinking is critical to enabling enterprise and change to happen.

More recently the provincial and federal government funding for rural development has changed and reduced. There is no longer any funding provided for the REDO roles and funding is now provided through initiatives (the Northern Development Initiatives Trust in the case of Valemount) rather than programmes. The Initiatives provide funding for training and developing expertise, webinars and marketing, rather than for projects and product

development, which is challenging for towns like Valemount as they need to think of new ways of accessing and using the funding available.

This also raises important concerns around how difficult it can be sometimes to demonstrate 'tangible' and 'short-term' success in terms of community development, and therefore justify funding. This is where having high levels of trust between the different actors involved is also critical.

Achieving this kind of transformation also takes time. Valemount is still on the journey towards 'its big dreams'- and those dreams are important to have. There are plans for a Geothermal Industry Park on the old logging mill site and for continued investments in the town's destination tourism offer to ensure it is all year round. The town's population is now slowly rising.

For Valemount, it has been critical to focus on the area's unique and special asset/s or strength/s, in order to compete globally. The narrative about these remote places therefore becomes a much more positive one rather than one based on what is needed or missing. Critical to achieving all of the success in Valemount has been the people, both in terms of having key individuals with a voice and the drive to take things forward and having people living locally to generate and deliver ideas. Where there is involvement by external individuals/organisations, this involvement needs to engage and take local people along with it. This is to ensure that the gap between the vision and reality is not too big, and that internal and external actors share the same vision, otherwise there is a real risk of frustration and disengagement.

### *3.3.3.3 Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia, Canada<sup>13</sup>*

#### *Background*

Tumbler Ridge is located in the Northeastern corner of BC, in the foothills of the rocky mountains, with a population of approximately 1,982 in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016d). The town was founded to accommodate the growing coal mining industry (Strengthening Rural Canada, n.d.) as the sedimentary rocks of the region are rich not only in coal, but also in oil and gas (Gill, 2002). The most recently constructed new town of Tumbler Ridge, was built between 1982 and 1984 in order to serve the large coal project in northeast BC. Tumbler Ridge has long experienced "boom and bust" cycles as a result of the mining industry on which the town's economy largely depends. Despite efforts to diversify the local economy, the mining sector still exerts significant influence over the town's economic fortunes.

#### *Key demographic challenges*

One of the main challenges facing the community of Tumbler Ridge, similar to Valemount, are the economic 'boom and bust' swings associated with employment in the mining industry. In

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<sup>13</sup> The information on which this section is based came largely from an interview with Jordan Wall, Chief Administrative Officer, Tumbler Ridge, Canada. Again thanks also to Professor Greg Halseth and Laura Murphy (from the University of Northern British Columbia) who provided additional insight for this case study work.

the last couple of decades there have been two significant economic swings, one in 2000, which lasted 7-8 years, and one in 2014, which lasted a couple of years.

### *Responses and solutions*

A range of factors have been critical in influencing Tumbler Ridge's more positive economic development trajectory recently. First, the increased price of housing in Canada's cities has helped to encourage people to move into the town, particularly when it marketed itself as a retirement destination following the 2000 downturn. Many of the town's empty properties were filled by this strategy through both permanent retirement in-migration and some second home ownership.

In 2015-16 Tumbler Ridge was successful in obtaining a provincial government re-training grant to support local people who had lost jobs in the mine back into work in other sectors, including tourism. While it was of limited scale and scope, the scheme did provide assistance to some local people.

A key success factor has been the ability of local people, including in the municipal government, to identify and map out future development trajectories for the town and future growth industries locally, such as tourism and renewable energy. One example is the large-scale wind energy project which has been constructed recently. The timing of this development was also significant (although largely due to luck) in that the construction of the project took place during the second mining downturn. The town also increased its facilities and reputation as an important tourism destination, with its close proximity to the untouched wilderness and trails in the area, as well as the nearby Kinuseo Falls.

Local decision-making has also been key, as has the strong commitment of local people to the local community. During the first mining downturn in the early 2000s, there was a clause in employment contracts which said that for those who had bought houses, their property would be bought back at the price they paid. They were then free to leave the town almost instantly. In this case, the strategy was to soften the blow for individuals, but this left the town almost completely devastated and close to shutting down completely. During the second downturn, this was not the case and, as many people had bought their houses at the height of the market, they were reluctant to sell when the market was weak, and so decided to stay and 'ride out the storm'. In this way, the potential blow for the community was softened, and 'individuals have taken the hit' (in contrast to during the first downturn). These different approaches are worth considering for places facing similar challenges elsewhere, where a decision between supporting a declining community to survive and restructure or supporting individuals within a community (which may lead to them leaving and the community becoming unviable) may be required.

In the case of Tumbler Ridge, external input has been critical, in the form of some limited provincial government funding and information and learning related to similar experiences elsewhere, but key for the town's stakeholders is that decision-making power must be retained locally. A positive local attitude is also important, which does not seek to blame others' for a place's fortunes but takes responsibility locally for how the situation could be improved. In Tumbler Ridge's case, the municipality was able to take the local vision and the rationale for it, building on the town's assets and strengths and local peoples' loyalty, to the provincial government for support in clearly identified and articulated ways.

Current and future development efforts in Tumbler Ridge can then be built on this local drive and vision and the relationship that it has engendered with the provincial government. The vision needs to be based on future scenarios rather than looking back to previous development trajectories. This may require tough decisions to be made which may be unpopular, but it is critical that such decisions are made quickly and strongly, so as to not leave people in a period of prolonged uncertainty.

Like Valemount, Tumbler Ridge has also experienced challenges in its economic and demographic renewal processes. The town's boom and bust cycles, closely associated with up- and downturns in the mining industry, still bring challenges. While building up the town as a retirement and tourism destination has helped, the mining sector still exerts significant influence over the town's fortunes – in a town of 2-3,000 population, when 200-300 jobs are lost in the mine, the impact locally is significant.

When the 2014 downturn happened and jobs were lost, Tumbler Ridge no longer met the provincial government's requirements for the delivery of social and medical services, including health and work counsellors, etc. Support and retraining schemes stopped at the very time when they were most needed. Local residents were told that they had to access services in surrounding settlements, but for many the cost of travelling to these locations was prohibitive. These cut-backs also led to shifts in the kind of services that were provided in terms of an end to first or direct contact services with local residents, to '3<sup>rd</sup> level contacts' in terms of provincial appointees/external 'experts' who could advise Tumbler Ridge on how other districts had dealt with similar challenges and share experiences and learning, but who weren't engaged in 'frontline delivery'.

This provision was better than nothing, but it did not deliver the core services that local residents needed, and put significant strain on the municipal government to provide services that had previously been provided by the province. At this time of increased pressure on the municipality to deliver, it had fewer resources to do so, especially as people were leaving which reduced the local tax base. Moreover, Tumbler Ridge's success in marketing itself as a retirement destination in 2000 has brought challenges for the town in recent years in terms of service provision for those residents who were the 'younger old' when they moved in, but are now reaching older age and requiring more health and social services interventions. However, with cut-backs, many of the required services are now no longer available at local level.

#### **4. Discussion at Rural Communities Liaison Group (RCLG), March 2019**

In March 2019, the issue of demographic decline, potential responses and the existence of a threshold below which endogenous development becomes impossible and external resources must be brought in to compensate, was discussed at a meeting of the Rural Communities Liaison Group (RCLG). This revealed some interesting perspectives from those present<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> The Rural Communities Liaison Group was set up in 2017 and involves a range of organisations working on and for rural communities in Scotland. The majority are academic, public or third sector

Certainly RCLG participants identified with the idea of there being a threshold below which a community would be in danger of decline which was hard to prevent/stop. Several participants had experience and/or knowledge of communities that had either fallen below this threshold and felt there was 'no way back', or communities that were in danger of experiencing this. However, RCLG participants felt that every community had its own set of specific circumstances which had led to it being in (or being in danger of being in) a precarious position. For some, it was about losing its *raison d'être* - such as as a holiday destination for a nearby urban centres which for various reasons was no longer attractive, or as a mining or other industrial centre. For other communities, the loss of a key service – particularly a transport link, a school or even before and after school childcare – was the driver of decline. For others, the decline may have resulted from the out-migration of those approaching older age who felt that health and social care provision locally was likely to be inadequate for their future needs.

Given that the circumstances in individual places were unique to that place, participants identified a range of different potential responses, all of which involved some degree of external input in terms of resources, networks, etc. but also local, endogenous activity and resilience too. This local input was critical in ensuring that the response was appropriate and tailored to local needs and opportunities<sup>15</sup>. As is often said in relation to rural development; one-size-does-not-fit-all.

The ownership of land in particular was suggested as a key factor in reversing population decline in some communities – with the Highlands and Islands region regarded as having many good examples of where community ownership of land had reversed or at least slowed population decline (such as on Eigg and Gigha) – and Community Land Scotland is doing work on this at present. Owning the land had led to housing, business, etc. developments enabling communities to provide the infrastructure to enable people to stay/return and giving them a degree of control or empowerment over their future. However, this raises questions for communities that do not have the option of taking on land ownership open to them.

RCLG participants also discussed the importance of communities having everyday resilience in order to be able to identify when they are in danger of reaching that threshold, and then act before that threshold is breached – a kind of 'early warning system'. Participants noted that many of the organisations (including local authorities) that previously 'did' community development work were no longer able to do it (often due to budget cuts). There was therefore a very real danger therefore of some communities not having any of this everyday resilience and therefore facing particular risks if they experienced demographic decline – thus potentially leading to an ever more uneven landscape of rural community development.

As mentioned earlier, participants felt that although two different communities may have faced similar triggers in terms of declining to a threshold, each of those communities would be different in terms of how it responded, depending on its location, geography, set of assets, sense of empowerment, resilience, etc. For some communities, the response may be about

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organisations. The Group provides a forum for members to update one another on ongoing work on rural issues and to discuss topical issues. The threshold concept was discussed as an agenda item on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>15</sup> See also, Chapman, P. and Weaver, B. (2016) A Visual Tour of the Challenges of Rural Social Enterprise in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, Paper presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> Rural Entrepreneurship Conference, University of Lincoln (June)



accessing funding; for others it would be about changing the way that something/s is/are done. Digital responses may be the solution in some places or community-based, bottom-up health and social care services in another. Flexibility of the 'enabling' policy landscape and the practical responses is critical here, so that communities can identify the solution best for them, and tackle the barriers that they encounter – i.e. a place-based response<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, participants felt that better sharing of information between communities would be useful particularly in terms of learning about how one community has overcome a particular challenge – in this way, drawing on external information.

For RCLG participants, the responses by communities to demographic decline and approaching a critical threshold may require some external input, but ultimately they are about the resources, capacity and the 'every day' resilience of local communities. These factors are required for communities to recognise that they are about to reach a critical threshold and to know where, when and how to seek external support – a kind of emergency resilience. However, the existence of that everyday capacity or resilience may in itself require some external help for some communities<sup>17</sup> – the kind of help that RCLG participants noted was increasingly hard to come by. At the same time, it is important to note that several organisations do still provide different kinds of support to communities, including for example, the Scottish Community Alliance, the Development Trusts Association Scotland, Community Land Scotland, HIE, etc. At a time of crisis, even for those communities that have some everyday resilience, some external support may be required to build that emergency resilience. Parallel research is ongoing in the Strategic Research Programme (Research Deliverable 3.4.4 on Local assets, local decisions and community resilience) on everyday and emergency resilience<sup>18</sup>.

Finally, it is worth noting other work going on in Scotland on demographic renewal. A newspaper article written by Calum Macleod in March 2018 in the West Highland Free Press highlighted the potential for the Planning Bill currently passing through the Scottish Parliament (now at Stage 3), with innovative thinking, to play a role in encouraging demographic renewal, repopulation and resettlement<sup>19</sup>. HIE published research in November 2018 which explored the attitudes and aspirations of young people relating to living in the Highlands and Islands. This work revealed that interventions by HIE and others aiming to retain and attract young people to the region were having some success and highlighted some other areas for attention in future.

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<sup>16</sup> Research Deliverable 3.4.2 on 'Place-based policy and its implications for policy and service delivery within the Strategic Research Programme is undertake more work on this topic. More information is available [https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120671/our\\_projects/1806/strategic\\_research\\_programme/3](https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120671/our_projects/1806/strategic_research_programme/3) online:

<sup>17</sup> It is worth referencing here a paper on rural social enterprise creation from 2015 which discussed the community development process, through the co-creation of a vision with the community and then over time, the community taking on development and delivery itself. For more information, see: Munoz, S-A., Steiner, A. and Farmer, J. (2015) Processes of community-led social enterprise development: learning from the rural context, *Community Development Journal*, 50 (3), pp. 478-493.

<sup>18</sup> More information is available online: [https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120671/our\\_projects/1806/strategic\\_research\\_programme/4](https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120671/our_projects/1806/strategic_research_programme/4)

<sup>19</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/WHFP-.pdf>

## 5. Over-arching themes and conclusions: lessons for Scotland?

The focus in this working paper is on demographic change in selected case study areas and the different responses in these areas to addressing demographic change and decline over time. It should be noted that demographic change is only one factor which affects rural areas and rural development, with a variety of other factors affecting outcomes in rural areas (e.g. policy drivers including agricultural and regional development policy, societal and market demands and wider economic factors). Nevertheless, demographic change represents a fundamental driver of change in rural areas, with communities and their people constituting the fundamental ingredient for endogenous development in rural areas.

Key concluding points or 'lessons for addressing demographic decline' which can be drawn from the case studies presented here, and the subsequent discussion at the RCLG, include the following:

- **Inward migration, whether foreign or domestic, can play an important role in slowing or reversing population decline and wider demographic decline** (ageing, youth out-migration) and addressing labour shortages in some rural towns and regions. Following periods of sustained out-migration, some peripheral regions in Europe have experienced a more recent influx of international migrants, which offers potential for regional growth. However, **in-migration does not guarantee a sustained shift in demographic trends and labour market integration does not guarantee social integration of in-migrants**, with long term retention of in-migrants very challenging and requiring considerable support. Critically, the national political context and existing socio-economic factors may limit the potential for foreign in-migration to be utilised effectively to address demographic change in some national contexts.
- **Long term integration of foreign in-migrants in rural areas requires a holistic approach**, which goes beyond the provision of suitable employment. This requires the development of specific posts (e.g. integration coordinator) and initiatives (e.g. mentoring programmes, housing provision schemes) and catering to the needs of whole families, including men, women and children and unaccompanied minors. In remote rural areas opportunities to develop social networks are of critical importance to combat isolation and exclusion. Easy and low cost access to language training is a critical component of building long term social inclusion.
- **Young people represent a critical and limited asset in remote rural areas – ensuring their retention and/or return requires innovative approaches to providing opportunities for empowerment, education and employment.** Empowerment (e.g. through involvement in democratic processes such as youth councils) offers scope for involving and engaging young people in the future development of their own municipalities. Ensuring sufficient availability and diversity of educational (e.g. through online learning or training programmes), employment (e.g. career pathways as opposed to 'jobs') and entrepreneurial opportunities is a fundamental aspect of both slowing youth out-migration and upskilling those remaining in a rural area.
- **Effective collaboration, communication of local values and opportunities and knowledge sharing is a key component of addressing demographic challenges in rural areas.** This requires, for example, clear and consistent political leadership, as

well as a long-term strategy at regional level and specific initiatives at local level. Employers and civil society also play a key role both in addressing the loss of young people from rural areas and in increasing opportunities for in-migrants to integrate socially in these areas. This requires an adaptable approach, which allows market or policy driven opportunities to be grasped as they emerge.

- **Community resilience and capacity.** The successful integration of international migrants or retention/re-attraction of both young and older residents, and the appropriate diversification of a local economy, all require communities to have some existing (or everyday) resilience. Over time, this attraction/retention and integration will then lead to enhanced community resilience. This everyday resilience may be critical in determining how and how effectively a community can respond to a challenge or change, such as large-scale in-migration or a sudden and/or serious economic downturn.
- **Networked rural development.** External input may be required to help initially kick-start everyday resilience, and is very likely to be required in a critical situation where the future of the community is at risk, but this external input must be shaped and guided by local needs, challenges and opportunities; in short it must be appropriate and tailored to the particular place. This approach to rural development emphasises the inter-twining of local and extra-local or endogenous and exogenous assets, resources, skills, knowledge, information etc. for successful rural community development.

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## **APPENDIX – Interviewees**

### **Canada - Interviewees**

Professor Greg Halseth and Laura Murphy, University of Northern British Columbia  
Silvio Gislumberti, Economic Development Officer, Valemount, BC, Canada  
Jordan Wall, Chief Administrative Officer, Tumbler Ridge, BC, Canada

### **Norway - Interviewees**

Torbjørn Trane Jensen, Nordland Regional Council  
Leneisja Jungsberg, Nordregio

### **Sweden - Interviewees**

Mats Johansson demographer (retired) at Stockholm Royal Institute of Technology  
Dean Carson, Visiting Fellow, Centre for Rural Medicine, Sweden, Arctic Centre at Umeå University, Sweden  
Karina Umander, Local Project Manager (Storuman) for REGINA  
Wolfgang Pichler, Analysis unit, Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth  
Daniel Granello, Rural Developer, Regional Council of Kalmar County  
Alexandre Dubois, Researcher, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences  
Visit to Edinburgh by local and regional development stakeholders from Kalmar County, Sweden