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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN PERIPHERAL AREAS OF THE NPA

NPA COVID-19 RESPONSE PROJECT ON
ECONOMIC IMPACTS
MAIN REPORT: PART 6

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drawing on 10 partner reports

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The project involved the following partners and associated partners:



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6.1 Demographic trends and rural attractiveness pre-Covid

The NPA Cooperation Programme document states, “The primary characteristics that draw the area together are peripherality and low population density. ... the Programme area’s small number of larger cities and towns have an increasingly dominant position, while more peripheral areas suffer from out-migration, brain drain and ageing populations.” Youth out-migration is listed as one of the three key demographic challenges along with sparse population and ageing populations.

Even before the pandemic these long-term trends were changing in some areas within the NPA. Nordregio ([State of the Nordic Region 2020: Wellbeing, health and digitalisation edition](#)) analysed net migration rates of young adults (20 to 29 years-of-age) in 2010-2019, as follows:

“While the great majority of municipalities experience negative net migration of young adults in favour of a few functional urban areas and some larger towns, it is possible to observe a number of exceptions to this general rule. The rural municipalities of Utsira, Moskenes, Valle, Smøla, Ballangen and Lierne in Norway have the highest positive net migration rates both for men and women. There are also positive net migration rates for males and females in the peripheral municipalities of Jomala, Kittilä, Lemland and Finström in Finland and Åland.”¹

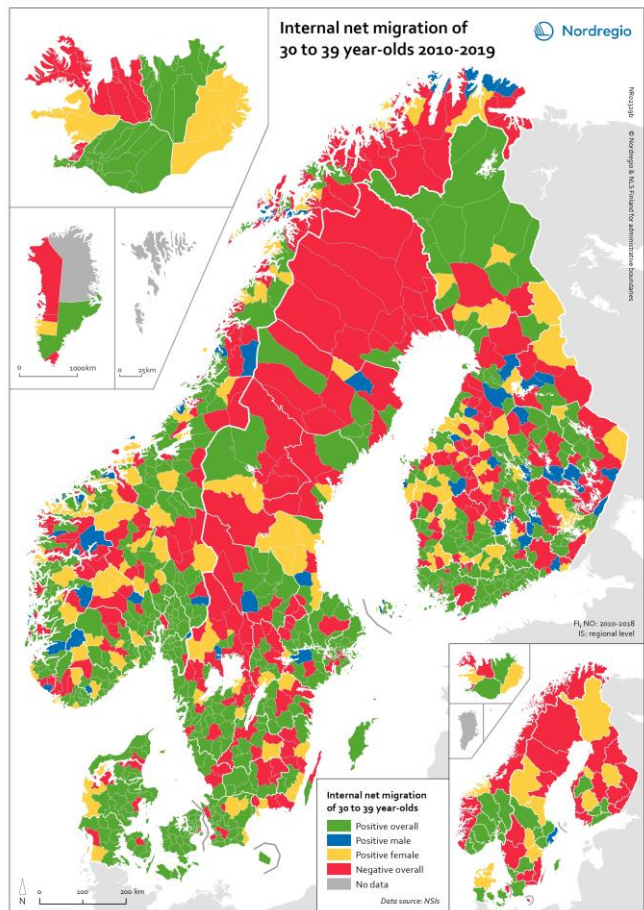
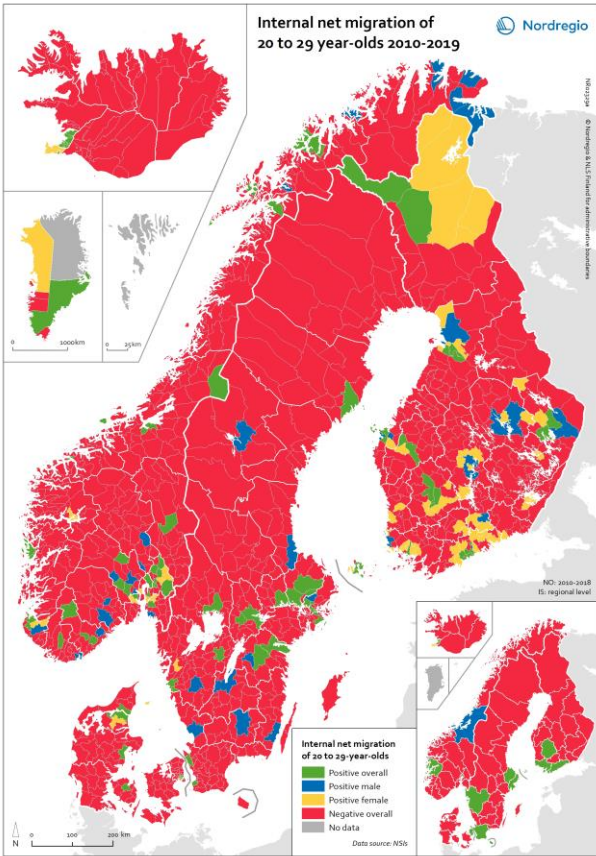
“However, several studies show that there are substantial return migration flows of women in the age group of 25 to 34 years (Johansson, 2016), as well as individuals with children and families moving from urban areas to rural regions in Sweden (Bjerke & Mellander, 2017; Haley, 2018; Sandow & Lundholm, 2019). This pattern is also reflected in [this] Figure, which shows internal net migration of 30 to 39-year-olds between 2010 and 2019.”

“When compared to internal net migration among young adults, this map offers a more positive picture, because a considerable proportion of rural municipalities have experienced positive net migration among females, males, or both sexes across all the Nordic countries.” It is still the case that most municipalities within the NPA area have experienced net out-migration within this age group, but there are clearly exceptions.

Research on Scottish islands also identified some striking examples. Of 469 young adults below age 40 identified in the islands that make up Uist (pop about 5000) in the Outer Hebrides, half of them were returners or newcomers. Just as significant, many of these young people had children. Between them the 469 young people have 253 children. Four out of 10 of these children were living on Uist because both their parents had chosen to return or settle on Uist, suggesting that returners were bringing back significant numbers of children who had not been registered on Uist ([CoDeL, 2018](#)).

This research led to the Islands Revival blog, a partnership of CoDeL with leading Scottish research institutes, the James Hutton Institute and SRUC, as well as Community Land Scotland. The key hypothesis underlying the blog was that aggregated macro-data was not capturing micro-trends in small island communities (often equivalent to Nordic municipalities).

¹ However, it is important to remember that Danish, Finnish and Norwegian municipalities are smaller in size than their counterparts in the rest of the Nordic Region (Nilsson & Jokinen, 2020). These distinctions may impact the results in the analysis. The regional map shows that, with the exception of Suðurnes (Iceland), only regions including major cities experienced positive net migration of young people aged 20-29 years.



In their blog post, JHI pointed to “the shortcomings of official data sources: population projections assume the continuation of existing patterns and do not consider sudden changes in the conditions that attract or drive away local residents; and the risk of inaccuracy of intercensal estimates increases over time.

“One source of data that is often overlooked by policy analysts is that of the observations of local residents. Members of the local community are usually sensitive to changes in the way migration is affecting the population, and often have a sophisticated understanding of the complex factors at play in population change.”

The blog posts supplied by local residents identified a range of Scottish islands that had experienced increasing populations, including those where the island or part of the island had been bought by the local community who rapidly invested in the estate. Kerera has doubled its population since 2011, Eigg has seen an increase of well over 50% since the community bought the island in 1997, West Harris has seen a 27% rise in population between 2012 and 2019 (the community bought the land in 2010), Colonsay a 25% rise between 1991 and 2001, while Westray in Orkney registered a growth in population for first time in 2011 and is now stable with marginal growth. These islands are among the smaller Scottish islands, which would in the past have been considered the most marginal, and yet they demonstrate significant population turnaround after decades of decline.

Likewise, the Canadian report highlights that “Prince Edward Island ... has experienced growth well above the national average in both population and GDP in the last five years in particular.” In fact, population has been steady or growing across most of Atlantic Canada (except in Newfoundland and Labrador), “because of its diversified economy and employment opportunities, lower housing prices and access to nature”.

Like in the Nordic context, some of the growth in population is focused on urban areas in the Atlantic provinces, while rural areas may continue to have net population declines. However, while “much of the immigrant population is expected to make its way to large cities, there are cases in the Maritimes where the rural immigrant population is booming. In the Miramichi, New Brunswick, immigration went from single digits to 300 new immigrants between 2018 and 2020. This growth is attributed to the community ‘embracing the idea of newcomers and welcoming them’. And Craig Mackie, Director of the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada, describes the importance of immigration in his province: ‘Beyond dollars, immigration has brought us diversity in terms of people, culture, languages, and especially food. Immigration has also given us a broader global view that has connected PEI to the rest of the world.’”

Nordregio’s recent project on regional attractiveness in the Nordic regions within the NPA has sought to identify some of the factors involved. Aspects of ‘good life’ in rural settings, e.g. where natural amenities are part of daily life including easy access to forests, mountains or other physical attributes, emerge from the casestudies in this project.

Inari, the municipality in the far north of Finland, is a good example. Many of the interviewees that participated in the research stressed the high quality of life and nature in Inari. In fact the municipality’s slogan, targeted not least at outsiders, is ‘voimakas luonnostaan’ which translates into ‘mighty by nature’. Many of those moving to Inari are outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy nature and related activities such as hunting or fishing. But it is not only nature that makes Inari a good

place to live. The people and the relationships they establish are another valuable element because “people know and trust each other, these are honest and hard-working people up here, down to Earth, who can also enjoy life”. “People are tired of commuting; life is much easier up here. It is the quality of life, which is high here. And you get quite fast to a city, Helsinki, which is really close by plane”.

A similar picture emerges from Lebesby, in the far north of Norway, where the respondents stated that the freedom to roam, high levels of trust and the connection to nature were some of the attractive elements to live in a place with precarious weather conditions and unreliable infrastructure. One interviewee said, “you need to be a bit of an entrepreneur to live here”, and both of the families interviewed were actively engaged in either informal or formal volunteering, creating their own businesses or cultural initiatives.

As we will see in reflecting on housing challenges below, patterns of such migration are complex, just as they have been in the past around tourism and especially second and holiday homes. Among people choosing Inari are wealthy migrants from Helsinki and other larger cities building second homes in Inari, people seeking silence for work and who are able to work remotely. They also include people coming from other EU member states. They contribute to population and support local economic activity, but can also have significant effects on house prices and availability, and on fragile cultural identities.

The ESPON report BRIDGES (2020), engaging partners from 14 European countries, including Iceland, Sweden and Scotland, focused on territories with geographic specificities, such as insularity, peripherality, remoteness, accessibility, vulnerability and lack of critical mass. After jobs, the study concluded that quality of life is the second important influence on life choices. Key factors include the marginality of the region; the geographical and ICT access; the natural environment; the quality of schools; availability of public transport; cultural activities and health and social services.

In the Scottish context, in a presentation at the Scottish Parliament in October 2019, CoDeL suggested that young people were returning or coming to remote islands like Uist in the Outer Hebrides for holistic reasons, e.g.

- for the unique way of life on the islands, ... for a sense of belonging
- to be with family and within a close-knit community,
- because of the cultural revival taking place in Uist, rooted in Gaelic language
- for the stunning environment
- for their sense of identity
- for the enterprising opportunities on the islands (as one young person commented, “Where else would I have worked for a public agency, then built a windfarm, then built a harbour, and now be managing a major social enterprise, and all so early in my career?”). And 1 in 10 of the young people surveyed run their own business.

These attitudes mark a very strong shift in demographic tides. Previously the consensus within island communities towards their young people was very much summed up in the phrase, “if you want to get on [in life], then get off [the island]”. In contrast, at a gathering of island representatives from Scotland and Ireland, along with the Scottish Government Islands Team, in October 2019, a young returner who had recently set up the North Uist Distillery with his partner,

said, “I happen to be passionate about distilling, but on these islands there are 100 or more enterprising opportunities I could have taken up.”

The evidence from the [Islands Revival blog](#) led to the [Islands Revival Declaration](#), which opened, “We affirm that there is credible evidence of ‘green shoots’ of population turnaround in the Scottish islands, which as yet does not show up in official statistics.”

6.2 Covid-19 impacts on demographic trends

Covid-19 is likely to have accelerated these trends. In Atlantic Canadian provinces, “population growth is helping the region to weather this storm. People have ... been moving into the region since Covid-19 as it is seen as a safe area. In fact, net interprovincial migration to the Maritime provinces was over 1,200 in the second quarter of 2020, up from 600 in the same quarter in 2019.” While there is evidence that Covid-19 and its impacts have given rise to significant mental health challenges among young people in the Atlantic provinces, one Ontario mother sees Newfoundland and Labrador as the best place for her children to be during the pandemic claiming that they have “had a far happier experience in Newfoundland where both cases and government measures are much more limited”.

Another theme that emerged in this research is a renewed interest in rural living. Since the start of the pandemic, anecdotes have been shared across the country of people from cities “escaping” to rural to access rural assets like affordability, space and natural amenities. In some instances, individuals have relocated to a seasonal residence during lockdowns and stay at home orders. In other cases, highly educated ‘knowledge workers’ who have shifted to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic are moving to rural driven by the search for more space, greater affordability, natural amenities, and a different lifestyle (Rich 2020; Weeden 2020). This “retreat to rural” can certainly bring opportunities including demographic and economic growth, diversity, new ideas, and new networks. As noted, some rural communities and provinces are even looking to attract so-called “digital nomads” to work from rural. However, not all rural communities can capitalize on this retreat to rural. Access to high quality, reliable broadband is essential for working from home and this is a significant challenge for many rural communities across Atlantic Canada and across the county (Hall et al, Covid-19 Impacts on Rural Economic Development in Atlantic Canada, CRRF, forthcoming)

The Nordregio report provides evidence from the Nordic context. Swedish media is demonstrating an emerging trend that Covid-19 has affected directly. One of the largest newspapers in Sweden DN reports young families moving from Stockholm to smaller more peripheral places. Young families are looking for more spacious facilities outside of cities where they can combine work and family life after over 40% of working age professionals have been sent home to work. Persistently booming house prices in the urban areas, expensive flats with smaller living areas in dense urban settings and the move to home for work have created a shift in the pull from rural areas even if it is too premature to see emerging trends of counterurbanisation.

In the peripheral region of East Iceland, no house or apartment is available for sale, and if any is put on sale in the area of Egilstaðir, Fellabær or Fljótsdalur it is sold within the hour. Some very remote rural areas that have shown a persistent decline in fertility rates for decades are now revitalising, e.g. Barðaströnd in NW Iceland. And there are reports of people normally working in

Norway and Denmark who have moved to the Faroe Islands with much fewer Covid-19 restrictions because they can work remotely.

The research on the Highlands and Islands in Scotland identified a significant trend of “moving house from urban to attractive rural areas – in part due to the increased need or scope for home working”. There is significant evidence from both Scotland and Ireland that house prices in some rural areas are rising sharply as urban residents seek to shift to rural areas.

The Nordregio report raises the following opportunity: “During the Covid-19 crisis, a large proportion of employees and employers have adjusted their routines to enable distance working from the employees’ homes. These changes within the labour market may be long-term, allowing remote working to happen to a greater extent even after the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, restructuring and the more efficient use of distance-spanning technologies could also contribute to a change of employees’ preferences regarding residence, which would in turn revitalise the processes of counter-urbanisation and counteract the brain drain from peripheral areas to urban centres.”

A key question is whether these accelerated trends will continue after Covid-19 and extend into further peripheral areas. Most analysts and journalists argue that the huge shift to remote working caused by Covid-19 is here to stay, even if many return to a blended work pattern, part in the office, part at home. Even if some companies (like Goldman Sachs) want to revert to the old office work patterns, many companies do not, and after Covid-19 employees will have a much greater sense of assessing potential employers based on the work patterns they would like. And the rapidly accumulating evidence of rising house prices in rural areas, and very quick house sales, in some cases after years of very sluggish housing markets in remote communities, suggests that the trend towards rural and remote living will continue. Covid-19 has significantly disrupted old patterns and attitudes, from employment practices to perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages between urban and rural living (as is evidenced in the previous Section 5 of this report on resilience factors).

Based on the survey of 62 entrepreneurs across Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, as well as virtual workshops with young entrepreneurs in particular, the Baltic Sea Cluster Development Centre reports: “More jobs are now being performed on-line and the pandemic has increased the demand for access to nature. This provides opportunities to increase the number of jobs that can be performed from peripheral regions, and increases future economic opportunities for peripheral regions independent of tourism. Doing many jobs virtually from remote locations during the pandemic has also opened opportunities to integrate peripheral businesses and jobs into urban economic markets.”

Covid-19 has significantly disrupted previous demographic patterns and attitudes that underpin these patterns, and, like other crises, has accelerated trends, in this case towards rural and peripheral living, that were already emerging, including among younger people. This disruption significantly changes the policy opportunities around demographics in peripheral areas, shifting the focus from measures to prevent outmigration to encourage in-migration through former residents returning and incomers settling.

Box 6.1 Young East Iceland

Ungt Austurland (Young East Iceland) seeks to attract young people to the region. The NGO was established in 2016 and targets young people from 18 to 40 years old who are concerned about the region's future and development. The aim is to strengthen young people's networks in the region and to raise awareness among those who have emigrated about opportunities in East Iceland. In 2017 the organisation hosted a forum "Að heiman og heim" (Home and Back) to increase the visibility of companies and businesses in the area for those thinking about returning to the region. About 50 companies, schools and entrepreneurs presented their activities, operations and opportunities. Young East Iceland has also been an advocate for young people in the area to get them involved in development, e.g. in local politics, elections or transport. In 2018 they offered a course on politics to encourage young people to actively take part in local politics and to stand on some of the party lists. The chairman of the organisation says that the voice of young people is both essential for future local development and also appreciated by many in senior positions in the municipality.

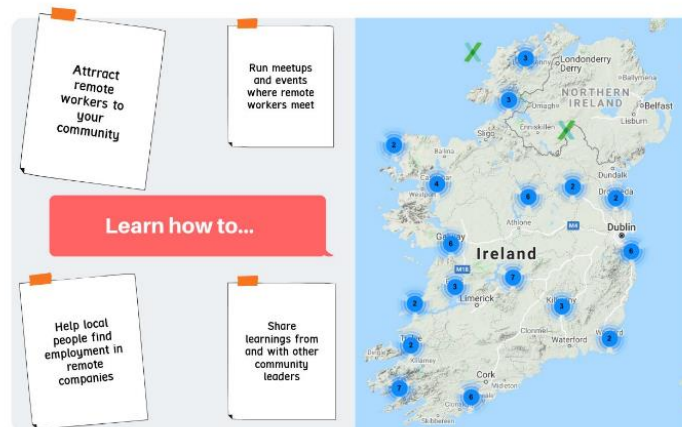
Many peripheral communities are already responding to these opportunities, as we saw in the section of this report on sustainable tourism (Section 4). But there are plenty of examples pre-Covid also, like north Iceland, where the local councils set the goal that a new merged municipality will be known and sought after as a great place to live and run sustainable businesses. To push for this, an ambitious project was launched, Innovate North, which aims to put the new municipality at the forefront of the fight against climate change, strengthening the region's long-term competitiveness. Box 6.1 provides another example from Iceland, from East Iceland.

In Klakksvík in the Faroe Islands, one of the key features of the municipal growth plan is young people and strategies to motivate people to move to the municipality, or move back after studying abroad. Not only were students consulted in developing the plan, the municipality also went to Denmark to inform students about opportunities that could attract them to returning to Klakksvík. This was part of wider initiatives in the Faroe Islands, seeking to motivate students to return as a reaction to the decline in population. The House of Industries, the community of business associations in the Faroe Islands, together with representatives from different Faroese municipalities, went to Faroese students studying abroad to try to convince them to return after studying. The focus was both on Danish towns and beyond. "During Christmas holidays", adds the CEO of Búnaðarstovan Agricultural Agency, "when students were back, they arranged different events for students here as well." Information was provided on working opportunities, child care, health, building / buying houses and offering trainee opportunities with local companies.

Likewise, [Grow Remote](#) started in Ireland pre-Covid, in 2018, as a WhatsApp group. "We grew into 4 countries, a CLG (Not for Profit) and have 60+ local chapter leads using remote work as a tool for community development." "We're a not for profit on a mission to enable us to work, live and participate locally. We do this by making remote work (via employment) both visible and accessible."

Build your own community

- 130 local communities
- Monthly meetups, dedicated resources, and support for your local community
- 1 free 6 week onboarding programme with everything you need to know



And in direct response to Covid-19, Tourism Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia Business Inc. launched a marketing campaign to attract people working from home to move to Nova Scotia. It includes a website (www.workfromnovascotia.com) with information on coastal experiences, real estate, and things to do. Their ad campaign includes innovative taglines like: “If you can do your job from anywhere, do it from here”; “Way better than the office water cooler. Find your work-life balance”; “Not all breakout rooms are created equal. Work where you want to live”; “You always wanted an office with a view. Remote work, meet coastal life”; and “How’s that for office space? Working from home? Work from here.” The campaign’s goal is to attract 15,000 to the province within one-year (CRRF report).

Likewise, the Shetland islands in Scotland have developed a website www.shetland.org not just to attract tourists and visitors, but also to target specific professions and economically active groups to come and live in Shetland. Under the headline, “Welcome to the Islands of Opportunity” they feature sections on visiting Shetland, but also prominent sections on “Invest in Shetland” (to increase investment in long-term non-tourism driven value creation) and “Live, Work, Study in Shetland”, with features like “living sustainably by the sea”, “making a new life in Fetlar” (one of the Shetland islands) and, as a direct response to changed mindsets due to Covid, “2021: The year to make your move”.



Such examples of showing peripheral areas in a positive light, focusing on their many assets and strengths, on the opportunities, including enterprising opportunities, and quality of life they deliver, are critical. Often peripheral regions have focused primarily on their disadvantages, in part in the hope of attracting public funding and investment, but in the process potentially undermining the attractiveness of their area among key demographic groups, especially younger people. The ESPON study BRIDGES recognised that a “demotivating environment” and “uninformed pessimism” are also factors that push young graduates to leave their region. This has led young people not even to look for a job in a mountainous region, for example.

The examples cited above from Canada, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, Finland, Scotland and Ireland demonstrate just how significant this approach of seeking to attract people to settle or return to peripheral areas in order to reverse past demographic trends is becoming across the NPA. And Covid-19 has given these efforts a significant boost, accelerating the trends that were already emerging pre-Covid.

6.3 Strategies and challenges for positive demographic trends in peripheral regions

The research identifies a range of strategies that are important for reversing demographic change, including jobs, education and families, and not least housing.

Education, jobs and families

The ESPON report BRIDGES (2020) that focused on territories with geographic specificities suggests the availability of professional opportunities is the primary basis of decisions to stay in, return to, or leave a region. For non-returning graduates, 74% stated that the region does not offer adequate professional opportunities corresponding to their levels of education. The results also show that the availability of jobs in surrounding regions is fundamental to stay in the region as long as commuting possibilities exist.

This result in part reflects a typical strategy in peripheral areas of ‘educating for export’, which has been particularly pronounced in the remotest rural and island communities, of delivering standard qualifications in schools that do not match the job opportunities in the local area, but instead qualify graduates for professional jobs that may be relatively few in number in a peripheral area.

The Nordregio report provides an example from Ilulissat, the third largest city in Greenland with a population of just under 5000, located in western Greenland approximately 350 km north of the Arctic Circle. In this case all young people aged 15 to 18 have to move to other places to attend upper secondary education, and as a result there is little teenage culture in town. Traditionally many of the children from the villages move from 9th grade to town schools with full care and board, and a lot are going to boarding schools in Denmark. As the Mayor says: “The active and clever leave. ... The plans are to get a gymnasium next year and some tourism education. We would like to have some craftsmanship education as well and are working towards this now. Within sports there are some Northern Greenlanders who are very good. We try to keep the linkages to the students in Denmark, for example at educational fairs in Denmark. The problem is

that the more education you get the less keen you are on returning as you will only have a few colleagues whether you are a lawyer, teacher or medic. These professional networks are important.”

The Outer Hebrides in Scotland have been at the forefront of changing this approach, by developing vocational education with fully accredited qualifications in skills that are matched to employment opportunities in the local island economies, such as maritime studies, crofting (small farming), local food production, health and social care, and engineering. In some cases, the local authority commissioned the development of new qualifications in these subjects, because they did not exist, and ensured they were accredited through the national accrediting body in Scotland so that these qualifications would enjoy parity of esteem with any other qualifications offered at secondary school. This approach was matched by enterprising young people’s workshops, day-long sessions for all senior pupils across the islands, that enabled each pupil to come up with an enterprising idea they could take up in their island. The power of so many different enterprising ideas emerging from young people themselves lay in changing mindsets about local opportunities. It is likely that these approaches contributed to increasing the number of young people returning to the islands in their 20s and 30s, even though very few actually set up the enterprising idea they had developed when they graduated from school at 16, 17 or 18 years old.

In Lebesby in northern Norway the municipality is seeking to make the region attractive for young people even at a younger age. At the centre of the municipality’s strategy on creating an attractive and viable place to live is ensuring enjoyable living conditions for young people in order to retain or incentivise young people to return to Lebesby: “It is the most important measure we have.” The municipality is creating a diverse list of courses in the local School of Arts, as well as youth activities and sports. For example, the School of Arts is working in an interdisciplinary way to create a positive environment where children are allowed to develop their cultural interests. Some of the shows have even been held for passengers on Hurtigruten cruises: “The children were very proud”. Creating an environment for children to thrive and be creative is important, both for stimulating intellectual curiosity and arguably also for encouraging job creation at a later stage.

The Norwegian project Barnetråkk (‘Kids Tracks’) was motivated by the sense that the majority of municipalities in Norway have a greater knowledge on the movements of elks than of children and adolescents in their areas. Kids’ Tracks is a digital registration tool that gives a clearer indication of children’s movements in and around their surrounding area, which places they like and don’t like, and complements web-based GIS platforms that engage with local stakeholders and provide foresight on the potential social and economic impacts of development plans. Although children and adolescents have a legal right to participate in society, most Norwegian municipalities seem to lack a firm understanding of their exact wants and needs. The tool was developed to let children tell planners, the municipality and local politicians how they live in the place and what they want to change. 217 municipalities have implemented the tool – many of them rural.

In the Faroe Islands about 50% of young Faroese are currently abroad for education and roughly half of them do not return. According to the CEO at Búnaðarstovan Agricultural Agency, keeping young people two to three years after graduation increases the probability that they return home again, compared to those who leave right after High School. And compared to the past, more students tend to return these years. Among the reasons is higher unemployment in Denmark and

good job opportunities on the Faroe Islands. One important reason was also an improved marketing for job and life opportunities on the Faroe Islands.

Highlighting exciting job and enterprise opportunities is a critical strategy. Our research tapped into young entrepreneurs, including in tourism and related industries, in Canada, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Scotland, many of whom demonstrated dynamic and innovative entrepreneurship. One out of 10 of all young people under 40 identified in Uist in the Outer Hebrides runs a business. Nordergio's BeUBio project highlighted examples of young entrepreneurs in the Nordic and Baltic region who are engaged in innovation within the bioeconomy. The BiUBeo website collects "stories of young people whose business ideas, jobs and other activities lead the way towards a different and more sustainable economic path. With a variety of different examples, young people from across the Baltic Sea Region, inspire new ways of making business while having a positive impact to the environment and society". And the many anecdotes on young talented entrepreneurial people seeking to accommodate quality of life by moving to more rural areas is now more visible in the mobility trends among 30-39-year Scandinavians (see the figure at the beginning of this section).

Housing

One of the main impacts of Covid-19 and of remote working during the pandemic, has been to change mindsets, including among urban residents, about the balance of attractiveness between urban and rural living. Many are deciding to move to more rural areas which is leading to well documented rises in house prices, and many houses on the market being snapped up almost immediately by wealthy buyers, some of whom may not even have visited the rural area or island where they are buying. This can significantly reduce opportunities for local people to find appropriate and affordable housing, and for young people to find housing that would allow them to stay, return or settle in peripheral communities.

In this way the apparent welcome trend of skilled professionals moving into peripheral regions can undermine the sustainability of the peripheral communities that they find so attractive. And this is all the more the case with older people retiring to peripheral areas, who may not be able to contribute much longer to economic activity and may well require significant health care in future. As one member of a local island health body says, "it is frustrating to discuss how many hip replacements we may need to deliver in future, rather than how many midwives we need."

This negative demographic development in remote and peripheral areas is partly rooted in unfavourable house market conditions over the last few decades, including higher costs to build social housing in peripheral areas, the poor quality and often low value of housing, and significant land issues for securing housing plots. Housing is generally seen as a human right, a consumable that serves as the framework for our lives. However, real estate is also a financial commodity on the market, with prices often driven by factors well beyond the peripheral areas concerned.

In fact, the negative demographic development goes back to the 1970s when a wave of migration back to the country emerged that started with second home owners. The 1970s and early 1980s was an era when affluent and often urban residents were drawn by pictures of desirable locations to buy second and holiday homes in rural areas. This trend accelerated when tourism development became a key and sometimes predominant strategy for economic development in

peripheral regions. In some remote communities, 40% or even over half of all housing stock are holiday or second homes. This can undermine the sustainability of remote communities, and endanger fragile cultural traditions. The visitors do contribute to the local economy, e.g. by providing a customer base for services provided by peripheral communities and by creating value for the community through their networks beyond the region. However, the most important housing challenge for peripheral communities with demographic challenges is to be able to attract young people of working age and families with children.

In September 2020, young people in particular from Uist, Skye, Argyll and Mull published an open letter – Save the Highlands and Islands from an 'economic clearance' – as a direct response to urban flight caused by Covid-19 making it impossible for local residents to purchase homes (see [here](#)). As one of the authors said, "The vitality of our island communities is reliant on support to our younger generations and any effort to help them must be made." The letter calls for increased support for younger generations struggling to make their homes in the Highlands and Islands and cites a recent example of a Uist rental property successfully being marketed exclusively to young locals and rented to a family with three children. In a housing market where long term rentals are almost exclusively shunned in favour of holiday lets, the letter writers point out that this could serve as a template moving forwards.