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## Foreword

### *ANZRSAI 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference 2024*

The 2024 ANZRSAI Conference (i.e. Our 47th annual conference) is planned to be held jointly with RSA conference at the University of Canberra in Canberra over two days, 02-03 December. It will be an in-person conference, although opportunities for on-line presentation and streaming will be available. The conference this year will go back to the general theme of development with a particular focus of being inclusive. The theme hopes to cover a wide range of topics from the understanding of development, various indicators such as economic activity, income and wealth, the fulfilment of housing, transport, infrastructure, the role of technology and artificial intelligence and various other factors such as government and governance. In trying to capture the inclusiveness of development within and between people, space and place, the conference will also look at topic such as Urban-Rural Divide, Cultural, Community and Intergenerational issues. Proposals for contributed papers, for themed panels, or for special sessions, will be welcomed on any topic related to regional development futures.

Further information about the conference is available at:

<https://www.anzrsai.org/conference/>

### *Swiftonomics: an economic impact of Taylor Swift's eras tour*

Taylor Swift's early eras tour concerts in the United States made the singer-songwriter about \$US13 million (\$19 million) a night, according to Bloomberg, and generated considerable economic activity for the communities involved.

As Australia readies for Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, Melbourne and Sydney are gearing up for "Swiftonomics".

"We actually think the total spend will be in the order of \$136 million, or \$135.8 million to be precise," Venues NSW chief executive Kerrie Mather told RN Breakfast.

"It'll be a very significant economic contributor to New South Wales."

Frontier Touring is responsible for bringing Taylor Swift out to Australia and predicts 60,000 interstate visitors and 6,000 international visitors across the four concerts in Sydney.

"An event like Taylor Swift attracts significant interstate and international visitation, which means that people actually come, and they stay at hotels, or Airbnb, they actually go out to dinner, they go to bars and restaurants," Ms Mather said.

"We have thousands of staff that work for a wide range of companies on the event day to support the concert."

With four back-to-back concerts at Sydney's Accor Stadium, it will be a concert like no other for the city.

"By comparison, the New Year's Test is five days in a row [of] 30,000 people and it's New South Wales's largest annual sporting event," Ms Mather said.

"This will be 80,000 people per night; the total attendees will be around 300,000."

**Swiftenomics is serious business**

The economic impact of Taylor Swift is now spilling into different sectors.

The United States' largest newspaper chain, Gannett, hired a full-time journalist dedicated to the Taylor Swift beat.

When the pop star attended her boyfriend Travis Kelce's NFL game, she boosted sales of his No. 87 jersey by about 400 per cent, according to Fanatics, which sells the league's merchandise.

Forbes declared the 12-time Grammy winner part of the billionaires club last year, but the difference for Swift is her wealth is solely based on her music catalogue and tours, not having side hustles like a beauty line.

By the end of her Eras Tour, The Washington Post estimates she could have contributed \$US5.7 billion (\$8.3 billion) to the US economy.

"Some people do kind of turn their nose up and go, 'she's a pop star, I don't really get it, why should we be taking her seriously?'," RMIT University's fan studies expert Kate Pattison said.

"She's broken so many records when it comes from a music perspective, she recently overtook a Barbra Streisand and an Elvis Presley record.

"I guess people haven't taken it as seriously as maybe rock music or sport or other types of more masculine fandoms."

While there is plenty of praise and celebration for Swift, there is also criticisms about her career and the fan following she's created.

Ms Pattison believes some of that criticism comes from a long-standing perception of fans of females and female-led movements.

"I think it's really important that we look at what she's doing and what she's continuing to do and not dismiss it as being a frivolous fan-girl obsession."

Swift's concerts at the Melbourne Cricket Ground are set to be some of the biggest of her career, and she's sold out three back-to-back shows.

The director of the Social Change Enabling Impact Platform at RMIT University, Lisa Given, is behind a free fanposium event in the lead-up to the Eras Tour launching in Melbourne, featuring some of the world's leading experts in music and pop culture.

However, many regional towns, including Ballarat businesspeople say city-focused events including Taylor Swift's Eras Tour have resulted in people spending less in the regions.

The news with some significant data can be explored here at the following links:

[https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-10/taylor-swift-australia-eras-tour-economy/103297868?utm\\_campaign=abc\\_news\\_web&utm\\_content=link&utm\\_medium=content\\_share&utm\\_source=abc\\_news\\_web](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-10/taylor-swift-australia-eras-tour-economy/103297868?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_share&utm_source=abc_news_web)

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-03-26/taylor-swift-economic-boom-not-so-good-for-regions/103627154>

*Regional Australia reels from several women's deaths*

Half of the 26 women who have been killed so far this year have been in regional parts of the country, highlighting a need for more resourcing outside metropolitan areas.

In regional Australia, a series of tragic deaths has rippled across a group of close-knit communities.

During the course of the past week, the death of Molly Ticehurst, a 28-year-old childcare worker in the New South Wales town of Forbes, sparked outrage just a day before the body of Emma Bates, 49, was found in Cobram, Victoria.

The mayor of Forbes, Phyllis Miller, says Ticehurst was loved by many and that her death had left many families and the children she cared for reeling.

“Molly was a very beautiful young woman and very highly regarded in our community,” Miller says.

“The whole system has let her down badly.”

This year, 26 women in Australia have been killed – a rate of one death every four days – according to data compiled by advocacy group Destroy the Joint's project Counting Dead Women.

Of those, half occurred in regional parts of Australia, highlighting the vulnerabilities faced by women experiencing violence outside metropolitan areas.

Across Australia, frontline services, domestic violence advocates and police officers are demanding investment in violence prevention and a crackdown on law enforcement.

The NSW government also has ordered a review of the bail laws following Ticehurst's death, over which her ex-partner Daniel Billing has been charged with murder. The NSW police commissioner, Karen Webb, has backed this review as an urgent priority, but she acknowledged that more needed to be done to stop domestic violence happening in the first place.

This weekend, thousands are preparing to take to the streets in 17 rallies across the nation calling for greater action on a growing epidemic of women killed in violent attacks.

In Ballarat, Victoria's third-largest regional city, the rally on Friday marked the second time in a month residents had marched the city's streets demanding an end to the killing of women.

An earlier protest came a week after the body of Hannah McGuire, from the nearby town of Clunes, was found dead in a burnt-out car in a state forest, and within 48 hours of police launching a new and unsuccessful search for the body of Samantha Murphy, allegedly murdered on 4 February after leaving her family home to go for a run.

Ballarat has also been rocked by the death of 42-year-old Rebecca Young, who was killed in a suspected murder-suicide by her partner, in the small suburb of Sebastopol.

Wendy Sturgess, the chief executive of non-profit community service organisation Child & Family Services Ballarat, says the interconnected nature of regional and remote communities can add additional barriers.

“We hear about women in remote settings, who lived for years with family violence because they don't have access to means of transport to leave, they don't have access to legal services and the perpetrator can often be a mate of everybody's,” she tells Guardian Australia.

Elise Phillips, the deputy chief executive of Domestic Violence NSW, says resourcing in regional and rural areas is a major issue. In particular, the lack of housing and crisis accommodation.

“Women are having to choose between being homeless or between continuing to experience abuse,” she says.

Phillips points out that the Victorian government spends more than all of the other states and territories combined on DVF services. The NSW government spends less than half of what Victoria does, despite supporting a larger population.

“This means that frontline services on the ground are struggling to meet demand and frontline workers are faced with having to turn vulnerable women and children away,” says Phillips.

Meanwhile, women in rural areas across Australia are 24 times more likely to end up in hospital due to domestic violence issues, she says.

Antoinette Braybrook, the chief executive of the Victorian Aboriginal-community controlled family violence prevention and legal service Djirra, also says data on the number of murdered and missing First Nations women is poor.

“The most recent national data suggests that Aboriginal women are 33 times more likely to be hospitalised and 11 times more likely to die from a violent assault than other women. But rarely are our stories covered or seen as newsworthy,” she says.

The Victorian premier, Jacinta Allan, has vowed to establish a taskforce to determine ways to curb the spate of women’s deaths.

Sturgess says solutions must be focused on early prevention and notes men’s behavioural programs are critical to help break intergenerational cycles of violence.

“There is a lack of support the further out you go for men, in particular in terms of behaviour change programs,” she says.

Such programs are critical, she says, for helping men, women and children.

“If we’re helping men, we’re helping women and children as well.”

Lauren Callaway, Victoria police’s assistant commissioner for family violence, says practical measures that could be considered include tougher penalties for perpetrators who breach family violence intervention orders.

...

Australia must do better’: Albanese calls urgent national cabinet meeting as thousands rally to end men’s violence against women.

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/27/as-regional-australia-reels-from-several-womens-deaths-advocates-seek-both-policing-and-prevention>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/28/australia-must-do-better-albanese-calls-urgent-national-cabinet-meeting-as-thousands-rally-to-end-mens-violence-against-women>



*Iran and Israel's conflict, marking a dangerous moment for the world*

Inside the situation room of the White House, surrounded by members of his national security team, Joe Biden watched Iran's attack against Israel unfold in real-time.

The president had made an early return to Washington from his beach house in Delaware, days after the United States began publicly warning that an Iranian strike could be imminent.

Over a period of hours, Israel and its partners — including the US — intercepted an estimated 99 per cent of the more than 300 drones and missiles launched by Iran.

A senior Biden administration official, who spoke to reporters on the condition of anonymity, described the effort as a "phenomenal display" of Israel's defensive capability.

The US also argued it was evidence of what it calls its "ironclad" commitment to helping Israel defend itself.

But in the immediate aftermath of the attack, the president made another message clear to his Israeli counterpart: the US would not help Israel with any possible counter-attack.

"The president had a discussion about trying to slow things down, think through things — given what we just went through, let's assess kind of where we are," the administration official said.

As US outlet Axios reported, Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "take the win".



A police officer and residents inspect the remains of an Iranian rocket booster that Israel says injured a young girl.

[Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-04-15/iran-israel-shadow-war-becomes-direct-attack-analysis/103707566>]

Six months after Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, the US is still hoping to prevent the conflict from spilling out into a broader regional war.

But at an incredibly tense moment for the Middle East, it's not yet clear how Israel will respond — or if fears of further escalation can be avoided.

### **What happens next**

The big questions now are: What will Israel do in response? And will this lead to the major widening of the conflict that's been feared for the past six months?

Much of it will come down to the decisions of Israel's three-man war cabinet.

Before they met on Sunday, war cabinet minister Benny Gantz said Israel would "exact a price from Iran in a way and time that suits us".

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who also sits on the war cabinet, said Israel now had "an opportunity to establish a strategic alliance against this grave threat by Iran".

But the cabinet, which also includes Netanyahu, is reportedly divided over the timing and the scale of their response. CNN, also citing an Israeli official, reported their meeting ended without any decision being made.

Some Israeli leaders are pushing for heavy retaliation.

The right-wing national security minister Ben Gvir says Israel should "go crazy", and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich is calling for a response that "resonates throughout the Middle East for generations to come".

The military spokesman, Hagari, said "operational plans for both offensive and defensive action" had been approved.

The US insists it's up to Israel to decide how to proceed.

But Biden's message to Netanyahu — and the fact it has become public — has been criticised by some in US congressional and national security circles.

Republican senator Marco Rubio said he expected Israel to respond, without US involvement.

"I imagine that Israel does not want a full-scale war either, and one of the ways they've prevented it in the past is through the kind of deterrence that comes from attack," he told CNN.

"What I don't understand is why Joe Biden, and the administration, would leak to the media, the contents of a conversation in which he tells Netanyahu, he doesn't think Netanyahu should respond at all.

"There's only one reason they leaked that, and that is that so when Israel does respond, the White House can say we told them not to do it."

Biden reiterated his warning against further escalation in a joint statement issued by the leaders of the G7 nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US).

"With its actions, Iran has further stepped toward the destabilisation of the region and risks provoking an uncontrollable regional escalation," the leaders said.

"This must be avoided."

The relationship between Biden and Netanyahu has been increasingly strained over the course of the war, culminating in the president's recent threat to reassess American policy after an Israeli strike killed Western aid workers.

As Israel found itself under direct attack at the weekend, the US once again came to its aid.

But in an effort to prevent a catastrophic escalation in the conflict, it's signalling there are limits to how far it will go.

Further information interesting reports can be found at the following links:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-04-15/iran-israel-shadow-war-becomes-direct-attack-analysis/103707566>

## **Commentary**

### **From the Regional Australia Institute**

#### ***National regional housing summit outcomes and recommendations***

On Friday 9 February 2024 more than 350 Australians took part in the first National Regional Housing Summit. Delegates joined in person and online, from each state and territory, representing regional communities and local governments; community housing providers and the not-for-profit sector; peak bodies; the building and finance sectors.

The day was solutions-focussed with a bold objective: to take a proactive approach to addressing the challenges before regional housing markets: spanning housing supply, labour shortages, home ownership, private rental, social and affordable housing and homelessness.

The Regional Australia Institute, Real Estate Institute of Australia and Master Builders Australia, knew the time was now to convene this important conversation.

The Summit was also supported by the Australian Forest Products Association, National Farmers Federation and Bendigo & Adelaide Bank.

To guide the Summit, a Discussion Paper set the scene outlining population, rental availability, house price trends and the regional jobs and skills landscape. These insights are also included within this report. Notable facts from the Paper include:

- Regional rental availability continues to decline: down from 1.5% in September 2022 to 1.2% in September 2023
- Regional median house prices have increased by 54.2% (from March 2020 to December 2023) compared to 29.3% in metropolitan Australia
- Regional Australia saw a 600,000 net population gain during the last census period
- Internet-advertised job vacancies continue to hover around 100,000 every month.



Importantly, the Discussion Paper also includes placebased examples of communities taking action to address their unique housing challenges. Like, Dubbo's No 1. Church Street– a 15 storey, 80 unit development, to address the inland city's lack of multi-density, low-maintenance housing options.

Over the course of the day, delegates engaged in subjectspecific panels and heard a series of insightful keynote addresses, including from Housing Minister, the Hon Julie Collins MP, Shadow Federal Housing Minister the Hon Michael Sukkar MP and Independent Member for Indi, Dr Helen Haines MP.

Key themes from the day's discussions, although unsurprising to delegates, are critical for all interested parties to understand in order to overcome current housing challenges. The need to think long-term, to enable local solutions, and targeted policy measures, and to address the lack of supply, in particular across housing and rental markets, the workforce, and funding of critical infrastructure and new housing, emerged as critical barriers to regional housing markets and community prosperity.

Importantly, participants had their say in a workshop session, answering three questions:

1. What do you want government to really understand?
2. What are the short-term changes to address regional housing challenges?
3. What are potential game changing polices, investment and innovations that could lead to longterm, enduring improvements?

The outputs of these discussions and the research and analytical expertise of the RAI have formed the following policy insights, that we, as National Regional Housing Summit convenors, provide for your considered review.

These ideas and innovations are grounded in the lived experience of regional Australians, who everyday are on the frontline of their community's housing and related challenges. Many of the recommendations are brought forward having been tested and proven successful on a micro-scale in regional, rural and remote Australia.

We urge you, as a leader with influence, to consider the recommendations of this report, when formulating policy and investment decisions that shape and intersect with regional housing.

As the convenors of the National Regional Housing Summit, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss regional Australia's housing needs and how, together, we can help to guarantee regional Australia continues to be a great place to live, work and invest.

Although a detailed report is available at the link below, a quick summary follows:

“Regional Australia is experiencing change like never before. More people than ever are looking to make a life outside our capital cities, and many have already made the move. Each month internet-advertised job vacancies continue to hover at rates just under 100,000. Demand is highest for professional skilled roles and those fundamental to regional living such as GPs, nurses, allied health professionals, aged care workers and early years educators. However, housing persists as a key barrier to facilitating this growth, with rental vacancies continuing at detrimental lows and new housing playing ‘catchup’ to population needs. This Discussion Paper was used to assist in directing conversation at the National Regional Housing Summit 2024.”

Detailed information, including a copy of the full report can be found at:

<https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/libraryviewer?ResourceID=111>

*Regions' role in nation's future focus of new report*

The release today of the Australian Government's State of Australia's Regions 2024 report highlights the important role regional Australia is playing in the nation's future prosperity and development.

Regional Australia Institute (RAI) CEO Liz Ritchie said the new report crucially acknowledged that while regional Australia was undergoing a significant transformation, with strong gains in population and significant employment opportunities, further investment and support is needed.

"A significant societal transformation is underway in Australia. More people are choosing a life in the regions, and metropolitan to regional relocations remain almost 12% above the pre-COVID average. With all those additional people calling regional Australia home, we must now ensure that they are able to access the services they need to lead safe, productive, fulfilling lives and contribute to the nation's success," Ms Ritchie said.

"I applaud Ministers King and McBain for driving the reintroduction of this important report as it signifies, not only to regional residents, but the wider nation, that the regions are integral to the Australia of tomorrow."

The State of Australia's Regions report notes addressing issues like housing availability and affordability, access to early childhood education and care; and responding to the challenges and opportunities of the transition to net zero are of great importance.

Ms Ritchie said the same issues had been identified in the RAI's 2022 released Regionalisation Ambition, a 10-year, 20-goal framework for an Australia where more people living in the regions.

"What is clear, is collaboration and co-operation is needed, not only by all three levels of government but also by industry, the not-for-profit sector, and communities themselves to ensure these challenges are resolved," Ms Ritchie said.

"To fill the job vacancies available in our regional communities, we need to ensure that workers have somewhere to live. To build more houses in our regional communities, we need skilled tradespeople. To have more skilled tradespeople, we need to ensure our regions have the education facilities to deliver that training. We cannot look at these issues in isolation, they must be addressed holistically."

Further information can be found at the links:

[https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/Web/Media/Media-Releases/2024/regions\\_role\\_in\\_nations\\_future.aspx](https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/Web/Media/Media-Releases/2024/regions_role_in_nations_future.aspx)

*From Brookings*

*Anti-corruption project to strengthen democracy worldwide*

Washington, D.C. – The Governance Studies program at the Brookings Institution announced a new project to address critical anti-corruption challenges that threaten global democracy and security. Through extensive research and collaborative efforts with stakeholders worldwide, the Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and Security Project (ACDS) aims to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts and track progress on global commitments aimed at combatting corruption and mitigating emerging challenges to democracy.

Leading ACDS is Brookings Senior Fellow Ambassador Norman Eisen (ret.), a globally recognized expert in anti-corruption and rule of law. Ambassador Eisen, serving as Chair, has spearheaded Brookings' Leveraging Transparency by Reducing Corruption project, and held key government positions, including special counsel and special assistant to the President for ethics and government reform in the Obama White House.

"Corruption has a corrosive effect on democracy and fighting that in the U.S. and around the world is not for the faint of heart," emphasized Ambassador Eisen. "This pressing challenge requires resolute action, both domestically and globally, and an unwavering shared commitment to develop and implement rigorous and innovative anti-corruption policies."

ACDS Senior Director Jonathan Katz, an expert in anti-corruption, national security, and democracy, outlined the project's mission: "Our goal is to empower good governance champions around the world with the knowledge, tools, and connections needed to combat corruption and fortify democracy. We are committed to working with governments, civil society, media, and the private sector to confront the formidable challenges posed by autocrats, enablers, and corrupt entities."

Camille Busette, interim vice president of Brookings Governance Studies program, highlighted the significance of the project: "This project marks Brookings' latest effort to help solve the biggest challenges facing democracy. ACDS brings strong leadership, expertise, and relationships to support those combating public sector corruption worldwide."

The project's areas of focus and activities include:

Co-leading the Financial Transparency and Integrity cohort – In collaboration with the Open Government Partnership and the U.S. Government, ACDS leads a 'Democracy Cohort' focused on advancing financial transparency, accountability, and integrity, a critical component of the 2021 Summit for Democracy.

Analyzing anti-corruption commitments – Tracking the progress of commitments made by participating governments to enhance government accountability and address implementation gaps.

Assessing corruption measurement frameworks – Exploring best practices and challenges in measuring corruption.

Building a global multi-stakeholder community – Convening anti-corruption practitioners across civil society, governments, media, and the private sector to foster peer learning and share best practices, including combatting corruption in businesses and understanding the evolving role of artificial intelligence.

Integrating Ukraine's anti-corruption and democracy priorities into its recovery and reconstruction process – Ukraine's success in combating corruption is critical to sustained international support and the realization of an independent and robust democracy. In addition to new research and convenings on this topic, ACDS will continue to update the Brookings Sanctions Tracker.

This commentary's findings have implications for regional development in the Asia Pacific Regions, including the Southeast Asia.

Read the whole article here at:

<https://www.brookings.edu/news/brookings-launches-anti-corruption-project-to-strengthen-democracy-worldwide/>

*Girls' agency at the crest of the climate crisis*

Nasrin Siddiqa and Atenea Rosado-Viurques (April 2024)

Imagine you are a young girl residing in a rural coastal community in Bangladesh, one of the communities most affected by the climate crisis. Your daily life requires balancing domestic, school, and work responsibilities, juggling arduous tasks like fetching water, getting to and from school safely, helping cook family meals, and taking care of your younger siblings, among other household chores. In addition, you work occasional underpaid jobs outside the home because your father migrated to the city due to changing sea levels. This exhausting routine mirrors that of your friends, neighbors, and teachers. Despite all this, you maintain good grades at school and hope to eventually become a nurse. Unfortunately, due to shared systemic oppression and struggles, your community can offer little support to the possibility of your continuing in formal education.

In Bangladesh, as in many other countries, women and girls are expected to carry most of the climate crisis burden, facing a high loss of livelihood opportunities, increased sexual harassment, and little scope of political participation when facing natural disasters.

To better understand how girls exercise their agency in marginalized contexts, including climate crisis-affected settings, the Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency (LAAGA), in collaboration with Education and Cultural Society (ECS), has worked on exploring what agency looks like for adolescent girls between 10-19 years old living in the coastal communities of Feni district, Bangladesh.

This effort is part of LAAGA's initial country case studies encompassing Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and the Karamoja region of Kenya and Uganda. Recognizing the need for evidence-based practice and policy, LAAGA and ECS co-organized two research presentations in Feni and Dhaka in February 2024. These events were attended by girls themselves, policymakers, educators, and partners in civil society and academia.

Here are three of our initial findings shared by LAAGA in Bangladesh:

**Agency requires a systemic, cross-sectoral, and multi-level approach**

While girls' agency has often been defined as an individual trait that can be developed through a focus on skills and abilities, our research shows that a more systemic approach is needed. Multiple forms of oppression and exclusion affect most of the girls who are part of LAAGA's research in Feni, and these are only exacerbated by the climate crisis.

The girls we spoke with pointed to economic inequality, unfair distribution of chores and care work, religious and cultural norms, family structure, climate displacement, and lack of transportation access as some of the challenges to their agency.

Clearly, transformations in the education sector alone cannot respond to this set of obstacles. We are not alone in our systemic reading of agency; recent research has shown that the exercise of women's agency is strengthened by widening social security networks: social care systems, cash transfers, economic equality efforts like asset acquisition, and climate-responsive public infrastructure, among other interventions.

Transformations in the education, health, economic, and transportation sectors hold the potential to impact girls' agency.

**Agency is learned in community and girls need access to strong role models**

Girls in our research indicated that they learn to exercise agency by observing, listening, and engaging with other girls and women who have had the chance to decide and pursue their dreams and aspirations. Agency is modeled. Throughout our research, we gained valuable insight into how girls learn agency by imitating and supporting others, such as female family and community members who, for example, have decided to continue their formal education or join the labor market. School can be a safe space for girls to find role models, including teachers and fellow students, but girls also pointed to the role of media in promoting discourses around gender that can both constrain or enable girls' access to agency role models.

Nevertheless, girls also spoke of significant challenges to finding role models, like limited availability of intentional opportunities and safe spaces for girls to learn from each other, deficient efforts to develop media literacy with girls to recognize gender-based violence in the media they consume, and lack of skills to negotiate social norms that stigmatize girls who exercise their agency. Furthermore, a considerable number of girls, primarily those out of school or enrolled in orthodox religious education, fall outside social structures and spaces that may offer more complex views about the spectrum of agency.

Through the LAAGA presentations in Feni and Dhaka, the network committed to work with local policy actors, academics, communities, and girls themselves to address girls' agency challenges in Bangladesh. At LAAGA, we think that the social nature of agency is an opportunity: collective work can allow for movement building.

**Agency implies girls defining their own solutions**

Grounded in Girl-Centered Methodologies, LAAGA's research in Bangladesh shows that collaboration with girls is fundamental in guiding policy and practice for girls' agency. LAAGA embraces an ethos of participation and humility, recognizing that girls and communities are the most aware of how they are affected by systemic challenges, in this case, the climate crisis. Drawing on LAAGA's research in Feni, the LAAGA team in Bangladesh identified three key practices to support girls in defining their own exercise of agency:

- a) inclusion of girls as researchers, not only as participants,
- b) adaptation of research questions and interests to appropriate girl-friendly language, and
- c) intentional and radical inclusion in policy spaces of girls as experts on their own lives.

Girls can identify, propose, and support policy and practice that strengthen their agency; it is the job of researchers, practitioners, and decisionmakers to create and facilitate methods that allow them to do so. For girls to co-create their own solutions, we must change the ways in which we research, speak, and make policy to make them more inviting, empathetic, and generous.

LAAGA's initial findings in Bangladesh present unique contributions to the discussion around girls' agency and the climate crisis. Together with our findings in Kenya/Uganda, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe, they offer an alternative perspective on agency from the point of view of girls living in marginalized rural contexts. Stay tuned for our upcoming regional and global reports to be published in the coming months. We hope for these reports to inform actions that support girls in exercising their agency.

Read the whole article here at:

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/girls-agency-at-the-crest-of-the-climate-crisis/>

**From University of Sydney, the Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering**

***Robots to transform the way infrastructure is maintained***

The University of Sydney is today launching the ARC Australian Robotic Inspection and Asset Management Hub (ARIAM) which researchers say will transform the way important assets are handled.

ARIAM's work will reduce the need for people to enter dangerous or hazardous locations to maintain assets such as tunnels and underwater infrastructure. It will also help manage the looming 'infrastructure cliff', which will see many post-World War II infrastructure assets approach their end of life.

Its work will lead to accurate and timely data collection, enhance safety, minimise disruption during maintenance and improve the efficiency of industry.

Researchers at ARIAM are led by Professor Ian Manchester, from the School of Aerospace, Mechanical and Mechatronic Engineering, who also directs the Australian Centre for Robotics. The team plans to develop semi-autonomous and autonomous machines capable of inspecting and maintaining complex structures in challenging environments, removing the need for people to enter dangerous or hazardous locations.

"This initiative marks a significant leap forward for robotics and will change the way industry operates," Professor Manchester said.

"With new designs we can eliminate the risk of injury associated with manned operations to inspect remote or dangerous areas, such as tunnels or underwater infrastructure, and enter previously inaccessible areas."

Professor Stefan Williams from the Australian Centre for Robotics and School of Aerospace, Mechanical and Mechatronic Engineering, said: "Australia faces a critical situation, with many of its post-World War II infrastructure assets rapidly approaching the end of their 50 to 80-year lifespan.

"This 'infrastructure cliff' presents a mounting maintenance backlog and the nation's productivity and global competitiveness depend on efficient infrastructure networks.

"Our work has applications in public sector infrastructure, including roads and utility networks, but also in renewable energy, space, mining, and land care."

The hub's researchers said ARIAM will work with industry partners to develop robotic systems with unprecedented capabilities. Systems including aerial, marine and legged robots will demonstrate those skills in field trials.

"We will collaborate with Australian industry to tackle critical challenges within the robotics sector, ultimately paving the way for the development, manufacturing, and successful exportation of Australian robotics and autonomous technology to a growing global market," Professor Stefan Williams said.

ARIAM's mission is to equip robots to autonomously collect data, creating a real-time representation of physical assets through 'digital twins': virtual models created with data collected by the robots. With the right sensors, robots can capture various aspects of a physical asset, such as its structural



integrity, temperature, movement and other relevant symptoms. This data is integrated into the digital twin in real-time.

ARIAM's projects have garnered interest from 15 industry partners including Thales, Reach Robotics, Abyss Solutions, and Nearmap. In one example, Nexxis is developing a spider-like robot with magnetic feet, capable of crawling around metal structures and inspecting them for damage.

“This partnership enables the next evolution of naval sustainment. With ARIAM Hub we will be able to capture decades of knowledge and create an efficient and agile environment through automation and modelling,” said Andrew Seale, Sales Director at Thales Above Water Systems.

ARIAM is an ARC Research Hub hosted by the University of Sydney in partnership with Queensland University of Technology and The Australian National University.

The hub will leverage interdisciplinary research and foster collaboration between academics and industry, advancing robotics, sensing, planning, data processing and machine learning technologies.

ARIAM launch event: The official launch of ARIAM, formally known as the ARC Research Hub in Intelligent Robotic Systems for Real-Time Asset Management, took place at the University of Sydney, on November 2 at 12pm, at the Australian Centre for Robotics in Chippendale.

Industry leaders, academics and government representatives converged for the event which included keynote speeches, industry panels and live demonstrations of cutting-edge robotic technologies.

Further details are available at:

[https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2023/11/02/university-launches-new-robotics-hub-to-automate-asset-management.html?campaign=2023\\_Ignite&source=email&area=university&a=industry&type=o](https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2023/11/02/university-launches-new-robotics-hub-to-automate-asset-management.html?campaign=2023_Ignite&source=email&area=university&a=industry&type=o)

### **From the Gulbali Institute of Agriculture, Water and Environment (CSU)**

#### ***Endangered species could be saved by linking water management and bittern breeding activities***

Researchers are investigating how environmental watering actions could promote the breeding of an endangered Australian bird species.

- Charles Sturt University researchers are investigating the impact of environmental water activities on Australasian Bittern breeding
- The research is analysing bird call and water activity data from the last seven years
- Findings of the research could assist in informing recommendations for the delivery of water for the environment to support bittern breeding in the Murrumbidgee

Researchers are investigating how environmental watering actions could promote the breeding of an endangered Australian bird species.

Postdoctoral Fellow in the Charles Sturt Gulbali Research Institute for Agriculture, Water and Environment Dr Elizabeth (Liz) Znidarsic is the environmental research scientist and ecologist leading the project.

Funded by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH), the research is investigating the relationship between the timing and duration of water for environmental deliveries and the calling activity of the endangered Australasian Bittern, or ‘Bunyip bird’.

“The reason the calling activity of the bittern is important to understand is because it’s one of the only ways to assess their numbers,” Dr Znidarsic said.



[Source: <https://news.csu.edu.au/latest-news/endangered-species-could-be-saved-by-linking-water-management-and-bittern-breeding-activities>]

“The bittern is an elusive and well-camouflaged bird, so often difficult to detect among its preferred vegetation of reeds, rushes and rice, but when males are in search of a mate, they have a distinctive ‘booming’ call which can resonate for more than a kilometre across a quiet wetland.

“Consequently, they are more often heard than seen, which provides an opportunity for researchers to gain insight into population and breeding activity, as well as an understanding of the watering needs of this species.”

Researchers are using previously deployed automated call recorders and depth loggers from key Lower Murrumbidgee Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (MER) wetland sites.

The team has been collecting data since 2016 from these wetlands, where Australasian bitterns are known or expected to reside, allowing researchers to evaluate the calling activity in response to water depth and temperature from the last seven years.

Dr Znidarsic has developed a call recognition model which identifies Australasian bittern calls, helping to evaluate large datasets and audio collections more efficiently.

“The challenge of detecting Australasian Bitterns is a result of their irregular calling pattern and that they call mostly in the hours of darkness,” she said. “This means we need to record continuous audio data to increase the detection probability which can amount to years of listening.

“Therefore, we use an automated computer analysis technique to detect the Australasian Bittern calls.”

The research team hopes to use their findings to help develop and inform recommendations for the delivery of water for the environment to support bittern breeding in the Murrumbidgee.

The project will also assist in developing guidelines for water managers, helping outline the ideal environmental watering regimes (timing, duration, depth, and volume) necessary to stimulate successful breeding and survival of Australasian Bitterns.

The research is part of the FlowMER program, which monitors the ecological response to Commonwealth environmental water delivery to wetlands along the Murrumbidgee. This includes water quality, vegetation, waterbirds, wetland and riverine fish, frogs and turtles.

Further details are available at:

<https://news.csu.edu.au/latest-news/angered-species-could-be-saved-by-linking-water-management-and-bittern-breeding-activities>

### **From CEDA**

#### *Australia must make better use of migrants' skills*

By Andrew Barker and Sebastian Tofts-Len (March 2024)

Australia must increase skilled migrants' access to English-language training and better recognise their international qualifications and work experience to tackle persistent skills shortages and boost productivity, new CEDA research has found.

While there is public debate around the current size of Australia's migration program, we are still facing skills shortages in key industries.

Making better use of migrants' skills shows we are not making the most of the skills of migrants already in the country and identifies how to fix this, CEDA Senior Economist Andrew Barker said.

"Recent migrants earn significantly less than Australian-born workers, and this has worsened over time," Mr Barker said.

"Weaker English skills and lack of skills recognition are preventing us from making the most of migrants' skills and experience, with discrimination likely also having an impact.

"Many still work in jobs beneath their skill level, despite often having been selected precisely for the experience and knowledge they bring.

"Ensuring migrants can use their skills within their first few years in Australia is crucial to addressing ongoing skill shortages across the economy.

"Our recommendations to improve employment outcomes for migrants can bring benefits for all Australians through a more productive economy in the long term."

On average, migrants who have been in Australia for two to six years earn more than 10 per cent less than Australian-born workers.

"There are big costs from not making the best use of migrants' skills," Mr Barker said.

“We estimate that if migrants earned comparable wages to similar Australian-born workers in their first six years in Australia, this would unlock around \$4 billion in foregone wages each year.”

English language skills are a key issue, as weaker language proficiency reduces wages for recent migrants by around nine per cent on average.

The costs are even greater for migrants with higher education because strong communication, writing and comprehension skills are even more crucial in highly skilled jobs.

Female migrants with a post-graduate degree have the worst wage outcomes, earning 31 per cent less than Australian-born women with similar education levels.

Expanding Federal Government funding for existing English programs would enable more skilled migrants to get a better start when they arrive in Australia.

We must also do more to recognise migrants’ work experience and training. The proportion of recent migrants whose overseas qualifications are recognised in Australia is low compared with other countries.

This can be achieved by improving recognition of foreign qualifications and experience through direct assessment of competence and requiring occupational regulators to explain any decision not to recognise a migrant’s foreign qualifications and identify ways to close the gap.

The report also calls for initiatives to tackle discrimination by building migrants’ local knowledge and work experience, together with programs to reduce prejudice.

The Government should also consider giving greater weight to the skills and work experience of secondary (partner) applicants to skilled migration visas to improve employment and wages for female migrants.

“While training and upskilling local workers is crucial, in an economy facing widespread worker shortages and low unemployment, we must do more to ensure we can access the right skills at the right time and get the right people into the right jobs,” Mr Barker said.

“By reducing skill shortages and boosting productivity, our recommendations can deliver a win-win through a stronger, more productive economy and greater wellbeing among migrants.”

Further details and the full report are available at the links follow:

<https://www.ceda.com.au/newsandresources/mediareleases/economy/australia-must-make-better-use-of-migrants%E2%80%99-skills>

<https://www.ceda.com.au/researchandpolicies/research/population/making-better-use-of-migrants-skills>

### **From the Productivity Commission**

#### ***Seizing Australia’s AI opportunity***

Productivity Commission (February 2024)

New research from the Productivity Commission finds that artificial intelligence could significantly boost Australia’s productivity if governments implement well-directed policy and regulation.

In this set of three papers, the Commission places Australia's AI opportunity in a global context, to consider how our governments can help to maximise the potential economic benefits of this evolving technology.

The first paper outlines how Australia stands to benefit most from AI technology, and consequently, where governments should focus their policy efforts.

“Australian business is already adopting AI through its integration with existing software and services – but to get the big productivity dividends we need business to transform core systems and adopt new tools as they emerge.

Governments can support this by investing in skills and digital infrastructure and modelling best practice,” said Commissioner Stephen King.

Paper two provides government with a playbook for developing AI protections in the context of the emerging AI regulatory landscape.

It outlines a stepped, gradual approach to regulation that's focused on addressing harms as they emerge.

“Australia's robust regulatory frameworks are one of our biggest strengths. Many uses of AI technology are already covered by this regulation.

Before jumping to new AI-specific laws, we should examine existing regulations and better explain how they apply to the uses of AI,” said Commissioner King.

“AI will likely highlight gaps in current laws and regulations that we will need to address.

But pre-empting these gaps with overzealous lawmaking could put local policy out of step with global norms, limiting the potential productivity gains of this new technology.”

The research finds the challenges presented by AI are particularly acute in the case of data.

Paper three considers how AI raises the stakes for data policy, and what Australian policymakers should do to address the new questions about data rights and incentives that AI presents.

“Advances in AI highlight that data is an increasingly valuable resource that is underutilised in Australia.

Key challenges for governments will be to improve protections and public confidence in data sharing, and to establish clear and consistent arrangements for training AI models.

“The new wave of AI innovation may finally pull productivity growth out of the shallows – judicious policy interventions and a practical approach to regulation would put the Australian economy in the best position to ride that wave.”

Access the full report here:

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/making-the-most-of-the-ai-opportunity>



## **From the Business Insider Australia**

### *Elon Musk is waging war on multiple fronts — and now Australia is in the firing line*

Beatrice Nolan (April 2024)

- Elon Musk is clashing with multiple governments around the world.
- His ownership of X/Twitter has pulled him into a new sphere of global politics.
- Musk has been in public spats with Brazil's Supreme Court and the Australian government this year.

Elon Musk is well known for his public spats.

The world's fourth-richest person rarely shies away from face-offs with other prominent figures but, increasingly, he appears to be drawing the ire of national governments too.

That's largely due to his ownership of Twitter, which thrust him into a new sphere of global politics.

In the past year, he's been engaged in several public fights with government representatives over issues including free speech, Starlink sales, and X's content moderation.

#### **Australian demands**

Musk has been criticized by the Australian government for ignoring demands to take down certain posts.

Videos and posts commenting on the stabbing of Sydney-based bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel have been circulating on X, which the Australian government seemingly wanted taken down.

X's global government affairs account claimed to have received a "demand" from Australia's eSafety commissioner to withhold certain posts or face a "daily fine of \$785,000 AUD."

Musk said on Friday: "The Australian censorship commissar is demanding global content bans."

Tanya Plibersek, Australia's environment minister, hit out at the X owner, calling him an "egotistical billionaire."

Australia's Federal Court has now ordered X to hide posts with videos of the stabbing incident, Reuters reported.

Musk said on X the content had been "censored" for Australia, "pending legal appeal, and it is stored only on servers in the USA."

He added: "Our concern is that if ANY country is allowed to censor content for ALL countries, which is what the Australian 'eSafety Commissar' is demanding, then what is to stop any country from controlling the entire Internet?"

Last October, Australia's eSafety Commission fined X almost \$400,000 for not fully outlining its methods for dealing with child sexual exploitation content, outlets including BBC News reported.

#### **Brazilian backlash**

Musk has been clashing with a judge on Brazil's supreme court, Justice Alexandre de Moraes.



The issues began after de Moraes asked Musk to block certain X accounts in Brazil the country amid an investigation into "digital militias" that he alleged were spreading fake news and threats against Brazil's supreme court.

Musk said X would not comply with the request, and later alleged de Moraes was betraying the Brazilian constitution, claiming he should resign or be impeached.

De Moraes has since opened a separate investigation into Musk.

### **Starlink, Russia, and Ukraine**

Musk's SpaceX has been dealing with an ongoing saga over Russia's supposed use of Starlink terminals during the war with Ukraine.

Prominent figures in Russia have lashed out at Musk over the claims.

Last year, a top adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy criticized the SpaceX founder over a report Musk had ordered his engineers to block Starlink satellites over Crimea.

Further details are available at:

<https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-waging-war-x-starlink-australia-brazil-ireland-ukraine-2024-4>

### **From the RNZ New Zealand**

#### *Interest rate cuts might have to wait until 2025 - economist*

Brad Olsen (April 2024)

Inflation is not falling as quickly as economists expected, with one high-profile consultancy picking the next interest rate cut might not come until 2025.

Petrol prices might be partially to blame, with data from price-tracking app Gaspy showing the average cost of a litre of 91 has risen 26c so far this year to an average \$2.86.

"It's just another large cost coming through the household," Brad Olsen from Infometrics told Morning Report on Monday.

While prices have at times in the past been higher - notably following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 - the recent "slow climb" looks likely to continue, Olsen said, or at least stabilise - but not go down significantly.

"When we're looking at futures markets as well, there does seem to be a little bit of downward pressure - but the markets always seem to suggest that, particularly given that globally, there's also weaker economic growth, particularly coming out of China.

"So, you know, generally speaking in the global economy, when there's thoughts that there's not going to be quite as much strong global growth, there's not quite as much extra demand for oil - and therefore oil prices don't rise quite as much.

"We did see though in the last couple of weeks, slightly stronger data coming out of China than before, so that's bolstered things a bit.

And... we've now seen missile attacks between Iran and Israel directly, we've seen further attacks even in the last week in the Red Sea from Houthi rebels out of Yemen - all of that contributing to that geopolitical risk.

"Again, not quite at the highs that we've seen, which is encouraging, but... there doesn't seem to be a lot of downside risk. It doesn't look like petrol prices are likely to push any lower at the moment. We expect that they might well remain fairly range-bound for the next couple of months.

"It might edge up a bit. You might see a few weeks where edges down, but in general, not a lot of relief for people coming forward."

With the economy in recession - as the Reserve Bank planned - some economists were asking, why is inflation not coming down faster?

"Who's doing the spending?" Olsen said. "And we know actually from the numbers that the spending isn't great. And so the question now becomes, who out there in the economy is still lifting prices when their business is obviously not seeing the same levels of growth?"

"The question we're trying to figure out now is, is it just a bit of a delayed effect? It takes a while for that stuff to come through.

Or is it that we've got some quite thorny issues still in inflation - the likes of rents going higher, the likes of insurance that might be keeping things too high?"

Another possible cause was cash-rich Baby Boomers spending to tick items off their bucket lists.

Unemployment and wage cost data due this week should make the situation clearer, Olsen said.

With the economy in recession, unemployment tipped to rise (some of that the result of the government's directive to slash spending) and petrol prices high, some economists have questioned the Reserve Bank's aggressive push to get inflation down the 1-3 percent target range.

Olsen disagreed.

"Only because if it's going to be tough to get from 4 percent to 3 percent, the fact that we're targeting 2 percent is going to be pretty tough as well.

My issue with changing the inflation target is that we've told people, we've told the public for the last 30 years that we're targeting that 2 percent mark.

And to move away from that, I'd go, well, look, if it's that hard and you move the goalposts all the time, then why stop at three? Why stop at four? Just keep going.

"You've got a target, you've got to stick to it - the minute you give up the target, you sort of give up the ghost on inflation."

Further details are available at:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/business/515446/interest-rate-cuts-might-have-to-wait-until-2025-economist>

## THE CONVERSATION

*Who invented the flat white? Italian sugar farmers from regional Queensland likely played a big role*

Garritt Van Dyk, University of Newcastle

Australia's coffee culture – a source of great national pride – is usually associated with the wave of Greek and Italian migrants who settled in Melbourne and Sydney following the second world war. But it was very likely in regional Queensland that one of Australia's favourite brews first took root.

This is the story of how Italian sugar growers in the Sunshine State are said to have inspired the “invention” of the flat white – a drink that would go on to become a global sensation.

Tracing this history shows a different side to how European tastes were imported to Australia beyond the capital cities. It also reminds us of big trends can come from small towns, and that multicultural influence can be easily taken for granted in something as basic as your daily cup of coffee.

### **The Little Italy of Northern Queensland**

Popular conceptions of Italian migrants in Australia are often focused on the wave of migration to the capital cities in the 1950s, overlooking the many migrants who were already settled in regional areas.

In 1891, immigration agent and businessman Chiaffredo Venerano Fraire organised a scheme to recruit cane cutters on behalf of the Queensland government. More than 300 Italians came to the region as a result, prompting chain migration and concerns about their ability to assimilate.

North Queensland became an even more popular destination in the 1920s, after the United States introduced quotas for Italian migrants. By 1925, Italians owned 44% of the sugar farms in the Herbert River area.



The Macknade sugar plantation viewed from the Herbert River, Ingham, in 1874, with men from the plantation in the rowboat. [Source: <https://theconversation.com/>]

These Italian communities expanded further after WWII, as did their cultural influence. The Australian Italian festival, established in 1995 by the Italian community in Ingham and Hinchinbrook shire, celebrates and preserves the legacy of Italian culture in the district.

### **What's in a name?**

There are many claims regarding the origin of the flat white, from England to New Zealand. But the best case for coining the term comes from Sydney Cafe owner Alan Preston, who details his reasoning extensively online. While the origin debate rages on, Preston's argument has the most solid historical evidence to back it.

The exact phrase "flat white" appeared on the coffee menu in Preston's cafe, Moors Espresso Bar, in 1985 in Sydney's Chinatown area. Preston claims he was the first to use the term on a menu, and has documented this use through photographs.

He says he brought this style of espresso-based drink to Sydney from Far North Queensland, where he's originally from. The drink was supposedly popular in cafes in sugar-producing towns as it catered to the tastes of wealthy Italian growers and their families.

According to Preston, these cafes had the best espresso machines available at the time, imported from Italy. There would be five coffee options on offer. The black options were the short black and long black, and the white options were the cappuccino, Vienna and the "flat". On his own menu, Preston changed the last one to "flat white" as a more efficient moniker.

After Moors Espresso Bar, Preston opened five more cafes with flat whites on the menu, popularising the name and style. In 2015, global coffee giant Starbucks added the flat white to its menu – a testament to its universality. Google is a fan too and made the flat white its doodle of the day on March 11 2024.

### **Why is the flat white so popular?**

The flat white's widespread appeal comes down to its balance of textured (steamed) milk and espresso. The sign of a quality espresso is in its "crema", the caramel-coloured emulsion of hot water and coffee bean oils.



The crema is the thin golden emulsion that sits atop a quality espresso shot.

[Source: <https://theconversation.com/>]

A flat white blends the natural crema of an espresso shot with a thin layer of microfoam at the cup's surface. Without the thicker foam of a latte or cappuccino, or the distraction of chocolate sprinkled on top, the flat white delivers a stronger coffee flavour with a unified creamy texture.

Preston says a properly prepared flat white should leave “tide marks” on the sides of the cup, showing the level go down with each sip.

### **Regional varieties**

Perth's unique “long mac topped up” and the enigmatic Melbourne “magic” are two more examples of how regional influences have given rise to different coffee preferences across Australia.

The West Coast's long mac topped up has a milk to coffee ratio of 1:4 in a 180ml serving. It's like a strong flat white where the coffee is no longer just “stained” by the milk (but somehow “double-shot flat white in a smaller cup” doesn't roll off the tongue).

Similarly, the Melbourne magic is made with a double ristretto (a shorter, more robust espresso shot) and textured milk, and served in a 148ml (5 oz) cup. So it's an even stronger flat white, in a smaller cup. The name “magic” may not reveal anything about the contents, but the proof is in the drinking.

The presence of coffee in Australia is as old as the First Fleet, wherein plants imported from Rio de Janeiro were grown on Norfolk Island in 1788. Reflecting on its long and nuanced history reminds us of the contributions multiculturalism has made to the nation, and why new iterations of old things ought to be welcomed.

The story of the flat white, along with its regional variations, reflects a dynamic coffee culture that will continue to evolve to cater to new tastes. For now, we can thank the Italian migrants of sugar country.

More on this story is available at:

<https://theconversation.com/who-invented-the-flat-white-italian-sugar-farmers-from-regional-queensland-likely-played-a-big-role-224747>

## **CONFERENCES and STUDY OPPORTUNITIES**

### **ANZRSAL 2024 Conference**

The ANZRSAL 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held at the Ann Harding Conference Centre in University of Canberra, ACT in collaboration with the Regional Studies Association 2024 Summer Conference. Further details are available at the ANZRSAL website, and also <https://www.regionalstudies.org/events/2024-australasia/>.

### **2024 RSA Winter Conference**

The Regional Studies Association Winter Conference 2024 presents a timely opportunity to discuss and debate these important issues, to establish the need and nature of future research imperatives in the field, and to assess options for practitioners and policymakers in working towards better regional futures.

This conference theme is – “**Driving Regions Forward: Transitioning to Brighter Regional Futures**”.

## **Special Sessions**

As part of the 2024 Winter Conference, we welcome proposals for Special Sessions. Special Sessions are a great way to bring together presenters to discuss and highlight a particular topic to develop or further extend your network. Please submit your proposals by 18th July 2024. We offer two types of Special Sessions:

1. Open Special Session – the session organiser proposes a topic and provides a short description/call for submissions. Delegates can submit their abstract for this session when they register for the conference.
2. Closed Session – the session organiser proposes the complete session including all speakers. Other delegates may not submit their abstracts for this session. Please note that all speakers need to register to be able to present.

Both sessions are open to all delegates to attend as the audience.

Once your Special Session proposal has been accepted, we will add it to the conference's page and promote it. As the session's organiser, we would be grateful if you could also spread the word to interested researchers via your networks.

After the general abstract submission deadline has closed, you will receive all abstracts submitted to your session for your review. After reviewing the abstracts, the next step will be to send the accepted abstracts in the order you wish to have them in your Special Session to the RSA. You must accept a minimum of four papers for your session to go ahead, if not, the papers will be redistributed into the general programme. The actual scheduling of the programme will then be done by the RSA.

**Date & Location:** London, UK, 7 Nov 2024 - 8 Nov 2024

More details are at <https://www.regionalstudies.org/events/2024-winter-conference/>

## **Regional Studies Blog**

Professor Paul Dalziel, Executive Officer, ANZRSAI has recommended the Regional Studies Association Blog, which has been running since 2010. Each post is an easy-to-read piece between 500 and 750 words on a topical issue in regional studies.

The link is [https://www.regionalstudies.org/category\\_news/rsa-blog/](https://www.regionalstudies.org/category_news/rsa-blog/). A recent contribution that is relevant to ANZRSAI as we plan for the new post-CoVID normal is the following item: [Moving towards a new conference model? The rocky road to virtual conferencing](#), by Daniela Carl and Alex Holmes. Ashleigh Weeden talks about the 'right to be rural' during the CoVID epidemic in a contribution entitled [COVID-19 and Cottage Country: Exploring place, power, and policy in the 'right to be rural'](#).



## **CURRENT RESEARCH ABSTRACTS**

### **ANZRSAL Abstract Alerts**

To contribute to ANZRSAL Abstract Alerts email the editors a title, abstract, and citation.

Yogi.Vidyattama

[Yogi.Vidyattama@canberra.edu.au](mailto:Yogi.Vidyattama@canberra.edu.au)

We would like to draw your attention to the abstracts from Australasian Journal of Regional Studies and a YouTube Channel 'Professor Joseph Drew's World of Local Government'

For the latter it can be found in:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn5CI2x5h1cgEsaT8nLK9g/videos>

The whole purpose of the channel is to help local government help other people. So, please consider subscribing and sending the link on to colleagues.

In a few weeks' time Prof. Joseph Drew will start uploading videos by some of his colleagues from around the world which will provide people with new global insights into what can be done to make LG even stronger.

### ***How to manage tourism development based on impacts of climate change in Turkiye?***

Aysun Aygün Oğur, Tüzün Baycan

Abstract: This paper aims to assess the impacts of climatic shifts caused by climate change on tourism destinations and provide a strategic roadmap to manage tourism development and investments in Turkiye. To assess the climate change impacts on the tourism sector, we focus on spatial variations in climate change, model the changing suitability of climatic conditions on tourism activities in different regions of Turkiye and estimate future climate conditions by considering climate scenarios. The "Tourism Climate Index" (TCI) is adopted to compare the suitability of the climate for

tourism activities during the base years (1963–2017) and the projected years (2040–2069). In applying current and estimated climatic data, the case study destinations are assembled into three groups based on magnitude and direction of change, namely, alarming, moderate, and advantageous destinations. To provide a strategic roadmap, a matrix is developed regarding the number of international tourists, the number of accommodation facilities, tourism type and TCI results. As a result, nine zones are defined to represent the risks and potentials of the destinations, their priority levels in future tourism development are determined, and recommendations for each zone are formulated. İstanbul and Antalya excel with their high demand, advanced infrastructure and potential for an extended tourism season, while Nevşehir, Ankara, and Konya stand out as alternative destinations. On the other hand, İzmir and Muğla stand out with their high risk and high demand. The significance of this study lies in adaptations of climatic shifts to a tourism development roadmap. The results are critical for formulation of strategic tourism development plans from the local to the national levels for sustaining viability of the tourism market.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/0.1007/s41685-023-00319-1>

### ***Impacts of enhancing regional network economies on regional productivity and productive efficiency in Japan: evaluation from stochastic frontier analysis***

Akihiro Otsuka

Abstract: With the advancement of technology and advent of a networked society, economic agents within a region benefit from local interactions within the region as well as the external economies. However, strengthening extra-regional ties may have negative consequences for regions near the center if all their economic resources are absorbed by the core. It is unclear, for regional economic agents, whether the negative network

externalities dominate the positive ones. This has not been fully elucidated in the previous studies. To contribute to a breakthrough for this research topic, this study identified the impacts of network externalities on improvements in productivity and productive efficiency using stochastic frontier analysis. The analysis revealed that the borrowed size effect of agglomeration in the manufacturing industry significantly raises total factor productivity through shifts in the production frontier. It also revealed that the shadow effect of agglomeration does not adversely affect the productive efficiency of industry in either the manufacturing or non-manufacturing sector. These results imply that enhancing quality transportation infrastructure and improving inter-regional transportation networks can enhance the production performance of regional industries.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41685-023-00323-5>

*Lights and the Invisibles: towards a regional/sector-wise policy approach exploring India's economy–environment trade-offs*

Monica Jaison, Althaf Shajahan

Abstract: Air pollution mitigation strategies are either global or national. In this study, we highlight the need for regional/sector-wise mitigation strategies. We first explored the relationship between economic activity (measured using Nighttime Lights) and air quality for India (and Norway as a comparative reference) employing the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC). Second, we focused on the need to shift from global/national-level air pollution mitigation policies to geoclimatic region-wise policy implementation in developing nations with significant economic and physical geography heterogeneity. We considered regional/sector-wise differences in the economic activity–air quality relationship, thereby aiding future policy action in these regions/sectors. We used

a panel econometric research design on geospatial variables extracted from the Google Earth Engine. We investigated causality using an Instrument Variable strategy. Economic activity in Norway led to improved air quality, while India is still far from an inverted U-shaped EKC. An inverted U-shaped EKC existed for BIMARU (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) states after accounting for transboundary pollution. Transport and industrial sectors were significant contributors to air pollution in India, with Nitrogen Dioxide concentrations highest in the Central, Western, and Eastern regions. At the same time, West India was no longer a Sulfur Dioxide polluting hub. Export hubs were sources of Nitrogen Dioxide pollution, while the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors were characterized by Carbon Monoxide and Sulfur Dioxide emissions. Given the geographical heterogeneities, global/national intervention policies may not solve the underlying problem anymore. Alternatively, shifting to a decentralized approach involving source-level interventions is the need of the hour.

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*Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child malnutrition in Selangor, Malaysia: A pilot study*

Azizur Rahman, Nezza Othman, Md Abdul Kuddus, Md Zobaer Hasan

Abstract: Child malnutrition risk factors are globally recognized, but the specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the prevalence of child malnutrition, considering socioeconomic burdens and changes in family lifestyles, remains underexplored. This study aims to identify the significance of COVID-19-related factors in relation to the prevalence of child malnutrition in Selangor, Malaysia. Purposive sampling was employed in this pilot study to select the households with under-5 children

and, a structured questionnaire was developed to gather data. Chi-squared tests, logistic regression modelling and World Health Organisation AnthroPlus software-based visualization were used for analyses. The present study's findings indicate that demographic and social factors, including 'Citizenship,' 'Type of House,' 'Number of Earning Members,' 'Father's Highest Educational Level,' and 'Number of Children in a Family,' have a statistically significant association with Wasting. Additionally, the mother's 'Highest Educational Level' is found to be linked to underweight prevalence. Within COVID-19 factors, "COVID-19 Impact on Employment/Business" demonstrated significance for both stunting and wasting. Multivariate analysis revealed disparities in childhood malnutrition by gender, age, and factors such as "COVID-19 impact on children's physical activity" and "COVID-19 impact on children's decrease in health over the last two weeks." This study identified COVID-19 factors alongside sociodemographic variables with statistically significant relationships impacting childhood malnutrition in Selangor, Malaysia. The results underscored the substantial influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on child malnutrition prevalence. Decision-makers at family and community levels can benefit by considering these factors in their actions. However, the study's limitation lay in its dataset, urging larger-scale analyses to explore further sub-categories of the examined variables.

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*Data-driven modelling for assessing trophic status in marine ecosystems using machine learning approaches*

Md Galal Uddin, Stephen Nash, Azizur Rahman, Tomasz Dabrowski, Agnieszka I Olbert

Abstract: Assessing eutrophication in coastal and transitional waters is of utmost

importance, yet existing Trophic Status Index (TSI) models face challenges like multicollinearity, data redundancy, inappropriate aggregation methods, and complex classification schemes. To tackle these issues, we developed a novel tool that harnesses machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI), enhancing the reliability and accuracy of trophic status assessments. Our research introduces an improved data-driven methodology specifically tailored for transitional and coastal (TrC) waters, with a focus on Cork Harbour, Ireland, as a case study. Our innovative approach, named the Assessment Trophic Status Index (ATSI) model, comprises three main components: the selection of pertinent water quality indicators, the computation of ATSI scores, and the implementation of a new classification scheme. To optimize input data and minimize redundancy, we employed ML techniques, including advanced deep learning methods. Specifically, we developed a CHL prediction model utilizing ten algorithms, among which XGBoost demonstrated exceptional performance, showcasing minimal errors during both training (RMSE = 0.0, MSE = 0.0, MAE = 0.01) and testing (RMSE = 0.0, MSE = 0.0, MAE = 0.01) phases. Utilizing a novel linear rescaling interpolation function, we calculated ATSI scores and evaluated the model's sensitivity and efficiency across diverse application domains, employing metrics such as  $R^2$ , the Nash-Sutcliffe efficiency (NSE), and the model efficiency factor (MEF). The results consistently revealed heightened sensitivity and efficiency across all application domains. Additionally, we introduced a brand new classification scheme for ranking the trophic status of transitional and coastal waters. To assess spatial sensitivity, we applied the ATSI model to four distinct waterbodies in Ireland, comparing trophic assessment outcomes with the Assessment of Trophic Status of Estuaries and Bays in Ireland (ATSEBI) System. Remarkably, significant disparities between the ATSI and ATSEBI System were evident in

all domains, except for Mulroy Bay. Overall, our research significantly enhances the accuracy of trophic status assessments in marine ecosystems. The ATSI model, combined with cutting-edge ML techniques and our new classification scheme, represents a promising avenue for evaluating and monitoring trophic conditions in TrC waters. The study also demonstrated the effectiveness of ATSI in assessing trophic status across various waterbodies, including lakes, rivers, and more. These findings make substantial contributions to the field of marine ecosystem management and conservation.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2023.117755>

### **Regional Studies**

Vol. 58, Issue 3, 2024

#### ***Do creative industries enhance employment growth? Regional evidence from Colombia***

Mercedes Campi, Marco Dueñas & Tommaso Ciarli

Pages 425-441

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2210620>

Abstract: Do creative industries have positive spillovers for the local economy in middle-income countries? While in high-income countries several studies have shown that creative industries are highly innovative and productive, positively impacting the local economy, the evidence is scarce for middle-income countries. Using employment data, we studied the agglomeration patterns of creative industries in Colombia between 2008 and 2017. We found a positive relationship between creative industries' agglomeration and employment in non-creative services industries. However, using a shift-share instrumental variable approach, we found no significant causality of an increase in creative industries' employment on employment growth in other industries.

#### ***Rezoning at the threshold of two systems: regionalised party-statecraft in China's Greater Bay Area***

Dimitar Anguelov, Jamie Peck, Jun Zhang & Xing Su

Pages 565-582

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2242381>

Abstract: During China's reform era, dominant narratives described a transition away from centralised planning in favour of mutually reinforcing processes of liberalisation and decentralisation. Under Xi Jinping, the talk has increasingly been of the recentralisation of authoritarian-state powers and party discipline. Questioning both reform-era transition narratives and equally simplifying claims about their recent reversal, the paper argues for an enriched treatment of party-state spatiality, understood as a polymorphic and multi-scalar process, rather than simply a more complex one. In the emergent Greater Bay Area megaregion, 'new era' zoning strategies are being repurposed as drivers of pathfinding reforms animated by the party-state, in contrast to received readings of zones as single-purpose instruments of liberalisation.

#### ***How the relationship between socio-demographics, residential environments and travel influence commuter choices***

Conor O'Driscoll, Frank Crowley, Justin Doran & Nóirín McCarthy

Pages: 636-653

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2199779>

Abstract: Individual socio-demographic characteristics influence the composition of residential environments, employment considerations and transport-dedicated resources, all of which influence individual travel behaviours. To analyse these interrelationships, we employ generalised structural equation modelling using individual-

level data from the 2016 Irish Census on workers across the Republic of Ireland alongside highly spatially disaggregated residential built and social environment data. This allows us to consider the non-linear relationships between multiple variables known to influence travel behaviours and provide direction for future policymaking. We find that regardless of socio-demographic compositions, increased developmental compactness and infrastructure quality are associated with increased public and active travel.

### **Regional Science Policy and Practice**

Volume 16, Issue 4 (April 2024)

#### ***Does economic globalization trigger de-industrialization in Western Balkan countries? Empirical evidence based on augmented mean group estimator***

Orhan Cengiz, Müge Manga

<https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12709>

Abstract: Integration into the global economy can cause shifts in industries and decrease the industrial sector's share. Deindustrialization, which refers to declining industry share, is commonly observed in developed countries. However, many developing countries have also experienced deindustrialization without attaining a high economic level in the era of globalization. Since transitioning to a market economy and integrating with the European Union (EU), deindustrialization has become a significant issue for Western Balkan countries. Thus, our paper analyzes the impact of economic globalization on the deindustrialization process in five Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia by using panel data spanning 2000–2019. Our study involved the creation of two models utilizing the augmented mean group (AMG) estimation method to ensure precise results. Our research shows that in model I, the economic globalization index, economic

growth, capital investment, and the rule of law positively impact industry employment share. In model II, trade openness and economic growth positively affect manufacturing value-added; however, capital investment and the rule of law have a negative impact. Our findings indicate that economic globalization promotes industrialization in the Western Balkans instead of leading to deindustrialization. The panel causality results from Dumitrescu–Hurlin indicate that in model I, there is a one-way causal relationship going from economic globalization and capital investment to the share of industry employment. In model II, the causal relationship goes from economic growth and the rule of law to manufacturing value-added, from manufacturing value-added to trade openness and capital investment.

#### ***A linkage analysis of the mining sector in the top five carbon emitter economies***

Francisco Benita, David Gaytán-Alfaro

<https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12678>

Abstract: This article conducts an environmental and economic impact evaluation of the mining and quarrying sector in the top five carbon-emitting nations. By applying the hypothetical extraction method, we investigate both the demand and the supply side of the carbon dioxide emission of each industry in China, the United States, India, Russia, and Japan. The results show that inter-sector linkages are similar between countries. We identify the priority sectors associated with the mining industry, which deserve more consideration in formulating mitigation policies to reduce the carbon footprint. Among these sectors, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, and manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products hold special responsibility toward the environment.



**Papers in Regional Science**

Volume 102, Issue 6 (December 2023)

***Quality of government and women's political empowerment: Evidence from European regions***

Vicente Rios, Mercedes Beltrán-Esteve, Lisa Gianmoena, Jesús Peiró-Palomino, Andrés J Picazo-Tadeo

Pages 1067-1096

<https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12761>

**Abstract:** This study examines the relationship between women's political empowerment (WPE) and the quality of government (QoG) in European regions. The analysis considers both the endogeneity of the QoG and female empowerment, and their spatial interdependence. We use exogenous variation in preindustrial societal traits, legal origins, and geographic and climatic characteristics to construct instruments using random forest forecasting. To model interdependence across regions, we employ convex combinations of connectivity matrices based on geography, trade, social networks, and cultural links. Our findings show that WPE raises the QoG, and that the QoG also boosts female empowerment.

***The European regions in the global value chains: New results with new data***

Miguel Ángel Almazán-Gómez, Carlos Llano, Julián Pérez, Giovanni Mandras

Pages 1097-1126

<https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12760>

**Abstract:** This article contains the methodology and main results related to the update and extension of the widest interregional input–output tables for the entire EU27, UK and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. This work continues the outstanding effort developed in

the past years regarding the estimation and analysis of different multiregional input–output (MRIO) databases at the country level (world input–output database, EXIOBASE, ICIO, FIGARO, etc.) and the MRIO tables developed for the European Union (EU) at the NUTS2 level. The main contribution consists of updating and extending the current EUREGIO collection to obtain a EUREGIO table for 2017, which will be referred (NUTS-2 Rev.2016) for all the EU27 + UK + EFTA countries and will be embedded in the new FIGARO multicountry 2017. Such effort was developed in the context of the ESPON-IRIE project. This article summarises the methodology used and compares the results obtained with the ones of the main benchmarks, providing an analysis of the national and regional participation in the global value chains (GVCs). The main results suggest that, on average, 65% of value added is embodied in the goods and services sold to the same NUTS-2 region, 16% is embodied in the ones sold to regions in the same country and the remaining 20% is exported (to other countries). Exploring the heterogeneity within these figures can also be seen that the variety is higher across regions than across sectors. Our analysis suggests that, to a large extent, the heterogeneous participation of EU27 + UK + EFTA regions in the GVCs is explained by their sectoral structure more than by the regional idiosyncratic characteristics. Such results open the floor for the correct design of industrial policies, embedded in the smart specialisation paradigm.

**Australasian Journal of Regional Studies**

Vol. 29, No. 2

***URBAN RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL SECURITY UPTAKE: NEW ZEALAND EVIDENCE FROM THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC***

WILLIAM COCHRANE, JACQUES POOT, MATTHEW ROSKRUGE



PAGE NUMBER - 155

Abstract: This paper focuses on the spatial variation in the uptake of social security benefits following a large and detrimental exogenous shock. Specifically, we focus on the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and on the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We construct a two-period panel of 66 Territorial Authorities (TAs) of New Zealand (NZ) observed in 2008-09 and 2019-20. We find that, despite the totally different nature of the two shocks, the initial increase in benefit uptake due to the COVID-19 pandemic was of a similar magnitude as that of the GFC, and the spatial pattern was also quite similar. We link the social security data with 146 indicator variables across 15 domains that were obtained from population censuses that were held about 2 years before the two periods. To identify urban characteristics that point to economic resilience, we formulate spatial panel regression models. Additionally, we use machine learning techniques. We find that the most resilient TAs had two years previously: (1) a low unemployment rate; and (2) a large public sector. Additionally, but with less predictive power, we find that TAs had a smaller increase in social security uptake after the shock when they had previously: (3) a high employment rate (or high female labour force participation rate); (4) a smaller proportion of the population stating ethnicities other than NZ European; (5) a smaller proportion of the population living in more deprived area units. We also find that interregional spillovers matter and that there are spatial clusters of resilient regions.

***SKILLS AND RURAL-URBAN WAGE DIFFERENCES IN AUSTRALIA***

PHUONG HO

PAGE NUMBER - 185

Abstract: Evidence from countries around the world suggests that rural-urban wage gaps are not solely explained by skill differences. Using

data for Australia, the current study reaches the same conclusion; there is positive relationship between local economy size and local wages. Workers in Australian large urban centres earn around 7.5% more than workers with similar skill levels in rural areas. Urban Australians do not experience higher wage growth than rural Australians. Therefore, high wage growth in the year following rural-urban migration is most likely explained by the migrant taking jobs that below his ability upon arrival.

***COVID-19: THE ISSUE OF POLICIES AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR EASTERN INDONESIA***

YOGI VIDYATTAMA, MUHAMMAD HALLEY YUDHISTIRA, MEILA HUSNA

PAGE NUMBER - 207

Abstract: As in other countries, the incidence of COVID-19 and its infection rate is not the same in every area in Indonesia. In addition, the different local conditions and situations mean the policy action items often need to be adapted to these factors. This study aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Eastern Indonesia's economy compared to other places in Indonesia and the contribution of their governments at provincial and district levels in terms of COVID-19 prevention and economic recovery effort. This study shows that remoteness has not excluded Eastern Indonesia from COVID-19 infection. Despite less requirement for the community to stay home, the mobility data shows that other activities such as retail, recreation, grocery shopping and park use still went down as much as in other parts of Indonesia. However, activities in workplaces dropped considerably less and allowed the economies in Eastern Indonesia to grow better than other areas during the pandemic.

***POPULATION, REGIONAL STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE AND THE PANDEMIC: A LIMESTONE COAST PERSPECTIVE***

ANDREW PARKIN, LEONIE  
HARDCASTLE

PAGE NUMBER - 234

Abstract: Uncertain post-pandemic population trends raise an interesting dilemma for regional governance authorities. Population stagnation afflicting non-metropolitan regions had been a familiar feature of Australian history. In recognition of its serious social and economic effects, population retention and growth have been familiar elements within the development strategies promulgated by regional governance authorities. Such was the case for South Australia's Limestone Coast region. Unexpectedly, the coronavirus pandemic became associated with more favourable population-movement trends for many regions, including the Limestone Coast. In that region, there is an emerging sense that future strategic challenges may centre on the housing and infrastructure implications of a growing population rather than on the problem of a stagnant population. The strategic response of the region's governance authorities is hampered by the uncertainty about whether the more favourable population trends will turn out to be a temporary or a more enduring phenomenon.

## **ABOUT ANZRSAL**

### **ANZRSAL Council Notes**

Council has planned for the 2024 conference in Canberra at the Ann Harding Conference Centre in University Canberra and improving access to and ranking of AJRS and the website. Conference participants gain access to support, encouragement, and relevant experience. AJRS offers an opportunity for publication. Council acknowledges Rolf Gerritsen's contributions to ANZRSAL and proposes his name as a lifetime member of ANZRSAL.

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