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## Foreword

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

For more than forty-six years, the Australia and New Zealand Regional Science Association has brought together researchers across academic and policy fields to explore the cutting edge of regional development and regional analysis in Australia, New Zealand and around the world. If your work involves regions, join us at our 47th Annual Conference at the University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia. The 2024 Conference will be convened jointly with the Regional Studies Association (RSA), bring together researchers from Asia, Europe, Australasia and beyond. The event will be hosted by the Ann Harding Conference Centre, University of Canberra on 2-3 December 2024. Two Best Paper Awards sponsored by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts will be presented at the conference.

### **2024 Joint ANZRSAI/RSA Conference Theme: “INCLUSIVE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT”**

It will be an in-person conference, although opportunities for on-line presentation and streaming will be available. To register, and for more information on the conference, visit the ANZRSAI website at: [www.anzrsai.org](http://www.anzrsai.org). **To submit your abstract [click here](https://www.regionalstudies.org/events/2024-australasia/)** (<https://www.regionalstudies.org/events/2024-australasia/>).

### **Important Timeline:**

Date	Actions
17 October	Final date for submission of proposals for themed panels or special sessions on particular topics.
17 October	Final date for submission of abstracts for papers.
24 October	Date for notification of acceptance of paper.
31 October	Final date for conference registration for paper presenters, for their paper to be confirmed in the programme.
31 October	Final date for submission of full paper by authors wanting their contribution to be considered for the best paper awards.
18 November	Date for publication of programme.
01 December	Informal welcome party (optional, time TBC)
02-03 December	Conference
03 December	Conference Dinner 7pm (separate registration necessary)

### **Conference sponsors/supporters:**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CANBERRA**



*The regional hotspots where Australians are relocating*

The trend of Australians moving from cities to the regions continues to grow beyond pre-pandemic levels and is becoming a "sustained population trend".

**Key Points**

- The number of Australians moving from cities to the regions continues to grow.
- Regional NSW and regional Victoria attract most city movers.
- The Sunshine Coast was the nation's most popular destination for movers.

The nation's love affair with regional Australia continues to grow as the population flow from cities to regions measures around 16 per cent above pre-pandemic levels, according to the Regional Movers Index — a report by Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the Regional Australia Institute.

The report's findings show that in the last June quarter, 27 per cent more people moved from cities to regional Australia than in the other direction.

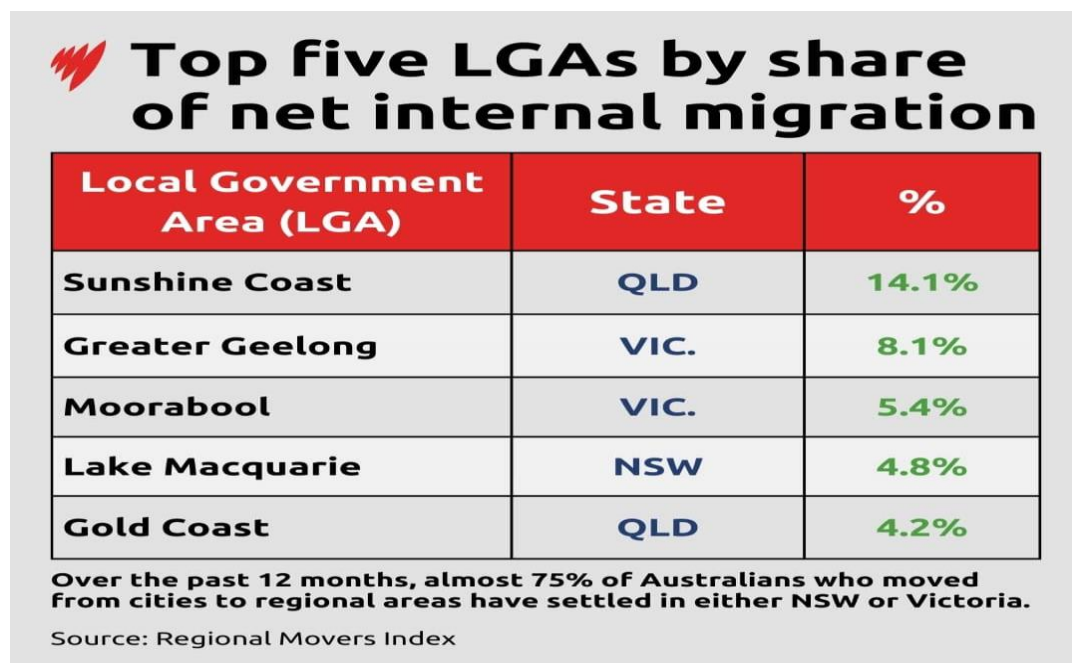
And over the course of the year there was a new flow of 11.2 per cent of movers heading from cities to the regions.

Regional Australia Institute CEO Liz Ritchie said: "Regional Australia has become the nation's new frontier. This analysis is clearly showing the population movement we're seeing is a sustained new trend, that is higher than pre-Covid migration patterns."

**2024 trends**

Around three-quarters of city dwellers moving to the regions have settled in NSW or Victoria over the past twelve months, up from half of all movers last year.

Regional NSW accounted for the largest share of all net regional inflows at 42 per cent.



Regional Queensland was the most popular moving destination last year but accounted for only 19 per cent of moves this year.

Sydney-siders and Melburnians led the exodus to the regions whereas Perth and Brisbane attracted net-inflows of migration at six and three per cent respectively.

### **Popular hotspots**

The study measured the per centage of people leaving and arriving in Local Government Areas and found that the Sunshine Coast was the area with the highest net internal migration.

Lake Macquarie in NSW emerged onto the hotspot list for the first time.

Neighbouring Local Government Areas of Bega Valley and Eurobodalla both experienced strong annual and quarterly growth.

The report noted that three of the five fastest growing Local Government Areas were in Western Australia (Albany, Bunbury and Northam) with Bega Valley in NSW topping the list.

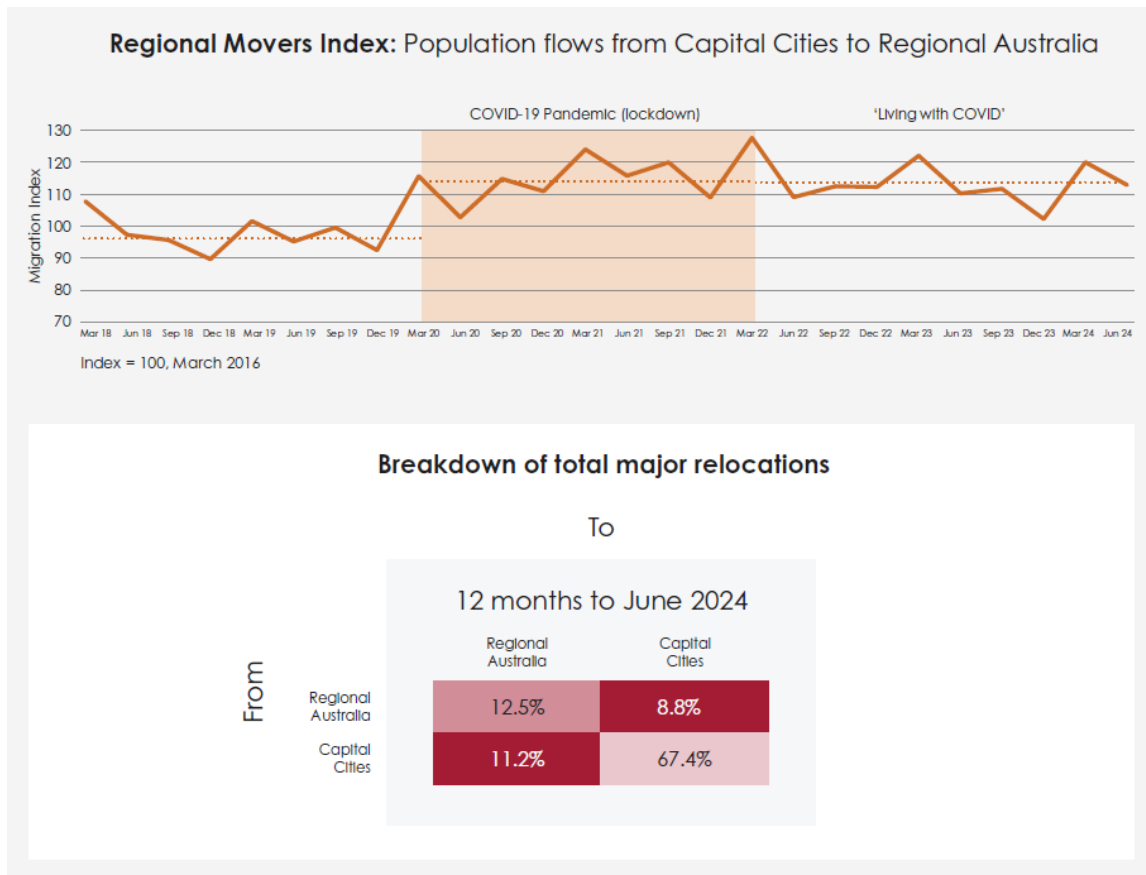


[Three of the five fastest growing Local Government Areas were in Western Australia, including the southwestern port and town of Albany. Credit: SBS news/Walter Bibikow/Getty Images]

Reflecting on the data, Ritchie said, "the regions provide so much: affordability, a sense of community, fulfilling career options and green space. Let's ensure this new era of regionality is met with vision and leadership to drive a more decentralised Australia."

In summary, Australia's pandemic-spurred love affair with regional Australia shows no signs of abating as city dwellers continue to flock to the regions in elevated numbers.

The population flow from capital cities to regional areas is tracking around levels reported during the height of COVID, and 16.4 per cent above the pre-pandemic average.



[Source: Regional Movers Index (RMI) report]

The RMI usually falls in the June quarter as relocations slow after their earlier-year rally. The 6.1 per cent decline in the latest quarter is the smallest decline in the June quarter to date, and well below the average June quarter decline of 9.3 per cent.

The share of those moving from the cities to the regions now stands at 11.2 per cent of all internal migration flows, compared to 8.8 per cent making the move in the opposite direction.

More information with some other significant data can be explored here at the following links:

<https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/2024/Regional%20Movers%20Index/RMI%20June%202024%20Report.pdf>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/revealed-the-regional-hotspots-where-australians-are-relocating/s1byy6wro>

***If we want more solar and wind farms, we need to get locals on board***

The race is on to transition to clean energy. Solar and wind farm developers are inundating regional communities in the hope they will host generation and transmission infrastructure. This extra capacity is needed to achieve the federal government target of 82% renewables in Australia by 2030.

The Clean Energy Council has estimated the capacity needed to come online between 2026 and 2030 to hit this target. It equates to 5,400 megawatts (MW) of wind, 1,500MW of commercial solar farms and 3,600MW of rooftop solar each year.

The scale of this challenge is staggering. It amounts to an annual 240% expansion in added capacity compared to the past three years.

So how do developers entice communities to accept these projects? They typically offer payments to landholders. Community development funds are also popular, with developers helping to fund local needs such as housing and community services.

But these approaches have been inconsistent and lacking in transparency. Developers have been accused of acting opportunistically. There has been confusion and sometimes conflict between neighbours in regional communities.

In short, many regional communities feel left in the dark and short-changed. The energy transition is happening “to them” rather than “with them”. Research indicates these projects are much more likely to succeed when locals feel the project is theirs or includes them and they will share enduring benefits.

### **How are communities responding?**

Some regional communities are taking matters into their own hands to re-balance negotiation with developers.

For example, the Wimmera Southern Mallee Collaboration in Victoria has brought together the community and the 12 energy companies with projects in the region. The state government, NGOs and trusted local consultants are supporting this work to agree a collaboration framework.

This framework will create the structure and commitments needed for energy businesses to collaborate and ensure communities benefit. These benefits include solutions to pressing local needs such as housing, childcare and other infrastructure and services.

Similarly, Hay Shire Council in the NSW Riverina has led consultation to increase community influence. The aim is to make clear to renewable developers what the locals do and don't want.

State and federal governments as well as organisations such as the Clean Energy Council, The Energy Charter, RE-Alliance and Community Power Agency are also trying to level the playing field. One such initiative, Striking a New Deal, will support and fund one rural or regional body – a local council, association or organisation – to drive better local outcomes from local energy projects.

Yet challenges remain. Renewable energy developers are struggling to build their social licence to operate in regional communities. These challenges threaten to undermine the entire energy transition.

### **New business models are needed**

Creative new business models are slowly emerging in Australia. One example is the community-owned Haystacks Solar Garden in Grong Grong, New South Wales. Another approach is to offer electricity rebates to residents living near wind and solar farms.

Sadly, these approaches tend to be the exception rather than the rule in Australia. Casting our eyes overseas may better inform our approach at home.

In Denmark, for example, the Danish Renewable Energy Act has required at least 20% local community ownership for all new wind projects since 2009. Wind now generates 54% of Denmark's electricity.

Similarly, community-owned projects play a big role in Germany's Energiewende or energy transition. Germany boasts more than 1,700 energy communities, most of them co-operatives (55%) and limited liability companies (37%). Ownership and the ability to shape the local energy system are the key drivers for community participation.

The privately owned Midtfjellet 55 wind farm in Norway is more comparable to Australian approaches. Its owners are investing €1.8 million a year (A\$3 million) into local infrastructure and activities for the community of 3,100 residents.

These numbers are played out across Europe. Strong political support and a mature regulatory environment are encouraging investment from households and industry alike.



[The operator of Midtfjellet wind farm in Norway invests about A\$3 million a year into the community of 3,100 residents. Source: The Conversation, CC BY-SA]

### **Involving and informing communities is vital**

Closer to home, the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's review of community engagement offers guiding principles of good practice. The Commonwealth-commissioned report was released in February. Its nine recommendations include "keeping communities better informed on energy transition goals, benefits and needs" and "equitably sharing the benefits of the transformation".

Arron Wood of the Clean Energy Council welcomed the report's findings, saying:

"Community engagement and effective communication are the antidotes to the misinformation that is being used to stir division within some regional communities. Genuine engagement in good faith from all parties is needed to ensure that we get the balance right between managing community expectations and getting on with the job of building the generation, transmission and storage infrastructure that Australia urgently needs."

Importantly, the federal government has accepted all nine recommendations in principle. It recently released long-overdue national guidelines for community engagement and benefits for transmission projects.

States are also working closely with industry bodies and NGOs to provide guidance on community engagement. The NSW, Victoria and Queensland governments are offering payments to landholders for transmission projects.

It is questionable, though, whether regional community concerns can be overcome without a more prescriptive, standardised approach to benefit-sharing.

Further information can be found at:

<https://theconversation.com/if-we-want-more-solar-and-wind-farms-we-need-to-get-locals-on-board-by-ensuring-they-all-benefit-too-236226>

## **Commentary**

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

#### ***RAI's Policy Submission – Regional Migration Settings 2024***

This RAI submission responds to the Australian Government's Supporting strong and sustainable regions: Review of Regional Migration Settings Discussion Paper – June 2024.

Migration plays a vital role in regional economies and migrants will continue to make an enormous contribution to regional Australia's future.

Regional migration will be a critical component for achieving the RAI's Regionalisation Ambition population target of over 11 million people living prosperously in the regions by 2032, up from 9.78 million today. Our research confirmed that Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2032 would be \$13.8 billion when we meet the above target. It's important to note that we are well on track to do so, which creates a sense of urgency to ensure our migration settings that support regional migration are targeted towards supporting regional communities and settlement. Due to the significance of our migrants in Australia, the RAI's Ambition also set a target to double regional migration settlement from 20 per cent to 40 per cent of the migration program. Post COVID we saw an increase but during the last year this settlement has declined – we must address this urgently.

The success of Australia's regional economies is critical to the prosperity of all Australians. Regional Australia is home to Australia's leading wealth generating and export industries such as mining, agriculture, energy and tourism. A significant proportion of 'Future Made in Australia' investment will be in the regions. The transition to a net zero economy will depend on the success of investments in renewable energy infrastructure that will be located in regional Australia.

Skilled migration will be vital for the sustainability and economic and social development of Australia's regional cities, towns and remote areas. It will contribute to Australia's diversification and take the pressure off our burgeoning major cities.

Australia's regions need more skilled migrants right now. Many regional areas have growing populations and persistently high job vacancies that are difficult to fill from the local workforce. The smaller scale of regional labour markets and the need for specialist skills means regional employers and communities must often attract and retain skilled workers from other parts of Australia and overseas. Jobs and Skills Australia research highlights the recruitment challenges in regional Australia. Our own report called the Big Skills Challenge also highlighted that jobs grew three times



faster in regional areas when compared to metro and the trend may have slowed but the findings ring true – we need to double down our efforts on regional Australia if we have any chance of meeting the skill demand. The RAI, in concert with community and business leaders in regional and remote areas, are calling for increased levels of migration to grow their populations, offset workforce and demographic challenges and take advantage of the significant economic opportunities ahead.

Regional Australia currently has access to a mix of temporary and permanent skilled visas. However, feedback from RAI's regional stakeholders is that the visa system is not delivering the right skills to the right places. Concerns have been expressed about the availability, cost and complexity of regional visas. Regional visas could work together better. For instance, take-up of the provisional employer-sponsored regional visa – which should be the cornerstone of a successful permanent regional migration system – is low relative to temporary skilled visas.

The RAI appreciates and supports the Australian Government's prioritisation and increased allocation of regional visas in 2024-25. Further steps are now needed to implement a regional migration system that is place-based, low-cost and highly responsive to local needs for people and skills.

In designing a regional migration system, it is critical to recognise the differences in Australia's regional economies and that they have unique skills needs. A one size fits all approach will not work in regional Australia. The core elements of a future regional migration visa system will need to be:

- A place-based approach, that caters for the unique skills needs of regions.
- Highly responsive to changing local needs, with a preference for demand-led, employer sponsored skilled visas and occupational priorities that reflect skill shortages identified through consultation with regional representatives.
- Low cost and easy to navigate, coupled with timely decision making that provides participants with certainty and confidence in the system.

Visa system reform should be accompanied by a strategy to attract and retain migrants to Australia's regions. The strategy should include promotional initiatives and information provision about opportunities to live and work in regional Australia. It should set out actions to strengthen settlement services and provide migrants with access to education and health services, housing and infrastructure that collectively make regional areas more attractive and more liveable. Getting this right will require all three levels of government working collaboratively and with regional employers and community representatives.

### **Recommendations**

- Adopt a place-based approach to regional skilled migration with visa settings and allocation that meet local needs for people and skills.
- Make changes to the employer-sponsored regional visa to boost take-up, including by broadening occupational eligibility and concessions and raising awareness with employers.
- Reform the Regional Occupations List by adopting localised skilled labour needs assessments that identify priority occupations to be filled in each region, but which otherwise have limited restrictions on occupational eligibility (if any). Involve regional employers, RDAs, local governments, regional RTOs and Jobs and Skills Australia in the assessments.

- Lower visa system costs on regional businesses and migrants by:
  - speeding up skills assessment and decision-making timelines
  - removing or reducing the Skilling Australians Fund levy for regional visas.
- Apply a consistent definition of regional Australia across the visa system that excludes the five main capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide).
- State-wide DAMAs should prioritise regional visas over metropolitan visas.
- No further reduction to regional work requirements for the Working Holiday Maker visa.
- Promote opportunities to live and work in regional Australia to prospective offshore and onshore migrants:
  - Use marketing campaigns, information provision and promotion at migration and trade fairs
  - The RAI's Move to More tool could be extended to support the promotion and cater for culturally diverse cohorts of first and secondary migrants
- Improve the provision of settlement services for migrants to regional Australia:
  - Governments and employer and community groups should adopt the strategies in the RAI's Settlement services – RAI Toolkit
  - Implement inclusive place-based approaches to federal and state policy and program delivery to support regional multicultural capabilities in the long-term
  - Federal Government to enable LGAs to provide support services by providing them with data on visa holders living and working in their jurisdiction.

Detailed information can be found at:

<https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/2024/Policy%20Submissions/RAI%20Regional%20Migration%20Settings%20Submission.pdf>

### ***From Brookings***

#### ***Sick of polls? Here are 2 other ways to measure the presidential race***

Michael Hais and Morley Winograd (September 2024)

- In 2024, the most frequently discussed voter registration indicator was visits generated by Taylor Swift's Instagram endorsement of Vice President Harris's candidacy, which included a custom URL that her followers could visit to register to vote.
- When Target Smart analyzed the first wave of voter registration data from July, following "the switch" in the Democratic nominee, it found "incredible surges in voter registration relative to the same time period in 2020...especially [among] women, voters of color, and young voters."
- In August, the Harris campaign raised \$361 million compared to Trump's \$130 million, representing a decline from his \$139 million July numbers.

Every day we are bombarded with polls telling us where the presidential race is. There are polls of the nation and polls of the swing states. There are so many polls that it's hard to keep up. As we know, polls are merely a snapshot in time, subject to large variations and, at this point at least, they cannot foretell the future with any accuracy.

So, putting aside the polls, what other indicators are there on the state of the race? Until early voting begins, the two most important are voter registration and campaign donations.

This year, the most frequently discussed voter registration indicator was visits generated by Taylor Swift's Instagram endorsement of Vice President Harris' candidacy, which included a custom URL that her followers could visit to register to vote. The federal government's General Services Administration (GSA) confirmed that 405,999 visitors were directed to the site in the 24 hours following Swift's "childless cat lady" posting. More than 80,000 of them used the site to verify their registration status. At least 27,000 new voter registrations were generated the day following the posting, suggesting the endorsement was "swiftly" changing the composition of the November electorate.

### **But how many of these new registrants will turn out to vote?**

Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau suggests what's likely to happen. It indicates that failure to register to vote is the greatest barrier to casting a ballot; once registered, the large majority of Americans of all ages vote. For instance, in the 2020 presidential election, 50.8% of 18- to 24-year-olds were registered and 86% of those cast a ballot. In that election, 70.15% of those 25 to 44 years old registered to vote, and 89.3% of them voted. Voter registration for those between 45 and 64 was 75.65%, while 93.7% of registered voters in the age cohort turned out. Among those 65 and older, 78.45% were registered to vote, and 94.8% of registered voters cast a ballot. These numbers suggest that around 80% of those who registered as a result of Taylor Swift's endorsement posting will join the voting electorate this fall. Using the census data, the voting turnout percentages were calculated by dividing the number of those in an age cohort that voted in 2020 by the number of those in the cohort that were registered to vote that year.

This year, we have the benefit of a more comprehensive and current set of data on voter registration thanks to TargetSmart, a company that provides data-based consultation to political campaigns, businesses, and other organizations. They constantly update their files to record publicly available voter data, such as registration or early voting. When Target Smart analyzed the first wave of voter registration data from July, following "the switch" in the Democratic nominee, it found "incredible surges in voter registration relative to the same time period in 2020...especially [among] women, voters of color, and young voters." Not coincidentally, those are the demographic groups that virtually all surveys suggest will be the key to Vice President Harris' efforts to generate significant margins over Trump.

In the week after Vice President Harris became the Democratic nominee, TargetSmart's report, based on data released by 38 states, found that women accounted for nearly 55% of all new registrants recorded. The July 2024 surge in the percentage of women registering to vote compared to men even exceeded the highest previous such imbalance which was recorded in the aftermath of the Dobbs decision in June of 2022. Young Black women led the way, with registration nearly tripling relative to the same point in 2020. Overall, Black women almost doubled their registration numbers from 2020; young Hispanic women registration increased by a 150%.

The same trends were evident in the data TargetSmart collected from those battleground states that have published their voter registration data so far. For example, in Pennsylvania, the proportion of new registrations from voters under 30 rose 59.6% compared to 2020. Black registration was up 110% overall—262% among Black women. The proportionate rise in registration for Democrats was more than double the rate for Republicans.

In North Carolina, 43% of new registrants were under 30 compared to only a 20% rise in 2020. In the week after Harris became the presumptive nominee, the total number of registrants was almost 50% higher than it was during the same week in 2020 (17,178 to 12,426).

The greatest proportionate rise among young voters in any of the battleground states occurred in Nevada where the number of Hispanic women under 30 registering to vote was three times the number in 2020. Black female registration doubled according to that state's data.

Although we can't say for sure what the partisan implications of this data are, these trends in voter registration seem to come from groups that have historically voted Democratic.

Another metric that seems to bear good news for the Democratic candidate is the amount of money each campaign has raised. The impact Harris' candidacy is having on the composition of the electorate, evidenced in the new voter registration data, was reflected in the campaign's August fundraising with 1.3 million of the nearly three million contributions coming from people making their first donation in 2024.

In August, the Harris campaign raised \$361 million compared to Trump's \$130 million, representing a decline from his \$139 million July numbers. In just the day following the debate, the Harris campaign raised \$47 million from nearly 600,000 individual donors. Since she became the nominee, her campaign has raised almost double the amount of money the Trump campaign has. Of that amount, 41.63% came from donations of less than \$200 compared to Trump's smaller donor percentage of 31.71%.

So far, data from actual voter behavior such as voter registrations and campaign donations suggest that Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign has been successful in motivating traditionally Democratic voters and increasing small donor money.

Read the whole story here at:

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/sick-of-polls-here-are-2-other-ways-to-measure-the-presidential-race/>

### **From the Australia Rural and Regional News**

#### ***International equitation success***

Ted Rogers (September 2024)

East Greenmount equestrian instructor Linda Shore, alongside her student Nicola Saunders from Toowoomba, have just returned from spending a week training and competing in Working Equitation in Canada at the 2024 Cross Nations Cup.

This event is run every two years usually in the United States or Canada.

This year it was run in Moose Jaw, Canada from August 26th to September 1st.

Working Equitation riders from all over the world are invited to attend on a borrowed horse against local riders on their own horses.

Working Equitation is a three-phase discipline incorporating a dressage test, obstacle course judged on style, and obstacle course judged on speed and accuracy.

Working Equitation is currently one of the fastest growing new equestrian disciplines in Australia with one of the largest clubs in Queensland based in Toowoomba.

Linda and Nicola were joined in Moose Jaw by two other Australian riders, from Victoria, Christine Staats and Kerry Bryant.

The Cross Nations Cup consists of a four-day training camp followed by a three day competition.

Linda Shore and Christine Staats were also coaches, presenting training sessions to international riders at the Camp.

Linda and Nicola were fortunate to be able to source two fantastic western performance trained horses from Melissa and Emily Rowe, local residents of Moose Jaw.

While neither of these horses had ever done Working Equitation previously, their prior training was such that they were able to put in a solid performance for Linda and Nicola after training with them for five days leading into the competition.



[Linda and Taxi in competition. Source: ARR.News]

Linda and her horse, Taxi, competed at the second highest level, level 6, which required all phases of the competition to be ridden one handed, and came away with Level 6 Champions.

Nicola and her horse, Krikrit, put in a solid performance in Level 4, to finish 8th in a large, strong class.

Of the other Australians, Christine Staats finished 7th in Level 4 and Kerry Brant finished 8th in Level 2 Amateur.

Nicola and Linda are now back in training for the three final working equitation competitions of the 2024 season including the Queensland Championships at Nanango in September, regional championships for the Darling Downs at Toowoomba in October and the National Championships at Tamworth in November.

At the 2024 National Championships, Linda will be aiming to achieve a qualifying score to be considered on the Australian team for the 2026 World Championships in Spain.

Linda has been running an equestrian coaching, training and breeding business from her East Greenmount property for the past 22 years.

The full report is available at:

<https://arr.news/2024/09/19/international-equitacion-success/>

### **Golden Girl Alexa Leary breaks world records, wins 2 gold and 1 silver**

Rodney Stevens (September 2024)

When Alexa Leary, who grew up in Yamba, was fighting for life in intensive care after an extremely serious 2021 cycling crash that almost claimed her life, her parents engaged a fortune teller who predicted she would survive and compete at the Paralympics.

But the fortune teller didn't predict Alexa would become the golden girl of the 2024 Paris Paralympics by breaking the world record and taking home two gold medals, while, at the same time, winning the hearts of the nation she so proudly represented and gaining millions of admirers worldwide.

Alexa won gold in both the 100 metres S9 freestyle and the mixed 4×100 metre Medley Relay – 34 points and silver in the mixed 4×100 metre freestyle relay at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

As Alexa was still in the Olympic Village with the Australian Paralympic Team, her father Russell spoke exclusively to the CV Independent about his superstar daughter and her journey to Paralympic Gold.

“We moved to Yamba [] to give our kids a more simple life than on the Gold Coast,” he said.

“Alexa was in year four at St James Primary School, Yamba and then she went to McCauley Catholic College in Grafton.

“We didn't even know that she could swim and the first person who recognised her potential was Richard Beresford from the Yamba Community Heated Pool, he came to us one day and said ‘your daughter can swim, so I want to send her to the Australian titles’.

“In her first Australian titles aged 13 she got third, then the next year at the All-Australian School Titles she won four gold medals, but she didn't want to be a swimmer, she wanted to be a triathlete.”

To follow her dream, Russell said Alexa joined the Yamba Multisports Club (Triathlon Club).

“She did really well with the Yamba Triathlon Club for about 3 years, but it was really hard for her to go to school in Grafton and come home and have the time to train, so an opportunity came up in Noosa,” he said.

“Then we moved her to Noosa to be in the capital of the triathlon scene in Australia to train and a coach took her on board and saw that she had a future.”

Rapidly, Alexa showed her potential as a triathlete, winning Queensland and Australian titles in the 16 to under 19 years division, then coming second in the world in 2019.

“Alexa had her heart set on going to the Paris Olympics as a triathlete until a catastrophic cycling crash at 70km/h changed everything,” he said.

Alexa was on a training ride in the Noosa area on July 17, 2021, when her front wheel clipped the back wheel of the bike in front and she crashed and landed on her head, suffering severe head injuries, a fractured scapula, shoulder blade, wrist, ribs, a collapsed lung, and serious nerve damage.



[Russell Alexa and Belinda Leary Paris 2024 Paralympics. Source: ARR News]

“A passing doctor positioned her so she could stay alive and breathe properly until the ambulance got there...I came along, and the paramedic didn’t know I was her father, and he said, ‘it doesn’t look good’,” Russell said.

“We went to Sunshine Coast Hospital emergency department, and we were told in no uncertain terms, ‘if she gets to Brisbane alive, she will have no quality of life’.”

For most people this would spell the end of their competitive sporting career, but not Alexa. What followed was 111 days in hospital.

“Alexa spent two weeks in intensive care, four months in hospital, then three months in rehab,” Russell said.

“With brain damage it’s not easy, the anger came out, she lost her hair, she was very confused, she lost all of her friends because they didn’t understand brain damage, it was hard for us, we took a lot of aggression from her, and we didn’t know what to do.”

Alexa is one of Russell and Belinda Leary’s seven children.

“Life was still tough for all of us and the family, when we were away for four months our other children suffered because we’re not around them because we had to move to Brisbane,” he said.

“We had a girl who couldn’t walk or talk, she didn’t move anything, the only thing that she could move was her left arm after about eight weeks, then the rest of her faculties slowly came back.

“The reason she’s in the Paralympics is because the left side of her brain which controls the right side of her body doesn’t operate properly, and we never thought it would actually operate at all.

“Then it was just a slow progression, she didn’t have a clue who we were.”

The Move for Lex campaign was launched to help her regain memories and movement which quickly gained hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram.

“One day with her left hand, Alexa was scrolling through the Move for Lex, and she seemed to be taking it in, so at that stage we thought there is someone in there, we just don’t know how badly brain damaged she is,” he said.

“It just took time, every day we lived at that hospital, and we worked with her, doing what ever we could do to help and just being there to support her.

“The biggest turning point came when we moved her to the Princess Alexandra Hospital Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit Biru, and as Covid had hit, when we moved her to Biru we couldn’t go and see her, it was very, very tough, we couldn’t see her for 2 weeks and that killed us.

“After that 2 weeks she could start to walk, the talking was coming, which was a huge changing factor.”

After 2 months at Biru, Russell said Alexa came home to Noosa aged 20 and they took her to Eden Private Rehabilitation Hospital at Cooroy daily for three months.

“She lived at home, she had no hair, no licence and was very frustrated with life,” he said.

“It’s only her inspirational fighting will that has got her through this.”

About 12 months after her crash, Alexa got back in the pool.

“She began training in the pool at Noosa and got noticed by one of the Australian coaches and we took her to Adelaide to the Australian titles where she came third and she got spotted by and Australian selector and she was put in an Australian Dolphins team,” he said.

“Alexa got to the world titles last year where she won gold and silver, then she got her focus back and said, ‘I want to swim’.

“After the world titles was a big change for her because she realised, she had the skill and potential...so she treats her swimming now like her job, which it is.



“That’s her income and she’s a very gifted young girl to be able to be given an income from doing what she loves.”

Alexa’s fierce determination, tenacity and incredible fighting spirit can be traced back to her parents, Russell was a former basketball player and cyclist, and Belinda was a triathlete.

“Sport is all through our family,” he said.

“She wouldn’t be alive today without her incredible fighting spirit and she wouldn’t have won 2 gold medals without that spirit.”

To support Alexa’s Paralympic campaign, a large contingent of family and friends travelled to Paris to cheer her on poolside.

Russell said the atmosphere and excitement at the 2024 Paris Paralympics was electric.

In her first race, the women’s 50 metre freestyle S10, Alexa convincingly won her heat before coming 6th in the final, which was followed by the mixed 4×100 metre Medley Relay 34 points, where she anchored the team and mowed down her male competitor from the Netherlands, who had a large lead, to win gold.

“In the relay, for her to be labelled with Ian Thorpe in a comeback swim was quite incredible,” Russell said.

“There was no hope of Australia winning that, and for her to bring it home the way she did was just inspiring.”

Next was Alexa’s ‘pet’ event, the 100 metre S9 Freestyle in which she set a new world record of 59.60 in a promising heat swim.

“In the heat of the 100, we thought she went out too hard too early, and the American girl she wasn’t far off the back of her,” he said.

In the 100 metres S9 final, Alexa set another world record of 59.53, claiming her first individual Paralympic gold medal.

Russell said he almost lost his voice from cheering so loudly for Alexa.

In her final race of the games, Alexa headed the mixed 4×100 metre freestyle 34-point relay where Australia set a new world record but were narrowly beaten by Italy.

“The Australian’s were very unlucky last night not to win that race over Italy, it was so close,” Russell said.

Now the 2024 Paralympics are over, Russell said he and Belinda are meeting Alexa and enjoying a holiday together before returning to Australia and looking to the future.

“From here we will give her a good rest, then get her focused for the world titles next year, then the next Olympics,” he said.

Further details are available at:

<https://arr.news/2024/09/11/golden-girl-alexa-leary-breaks-world-records-wins-2-gold-and-1-silver/>

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

***Addressing the drop-out rate of regional university students requires a more coordinated approach***

Professor Graham Brown, DVC (Academic), CSU (July 2024)

As reported in *The Australian*, almost half of university students from a regional background drop out of their courses. This is a very concerning statistic, one that regional universities are sadly all-too familiar with.

Regional universities like Charles Sturt play a critical role in training the nation's core workforces in education, healthcare and social services. At Charles Sturt, 40 per cent of domestic students doing a Bachelor's degree are studying to become teachers, nurses, social workers or paramedics.

“There is a demonstrable demand for these students in the workforce: for the seventh year in a row, Charles Sturt has the highest graduate employment rate in the country. Australia desperately needs these students to become graduates, especially regional communities where the shortage of critical skills is felt most sharply.”

So why are regional students dropping out in such high numbers?

Charles Sturt interviews students who withdraw from our courses to understand why they are leaving and what we can do to help them. Last year, two thirds of students who withdrew from their studies reported financial, employment and caring issues as the reasons.

Only 2 per cent stated that a poor educational experience led them to withdraw and only 5 per cent were transferring to a different university. The problem regional students face is not with the quality of education delivered by regional universities but with the unique economic challenges they face as regional students.

Very often, regional students are the first in their family to attend university, and/or are from lower socioeconomic groups, and/or don't have the luxury of full-time study with family support. Yet income support payments for students are below the poverty line and means-tested out by even modest parental incomes.

These challenges are exacerbated for students undertaking placements, especially regional students who often have to relocate hundreds of kilometres from their homes, families and workplaces to complete this part of their course. The Government has responded in this year's Budget with a welcome announcement of some payments for students undertaking mandatory placements, but more needs to be done.

Regional students, with higher rates of socioeconomic disadvantage, typically have less time to dedicate to their studies. In the Regional University Network, the average domestic undergraduate student is studying about 60 per cent of a full-time load. At the elite metropolitan Group of Eight universities, this figure is over 80 per cent.

Australian universities are predominantly funded according to student load and not an institution's headcount of students. This means regional universities are at a double disadvantage in supporting students: our students often have increased support needs due to higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage, but precisely because of this disadvantage we receive less funding per student to support them.

The Government has indicated a clear commitment to supporting equity students and regional universities and is already making important steps towards this. But as the new funding system for universities is developed, it will be critical to take a coordinated approach to avoid unintended consequences.

Regional universities deliver high quality education where it is most needed - in regional communities. But both our students and our institutions face high costs in this delivery. We need a funding mechanism that recognises these costs for our students to flourish in regional Australia.

Further details are available at:

<https://news.csu.edu.au/opinion/addressing-the-drop-out-rate-of-regional-university-students-requires-a-more-coordinated-approach>

### **From CEDA**

#### *Cultivating compassion in volatile times*

Georgie Harman (Beyond Blue CEO, September 2024)

For the past five years in Australia, it has felt as though we're living in a state of "permacrisis"; compounding events that are provoking stress and anxiety without reprieve. As humans, we're evolved and socialised to find safety in calm and certainty. Uncertainty – in our world, our communities and our daily lives – can bring stress and discomfort that we often try to avoid.

Socially, economically and culturally, it feels like we are living through a decisive moment in human history – a time of existential adaptation. We're facing shifting macro global forces, including climate change, rapid technological shifts and rising inequality, while closer to home and further downstream, it's financial pressure, housing stress and extreme weather.

In Australia and around the world, an increasingly cynical and divisive political discourse is undermining trust in civic institutions and testing the viability of democracy itself. All this is unfolding against a cultural backdrop that seems to place high value on individualism, materialism and competition.

If we follow the arc of human evolution, we've never been healthier, safer or more prosperous. We have demonstrated our resilience time and again. Yet for the past five years in Australia, it has felt as though we're living in a state of "permacrisis"; compounding events that are provoking stress and anxiety without reprieve.

We've moved immediately from catastrophic bushfires to a protracted pandemic, through a shrill and heartbreaking expression of racism and now, to simmering cost-of-living pressures. No wonder we're feeling untethered.

Quite naturally, these conditions will present a challenge to our mental health, directly and indirectly. We might feel particularly sensitive to loss or failure, and perhaps more attuned to any sense of threat in our daily lives. As humans, we're evolved and socialised to find safety in calm and certainty. Uncertainty – in our world, our communities and our daily lives – can bring stress and discomfort that we often try to avoid.

But we can remind ourselves that we have managed change before. We have done it with hope, with action and with each other. Change is inevitable and arguably, change is what our world needs right now.

The question is how we can support ourselves and each other through this moment.

We can start by looking to First Nations peoples. Learning from the wisdom of First Nations peoples, we can recognise that our mental health and wellbeing as individuals rely on the health and wellbeing of the world around us. By demonstrating the interrelatedness of mind, body, family and kinship, community, culture, Country and spirit, the First Nations construct of social and emotional wellbeing presents an eloquent, holistic expression of how our mental health takes shape. It invites us to think of our mental health as an extension of the health of the complex, dynamic and interwoven systems on which it relies.

Relevant, then, is the health of society. Social determinants that influence our mental health include income, employment, education, housing, adverse childhood experiences and access to mental health support.

Fundamentally, these determinants stem from inequality – from a power imbalance that is often entrenched across generations of disadvantage. As the World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests, levels of distress among communities need to be understood less in terms of individual pathology and more as a response to social injustice.

We can think of some forms of emotional distress as a response to difficult life circumstances and not as a particular disorder. Australians have made it clear that equality and wellbeing matter to them, and that they expect governments to act on these issues.

Beyond Blue will continue working with lived experience and our sector colleagues to push for reforms that address systemic inequity, and for economic frameworks that measure our nation's collective mental wealth.

Social capital is a part of this. Do we know our neighbours? Do we trust them? Demonstrating care, taking an interest in others, sharing experiences and pursuing common goals can foster connection, belonging and meaning. By building communities that are inclusive, respectful, warm and which value diversity, we are supporting our own mental health and the mental health of those around us. We know social cohesion is a powerful force.

There are steps we can take as individuals, too. We can acknowledge our discomfort – and learn to see it differently. We can explore ways to solve our problems and talk them through with people we trust or who have had similar experiences. We can learn skills and healthy ways to cope. And we can identify our values – who we are and what really matters to us – then choose, every day, the actions that match. We can pursue activities that mean something to us, relationships that fill us up and tasks that help us feel accomplished and inspired. And we can try to see our struggles as a chance to grow.

These are volatile times. And there is a way through. We can evolve through this challenging period by drawing on the parts of ourselves and our communities that promote altruism and compassion.

Further information about this report is available at:

<https://www.ceda.com.au/newsandresources/opinion/health-ageing/cultivating-compassion-in-volatile-times>

**From the Productivity Commission**

*Progress and setbacks on closing the gap targets*

The latest Annual Data Compilation Report (ADCR), which tracks progress towards the targets and indicators in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, shows that five of 19 targets are on track to be met.

The report includes new data for nine targets since last year. Improvements in two targets means they are now on track: healthy birthweights and sea country subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights. However, an increase in the rate of young people in detention means that this target is no longer on track to be met.

A further five targets show improvement but are not on track to be met, while progress towards four targets is worsening.

New data shows that the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men is 71.9 years and is 75.6 years for women, but the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people is not on track to close by 2031 (the target year).

However, the target for the proportion of babies born at a healthy birthweight is on track to be met by 2031. 89.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies were born with a healthy birthweight in 2021 (the last year for which data is available).

Tragically, the rate of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has increased since the baseline year. The most recent data shows suicide was the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–39 in 2022.

Research in the 2024 ADCR provides insights into some of the factors that are crucial for improving outcomes.

“We know that having ready access to culturally safe and responsive services (and systems) can make all the difference to socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” said Commissioner Button.

“In our recent three-yearly review, we saw ‘pockets of good practice’ where outcomes were not only achieved but exceeded. The consistent theme to improved outcomes was governments enacting the Priority Reforms: a strengthened Aboriginal Community Controlled sector, shared decision making, shared data and the government changing its operation. The aspirations of the Agreement are not only achievable, but equity of outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is within reach if governments breathe life into the Priority Reforms,” said Commissioner Siegel-Brown.

The 2024 ADCR highlights gaps in the data that are preventing a full assessment of progress.

“The four Priority Reforms are the key to achieving the targets under the Agreement – but the parties to the Agreement have still not yet agreed on an approach to measure them. This should be addressed as a matter of priority,” said Commissioner Natalie Siegel-Brown.

These data gaps extend to the Agreement's socio-economic targets and indicators too.

“Holding governments accountable for change includes having the data to measure change – and there is still much we do not know. For example, we still do not have a reliable source of data to assess

whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have access to clean drinking water, sewerage treatment and electricity. Giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the resources and authority to generate and control their own data in line with Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles will be a vital part of addressing these gaps,” said Commissioner Button

The 2024 ADCR comes shortly after the Commission’s review of action towards the Agreement. Joint Council – including all Australian governments – has recently accepted the four headline recommendations of the Commission’s review and agreed to 15 out of the 16 actions that governments need to implement those recommendations.

“The latest data underscores the need for government action and we welcome governments’ commitments to make the changes necessary to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If the recommendations of our review are acted on quickly, the targets should look very different in future ADCRs,” said Commissioner Siegel-Brown.

The Annual Data Compilation Report is available on the Productivity Commission website at [pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report](https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report).

Further information and the full report are available at:

<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report#btn-reportmr>

<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/closing-the-gap-annual-data-compilation-july2024.pdf>.

### **From the Business Insider Australia**

#### ***Meta's AI can now edit photos for you and 'talk' like various celebrities***

Ana Altchek (September 2024)

- Meta AI now includes visual and voice capabilities, Meta announced Wednesday at its Connect event.
- The chatbot can now edit photos you share and answer questions about what's in them.
- It can also talk to you in celebrity voices like John Cena's and Keegan-Michael Key's.

Meta AI has moved beyond typing — the chatbot can now see and speak.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced the new features Wednesday at Meta's Connect event. The chatbot can use these capabilities to understand the world better and provide faster responses, the company said.

Meta AI can reply to photos shared in the chat and answer questions about what's in them, according to the company. For example, if you take a photo of a bird and don't know what kind it is, you can ask Meta AI to identify it. And the chatbot can also now edit photos, including changing the background, removing objects, or adding accessories.

The chatbot now also offers celebrity voices like those of Awkwafina, Judi Dench, John Cena, Keegan-Michael Key, and Kristen Bell. The voices can be selected as your AI voice of choice to answer you any time you ask Meta AI something.

It's not the first time Meta AI has made celebrity voices available — but the last time didn't go so well, and the feature was discontinued less than a year after its release. The company had signed deals with celebrities including Kendall Jenner, Tom Brady, and Snoop Dogg, paying them up to \$5 million to use their voices for two years.

Meta ended up pivoting to focus on its new AI Studio, which Zuckerberg said was an important part of Meta's vision to help people create their own AIs.

The new features come just as OpenAI rolls out its Advanced Voice Mode. Similarly, the two features have a blue circle that indicates voice interaction.

But unlike Meta, OpenAI hasn't quite nailed the celebrity-voice feature yet. When the ChatGPT maker used a voice that sounded like Scarlett Johansson, the actor lawyered up.

You can interact with a Meta AI voice on WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger. Over the next month, the feature is set to roll out in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

According to the company, Meta is also experimenting with other features on its platforms, such as automatic video dubbing and lip-syncing on Reels. These features are supposed to help users see more content in their preferred languages and let creators reach more users around the world.

Meta AI is also testing imagined content on Facebook and Instagram. Some images will be based on your interests, and others may feature you, the company said, "so you can be the star of your own story and share your favorites with friends."

Further details are available at:

<https://www.businessinsider.com/meta-ai-can-see-and-speak-with-celebrity-voices-2024-9>

<https://www.aol.com/watch-arkansan-johnny-cash-statue-143000836.html>

## THE CONVERSATION

*How well are NZ companies reporting their climate impacts? Our new tracker shows very mixed results*

Sara Walton and Andrea Foley (September 2024)

Interpreting corporate reports on carbon emissions can be challenging. The current, adhoc approach to how businesses share this information makes it difficult to see whether they have set the right targets, have realistic plans to meet them or are being transparent about their progress.

While there are frameworks for reporting climate and sustainability data, there are still big differences in the way the data is being disclosed.

We developed the Climate Action Tracker Aotearoa (CATA) to address these issues. Based on the global Net Zero Tracker, CATA evaluates company reports and climate plans to share and explain their climate action.

Using the tracker, we analysed 21 companies in Aotearoa New Zealand, focusing on the top emitters and companies in the energy, retail, agriculture and transport sectors, as well as the banking sector.

We evaluated three aspects – targets, plans and reporting – by reading through publicly available information provided by the company. These three aspects help make sense of what a company is doing and going to do to mitigate climate change. Below is what we found.

### **Setting targets**

While the majority of companies have 2030 targets (86%) and absolute targets (81%), only five companies of the 21 (25%) have targets that have been verified by the Science-based Targets Initiative.

All but two companies include scope one (emissions the company creates directly) and scope two (emissions created indirectly from, for example electricity or energy it buys for heating and cooling buildings) – the areas companies have the most control and ownership over. But when it comes to scope three emissions, which come from company travel in planes, trains and taxis, and the supply chain, far fewer companies have set such targets.

Scope three targets are difficult to set due as they involve a large number of supply chain partners. But understanding the full impact of a company’s emissions is an important factor towards meeting the Paris Agreement targets.



[It can be difficult for businesses to track emissions along their supply train. But it is important to gain the full picture. Source: The Conversation]

### **Making plans**



It is in the planning that there starts to be a divergence in the results across the companies. It would seem that it is easier to set a target than provide detailed plans on how to reach it.

Some companies do this very well, laying out a transparent and plausible climate map (Meridian Energy, for example). But many companies have failed to provide enough detail to be able to understand just how the reductions might occur.

It is even harder to understand how companies plan to use carbon offsets and credits.

Carbon offsetting involves a reduction or avoidance of emissions that can be used to compensate for emissions elsewhere. For example, offset projects could include renewable energy projects or energy efficiency improvements.

We found that just over half of the companies were offsetting or intending to, with only two stating they will only offset hard-to-abate emissions.

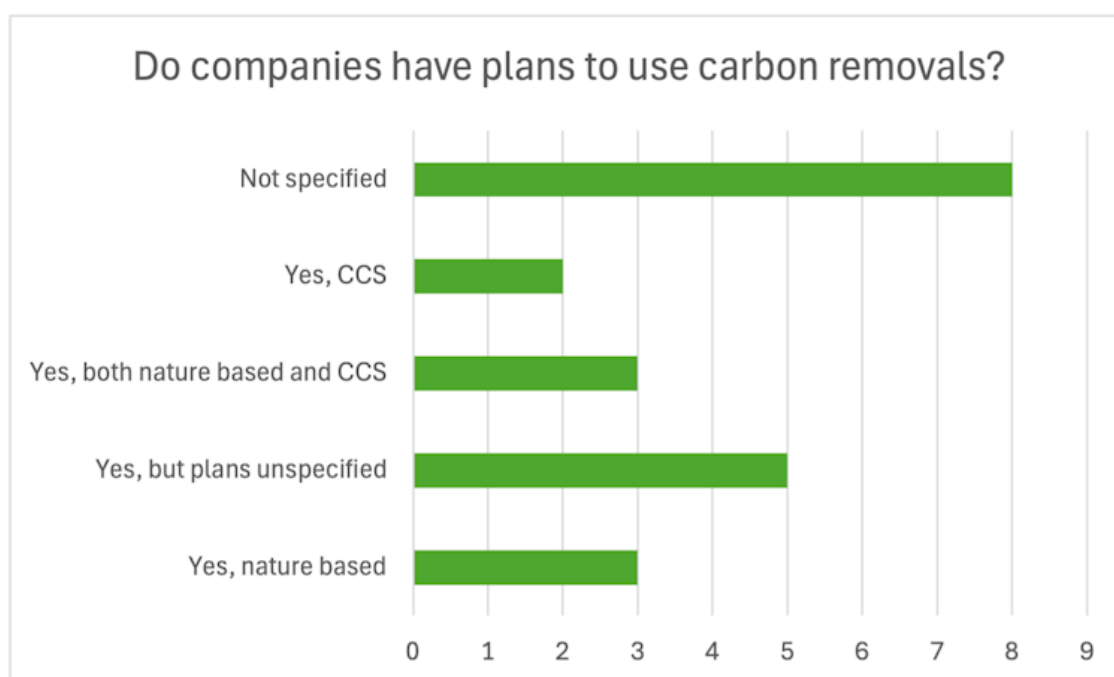
According to the University of Oxford Offsetting Principles, the best practice is to reduce as much as possible and use offsetting closer to the net zero date (2050) for those residual emissions.

It is not great to be seeing offsetting already in use.

We also found companies are not always transparent about their policy for using offsets. The majority either did not specify conditions for offsetting or just didn't have any conditions to begin with.

The majority of companies were unspecified in their approach to carbon removals (the process of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere).

The carbon removal measures that were mentioned were nature-based (such as planting a mixture of exotic and native trees) and carbon capture and storage (CCS). These tended to be from companies that also operated overseas.



[Results from our analysis on whether or not companies plan to use carbon removals. Source: Authors]

The World Economic Forum outlined the best practice for voluntary carbon removals last year.

Carbon removals were seen as necessary for the hard to reduce emissions, to reverse the build up of historical emissions, and deal with feedback loops in natural processes such as forest fires.

In 2022, the Ministry for the Environment also published a set of principles around carbon removals. These principles included that information needs to be transparent, clearly stated and publicly available.

We found the minority of companies adhered to such standards. Therefore, more transparency is needed on both offsetting and removals in their reporting.

### **Reporting climate action**

Most companies are reporting carbon emissions and providing some level of detail on the emissions to an international standard.

But at the same time, many companies are making it very difficult to find and piece together the data needed to clearly see what climate action they are undertaking.

We know that voluntary disclosing on social and environmental impacts can be a result of pressure from stakeholders. But it can also be used to conform to these societal expectations without giving sufficient information.

Throughout our research, we found a mixture of conformity and diversion. Some companies provided vast amounts of positive information about some of their impacts, some provided multiple reports with information scattered between them, and then some were straightforward with the required information.

Companies should use CATA as a tool to benchmark themselves and their reporting to be able to provide a sufficient and transparent level of information to stakeholders, partners, investors, and consumers.

More on this story is available at:

<https://theconversation.com/how-well-are-nz-companies-reporting-their-climate-impacts-our-new-tracker-shows-very-mixed-results-238314>

### **From Other Government or NGO**

#### ***Proposed amendments to the Gene Technology Act 2000***

The Third Review (Review) of the National Gene Technology Scheme (Scheme) found that overall, the Scheme is working well and has operated successfully in assessing and managing the risks posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The Review also identified opportunities to update and modernise the Scheme that would strengthen it and make sure it remains fit for purpose.

The proposed amendments to Gene Technology Act 2000 (the GT Act) aim to ensure the Scheme maintains flexibility to deal with future developments and challenges. They are the first major changes made to the GT Act since it was implemented.

Consultation with stakeholders is important in the development of the proposed amendments to the GT Act. This consultation provides an opportunity for all impacted industry, regulated entities, academic institutions, researchers, and interested members of the public to consider the proposed amendments to the legislation and how they might impact them.

Consultation responses should be provided via the survey in the consultation hub. Where possible, reasoning and supporting information should be included. Providing consultation responses via the survey in the consultation hub will ensure that input can be clearly considered against the relevant proposed amendments.

It is recommended that the questions in this consultation are considered in conjunction with the Exposure Draft of the Gene Technology Amendment Bill 2024 (the draft Bill) and the Consultation Paper. A future law compilation, that shows how the GT Act would read if amended by the Bill, is available below.

A series of short, targeted information sheets have also been included to support understanding of some of the key sections within the proposed draft Bill. These documents can be downloaded below.

Please note that the draft Bill will require further amendment following this consultation to include the areas that have been outlined in the Consultation Paper.

You do not have to provide a response to all questions - only those that you wish to provide relevant feedback for.

Further details are available at:

<https://consultations.health.gov.au/best-practice-regulation/amendments-to-the-gene-technology-act-200/>

## **CONFERENCES and STUDY OPPORTUNITIES**

### **ANZRSAL 2024 Conference**

The ANZRSAL 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held in the Ann Harding Conference Centre at the University of Canberra, Canberra from 02-03 December 2024. Further details are available at the [ANZRSAL website](#).

### **2024 RSA Winter Conference**

The Regional Studies Association Winter Conference 2024 presents a timely opportunity to champion a positive agenda for regional change and development. The event will provide an important platform to come together, to discuss and debate the future of regions and regional studies, to establish the need and nature of future research imperatives in the field, and to assess options for practitioners and policymakers in working towards brighter regional futures.

The conference organisers are keen to attract papers and closed special sessions (see below) which identify new fields of enquiry, address broad research and policy agendas, and include contributions

from any discipline offering insights at local and regional levels. Papers which are highly innovative, collaborative, international or multi-disciplinary are especially welcome.

Broad themes and key agendas the organisers are keen to facilitate discussion around include, but are not limited to:

- Teaching the next generation: pedagogy, skills, knowledge
- Building better futures: housing, labour markets and infrastructure
- Strategies for enhancing regional security (e.g. health, food, energy, data, financial, geopolitical, democracy)
- Reviving left behind places and tackling uneven development
- Industry 4.0 and the future shape of innovation, industrial development and strategy
- Regional policies for the majority world: fostering stronger South-South and North-South relations
- Designing the regions, cities and rural areas of the future
- Pathways to successful transitions: energy, climate, and sustainability
- Fair regions: justice, democracy, equality
- Equity, diversity and inclusion in regions and regional studies
- Caring for people: health, ageing populations and young people
- Caring for places: communities, land use, settlements, environment, nature
- Welcoming regions: migration, labour, housing
- Cities and regions in a post-Covid world
- Alternative models for regional development (e.g. foundational, circular, post-growth)
- Reshaping regions: the role of universities, private actors, and non-state actors
- Financing regional change: investment flows, trading relations, value chains
- Technological change, innovation and entrepreneurship
- Digital transformations: data analytics, smart cities and AI
- The future of the European project

**Date & Location:** London, UK, 7-8 November 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.

### ***The role of immigrants, emigrants and locals in the historical formation of European knowledge agglomerations***

Philipp Koch, Viktor Stojkoski & César A. Hidalgo

Abstract: Did migrants make Paris a mecca for the arts and Vienna a beacon of classical music? Or was their rise a pure consequence of local actors? We use data on more than 22,000 historical individuals born between the years 1000 and 2000 to estimate the contribution of famous immigrants, emigrants and locals to the knowledge specialisations of European regions. We find that the probability that a region develops or keeps specialisation in an activity (based on the birth of famous

physicists, painters, etc.) grows with both the presence of immigrants with knowledge about that activity and immigrants with knowledge in related activities. In contrast, we do not find robust evidence that the presence of locals with related knowledge explains entries and/or exits. We address some endogeneity concerns using fixed-effects models considering any location–period–activity-specific factors (e.g., the presence of a new university attracting scientists).

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2275571>

### ***State fragility, violence and trade: Dangerous trade routes in Colombia***

Paul H. Jung, Jean-Claude Thill, Luis Armando Galvis-Aponte

Abstract: We investigate the effect of domestic armed violence brought about by insecurity on the geography of freight mobility and the resulting differential access of regions to global markets. There is a preponderance of evidence from the micro-level analysis of Colombia-U.S. export shipping records that export freight shipping from inland regions was re-routed to avoid exposure to domestic armed violence despite extended landside and maritime shipping distances. The discrete choice model shows that the shipping flow was curbed by the extended re-routing due to localized domestic armed violence. The results highlight that security must be accommodated for sustained freight mobility and export-oriented economic development in the Global South.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pirs.2024.100024>

### ***Impact of climate change on Indian agriculture: new evidence from the autoregressive distributed lag approach***

Mohammad Azhar Ud Din, Shaukat Haseen

Abstract: Climate change constitutes one of the most critical challenges of the contemporary period and can affect various sectors of economies across the globe, the agricultural sector is not an exception. This study aimed to assess the impact of climate change on India's agricultural sector from 1990 to 2020. The autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) approach was utilized to determine the short-run and long-run relationships between variables such as carbon dioxide emissions, temperature, energy utilization, and fertilizer consumption. The ARDL method and the Johansen and Juselius cointegration test both supported the existence of a significant and long relationship among the selected variables. The estimated short- and long-run findings showed that carbon dioxide emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>), temperature, and energy consumption affect agricultural yield positively and significantly. These findings have several implications for the Indian economy. With a large population dependent on agriculture, improved productivity can directly impact food security and rural income, consequently leading to the country's overall economic development. Enhanced agricultural output due to these factors may potentially lead to surplus production, allowing India to export more agricultural produce. This can positively impact the country's trade balance and generate revenue through exports.

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***Reimagining Urban Living Labs: Enter the Urban Drama Lab***

Cecilie Sachs Olsen, Merlijn van Hulst

Abstract: In this paper we introduce the Urban Drama Lab as a new manifestation of Urban Living Labs. We expand current debates concerning Urban Living Labs by contrasting and comparing them with knowledge and practices developed in the field of theatre and performance. This enables us to scrutinise the

ways in which stakeholders, issues and interests are represented and, in extension, performed in Urban Living Labs. We argue that this is important for two reasons: (1) because the current focus of Urban Living Labs on offering a real-world testing ground for urban experimentation constitutes a specific way of representing and performing stakeholders, issues, and interests, but that (2) questions of representation are seldom explicitly addressed because Urban Living Labs are seen to offer direct access to the real-world in a presumably 'neutral' setting. The Urban Drama Lab foregrounds that Urban Living Labs can never be neutral and free from structures of power but that they can set up a frame in which these structures can be scrutinised, assessed and possibly remodelled and rearranged. We conclude that the Urban Drama Lab might enable a fuller understanding of how the Urban Living Lab may address not only complex urban challenges, but also how it might also engage better with the power relations, contestations, conflicts and politics that are often at the core of these challenges.

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***Analysis of child development facts and myths using text mining techniques and classification models***

Mehedi Tajrian, Azizur Rahman, Ashad Kabir, Rafiqul Islam

Abstract: The rapid dissemination of misinformation on the internet complicates the decision-making process for individuals seeking reliable information, particularly parents researching child development topics. This misinformation can lead to adverse consequences, such as inappropriate treatment of children based on myths. While previous research has utilized text-mining techniques to predict child abuse cases, there has been a gap in the analysis of child development myths and facts. This study addresses this gap by

applying text mining techniques and classification models to distinguish between myths and facts about child development, leveraging newly gathered data from publicly available websites. The research methodology involved several stages. First, text mining techniques were employed to pre-process the data, ensuring enhanced accuracy. Subsequently, the structured data was analysed using six robust Machine Learning (ML) classifiers and one Deep Learning (DL) model, with two feature extraction techniques applied to assess their performance across three different training-testing splits. To ensure the reliability of the results, cross-validation was performed using both k-fold and leave-one-out methods. Among the classification models tested, Logistic Regression (LR) demonstrated the highest accuracy, achieving a 90 % accuracy with the Bag-of-Words (BoW) feature extraction technique. LR stands out for its exceptional speed and efficiency, maintaining low testing time per statement (0.97  $\mu$ s). These findings suggest that LR, when combined with BoW, is effective in accurately classifying child development information, thus providing a valuable tool for combating misinformation and assisting parents in making informed decisions.

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### **Regional Studies**

Vol. 58, Issue 9, 2024

#### ***Productivity slowdown across European regions: does non-standard work matter?***

Michele Capriati, Valeria Cirillo, Marialuisa Divella

Pages 1687-1709  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2281428>

Abstract: In recent decades, Europe has experienced a significant slowdown in productivity, accompanied by rising regional

inequalities. At the same time, the fragmentation of work and the rise of non-standard forms of employment have deeply reshaped labour markets. Through the analysis of an extensive database comprising data on regional labour markets and productivity trends, we investigate the relationship between non-standard work and labour productivity dynamics in European regions from 2004 to 2018. The findings highlight that increasing non-standard employment across regions is likely to negatively affect labour productivity growth. Moreover, to some extent, the spread of non-standard jobs, especially of permanent, yet involuntary, part-time positions, might contribute to the widening of regional disparities.

#### ***The role of regulation and regional government quality for high-growth firms: the good, the bad and the ugly***

Sara Amoroso, Benedikt Herrmann, Alexander S. Kritikos

Pages 1710-1727  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2024.2366289>

Abstract: High-growth firms (HGFs) are important for job creation and productivity growth. We investigate the relationship between product and labour market regulations, as well as the quality of regional governments that implement these regulations, and the development of HGFs across European regions. Using data from Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Economic Forum (WEF), and Gothenburg University, we show that both regulatory stringency and the quality of the regional government relate to the regional shares of HGFs. In particular, we find that the effect of labour and product market regulations is moderated by the quality of regional government. Depending on the quality of regional governments, regulations may have a ‘good, bad or ugly’ influence on the development of HGFs. Our findings

contribute to the debate on the effects of regulations and offer important building blocks to develop tailored policy measures that may influence the development of HGFs in a region.

***Does decentralisation theorem shape intermunicipal cooperation?***

Quentin Frère, Lionel Védrine

Pages: 1728-1753

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2282139>

**Abstract:** This paper proposes a theoretical model of voluntary intermunicipal cooperation and empirically tests its assertions through the French municipalities' choices of transferring their competences to the intermunicipal level. Using an original threshold models inference procedure, a probit model is estimated on shared competences. Two main results arise. Contrary to the decentralisation theorem prediction, citizens' preference heterogeneity does not hinder local cooperation, but fiscal potential heterogeneity does. Moreover, a zoo effect is at stake for some competences, for which a significant threshold effect in their transfer probability is identified.

**Asia-Pacific Journal of Regional Science**

Volume 8, Issue 2 (June 2024)

***Regional decline and structural changes in Northeast China: an exploratory space-time approach***

Yilin Chen

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41685-023-00328-0>

**Abstract:** Literature on New Economic Geography (NEG) highlights the importance of spatial concentration and spillover effects in economic growth or decline. Northeast China, as an old industrial base, is experiencing a regional decline since its transition to the post-industrial stage. Therefore, what is the main sectoral composition in Northeast China and

how does this influence regional decline? To what extent do spatial spillovers play a role before and during the regional decline of Northeast China? Based on these questions, we investigated the spatial connections between regional decline and structural changes in Northeast China over three development periods: Rust Belt (1995–2002), revival (2002–2015), and decline (2015–2019). The recent exploratory space-time data analysis was employed on prefecture-level income and its structural change components (sectoral output and employment ratio). We found that the possible reason for the regional decline in Northeast China is premature deindustrialisation. Spatial co-decline in the employment of industry and construction, the primary source of regional decline, facilitates most of the space-time patterns of the regional income. Agglomeration of the agricultural sector has shifted to the north, while industry and construction have gravitated towards the middle and south, with no clear spatial patterns in the service sector. Dependence on natural resources has a "lock-in effect" that inhibits the transition from industry to services, so industry and construction remain the most efficient in Northeast China. Strengthening spatial connections is essential for local governments to develop service sectors and overcome declining conditions.

***Provincial income convergence in Vietnam: spatio-temporal dynamics and conditioning factors***

Minh-Thu, Thi Nguyen

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41685-024-00334-w>

**Abstract:** In this article, we use a three-step procedure that combines the log t convergence test, Explanatory Spatial Data Analysis, and ordered logit regression to determine the spatio-temporal dynamics and determinants of provincial income clustering in Vietnam during the 2010–2020 period. Our findings are three-fold. First, provincial income clustering in Vietnam follows patterns of club



convergence towards multiple equilibria. Seven convergence clubs encompassing 61 provinces are identified. Second, spatial autocorrelation encourages neighboring provinces to converge toward shared income equilibria. High-income clusters are observed in the Northern and Southern Key Economic Regions, while low-income clusters are concentrated in the mountainous areas of Northern Vietnam. Finally, both internal and external factors significantly affect the formation of convergence clubs. Vital internal factors include localities' initial conditions of physical capital and structural change. Meanwhile, external factors refer to spatial externalities among neighboring provinces. We highlight spatial complementarity in physical capital accumulation and spatial competition in industrial intensification among neighboring provinces.

*Assessing the impact of rural electrification on economic growth: a comprehensive analysis considering informal economy and income inequality in Bangladesh*

Sanjoy Kumar Saha

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41685-024-00336-8>

Abstract: Rural electrification, serving as a proxy for energy access, is pivotal for economic growth in Bangladesh. This paper investigates the long-run and short-run effects of rural electrification (RELEC) on economic growth, while also considering the influence of the informal economy, and income inequality. Using an autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) approach and analyzing data of Bangladesh economy over the period 1976–2020, the study finds that RELEC has a significant positive impact on economic growth in the long run. However, in the short run, RELEC exhibits negative effects on economic growth. FMOLS method is utilized to check the sensitivity that confirms the long run favorable impact of rural electrification on economic growth. The Informal Economy

negatively affects growth, while the Gini coefficient has a positive impact in both short and long terms. Vector error correction methodology (VECM) shows bidirectional causality between growth and electrification. This unique study considers diverse determinants amid Bangladesh's evolving economic landscape. Policymakers are urged to diversify the energy mix to meet rural electrification demand, involving private investment, boosting capacity, and fostering competition. Moreover, there is a necessity to promote various channels such as sustainable agriculture, rural industrialization, poverty reduction through which electricity access may enhance growth. The error correction term (ECT) coefficients show a rather quick adjustment process, demonstrating that the model's adjustment mechanism is agile.

**Papers in Regional Science**

Volume 103, Issue 4 (August 2024)

*Regional disparities in the European Union. A machine learning approach*

Massimo Giannini, Barbara Martini

Pages 1-11

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pirs.2024.100033>

Abstract: We investigate the hypothesis of regional convergence in the per-capita GDP in 242 European regions (NUTS2) during the 2000–2021 period. The literature shows mixed results, from absolute convergence towards a joint long-run distribution to multiple regimes (convergence club). Our results show a broad convergence to an unimodal distribution. Although the GDP distribution was characterized by a twin-peak property in 2000, it tends to disappear over time, bringing, in 2021, to an unimodal distribution. Physical and human capital is the most responsible for the convergence process and the EU cohesion funds. To empirically investigate the question, we first apply alternative techniques of cluster identification. Later, we assess whether clusters and covariates affect the per-capita

GDP. We use a novel machine learning algorithm (GPBoost) instead of the more traditional techniques used in the current literature. The results show that a convergence process is at work; physical and human capital are mainly responsible for the gdp explanation. but eu funds play a relevant role as well. moreover, complementarities do exist among these variables.

***Human capital and border effect: The case of Minho River area***

Carlos M. Jardon, X. Martinez-Cobas, E. Shakina

Pages 1-11

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pirs.2024.100035>

Abstract: This study investigates the dynamics of human capital in borderlands, focusing on the case of the Minho River border between Spain and Portugal. We examine how this capital influences company sales in these culturally and economically intertwined regions. The problem is critical due to the unique nature of borderlands in global trade and cultural exchange. Our novel approach uses hierarchical linear models for comparative analysis between municipalities in the border regions and those in the wider province (NUT III UE). This allows a deeper understanding of the localized effects of human capital. Empirical results reveal significant country and border effects on company sales in the examined case. Spanish companies face disadvantages compared to Portuguese ones, likely due to lower industrial land costs, cheaper labor, and different tax systems in Portugal. The analysis indicates a positive border effect on sales, attributed to geographical and cultural proximity, outweighing the disadvantages of smaller firm size and lower agglomeration in border territories. This research not only highlights the specific context of the Minho River borderlands but also offers broader insights into the role of human capital in regional economic development. This case study

provides a foundation for future research and policy formulation in similar border regions worldwide, emphasizing the significance of human capital and its varied impact across different geographical and political contexts.

***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 ANZRSAI**

### **ANZRSAI 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 ANZRSAI and proposes his name as a lifetime member of ANZRSAI.

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