

Centre for People,  
Organisation & Work



**Factors in Regional Mobility:  
An Addendum to Diversity and Growth in Regional  
Development**

**Report for Regional Australia Institute**

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# 1 Introduction

This report investigates the impact of residential mobility on the demographic structure of the six study regions, using changes in place of residence between 2011 and 2016 for the analysis. Four mobility statistics provide the foundation for the analysis: non-movers, in-movers, out-movers, and net-migration.

Analyses of two forms of Australian Bureau of Statistics data on change of residence are included. First, the indication of whether census respondents were living at the same address in 2016 as in 2011 is recorded in the *UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator*. Second, the place of residence 5 years ago is recorded in the ASGS structure as *PUR5P Place of Usual Residence Five Years Ago*, which enables the attributes of those who move into a region and those who move out to be compared.

To some extent, these two data sources reflect the distinction made between migration and mobility, as:

Residential mobility is a relocation only of the place of residence. Migration is a relocation not only of the place of residence, but also of activities in other life course trajectories such as in the labour market (Van Wissen & Dykstra 2012, p. 179).

To elucidate, residential mobility is part of migration, along with other factors that imply changes in lifestyle and livelihood.

Given this distinction, the first analytical section of the report focuses on residential mobility in the six study region, indicating that while there is variation between the regions, as a whole the propensity to remain in the same location over the five year period of analysis is similar to all Australians.

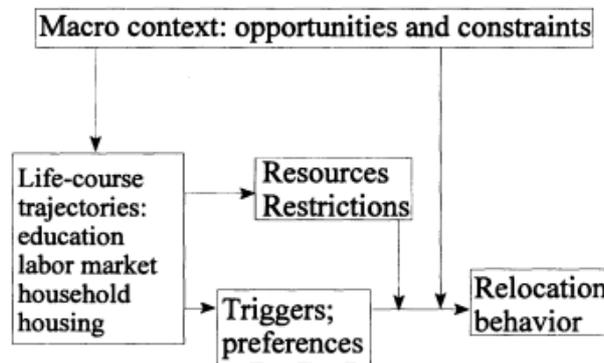
The second section of analysis provides the in and out flows in 5 year age groups in each of the six study region. The results concur with previous studies, particularly the mobility of those transitioning out of secondary education for employment, education and social reasons (Cuervo & Wyn 2012; Dalley-Trim & Alloway 2010; Dufty-Jones et al. 2014).

The third section focuses on the outcomes for residents of the study regions that were in the crucial 15-19 and 19-24 years of age groups as of the 2011 census, and therefore aged 20 to 29 by the time of the 2016 census. This cohort is of particular interest due to their higher propensity for mobility and migration, the proposition that the continued out-flow of this cohort from is detrimental to regional communities and, their connection to the training and employment issues central to this program of work.

This report should be read in conjunction with the *Diversity and Growth in Regional Development* (Toner & Douglas 2020), also completed as part of the 2019 Regional Australia Institute research program.

## 1.1 Factors in mobility and migration

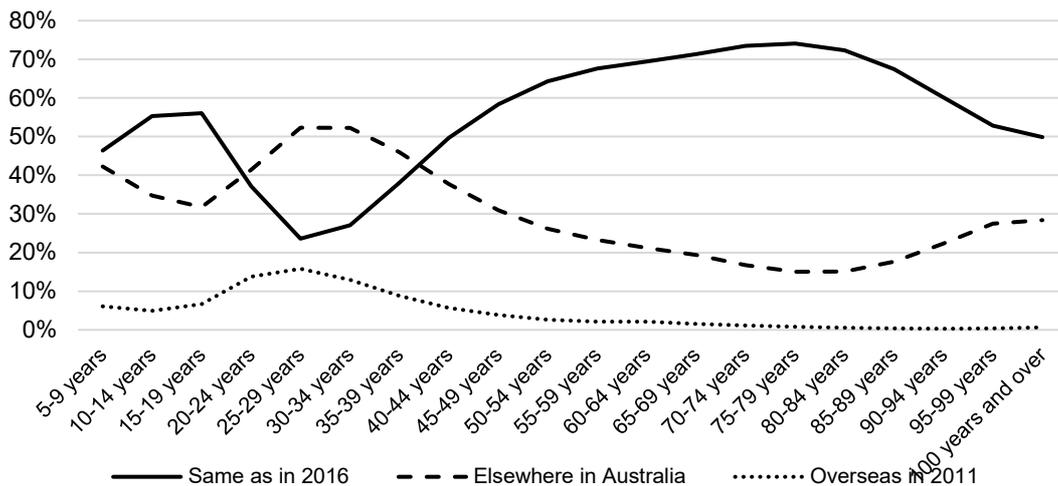
Relocating within and across regions is seen as a response to a range of macro-factors, life situations, individual constraints and resources, as depicted in the diagram in Figure 1. Certain stages of life are associated with greater propensity to relocate, such as the transition from secondary education to employment or further education, family formation, and retirement (Sander & Bell 2016; Van Wissen & Dykstra 2012).



**Figure 1: Mobility and migration: a theoretical framework**

Source: Van Wissen and Dykstra (2012, p. 164)

The data in Figure 2 provides the propensity for Australians to be living in the same location in 2016 as 2011, by five year age groups, as well as if they were living elsewhere in Australia or overseas at that time. There are two demographic groups with substantially higher propensity to have relocated, those aged in their 20s and early 20s, and those aged over 79.



**Figure 2: Place of usual residence 5 years ago indicator by age - 2016**

Source: ABS (2016), AGE5P - Age in Five Year Groups by UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator, all Australian residents.

The propensity for migration across these age groups can be assessed through the prism of the migration framework. As people move through life stages, different needs emerge and interactions with government policies and macro-economic conditions change, related to employment, housing, health care and service provisions, and connections to community.

### **1.1.1 Employment and migration**

The influence of employment on migration decisions has been widely studied, both in Australia and internationally. Based on analysis of migration and employment data for Queensland, Trendle (2009, p. 306) observed both people following employment and employment following people but concluded that employment-led migration provides a “stronger for the explanation that employment change drives population change i.e., that people follow jobs”.

Studies in the United States have provided mixed outcomes. The seminal study of Muth (1971, p. 295) found that employment and population “affect and are affected by the other”. However, subsequent research has indicated that differences in incomes and employment prospects provide explanation for inter-regional migration (Greenwood 1985; Greenwood & Hunt 1989; Greenwood et al. 1991). An important observation of this propensity for migration to be a result of employment growth within regions is that interventions aimed at improving local circumstances may not improve the circumstances of under- or unemployed residents as new opportunities are taken up by in-migration or those commuting from outside the region, particularly for employment that has prerequisite training or experience requirements (Bill et al. 2006; Stockdale et al. 2000; Trendle 2009). Beer et al. (2011, pp. 1-2) associated rapid population in-flows as a result of employment opportunities in the resources sector with divides in regional housing markets:

In many rural and regional centres, the pace of change within their housing markets has been substantial. Much of rural and regional Australia has been affected by the rapid house price inflation evident across Australia since the year 2000. Many regions have been affected by the ‘resources boom’ which has placed increased strain on many housing markets and resulted in bifurcated housing markets: one segment of the market is focused on high income, often temporary, mine workers; while the established population working in ancillary industries or not working at all are forced to compete for less expensive properties at the bottom end of the housing market.

In this context, it is of note that the federal government are actively promoting regional migration as a way out of unemployment and dependence on the Newstart allowance, as Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack stated:

There are jobs out there in regional Australia and there are good paying jobs and what I think we do need in this country is a more mobile workforce.

And so people have to be prepared to move sometimes out of their comfort zone and their home town and move to the next town to take a job.

There are jobs there – it is just that you’re not always going to get a job in the home town you’ve grown up in; you’re not always going to get the job that you actually want for the right here and now (cited in Remeikis 2019).

It is of note that this statement was in response to whether unemployment benefits should be raised. That is, the government’s position can be interpreted as spatially blind, whereby regional development is fostered through people relocating to opportunity as opposed to intervening to create employment and opportunity in places of disadvantage (Barca et al. 2012).

### **1.1.2 Youth Mobility**

The migration drivers and experiences of regional youth have been frequently researched in Australia and internationally (see Hillman & Rothman 2007). The propensity to relocate has been associated with the macro-level opportunities and constraints associated with residing in regional areas, as well as life-course trajectories outlined in the Figure 1 framework. Dufty-Jones et al. (2014) consider that the reasons are broadly structural and socio-cultural. Structural issues are related to the stage-of-life, such as finishing school, starting employment and leaving the parental home. In a European study, Thissen et al. (2010, p. 434) found that these life-stages are likely to occur earlier in rural youth, albeit “significantly connected with hard structural factors - where they expect to find work -on the one hand, and soft cultural factors - where they feel at home - on the other”. This introduces the socio-cultural factors in youth migration decisions, where leaving regional areas have become normalised, as a result of the influence of peers, family and institutions (Dufty-Jones et al. 2014). These expectations -what appear to be norms for significant sections of regional communities – was also evident in focus groups of young people held across Australia, as

... it was the case that most of the students were looking *onward* and, in line with this in many instances, *outward* – away from their rural communities – in order to accommodate and fulfil their aspirations for the future (Dalley-Trim & Alloway 2010, p. 121).

Of interest is the indication that education institutions are communicating to “non-academic and academic students alike regarding the desirability of moving beyond this town if you really want to get on” (Forsey 2015, p. 780), which is linked to investment in the quality of education provided in the city. Forsey also observes dichotomies in the literature exploring the mobility-education nexus: ‘learning to stay’ in remote Canadian fishing communities, and ‘learning to leave’, where:

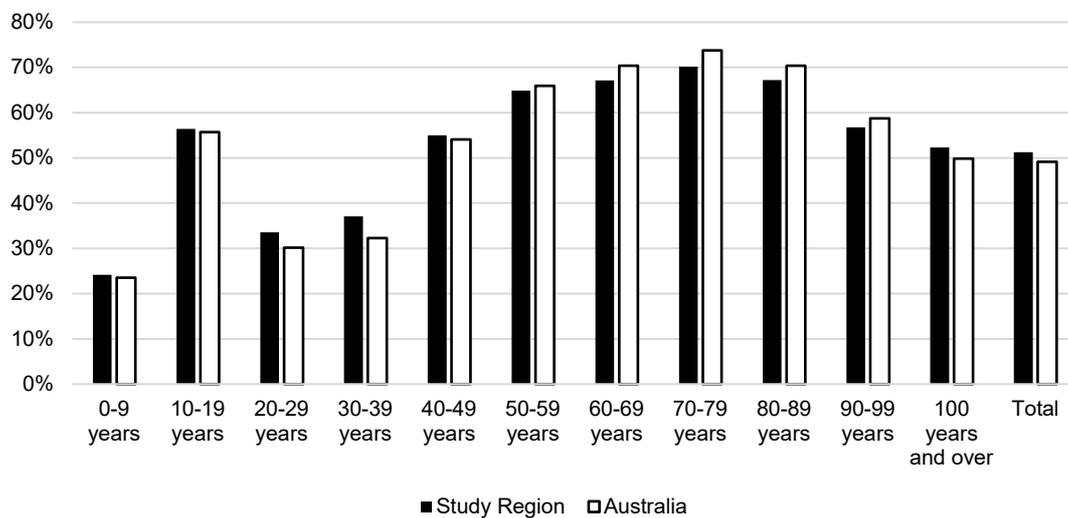
... place attachment and local knowledge are precisely what many rural educators struggle to subvert in the interests of democracy and what is often called ‘broadening the horizons’ of rural children and youth (Corbett 2007, p. 10).

Therefore, the higher propensity for youth and young adults to be mobile and to migrate is a result of social expectations as much as economic and employment drivers. There is evidence that as some people move through stages of life they will return to - or at least near - their previous places of residence (Hillman & Rothman

2007). The result is a complex interaction between the private benefits of following opportunities in employment and education, the social benefits of people returning to communities offering experience and human capital and the social disbenefits of dejuvenation and in some instances population decline.

## 2 Residential Mobility

Residents of the six study regions have a similar propensity as other Australians to be living in the same location in 2016 as they were in 2011, as shown in Figure 3. This has been confirmed by Chi-test analysis, which indicated that propensity to move was independent of location (95% confidence). As this data is the percentage of people that are living at the same address as 5 years' ago, people who have relocated within the same SA4 are not included. An advantage of using this data is that changes to administrative or statistical geography in the intercensal period does not impact on the analysis.



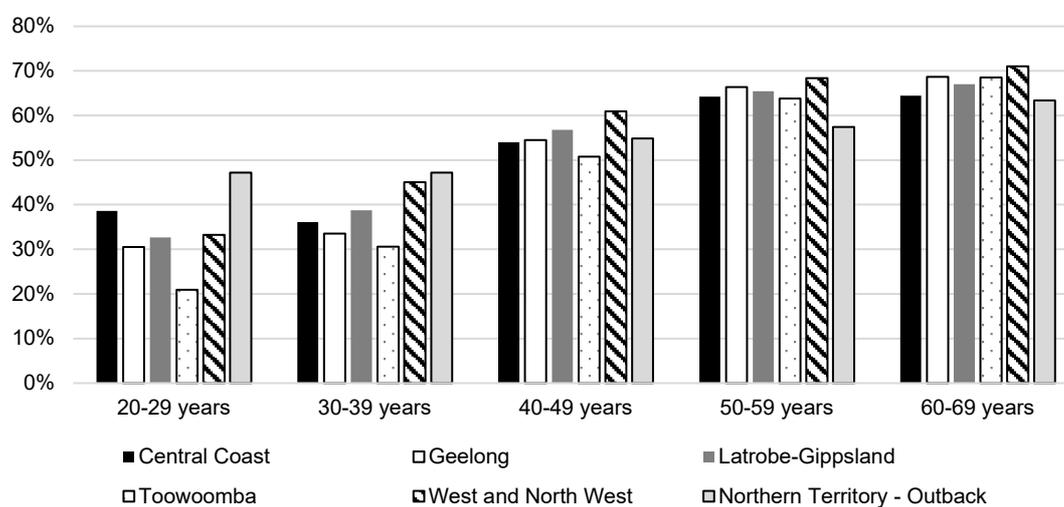
**Figure 3: Percentage of residents living in the same place as five years ago - 10 year age groups, 2016**

Source: ABS (2016), Study region SA4s, UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator.

It is of note that the data indicates that those aged between 20 and 39 years residing in the study regions have a marginally greater propensity to be living in the same address than the for all of Australia. While this age group has a low propensity to be living at the same address in general, due to stage of life factors, this result is against expectations as the declining population within this age group is seen as an issue in regional areas. Also, the low percentage of those at the same address for 0-9 years is attributable to those aged up to five years at the time of the census were not applicable, as they had not been born in 2011. The decreasing propensity for remaining in the same location as people pass 80 years of age is likely a result of relocations to nursing homes or other aged care facilities.

For the six study regions, the mobility of the working-age population is depicted in Figure 4. There are three main observations from this data. First, there is that there is

a greater percentage of Outback Northern Territory residents aged between 20 and 39 years residing in the same place in comparison to the other regions, but a greater propensity to relocate in the older age brackets. Second is the high propensity for residents of Toowoomba aged between 20 and 49 years to have relocated between 2011 and 2016. The third observation is that residents of West and North West Tasmania are likely to be living in the same location, with the highest or second-highest percentage in all age categories above 30 years of age.



**Figure 4: Percentage of residents living in the same place as five years ago, study regions - 10 year age groups, 2016**

*Source: ABS (2016), Study region SA4s, UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator.*

### 3 Migration and Demography

This section of the report extends the previous section by investigating the impact of residential mobility on the demography of the six study regions, using SA4 geographic classifications. The demographic changes are depicted in the six charts included in *Figure 5: Mobility and demographic change – 2011-16*, on pages 8 and 9.

#### 3.1.1 Method

There are three elements to the mobility data in this section of the report:

1. Non-movers is the count of those who lived in the same SA4 in 2016 as in 2011.
2. Out-movers is the count of those who lived in the SA4 in 2011, but not in 2016.
3. In-Movers is the count of those who lived elsewhere in 2011 and in the SA4 in 2016.

In-movers and Out-movers are compared to prove the number of Net movers per 5-year age bracket in each of the study regions SA4s.

### 3.1.2 Discussion

The first observation is that the six study areas have varying demographic age structures. Notable demographic features for the study areas include:

- Moving into and out of SA4s is most likely to occur in people's twenties.
- Both inward and outward migration declines markedly in the post-65 years of age brackets.
- For most age groups across the regions, there is net in-migration, the only significant net out-migration was recorded for 20 to 24 year olds in the Latrobe-Gippsland and West and North West Tasmania SA4s.

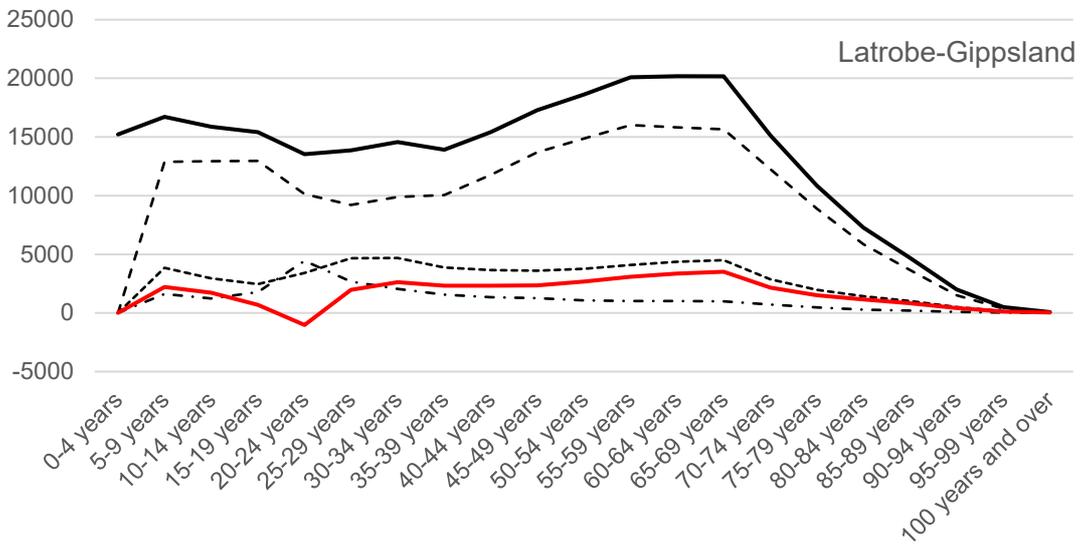
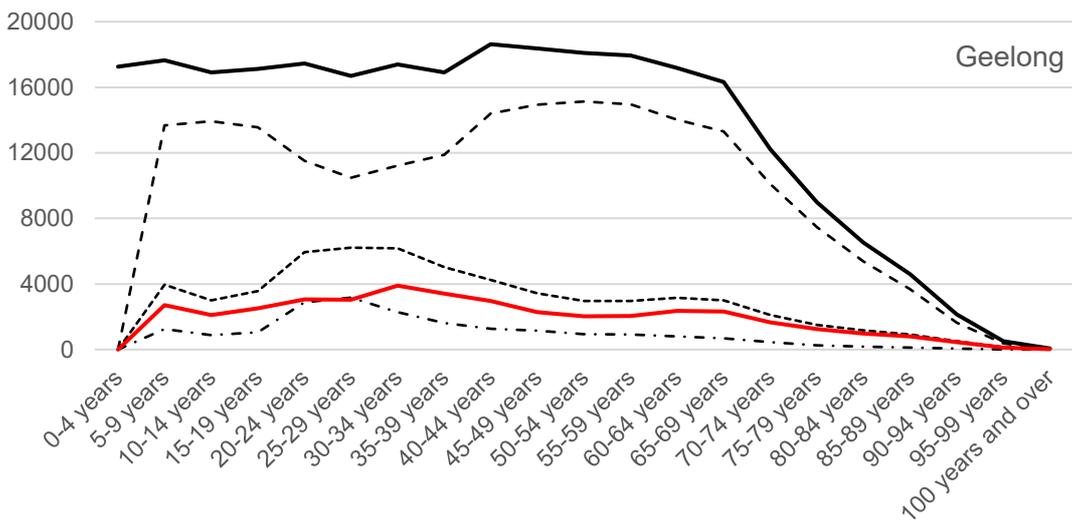
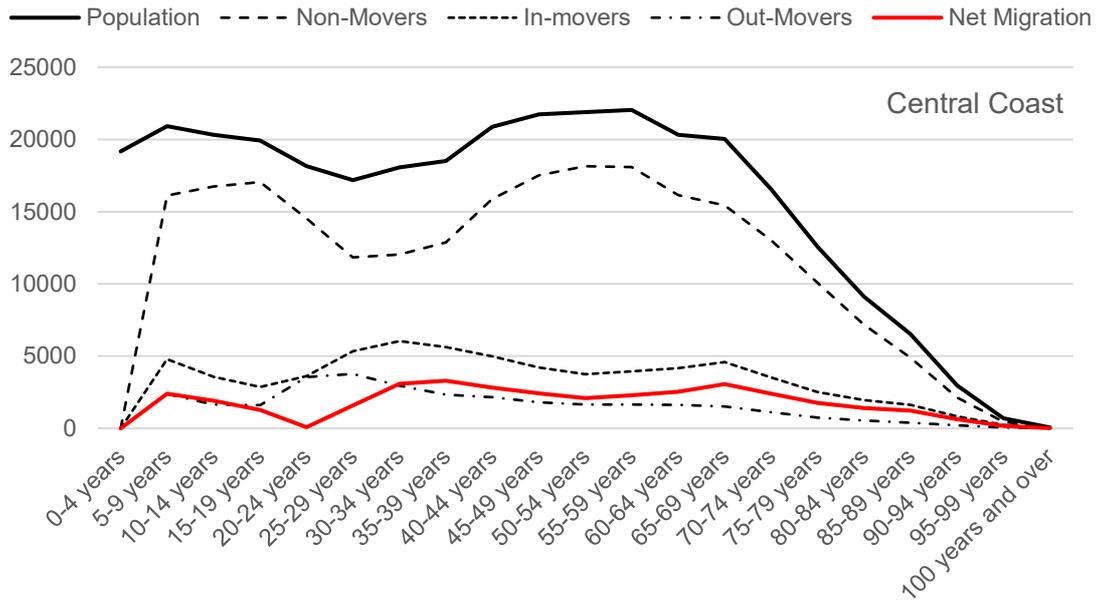
Geelong and Central Coast are similar, with relatively equal distributions up to the 64 to 69 years of age bracket. The Central Coast does have a noticeably lower number of residents in between 20 and 34 years of age, which can be attributed to the lower net in-migration of people of these ages. In particular, mobility resulted in a net-zero effect on the 20 to 24-year age population while all other age groups grew.

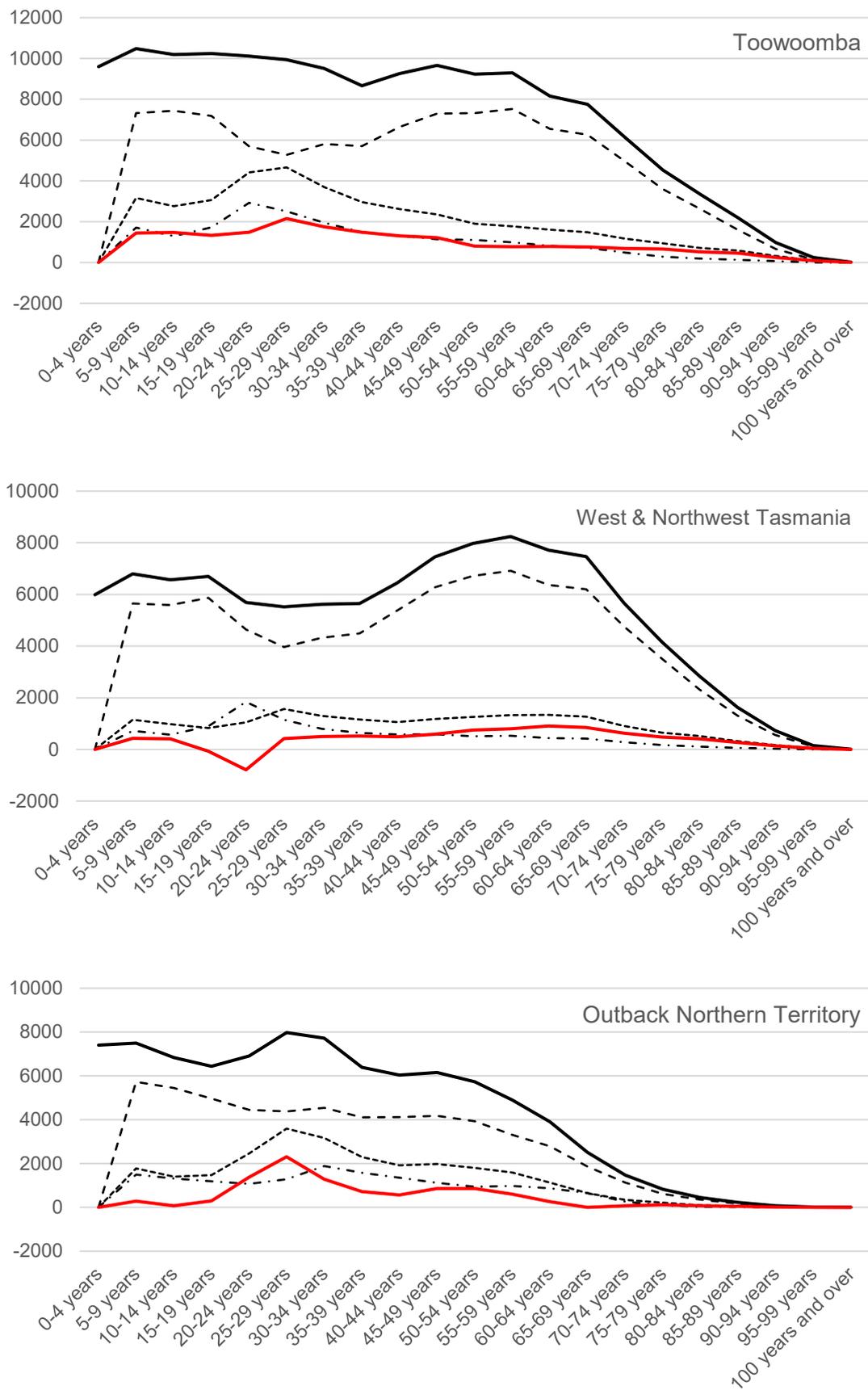
Net migration to Geelong is positive and is the only one of the six study regions where there is not a negative or low net out-migration of those aged between 20 and 24 years. The mobility patterns of those aged between 20 and 29 is explored further in Section 4. There is a noticeable increase in the Geelong profile at the 40 to 44 year old bracket, which is likely to be a result of natural increase in the late 1970s or earlier in-migration patterns, rather than net in-migration between 2011 and 2016. In each of the six study regions, the non-mover cohort was larger than either in-movers or out-movers, although with notable variation in the gap between the six study areas.

There is indication of retirement-related in-migration to the Central Coast, Geelong and Latrobe-Gippsland regions, with each reporting a noticeable uplift in net migration in the 60 to 64 year old age group, which tapers off in the older age groups. The increase in mobility in this cohort is associated with the move of the 'baby boomers' through this stage of life, and also a reflection of their higher propensity to move than other generations (Sander & Bell 2016). As noted in Section 2, there is a propensity for those aged over 80 to shift residential address, when taken in conjunction with this data it suggests that they are relocating within place: it is mobility, not migration.

The ageing population issues discussed in the *Diversity in Regional Growth* report is evident in the demographic distribution of the Latrobe-Gippsland and West and North West Tasmania SA4s. These two study regions also experienced net out-migration of those aged between 20 and 24.

Toowoomba's demographic profile is a slowly declining distribution with age, with a slightly lower number in the 30-34 years of age bracket. This appears to be a result of a cross-over point between increasing non-movers with age and declining net in-migration with age.





**Figure 5: Mobility and demographic change – 2011-16**

Source: ABS (2016), Study Area SA4s, UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator.

## 4 The 20 to 29-year-old Cohort

As the 20 to 29 year olds' are the most mobile demographic cohort, this section investigates the relationships between mobility, employment and education for this cohort to provide insight into the influences on relocation to and from regional areas.

A salient feature of this cohort is that as the mobility data spans the five-year intercensal period, they were aged between 15 and 24 in 2011 and thus many will have finished secondary education and moved into the next phase of life: family formations, employment and education, or for some unemployment or disengagement from the labour force (Cuervo & Wyn 2012; Dalley-Trim & Alloway 2010; Dufty-Jones et al. 2014). In Australia, research in the mobility patterns of age cohorts found "high unemployment does appear to interact with cohort effects in shaping the propensity to migrate among young adults" (Sander & Bell 2016, p. 627).

### 4.1.1 Method

To capture these influences on mobility in the years spanning the transition out of secondary education, the data in Table 1 and Figure 6 combines labour force status and type of educational institution attending data for 20 to 29 year olds at the time of the 2016 census. The migration analysis uses the same methods as Section 3 to compare the employment and educational status of in-movers, out-movers and non-migrants for the six study region SA4s between 2011 and 2016. As the results of a combination of two data sets, there may be instances where individuals are recorded twice - employed in part-time work as well as attending an educational institution for example – and thus the rows in Table 1 do not total to 100%.

An additional point to note is that this data is for place of residence, it does not indicate whether the members of this cohort are employed or enrolled in study within their place of residence SA4.

### 4.1.2 Discussion

For the 2016 census year, full-time Employment is the main activity of the 20 to 29 year olds. The only exception was Outback NT, where *Not in the labour force* accounted for the greatest number.

In all regions, the unemployment rate is similar for out-movers and non-movers, but greater for in-movers, with the exception of Outback NT. While the explanation for this is not obvious from the data and would require additional research, previous research on migration patterns in regional Queensland has indicated that people migrate to follow employment opportunities (Trendle 2009). One indication from the data is that few people in this cohort are moving into Outback NT without employment as only 3 per cent of in-movers were unemployed. The data in Figure 6 also highlights the low levels of workforce or education participation in Outback NT.

The migration patterns for the 20 to 29 year old cohorts also indicates the importance of access to universities if these people are to remain in regional areas. The marked contrast in the in-movers attending university in Geelong compared to the other SA4s indicates the appeal of Deakin University, as well as the possibility that students are

attracted to the cheaper accommodation in Geelong while studying at Melbourne institutions, as the two cities are only 75 kilometres apart.

**Table 1: Migration summary data, 20 to 29 year olds 2016**

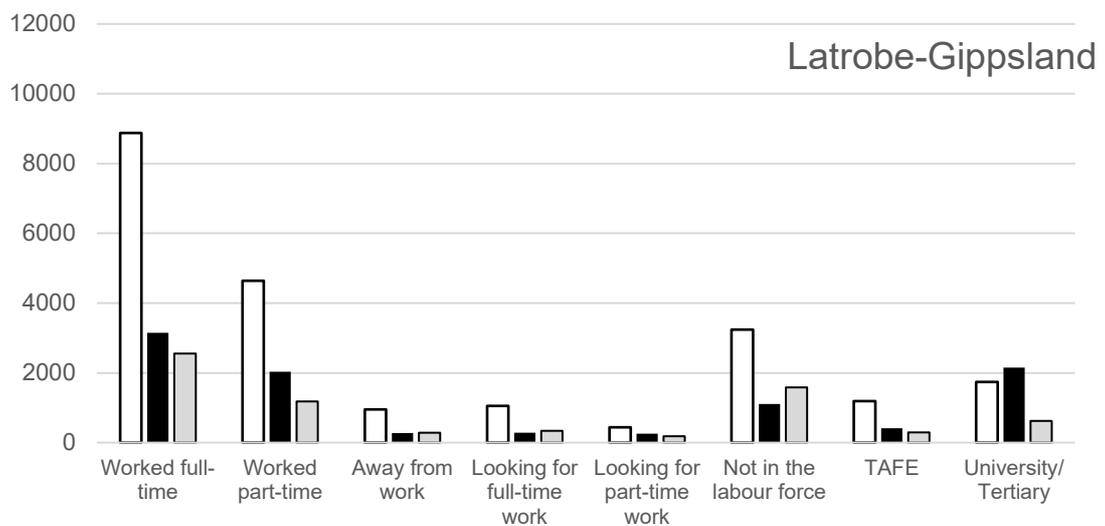
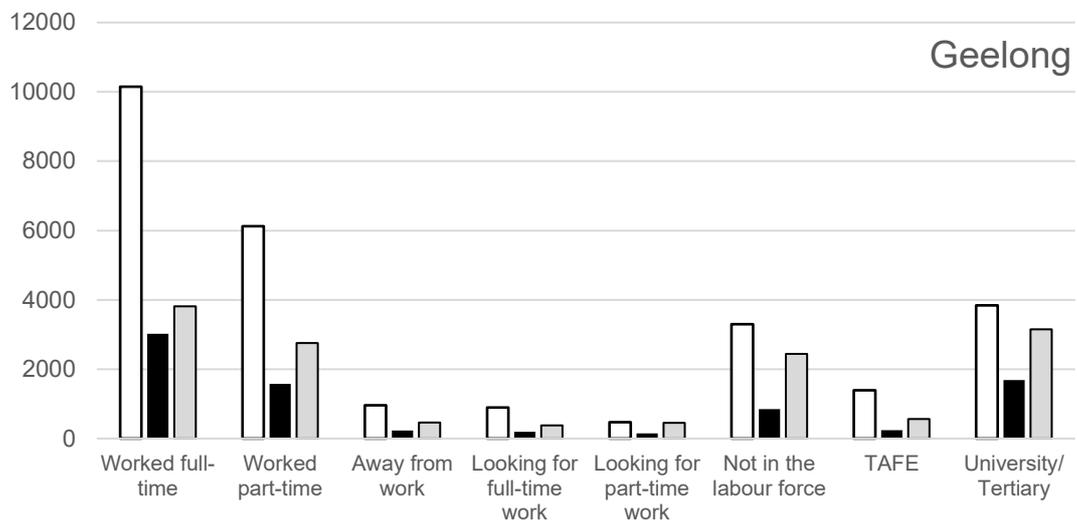
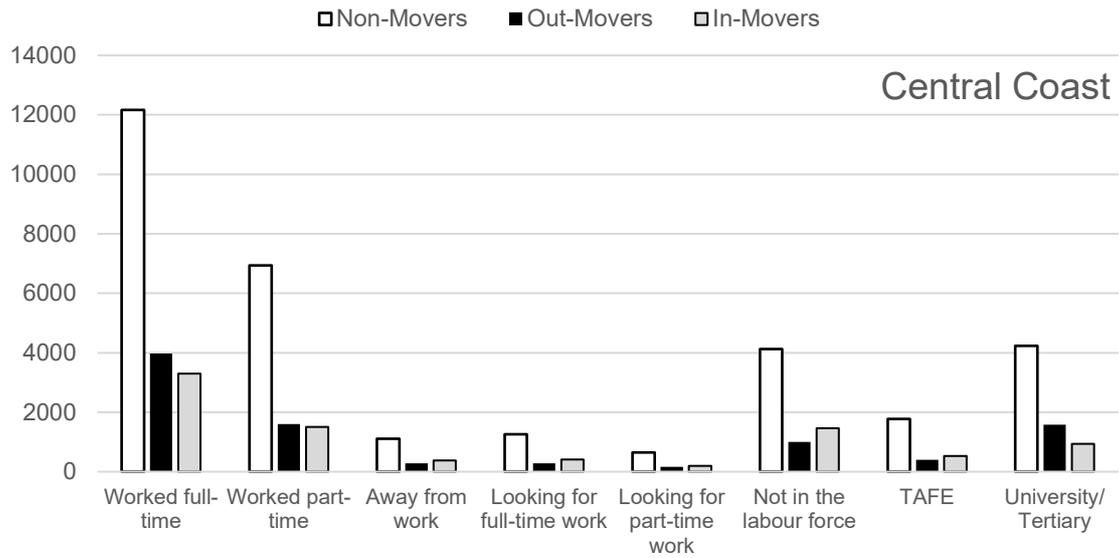
		Unemployment Rate	TAFE	University/ Tertiary
<b>Central Coast</b>	<b>Non-Movers</b>	9%	7%	16%
	Out-Movers	7%	5%	22%
	In-Movers	10%	6%	10%
<b>Geelong</b>	<b>Non-Movers</b>	7%	6%	17%
	Out-Movers	7%	4%	28%
	In-Movers	11%	5%	26%
<b>Latrobe-Gippsland</b>	<b>Non-Movers</b>	9%	6%	9%
	Out-Movers	9%	6%	30%
	In-Movers	11%	4%	8%
<b>Toowoomba</b>	<b>Non-Movers</b>	8%	5%	16%
	Out-Movers	9%	5%	25%
	In-Movers	12%	5%	19%
<b>West and Northwest Tasmania</b>	<b>Non-Movers</b>	10%	6%	6%
	Out-Movers	9%	5%	28%
	In-Movers	14%	3%	6%
<b>Outback NT</b>	<b>Non-Movers</b>	28%	2%	2%
	Out-Movers	13%	7%	21%
	In-Movers	3%	2%	5%

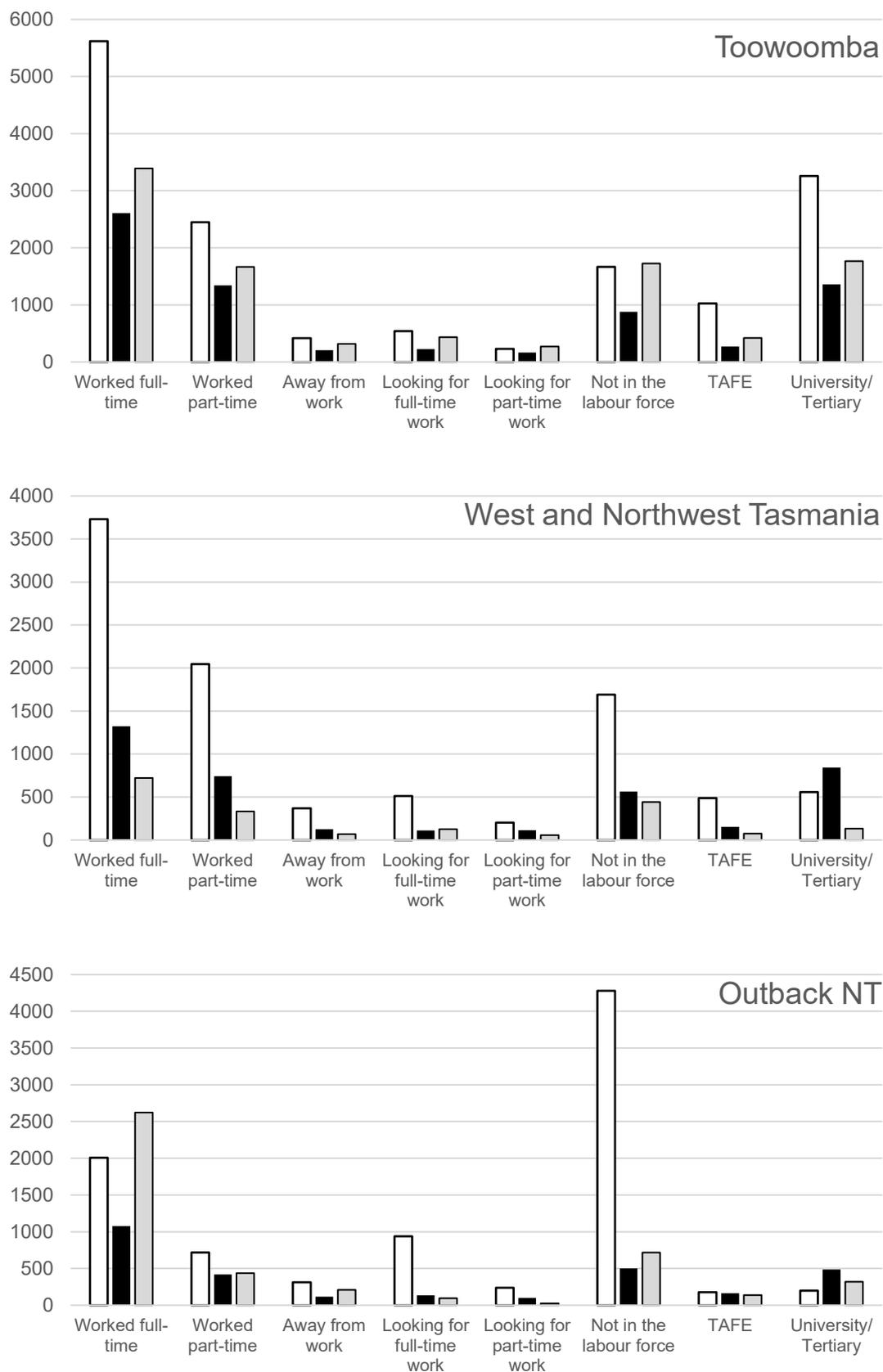
*Source: ABS (2016), Study Area SA4s, UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator, Labour Force Status and Type of Educational Institution Attending.*

This analysis of migration patterns and university attendance is underscored by comparisons between the In- and Out- Movers in the other SA4s, particularly the low-levels of non-movers in tertiary education in Latrobe-Gippsland, West and Northwest Tasmania and Outback NT. Also of note is the comparatively low uptake of tertiary education by the Outback NT cohort.

There is also a low uptake of TAFE in the analysis across all cohorts, particularly in comparison to university enrolments. Of note is the number of Outback NT Out-movers who were enrolled at a TAFE institute, at 7 per cent compared to 2 per cent for the In- and Non- movers.

Caution should be taken in implying causality for mobility decisions in this data, as it indicated propensity rather than decision making processes, and provides a snapshot and two points in time rather than the complex paths of housing, employment and education that typify the lives of many in the 20 to 29 year old cohort. However, the data does indicate the importance of employment opportunity and access to tertiary education in retaining this cohort in regional areas.





**Figure 6: Mobility, employment and education, 20-29 year olds**

Source: ABS (2016), Study Area SA4s, UAI5P Usual Address Five Years Ago Indicator, Labour Force Status and Type of Educational Institution Attending.

## 5 Conclusion

This report provides analysis of the relationships between mobility, migration and demography in six regions of Australia: Central Coast, Geelong, Latrobe-Gippsland, Toowoomba, West and Northwest Tasmania, and Outback Northern Territory. While each region has distinct features, changing places of residence is most prominent in the post-secondary education cohort and to a lesser extent post-retirement.

The data supports previous research relating to the mobility and migration of regional residents aged between 20 and 29 in 2016 in particular, which links relocation decisions to employment and education opportunities, as well as social expectations. Given the data presented here, as well as previous research, access to tertiary education located either within regional cities or in nearby metropolises, appears to be an important factor in retaining and attracting this cohort: Geelong is the primary example of this. There is a notably lower enrolment in TAFE institutions across the cohorts for non-movers, in-movers and out-movers.

Differences were evident between the regions. The entrenched disadvantage in Outback NT is indicated by the low proportion in the labour force, as well as the implication of higher mortality rates in the demographic distribution in Figure 5. The evidence of regional population ageing reported in *Diversity and Growth in Regional Development* (Toner & Douglas 2020) is particularly evident in Latrobe-Gippsland and West and Northwest Tasmania, while the migration data suggests it is more of a result of migration flows of 20 year olds in the Central Coast.

The data presented here can be seen as a preliminary step towards understanding how migration affects the demography of regional Australia. Without qualitative understandings of motivations, experiences, and life trajectories the results can only be indicative of scope and change. With this qualification taken into account, the insights from this research that could be further explored are:

1. The correlations between the strength of regional universities and youth retention and attraction should be explored further, particular to disentangle the effects of local provision and access to institutions in metropolitan areas.
2. Given the propensity for out-movers to work and undertake tertiary education, if they can be encouraged to return to regional areas later in life, they would provide benefits to regional communities through their human capital and workplace experiences. This is also founded in the evidence that people are inherently mobile post-education, that it is likely that many will continue to move regardless of what initiatives are put in place to retain them in regional areas.
3. The TAFE sector appears under-represented in the data. The development of TAFE programs to meet employment demands in growing regional industry sectors, such as health and aged care, can address regional out-migration may be of benefit. This is explored further in the associated report *Work Package 4: Regional Skills Trends and Learning*.

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