

Movement of non-metropolitan youth towards the cities

LSAY Research Report 50

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on a group of young people who were living in non-metropolitan areas in their final years of secondary school, and the pathways they followed in the years following secondary school, including their geographic mobility and participation in education, training and employment. Rural communities have long felt concern about the rate at which young people leave for urban areas, many never to return. This report analyses the issues involved by mapping the experiences of the same group of young people over an extended period of time.

The data used in this report are drawn from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), which studies the progress of cohorts of young Australians as they make the transitions from secondary school to work and further education and training, beginning in Year 9.

The sample for this report was selected based on their home location at the time of the survey in 1997, when the majority of the cohort was in Year 11. At that time, 5112 young people were living in areas considered to be non-metropolitan, that is, outside the major cities of Australia and their surrounding suburbs (Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth, Canberra and Brisbane). The report follows their experiences until the end of 2004, at which point their modal age was 23 years. It is the first Australian study to use a national longitudinal data set to study young people's geographic mobility.

Major findings of the investigations are summarised below.

What pathways do non-metropolitan youth follow in the years after school?

- Among young people in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort who had been living in non-metropolitan areas in 1997 (when 16 years of age), 26 per cent were living in a metropolitan area in 2004, with 36 per cent having experienced at least one year in a major city during 1998–2004.
- For many of the young people who did leave their non-metropolitan areas, that move was associated with participation in post-compulsory education, and more frequently university study.
- Young people in the non-metropolitan sample moved to the major cities to study at university more frequently than to take up an apprenticeship or traineeship, or to undertake other study.
- Although there was 'return migration', the level was not nearly equal to the number of young people who had moved to the cities. Approximately 30 per cent of young people who had relocated from a non-metropolitan area to a major city in the years following secondary school went on to experience a further move back to a non-metropolitan area within the observed time period.

Which young people are most likely to leave non-metropolitan areas in the years after school? Which young people are most likely to stay?

- For young men, current activity had the strongest effect on the likelihood of leaving a non-metropolitan area— full-time study at university and TAFE increased the likelihood of leaving while full-time employment decreased the likelihood of leaving. Young men who had a parent with tertiary qualifications were also more likely to move from a non-metropolitan area to a city.

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- Young women who were involved in full-time study at university were more likely to leave or have left a non-metropolitan area, while those who were working full-time were less likely to leave.
 - For both young men and young women, the less access the location they lived in had to a number of services (including educational facilities), the more likely young people were to move.

Which young people are more likely to move back to a non-metropolitan area after spending some time in a major city?

- For young men, being involved in full-time employment in the last year they were located in a metropolitan area was the only significant influence on whether they were likely to return to a non-metropolitan area or not. Those who were working full-time were less likely to return to a non-metropolitan area.
- Young women who found full-time employment while in the cities were significantly less likely to return to a non-metropolitan area than those who were not working full-time.
- Young women who held tertiary qualifications were less likely to return to non-metropolitan areas than were young women who did not hold such qualifications.

What differences are there in social and financial outcomes for stayers, leavers and returners?

- Compared with young people who remained in non-metropolitan areas (Stayers) and those who moved away but then returned (Returners), fewer Leavers were still living with their parents, and fewer had become parents during the surveyed period. There were no differences in rates of marriage or aspects of life satisfaction across the groups of Stayers, Returners and Leavers.
- Levels of employment were similar across the three groups, although a greater proportion of those in the Stayer group were employed in Trades occupations, and a smaller proportion of Leavers were in similar occupations. There were no differences in the average weekly income and hours worked reported by Stayers, Returners and Leavers once occupations were accounted for.
- Rates of home ownership by age 23 were lower amongst Leavers compared with Stayers and Returners, which may largely reflect more affordable housing in non-metropolitan areas.

Conclusions

Overall, the influence of the variables investigated here on the likelihood that young people would leave non-metropolitan areas in favour of the major cities was not large. This is to be expected, as the decision to leave one's local area is presumably a large step, and influenced by a broader range of factors than was possible to analyse in the current study. While relatively limited possibilities for further education and subsequent employment in many non-metropolitan locations may be a factor in leaving home, other motivations are also at play – including the opportunity for young people to assert their independence, meet new people and have experiences that are not available in their local communities. Nevertheless, the pursuit of further educational opportunities, particularly attending a university, was a significant influence on the likelihood that a young person would relocate from a non-metropolitan area to a major city during late adolescence and early adulthood. The results suggest that the decision to leave non-metropolitan areas, particularly in pursuit of further education, is not a spontaneous one; rather, it is developed over a period of time and within the context of other decisions about one's future, including educational and occupational aspirations and expectations.