

Foreword

This study examines rural development in Korea in the context of ongoing decentralisation reforms. In particular, it examines the effects that Korea's balanced national development policy is having on rural development. As the government's decentralisation agenda advances, new efforts are underway to devolve competencies and fiscal capacity to regional and local governments. This is expected to provide local governments with a greater control of their development strategies, foster urban-rural linkages and promote inclusive growth. These efforts are making some headway. The high levels of concentration in the capital city of Seoul have started to decline in recent years with a concomitant positive population growth observed in some rural regions. Notwithstanding those positive developments however, the balanced national development initiative could further promote inclusiveness of, and growth in, rural communities to enhance well-being and further leverage on specific place-based advantages.

The COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world shortly after this study began has increased the importance of inclusive growth, especially during the recovery, as well as the need to make effective use of public resources across different levels of government. It has also emphasised the critical role that digital technology and connectivity can play in enabling rural areas to participate more broadly and more equally in the modern economy. Looking ahead to the post-pandemic period, there is an opportunity to revisit the benefits and opportunities of rural places to continue to drive the implementation of a balanced national development strategy.

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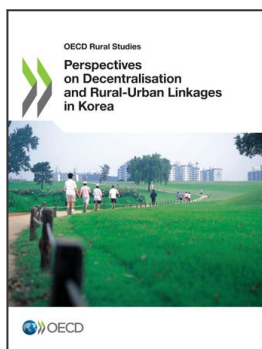
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