

# Foreword

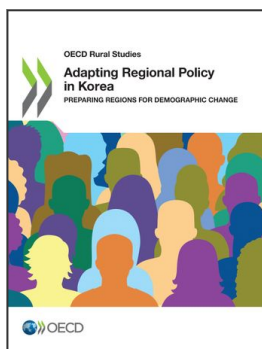
Since the 1950s, OECD countries, including Korea, have experienced three important demographic trends. The first has been a steady increase in the share of the total population living in urban areas, reflecting both internal migration from rural areas, and inflows of migrants from other countries. This has led to the rural share of national populations declining even in those countries where rural populations grew in absolute numbers. A second trend has been the growing sprawl of urban economies to absorb neighbouring rural regions, as part of their functional urban areas. The third trend is an absolute decline in the number of rural people present in a number of OECD countries, reflecting a combination of falling fertility rates and ongoing outmigration and ageing. Until recently, in most OECD countries fertility rates in rural areas exceeded those in urban areas, allowing the rural population to stabilise or increase, despite the high rates of outmigration. More recently, rural fertility rates have shrunk to the same level as in urban areas, and in many OECD countries this level was below the natural replacement rate.

In many OECD rural regions, the key workforce problem had been too few job opportunities for the number of available workers, which in part explained the earlier waves of outmigration in the latter half of the last century, but in recent decades the problem has become instead too few workers for available jobs. For rural regions to attract new workers and mitigate out-migration flows, quality and higher paid jobs will be needed, but so too will be rural attractiveness, including though improved quality and access to services (education, health, childcare) and effective investments in infrastructure and technology (e.g. transport and digitalisation). In addition, higher life expectancy and lower fertility rates have caused a rapid ageing of the population, and in turn an increased demand on public services. With many regions continuing to suffer from shrinkage at some point their local economies may no longer be viable and communities collapse.

While at national level, demographic decline leads to a smaller and older population, the effects and responses will vary greatly across regions. The OECD has shown that rural areas can make effective contributions to national economic objectives, but they need particular types of support that are tailored to their situation and capabilities, which differ considerably from large urban regions. Because new development opportunities have multiple location choices, bottom-up lead initiatives than can mobilise local assets and amenities, foment entrepreneurship and enable effective public and private cooperation can be successful in promoting development pathways.

This report *Assessing Demographic Change: Regional Policy Directions in Korea* analyses Korea's demographic trends and the country's regional and rural development policies in response to demographic and socio-economic changes and identifies effective place-based policy responses to manage demographic pressures in Korea.

The study, which is part of the OECD workstream Preparing Regions for Demographic Change, was carried out as part of the OECD's Regional Development Policy Committee (RDPC) Programme of Work on OECD Rural Studies and was discussed at the 26th meeting of the RDPC's Working Party on Rural Policy. It was approved by the RDPC [CFE/RDPC/RUR(2021)9/REV2] via written procedure on 27 April 2022. The RDPC provides a unique forum for international exchange and debate on regional economies, policies and governance.



**From:**  
**Adapting Regional Policy in Korea**  
Preparing Regions for Demographic Change

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/6108b2a1-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2022), "Foreword", in *Adapting Regional Policy in Korea: Preparing Regions for Demographic Change*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/1baf668e-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.