



Addressing the issue of demographic vulnerability

Demographic handbook for the Nordic countries – and how the B7 islands could make use of it

The new *demographic handbook for the Nordic countries*¹, produced by Nordregio, emphasises the emergence of three key demographic trends across the Nordic countries. Migration is the main driver of demographic development with the population being increasingly concentrated to larger cities and regional centres; the population is also ageing, although this varies both in its extent and in the actual rate of increase, while in addition, the gender balance continues to vary significantly across the territory².



INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY these trends will have a crucial impact on practically all policy fields. The purpose of this policy brief is to provide regional and local policymakers with useful information for decision-making and planning to handle the demographic challenges. The handbook uses demographical vulnerability indicators as a tool to detect local and regional demographic challenges, a tool that can be used in various contexts to benchmark regions, as illustrated, for instance, by the analysis of the B7 Islands. The handbook provides a useful tool enabling policymakers to become more proactive in the face of these on-going demographic changes.

Indicating demographic vulnerability

To highlight the demographic diversity across Nordic municipalities and regions, and in order to make it easy to benchmark areas with others, Nordregio has developed the concept of 'demographic vulnerabilities' based on demographic data. On the basis of 10 demographic indicators - five related to age structure, two related to gender balance, two to natural population change and one to migration - map 1 facilitates the understanding of the demographic dynamics that characterises Nordic regions. It helps to identify types of regions which share common demographic development opportunities, as

Results and policy considerations

The results presented in the handbook show that in Sweden, vulnerable municipalities are typically found in the northern parts of the country but also that there are many high risk municipalities in the inner parts of southern Sweden. In Finland, the most vulnerable municipalities are found in the easternmost parts of the country. In Norway the pattern is more diverse, showing that vulnerable municipalities are to be found across the whole country. In Denmark, the municipalities with the highest risk levels are to be found in the western and southern parts of Jutland and on the southern islands (see map 1).

On the basis of the results reported a number of overall policy conclusions, valid for all of the Nordic countries, can be drawn:

- Since the demographic challenges outlined above vary from region to region the solutions have to take local and regionally-specific conditions as their point of departure.
- Increased regional and local autonomy over decision-making can be important in order to ensure that strategies and policy measures are better anchored and better adapted to place-specific characteristics.

■ In order to meet the challenges of demographic development more efficiently initiatives within different policy areas have to be better coordinated and integrated.

■ Demographic parameters such as gender balance, migration, age structure etc., have to be analyzed together with other types of parameters such as economic structure, education, etc.

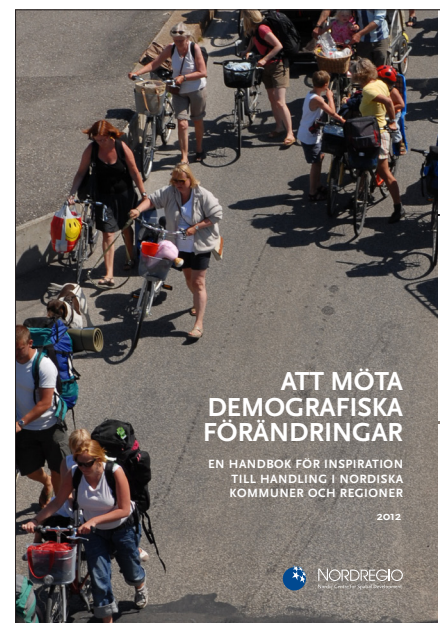
■ There must be greater effort to, and increased focus on, enhancing the attractiveness of the region or municipality concerned not only to attract new citizens but also to create a good living environment for those who already live there.

well as specific challenges. It is however important to bear in mind that the existence of a large number of indicators over the risk level does not necessarily indicate a bad demographic situation but rather it simply illustrates the complexity of the specific situation.

For each of the indicators a threshold has been chosen in identifying whether or not they can be considered 'at risk'. For the age indicators the threshold is set on the potential replacement in comparison to Nordic averages. For example, if the age group of 0–14 years drops below 17.5% a proper reproduction rate comparable to the Nordic standard will not be maintained, and the population will drop unless compensated for by other factors such as in-migration. For the other indicators (gender balance, natural population change and migration) the threshold values have been decided in relation to a balanced situation i.e. a female rate below 100 (female shortage) results in a distorted gender structure which reduces the natural reproduction rate, just as it, with the present pattern of educational and occupational choices, will have implications for the potential labour force.

Learning from others

In addition to providing a description and an analysis of these demographic trends the handbook references some 150 projects, providing concrete examples of how various Nordic municipalities and regions have sought to address these challenges. As highlighted above the demographic development described in map 1 will have a huge impact on practically all policy fields. The collection of examples described in the handbook provides an indication of the extensive number of initiatives and projects that regional and local policymakers have already initiated to deal with the consequences of demographic change across various policy fields. The handbook also sets out a Nordic platform in order that a learning process can be initiated where policymakers can find inspiration from other municipalities and regions. Of course, even though the Nordic countries share many common characteristics important differences between them remain in the division of responsibilities between different actors and levels in the political system. This means that the examples are not always directly transferrable from one context to another.



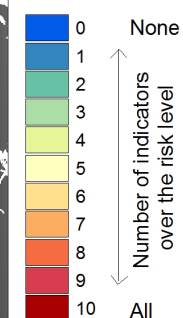
The demographic handbook is published in Swedish and Finnish.

Swedish:
www.nordregio.se/NR20124
Finnish:
www.nordregio.se/NR20125

Demographic Vulnerabilities in 2011

— National boundary
— Regional boundary

Total nr of vulnerabilities



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Thresholds for vulnerabilities

Indicator is understood to be over the risk level, if:

Crude birth rate < 11.0%
Crude death rate > 10.0%
Net migration < 0.0%

Share of population in age group:
0-14 years is below 17.5%
15-24 years is below 12.5%
25-54 years is below 37.5%
55-64 years is above 14.0%
65+ years is above 18.0%

Balance between females & males:
Less females than males
Less than 95 females per 100 males in age group 15-64 years

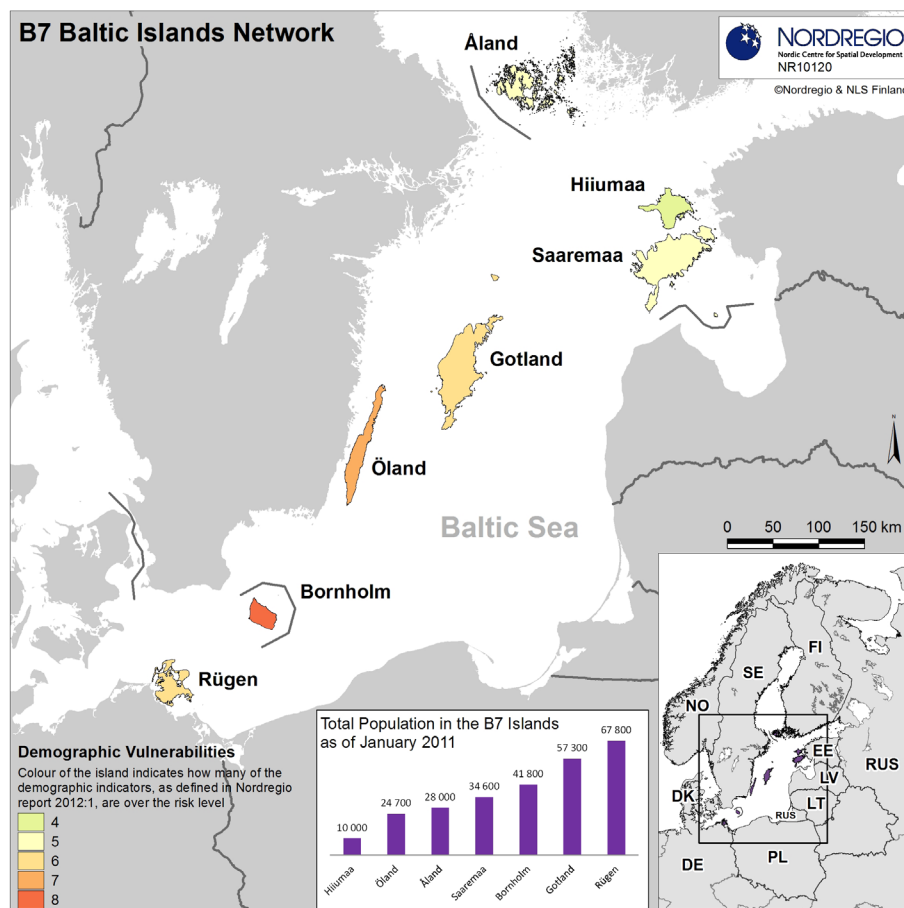
Map 1: Demographic vulnerability based on 10 indicators.

Focus on the Baltic islands

Even though the concept of demographic vulnerabilities, and the thresholds used to help identify them, has been specifically tailored to the Nordic countries and regions, this does not mean that the concept could not be adapted for use in other regions – as long as the territory-specific circumstances are taken into account. When mapping the demographic vulnerabilities for the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea (map 2), a large spectrum of demographic vulnerabilities between the islands can be seen. Hiiumaa is vulnerable on 4 out of 10 indicators, Saaremaa and Åland islands have 5 indicators above the risk level, Gotland and Rügen have 6 indicators, while Öland scores 7 indicators and Bornholm 8.

In terms of age structure and gender balance the Baltic Islands share some common characteristics. All islands are currently coping with the challenges of an ageing population. The low share of children, and also low birth rates, will, moreover, pose challenging implications for the coming decades, particularly as all of the islands also have a high share of elderly people. There are more women than men living on the islands. The surplus of women is primarily related to the high share of older women in these places. In the working-age population (population aged 15–64 years) there is a male surplus in the Nordic islands and in Rügen. In Hiiumaa and Saaremaa there are more women than men, but mostly as a result of a high female surplus in age groups 55 years and over. Compared to Estonian averages, the share of women is however relatively low in Hiiumaa and Saaremaa.

In terms of population change and migration, the Baltic Sea islands show a rather varied pattern. Gotland, Åland and Öland have rising populations. Åland has an overall population increase and migration surplus whereas the domestic out-migration from the Swedish islands is compensated with higher immigration. In contrast, total population is declining in Bornholm, Hiiumaa, Rügen & Saaremaa. The Estonian islands are struggling with overall out-migration whereas in Bornholm immigration is not large enough to compensate for domestic out-



Map 2: Demographic vulnerabilities of the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea.

migration. Rügen is among the German regions with the lowest share of foreign population.

Differences in territorial context of course have to be taken into consideration. Island regions might face a particular challenge because of their insularity.³ Islands are very diverse when it comes to issues such as accessibility, degree of self-governance, regional identity etc. Most of the Baltic Islands are dependent on ferry or flight connections for transports. The islands also enjoy a varying level of self-administration; from autonomy (Åland islands) to municipality status (Öland which is composed of two municipalities and a part of Kalmar county). Thus it is clear that different preconditions and thus starting points exist in terms of the ways in which the various island communities seek to handle the consequences of their demographic situations.

Resources

Project

The overall aim of the handbook is to provide a Nordic comparative perspective on the initiatives launched to meet demographic challenges. The handbook contains various tools for regional and local policy-makers to help them create a demographic profile for their region or municipality and also to allow for benchmarking across the Nordic countries. The handbook also references a collection of projects and initiatives that will serve as an inspiration both in identifying the challenges faced and in adapting strategies to handle these challenges.

The demographic handbook is published in both Swedish and Finnish:

Att möta demografiska förändringar – en handbok för inspiration till handling i nordiska regioner och kommuner, Nordregio Report 2012:4

Väestömuutosten kohtaaminen – Käsikirja Pohjoismaiden kunta- ja alueviranomaisille, Nordregio Report 2012:5

The background report to the handbook describes the demographic status and trends in the Nordic Countries analysing the main drivers for the change. The report is published in English:

Demography in the Nordic countries – a synthesis report, Nordregio Working Paper 2011:9

End notes

¹ *Att möta demografiska förändringar – en handbok för inspiration till handling i nordiska regioner och kommuner*, Nordregio Report 2012:4

² Hansen, Klaus Georg, Rasmussen, Ole Rasmus och Roto, Johanna (2011), *Demography in the Nordic countries – a synthesis report*, Nordregio Working Paper 2011:9

³ ESPON GEOSPECS – *Geographic Specificities and Development Potentials in Europe* (2012). Final report forthcoming, August 2012.

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Nordregio conducts strategic research in the fields of planning and regional policy. We are active in research and dissemination and provide policy relevant knowledge, particularly with a Nordic and European comparative perspective.