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Theme: Demographic and migratory flows

Young Women on the Run? A Snapshot from Rural Sweden

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Abstract. Labour market structures which offer fewer options to women than to men and relatively poor educational facilities are usually mentioned as main reasons why remote and economically weak regions are affected by selective out-migration and shortage of young women. Also traditional gender structures and “macho” lifestyles are often heard motives that influence the out-migration of young women from rural areas.

This paper is a spin-off from the ESPON-project SEMIGRA – Selective Migration and Unbalanced Sex Ratio in Rural Regions – and the aim is to analyze the out-migration of young women from the Swedish region Västernorrland with its dual character that is contrasted to the migration patterns in the whole of Sweden and the Stockholm region. The theoretical frameworks are based upon the neoclassical macro theory of migration, New Economics of Migration and the dual labour market theory in combination with the human capital theory that might have differing impact in various age and labour market segments. The empirical material consists of age-specific gross migration data for the cohorts in the ages 18-34, a literature review and a survey with 5,512 teenagers aged 14-17.

By disaggregation of the migratory flows some contrasting result can be shown. It is only in the ages 18-24 that net out-migration is a reality – in the ages 25-29 and 30-34 the opposite is instead valid. This implies that the “problem” of out-migration of young women is connected to studies and moving to more female-friendly labour markets. In the household creating ages there seems to be a return-migration flow with net in-migration as one result. In the dual region of Västernorrland this is valid especially in the more densely populated coastal areas.

The dual character of Västernorrland region is also highlighted as the differing municipalities and cities are analyzed where different migratory patterns among young women and men can be shown as a consequence of the economic, social and demographic structures.

Keywords. Migratory patterns of young women, rural areas, economic dualism, labour market segmentation, regional and local images, return migration.