

Highest emigration rates from the capital

Regional differences in emigration from Norway

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NIBR-kortnotat 2024:1 ISSN 2703-8831 (Online)

October 2024

Oslo – Norway’s capital county – has by far the highest emigration rates of all Norwegian counties: Annually more than 1% of Oslo’s population move abroad. The trends were quite different during the historic emigration waves to America, when people in Innlandet and Agder were most prone to emigrate.

One reason for the currently high emigration rates in Oslo is the high share of immigrants living in the capital. However, natives in Oslo emigrate to a larger extent than natives in other parts of Norway. Moreover, while immigrants in certain counties emigrate rather than moving to another county, the opposite is found in other counties. The mobility patterns of immigrant children also differ from those of native children, with clearly higher emigration rates.

This Policy brief summarizes findings from several publications that so far have come out of the EXITNORWAY research project. They all focus on the regional dimension of emigration from (and migration within) Norway: One report about migrations among immigrants in Norway (Tønnessen, 2022a), and two book chapters: one about migrations among children in Norway with different immigrant background (Hornstra et al, forthcoming) and another about historical and contemporary migrations out from and into Agder county (Tønnessen, 2022b). From this last study, a selected figure has been updated for this Policy brief and re-made for all Norway’s counties (Figure 3).

HIGHEST EMIGRATION RATES FROM OSLO

Over the last decade, the county of Oslo – Norway’s capital – has had significantly higher emigration rates than any other Norwegian county. During the period 2014–2023, an average of 12.6 per 1000 of Oslo’s population emigrated each year (Figure 1). This is clearly higher than for any other county in Norway. Also Rogaland and Akershus had relatively high emigration rates, with 7.6 and 6.5 per 1000, respectively. Lowest emigration rates are found in Telemark, Innlandet (formerly Hedmark and Oppland), Nordland and Agder, which all have around 3.5 – 4 emigrations annually per 1000 inhabitants.

... BUT NOT HISTORICALLY

The current emigration differences between Norway’s counties differ noticeably from what was observed during the major overseas emigration waves of the late 1800s and early 1900s. In her documentation of this historical emigration, Backer (1964) concludes that even though emigration rates were higher from towns and cities than from the countryside, Oslo did not have higher emigration rates than other counties. In contrast to the current pattern, emigration rates back then were actually highest in some of the counties with least emigration today: Oppland and Hedmark – today’s Innlandet – in 1875–90, and the Agder counties (1901–10 and 1921–25), see Figure 2.

Emigrations per 1000 from Norway's counties (2014–23)

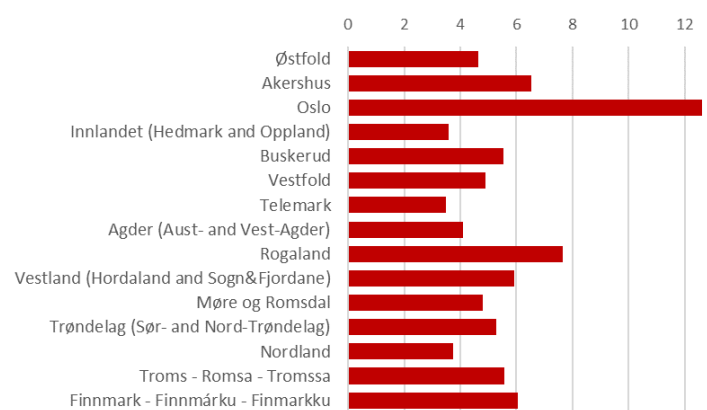


Figure 1: Emigrations per 1000 from Norway’s counties. Average annual rates 2014–2023. Former names of amalgated countries in parentheses. Source: Statistics Norway

Diagram 28. Utvandringen til oversjøiske land pr. 1000 av folke- mengden i de enkelte fylker 1876—1925. Rate of oversea emigration per 1000 of population in different counties 1876—1925.

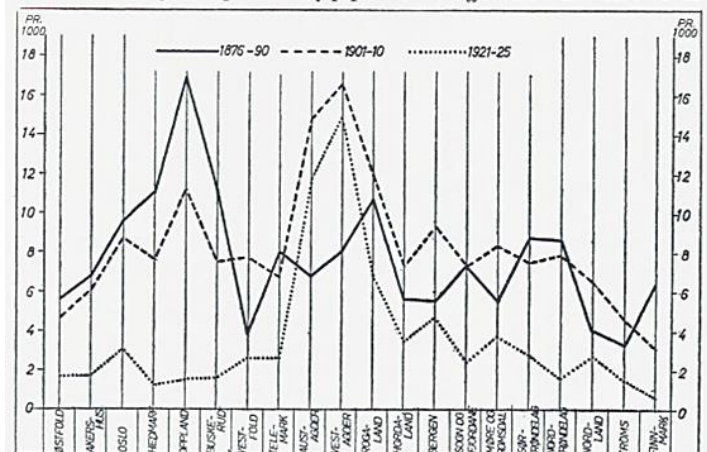


Figure 2: Historical emigration rates from Norway’s counties, 1876–1925. Source: Backer (1965) p.165

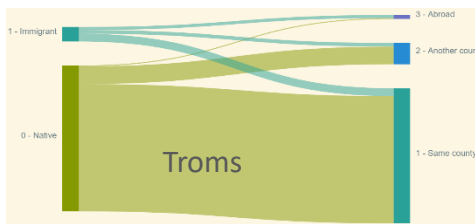
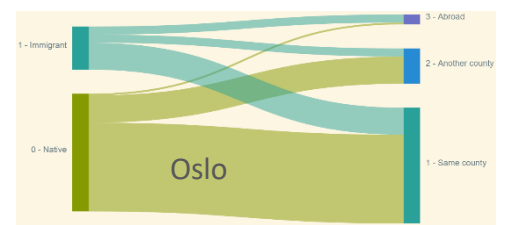


Figure 3: Population 2014 by immigrant category (left) and by where they lived in 2024 (right). Top panel: National figures. Lower panels: Figures by county, limited to immigrants and natives and whether they in 2024 lived in the same county as in 2014, another county or abroad in 2024. Source: microdata.no

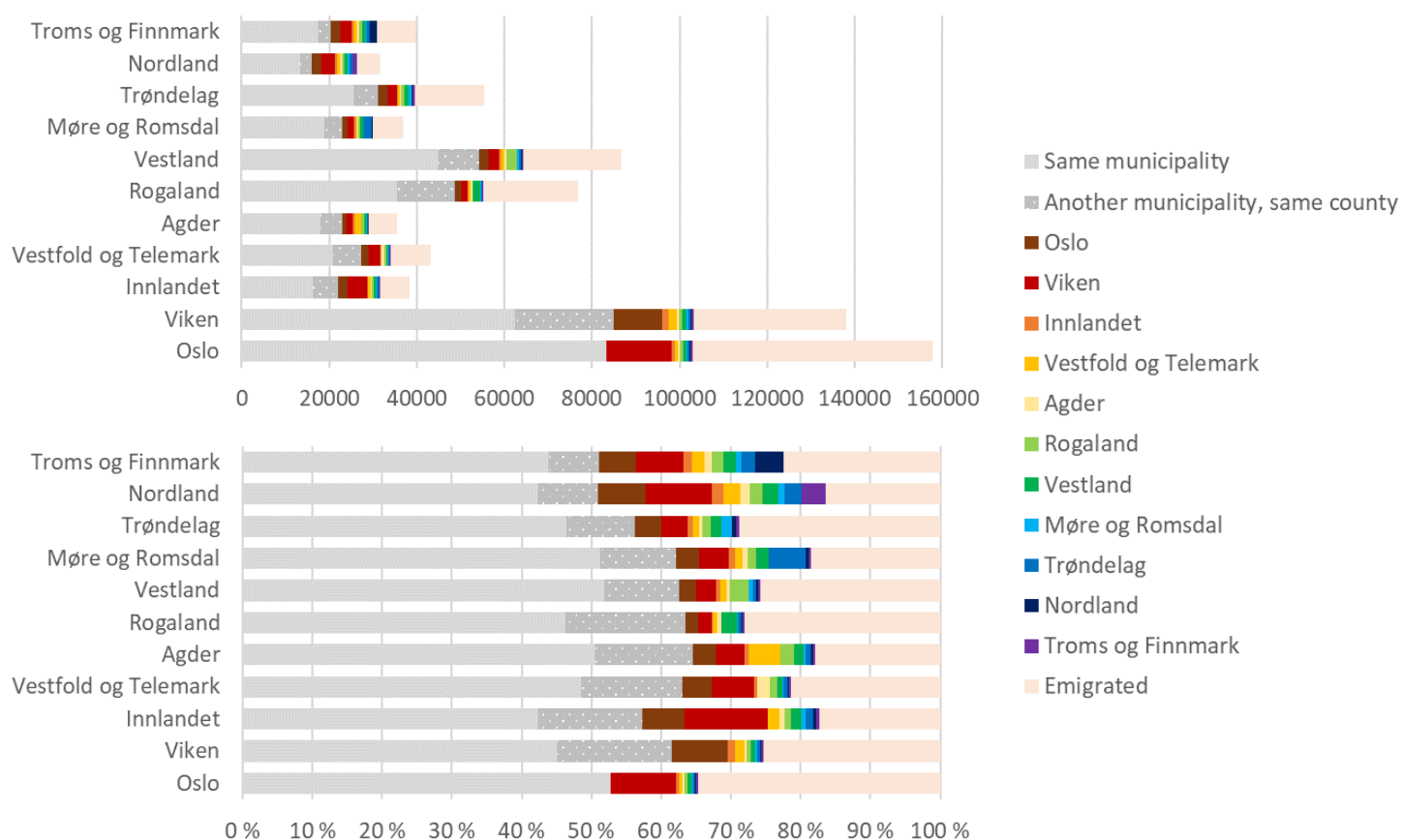


Figure 4: Immigrants' place of residence five years after immigration, by their first county of residence. Absolute numbers (upper panel) and shares (lower panel). Includes all immigrants who arrived in Norway 2000–2016. Source: Tønnessen (2022a).

ALSO A HIGHER SHARE OF IMMIGRANTS

One reason why Oslo's current emigration rates surpass those of any other county in Norway is its higher proportion of immigrants. Immigrants tend to emigrate more often than natives. However, even if we only compare the emigration patterns of natives, the natives in Oslo emigrate more than natives in other counties.

Figure 3 follows people who lived in Norway in 2014 and reports their situation per 1.1.2024. The top panel shows the whole population. In 2014 (left side of the diagram), the large majority were natives, some were immigrants, and relatively few were 'second generation' (born in Norway with two immigrant parents). The right side of the diagram shows that in all the three groups, most of the 2014 population still lived in the same county ten years later, in 2024. However, some had died, some had emigrated abroad, and some have moved to another county. As the top figure shows, it was much more common for natives to move to another county in Norway (10%) than to move abroad (0.7%). For immigrants, the share who emigrated abroad was slightly higher (18%) than the share who moved to another county in Norway (15%). Their Norwegian-born children, on the other hand, rather moved to another Norwegian county (18%) than abroad (9%). The lower parts of Figure 3 shows this pattern (limited to immigrants and natives) for all Norway's counties. At first glance, the diagrams seem very similar, and indeed these patterns do not differ a lot between counties. But there are certain differences. Oslo, with a higher share of immigrants in 2014, also display the highest total emigration shares. In fact, this is also the case if only natives in different counties

are compared: Around 1.4% of Oslo's native population in 2014 had left the country in 2024. In most other counties, this share was around 0.5%.

For immigrants, the share who moved abroad is almost like the share who moved to another county, with some exceptions: In Innlandet, Telemark, Nordland and Finnmark more immigrants moved to another county than to another country, whereas in Rogaland, Vestland and Møre og Romsdal the share who moved abroad was clearly higher than the share who moved to another county in Norway.

IMMIGRANTS' MOBILITY THE FIRST YEARS

Immigrants' moving patterns can also be studied by looking at their mobility during their first years after arrival. This is done in Figure 4 (and in Tønnessen (2022a)). In the top panel, the length of the horizontal columns shows the number of immigrants who first arrived in the different counties in 2000–2016 (Oslo had the largest arrivals). The colours of the columns indicate where they were five years after immigration. The pinkish parts are those who emigrated.

The same is shown in the lower panel, by shares. As Figure 4 shows, most of those who left Oslo for another county, moved to Viken (currently Akershus, Østfold and Buskerud county). From all other counties, a substantial share of immigrants moved to Oslo or Viken (red colours). However, some also moved within their region – for instance, among immigrants who first arrived in the northernmost counties (Nordland and Troms&Finnmark), a non-negligible share of the domestic movers stayed in the north.



IMMIGRANT CHILDREN EMIGRATE MORE OFTEN

Many of the patterns observed for immigrants and natives in general, are found also when analysing children's geographical mobility (Hornstra et al., forthcoming). Children who have immigrated to Norway are more mobile than other children, both when it comes to internal migration within Norway and emigration. While children who are themselves immigrants move almost twice as much as other children between Norway's municipalities, the differences between native children, second-generation (born in Norway with two foreign-born parents) and 2.5 generation (born in Norway with one foreign-born parent) are smaller.

Children in the majority group ('native children') relatively often move away from Oslo/Viken to other regions in Norway, especially to the south, Vestlandet and Innlandet, and in this group there are more childhood moves from Oslo/Viken than towards Oslo/Viken. However, this is different when we consider the first- and second-generation immigrant children, where Oslo/Viken are main destinations

for those who move between municipalities, and relatively few move out of this region.

Emigration rates are particularly high for immigrant children who are below school age and who have short durations of stay in Norway. Second generation children emigrate more than 2.5 generation who again emigrate more than native children.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Studies in the EXITNORWAY research project have found quite distinct differences between Norwegian counties when it comes to emigration (and internal migration) of people with different degrees of immigrant background.

Oslo, the capital county, stands out with particularly high emigration rates in general – including for natives. Further work in the EXITNORWAY project will dig deeper into these geographical differences, with analytical frameworks that link emigration and internal migration within Norway.

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Please cite as: Tønnessen, M (2024) Highest emigration rates from the capital - Regional differences in emigration from Norway. EXITNORWAY policy brief 6. Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, Oslo Metropolitan University.

EXITNORWAY is a research project supported by the Norwegian Research Council and managed by the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research at Oslo Metropolitan University (project no. 313823). <https://uni.oslomet.no/exitnorway/>