

REASONS TO STAY // REASONS TO RETURN

Migration policies maximising the population of higher educated youth in the Faroe Islands

Introduction

The Faroe Islands are a small-island nation in the North Atlantic faced with issues common to peripheral regions worldwide, such as structural dependency on its historical sovereign (Denmark), expensive livelihood, negative net-migration, and a subsequent 'brain-drain' of highly educated youth [1]. However, in 2013 net-migration turned positive for the first time in 10 years, making the Faroese case a conundrum in the North Atlantic region. Concurrent with this phenomenon was the Faroese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's introduction of the 2013 Migration Policy Programme [2]. This research focused on understanding young Faroese people's migration behaviour, answering whether five specific policies targeting tertiary degree students affected the positive changes in migration, and highlighting the most impactful policies.

The Faroe Islands' three simultaneous migration objectives



Out-migration

The structural challenge to properly educate and prepare young people with academic ambitions to out-migrate to obtain academic qualifications that the Faroe Islands are unable to provide due to structural, financial and logistical constraints.

Non-migration

The domestic challenge of respecting and providing for voluntary or involuntary non-migrants by improving their opportunities and options to achieve a higher education, as well as comparative advantages of staying.

Return-migration

The demographic challenge of a skewed population pyramid caused by a disproportionately ageing society, which means incentives must be provided to encourage return-migration of young people of working age to maintain the country's tax and welfare system.

Method



Primary data was collected through an anonymous and voluntary original quantitative survey analysing the impact of five specific policies in the 2013 Migration Policy Programme regarding Faroese students in higher education. It was completed by 378 former and current tertiary degree students aged 20-34, or 4.4% of the entire Faroese 20-34 year-old demographic in October 2018. The survey was conducted in Faroese to filter for Faroese-speaking respondents only.



Secondary data was provided by The University of the Faroe Islands, Statistics Faroe Islands, The Prime Minister's Office, and The National Bank.



The impact analysis was conducted through two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variance, regression analyses, and survey responses.

Policies

- 1

Increase the number of degrees offered at the University of the Faroe Islands
- 2

Increase options for affordable student accommodation
- 3

Improve diaspora connections abroad
- 4

Inform about job opportunities in the Faroe Islands
- 5

Expand on expats' rights to vote in Faroese elections

Key findings

Statistical analysis shows that budget allocation to the University of the Faroe Islands is not rejected as having an impact on reducing out-migration, but that changes in student intake are rejected as having an impact on out-migration.

Of those studying in the Faroe Islands, 75% live with family or friends, while only 7.7% live in student accommodation. Of those studying abroad, 92% live in student accommodation, while 6.7% live with family or friends.

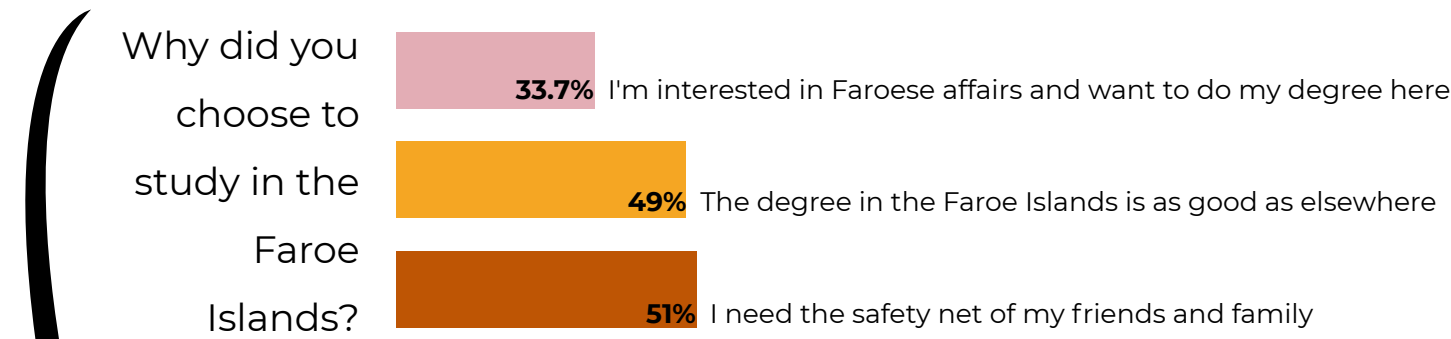
Of those studying abroad, 71.4% of those who moved back to the Faroe Islands participated in events with other Faroese expats, while only 46.3% of the other two groups did the same. However, the causal direction could not be established, meaning they might have participated with other expats due to already being interested in return-migrating.

Only 3.9% obtained positive results from attending the Faroese job fair aimed at students. 30.7% obtained no results from attending, and 65.5% have not attended it. The job fair is therefore not deemed to be effective. Having a holiday job in the Faroe Islands while studying abroad was however a significant factor for willingness to return.

Of those studying abroad, 73.7% have voted in Faroese elections, 59.1% have voted in foreign elections. Current students abroad have the highest participation in both categories across all groups. Of those who have finished studying abroad, the ones still living abroad participated significantly more in foreign elections than those who moved back to the Faroes. No changes were made to voting rights as a result of the 2013 Migration Policy Programme, indicating that voting participation is high regardless of legislative interference.

Survey

104 students in the Faroe Islands

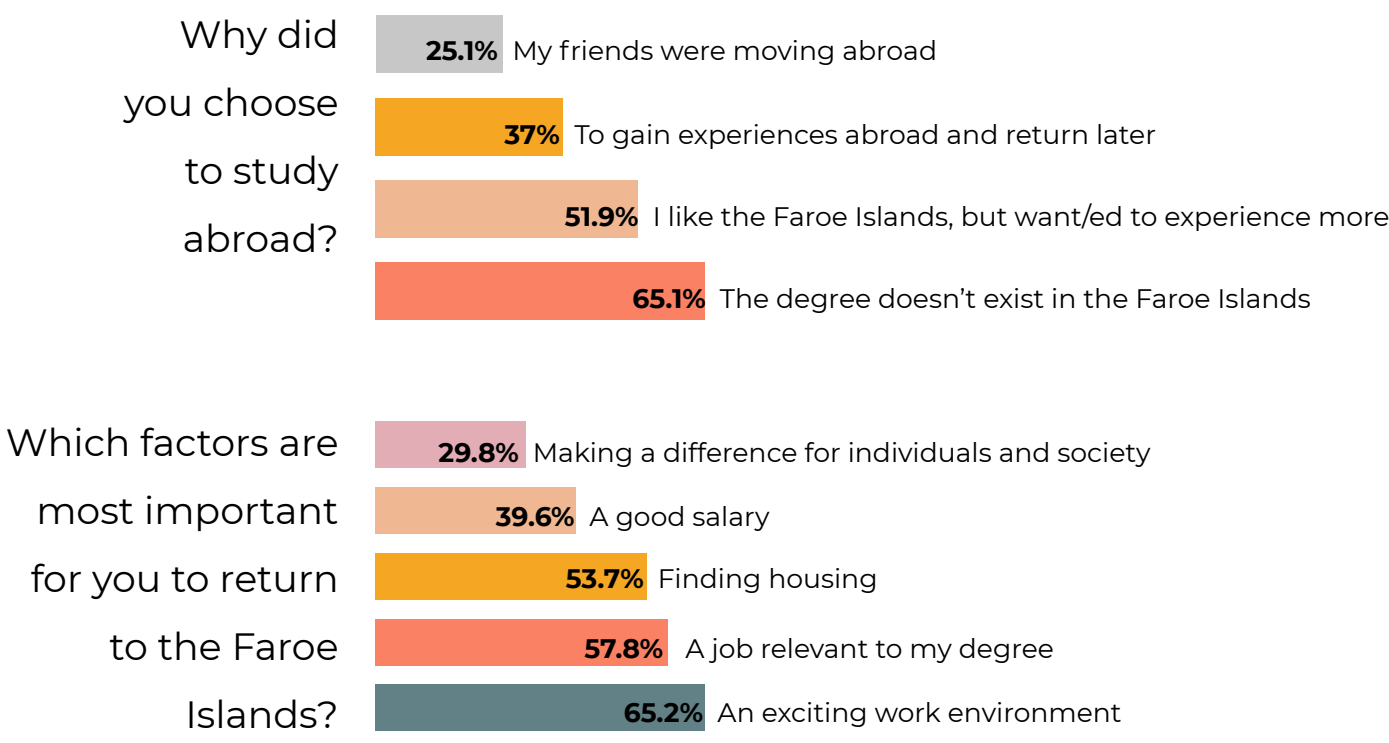


44.2%
HAVE A FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME JOB



92%
LIVE IN STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

274 Faroese students abroad



Conclusions



Faroese students who studied abroad have higher degrees than non-migrants. The most cost-effective solution for continued growth within this population would be to incentivise out-migration for education purposes, and to focus political resources on facilitating return-migration [3]. Increasing budget allocation to the University of the Faroe Islands might decrease out-migration, but increasing student intake does not.

The most important factors for increasing return-migration are (1) obtaining a job with an exciting work environment after graduation, and maintaining connections to the Faroese labour market through part-time and holiday jobs rather than through job fairs, and (2) adequate and affordable housing.

To improve circumstances for non-migrants, increasing availability of affordable rental and student accommodation would raise their independence and comparative standard of living.

References

[1] OECD (2011) "OECD Territorial Reviews: NORA Region 2011: The Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Coastal Norway." Paris: OECD Publishing. [2] Føroya Landsstýri (2013) "Heildarættan: Fólkaflýting og fólka­vøkstur". Tórshavn: Føroyaprent. [3] Dustmann, C., Itzhak, F. and Weiss, Y. (2011) "Return Migration, Human Capital Accumulation and the Brain Drain" in Journal of Development Economics, Vol. 95, Issue 1 (May 2011), pp. 58-67.

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