



# Building resilience in Rural Communities – a focus on mobile population groups

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The idea of significant mobile populations has crept up on us. Traditionally we have thought of communities, rural communities in particular, as being somewhat staid and slow moving. Alongside ongoing primary sector changes in production and consumption, we now see an increase in mobile workers and, in the case of tourism, mobile consumers. Today most of our smaller communities are heavily dependent on these groups, be they involved in horticulture, dairy and other agriculture sectors, contractors of various forms, as tourists or serving them. As a corollary, communities and mobile groups themselves are increasingly vulnerable to extreme natural hazards and hazard events. This brief article introduces and connects with new research into the mobility of rural populations and also introduces a new resource to assist SIA practitioners and the communities they are working in, to assess and manage transience.

Data are hard to find at the local level but national level data paint a broad picture of the extent of some of these types of mobile populations. For the 2017/18 year there were 230,259 temporary work visas (+46% since 2012/13), and in the 10 years from August 2009 to August 2019, the number of work visas issued increased from 87,138 a year to 193,311 a year (+122%). Student visas increased from 58,398 a year to 84,552 (+45%). Many of the incoming workers meet the demand for mobile and increasingly essential seasonal work throughout New Zealand from small, medium and at times large enterprises for tasks such as pruning and fruit picking.

At the same time, across New Zealand international (and domestic) tourism continues to grow with the August 2019 year reporting \$3.9m visitors (+70% since 2009). Domestic visitor mobility is often overlooked, but domestic visitors are also growing, albeit at a slower rate and are consistently reported to be just over 50% of total sector demand. Domestic mobility is not necessarily seen as tourism but can involve significant daily commutes, 'tradies' on short-term projects and others on short work/inspections, or technical contracts. A final part of the broader picture of mobility across our population landscape is to note that the 2013 Census data show that 36% of the resident population had been living elsewhere in 2006. The picture that emerges is a landscape flush with movement, with communities of all shapes and sizes ebbing and flowing in response to the requirements of various employment demand factors, and the increasing need to provide services for the more mobile consumption patterns of tourism.

New Zealand communities also face a diversity of natural hazards! Building community resilience to nature's challenges requires understanding local risk profiles and vulnerabilities, including those associated with transient population groups. Natural hazard events can cause short-term movements in people as they move due to the impacts of the event, such as damaged housing. They can also attract large numbers of people working in the

response stage and then in the recovery stage, such as the construction workers brought into Kaikoura by the 2016 earthquakes there.

The following framework is a resource that provides guidelines to assist impact assessors and local authorities to identify and understand the transient population groups present in the communities under their remit. The framework proposes that mobile or ‘transient’ populations can be usefully understood according to a temporal continuum based on the length of time they are present in a community. It is framed by a four category classification within which transience (and its associated social vulnerabilities) can be understood more fully and it provides the basis for a structured set of questions (a community situation analysis) designed to raise awareness of the various transient groups found within communities.

The four groups of population proposed are:

Permanent residents	Semi-permanent residents	Temporary residents	Transient populations
Intention to remain	6 to 12 months	2 weeks to 6 months	Less than 2 weeks
Long-term residents Māori (turangawaewae) Medium-term residents New residents (NZ) New migrants (overseas)	RSE <sup>2</sup> scheme workers Secondment workers Infrastructure workers Holiday home owners	Temporary workers Contract workers Infrastructure workers (Holiday home owners)	Domestic holidaymakers International tourists Travelling workers Emergency response Transiting public

Each transient population group can be further described by four key dimensions and their associated descriptors:

1. Temporal: time in community (as above); frequency of visitation; previous experience of place
2. Demographic: age; family structure; language; cultural distance
3. Economic: employment type; industry; location of employment
4. Spatial: type and location of dwelling; use of community, commercial and social spaces

Together, these characteristics influence both the type and degree of interaction and social connection between the various groups found within a community and the degree of in-group vulnerability. Differences occur between the transient groups whose individual members change over time (e.g., international tourists, WHM) and those which contain a stable population of individuals (e.g., new migrants, holiday home owners).

Each group’s visibility, prominence and importance within the host community also varies. Interaction between the permanent host community and transient population groups may be formal and direct, via employment or commercial accommodation provision, or informal and indirect, via social activities and encounters which occur in public and commercial spaces. The various transient groups also interact with each other in the employment, housing/accommodation and social arenas.

To improve the resilience of communities and of transients themselves the guidelines set out a framework for ‘settlements’ – as often these too are remote or dis-joint from formal governance structures – to chart out the dimensions of such groups in their communities. The research offers some ‘starters’ on building a community overview (including economic and social dependencies), connectivity (within groups and the residential community) and, population dynamics. For each of these there is a checklist of factors to consider.

The goal is to improve the resilience to nature’s challenges prior to experiencing significant



disasters such as the Kaikoura earthquake, alongside improving community integration and wellbeing.

**Note:**

Further information on the framework is available in a summary document '*Building resilience in transient rural communities: Guidelines for council*' which can be downloaded [here](#).

Additional research materials from the *Building resilience in transient rural communities* project are available as follows:

- [Scoping report](#)
- [Fieldwork report](#)

This note was undertaken within the 'rural backbone' theme of the Resilience to Nature's Challenges National Science Challenge undertaken by the author and Dr Jude Wilson.