This policy brief on recent internal migration determinants in South Africa stems from a working paper\(^1\) analysing the individual and regional factors affecting the migration decision, with some emphasis on the link between geographical mobility and social mobility. The findings suggest that migration is welfare-enhancing, in that earnings for migrants are on average higher than for non-migrants, and that migrants enjoy better access to services than their non-migrant counterparts.

1. Migrant origins and destinations

While most migration in South Africa occurs within relatively short distances, the focus in this paper is on inter-municipal migration (migration between municipalities). This geographical level of aggregation is assumed to be most appropriate for analysing internal migration for working-aged individuals because it is the lowest level of geographical aggregation at which there is adequate variation in labour market conditions and other regional factors expected to influence the migration decision. Migration is therefore defined here as the movement of individuals across municipal boundaries in the years 2010 and 2011.

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Much of South Africa’s internal migration occurs within provinces. Table 1 shows migrants who had changed municipalities of residence in 2010 and 2011, by current province and previous province.

**TABLE 1: Inter-municipal migrant flows, by previous and current provinces (2010/11)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous province</th>
<th>WC</th>
<th>EC</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>FS</th>
<th>KZN</th>
<th>NW</th>
<th>GAU</th>
<th>MPU</th>
<th>LIM</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>WC</td>
<td>45.32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>21.57</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.07</td>
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<td>31.26</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.81</td>
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<tr>
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<td>45.71</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>12.83</td>
<td>3.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>FS</td>
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<td>4.06</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.49</td>
<td>2.35</td>
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<td>10.05</td>
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<tr>
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<td>57.86</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>8.69</td>
<td>37.67</td>
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<td>7.51</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data.

As the percentages on the diagonals show, migration flows are largely intra-provincial (within province). There are distinct differences between provinces in the nature of migration, with poorer, more rural provinces such as Limpopo and the Eastern Cape more likely to send migrants over provincial borders (68.81% and 68.74% respectively) than more urbanised provinces such as the Western Cape and Gauteng where most migration occurs within provinces. The dominant inter-provincial corridors are still from the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape and Gauteng on the one hand, and from Limpopo to Gauteng, with both of these corridors contributing to more than 150 000 working-age individuals moving from more rural origin provinces to Gauteng and the Western Cape in 2010/11.

**FIGURE 1: Net out-migration rates by municipality, 2009**

Source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data
Figure 1 shows net out-migration rates by municipality between 2001 and 2009. Darker regions show higher net out-migration rates while lighter regions show lower (or negative) out-migration rates. Municipalities in the former homelands (shown by yellow borders) exhibit high net out-migration rates (out-migration substantially exceeds in-migration), while the more urban economic centres in the Western Cape and Gauteng show negative out-migration rates (in-migration exceeds out-migration).

The connection between regional poverty and internal migration becomes clear when one compares figures 1 and 2. Net out-migration is generally highest in poorest municipalities (shown as light blue to dark blue in figure 2), suggesting that regional poverty is a very strong push factor associated with internal migration. Regions that are poor have suppressed labour markets which are unlikely to reward education as well as it would be in more affluent regions. Residents in poor municipalities also have poor access to basic services such as piped water, flush sanitation and electricity. The absence or poor quality of these services in rural municipalities can affect child and adult health negatively, resulting in losses in productivity and income, and time spent at school.

**FIGURE 2: Poverty headcounts by municipality, 2011**

*Source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data.*

### 2. Individual characteristics associated with internal migration

As figure 3 shows, internal migration is highly age-selective. Young men and women are most likely to migrate, with decreasing probabilities of migration as age increases. Young adults generally have weaker ties to their communities of origin (both economically and psychologically), and are more physically able to participate in far-flung labour markets.
The educational attainment of migrants and non-migrants, by race, is shown below in figure 4. Migrants are generally more educated than non-migrants. Education differentials between migrants and non-migrants are relatively pronounced amongst all races, bar the white population. 44.84% of black migrants had completed grade 12 or more, compared to black non-migrants where only 34.25% had completed matric.

**FIGURE 3:** Age distributions of migrants and non-migrants, 2010

*Source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data.*

**FIGURE 4:** Educational attainment by race and migration status, 2011

*Source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data.*
3. Individual and regional factors affecting migration: regression analysis

The impact of individual and regional characteristics on individual migration is shown in figure 5 which shows the odds ratios of factors associated with internal migration in 2010/11, for men and women aged 15 to 49 years. As far as possible, the individual and regional determinants of migration are retrospective – in other words, the conditions before the migration decision are considered. For example, the age variable refers to the age in the year of migration, while regional factors refer to regional conditions in the year prior to migration in 2010/11.

![Figure 5: Coefficient plot showing individual and regional determinants of migration, 2010/11](source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 and Community Survey 2007 data.)

The bold text shows the reference groups against which other groups must be compared. The x-axis shows how likely an individual is to migrate, relative to the reference group who all lie on the blue vertical line. For example, when considering how age affects migration probabilities, the reference group is 15 to 24 year olds. For both men and women, 15 to 24 year olds are most likely to migrate but as age increases, individuals become less likely to migrate.

Black and coloured individuals exhibit similar migration probabilities, while Indians are least likely to migrate and white men and women approximately twice as likely as their black counterparts to migrate. Educational attainment also plays a strong role in migration probabilities for both men and women, albeit more so for women. For men, migration likelihoods of those with less than a Matric are very similar to the probability of someone with no schooling (reference group) migrating. Men with a grade 12 education are 1.5 times more likely to migrate than men with no schooling, while women with a grade 12 education are almost twice as likely to migrate as their no schooling counterparts. Having migrated before also significantly increases the likelihood of migration. Those individuals whose birth province was different to their province of residence in 2009 were much more likely to migrate in 2010/11 than those individuals living in their birth province.
Figure 5 shows that municipal poverty headcounts also affect migration likelihoods. To derive the municipal poverty headcount quintile variable, municipality poverty headcounts were calculated, followed by an arrangement of municipalities from least poor to poorest. They were then divided into poverty headcount quintiles, with the richest 20 percent of municipalities in quintile 1 (Q1) and the poorest 20 percent of municipalities in quintile 5 (Q5). After controlling for other factors, individuals living in the richest municipalities (the poverty reference group Q1) are least likely to migrate.

Net municipal out-migration rates (a measure of past municipal-level migration propensity) are positively associated with internal migration probabilities. The more intense municipal out-migration was in 2009, the more likely it is that individuals will migrate in 2010/11. Men and women living in municipalities with very high net out-migration rates (Q5) are up to five times as likely as those living in municipalities with low net out-migration rates. In other words, past net out-migration predicts present migration probabilities.

### 4. Benefits of internal migration

The benefits of migration are assumed to be differences in labour market conditions. The coefficient plot in figure 6 shows the income differences between inter-provincial migrants and non-migrants, after controlling for race, age and education. The reference groups, shown by the dashed vertical line, are black males, individuals between the ages of 15 and 19 years, with no schooling, who live in rural areas and do not migrate. On average, whites earn more than Indians, who in turn earn more than coloureds, who themselves earn more than blacks (the reference group). Women earn less than men, while being older (having more labour market experience) is associated with higher wages. The powerful role of location as a determinant of income is shown by the urban premium in wages (relative to that of rural residents). Changing location is also beneficial to migrants. In every case, interprovincial migrants earn more than their non-migrant counterparts (after controlling for a number of other factors).

![FIGURE 6: Earnings function of interprovincial migrants vs non-migrants 2011](source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data.)

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1 The number of poor people in a municipality as a proportion of the total municipal population.

2 \((\text{Number of out-migrants} - \text{number of in-migrants})/\text{pre-migration population}\).
Migrants, particularly those moving from rural regions to more urban regions, also typically enjoy better access to services than their stationary counterparts. Figure 7 below shows the differences in access to flush toilets and piped water between the Western Cape, and the Eastern Cape which is a large sender of migrants to the Western Cape, by employment status. Migrants, regardless of their employment status, have better access to basic services, than non-migrants.

**FIGURE 7: Access to flush toilets and sanitation, by migrant and employment status**

*Source: Own calculations based on Census 2011 data.*

5. Conclusion

This paper has considered the impact of individual and regional characteristics on the internal migration decision. Migrants are most likely to be young adults and more educated. Prior migration experience also makes one more likely to migrate. Sending region characteristics appear to be important in explaining the migration decision, with prior migration flows and regional poverty both positively influencing migration probabilities. Migration offers migrants the possibility of social mobility through improved earnings in destination regions and better access to services. Both the migration decision and the capacity to earn more in destination regions are positively affected by educational attainment, highlighting the important role that education plays in social mobility possibilities.