RESEARCH ARTICLE

Temporary migration and regional development amidst Covid-19: Invercargill and Queenstown

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between temporary migration and regional development in the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Focusing specifically on Invercargill and Queenstown in Aotearoa New Zealand, I outline how temporary migration has become central to population growth and economic prosperity and how this relationship has been disrupted by the onset of border controls in response to Covid-19. The paper outlines how the pandemic has revealed several challenges associated with temporary migration, including mismatches between the national management of migration and the local impacts, the availability of suitable data to understand migration, and the path dependency associated with population growth reliant on temporary migration.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19, migration, migration management, New Zealand, population change, regional development

1 | INTRODUCTION

Migration policy in Aotearoa New Zealand has increasingly focused on managing large-scale flows of temporary migrants alongside a stagnating residence programme. While research on this shift has largely focussed on Auckland, the growth in work and student visa holders is evident in towns, cities and regions across the country. In some places, temporary migration has helped to mitigate demographic decline and ageing population composition and sometimes drive rapid regional population growth. The defining character of temporary migration, however, is its uncertain future, both for individual migrants and for regions seeking to construct stable pathways to population growth and social and economic prosperity.

Enter Covid-19 and its unprecedented and extensive impacts on global migration. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the government instituted a border closure from 23 March 2020, restricting entry of non-nationals including new migrants and leaving existing temporary visa holders

stranded offshore. For places where temporary migration has become significant, border closures raise challenges to future growth, particularly in relation to workforce availability. Moreover, given the importance of tourism to some regions, border closures also disrupt economic activity and create wide ranging social challenges. While the pandemic is ongoing, and its impacts on international travel and migration continue to evolve, local organisations are tasked with planning for future development in this uncertain context, including in relation to the role of migration in future population makeup.

This article explores the relationship between temporary migration and regional development with a particular emphasis on the impacts of the Covid-19 global pandemic. While uncertainty has been a feature of temporary migration policy for some time, the economic impacts of the pandemic and government responses— including border closures, nationalist rhetoric in policymaking and uncertainty about the future of temporary migration programmes—raise questions about the

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population prospects of smaller cities and towns. I focus on Queenstown and Invercargill as two settlements where temporary migration has been influential in population trajectories, driving rapid growth and turning around two decades of demographic decline, respectively. The paper draws on migration and population data and a series of interviews with stakeholders. This account contributes to understandings of the functioning of migration in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as international calls for a greater focus on the diverse locations of migration (Çaglar & Glick Schiller, 2018), decentring the study of migration governance (Triandafyllidou, 2020) and multi-level governance in migration policymaking (Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018).

The paper also offers important insights into the impacts and experiences of Covid-19 and what the framing and response to this crisis can tell researchers and policy-makers about the limits of particular approaches to managing migration. Framed as a crisis (Leyshon, 2021), the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent border closures, reveal the taken for granted approach to migration over recent decades in Aotearoa New Zealand (and very similarly in Australia and Canada). Temporary migration has been deployed as a response to claimed labour market shortages and a population growth strategy for underpinning economic development nationally and in key regions (Collins, 2020). This article highlights how this approach obscures the disconnect between national policymaking and local/regional impacts and challenges, can be undermined by a lack of localised data on migration and create path dependency that is revealed to be highly precarious in the context of Covid-19. Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis highlights the flaws of a migration policy centred on high-volume temporary migration that does not provide sufficient avenues for long-term settlement and inclusion, thus making migrants socially, economically and legally precarious while undermining the agency of cities and regions to address demographic challenges through migration and integration. Seemingly recognising some of these flaws, the Minister of Immigration announced in late 2021 (while this article was going to press) a Resident Visa for up to 185,000 temporary migrants and their families to settle in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2 | MIGRATION IN SMALLER CITIES AND TOWNS

Contemporary international migration has been largely oriented towards globally connected metropolises (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2011; Price & Benton-Short, 2008; Simard & Jentsch, 2016) and much place-based research has consequently focused on the patterns, experiences and politics of migrants in large cities, especially global cities in North America and Europe. These accounts produce particular narratives about migration and cities, highlighting how international migration is embedded in global connectivity (Collins, 2018), urban labour market transformations (Wills et al., 2009) and migration-led diversification (Ye, 2019). In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, most research on the experiences and mobilities of migrants has been undertaken in Auckland (Friesen, 2012), shaping how migration is understood across the country.

In contrast to large metropolises, regional cities and towns face different demographic and economic challenges, wherein migration can play a quite distinct role in altering current or future fortunes. While the number and proportion of migrants can be relatively small in towns, smaller cities and rural areas, their presence can be fundamental to economic activity. Seasonal workers, for example, are often critical to the harvesting and export of time-sensitive primary produce in regions with small populations (Corrado et al., 2018). The seasonality of tourism and its presence in regions that are not necessarily affordable or accessible to citizen populations has similarly led to reliance on temporary migrants (Duncan et al., 2013). Migration, then, is articulated with processes of uneven development, not least because of the way in which smaller cities and towns in North America, Europe and Australasia have often borne the brunt of neoliberal restructuring, in reducing employment opportunities, outmigration and population decline. In such contexts, the growth of migrant communities is sometimes positioned as a counter-narrative to representations "'defined by loss'—of industry, population and status" (Pottie-Sherman, 2020, p. 2). Çaglar and Glick Schiller (2018) suggest that "disempowered cities" present unique configurations of migration–urban intersections where migrants have different opportunities to create new economic endeavours, solidify community networks and contribute to local politics in ways that may not be possible in larger metropolises dominated by global elites (Çaglar & Glick Schiller, 2018).

While these accounts draw attention to diversity in the locations and impacts of migration, they are less clear on the role of migration governance. Yet, there are significant differences between the opportunities available to seasonal and other temporary migrant workers (Corrado et al., 2018; Duncan et al., 2013) and to new settlers in smaller settlements who have long-term rights of residence (Çaglar & Glick Schiller, 2018; Pottie-Sherman 2020). As Triandafyllidou (2020) argues, there is also a need to decentre our understanding of migration governance, recognising that multiple actors (local

authorities, community organisations, employers, educators amongst others) contribute to shaping migration flows and management. Undoubtedly, the nation-state remains preeminent in managing border crossings, but focusing exclusively on national state authority risks obscuring how, and with what interests, values and capacity, other actors contribute to and respond to immigration control. A multi-level governance focus on migration, by contrast, highlights the different vertical and horizontal relationships involved in migration policymaking and implementation (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). In doing so, multi-level governance also raises questions about the extent to which different actors are able to challenge or negotiate state-centred formal hierarchies of decision-making, and their responses to the impacts of migration policy arrangements (Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018).

Accounts of the regionalisation of migration policy offer some insight into these multiple locations and forms of migration governance (Collantes et al., 2014; Williams, 2009). National migration policy has tended to focus on selection processes that filter migrant arrivals and conditions but do not necessarily shape the geographical outcomes of migration (Dufty-Jones, 2014). Migration has thus often benefited larger cities because of the way that migration operates through existing social networks and the perceived social and economic opportunities in larger urban areas. Some governments have focused on incentivising regional migration (Dufty-Jones, 2014), particularly notable in Australia and Canada (Wulff et al., 2008), although New Zealand governments have also experimented with stimulating regional settlement (Spoonley & Bedford, 2008). These schemes involve mechanisms such as bonus points for residence applications, fast-tracked approvals, state, community and employer sponsorship, enhanced post-study flexibility for international students, or labour market programmes for regionally specific industries (Wulff et al., 2008).

Alongside regionalisation, decentring accounts of migration governance also involves recognising the changing character of migration management and how these impinge upon and are taken up by different actors. Most notable in the settler colonial contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand (Collins, 2020), Australia (Robertson, 2015) and Canada (Rajkumar et al., 2012), has been a shift towards an increasingly targeted focus on managing large-scale flows of temporary migrants alongside stagnant or declining provision of long-term residence rights. This shift, which involves the creation and constant change of temporary visa types and conditions, shapes the circumstances under which migrants arrive and are able to live their lives (Anderson, 2010). It involves an 'internalisation of the border' (Burridge et al., 2017) wherein national migration policy becomes an everyday reality for migrants and local authorities and organisations seeking to manage populations and economic development and cultivate different notions of community and social inclusion (Dufty-Jones, 2014).

Temporary migration programmes raise significant challenges for local actors that are also seeking to create population sustainability and social inclusion. Indeed, temporary migration is regularly framed by national policy makers in opposition to forms of settlement and inclusion (Samuk, 2020), constructing a form of domination that maintains precarity of migrant populations through coercive practices of societal exclusion (Teo, 2021). Temporary migration restrictions also include local measures: employer sponsored visas are tied to occupations, employers and regions, locating individuals for fixed periods in one place with limited work options; lower skilled workers often cannot access settlement support; eligibility for health, welfare and housing support is uncommon; and for seasonal and some other migrant workers housing can be provided by employers in a way that excludes them from local life. Cumulatively, such measures demonstrate the infiltration of bordering practices into daily life, constituting a form of 'social quarantining' (Horgan & Liinamaa, 2017) that undermines social cohesion for citizen and non-citizen populations alike (Taylor & Foster, 2015). While overall temporary migration flows and populations can play a role in regional development, the lives of migrants themselves are often 'permanently temporary' (Collins, 2012) and thus there are limits on the extent to which local authorities and organisations are able or willing to enhance their inclusion. As I discuss in this article, these are general challenges for smaller settlements like Invercargill and Queenstown but they have also been exacerbated under the border controls, travel restrictions and future uncertainties that have emerged in the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

3 | STUDY CONTEXT AND DESIGN

Since 2010, the number of people holding work visas resident in Aotearoa New Zealand has more than doubled, from 81,384 in June 2010 to 210,744 in June 2020 (even following Covid-19 border controls). By June 2021, there were still 183,054 work visa holders resident in Aotearoa New Zealand. These figures include employer sponsored work visas such as the essential skills (63,846 in 2021) or work to residence (18,822), alongside family (44,628), working holiday (6534) and post-study (32,487) work visas; additionally, international students in tertiary education (who are eligible to work) numbered 27,174 in

June 2020. This growth results from migration policy shifts since the early 2000s (Bedford, 2004) that have increasingly emphasised targeted selection, border securitisation, and using migration as a tool for addressing labour market gaps and generating population-driven economic development (Collins, 2020). Rather than only facilitating long-term settlement, migration policy has shifted towards tightening regulation of diverse forms of temporary status, sometimes linked into tenuous prospects for long-term residence. This shift involves a 'contractualisation' of citizenship wherein "the boundary between noncitizen and citizen becomes less about belonging and civic participation, and more about the fulfilment of particular economic criteria" (Robertson, 2015, p. 943). While it is widely recognised that these arrangements impact migrants, the creation of situations of permanent temporariness also impact upon where migrants live and work, influencing inclusion and the capacity for local organisations to plan for diverse populations.

The global spread of Covid-19 has generated more uncertainty into the management and experience of migration. With borders effectively closed, many temporary migrants have been literally stranded. Moreover, like other workers, many migrants also lost their jobs, or were unable to receive full pay, especially those employed in hospitality and tourism sectors. The New Zealand government did permit employers of work visa holders to access a wage subsidy scheme, although temporary migrants themselves have been generally excluded from all but nominal access to welfare support. Other temporary migrants were caught offshore with the border closure and unlike citizens and residents were not permitted to return (although some exceptions were made since late 2020). For work visa holders linked to employers (essential skills and work to residence), loss of employment or reduction in hours created significant issues with maintaining legal visa status. The government's response has been to universally extend expiring visas for 6 months, first in March, then July and December 2020 and June 2021, maintaining the legality of visa holders but not addressing the uncertainty created by the articulation of Covid-19 conditions into the existing migration regime. [1]

The growth of temporary migration, and its interruption through Covid-19, has been regionally uneven. The large cities, especially Auckland, have been the destinations for a wide range of temporary migrants, whereas other locations have more niche migrant populations. Dairy farming areas, particularly Waikato, Canterbury and Southland, have substantial numbers of temporary migrants in dairying; in horticultural areas such as the Hawkes Bay and Marlborough, migrants arriving through the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme are significant as well as working holiday visa holders. In many places, international students and post-study work visa holders, alongside working holiday visa holders, have been significant in retail, hospitality, transportation and other industries.

It has been those areas with greater reliance on short-term work visa holders, especially RSE and working holiday visas that have been most immediately affected by Covid-19 border closures. The number of resident working holiday visas holders reduced from 39,642 in February to 8670 in December 2020 and 6534 in June 2021. In contrast, many RSE workers were unable to return to countries in the Pacific—some worked longer seasons but were separated from their families for significant periods. The government made an exception in December 2020 for 2000 RSE workers to arrive but otherwise there have been no significant new arrivals in these categories. The challenge for employers, then, has been securing sufficient labour to meet the demands of harvesting seasons in horticulture (important in regions like Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay and Marlborough), or for domestic tourism in summer 2020/2021 and tourism activity emerging through the briefly opened trans-Tasman travel bubble (particularly challenging for Queenstown). For other areas, such as Invercargill/Southland, the border closures create uncertainty about labour-supply for key sectors like dairy farming, both presently and in the future, as well as the security of existing populations of migrants.

The research that underpins this article was conceived prior to the global spread of Covid-19. Originally, the research objective was to examine how local organisations plan for and respond to temporary migration. In this respect, the research objectives addressed Triandafyllidou's (2020) call for decentring studies of migration governance and the broad analytical aims of multi-level governance (Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018). The key research questions included: How do smaller cities and towns respond to the growth of temporary migration? What are the impacts of national level migration policy on regional planning? What roles does temporary migration have in the conceived future population scenarios of smaller cities and towns? The methodology was primarily qualitative, involving interviews with key informants in Invercargill and Queenstown supported by demographic data on population and migration generated from the Atlas of Population Change (https://socialatlas.waikato.ac.nz/). Initial interviews were undertaken in Invercargill in February 2020 and subsequent interviews were scheduled for Queenstown in mid-March. The latter interviews were cancelled as a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Following the nationwide (March–May 2020) and Auckland-specific lockdowns (August 2020), the project's research objective was revised to include a focus on the impacts of Covid-19 on future regional development and the place of temporary migrants. The alignment with a focus on decentring migration governance and multi-level governance became even more apparent as the research sought to address the rapid response to the pandemic and future scenarios of regions whose recent past had been significantly influenced by temporary migration that was now suspended through border closures. Interviews with eight representatives of local government, economic development, education and community sectors in Invercargill were carried out in February 2020; five of these individuals were interviewed a second time in October 2020. Seven representatives of local government, economic development, immigration and community sectors were interviewed in Queenstown in October 2020. The interviews were transcribed prior to analysis through an open coding exercise focused on identifying themes relevant to the research objective. Positions and names have been anonymised, while the identity of case study sites is retained in order to locate analysis.

4 | INVERCARGILL

Invercargill and Queenstown represent two very geographically proximate but also distinct experiences of population change associated with migration. Located in the southern parts of the South Island, both settlements are part of Ngāi Tahu territory and have historical significance as sites of resource gathering; coastal fishing and shellfish gathering in Mokamoka in the area of the Invercargill estuary and the hunting of Moa and Weka and extraction of pounamu in Tāhuna around Lake Wakatipu. European migration-led settlement proceeded unevenly, however, now reflected in the particular population circumstances of each settlement. Invercargill town was planned and established in 1856 and grew in population consistently from the late 19th century, nearly doubling between 1891 and 1916 from 8550 to 15,866, continuing through until 1981 when the population peaked at 58,581. Invercargill's growth hinged on an expanding farming, meat and dairy processing economy in Southland that was underpinned by close trading relationships with the UK (Pool 2017); in the mid-1960s Invercargill had the highest income per capita in Aotearoa New Zealand (Alimi et al., 2015). While the opening of the Tīwai Point aluminium smelter in 1971 seemed to signal ongoing growth, Invercargill faced significant decline demographically and economically, its

population reducing to 50,200 in 2001, 14.3% down from its peak in 1981 (see Figure 1).

Invercargill was seen as at risk of significant stagnation and decline; Jackson and Brabyn (2017) noting that it had a 90+% chance of experiencing population decline through the mid-21st century. Since 2001, however, the population has begun to increase modestly, initially through reductions in net migration loss and then through net migration gain in 2013–2018 of 2202, the first inter-censal net migration gain since the 1970s. Reflecting processes of structural ageing, natural increase has continued to reduce (498 between 2013 and 2018) but there is a combined positive net change of 2700 or an annual average growth rate of 1.0 (compared to 2.2 nationally). International migrants have been a fundamental to this population growth: the overseas born population grew from 3951 in 2006 to 6591 in 2018 and a 3090 net overseas migration gain outweighed an 888 net internal migration loss between 2013 and 2018. Temporary labour migrants and international students also contribute to this growth. Annual approvals for essential skills work visas for employment in Southland region, for example, have grown from 873 in 2010/2011 to 1518 in 2019/2020; amongst international students 486 student visas were issued for Southland in 2010/2011 year, growing to 1302 in 2017/2018 before declining to 1026 in 2019/2020, partly due to the effects of Covid-19 (see Figure 2).

4.1 | Temporary migration and Covid-19

The recent modest population growth in Invercargill results from ongoing strategy and planning to attract new domestic and international migrants. Since the early 2000s, local organisations across Southland have been undertaking and contracting studies of workforce demand and population projections, linking labour market research with the outcomes of structural population ageing (e.g., Jackson, 2015). Population is *the* central challenge identified in the *Southland Regional Development Strategy 2015*, "the greatest threat to the region is the lack of people now and projected into the future". Bold targets were set, including aiming for 10,000 additional people between 2015 and 2025. There has been progress towards these targets, with Southland's population growing by 4125 between 2013 and 2018, and the Invercargill urban area growing by 2325. While this growth includes natural increase and international migration gains, local representatives acknowledged temporary migration was a big contributor, bringing both positive gains and challenges:
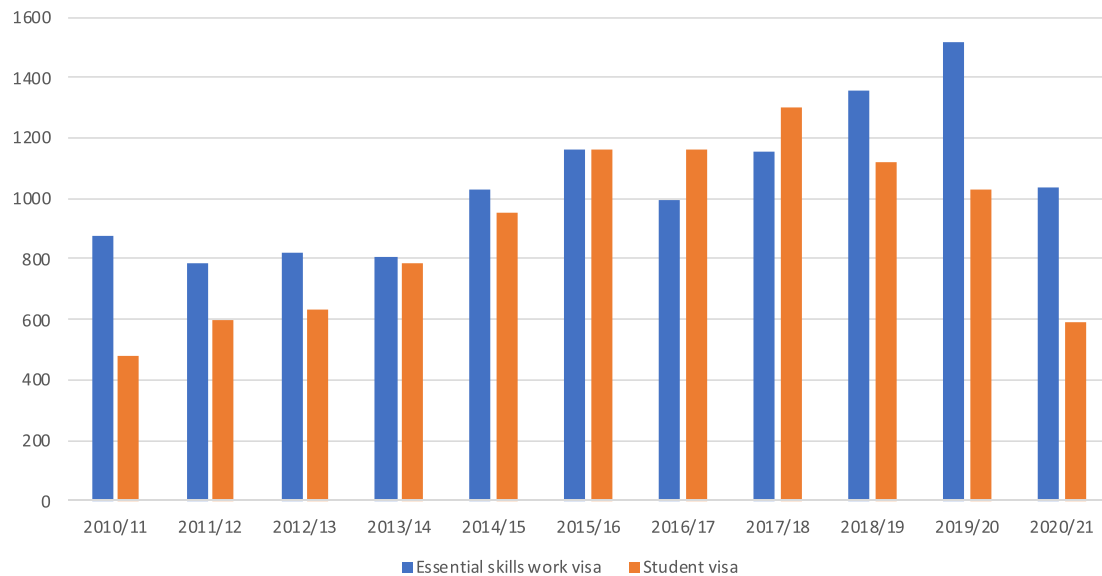
FIGURE 1 Invercargill City: Population trends and components of change. Source: Jackson & Pawar Demographic Accounting Model (2021). Compiled from Statistics New Zealand datasets. Notes: Changes in timing and method of estimating resident population between 1995 and 1996 mean that only natural increase can be shown for that year. *Net internal and net overseas via statistical modelling

It's a two-edged sword, really. It's great having new people come in and enjoy great New Zealand, it's fine, but again, they're not invested. For some people, that works. [...] You've got other people who could settle here and add real value to the local community, who can't. If you look at the threshold for permanent visas on salary, that is going up to a ridiculous level, so actually the problem you're going to have is [...] even if we end up with somebody here for two years and you go, "God, this individual is great, they can add real value", we cannot give them a job which meets the threshold for permanent residency. (Invercargill #7, February 2020).

The perception, then, has been that migration policy and local initiatives in Invercargill have been beneficial

FIGURE 2 Work visa and student visa approvals for Southland region 2010/2011–2019/2020. Source: MBIE migration data explorer

but gains in population are always at risk of being undermined. Even before Covid-19, participants identified the difficulty that working migrants have getting residence visas as constraining population sustainability. Another concern related to national changes in the governance of institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs). Southland Institute of Technology (SIT) has been a success story for Invercargill, attracting substantial domestic enrolments through its free fees scheme, and promoting itself successfully to international students. Central government is now centralising ITP governance, however, which will limit autonomy for such initiatives as ITPs are being tasked with focusing on regional catchments and discouraged from competitive behaviour. Prior to Covid-19, participants noted that this change was influencing SIT's feeder role, attracting students, who subsequently gain work visas and bring families: "That's definitely a noted change. In recruitment from two years ago, there would just be such an influx, we'd have no issue, and [now] it's just like it's dried up dramatically." (Invercargill #1, February 2020).

Central government policy, then, most notably in relation to migration, plays a role in shaping the capacity of local organisations to address demographic and economic challenges. Local actors are not only passive recipients of policy, or managers of its consequences, however (Triandafyllidou, 2020). Rather, stakeholders also identified how they actively made the case for different arrangements that might benefit Invercargill, Southland or regional areas more generally.

We've been pushing them. The policy change to give the extra year job search, post study job

search visa, was something that we pushed politically and gave to New Zealand First [political party]. We tried to push it with Michael Woodhouse [Minister of Immigration 2013–2017] and he wouldn't accept it, but New Zealand First picked up on it and we gave them all the data around it. So we've been proactive about you're having issues with infrastructure in Auckland, why on earth aren't you giving some carrots and stick around encouraging people, encouraging international students and new migrants to go outside of Auckland? (Invercargill #3, February 2020)

Despite positivity about migration and the role it plays demographically and economically, participants also identified difficulties with adjusting to a reversal in population trends. Housing, schooling and healthcare were all identified as areas of concern. Interviewees noted how house prices and rents (while low by national standards) were increasing, and that housing was particularly inaccessible to new migrants who may face discrimination from landlords, or be less familiar with rental practices. Schools also face new challenges, with growing numbers of students who are children of student or work visa holders, neither of whom are necessarily able to remain long-term and yet also benefit from additional English language and other support. In relation to healthcare, several participants noted that local general practitioners were full and that there was limited specialist provision at Southland Hospital.
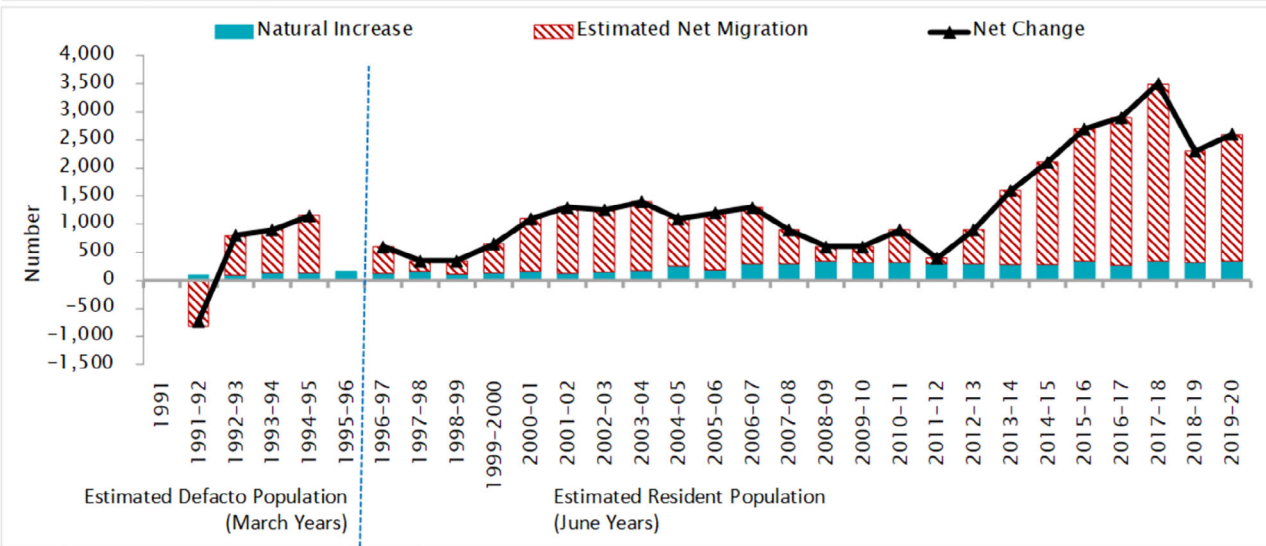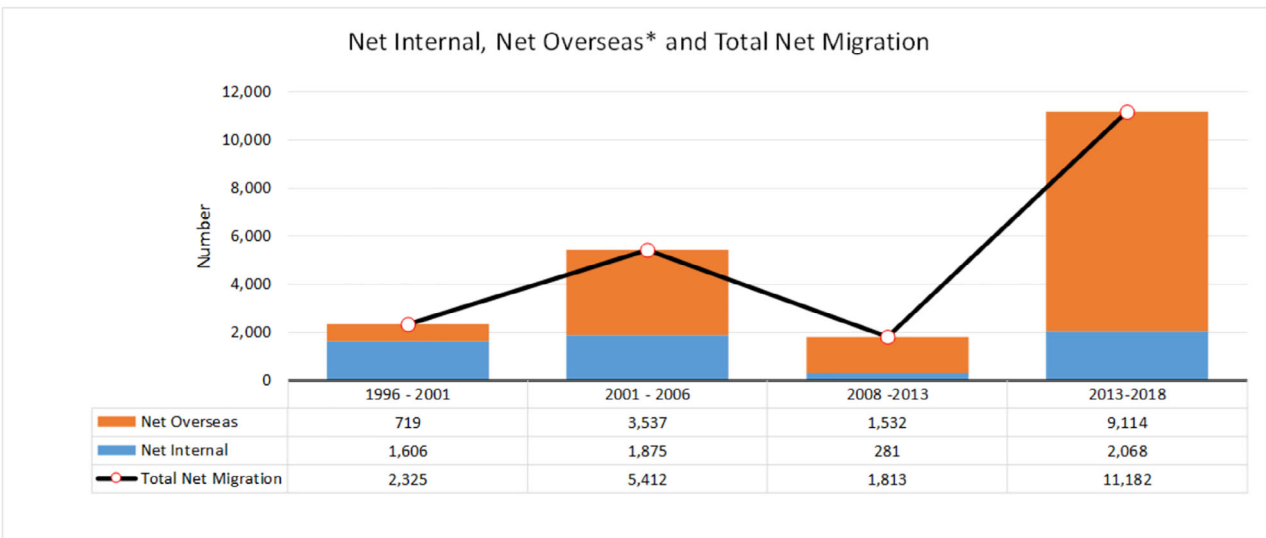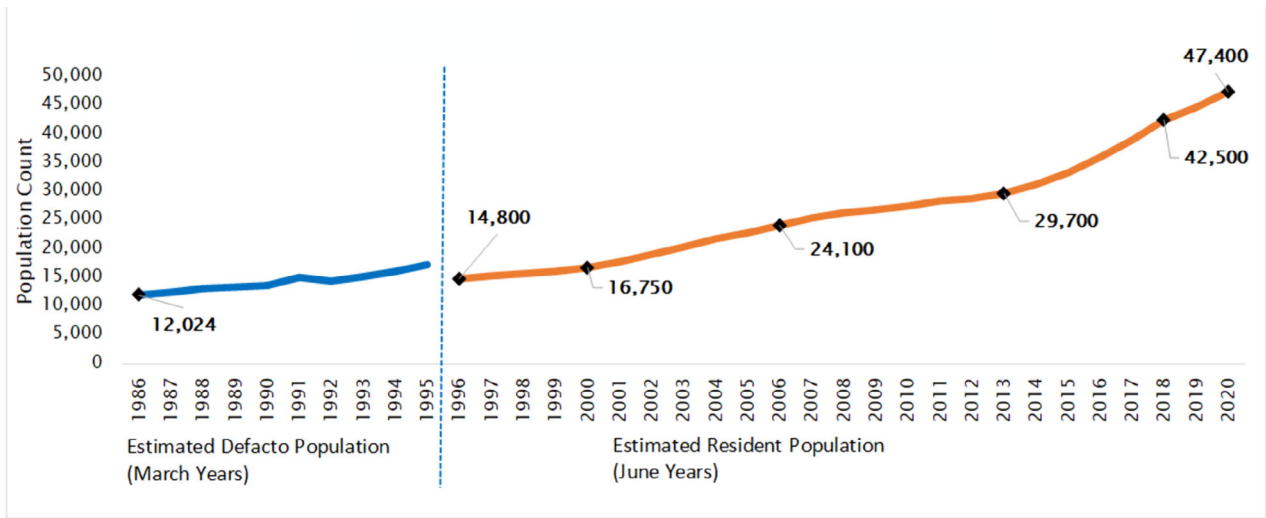
FIGURE 3 Queenstown Lakes District: Population trends and components of change. Source: Jackson & Pawar Demographic Accounting Model (2021). Compiled from Statistics New Zealand datasets. Notes: Changes in timing and method of estimating resident population between 1995 and 1996 mean that only natural increase can be shown for that year. *Net internal and net overseas via statistical modelling

The onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic amplified many of these challenges, although interviewees provided quite different accounts of this period. Some interviewees reported that surveys of employers indicated that there was little intention to reduce staff and that the government's wage subsidy scheme had been widely taken up including for work visa holders. Another interviewee connected to migrant communities, however, reported that those in insecure work were more likely to lose employment and that they were aware of notable numbers of families or individuals trapped offshore by the government's border restrictions. Policy settings compounded some of these issues because work visa holders with employer and occupation specified on their visas could not easily change jobs even if there were opportunities because changing employment requires a variation of conditions approved by Immigration New Zealand. The 6-month visa extensions that the government issued helped such people to remain legal in status but with under- and un-employment for some there were reports of increasing demand for food parcels and vouchers. By the middle of 2020, the government itself had initiated the Visitor Care Manaaki Manuhiri programme aimed at supporting these individuals, which between July and November provided emergency welfare support to 191 individuals in the Southland region, predominantly work visa holders as well as some international students (Red Cross, 2020b).

5 | QUEENSTOWN

In contrast to Invercargill, Queenstown's urban area has only grown substantially in recent decades and has during that time experienced the fastest population growth in Aotearoa New Zealand. While there was a gold mining settlement of several thousand during the mid-late 19th century, Queenstown's population dwindled afterwards to fewer than 1000 through most of the 20th century. Growing popularity as a domestic and international travel destination has led to rapid population growth since the 1970s, amongst the resident population as well as short-term visitors. The population of the Queenstown Lakes District has grown from 3133 in 1976 to 14,800 in 1996 and 42,400 in 2018 (see Figure 3), although during the tourist high seasons the peak day visitor population was estimated to reach 79,300 in 2018 (QLDC, 2019). The annualised growth rate for Queenstown has exceeded the national average since the 1970s, reaching 8.6% between 2013 and 2018 (compared to 2.2% nationally).

Net migration has been the key driver of population growth in the Queenstown Lakes District, exceeding natural increase in most years; between 2013 and 2018 total net migration reached 11,182. International migrants have been a particularly important part of this population growth, with the overseas born population growing from 5493 in 2006 (23.9% of the population) to 15,621 in 2018 (39.9% of the population), and accounting for 81.5% of net migration between 2013 and 2018. A substantial proportion of this overseas born population are likely to hold temporary work visas, especially working holiday visas. Because working holiday visa holders are not tied to regions or employers, however, there is no data available on their areas of residence (a point discussed below). Nonetheless, for the entire Otago region, annual essential skills work visa approvals have increased from 3135 in 2010/2011 to 6438 in 2018/2019 before declining in 2019/2020 to 5403, likely due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 4).[1]

5.1 | Temporary migration and Covid-19

The relationship between population growth and migration in Queenstown is markedly different from Invercargill. Indeed, rather than being the result of targeted plans and strategies, interviewees spoke about migration as something that just happened.

> *People come and go. Ski season happens, there's an influx of migrants who come and support ski season and then that tails off. And then people come and support the summer season. We kind of knew the ebbs and flows but we couldn't quantify it, we couldn't see it on paper. We never really needed to understand it. It was just something that happened. That's what Queenstown's like. (Queenstown #5, October 2020).*

Queenstown's economy has been built around these migratory flows, as well as the global growth in tourism. The interlinkage between migration and economic development has generated other challenges, however. While the area's population has grown rapidly there were still shortages of workers pre-Covid-19 while the volume of temporary workers and tourists had put immense pressure on infrastructure and housing affordability. Interviewees talked about the way in which the surface image of Queenstown as a luxury lifestyle destination obscured the actual economic dynamics of immense unaffordability, overcrowded housing and precarious work and living arrangements.

> *On paper, Queenstown medium household income is this, it all looks very shiny and lovely*
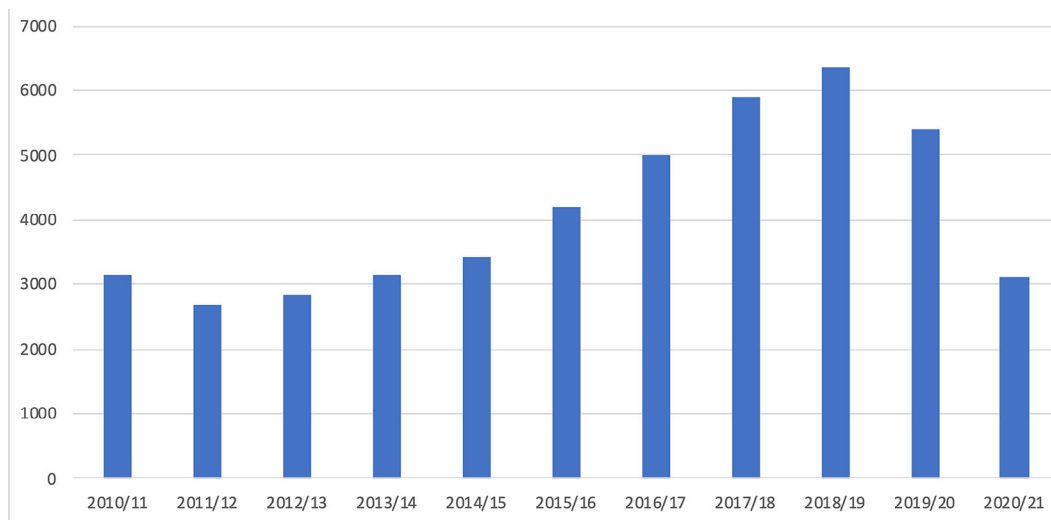
FIGURE 4   Work visa approvals for Otago region 2010/2011–2019/2020. Source: MBIE migration data explorer

and people come here and go jet boating and they have a lovely time, whereas I don't think [central government] get the nuances and the kind of dynamics of the economy here that is driven by that migrant workforce. I don't think they fully understand what that means. I think they just look on paper, okay, these are the work visas, we need to get Kiwis into jobs so all these people can just go home. (Queenstown #4, October 2020).

As in Invercargill, then, local representatives assert that central government policy is ill-suited to the specificities of regions and in particular unique locations like Queenstown. Partly this related to broader issues of investment in infrastructure, the limited provision of government health and welfare services, and significant issues around housing availability and affordability. There was also a clear concern about the ability to retain temporary migrants.

I think we're struggling to get that message across to Immigration New Zealand, that we need special visa conditions for us so we are enabled to employ these people that you just see on paper as a visa but that's someone that contributes to the community and is potentially a long term local, potentially is going to build a life here and be part of the social fabric of Queenstown. [...] That person has built a job here and they might be crucial to an employer here and they might be crucial to other people in their community, so we need some traction on that for us to enable Queenstown to continue to deliver this kind of tourism

offering what we've had previously. We can't do that without migrant workers. It falls over. (Queenstown #5, October 2020).

Some participants noted comparisons to other destinations overseas, such as Aspen (Colorado), which similarly rely on workers without long-term residence prospects. Many also noted that Queenstown aims to be socially inclusive and that migrants have to be part of the wider community for prosperity to be achieved. Some participants pushed back against terms like 'migrant worker' and 'low skilled' migrants, asserting that the significance of migrants to the workforce and their longstanding presence in the area meant that they are part of Queenstown itself, regardless of how national migration policy operates.

Possibly more than any other region, Queenstown has borne the full force of the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and government responses. By early March, Queenstown had already experienced substantial declines in tourist arrivals, and following the border closure and national lockdown tourism was effectively halted, suspending a large part of the local economy and employment activities. In relation to temporary migrants, the impacts were devastating; interviewees spoke about the whole daily life situation in Queenstown transforming almost overnight:

These migrants are in jobs that are hourly rate, so they're not on fixed term contracts that are paying a salary, and they're in hospitality and accommodation, everything shut so suddenly they're not being paid at all and then that concern over how do I pay my rent, how

do I pay my bills, I'm basically stuck here. It was basic welfare needs around food [that] was the big driver. And people seeing the world imploding, going, I do not want to go back, it looks way worse than it is here; I'd rather stick it out here because this dire situation I'm in here would be so much worse if I went back home. (Queenstown #6, October 2020).

Unlike Invercargill, many temporary migrants in Queenstown have held working holiday visas and are concentrated in casual work in the hospitality, accommodation, tourism and horticultural sectors. As this interviewee suggests, basic welfare needs became the most significant issue as many migrants had no source of income while others reported that the departure of some temporary migrants left others without accommodation because shared rental arrangements ended. The response from local organisations, including community and local government, was extensive and rapid, providing immediate relief through the establishment of the Kia Kaha community support hub. Through that programme more than 5700 migrants were provided with support, and subsequently through the government's Visitor Care Manaaki Manuhiri programme, 2472 temporary migrants were provided emergency food and housing relief (in the Otago region, although it is likely a substantial proportion were in Queenstown and surrounding areas, Red Cross 2020a).

6 | COVID-19 AND TEMPORARY MIGRATION IN REGIONAL AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

These accounts of temporary migration in Invercargill and Queenstown and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic reveal the complexity of population concerns in smaller settlements. In quite different ways, both places have come to rely on temporary migration as part of trajectories of population and economic development. This reliance has been facilitated by a national migration regime that is permissive of the arrival of large numbers of temporary work and student visa holders but does not provide either migrants with certainty about their future prospects or regions with the capacity to plan for stable population and economic growth. The experience with Covid-19 and its impact on temporary migration in the region also highlights broader issues—three are discussed here: the mismatch between the national migration regime and regional dilemmas; data and the visibility of temporary migration; and the path dependency of regional development underpinned by temporary migration.

6.1 | National migration regime and regional dilemmas

Interviewees in both regions identified frustration with the way in which the national framing of migration policy was incapable of addressing the needs of regional communities and economies. These issues were apparent prior to Covid-19, a view that a "centralised policy" that admirably focuses on protecting citizen workers also results in "regions which are being stifled because there isn't that ability to flex" (Invercargill #6, February 2020) in relation to regional challenges. In Invercargill those challenges relate to an ageing population that would be declining without international migration, and in Queenstown (prior to the onset of Covid-19) labour shortages in a context where there are actually very few citizens and residents available for work. While interviewees in both places were supportive of the general government response to Covid-19, they also articulated a view that Immigration New Zealand bureaucrats and policy makers did not understand regional demands and their growing complexity through the pandemic:

I don't think they get it. Sorry, that's a very big statement to make. I don't think they understand the regions and the regional dynamics. I think if you're in Wellington, you'll probably just look at total level data for New Zealand and look at where you're going to get bang for your buck, so where are the biggest inequalities, where can we drive investment? (Queenstown #4, October 2020).

Interviewees also lamented the potential effects on social inclusion and community when temporary migration (which in itself has been problematic for the limited opportunities for permanent settlement) becomes more difficult:

Immigration New Zealand are being pushed by policy makers saying we've got all these unemployed, we don't want to be looking like we're allowing too many people to get Permanent Residence or too many people to get visas, because we want this perfect match of unemployed and skill shortage to occur. Then I think for down here a lot of the comments that I've heard is things like, gosh, it's going to really be sad for our community if we lose that diversity, if we lose that vibrancy that we had of new cultures coming in. I think there's anxiety for the people that are involved, there's

anxiety around what it's going to mean for our community. (Invercargill #3, October 2020).

As this excerpt suggests, Covid-19 has amplified the view that immigration policy needs to more strongly support the employment of citizens and residents over new or existing migrants on temporary visas. For people in Invercargill and Queenstown this has manifested in observed difficulties in getting work visas altered such that migrants can work in areas of employment demand as well as longer-term concerns about the presence of people who have become important parts of communities well beyond their labour market contribution. While sympathetic to the broader concerns about national unemployment, there was a shared view that national-level approaches and especially rhetoric tends to obscure substantial differences in regional experience of unemployment, population and economic development.

6.2 | Data and the visibility of temporary migration

There are technical challenges in understanding temporary migration that emerge out of the national framing of migration policy, which have been exacerbated in the context of Covid-19. For local government, population levels and growth are critical to their statutory role in planning. While historically that can be achieved through five yearly census figures and population projections, participants reported that the pace of population change in a context of temporary migration made planning challenging, even before Covid-19:

> *"We're planning for population growth, but there is a lack—when the census comes out, it's too late. We can't plan for better housing, smaller housing, more diverse housing. [...] There's been a low population growth, therefore it's been fine; suddenly we're now going, oh, we've got a bit of pressure. Suddenly we can't build houses quickly enough." (Invercargill #5, February 2020).*

Central government has produced and made widely available substantially more data on temporary migration, particularly through MBIE's Migration Data Explorer tool, but there are limits on the regional and territorial granularity of information that is necessary for planning. Moreover, in the context of the pandemic where local organisations had to urgently assess entire community needs, there were challenges in even quantifying how many people were in a particular area and

what sort of circumstances they were in. This was particularly apparent in Queenstown:

> *The problem is there's not a lot of good data on this stuff. The employer sponsored stuff, the employer assisted visa stuff is pretty well pinned down, we know that they're here. [...] They have only dropped by 15%. Most of those people are still here. We don't know about the working holiday visa people. We know nationally that we would expect there to be around 38,000 in the country right now, and there's 20,000. So in round numbers, half of them are gone. We think we might have had 4000 in round numbers, so we can extrapolate that 2000 of those people are gone and 2000 are still here. However, they're expiring fast so who knows what's happening with them, and there is no way to find out. (Queenstown #1, October 2020).*

The social crisis in Queenstown demanded information on these populations—it was necessary to be able to make populations visible in order to adequately support them. Indeed, because of its role in providing emergency relief and the extent of need amongst temporary migrants, local government had to construct a database of more than 5000 people on temporary visas in Queenstown, which provided opportunities to continue to monitor need through the national lockdown and ongoing social and economic impacts of the pandemic. While useful in the immediate response, the expiry of visas and the inability to identify the location of working holiday, post-study, partner and student visa holders highlights how challenging it is for local organisations to adequately carry out their responsibilities when temporary migration becomes a significant part of population composition and change.

6.3 | Temporary migration and path dependency

The Covid-19 pandemic and response have revealed both the centrality of temporary migration in recent population change in Invercargill and Queenstown as well as the difficulty and potential undesirability of altering this situation. There is a stickiness or path dependency to the population trajectories that Invercargill and Queenstown have followed in recent decades.

For Invercargill and the Southland region, following the initial pandemic lockdown, concern shifted to the

longer-term impacts of extended border closures and the challenge of addressing ongoing labour market gaps without access to new migrant arrivals. Employment and business activity had increased following the initial national lockdown from March–May and interviewees reported that employers were struggling to fill positions:

> There's a very high level of anxiety around the industries here in not being able to get either skilled workers in or any sort of workers in, so the skilled drivers for the agricultural contractors, the freezing workers, the orchard pickers. One orchard owner that I spoke to said they are going to pick their cherries because they are the highest value and they'll just let their apricots drop on the ground. So they're making calls like that. (Invercargill #3, October 2020).

Interviewees also highlighted ongoing tensions between trying to support local employment in a context of low population growth and youth outmigration while seeking workers through temporary migration programmes. What has changed, however, is that border controls have restricted new international recruitment drives and immigration conditions for work visa holders already in Invercargill and Southland are such that it is quite difficult to change employment. Migration, in other words, remains a cornerstone of economic development in Invercargill and Southland—"we just can't populate fast enough. We just can't. We're too old" (Invercargill #3, October 2020)—even as avenues for recruiting and retaining migrants have been severely disrupted.

In the case of Queenstown, a different but related story about future prospects has emerged. Even more than Invercargill, Queenstown's population growth has been underpinned by the national growth of temporary migration. As a region that overwhelmingly relies on tourism as the cornerstone of its economy, the closure of borders and the national lockdown from March to May effectively halted the majority of tourism-related economic activity. The Queenstown Lakes District is expected to experience a 24.8% drop in GDP between 2020 and 2022 alongside a 28.2% reduction in employment (Kiernan, 2021). Interviewees spoke about diversification of the economy:

> From council and also people within the community were saying it, we really need to diversify, if something happens it's not going to be good. Then Covid happened and it wasn't okay. We were saying the things, it happened,

> and now we've really got to do something. (Queenstown #3, October 2020).

Covid has thus brought greater urgency to questions of sustainable economic development, although interviewees also noted the difficulty of shifting focus away from tourism that has underpinned growth for several decades. Moreover, what remains unclear is what a shift away from tourism would mean for the population of Queenstown, given that migrants (the vast majority on temporary visas) constitute around 40% of the population of the wider district, and over half within the Queenstown urban area. Yet, at the time of interviews the focus remained on much more immediate and somewhat intractable concerns: interviewees spoke about both migrants who were out of work and stranded in Queenstown as well as employers who were unable to open businesses because of a lack of workers, either citizens/residents or migrants who were unable to take up new employment because of restrictions on their visas. As one interviewee put it, with 70% of temporary work visas in Queenstown expiring in 2021 the employment challenge remains serious, "we've gone from an unemployment rate locally of 1.1%, so 28 people on [the Ministry of Social Development's] books, to around 550 now. Even if we were to be successful in getting all of those people jobs, we'd still be thousands short in terms of candidates." (Queenstown #4, October 2020). Like Invercargill, then, Covid-19 has generally served to exacerbate challenges around population and workforce in Queenstown and refocused attention around the place of temporary migrants in future trajectories.

7 | CONCLUSION

This article has outlined the experiences of two regional settlements in Aotearoa New Zealand that have become increasingly reliant on temporary migration and the challenges they faced during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Both Invercargill and Queenstown's recent economic development and population growth have occurred in part because of aligned shifts in the national migration regime towards the facilitation and regulation of high volume temporary migration flows. While there has been some discussion of the experiences and impacts of temporary migration nationally, there is a greater need to address local or regional impacts and futures, especially as the structure and character of international migration in the post-pandemic world is being reconsidered. The paper has identified three significant issues worthy of future consideration.

First, local government and regions are rule takers in relation to the regulation of migration. This is especially the case in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand where there is only a single level of governance of immigration (unlike Australia and Canada) and the state has maintained migration control as a key form of sovereignty before the onset of Covid-19 and increasingly so in the pandemic context. Local government and other actors thus have limited capacity to shape regulation to their own ends, or even to gain clear lines of sight on the futures of migration in their jurisdictions. In turn, central government policy makers and bureaucrats remain concerned with the national framing of migration, in terms of the production of data about migrant flows and activities, the response to labour market and population needs, and crucially in the pandemic context, the optics of managing migration and migrants for the perceived benefits of citizens and residents.

Second, however, for regions like Invercargill and Queenstown, the very centrality of temporary migration to population viability and economic success have generated a greater need for local government and other organisations to understand and respond to the presence of temporary migrants in their communities. In this regard, while Invercargill and Queenstown have little formal role in the multi-level governance that Triandafyllidou (2020) outlines, their promotion of migration as a response to population decline (Invercargill) or seeking to manage the outcomes of migration-led rapid population growth (Queenstown) speak to the wide roles, interests and values of different forms of migration governance and advocacy that may well differ from those of the national state. This was apparent in the pre-Covid context, particularly in Invercargill that has actively cultivated approaches to attract new populations. It has become a central concern in the context of a global pandemic where local organisations are faced with both the immediate crisis of emergency needs of temporary migrants and increasingly the longer-term dilemmas of maintaining population and economic development in a context where border-crossing remains severely limited for the foreseeable future.

Finally, the paper tells us something of the real problems associated with a national migration regime that permits and promotes high levels of temporary migration but provides few opportunities for long-term settlement and inclusion. It is already well established that these arrangements generate negative effects for individual migrants and their families, manifesting in the worst cases in forms of exploitation and modern slavery as a by-product of the regulation of temporary migration (Collins & Stringer, 2019). What this article shows is the challenge this poses for regional areas seeking to achieve population and economic stability in a context of severe uncertainty and

where current population composition does not provide a foundation for future growth. Even where local government and organisations desire to include temporary migrants as long-term residents and to encourage social inclusion and community cohesion, nationally oriented migration regimes that focus on labour market gaps and the preclusion of settlement reinforce a level of uncertainty and marginalisation of migrants that undermines these initiatives. The Covid-19 global pandemic did not create these issues but as this article has shown, it has revealed their significance and heightened the urgency facing places like Invercargill and Queenstown and likely many other regional areas in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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ENDNOTE

[1] In September 2021, as this article was being prepared for publication, the government announced the 2021 Resident Visa, which made up to 185,000 people on temporary visas eligible to apply for a residence visa subject to health and criminal background checks. A "one-off residence pathway [that] provides certainty to migrants and business," this scheme demonstrates official recognition of the flaws in Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to temporary migration and how these were revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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