

**Population Flows: Immigration  
Aspects**

**Department of Immigration and  
Multicultural Affairs**

**2000 edition**

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The beginning of a new millennium has seen Australia at a focal point of world events. The success of the Olympics has touched all Australians and will continue to bring kudos to our country. From a 'people' perspective, the success of the Olympics will benefit us in many ways.

International tourism is perhaps the most immediate beneficiary. Visitor visa numbers grew in 1999-2000 by some 7 per cent, generating foreign earnings of around \$16 billion as well as creating jobs in the Australian tourism industry. The Olympics have added to this industry with research conducted by the Tourism Forecasting Council suggesting that 1.5 million extra visitors are expected to come to Australia between 1998 and 2004. The first three months of 2000-01 saw an 8 per cent increase in visitor visas over the same period in 1999-00. It is particularly pleasing to see so much of this growth coming from emerging markets such as China.

The benefits of the Games are not purely tourism-related. The Olympics has been an important vehicle for focussing our energies towards a dynamic economy. An increase in international trade and investment, and the creation of new and growing markets has shown the need to attract people with skills and qualities that business requires to advance Australia's growing economy. The emphasis on attracting business and skills to our shores is having a positive effect. Recent research shows that more recent immigrants are faring better in the Australian labour force in the last couple of years compared with four to five years ago. The three main reasons for this appear to be:

- the stronger economy and employment situation in Australia;
- the introduction of the two-year wait for access to social security; and
- the more rigorous criteria now required of skilled migrants in terms of qualifications, age and English language ability.

Australia's strong position in the knowledge based dot.com world of the 21st century can be further enhanced. Initiatives have been developed that have facilitated the entry of increasing numbers of information technology professionals under both the migration and

temporary entry programs. In 1999-2000 the largest single occupation group in the skilled migration intake was in the area of information technology. The Government will continue to adjust skilled entry policies and procedures that will maximise the benefits to Australia from the entry of these and other skilled migrants.

The movement of skilled and business migrants is not one-way and we need to continue to attract skilled migrants to counter the permanent departure of highly skilled people looking for work experience in the international field. If Australia is to continue to benefit from a skills gain, we need to maintain immigration policies that attract a high level of skill to Australia. In 1999-2000 the net gain from permanent arrivals and departures of skilled people numbered over 15,000.

The statistics in this publication show that the globalisation of our economy is now a reality with net long-term temporary movements outnumbering net permanent movements for the first time in history in 1999-2000. Much of this movement can be attributed to the movement of highly skilled people into the Australian population. These long-term temporary entrants make a major contribution to Australia's international competitiveness, bringing with them new ideas, skills, technology, understanding and contacts. Demand for key skills under flexible arrangements has seen long-term temporary business resident grants increase by over one-third since 1996-97.

Overseas students are also making a significant contribution to Australia. Increasing numbers of students are building growth in our education industry, creating jobs and producing revenue of over \$3 billion in the 1999 calendar year. Students bring with them knowledge and skills that they further develop in Australia. Once qualified, these individuals have the necessary attributes and knowledge of Australia that make them attractive to Australian employers. Encouraged by Australia's streamlined provisions for skilled migration, many students eventually apply to migrate to Australia after they finalise their studies. Around 50 per cent of primary applicants under the new general points test are now former overseas students. Others take their knowledge home with them and ensure a lifetime link between their country and ours.

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Chapters 2 and 4 discuss the permanent and temporary entry programs for the 1999-2000 year.

All permanent and long-term temporary movements, contribute to the size of the population. The latest figures reported by the ABS estimate our population to number 19.0 million with an annual growth of 1.1 per cent. With declining fertility a feature that is expected to continue, Australia's population growth rate is projected to decline very gradually over the next five to ten years.

In terms of our population future, our objective is to achieve an economically, environmental and socially sustainable Australia. This can be achieved. It is projected that natural increase will fall below zero in the 2030s. Combined with net overseas migration of around 75,000 per year, this will see the population rising gradually to around 24 million by 2050, at which level it may stabilise.

By comparison, the populations of many European Union nations and Japan are projected to decline in absolute terms over the next 10 to 20 years. This is likely to have a significant impact on their pension and health expenditures and rates of economic growth. In response to this prospect, many of these countries are, for the first time, considering planned immigration programs. However, where immigration has never been part of the culture, public resistance becomes a real issue. Notions of citizenship that, unlike Australia's, are based on ancestry and race can compound this resistance.

This highlights the major strengths Australia has in a well established and orderly immigration program and an inclusive notion of citizenship. We were built on immigration and almost a quarter of our current population was born overseas. It is quite natural for us to anticipate significant future levels of net migration without the prospect of social or economic disruption. The inclusive nature of our society means that these migrants will be accepted as Australians and contribute towards our future on the basis of their skills and family ties alone. This is a major reason why the population news for Australia is, therefore, relatively good.

Chapter 1 reports the growth and movement of the Australian population over the past few years, along with the projected picture for the future.

The impact of migration, be it permanent, long-term or short-term, is most significant for regional development and economics. While the main focus of the Olympics was Sydney, many other regions are expected to benefit in the future. States and Territories are also benefiting from the state-specific migration mechanisms set up to assist in the dispersal of skilled migrants. In 1999-2000 these mechanisms accounted for around 5 per cent of the Migration Program, an improvement on 1998-99. These are described in Chapter 2 and an update of the demographic picture of each State and Territory can be found in Chapter 6.

While we look with great achievement over the last 100 years since Federation, the start of a new millennium projects a bright future for Australia. *Population Flows* will continue to document the demographic road travelled by all who live or have lived here and our contribution to Australia. It is with great pride I present, as the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, this my fifth edition of *Population Flows*

Philip Ruddock  
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs  
December 2000

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