

Chapter 3

State-Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM)

- A total of over 37,600 visas have been granted since the introduction of SSRM initiatives.
- In 2003-04, there were 12,725 visas granted under SSRM initiatives, an increase of over 60 per cent on 2002-03.
- This outcome represents nearly 18 per cent of the total Skill Stream in 2003-04.
- Victoria was the most popular State in 2003-04 (6,459 visas) followed by South Australia (2,071 visas), Queensland (1,483 visas) and Western Australia (968 visas).



State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

All spheres of government are focused on the development, acquisition and retention of skills. The Australian Government recognises that a balanced migration program plays an important role in contributing to the economic, demographic and social development of regional Australia and low population growth areas. Since 1996–97 the Australian Government, in consultation with State and Territory Governments, has introduced a number of initiatives designed to assist State and Territory Governments and regional authorities to:

- encourage a more balanced dispersal of Australia's skilled migrant intake;
- address skill shortages that may exist in specific regions of Australia; and
- attract overseas business people to establish new or joint ventures in regional areas.

Research into patterns of population distribution and the reasons why migrants decide to settle in certain areas of Australia shows that there are four factors which are of primary importance in determining where migrants settle: location of family members; the availability of employment; business opportunities; and prior experience of an area as, for example, an overseas student. The State-Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM) initiatives are based on these factors.

SSRM initiatives enable State/Territory governments, regional employers and development bodies to pursue regional development objectives and employment and business outcomes through the use of more flexible program provisions and threshold criteria for skilled migrants. They also provide an incentive through recognition of family linkages for skilled migrants to locate in areas of Australia that are seeking more migrants. These concessions have been carefully designed so that they do not undermine the overall integrity of the migration program objectives. Applicants must be skilled and meet mandatory health and character requirements.

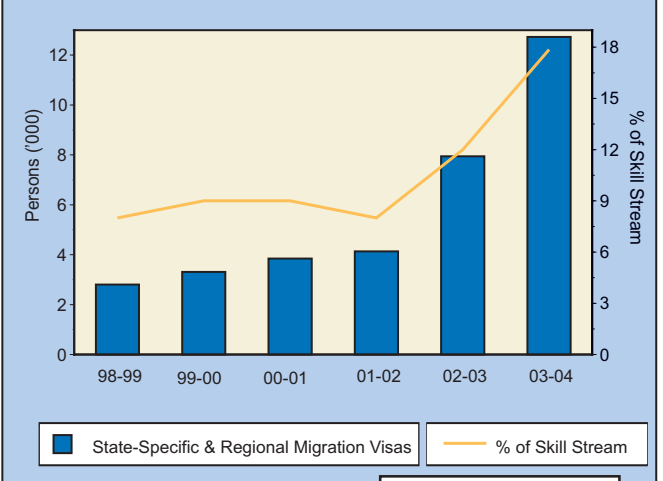
For the 2003–04 program year, 12,725 visas were granted under these initiatives. This is an increase of 60 per cent on the 2002–03 grant level of 7,940 visas and is the highest since the introduction of the initiatives in 1996–97. This outcome represents approximately 18 per cent of the total Skill Stream in 2003–04.

The distribution of these visas across States and Territories in 2002-03 and 2003-04 is provided in Figure 3-2.

Over 37,600 visas have been granted since the introduction of SSRM initiatives and continuing strong growth is expected particularly with the introduction of the Skilled Independent Regional visa from 1 July 2004.

The SSRM initiatives are designed to deliver a dispersal of skilled and business migrants that is in line with the needs of each jurisdiction. The Government continues to refine and introduce new initiatives to encourage skilled and business migrants to settle in regional Australia, with efforts continuing into 2004-05. The new Skilled-Independent Regional (SIR) visa provides a pathway to permanent residence for skilled people who wish to live and work in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan centre.

Fig. 3-1: State-Specific and Regional Migration Visa Grants, 1998–99 to 2003–04



Source Data: MPMS and IMIRS

Fig. 3-2: Distribution of State-Specific and Regional Migration Visa Grants

State/Territory	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
New South Wales	228	617	857
Victoria	2,129	4,146	6,459
Queensland	272	649	1,483
South Australia	703	1,324	2,071
Western Australia	341	584	968
Tasmania	204	197	291
Northern Territory	57	132	154
Australian Capital Territory	202	292	442
Total	4,136	7,941	12,725

Source Data: MPMS and IMIRS

Fig. 3-3: Settler Arrivals by State of Stay

State/Territory	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
New South Wales	35,301	36,431	40,561
Victoria	21,374	23,109	28,028
Queensland	15,825	16,182	20,284
South Australia	3,316	3,657	4,773
Western Australia	10,954	12,279	15,411
Tasmania	589	811	884
Northern Territory	459	483	596
Australian Capital Territory	1,075	957	1,050
Total^(a)	88,900	93,914	111,590

(a) Includes Christmas Island

Source Data: OAD Statistics, DIMIA

Key Milestones in State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

October 1995	–	Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)
November 1996	–	Skilled – Regional Linked category
November 1996	–	Skill Matching Database (SMD)
July 1997	–	State/Territory Sponsored Regional Established Business in Australia (REBA) category
November 1997	–	State/Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) category
July 1998	–	Enhancement to Regional Linked category
July 1999	–	Skill Matching Visa (SMV) class
July 1999	–	Skilled - State/Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) class
July 1999	–	Skilled – Regional Sponsored (SRS) category
July 1999	–	English Language Concession for SRS category
July 2001	–	Skilled – Regional Sponsored (SRS) became the Skilled Designated Area Sponsored category (SDAS)
May to July 2002	–	Enhancements to the Skill Matching Database/Skill Matching Visa implemented (early registration and trial removal of initial fee)
November 2002	–	English Language Concession for Skill Matching Visa
November 2002	–	Applicants on Skill Matching Database eligible for nomination under Labour Agreements without lodging a new application
November 2002	–	Concessions for regional sponsorship of temporary business entrants
March 2003	–	Business Skills two- stage process
July 2003	–	Changes to the points test for General Skilled Migration allows for the award of 5 additional points for overseas students who study and reside in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan area for at least 2 years
July 2004	–	Two-stage Skilled-Independent Regional (Provisional) visa
	–	Creation of network of Regionals Outreach Officers (ROOs)

There are challenges in attracting migrants to regional Australia, particularly as there is a well established migration path to Sydney. During 2003-04, the Australian Government worked with the NSW Government to identify measures to contain migration numbers to Sydney. Agreed measures include the development of a Sydney Skills Shortage List (SSSL) and a higher salary threshold requirement for skilled persons sponsored to Sydney.

The proportion of skilled migrants opting to settle in regional Australia is expected to continue to grow strongly and greatly assist economic development in regional areas. State and Territory Governments and regional authorities determine the extent of their involvement in SSRM initiatives depending on their own individual development priorities. The enhancements provide State and Territory governments with greater influence over the number and skill level of migrants settling in their jurisdictions and is in line with their economic and regional development objectives. This partnership approach is essential to the long-term success of these policies.

The initiatives include permanent skilled migration categories as well as specific temporary residence programs that can be used to fill skill shortages. These regional initiatives can be used to the advantage of regions experiencing skill shortages. The main SSRM initiatives are:

- Employment based migration initiatives
 - State/Territory Nominated Independent Scheme (STNI)
 - Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)
 - Skill Matching Database (SMD)
 - Skill Matching Visa (SMV)

- Skilled-Independent Regional (SIR) (Provisional)
- Additional General Skilled Migration (GSM) points for study undertaken in a regional or low population growth area of Australia;
- Employment based temporary entry schemes
 - Sponsored Business Long Stay Visa;
- Family based initiatives
 - Skilled Designated Area Sponsored
 - Skilled Designated Area Sponsored Overseas Student (Residence);
- Business based initiatives
 - State/Territory Sponsored Business Visas (two stage process).

Details of these initiatives follow in this Chapter and further information is located on the Department's website at: www.immi.gov.au/migration/regional.

In addition to the State-specific and regional migration initiatives there is a range of other migration categories (both permanent and temporary) that impact on regional Australia. Examples are:

- skilled migrants who do not migrate under regional initiatives, but who may still elect to reside in regional centres or low population growth metropolitan cities;
- Temporary Resident Doctors; and
- the Working Holiday Maker program, which allows young people to tour Australia and engage in short-term work during their stay which can be in regional areas.

Particular State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

Skill Matching

The Skill Matching scheme, introduced on 1 November 1996, is designed to support State and Territory governments and regional employers in meeting skill needs in regional areas of Australia.

Skill matching is made possible by the web-based Skill Matching Database (SMD). The database 'lists' the occupational, educational and work experience details of skilled applicants from overseas. Many of these applicants are interested in settling in regional Australia and have occupations that are in demand or in short supply in these areas. These potential migrants have lodged an application:

- in the Skilled-Independent category and opted for skill matching by completing the relevant form; or
- for a Skill Matching Visa (see below).

Operated by the Commonwealth, the database is regularly updated and distributed to all State and Territory governments and a network of regional development authorities.

State and Territory governments can nominate applicants from the database for the Skill Matching Visa or STNI scheme and employers can nominate applicants from the database for RSMS.

An abridged version of the database is available on the Internet through DIMIA's website www.immi.gov.au/skills. The SMD is being upgraded to provide a more user friendly interface.

To increase the effectiveness of the SMD:

- interested independent applicants are registered on the SMD shortly after lodgement of their application; and
- applicants on the SMD are eligible to be nominated under Labour Agreements without lodging a new application. In addition, the increased use of Labour Agreements by peak industries to fill regional labour shortages is being encouraged.

The changes have seen the number of people on the SMD more than quadruple in recent years with over 7,000 people registered at the end of June 2004, in over 300 occupations.

State/Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) Scheme

The STNI Scheme enables States and Territories to sponsor Skilled-Independent category and Skill Matching Visa applicants, who are interested in settling in States and Territories where their skills are in demand. They can be identified through the Skill Matching Database or directly by State and Territory governments.

State and Territory governments participating in the scheme aim to select applicants who have a sound chance of gaining employment in that State or Territory soon after their arrival.

The Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian governments actively sponsored skilled migrants in 2003–04. The 2003–04 Migration Program outcome included nearly 1,630 visas granted under the STNI and Skill Matching schemes. Of these, 1,003 persons were nominated by the Victorian Government, 566 persons by the South Australian Government and 59 persons by the Tasmanian Government.

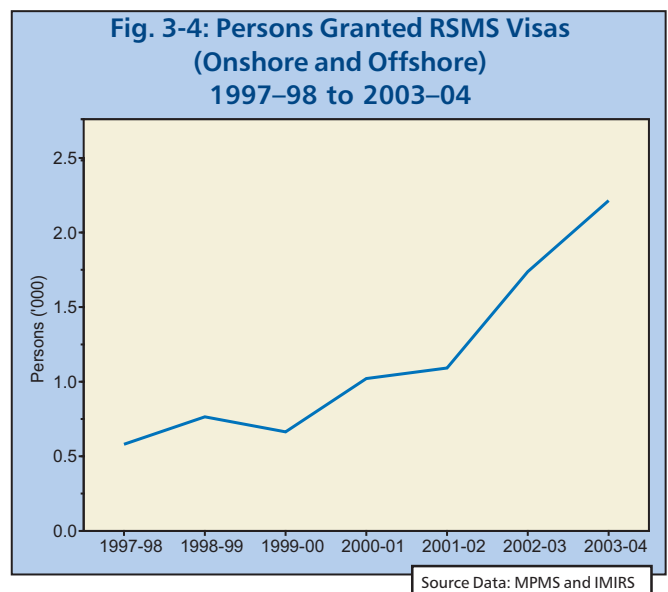
Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme

The Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) was initiated in 1995-96 to assist employees in regional Australia fill skilled vacancies where they have been unable to do so through the local labour market. The scheme is available to employers in all areas of Australia except Perth, Melbourne, Wollongong, Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

The RSMS process involves an employer nomination (through a State or Territory Regional Certifying Body (RCB) to confirm that there is a genuine need for the position to be filled) and a visa application by the prospective employee.

Employers may nominate employees directly from overseas, or from within Australia. Those nominated from within Australia are often already in regional employment on a temporary basis.

For the position to be approved under this program there must be a genuine vacancy for a position in a business in regional Australia and, unless the appointment is exceptional, requires a person with an Australian Diploma equivalent qualification, in full-time employment and for at least two years. The position can be approved as an exceptional appointment if the position is so highly specialised or unusual that a person with a Diploma could not be found for the position. The nominee is generally expected to have the skills for the position at Diploma level or higher (unless it is an exceptional appointment), be under the age of 45 and to have functional English. Any employer with their business based in regional Australia may participate in the scheme.



DIMIA actively promotes the RSMS and officers from DIMIA's Business Centres maintain close contact with interested bodies to increase awareness of the program. There is a special focus on developing closer links with Chambers of Commerce in regional areas and other government agencies such as the State and Regional Development authorities to overcome skill shortages.

Since its introduction in 1996, more than 8,000 visas have been granted under RSMS. In 2003-04, a total of 2,214 visas were granted under the RSMS (onshore and offshore) which represents an increase of more than 26 per cent in visa grants from last financial year.

More information on the RSMS can be found on DIMIA's website at: www.immi.gov.au/migration/employers/rsms.htm.

A current list of Regional Certifying Bodies can be found at: www.immi.gov.au/migration/employers/certifying_bodies.htm.

Skill Matching Visa

The Skill Matching Visa (SMV), introduced on 1 July 1999, is designed to link skilled migrants with specific skilled vacancies through STNI and RSMS.

It provides opportunities for skilled people who do not meet the current passmark under the Skilled-Independent category to be included on the SMD. It is not points tested, but applicants must meet key threshold criteria relating to skills and age. Compared to the General Skilled Migration (GSM) points test, there is a lower recent work experience requirement and more options available for applicants to meet the English language requirement.

On 1 November 2002, a concessional English language requirement was introduced for this category varying the requirement from vocational to functional English for applicants who agree to pay an English language upgrade fee. The State/Territory sponsoring the applicant gazetted by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs for this purpose have in place appropriate upgrading arrangements and South Australia and Tasmania are gazetted for this purpose. The Northern Territory is also gazetted for this purpose and is considering becoming involved in the Skill Matching scheme.

Skilled-Independent Regional (SIR) (Provisional)

From 1 July 2004, skilled people who wish to live in regional Australia are able to apply for a SIR (Provisional) visa. The SIR (Provisional) visa has been developed in consultation with State and Territory governments and is designed to attract skilled migrants who wish to live in a regional or low population growth area in Australia but are unable to meet the criteria to be granted a permanent visa.

Applicants for the SIR (Provisional) visa are required to meet the existing threshold criteria for General Skilled Migration. However, the passmark that must be attained is slightly lower than that applied to Skilled-Independent visas. If approved, visa applicants are granted a visa valid for three years. After they have resided in a regional or low population growth area for at least two years, and been employed for 12 months, they are then eligible to apply for a permanent visa.

An integral part of the new two-stage regional visa is that an authorised state or territory authority or regional certifying body must sponsor a prospective applicant. Sponsorship enables States, Territories and Regions to promote themselves to prospective migrants, target particular skills in short supply and give potential migrants information about living in their jurisdiction to help them settle.

Rewarding Study in Regional Australia

From 1 July 2003, overseas students who have studied and lived in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan area for at least two years can be awarded five bonus points under the General Skilled Migration points test. This is in addition to the five points already available to applicants who have an Australian qualification. These points are designed to encourage overseas students to live and study in regional Australia. It also aims to encourage these overseas students to remain and contribute their skills to the benefit of these areas after they complete their studies.

Regional Australia, for this category, is generally defined as any Statistical Division with a population at the 2001 Census of less than 200,000. In addition, metropolitan areas that have experienced low population growth between the 1996 Census and the 2001 Census (less than 50 per cent of national average population growth) are included as part of this measure.

Temporary Skilled Workers

The temporary business (subclass 457) visa, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, allows Australian businesses to appoint skilled overseas workers for up to four years. To meet the skilled occupation requirement, the position must meet minimum skill and salary thresholds. In November 2002, concessional arrangements were introduced to reflect the special skill needs of regional Australia. These provisions allow the salary threshold to be waived and the skill levels to be extended for regional Australia. Unskilled occupations are not included. The waiver of the threshold requirements must have the endorsement of the Regional Certifying Body in the area that the position is necessary, the salary levels are consistent with the awards for the occupation or industry and local levels, and the position could not be readily filled locally.

Skilled Designated Area Sponsored (SDAS) Category (previously known as Skilled Regional Sponsored and Regional Linked)

This visa allows Australian citizens and permanent residents to sponsor skilled relatives (including first cousins, nieces and nephews) to join them in designated areas identified by State and Territory governments. Currently all of Australia apart from Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Perth and Brisbane are designated areas.

Applicants need to meet threshold criteria for skill, age, English language and work experience. There are flexible thresholds for work experience and the English language requirement. Under the concessional arrangement, the English language requirement may be met where:

- the applicant has been assessed as having only functional rather than vocational level English;
- the applicant's sponsor lives in a State/Territory which has put appropriate upgrading arrangements in place and has been gazetted by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs for this purpose; and
- the applicant has paid the required fee to the designated service provider before the visa is granted.

Business Skills Category State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

Since 1 March 2003, the majority of all Business Skills entrants enter Australia initially on a provisional visa for four years and, after satisfactory evidence of a specified level of business or investment activity, may apply for permanent residence. There is also provision for high calibre business migrants under the Business Talent visa to obtain direct permanent residence if they have high level business attributes and are sponsored by a State or Territory government agency.

The interests of State/Territory governments have been given greater priority in the development of the two-stage processing arrangements. Applicants may apply for sponsorship from a State or Territory government and be eligible to meet concessional criteria, enabling sponsors to attract the kinds of business people they are seeking to assist in the economic development of their specific areas. This linkage also encourages applicants who are more committed to succeeding in business in Australia.

In 2003-04, State/Territory agencies approved over 1,490 sponsorship applications and 85 per cent of all business skills provisional (first stage) visa applications were State/Territory sponsored.

The 2002-03 and 2003-04 program years produced record levels in the number of business entrants and their families sponsored by State and Territory governments to establish new or joint ventures or to continue a business they had established in a regional area. In 2003-04 there were 1,193 visas granted under the State Sponsored Business Skills (SSBS) and Regional Established Business in Australia (REBA) categories. For the second successive year, Western Australia sponsored the highest percentage of these entrants (26 per cent), followed by South Australia and Queensland (21 per cent each). New South Wales sponsored fewer than 3 per cent of these entrants. Australia continues to actively encourage Business Skills entrants to set up business in regional, rural or low growth areas of Australia.

The following are the State/Territory sponsored Business Skills visa categories.

State/Territory Sponsored Business Owner (Provisional)

For people with a successful business career, including senior management or ownership of a business, who have significant assets and a genuine and realistic commitment to participate as a principal in the management of a new or existing business in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Senior Executive (Provisional)

For senior executive employees of major overseas businesses who have been responsible for strategic policy development affecting a major component or a wide range of operations of that business, who have significant assets and a genuine and realistic commitment to participate as a principal in the management of a new or existing business in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Investor (Provisional)

For investors and business people who have an overall successful record of business or investment activities, have significant assets, are willing to invest funds in a designated investment in Australia for four years and have a genuine commitment to maintain business and investment activity in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Business Owner (Residence)

For holders of Business (Long Stay) Independent Executive visas or Business Skills (Provisional) visas who have established a successful business in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Investor (Residence)

For holders of the State/Territory Sponsored Investor (Provisional) visa who have maintained a designated investment in Australia for four years and have lived in the sponsoring State or Territory for at least two years in the four years prior to application.

Business Talent (Migrant)

For high calibre business people who are owners or part owners of an overseas business and have an overall successful business career, significant business assets and have a genuine and realistic commitment to participate as a principal in the management of a new or existing business in Australia.

Regional Established Business in Australia (Residence)

For holders of Business (Long Stay) Independent Executive visas who have established a successful business in a 'Designated Area' of Australia.