

Leaving Australia: a new paradigm of international migration¹

Introduction

The number of people leaving Australia has increased significantly in recent years. In 2002–03 a record number of 50 463 people left with the intention of staying away permanently. ‘Long-term’ departures (people intending to leave for 12 months or longer) have also reached unprecedented levels: 171 466 in 2001–02. Australia is commonly categorised as a country of immigration, but it has also become a country of significant emigration.

This Research Note looks at the nature and implications of these ‘out-movements’ in a time of worldwide increased mobility and ‘a new paradigm of international migration’.

Who is leaving for where?

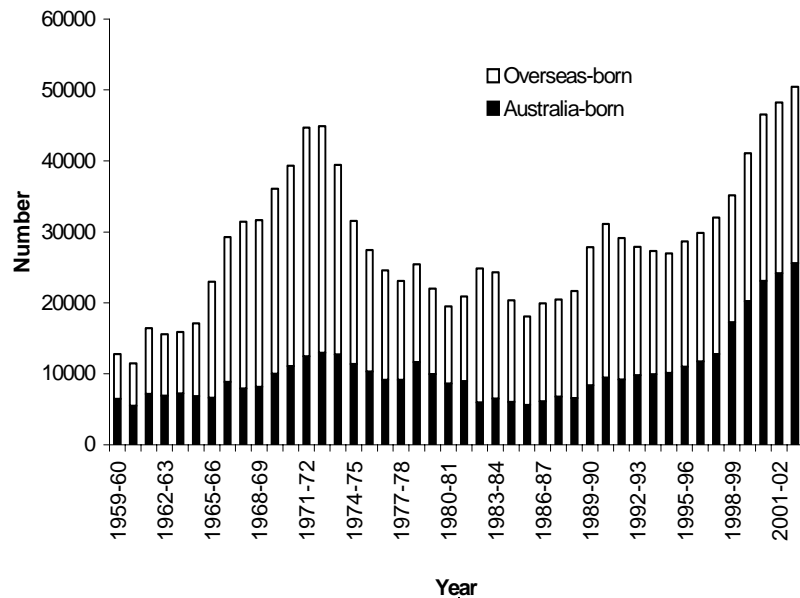
Settler loss has been a constant feature of post-war migration to Australia, with over 20 per cent of settlers eventually leaving, mostly returning to their home countries. Fluctuations in numbers have related to earlier levels of immigration. There has, however, been a quantum change in the level and nature of ‘out-movement’: over the last five years the number of people born in Australia who left ‘permanently’ doubled. In 2001–02 for the first time ‘Australian-born’ permanent departures outnumbered former settlers leaving the nation. In 2002–03 the number of Australian-born permanent departures reached a record level of 25 578, which was twice the average for the 1990s (12 145) and almost three times the average of the 1980s (8875).

A similar pattern has emerged with long-term departures. Between 1998–99 and 2001–02 there was an increase in the number of long-term departures from Australia from 140 281 to 171 446 (22.2 per cent). (A small decline in 2002–03 reflects the SARS epidemic and global

security concerns.) The estimated size of the Australian diaspora is around 900 000 persons. Besides being relatively large (over 4 per cent of the population), it is also highly selective. Departing residents tend to be younger and more educated than the general

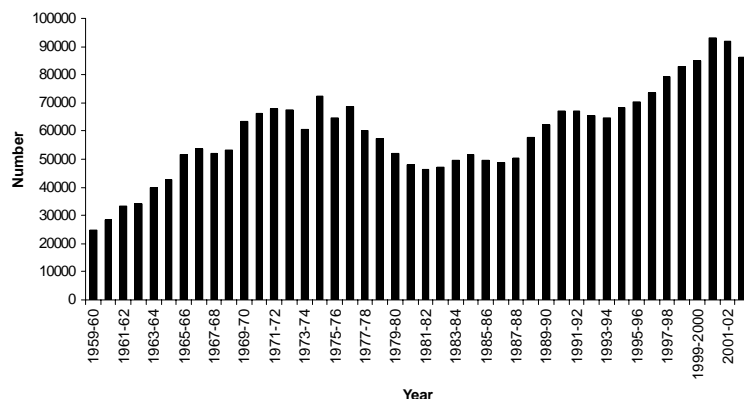
population. Major destinations are the developed economies of the United Kingdom, the European Union and North America. An increasing percentage of the outflow is to Asian countries where rapidly developing economies have experienced skills shortages.

Figure 1. Permanent departures of Australia-born and overseas-born persons from Australia, 1959–60 to 2002–03



Source: DIMIA, *Australian Immigration: Consolidated Statistics and Immigration Update*, various issues; DIMIA unpublished data.

Figure 2. Australian resident long-term departures from Australia, 1959–60 to 2002–03



Source: DIMIA, *Australian Immigration: Consolidated Statistics and Immigration Update*, various issues; DIMIA unpublished data

Note: The scales of these graphs are different

Brain drain, gain or circulation?

Record levels of departures have renewed concerns about 'brain drain'. However, it is unrealistic to expect that Australia can remain isolated from the new 'hyper-mobility' of highly skilled people that is associated with globalisation. Indeed, migration to Australia is already dominated by temporary movements.² Having a culture and long tradition of managed migration arguably gives Australia an advantage in the new 'age of migration'. Australia experiences a 'brain gain' in that it records substantial net migration gains in all high-skill and high-qualification occupational categories.³ In addition, there are advantages for Australia in the new 'out-movements':

- most Australians working overseas remit substantial sums of foreign exchange
- the skills and experience of Australian workers are being extended
- the linkages that are being established with overseas companies and markets are embedding Australia's economy internationally
- export opportunities are created for Australian companies through expatriates familiar with Australian-based suppliers.

In any event, most of the movement is not permanent; many expatriates eventually return to Australia. That said, concerns remain that Australia is losing its 'brightest and best', especially its top scientists, innovators and business people. The Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Australian expatriates. The terms of reference cover: the extent of the diaspora; factors driving Australians to live overseas; costs, benefits and

opportunities; needs and concerns of overseas Australians; policies and programs in other countries; and ways expatriates can be better used to promote Australia's economic, social and cultural interests.

An international migration policy?

Recent research suggests that Australia would benefit from developing a diaspora policy aimed at maximising benefits from the new 'brain circulation' of Australians going overseas and other skilled people coming in. A recent Committee for Economic Development of Australia report argues that Australia needs an *international* migration policy that embraces emigration and circulation as well as immigration.⁴ Such a policy would encompass:

- *recruitment*: Australia needs to build on its record of recruiting highly skilled persons. However, there should be a public debate about the effect of this on less developed nations. Policies need to be considered that maximise the development benefits on their home countries of immigrants to Australia
- *retention*: Australia must ensure that there are opportunities for the 'brightest and the best' so they do not have to leave the country permanently to achieve their potential
- *return*: Australia must recognise that there is much to gain from young Australians working in other countries. If a substantial number can return with enhanced talents the country will gain a double dividend
- *re-engagement*: Many Australians living overseas on a permanent or long-term basis still feel a strong sense of being Australian. On a cultural level, it

is important to include these expatriates in the mainstream of Australian life. On an economic level, there are many ways in which the expertise, experience and contacts of the diaspora can be harnessed to benefit Australia in a rapidly globalising economy.

1. This Research Note is one of a series of extracts derived from 'A new paradigm of international migration: implications for migration policy and planning for Australia', [Research Paper](#), no. 10, Parliamentary Library, Canberra 2003–04.
2. Graeme Hugo, 'Temporary Migration: a new paradigm of international migration', [Research Note](#), no. 46, Parliamentary Library, 2003–04.
3. B. Birrell, I. R. Dobson, V. Rapson and T. F. Smith, *Skilled Labour: Gains and Losses*, DIMIA, Canberra, 2001.
4. G. J. Hugo, D. Rudd and K. Harris, 'Australia's diaspora: its size, nature and policy implications', *CEDA Information Paper*, no. 80, CEDA, Melbourne, 2003.

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Table 1. National diasporas in relation to resident national populations

United States:	7 million – 2.5 per cent of national population
Australia:	900 000 – 4.3 per cent of national population
New Zealand:	850 000 – 21.9 per cent of national population
Philippines:	7.6 million – 9.4 per cent of national population

Source: US Census Bureau, *Team 7 Final Report* and Conference on an Enumeration of Americans Overseas in the 2010 Census, 2002; Southern Cross, *Estimates of Australian citizens living overseas as at 31 December 2001*, 2002; R. Bedford, *Reflections on the spatial odysseys of New Zealanders*, 2001; Commission of Filipinos Overseas, *Personal communication*, 4 February 2004.