

Regional migration: a new paradigm of international migration¹

Introduction

The spatial distribution of Australia's population is not only shaped by internal population movements. It is also greatly influenced by the extent to which immigrants settle in a different spatial pattern to that of the resident national population. Job opportunities, skills, work experience, areas of settlement of fellow countrymen and migrant networks all play a critical role. This Research Note summarises the settlement patterns of the Australian population and describes recent efforts to encourage migrants to settle in regional areas.

Settlement patterns

A shift in interstate population distribution has occurred in Australia's post-war population away from the south-eastern states to the northern and western parts of the country. In 1947, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania accounted for 78.4 per cent of the population, but by 2001 these states had only 68.7 per cent of the total. Queensland increased its share of the population from 14.6 per cent to 18.7 per cent and Western Australia from 6.6 per cent to 9.8 per cent.

While much of this shift has been due to interstate population movements, it is also due to a

propensity for immigrants to settle in particular states. A comparison of the Australia-Born and Overseas-Born columns in Table 1 shows that immigrants have settled disproportionately in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia and this has been an influential factor in shaping the distribution of the national population. It should be noted, however, that there has been a striking increase in the proportion of recently arrived migrants settling in Queensland (Table 1- Persons Arriving In Last 5 Years column).

The relative contributions of net international migration, net interstate migration and natural increases to changes in state and territory populations are shown in Table 2. In South Australia and Tasmania net international migration gains were not enough to counter-balance the net outflow from interstate migration.

Settlement by migrants in urban and rural areas shows the under-representation in non-metropolitan categories is much greater among recent arrivals than among immigrants of longer standing, especially in rural areas (Table 3).

Regional migration initiatives

The last few years have seen a more

concerted effort than at any time since the settlement of displaced persons after the Second World War to influence where immigrants settle. A raft of State Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM) schemes now enable employers, state/territory governments or relatives to sponsor prospective skilled migrants to designated areas. Mechanisms include the:

- Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme
- State/Territory Nominated Independent Scheme
- Skilled Designated Area Sponsored Visa Categories
- Skill Matching Database
- Skill Matching Visa
- Regional Established Business in Australia, and
- Two-stage Territory Sponsored Business Owner, Investor and Senior Executive visa categories.

Other initiatives include:

- temporary residence concessions for regional Australia, including a greater role for regional certifying bodies in supporting sponsorships in these areas
- changes to the general skilled migration category. In order to encourage a greater proportion of overseas students to consider studying and eventually settling in regional Australia, adjustments have been made to the points test and eligibility criteria
- the introduction of a two-stage process (that is, a provisional visa and then a granting of permanent residence once a business is fully established) for the business skills categories. In addition, there is a much greater emphasis on state and territory government sponsorship and support at both stages (with immediate permanent residence only available for high calibre

Table 1. Australian states and territories: percentage distribution of the population by birthplace and overseas-born arriving in the last five years, 1996 and 2001

State/Territory	Australia-Born (per cent)		Overseas-Born (per cent)		Persons Arriving In Last 5 Years (per cent)	
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
NSW	33.22	32.65	35.54	35.93	41.21	40.81
Vic	23.96	24.04	26.61	26.31	24.40	23.60
Qld	19.96	20.44	14.25	15.01	15.11	17.33
SA	8.15	8.07	7.74	7.22	4.52	4.10
WA	8.91	9.11	12.18	12.06	11.61	11.28
TAS	2.98	2.83	1.19	1.11	0.78	0.69
NT	1.13	1.16	0.75	0.72	0.73	0.72
ACT	1.68	1.68	1.71	1.63	1.61	1.47
Other Territories	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: ABS 1996 and 2001 Censuses.

business migrants who have state/territory government support).

The overall number of SSRM scheme settlers was 7921 by 2002-03. Continuing initiatives are likely to see further increases over the next few years.

The current debate

State Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM) schemes are currently at a key point in Australia. There is a strong commitment on the part of several state governments (South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria) and the federal government to increase the number of permanent settlement visas issued under these initiatives. Moreover, the Labor Opposition has committed to developing measures to ensure that at least 45 per cent of Australia's new settlers go to rural and regional areas.

Some have been sceptical of Australia's regional migration schemes. For example Birrell shows that most 'regional' migrants have settled in capital cities, especially Melbourne.² (Although Melbourne is not eligible for receiving migrants in all SSRM categories, it can receive those under the larger regional-linked Skilled-Designated Area Sponsor and, to a lesser extent, the State Sponsored Skill categories).

Temporary migration

Australia has entered a new paradigm of international migration with the new large-scale acceptance of temporary workers. This movement should be included in consideration of state-specific migration schemes because:

- the temporary migration is highly selective of very skilled persons
- it is likely that such migrants make a significant economic contribution, and
- a substantial proportion of the temporary residents eventually settle in Australia.

The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has indicated that the Regional Migration Scheme will include some new initiatives to direct temporary entrants as well as permanent entrants to states like South Australia. These include temporary residence for doctors who agree to go to an 'area of need' and temporary resident concessions for regional Australia which allow a greater role for regional certifying bodies to support sponsorships.

Conclusion

Attempts to influence where migrants settle in Australia have had only marginal influence on the distribution of migrants in Australia. Migration theory and past

experience point to recent migrants concentrating in areas where there are substantial communities of fellow countrymen and abundant job opportunities. Programs to divert migrants will always have difficulty. However, with entry requirements relaxed for people in peripheral areas, substantial numbers of potential migrants who are unable to qualify for settlement under the national migration regulations will be attracted to SSRM schemes. The effectiveness in terms of redistributing the population and assisting the development of regional areas and peripheral states will depend on the definitions of regional and eligibility (if metropolitan Melbourne continues to be included, it will attract the bulk of the new immigrants), and on the extent to which SSRM scheme settlers stay in their original location.

The eventual impact of the SSRM schemes is difficult to predict and cannot be based purely on past experience. It has mainly been the skill and family elements in the immigration program that have been the subject of such schemes, but it may be possible in the future to consider the humanitarian part of the program.

Table 2. Australian states and territories: natural increase, net overseas migration, net interstate migration and total population growth, financial years 1996–2001

State	Natural Increase		Net Overseas Migration		Net Interstate Migration		Total Population Growth No.
	No.	% of Growth	No.	% of Growth	No.	% of Growth	
NSW	244 414	60.9	243 869	60.8	-86 925	-21.7	401 358
Vic	166 298	53.6	141 572	45.6	2 332	0.8	310 202
Qld	149 510	41.0	88 129	24.2	126 659	34.8	364 298
SA	39 745	118.9	19 621	58.7	-25 950	-77.7	33 416
WA	84 107	47.6	79 144	44.8	13 361	7.6	176 612
Tas	14 184	385.1	1550	42.1	-19 417	-527.2	-3683
NT	16 662	87.4	4172	21.9	-1773	-9.3	19 061
ACT	17 510	199.7	-453	-5.2	-8287	-94.5	8770
Australia*	732 649	56.0	576 221	44.0	-	-	1 308 870

Source: ABS, *Australian Demographic Statistics June Quarter 2002*.

* Includes other territories.

Table 3. Australia: persons by section of state by birthplace by year of arrival at 2001 Census

	Overseas Born								Australian Born		Total	
	Arrived Before				Arrived After				No.	%	No.	%
	1996		1996		1996		1996					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Major Urban	2 778 580	80.6	584 872	89.0	8 163 240	59.9	11 526 692	65.0				
Other Urban	417 236	12.1	51 543	7.8	3 443 950	25.2	3 912 729	22.1				
Bounded Locality	43 479	1.3	3 806	0.6	410 248	3.0	457 533	2.6				
Rural Balance	207 476	6.0	17 062	2.6	1 606 337	11.8	1 830 875	10.3				
Migratory	1380	-	196	-	5706	0.1	7282	-				
Total	3 448 151	100.0	657 479	100.0	13 629 481	100.0	17 735 111	100.0				

Source: ABS 2001 Census, unpublished tabulations

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 2003-04.
2. B. Birrell, 'Redistributing Migrants: the Labor Agenda', *People and Place*, vol. 5, no. 4.

**Professor Graeme Hugo,
Consultant
Social Policy Group
Information and Research
Services
IRS Contact Catherine Böhm**

Views expressed in this Research Note are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Information and Research Services and are not to be attributed to the Parliamentary Library. Research Notes provide concise analytical briefings on issues of interest to Senators and Members. As such they may not canvass all of the key issues. Advice on legislation or legal policy issues contained in this paper is provided for use in parliamentary debate and for related parliamentary purposes. This paper is not professional legal opinion.

© Commonwealth of Australia
ISSN 1328-8016