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IMMIGRANT STOCK STATISTICS - THE AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

Submitted by Australian Bureau of Statistics *

Summary

1. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines Australia's stock of migrants on the basis of the number of overseas-born residents.
2. For statistical purposes, the ABS defines a resident as a person who is in Australia for 12 months or more, or who is usually resident in Australia but is absent for less than 12 months. The Australian definition of residency does not, therefore, depend on whether a person is in Australia on a temporary or permanent basis; nor is it based on a person's nationality, year of arrival in Australia, or the legal basis of their entry into Australia.
3. The main data source for the stock of overseas-born residents is the five-yearly Australian Census of Population and Housing. Census-year estimates of overseas-born residents are compiled by adjusting census counts (e.g. adding usual residents temporarily overseas, subtracting temporary visitors, and adding the estimated census net undercount).
4. Intercensal estimates of overseas-born residents are produced by updating the census-year estimates annually, using flow data on permanent and long-term temporary migration. The flows are based on quarterly administrative data obtained from passenger cards completed at Australia's border ports by travellers arriving or departing.

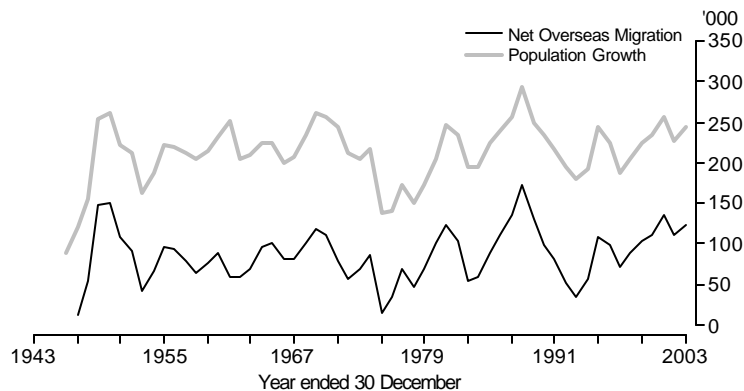
* Paper prepared by Garth Bode, ABS.

5. The ABS publishes the annual estimates of the number of overseas-born residents, classified by country of birth, age and sex.

Background

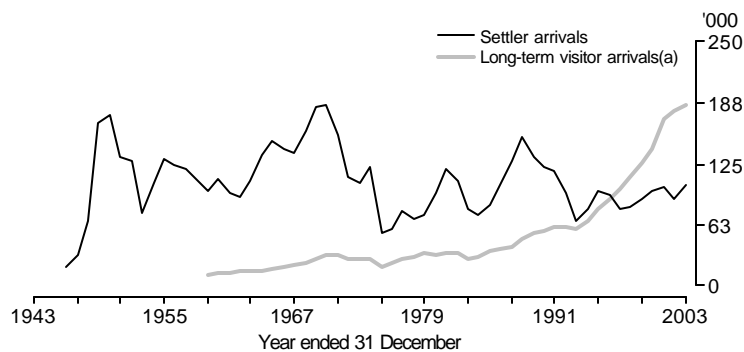
6. The Australian focus on estimating the stock of migrants in terms of the number of overseas-born residents is largely a result of Australia's status as a migrant receiving country. By international standards, Australia's levels of immigration have been high since the Second World War. Net overseas migration in Australia was around 100,000 per annum throughout the decade after the Second World War, and has rarely dropped below 50,000 per annum since. This has had a large impact on Australia's population, which grew from 7.5 million in 1946 to 20 million by 2004. Approximately 23% of all Australian residents are overseas-born, and 40% of all Australian residents have at least one parent born overseas.

CONTRIBUTION OF OVERSEAS MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA'S POPULATION



7. Over the past five decades, the emphasis of government immigration policy has been on permanent immigration, although this has changed in recent years. In the last decade, temporary migration has become increasingly important, with overseas students, temporary business entrants and working holiday makers arriving for periods ranging from three months to four years. The number of arrivals as short-term 'guest workers' has been negligible over this period, in contrast to the sizeable guest worker programs in some western European countries.

PERMANENT AND LONG-TERM VISITOR ARRIVALS TO AUSTRALIA



(a) Long-term visitor arrivals numbers were not measured separately before 1959.

8. While Australian governments have long favoured policies of high immigration, they have had control over less than half of all permanent and long-term arrivals and departures.

Departures have never been restricted, and many permanent arrivals are New Zealand citizens who do not need to apply for a visa before arriving in Australia, and whose arrivals are effectively unrestricted. New Zealanders constituted 17% of all permanent arrivals in 2003-04.

9. There is no comprehensive register of immigrants in Australia. However, there are some partial administrative lists such as electoral rolls, a national health insurance register, tax-payer registers, and a register of all persons in Australia on temporary visas.

10. The enumeration of migrants in terms of the overseas-born resident population has therefore arisen from several features of Australia's migration history: high levels of immigration have resulted in a high proportion of overseas-born people in Australia; a large proportion of these have arrived in Australia as settlers rather than as temporary long-term visitors; many arrivals (and all departures) have been unrestricted; and there is no register of all immigrants.

The concept of residency

11. An important definition which underpins Australian statistics on the stock of migrants is the definition of an Australian resident. An Australian resident is defined by the ABS as a person who is in Australia for 12 months or more, or who is usually resident in Australia but is absent for less than 12 months.

12. The ABS broadly follows the United Nations guidelines on long-term migrants and permanent settlers, counting both groups as residents for the purposes of population estimates. The Australian definition of residency does not, therefore, depend on whether the person is in Australia on a temporary or permanent basis, their year of arrival in Australia, or whether they have Australian citizenship.

Estimated resident population

13. The estimated resident population (ERP) of Australia is crucial to electoral distribution and to the allocation of taxation revenue to other levels of government; it is also important to many other government, community and business decisions and activities. ERP is updated each quarter through natural increase (number of births minus number of deaths) and net overseas migration (net permanent and long-term movements).

14. ERP is based on the concept of residency outlined above. It is the number of people, regardless of nationality or citizenship, who usually live in Australia, with the exception of foreign diplomatic personnel and their families.

ERP by Country of Birth

15. ERP by country of birth statistics, disaggregated by single year of age and sex, are available for 30 June each year. These estimates are compiled by updating the census year estimates with flow statistics on overseas arrivals and departures (sourced from passenger cards completed at Australia's border ports by travellers on arrival or departure) and death statistics by country of birth.

Asylum seekers / refugees

16. The ABS does not count asylum seekers or refugees in Australia as separate groups, although this information is produced by the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). However, they are included conceptually in the census if they fulfil the 12 month residency rule, and are subsequently included in ERP by country of birth statistics. In practice, persons in immigration detention centres on census night are enumerated using administrative data, and are imputed as residents of Australia.

Legal basis of entry

17. Apart from New Zealand citizens and returning Australian expatriate citizens, legal arrivals into Australia require a visa. However, as the ABS definition of residency is not associated with the legal basis of entry to Australia, the ABS does not measure its stocks or flows of immigrants by visa type. Further, while there are specific visas for groups of interest such as temporary business migrants, contract workers, students and refugees, these persons may travel using visas other than those specifically for these purposes.

Review of Australian measure of migration

18. A review is currently being undertaken by the ABS into how overseas migration is measured. This review is likely to result in changes to the number of overseas visitors who are counted as Australian residents, and to the number of departing Australians who cease to be counted as Australian residents. This review is a result of problems identified with application of the 12 month residency rule.

19. The ABS currently derives actual duration of stay in Australia for temporary arrivals by measuring the time elapsed between an arrival and subsequent departure. This is done by matching traveller movements to persons. (The actual duration of absence overseas of Australian residents can be derived in a similar manner.) Therefore, determination of whether an arrival or departure is short-term or long-term can always be made, albeit after a time lag of up to 12 months or more.

20. The ABS currently applies a strict 12 month criterion to the duration of stay data to determine residency. That is, visitors who come to Australia are included in the resident population if they spend at least 365 days consecutively in Australia. However, many of those coming to Australia to stay long-term (i.e. 12 months or more) spend several years in Australia in total, but not for a single continuous 12 month period. That is, their stay in Australia of several years is interrupted by trips overseas, usually to their country of origin. This may arise where the visitor is an overseas student who has embarked on a course of study of several years duration in Australia but returns to his/her country of origin for the end of year holiday period, or where the visitor is on a long-term employment contract or business trip in Australia punctuated with brief visits overseas.

21. The current review is investigating whether those whose stay in Australia is of more than 12 months duration over time, but who do not spend a *continuous* 12 months in Australia, should be counted as residents of Australia. (A similar issue is being addressed for Australian long-term departures.) Further, if some of these visitors are to be counted in Australia's resident population, criteria need to be established for determining under what circumstances a visitor is counted as a resident.

22. One possible approach is to count a visitor as a resident if they actually spend 12 months out of a somewhat longer period (say 15, 16 or 18 months) in Australia, regardless of whether it is continuous or broken. In this way, brief interruptions to a long-term period of residence in Australia would not cause such a person to be excluded from the Australian resident population.

23. A similar measurement method could be applied to Australians who have gone overseas for more than 12 months, but return to Australia for brief periods during their extended absence (e.g. for summer holidays). That is, as long as their total absence was more than 12 months out of a period of (say) 16 months, they could be considered as no longer a resident of Australia for migration purposes.

DATA SOURCES OF MIGRANT STOCKS

Population census

24. The basis of Australia's population counts is the Census of Population and Housing, held every five years, the latest having been held in 2001. The census provides an extensive range of information on Australia's overseas-born population, as well as being a basis for intercensal estimates of the resident population.

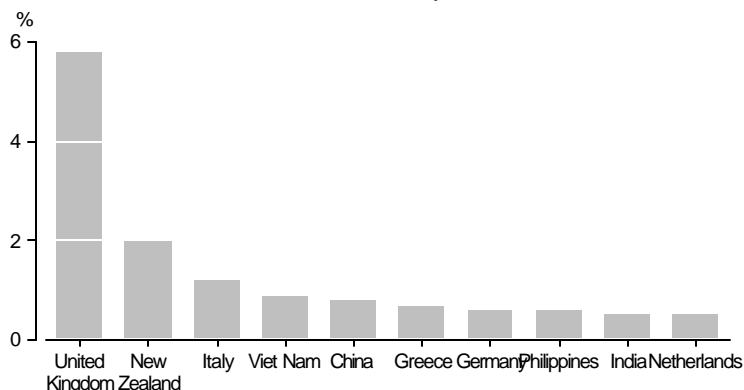
25. The census is conducted on a 'place of enumeration' basis, rather than a 'place of usual residence' basis. Therefore, information on overseas visitors in Australia for less than 12 months is collected in the census, although most census questions are not processed or tabulated for these people.

26. For compiling population estimates, overseas visitors who are in Australia for less than 12 months are removed from the census count, and those Australian residents who were overseas on that night are added in.

Major countries of birth

27. For over a decade, the proportion of Australians who were born overseas has ranged between 23 and 24 per cent. In 2001, the most common non-Australian country of birth was the United Kingdom (5.8% of the population). However, Australia's ethnic profile has diversified over time; in 2001, 2.0% were born in New Zealand, 1.2% in Italy, 0.9% in Viet Nam and 0.8% in China.

PROPORTION OF AUSTRALIA'S POPULATION, Major countries of birth—2001



Ethnicity

28. The census also asks a number of other questions which relate to ethnicity. Overseas-born respondents are asked their year of arrival in Australia. All respondents are asked whether they are Australian citizens, the country of birth of their father and mother, ancestry (2001 census only), the main language spoken at home, and their religion (which is an optional question). Country of birth of father and mother was only classified to 'overseas-born' or 'Australian-born' in the 2001 census. There is also a question on Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) origin.

Other immigrant groups

29. A number of other immigrant subgroups of interest can be determined from the census. Students born overseas can be tabulated by type of educational institution, whether studying part-time or full-time, and year of arrival in Australia. Overseas-born workers can be classified by whether working full-time or part-time, whether working on own account or as an employee, and the occupation and industry of their employment.

Labour force survey

30. A monthly labour force survey has been conducted in Australia since 1978. The scope of the labour force survey is the civilian resident population aged 15 years and over. Each month, country of birth and year of arrival are asked of persons in the labour force survey who were born overseas. Supplementary surveys on a range of topics are run in conjunction with the labour force survey.

31. A supplementary survey on characteristics of migrants is conducted about every three to four years. The last such survey was conducted in November 2004. The scope of this survey was all overseas-born persons who arrived in Australia in the previous 20 years as adults, and who had either permanent residency (including New Zealand citizens), or temporary residency of 12 months or longer.

32. In addition to the standard labour force survey items, the supplementary survey of migrants includes questions on country of last residence, migration category (e.g. temporary, permanent, business, student, employer sponsored, family, refugee), proficiency in spoken English, occupation before arrival, educational attainment before arrival, and whether qualifications were recognised in Australia.

Administrative data

33. All persons arriving in or departing from Australia are required to provide information by filling in passenger cards. Incoming persons (apart from Australian and New Zealand citizens) also provide information in visa applications. Each month, the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs provides passenger card and visa data to the ABS.

34. The ABS publishes selected data monthly in *Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia* (cat. no. 3401.0). This publication, and associated unpublished data, provide a wide range of information on passengers' movements to and from Australia, including nationality, country of birth, age, sex, category of travel, and characteristics of overseas visitors (e.g. intended length of stay, main reason for journey).

35. The overseas arrivals and departures (flow) data are the main source of ABS quarterly estimates of net overseas migration, which in turn are used for intercensal population estimates.

PROBLEMS WITH INTERNATIONAL COMPARABILITY

36. Certain problems arise in comparing Australia's overseas-born resident population with similar populations in other countries. Many people counted as residents in Australia may also be counted as residents in other countries which do not apply the UN residency rule in the same way as Australia. For instance, a person who is in Australia on a temporary, long-term basis may be counted in their country of origin as well as in Australia (e.g. if residency in their country of origin is based on registers). Some Australian-born persons who are not counted in Australia's ERP (because they have left Australia for another country for a period of more than 12 months) are also not counted in their country of residence, if that country excludes temporary migrants born overseas. There will also be situations where Australian-born persons who have left Australia for more than 12 months (and hence are excluded from Australia's ERP) may not stay in any one country for sufficient time to be a resident according to the 12 month residency rule.

CONCLUSION

37. The Australian approach to migrant population estimation offers some advantages to the international community. The focus on country of birth is clear-cut and easily measurable and consistent over the life cycle. Counting residents, rather than citizens or some other population, both includes all those of interest in government programs and is an appropriate response to high levels of immigration. However, ever-increasing levels of international movement pose a challenge to the measurement of residents based on duration of stay or absence. This approach has been possible in Australia due to the quality of movement data, which has in part been as a result of Australia's isolation and lack of land borders. Also, Australia's five -yearly population censuses have enabled estimates of residents (both overseas-born and Australian-born) to be evaluated and updated for a new census base more frequently than for countries that only have a population census every decade (or less frequently).
