

## Temporary migration: a new paradigm of international migration<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Perhaps the greatest change that has occurred in Australian immigration in the last decade is a change in emphasis from settlement migration to temporary migration. As a result, there has been an exponential increase in both long-term arrivals (mostly temporary workers on visas for 12 months or more) and short-term arrivals (less than 12 months).

In 2001–02 there were 340 200 foreigners granted temporary residence in Australia, but only 88 900 incoming permanent settlers. On 30 June 2001 there were 554 200 people in Australia on a temporary basis, of whom 289 300 had the right to work.

### Increased temporary migration

Although there has been a long history of significant non-permanent flows to Australia, the contemporary flow is quite different in scale. It involves large numbers of temporary residents with the right to work and a plethora of new kinds of temporary migration to Australia.

The exponential increase in non-permanent migration has not been confined to Australia. In the United States, for example, there were 4.6 million immigrants admitted between 1995 and 2000 while 142.8 million non-migrants were admitted, of whom 2.2 million were temporary workers, 2.8 million were students and 3.6 million were others who had the right to work. Indeed, in the international literature there have been calls for replacing the concept of 'international migration', which implies permanent settlement, with the term 'trans-national migration'.

### Short term movement

In Australia over the last two decades there has been an acceleration in short-term movement, with both foreigners visiting Australia and Australians going overseas on a short-term basis.

It is clear that short-term visiting has greatly increased and this represents much more than an expansion of global tourism (despite the fact that there has been a slowdown in recent years

reflecting SARS, the Asian financial crisis and similar concerns). This trend represents a new global regime in which many people work for considerable periods in more than one country.

### Skilled migration

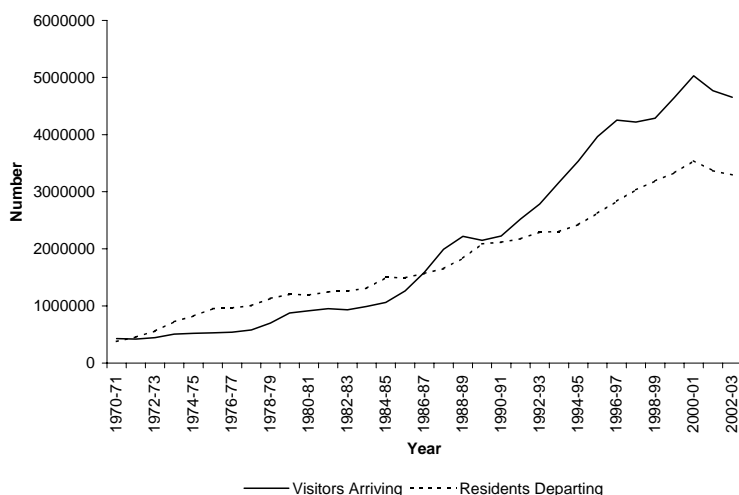
Australia has long had an emphasis on attracting permanent settlers to the country and a strongly expressed opposition to attracting temporary and contract workers. During the labour shortage years of the 1950s and 1960s, Australia's migration solution to the problem contrasted sharply with that of European nations, such as Germany and France, when it opted to concentrate on attracting permanent migrants to meet worker shortages rather than contract workers. However, in recent years attitudes have changed in Australia and it has been recognised that, in the context of globalised labour markets, it is essential to have mechanisms to allow non-permanent entry of workers in certain groups.

Nevertheless, this form of entry has not been extended to unskilled and low-skilled areas and has been open only to entrepreneurs and people with particular skills. There has been increasing pressure from some groups to allow unskilled workers to enter the country temporarily to meet labour shortages in some areas. The most notable example of this is in the area of harvest labour, especially in fruit, vegetables and vines where significant seasonal labour shortages have occurred in recent years.

### Net migration

The significance of people coming to work in Australia temporarily is especially evident in the increase in long-term arrivals to Australia. This has had an impact, at least in the short-term, on overall net migration gains in Australia. An increasing

Figure 1. Australia: short-term movements, 1970–71 to 2001–03



Source: DIMIA, *Australian immigration: consolidated statistics and Immigration update*, various issues; DIMIA, unpublished data.

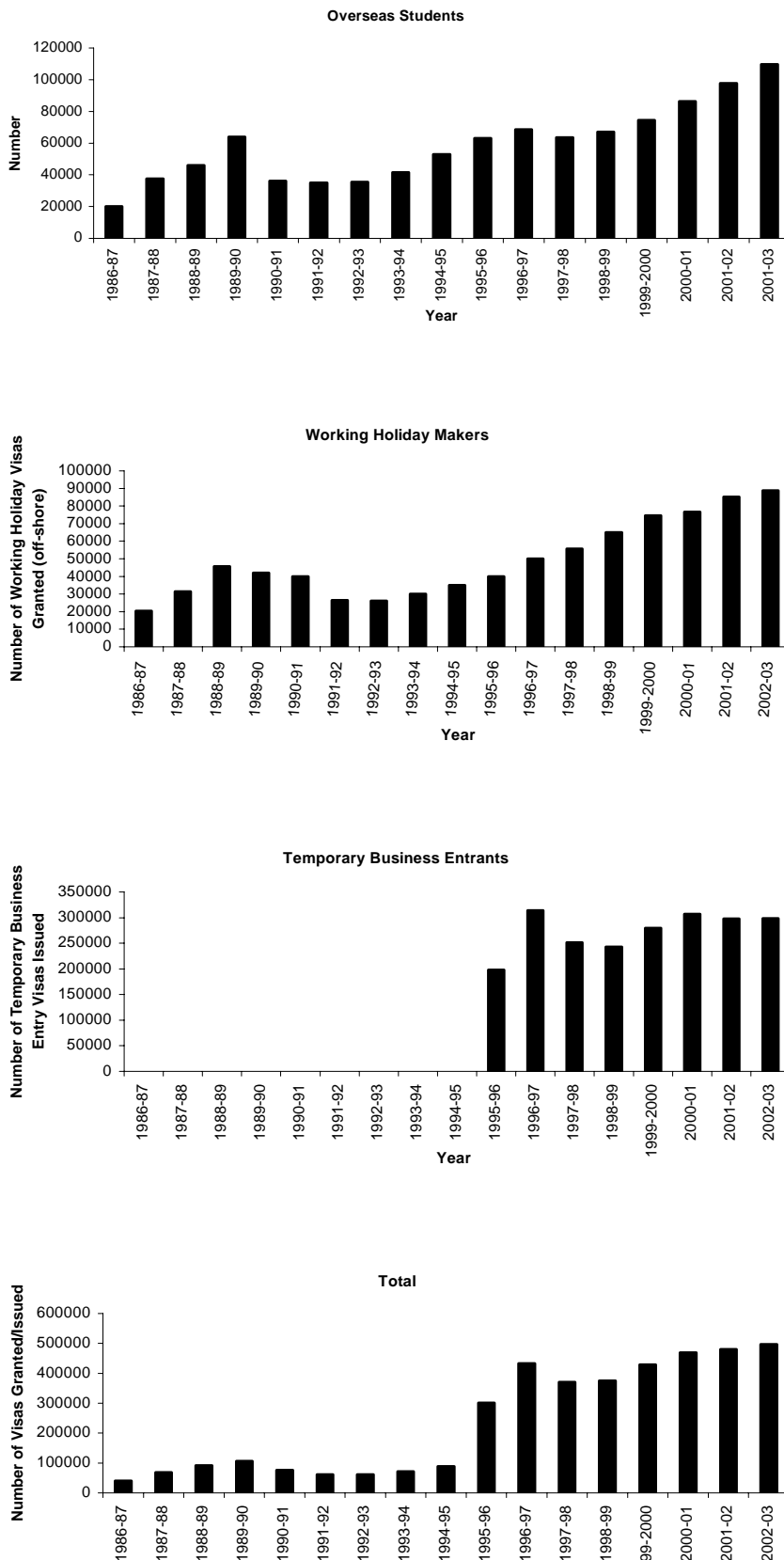
proportion of Australia's net migration gain in recent years has been from more long-term arrivals than long-term departures and a reducing proportion has been from more settler arrivals than permanent departures. Indeed, since

1999–2000 the net migration gain from long-term movement exceeded that from permanent movement.

A key dimension of recent net migration gains is that in recent years an increasing proportion of

that gain has been derived from there being more long-term (as opposed to permanent) arrivals than long-term departures. In 2002 long-term net gains were twice as large as net permanent gains. This represents a significant change in Australian immigration.

**Figure 2. Temporary migration to Australia by category, 1986 to 2003**



**Conclusion**

Temporary movements are shaping Australia's migration program. More than half of the skilled permanent migrants in 2002–03 entered as students.

There is no doubt that there has been a transformation of the scale, characteristics and significance of international population movements in recent years. This demands a continuous reassessment of Australia's immigration policy and program as well as a full assessment of the global situation impinging on population movements to and from Australia.

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.

**Professor Graeme Hugo,  
Consultant  
Social Policy Group  
Information and Research  
Services  
IRS Contact Janet Phillips**

*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

Source: DIMIA *Population flows: immigration aspects*, various issues; A Rizvi, *SOPEMI 2004: Australia*.

**Note: The scales of these graphs are different**