

A new paradigm of international migration: implications for migration policy and planning for Australia

The last decade has seen a major increase in both the scale and complexity of international population movements. There has been a massive increase in the proportion of the global population for whom international movement is an option. The constellation of forces driving movement between countries is different and the context in which migration is occurring has been transformed in both origin and destination countries. A half century ago relatively few countries were influenced in a major way by international migration. Now a majority of the world's nations are affected. Australia was one of a handful of traditional migration countries (along with the US, Canada and New Zealand), which drew the bulk of their immigrants from Europe. Overwhelmingly the main type of international population movement was of more or less permanent migration involving settlement in the destination country.

The context has changed. Yet much Australian thinking and study of international migration remains anchored in a paradigm of migration

which applied in the first four post-war decades. Policy making and research into international migration in Australia needs to be undertaken in such a way as to take account of the shifts which have occurred in the drivers of international migration and in the types of international movement affecting Australia.

Perhaps the greatest change which has occurred in Australian immigration in the last decade is that whereas in the first five post-war decades Australia emphatically eschewed acceptance of temporary workers in favour of an overwhelming emphasis on settlement migration, there has been a reversal with a number of new visa categories designed to attract temporary residents to work in Australia (especially the temporary business and student visa categories). As a result there has been an exponential increase in non-permanent migration to Australia so that while in 2001-2002 there were 88 900 incoming permanent settlers to Australia, there were a total of 340 200 foreigners granted temporary residence in Australia in that year. On 30 June 2001 there were 554 200 people in

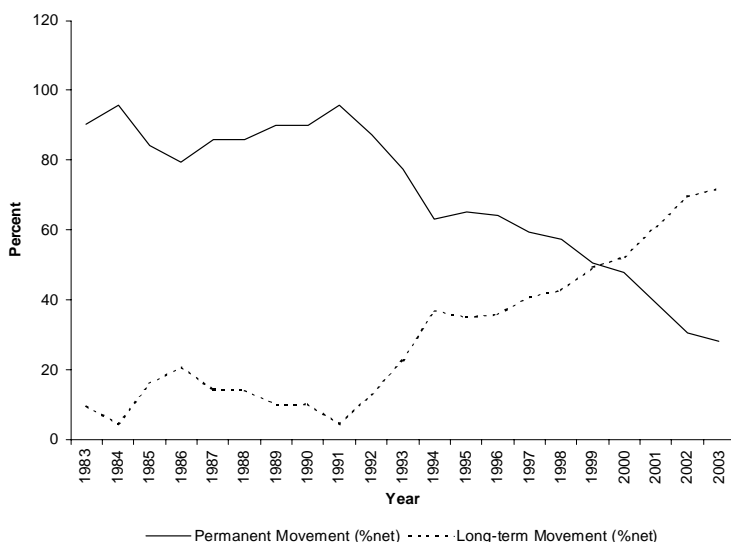
Australia on a temporary basis of whom 289 300 had the right to work. These people differ in many important ways to permanent settlers but the bulk of our research and knowledge relates to the impact of the permanent settlers. The much larger numbers of temporary residents are also having significant effects on labour and housing markets as well as other areas of Australian society.

However, settler migration to Australia has also undergone profound change in the last decade or so. There has been a substantial reduction in the proportion of our migrants drawn from traditional sources of the UK and Europe while the numbers from Asia, Oceania and Africa have increased. Also our model of the immigrant settler being someone who applies for immigration in a foreign country, is processed and then some time later arrives in the country needs modification. Three out of every 10 'settlers' to Australia are 'onshore' immigrants in that they are already in Australia under a temporary residence visa and seek to transfer to permanent residence.

There has also been a substantial shift in the balance of the settlement programme away from family and humanitarian to skill selected immigrants. Accordingly the labour market performance of recent migrants has improved substantially while in the United States and Canada it has declined. There has also been a substantial increase in governmental efforts to influence *where* new immigrants settle in Australia. There has been a raft of state specific and regional migration schemes introduced in an attempt to reduce the proportion of immigrants being attracted to Sydney, and, to a lesser extent, some other major urban centres. To date these have had limited success.

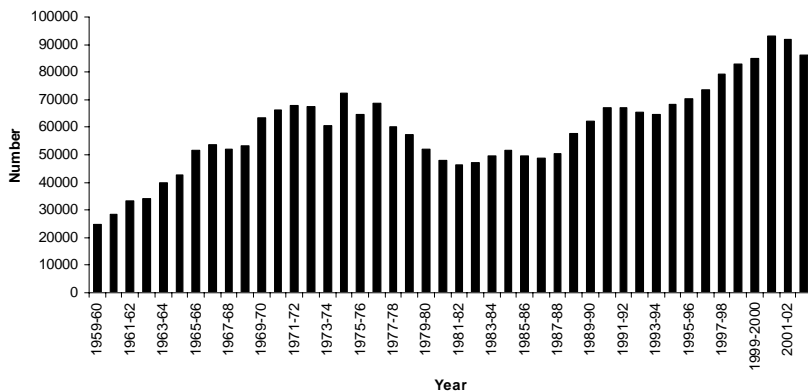
There is a tendency for Australia to be thought of purely as an 'immigration country'. Yet it has a substantial outflow of emigrants which has increased in recent years with the

Australia: net permanent and long-term movement as a percentage of total net migration gain, 1983-2003



Source: DIMIA *Immigration Update*, various issues and unpublished data

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

internationalisation of labour markets and other globalisation effects. It is estimated that there are around one million Australians living on a permanent or long term basis overseas. In relation to the resident population this is one of the world's major diasporas. The emigration of Australian residents is highly selective of young, highly educated, skilled and high income groups and has led to discussions of brain drain. Undoubtedly however, there is a 'brain gain' since skilled immigrants outnumber their emigrant counterparts, yet suspicions remain that we may be losing the 'brightest and best' among our young people. The setting up of a Senate *Inquiry into Australian Expatriates* indicates the significance which is now being given to Australians overseas. It is argued that Australia needs to develop a policy toward its skilled workforce which includes four elements—recruitment, retention, return and re-engagement. A diaspora policy is an important part of that. It should seek to include the diaspora more on a cultural level; it is important that expatriates who still consider themselves Australian are included more in the mainstream of Australian life. On an economic level, there are a myriad of ways in which the expertise, experience and contacts of the diaspora can be harnessed to benefit Australia in a rapidly globalising economy. We must realize that there is much to gain from young Australians leaving Australia and acquiring experience, knowledge and connections in foreign nations. However, if a substantial proportion can return, the country can gain a double dividend—not just retaining their talents but having those talents enhanced by the period away. Perhaps we should be working toward policies which facilitate 'brain circulation' as

opposed to attempting to stem 'brain drain'.

There is no doubt that the last few years have seen a transformation of the scale, characteristics and significance of international population movements. This demands a continuous reassessment of Australia's immigration policy and program as well as a full assessment of the global situation. Australia can no longer confine its consideration of immigration to what is happening in Australia. The globalisation of capital, the transformation of international travel and communications systems, the instant worldwide distribution of information, the increasing levels of education, the internationalisation of many labour markets and the creation of political and environmental refugees, are among only a few of the processes and trends which are producing an exponential increase in all forms of international population movements and opening up such movement to a much broader spectrum of the world's population. No nation can isolate itself from the global system of which population movement is an important part. These changes not only have important implications for people wishing to come to Australia, but also for Australian residents wishing to move elsewhere.

All of the world's nations are facing challenges associated with the new global regime of international migration in what has been termed the 'Age of Migration'. However, few are as well positioned to meet those challenges as Australia. The long experience as a 'country of immigration', especially during the post-Second World War era, has given Australia an almost unique capacity not only to cope with new migration pressures but also to

develop policy and program approaches which maximise the benefit of those developments. Australia has developed a culture of migration in which there is broad acceptance in the community of the benefits that immigration can deliver. This contrasts sharply with community attitudes in many nations. Moreover, Australian politicians have developed a more sophisticated understanding of the issues surrounding migration and settlement than in most other nations so that the capacity to formulate, develop, introduce and operate sound and effective policy is considerable.

Finally, it is often overlooked that Australia is one of very few nations that has had a federal government department devoted to immigration and settlement for more than half a century. This has meant that there has been the development of a skilled and committed cadre of 'immigration bureaucrats' over a number of generations. This substantial body of people with a level of professionalism, knowledge and experience gives Australia a huge advantage in confronting the challenges created by the new migration. The need for 'management of migration' has become the mantra emerging from international fora, conferences, summits and meetings concerned with international migration. However, an essential element in any migration management is the availability of human resources, institutions and infrastructure to develop and operate effective management strategies. Australia is extremely well positioned in that respect.

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**Professor Graeme Hugo,
Consultant
Social Policy Group
Information and Research
Services**

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