

4. OVER FIFTY YEARS OF POST-WAR MIGRATION

Since 1945, almost 5.9 million people have come to Australia as new settlers. Their arrival has had a marked influence on all aspects of our society.

The trigger for a large-scale migration program was the end of World War II.

In Europe, millions of people were stranded outside their homelands, unable to return. In Australia, there was a desperate shortage of labour and a growing belief that substantial population growth was essential for the country's future.

These and other factors led to the creation of a federal immigration portfolio in 1945.

By 1947, a post-war immigration boom was under way, with a large and growing number of arrivals of both government-assisted and other immigrants.

Agreements were reached with the United Kingdom, some European countries and the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) to encourage migrants, including displaced persons from war-torn Europe. By 1950, almost 200 000 people had arrived.

A million more migrants arrived in each of the following four decades. Today, nearly one in four of Australia's 19 million people were born overseas. New Zealand and United Kingdom are the largest source countries for migrants, but other regions – notably Asia – have become more significant.

Early migration waves

The date of the first human occupation in Australia remains an open question, but evidence exists that humans have been on the continent for at least 40 000 years. Consequently, Aboriginals are regarded as the indigenous people of Australia.

Transported criminals were the basis of the first migration from Europe. Starting in 1788, some 160 000 were shipped to the Australian colonies.

These convicts, along with the officials of the penal system, were joined by free immigrants from the early 1790s.

The 1820s saw a marked increase in the migration of free people from the United Kingdom.

Early migration peaked between 1851 and 1860, when arrival levels were around 50 000 people a year. During this gold rush era, Chinese immigrants were the largest non-British group. Over the years, the migration program reflected economic or social conditions in Australia and elsewhere. For example:

- a population imbalance resulted in deliberate efforts to attract women (1860 - 1920);
- Afghans in the second half of the 19th century arrived to play a part in opening up the continent's interior; and

- Japanese were instrumental in the pearling industry late in the 19th century.

The two world wars also influenced Australia's migration program. The resettling of ex-servicemen, refugees and young people were significant chapters in Australian immigration history.

Post-war developments

The most ambitious part of Australia's migration program followed the end of World War II. Australia negotiated agreements with other governments and international organisations to help achieve high migration targets.

The agreements included:

- a system of free or assisted passages for United Kingdom residents;
- an assisted passage scheme for British Empire and United States ex-servicemen, later extended to ex-servicemen or freedom fighters from The Netherlands, Norway, France, Belgium and Denmark;
- an agreement with the IRO to settle at least 12 000 displaced people a year from camps in Europe;
- formal migration agreements, often involving the grant of assisted passage, with the United Kingdom, Malta, The Netherlands, Italy, West Germany, Turkey and Yugoslavia; and
- informal migration agreements with Austria, Greece, Spain, Belgium and other countries.

Economic and humanitarian events around the world subsequently influenced the size and source countries of the Australian program. At various times in the 1950s and 1960s, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia were important migrant source countries.

There were also significant intakes:

- of Hungarian and Czech refugees following unrest in those countries in 1956 and 1968 respectively;
- from Chile following the overthrow of the Allende Government in 1973;
- from Indochina after the end of the Vietnam war in 1975; and
- from Poland after martial law was declared in December 1981.

Today the migration program is global, using one set of criteria for applicants anywhere in the world, with migrants originating from more than 170 countries.

Today's program

This financial year (2000-01), about 76 000 migrants will be granted visas under the Skilled and Family

Streams of Australia's migration program, and another 12 000 humanitarian entrants will rebuild their lives here, having fled persecution or suffering.

In the past decade, the number of arrivals peaked in 1990-91 (121 688 arrivals) but world economic conditions resulted in decreased migration and the number of places made available for new settlers.

Today's program also recognises that business globalisation has resulted in a major flow of people who often do not want to stay in Australia permanently. Almost 99 000 people received visas for temporary entry to Australia last financial year to undertake specific work, business, entertain, play sport or for a working holiday.

The impact of immigration

The post-war immigration program has benefited Australian life in many ways.

Economic

Immigration affects the demand side of Australia's economy through:

- migrants' own spending (food, housing and leisure activities);
- business expansion (investment to produce extra goods and services); and
- expansion of government services (health, education and welfare).

It also affects the supply side of the economy through:

- labour, skills and money introduced into Australia;
- new businesses developed by migrants;
- migrant contributions to technology; and
- adding productive diversity through knowledge of international business markets.

Social

The make-up of Australia's population has changed dramatically over the past 200 years. It has gone from an almost total Aboriginal population to predominantly Anglo-Celtic (by 1900), and on to its present mix of about 74 per cent Anglo-Celtic, 19 per cent other European and 4.5 per cent Asian.

Some of the social effects of this change have been the introduction of more than 150 languages into Australian life (while retaining English as the common language), the growth of community language schools, ethnic media, businesses, new foods, and diverse religious and cultural activities.

Population

Immigration is a major contributor to Australia's population growth.

At the end of World War II, Australia's population stood at just over 7 million, with around 90 per cent born in Australia.

The migration program has changed the population markedly – both the natural population increase and migration have resulted in a population of more than 19 million. Today, nearly 77 per cent are Australian-born.

The contribution of migration to population growth varies. In the year ending 30 June 1993, about 18 per cent of population growth was due to net migration* gain. By contrast, in the late 1980s the net migration gain accounted for around 55 per cent of population growth.

In the year ending 30 June 2000, Australia's population had increased by 219 900 people, or 1.2 per cent since the previous year. Some 45.1 per cent of this growth was due to net overseas migration and 54.9 per cent was due to natural increase - births minus deaths.

**Net overseas migration gain is a measure of the net addition or loss to the resident population of Australia, ie, the difference between permanent and long-term arrivals and departures, with an adjustment for people who change their immigration category.*

Statistical summary

Since planned post-war migration started:

- about 3.1 million males, and 2.8 million females have arrived in Australia;
- more than 599 000 people arriving under humanitarian programs, initially as displaced persons and more recently as refugees; and
- a population rise from about 7 million to over 19 million.

In 1999-00, there were:

- 92 272 new settler arrivals;
- 7267 arrivals under the humanitarian program;
- an additional 121 825 people received temporary residence visas; and
- 3.23 million visitor visas were granted, along with 73 867 student visas.

Information on Australian immigration matters is available through the Internet on:

<http://www.immi.gov.au>

The Department also operates a national telephone inquiry line on 131 881, for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

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