

Fifty Years of Post-War Migration

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1995 marks the 50th anniversary of Australia's post-war migration program.

Since 1945, more than 5.3 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 Two.

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, in 1945, of a federal Immigration portfolio.

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

Agreements were reached with Britain, some European countries and with the International Refugee Organisation 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 18 million people was born overseas.

Britain remains the largest single source country of 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.

Initially, the mainstay of migration from Europe was transported criminals. Starting in 1788, some 160,000 were shipped to the Australian colonies.

They and the officials of the penal system were, from the early 1790s, joined by free immigrants.

The 1820s saw a marked increase in the migration of free persons from Britain.

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 has reflected economic or social conditions in Australia and elsewhere. For example:

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

the continent's interior; and

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

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 Two.

Australia negotiated agreements with other governments or international organisations, to help achieve high migration targets.

The agreements included:

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

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 (1994-95), 73,000 migrants will arrive under the skills and family reunion categories of Australia's migration program, and another 13,000 humanitarian entrants will rebuild their lives here, having fled persecution or suffering.

(In the past decade, the number of arrivals peaked in 1988-89 [145,300 arrivals] but world economic conditions subsequently saw a downturn in interest in migration, and the number of places made available for new settlers. Numbers are now rising.)

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. Some 88,000 people received visas for temporary entry to Australia last financial year to undertake specific work, do business, entertain, play sport or (for young people) for a working holiday.

The migration program is also involved with other people here temporarily - in 1994, Australia was hosting about 70,000 overseas students, and in 1993-94 it welcomed more than 3 million short-term visitors.

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 -

- 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 - from an almost total Aboriginal population to (after 100 years of immigration) a predominantly Anglo-Celtic one by 1900, to its present mix of about 74% Anglo-Celtic, other European 19% and Asian 4.5%.

Some of the social effects of this change have been the introduction of more than 100 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 Two, Australia's population stood at just over 7 million, with around 90% born in Australia .

The migration program of the past 50 years has changed the population markedly - both the natural population increase and migration have combined to result in a population of around 18 million. Today, about 75% are Australian-born.

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

Currently, Australia's population is ageing. However, the average immigrant on arrival is about five years younger than the average Australian, slowing down the ageing of the population.

Statistical Summary

In the 50 years of planned post-war migration Australia has seen:

- 5.3 million migrants arrive;
- within this figure, about 2.8 million males, 2.5 million females;
- more than 500,000 people arriving under humanitarian programs, initially as displaced persons and more recently as refugees; and
- a population rise from about 7 million to around 18 million.

In the last financial year (1993-94):

- almost 70,000 new settlers arrived, bringing with them unrequited capital transfers of

about \$ 1.1 billion;

- more than 11,000 of the new settlers came under the humanitarian program;
- an additional 88,000 people received visas allowing them to take up temporary residence;
- 2.27 million visitor and 41,500 student visas were issued; and
- 16,000 New Zealanders arrived either permanently or for a long-term stay.