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BIRTHPLACE ORIGINS OF AUSTRALIA'S IMMIGRANTS

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The birthplace origins of Australia's migrants have changed; in the 1960s most came from Britain and Europe. In the late 1970s this pattern began to shift and countries in Asia and the Middle East started to become more important sources. In 2002 the proportion of net permanent and long-term migrants who had been born in Asia was just under 72 per cent, and the proportion from the Middle East and North Africa was just over seven per cent.

Since the end of World War II Australia has taken in many immigrants from a wide range of countries. But as is now well known, the countries of origin of these immigrants have altered. Up until the late 1960s most came from Britain and other European countries. Since the mid 1970s this changed. From that time on, Britons and Europeans made up a smaller proportion of the intake and people born in the Middle East and Asia constituted a larger proportion.

For some commentators the ethnic composition of the intake is irrelevant; their concern is with numbers, or skills, or the proportion who are refugees. For others the ethnic composition is only relevant if there might be discrimination against non-Europeans.¹ But there are legitimate questions to be asked about the ethnic composition. For some time now immigrants have disproportionately settled in Sydney and, to a lesser extent, in Melbourne and this is especially true of migrants from non-English-speaking-background (NESB) countries.² We are now seeing strong concentrations of NESB migrants in these cities, particularly in Sydney.³ To what degree is the current migrant intake likely to intensify these concentrations?

Distinctive patterns of voting are also emerging, with NESB immigrants disproportionately likely to vote Labor while Australian-born voters are disproportion-

ately likely to support the Coalition.⁴ Immigration has changed Australia; in particular it has swelled the growth of the major cities, changed their ethnic composition and altered voting patterns.

Since 2000-01 the Howard Government has increased the size of the formal immigration program. In 1997-98, it issued 79,000 permanent visas; the planning figure for 2003-04 is around 120,000 (with the capacity to vary between 112,000 and 128,500).⁵ The Government has also continued to encourage temporary migration, particularly people termed *temporary business migrants* who are sponsored by employers and admitted on four year visas.⁶ By the end of the calendar year 2002, net long-term temporary migration (migration for periods of 12 months or longer) was far larger than net permanent migration. (Net permanent migration in 2002 was 40,300 people while net long-term migration was 98,800.)⁷

There are three categories of movement: permanent, long-term (12 months or more) and short-term (less than 12 months). These allow us to calculate a variety of net migration figures including net permanent migration, net permanent and long-term migration and net total migration. This last measure includes all movement together, irrespective of category. Its virtue is its reliability; because it counts physical movement and

ignores statements about travelers' intentions it is not subject to revision. Its drawback is its volatility. Short-term movement far outweighs long-term or permanent movement and can be subject to wide fluctuations. Governments and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have preferred to use the net permanent and long term figures, adjusted for category jumping (and known as *net overseas migration*).⁸

However, for the last three years debate about whether net total migration was a better measure than net overseas migration has become less relevant because the data required for the former have been unavailable. In August 2000 the Immigration Department moved to a new computer system for recoding arrivals and departures. It experienced problems with the change over and data on a number of aspects of the intake were not published from the end of the September quarter 2000, including data on the distribution of the intake by category of arrival.⁹ This problem has recently been resolved: the December 2002 figures (published in June 2003) fill most of the gaps in the record.¹⁰ The lacunae also meant that it was not possible to get data on permanent and long-term migration by place of birth.

As the article by McDonald et al. in this issue makes clear there are problems with the net permanent and long-term figures; in recent years the net-long term migration component in this measure has been inflated by some systematic double or multiple counting. This is a disadvantage and readers should bear in mind that because the measure used here includes net long-term migration the overall figures shown are probably inflated. However, to ignore the long-term movement would also provide a biased picture. Today long-term

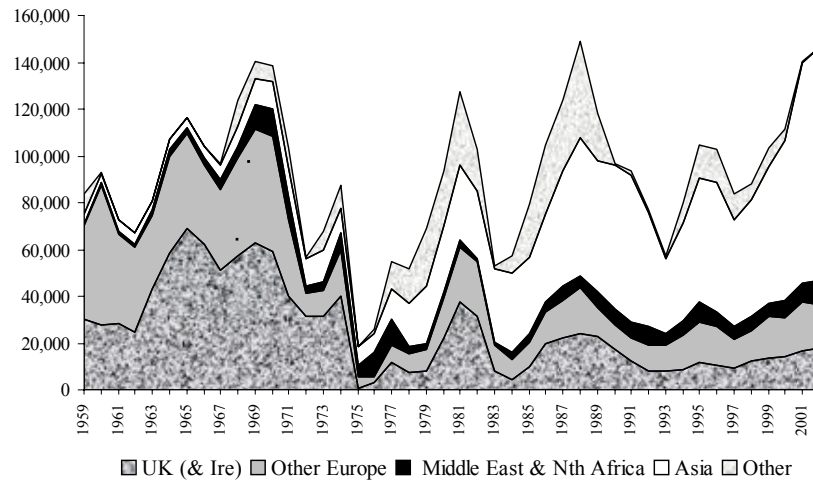
temporary movement is large; if we restrict ourselves to analysing permanent movement only we will capture less than a third of the current picture. Net long-term migration in 2002 was 98,800 people; even if this figure were to be revised downward by a third it would still be large. A further consideration is that net permanent and long-term figures by birthplace are available back to 1959. This allows us to construct a time series spanning more than 44 years.

Figure 1 shows that current net permanent and long-term migration as recorded by the ABS is high, comparable to the boom years of the 1960s. But while the overall totals for more recent years may well be revised downward, Figure 1 also demonstrates the shift from European source countries to Asia and the Middle East since the early 1980s, though relatively large numbers of Middle Easterners (many of them Lebanese) also arrived during the late 1970s.

Sometimes commentary on the birthplace composition of the migrant stream concentrates on settler arrivals. This is misleading for two reasons: first it omits the long-term arrivals, some of whom will convert to permanent residence. (See McDonald et al. this issue for the increase in on-shore applications for permanent visas.) Second, an analysis based on arrival data alone cannot show the differential tendency of arrivals (permanent or long-term) from some birthplace groups to leave Australia. It is important then to include the long-term data and to look at the net figures rather than the gross.

Table 1 demonstrates a strong difference between the per cent distribution of the gross permanent and long-term arrivals by birth place and the per cent distribution of the net. It also sets out the pattern of arrivals shown in Figure 1 in

Figure 1: Net permanent and long-term migration to Australia by birthplace, 1959 to 2002



Sources: *Overseas Arrivals and Departures*, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Cat. no. 4304.0 (various issues) and *Australian Demographic Statistics*, ABS, Cat. no. 3101.0 (various issues). Information on long-term migration by birthplace has not been published since 1996: the data for 1997 to 2002 have been purchased from the ABS.

Note: The category 'other' includes New Zealanders and the Australian-born. Movement of the Australian-born is substantial and in some years (1961-65, 1975 and 2002) the totals for 'other' are negative: in 2002, the total for 'other' was -7,682. These negative quantities are not shown in Figure 1.

more detail and demonstrates that in recent years most arrivals from NESB countries have been from Asia or the Middle East and North Africa: indeed from 2000 to 2002 on average just over 73 per cent of net permanent and long-term migration consisted of people born in these regions. But differences in the relative tendency of arrivals from different birthplace areas to stay on in Australia are obscured by the large out-migration of Australian-born people.

Logically one would expect the net migration of the Australian-born to Australia to be either zero or negative. In fact, some Australian-born people do migrate permanently to Australia. Many of them would be children of former migrants who had gone back, with their parents, to the parents' country of origin as children and then later migrated to Australia as adults. In 2002, 431 Australia-born people

arrived in Australia and said they were permanent settler arrivals, but they were offset by 24,656 Australian-born people who said they were departing permanently. However, most temporary movement of the Australian-born would come under the heading of movement by Australian residents and, in the absence of category jumping, we would expect this to average out at zero as travelers who had departed on long-term trips abroad returned. In fact, between 2000 and 2002, the mean net long-term migration per annum of the Australian born was -17,150. Overall, the mean net permanent and long-term migration of Australian-born people between 2000 and 2002 was -40,078 p.a.¹¹

As Table 1 shows, all of the major birthplace groups (except Australia, and thus Oceania and Antarctica) make up a larger proportion of the net flow than they do of the gross. But because of the large

Table 1: Permanent and long-term migration by birth place, arrivals and net figures, 2000 to 2002, per cent

	Arrivals			Net		
	2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
Europe and the former USSR	20.9	20.2	19.9	27.8	26.7	26.3
United Kingdom	10.6	10.0	10.3	12.4	12.0	12.9
Former Yugoslav Republics	2.0	1.4	1.1	4.1	2.6	1.9
Former USSR and Baltic States	0.5	0.6	0.7	1.0	1.0	0.9
Germany	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.8	2.2	2.3
Greece	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.3
Malta	0.1	0.0	0.1	-0.1	0.0	0.0
Netherlands	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.0	0.9	0.7
Poland	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4
Other Europe and the former USSR	5.2	5.5	5.2	7.2	7.6	6.9
Oceania and Antarctica	25.9	22.6	20.7	-13.7	-16.9	-20.7
Australia (includes External Territories)	14.5	13.4	14.0	-34.7	-30.5	-27.9
Fiji	0.9	1.0	0.7	1.6	1.4	0.5
New Zealand	10.5	8.3	6.0	19.4	12.2	6.7
Other Oceania and Antarctica	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.5	1.2	0.6
Middle East and North Africa	3.4	3.2	3.9	6.4	5.6	7.3
Egypt	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.5	0.4
Turkey	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.9
Other North Africa and the Middle East	2.9	2.7	3.3	5.2	4.5	6.0
South East Asia	14.9	15.2	15.6	24.3	23.4	24.0
Indonesia	4.2	4.3	3.8	6.8	6.9	5.4
Malaysia	3.4	3.4	3.9	6.0	5.9	7.4
Philippines	1.6	1.4	1.5	2.2	1.5	1.7
Singapore	0.7	0.8	0.8	1.6	1.8	1.8
Viet Nam	1.0	0.9	1.3	1.9	1.4	2.3
Other South East Asia	4.0	4.3	4.2	5.7	5.8	5.4
North East Asia	17.3	21.5	23.6	25.5	33.8	38.4
Hong Kong and Macau	4.1	4.2	4.4	5.9	5.8	6.4
Other North East Asia	13.2	17.3	19.2	19.6	28.0	32.1
Southern Asia	6.7	6.4	6.1	11.4	9.8	9.4
India	4.0	3.7	3.4	6.6	5.5	5.4
Sri Lanka	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.8	1.9	1.6
Other Southern Asia	1.6	1.5	1.5	3.0	2.4	2.4
Total Asia	39.0	43.1	45.3	61.2	67.1	71.9
The Americas	1.9	1.9	1.8	2.4	2.3	2.1
Canada	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.6	1.5	1.3
Chile	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
United States of America	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Other Americas	2.9	2.8	2.8	4.6	4.0	3.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.6	5.1	4.6	9.7	9.9	8.8
South Africa	2.9	3.1	2.6	6.4	6.3	4.9
Other sub-Saharan Africa	1.6	1.9	2.1	3.3	3.6	3.8
Other and not stated	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total numbers	317,560	356,408	361,988	111,440	140,277	139,048

Source: unpublished data provided by the ABS

Table 2: Permanent and long-term migration by birthplace groups, arrivals and net figures, 2000 to 2002, excluding Australia, per cent

	Arrivals			Net		
	2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
Europe and the former USSR	24.4	23.3	23.1	20.7	20.5	20.6
Oceania and Antarctica (excl. Australia)	14.9	12.0	8.9	16.7	11.3	6.1
Middle East and North Africa	4.0	3.7	4.6	4.7	4.3	5.7
South East Asia	17.5	17.6	18.1	18.0	17.9	18.8
North East Asia	20.3	24.8	27.5	18.9	25.9	30.1
Southern Asia	7.9	7.4	7.1	8.5	7.5	7.3
Total Asia	45.6	49.7	52.6	45.4	51.4	56.2
The Americas	5.7	5.4	5.3	5.2	4.9	4.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	5.3	5.8	5.4	7.2	7.6	6.8
Other and not stated	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total numbers	271,668	308,673	311,428	150,078	183,032	177,890

Source: Unpublished data provided by the ABS

out-migration of the Australia-born, Table 1 cannot readily show whether any particular groups of overseas migrants are more likely to stay on in the country than others. To shed light on this question, Table 2 shows net permanent and long-term movement for the major birthplace groupings, with Australia omitted from the Oceania and Antarctica grouping.

People departing in any one year are not necessarily drawn from the pool of those who arrived in that same particular year. But Table 2 suggests that, over the three-year period analysed, permanent and long-term immigrants from Europe

and the Americas may be slightly more likely to leave the country than other immigrants, while those from the Middle East and North Africa, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa may be rather less likely to leave.

The data presented here suggest that the trend towards more distinct patterns of concentration of NESB migrants in Sydney and Melbourne could persist. They also suggest that the effect of country of birth on voting behaviour may be a continuing feature of Australian politics. These trends are not inevitable, but the demographic potential is there.

References

- ¹ See, for example, W. Maley, 'It's a lottery: letter to the editor', *The Australian*, 5 September 2003, p. 10; Ghassan Hage quoted in D. Bagnall, 'White Man's burden', *The Bulletin*, 16 July 2002, pp. 86-88; Kim Beazley quoted in M. Gordon, 'PM must repair race talk damage, says Beazley', *The Australian*, 12-13 October 1996, p. 9; M. Seccombe and A. Clennell, 'White Australia Policy revisited, says Labor MP', <www.australianpolitics.com/news> accessed 19 September 2001.
- ² B. Birrell and V. Rapson, 'Two Australias: migrant settlement at the end of the 20th century', *People and Place*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2002, pp. 10-25
- ³ *ibid.*; E. Healy and B. Birrell, 'Metropolis divided: the political dynamic of spatial inequality and migrant settlement in Sydney', *People and Place*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2003, pp. 65-87; L. Carroll, 'Mobility of the Vietnam-born in Sydney: a re-assessment after the 2001 census', *People and Place*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2003, pp. 50-64
- ⁴ B. Birrell, 'Birthplace: the new political divide', *People and Place*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2001, pp. 38-49

- ⁵ The number of visas issued in the general program for 1997-98 was 67,100 and in the Humanitarian program 12,055, making 79,155 in all. See DIMA, *Population Flows: Immigration Aspects*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1999, pp. 13, 17. The planning figure for 2003-03 consists of 12,000 in the Humanitarian program plus 100,000 to 110,000 in the general program with a contingency reserve of 6,500 for parents. See Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, MPS 19/2003 and MPS 18/2003 <<http://www.immi.gov.au>> accessed 6/9/03.
- ⁶ See K. Betts, 'Immigration policy under the Howard Government', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2003, pp. 179-182.
- ⁷ Calculated from Tables 17 and 18 in *Australian Demographic Statistics*, December 2002, Cat. no. 3101.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Canberra, pp. 30-31. Figures have been rounded.
- ⁸ For a history of the development of this measure see C. Price, *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Work of Charles Price*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1996, pp. 2-3, 17-19.
- ⁹ These data appeared in full in *Australian Demographic Statistics*, June Quarter 2000, op. cit., pp. 30-31. After that issue, only permanent movement, and total long-term movement were available. Some of the data had reappeared in the December 2001 figures, published in June 2002, but there were still gaps in the record. It was not until the December 2002 issue of *Australian Demographic Statistics* (published in June 2003) that all of these gaps were filled.
- ¹⁰ Permanent departures broken down by former settlers and other residents have been unavailable since 1997.
- ¹¹ All data in this paragraph are calculated from unpublished data on permanent and long-term movement by country of birth supplied by the ABS.