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Migration to Australia: a quick guide to the statistics

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Overview

Australia is considered to be one of the world's major [‘immigration nations’](#) (together with New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America (USA)). Since 1945, when the first federal immigration portfolio was created, over 7.5 million people have [settled](#) here and Australia's overseas-born resident population—[estimated](#) to be 27.7 per cent of the population in June 2013—is considered high compared to most other [OECD](#) countries.

Permanent migrants enter Australia via one of two distinct programs—the [Migration Program](#) for skilled and family migrants or the [Humanitarian Program](#) for refugees and those in refugee-like situations. The Australian Government allocates places, or quotas, each year for people wanting to migrate permanently to Australia under these two programs.

Until very recently, the United Kingdom (UK) had always been the primary [source country](#) for permanent migration to Australia. However, for the first time in the history of Australia, China surpassed the UK as Australia's primary source of permanent migrants in 2010–11. Since then, China and India have continued to provide the highest number of permanent migrants. [New Zealand](#) (NZ) citizens also feature highly in the number of settler arrivals, but they are not counted under Australia's Migration Program unless they apply for (and are granted) a permanent visa.

Over the decades, migration program planning numbers have fluctuated according to the priorities and economic and political considerations of the government of the day. However, it is important to note that the Australian Government's immigration policy focus has changed markedly since 1945, when attracting general migrants (primarily from the UK) was the priority, to focussing on attracting economic migrants and temporary (skilled) migrants. Currently the [planning figure](#) for the Migration Program is 190,000 places, with skilled migrants comprising the majority.

One of the most significant developments in the [dynamics of migration](#) to Australia in recent years has been the growth in temporary migration. In 2000–01 temporary migrants outnumbered permanent arrivals for the first time. Many of these entrants arrived on either [student](#) visas or long-term temporary skilled business visas ([subclass 457](#)). Unlike the permanent Migration Program, the level of temporary migration to Australia is not determined or subject to quotas or caps by Government, but rather is demand driven.

The 457 visa also provides a pathway for skilled workers and their dependants to apply for permanent residence and many students are also eligible to apply for permanent visas under the Migration Program at the completion of their courses. The largest contribution to net overseas migration (NOM) in recent years has been from people on temporary visas—mostly comprised of overseas students and temporary skilled migrants and the rate of

Australia's population growth has increased significantly over the few years largely driven by an increase in NOM.

For some more detail on these issues see:

- J Phillips and H Spinks, [Skilled migration: temporary and permanent flows to Australia](#), Background Note, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2012.
- G Larsen, [Measuring success in skilled migration policy: the subclass 457 visa program](#), FlagPost, Parliamentary Library, 11 September 2013.
- G Larsen, [Family migration to Australia](#), Research paper, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2013.
- G Larsen, [Permanent and temporary migration to Australia: a quick guide to internet links](#), Quick guide, Parliamentary Library, 2013.

Migration statistics

Annual statistics on Migration and Humanitarian Program 'outcomes' (visa grants) provided by the Immigration Department since the 1980s provide accurate data on the number of people who are planning to migrate to Australia. However, other immigration-related data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is also used to measure migration flows or settler arrivals. These statistics are often used interchangeably and/or incorrectly with the result that data used in the public debate to describe migration flows can often be inaccurate or misleading. Changes in government policy and data collection methodology by government agencies have also added to the complexity in interpreting this data, and make it difficult to compare migration-related statistics over time. Some of the more commonly used data sets (and their limitations) include:

- Net overseas migration (NOM) data, compiled since 1925 by the ABS, is often used to describe and measure population growth. However, NOM is not a measure of the number of permanent migrants arriving in any given year as it measures departures and arrivals of both permanent and (long-term) temporary entrants and the resulting increase or decrease in the population overall. In addition, the methodology for the calculation of NOM has changed significantly over the years and should be used with caution.
- Settler arrival statistics, also compiled by the ABS, are a better indication of permanent migration flows than NOM, but include NZ citizens and some other temporary migrants who have indicated an intention to settle longer term. Other ABS data on overseas arrivals and departures may also include multiple arrivals and departures of individuals and not the total number of individuals.
- Migration Program visa grant outcomes recorded by the Immigration Department provide the most accurate statistics on the number of permanent migrants intending to settle in Australia, however not all migrants granted visas take them up, and accurate data is only available back to the 1980s. Prior to that, it is necessary to resort to settler arrival statistics.

This quick guide provides a summary of some of the key statistics on permanent and temporary migration to Australia. It updates some of the data in the statistical appendix of a more detailed Parliamentary Library paper on migration trends since 1901—[Migration to Australia since federation: a guide to the statistics](#) (2010).

Statistics include:

Table 1: Permanent migrants—migration and humanitarian program visa grants since 1985.

Table 2: Temporary migrants— overseas student and business long stay (subclass 457) visa grants since 1996.

Table 3: Net Overseas Migration (NOM) since 1901.

Table 1: Permanent migrants: migration and humanitarian program visa grants since 1984–85

Year	Migration Program				Humanitarian Program
	Family	Skill	Special Eligibility	Total	
1984–85	44 200	10 100	200	54 500	14 207
1985–86	63 400	16 200	400	80 000	11 700
1986–87	72 600	28 500	600	101 700	11 291
1987–88	79 500	42 000	600	122 100	11 392
1988–89	72 700	51 200	800	124 700	11 309
1989–90	66 600	52 700	900	120 200	12 415
1990–91	61 300	49 800	1 200	112 200	11 284
1991–92	55 900	41 400	1 700	98 900	12 009
1992–93	43 500	21 300	1 400	67 900	11 845
1993–94	43 200	18 300	1 300	62 800	14 070
1994–95	44 500	30 400	1 600	76 500	14 858
1995–96	56 700	24 100	1 700	82 500	16 252
1996–97	44 580	27 550	1 730	73 900	11 902
1997–98	31 310	34 670	1 110	67 100	12 055
1998–99	32 040	35 000	890	67 900	11 356
1999–00	32 000	35 330	2 850	70 200	15 860
2000–01	33 470	44 730	2 420	80 610	13 733
2001–02	38 090	53 520	1 480	93 080	12 349
2002–03	40 790	66 050	1 230	108 070	12 525
2003–04	42 230	71 240	890	114 360	13 823
2004–05	41 740	77 880	450	120 060	13 178
2005–06	45 290	97 340	310	142 930	14 144
2006–07	50 080	97 920	200	148 200	13 017
2007–08	49 870	108 540	220	158 630	13 014
2008–09	56 366	114 777	175	171 318	13 507
2009–10	60 254	107 868	501	168 623	13 770
2010–11	54 543	113 725	417	168 685	13 799
2011–12	58 604	125 755	639	184 998	13 759
2012–13	60 185	128 973	842	190 000	20 019
2013–14 (planned)	60 885	128 550	565	190 000	13 750

Sources: J Phillips, M Klapdor and J Simon-Davies, [Migration to Australia since Federation: a guide to the statistics](#), Background note, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 27 August 2010; Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP), [Report on Migration Program](#) reports, 2009–10 to 2012–13; Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Annual Report 2011–12*, p. 117; and DIBP, [Australia's refugee and humanitarian program](#), fact sheet 60.

Table 2: Temporary migrants: overseas student and business long stay (subclass 457) visa grants since 1996–97

Year	Overseas students	Temporary business (long stay) 457 visas
1996–97	113 000	25 786
1997–98	108 827	30 880
1998–99	110 894	29 320
1999–00	119 806	31 070
2000–01	146 577	36 900
2001–02	151 894	33 510
2002–03	162 575	36 800
2003–04	171 616	39 500
2004–05	174 786	48 590
2005–06	190 674	71 150
2006–07	230 807	87 310
2007–08	278 715	110 570
2008–09	319 632	101 280
2009–10	270 499	67 980
2010–11	250 438	90 120
2011–12	253 046	125 070
2012–13	259 278	126 350

Sources: J Phillips, M Klapdor and J Simon-Davies, [Migration to Australia since Federation: a guide to the statistics](#), op. cit.; DIAC, [Australia's migration trends 2011–12](#), 2013; DIBP, [Student](#) and [Subclass 457](#) visa statistics web pages; and departmental annual reports (various years).

Table 3: Net overseas migration (NOM) since 1901 (calendar year)

Year	NOM ^{(a) (b)}	Year	NOM ^{(a) (b)}	Year	NOM ^{(a) (b)}
1901	2 959	1940	10 676	1979	68 611
1902	-4 293	1941	5 136	1980	100 940
1903	-9 876	1942	8 536	1981	123 066
1904	-2 983	1943	1 587	1982	102 709
1905	-2 600	1944	-1 761	1983	54 995
1906	-5 049	1945	-3 273	1984	59 823
1907	5 195	1946	-11 589	1985	89 319
1908	5 437	1947	12 186	1986	110 661
1909	21 783	1948	48 468	1987	136 093
1910	29 912	1949	149 270	1988	172 794
1911	74 379	1950	153 685	1989	129 478
1912	91 892	1951	110 362	1990	97 131
1913	63 227	1952	97 454	1991	81 669
1914	-8 226	1953	42 883	1992	51 358
1915	-84 410	1954	68 565	1993	34 822
1916	-128 737	1955	95 317	1994	55 506
1917	-17 822	1956	102 105	1995	106 864
1918	23 359	1957	77 622	1996	97 444
1919	166 303	1958	64 879	1997	72 402
1920	27 606	1959	83 578	1998	88 781
1921	17 525	1960	92 776	1999	104 210
1922	40 157	1961	65 439	2000	111 441
1923	39 714	1962	64 638	2001	136 076
1924	46 069	1963	76 844	2002	110 475
1925	39 762	1964	103 999	2003	110 104
1926	42 282	1965	111 609	2004	106 425
1927	49 401	1966	95 931	2005	137 000
1928	28 864	1967	96 558	2006	182 100
1929	10 087	1968	123 452	2007	244 000
1930	-9 833	1969	140 331	2008	315 700
1931	-12 117	1970	138 382	2009	246 900
1932	-4 608	1971	103 553	2010	172 000
1933	-1 364	1972	56 320	2011p	205 700
1934	-388	1973	67 494	2012p	242 700
1935	1 251	1974	87 248		
1936	1 283	1975	13 515		
1937	5 075	1976	33 997		
1938	8 145	1977	68 030		
1939	12 527	1978	47 394		

P = preliminary estimates

Series Break Information

Prior to July 1922 crew members were included

Prior to July 1925 figures are total overseas arrivals and departures from Australia

From July 1925 figures are Net Permanent and Long Term migration

Break in series from September quarter 1971 to June quarter 2006 inclusive, Net Overseas Migration (NOM) was the difference between permanent and long-term arrivals and permanent and long-term departures.

For September quarter 2006 onwards estimates for NOM are the difference between the number of incoming travellers who stay in Australia for 12 months or more and are added to the population (NOM arrivals) and the number of outgoing travellers who leave Australia for 12 months or more and are subtracted from the population (NOM departures)

(a) Estimates for September quarter 2006 onwards use an improved methodology and are not comparable with NOM estimates prior to this.

(b) An adjustment for category jumping (later referred to as migration adjustments) was included for estimates for September quarter 1976 to June quarter 2006, except for September quarter 1997 to June quarter 2001 when it was set to zero.

Sources: Data for 1901–1924: DIAC, [Immigration: Federation to Century's End](#), DIAC, Canberra, 2001.

Data for 1925–2005: ABS, [Australian Historical Population Statistics](#), cat. no. 3105.0.65.001, 2008.

Data for 2006 onwards: ABS, [Australian Demographic Statistics](#), cat. no. 3101.0, 2010.

Table 4: Components of population growth: 1980–2013

As at June	Natural Increase		Net overseas arrival	
	Number	% of total growth	Number	% of total growth
1980	115 500	66.6	57 900	33.4
1981	118 300	65.4	62 700	34.6
1982	115 100	67.6	55 100	32.4
1983	117 000	60.7	75 900	39.3
1984	121 500	50.5	119 200	49.5
1985	126 100	49.6	128 100	50.4
1986	128 900	63.7	73 300	36.3
1987	129 600	72.5	49 100	27.5
1988	127 600	63.4	73 800	36.6
1989	123 000	55.0	100 500	45.0
1990	126 600	50.2	125 800	49.8
1991	125 800	45.7	149 400	54.3
1992	131 300	45.5	157 500	54.5
1993	132 400	51.5	124 700	48.5
1994	141 600	62.1	86 500	37.9
1995	138 700	66.9	68 600	33.1
1996	139 200	82.2	30 100	17.8
1997	135 300	74.4	46 600	25.6
1998	132 400	62.3	80 200	37.7
1999	124 400	54.5	104 000	45.5
2000	126 900	59.3	87 200	40.7
2001	120 500	60.4	79 100	39.6
2002	122 400	55.9	96 500	44.1
2003	122 100	53.2	107 200	46.8
2004	120 400	47.0	135 700	53.0
2005	119 200	51.9	110 600	48.1
2006	116 900	50.1	116 500	49.9
2007	118 800	54.3	100 000	45.7
2008	126 900	50.6	123 800	49.4
2009	132 000	47.4	146 700	52.6
2010	151 300	39.4	232 700	60.6
2011	154 400	35.8	277 400	64.2
2012	156 400	34.3	299 800	65.7
2013	162 500	45.3	196 100	54.7

Sources: ABS, [Australian Demographic Statistics](#), cat. no. 3101.0, 2010.



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