

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 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 28.2 per cent of the population in June 2015—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. Each year, the Australian Government allocates places, or quotas, for people wanting to migrate permanently to Australia under these two programs.

Until 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 (predominantly skilled) migrants. Currently the [planning figure](#) for the Migration Program is 190,000 places (it has remained at this record high level since 2012–13), with skilled migrants comprising the majority.

One of the most significant developments in the [dynamics of migration](#) to Australia since the late 1990s has been the growth in temporary migration. The net migration gain from long-term temporary movement [exceeded](#) that from permanent movement in 1999–00 and there were record numbers of temporary entrants in [2000–01](#). Many of these entrants arrived on either [student](#) or [Temporary Work \(Skilled\) \(subclass 457\)](#) visas. Unlike the permanent Migration Program, the level of temporary migration to Australia is not determined or subject to quotas or caps by Government, but 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.

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 4: Components of population growth: 1980–2015](#)

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

Year	Migration Program					Humanitarian Program
	Family	Child	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	13 778
2011–12	58 604		125 755	639	184 998	13 745
2012–13	60 185		128 973	842	190 000	19 998
2013–14	61 112		128 550	338	190 000	13 759
2014–15	61 085		127 774	238	189 097	13 756
2015–16	57 400	3512*	128 550	308	189 770	17 555

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 2014–15; Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Annual Report 2011–12*, p. 117; DIBP, [Australia's refugee and humanitarian program](#), fact sheet 60 (which regularly revises and updates the figures and may differ from previously published figures); and departmental annual reports and ministerial press releases (various years).

Notes: *Child places are now identified separately from the Family stream in response to recent reforms to the inter-country adoption processes. See DIBP, *Annual report 2015–16*, p. 61.

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	71 149
2006–07	230 807	87 313
2007–08	278 715	110 567
2008–09	319 632	101 284
2009–10	270 499	67 979
2010–11	250 438	90 119
2011–12	253 046	125 070
2012–13	259 278	126 348
2013–14	292 060	98 571
2014–15	299 540	96 084
2015–16	310 845	85 611

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	2011	205 700
1934	-388	1973	67 494	2012	237 400
1935	1 251	1974	87 248	2013p	206 200
1936	1 283	1975	13 515	2014p	178 000
1937	5 075	1976	33 997	2015p	177 100
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.

Table 4: Components of population growth: 1980–2015

As at June	Natural Increase		Net overseas migration	
	Number	% of total growth	Number	% of total growth
1980	117 000	60.7	75 900	39.3
1981	121 500	50.5	119 200	49.5
1982	126 100	49.6	128 100	50.4
1983	128 900	63.7	73 300	36.3
1984	129 600	72.5	49 100	27.5
1985	127 600	63.4	73 800	36.6
1986	123 000	55.0	100 500	45.0
1987	126 600	50.2	125 800	49.8
1988	125 800	45.7	149 400	54.3
1989	131 300	45.5	157 500	54.5
1990	132 400	51.5	124 700	48.5
1991	141 600	62.1	86 500	37.9
1992	138 700	66.9	68 600	33.1
1993	139 200	82.2	30 100	17.8
1994	135 300	74.4	46 600	25.6
1995	132 400	62.3	80 200	37.7
1996	124 400	54.5	104 000	45.5
1997	126 900	59.3	87 200	40.7
1998	120 500	60.4	79 100	39.6
1999	122 400	55.9	96 500	44.1
2000	122 100	53.2	107 200	46.8
2001	120 400	47.0	135 700	53.0
2002	119 200	51.9	110 600	48.1
2003	116 900	50.1	116 500	49.9
2004	118 800	54.3	100 000	45.7
2005	126 900	50.6	123 800	49.4
2006	132 000	47.4	146 700	52.6
2007	151 300	39.4	232 700	60.6
2008	154 400	35.8	277 400	64.2
2009	156 400	34.3	299 900	65.7
2010	162 500	45.3	196 100	54.7
2011	155 700	46.3	180 400	53.7
2012	158 900	40.9	229 400	59.1
2013p	162 600	41.7	227 100	58.3
2014p	157 000	45.7	186 400	54.3
2015p	148 900	45.7	176 500	54.3

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



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