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**COUNTRY PAPER: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STATISTICS IN AUSTRALIA**

**INTRODUCTION**

1 International migration statistics in Australia are produced and disseminated by two agencies, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). The production of these statistics have different but complementary objectives. The prime aim of ABS migration statistics is to produce an input into national, state and territory estimated resident population (referred to as ERP) - the key Australian population measure. These are compiled quarterly (as at the last day of March, June, September and December). Estimates of the resident population for 30 June each year are also disaggregated by country of birth. The ABS conducts the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing, and the census includes significant content related to persons born overseas and their social, demographic and labour force characteristics. In addition, the ABS conducts many household surveys that collect a range of information on migrants and ethnicity (e.g. country of birth, year of arrival and English proficiency). The triennial Characteristics of Migrants survey is one of these. DIMA disseminates statistics on immigrants by visa category in accordance with its objective of managing entry and settlement of immigrants.

2 Results from the five-yearly Australian Census of Population and Housing are used to rebase the population estimates series (ERP) for the intercensal period back to the 30 June of the previous census year. Results from the Census (which is conducted on a place of enumeration or *de facto* basis, with responses coded to an address of usual residence or *de jure* basis) are adjusted to:

- i. remove overseas visitors in Australia for less than 12 months,
- ii. include an allowance for net undercount (measured by a Census Post Enumeration Survey),

- iii. include an estimate of Australian residents temporarily overseas on Census night (measured using incoming passenger cards after Census night) , and
- iv. backdate the resulting "Census night" resident population estimate to 30 June of the Census year based on births, deaths and net migration.

The resulting estimated resident population of Australia for the 30 June of the Census year is then the base population to which births are added, deaths subtracted and net migration estimates included to estimate the resident population for subsequent quarters until the results of the next Census become available.

3 As the ABS has a legislative requirement to produce estimates of the population of Australia and the Australian states on a quarterly basis, migration flows are more central to ABS work in this area than estimating migrant stocks. This is because net overseas migration (NOM) is a key input into population growth (accounting for approximately half of Australia's annual population growth), along with estimates of births and deaths (obtained from registrations recorded in registers maintained by the Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages in each of Australia's six states, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory).

4 Central to the definition of Australia's estimated resident population is the concept of *residency*. In Australia this is currently based on the '12 month rule' (see C. Best Practice and Challenges); a person is considered to be a resident of Australia if they are in Australia for 12 months or more at the time of enumeration, and to be excluded from the resident population if they are away from Australia for 12 months or more. The residency definition does not draw on visa status, citizenship, birthplace or ethnic background.

5 At the same time, a significant aspect of ABS demographic work is that of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the population, including those characteristics that are migration-related. ERP is disaggregated by country of birth, age, sex and state/territory of usual residence. The census collects many characteristics of the Australian population, including ethnicity variables. Many household surveys carried out by the ABS include a question on country of birth, and the Characteristics of Migrants Survey focuses on aspects of migrant experience.

## **A AUSTRALIA'S CURRENTLY AVAILABLE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STATISTICS**

### **1. Measurement**

*What are the criteria applied to identify migrant stock in your country? Is it place of birth, citizenship or background (e.g. origin of parents or the language spoken in the household)? What socioeconomic characteristics of the migrants are collected?*

6 As noted in the introduction, the prime focus of statistics related to international migration is on flows rather than stocks. The five main sources of international migration statistics are described separately here:

### Overseas Arrivals and Departures

The ABS compiles and reports monthly statistics based on passenger-completed incoming and outgoing passenger cards (including related information obtained from visa applications and passports scanned at Australian ports on arrival or departure). All travellers excluding crew and diplomats are required to complete a passenger card on arrival or departure from Australia and cards are collected by the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service under a tripartite arrangement with the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Arrivals and departures can be disaggregated by category of traveller, country of birth, country of citizenship and demographic characteristics.

### Net Overseas Migration (NOM)

The ABS does not use birthplace, Australian citizenship, background or visa status to measure NOM. Rather, the definition of an overseas migration event is based on duration of stay in Australia or absence from Australia (see 3. Sources of data and C. Best practices and challenges). NOM is disaggregated by arrival/departure, permanent/long-term (temporary), age, sex, country of birth and Australian state or territory of residence/former residence.

### Population Estimates (ERP) by Country of Birth

The ABS does not have an official definition of migrant in compiling estimates of the resident population. ERP is disaggregated by country of birth so statistics on overseas-born residents are reported. As with Net Overseas Migration, residency is not defined by visa status, citizenship or background. Overseas-born ERP is disaggregated by country of birth, age and sex on an annual basis and state/territory of usual residence for Census years (e.g. 2001).

### Population Census

The Australian Census of Population and Housing does not incorporate a formal definition of a migrant. However, the census does collect information on:

- country of birth,
- year of arrival in Australia,
- country of birth of parents (whether parents were born in Australia or overseas),
- residential address one year ago ("overseas" is the only category available for persons who report addresses in a country other than Australia),
- residential address five years ago ("overseas" is the only category available for persons who report addresses in a country other than Australia),
- citizenship (Australian or other),
- ancestry, and
- language other than English spoken at home.

Many other characteristics of the population are collected in the census, including demographic characteristics, educational participation and attainment, labour force status, income, family characteristics and dwelling characteristics. Overseas residents present in Australia and enumerated in the census are categorised as overseas visitors based in the address of usual residence question and whilst included in the census counts are excluded for the purposes of compiling resident population estimates (ERP). Accordingly, it should be

noted that census counts are not the same as ERP; rather the census is used as a basis for compiling ERP, along with net overseas migration, birth and death registrations for post censal reference quarters.

#### Characteristics of Migrants survey

The 2004 Characteristics of Migrants survey has a very specific definition of migrant. The survey pertains to labour force outcomes of recent arrivals and thus defines migrants as: people who were born overseas, arrived in Australia after 1984 (i.e. within the last twenty years), were aged 15 years and over on arrival, and have permanent Australian resident status. Information is also provided for people who were temporary residents who planned to stay in Australia for 12 months or more.

#### Other household surveys

Other household surveys do not define migrants. Rather they collect information about country of birth and year of arrival as standard demographic data items. From this information the varying areas of interest in terms of migrants can be deduced. There is generally no indication of the permanent or temporary nature of the person's residency status although the 2006 General Social Survey collected information relating to visa category.

#### DIMA visa data

Similar to Net Overseas Migration, the focus of DIMA migration statistics is mostly on flows rather than stocks. Unlike the ABS measure of migration flows, DIMA counts of immigrant arrivals are disaggregated by visa type. Permanent arrivals are published and these are presented with counts of grants of permanency to people already in Australia on a temporary basis. Categories of visa presented are: Skilled, Humanitarian, Family reunion and a small number of other visas and non-visaed arrivals. The arrivals that do not require issuing of a visa prior to arrival mostly comprise New Zealand and Australian citizens.

## **2. Concepts and definitions**

*How many types of international migrants are categorized in your country? e.g. Lifetime migrant, Recent migrant, Return migrant, Multiple migrant, Refugees, Internally displaced person (IDP) What are the definitions used for categorizing the different types of migrants?*

7 As the focus of work by the ABS is on migration flows, categorisation of migrants is limited. Some statistics are produced as part of the estimation of net overseas migration (NOM) and population estimates (ERP).

Lifetime migration: the ABS estimates the resident population of overseas-born as a subpopulation of the Estimated Resident Population.

Recency: the ABS collects year of arrival of overseas-born residents in the census.

Return migration: Only flow measures are available. Permanent and long-term arrivals and departures can be distinguished by country of birth, including Australian-born arrivals and overseas-born departures. Some information on return migration can be derived from census responses on usual residence at enumeration, one year ago and five years ago but these are incomplete for estimating the level of return migration.

Multiple migrants: A new method of measurement of NOM will soon use multiple movements in determining duration and residency but the ABS has no plans for disseminating statistics on multiple movement - see C. Best Practice and Challenges.

Refugees: DIMA publishes visa category data, including Humanitarian visas: Refugee and Special Humanitarian

- Refugee (DIMA): resettlement to Australia for people outside their home country subject to persecution in their home country
- Special Humanitarian (DIMA): People suffering persecution within their own country, and people who have left their country because of substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights.

Internally-displaced persons: not relevant in the Australian context.

*How do elements such as residence, time or duration of stay, and purpose of stay, feature in the definitions?*

8 Residence is the focus of the key measure of population produced by the ABS, ERP. Central to the definition of residence is the duration of stay or absence of a traveller (see the Introduction to this paper). The ABS does not use a definition of migrant that either constitutes a population distinct from ERP, or that is a subpopulation of ERP. The closest the ABS gets to identification of a migrant population is overseas-born ERP. However, year of arrival is a variable available from the Census and most household surveys.

### **3. Sources of data**

*What are the existing sources of migrant stock data in your country?*

9 The existing sources of migrant stock data for Australia are as follows.

#### ERP by country of birth

Overseas-born ERP is a disaggregation of ERP for Australia and the states and territories. ERP is estimated using the census, NOM, births and deaths. The country of birth disaggregation is done using country of birth of NOM and deaths, as well as birthplace information in the census.

#### Population Census

Although not adjusted for undercount and residents temporarily overseas at the time of enumeration, the Population Census provides a useful source of the detailed demographic,

social and economic characteristics of Australian residents born overseas including their year of arrival.

#### Characteristics of Migrants survey

The Characteristics of Migrants survey is conducted as a supplement to the ABS monthly Labour Force Survey. This is the main household survey carried out by the ABS. The Characteristics of Migrants survey is conducted every three years and was last conducted in 2004.

#### *Sources of flow data on migrants*

10 In addition there are the following sources of data on international migrant flows.

#### Overseas Arrivals and Departures

A monthly administrative by-product statistical collection based on passenger-completed incoming and outgoing passenger cards (including related information obtained from visa applications and passports scanned at Australian ports on arrival or departure). All travellers excluding crew and diplomats are required to complete a passenger card on arrival in or departure from Australia. Cards are collected by the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service under a tripartite arrangement with the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Arrivals and departures can be disaggregated by category of traveller, country of birth, country of citizenship and demographic characteristics.

#### Net overseas migration (NOM)

Net overseas migration is measured using records of movement into and out of Australia. Unit record data is supplied to the ABS by DIMA. This data is collected from passenger cards completed by travellers, enhanced with information from visa applications and passports.

Duration of stay and type of movement variables indicate whether the movements are permanent or temporary, and if temporary, whether short-term or long-term. Only permanent and long-term (12 months or more) movements are used in estimating NOM. Long-term movements are those with a duration of stay or absence of 12 months or more. Long-term and permanent movements are adjusted to account for differences between stated travel intentions and actual travel patterns. For example, where people who have recently arrived on a permanent basis leave the country soon after arrival, and where people who have arrived on a long-term basis depart within less than 12 months, they are subtracted from NOM and ERP.

#### DIMA visa statistics

Similar to Net Overseas Migration, these are based on records of movement into and out of Australia. Only permanent arrivals are included, and counts of people who are granted permanent residency while already in Australia are presented with these. Unlike NOM, the movement counts are not adjusted for changes in traveller intention. DIMA aggregates permanent arrivals and on-shore grants as permanent additions (to the Australian legally resident population).

*Does a coordination mechanism exist among different sources within the country to produce aggregate statistics? If so, how?*

11 Representatives from the ABS and DIMA meet regularly to discuss issues relating to the collection and processing of international movement data, the national migration and humanitarian programs regime and dissemination of migration statistics. A Passenger Card Steering Committee comprising representatives of the key Australian Government Departments and Agencies responsible for various aspects of international border movements (customs, quarantine, immigration, health, taxation, statistics, etc.) meets several times a year to monitor improvements and other changes to the passenger card and processing arrangements while an operational level Passenger Card Data User Group meets as required to discuss data issues with respect to the card (including policy departments responsible for tourism). Senior representatives of all Australian Government departments with a stake in Australia's migration programs meet annually to discuss policy issues with regard to Australia's Migration and Humanitarian Programs.

12 The ABS has recently established the National Migrant Statistics Unit (NMSU), which has responsibility for development and coordination of statistical issues relating to the employment, education, cultural and social outcomes for migrants in Australia.

13 There is a direct association between NOM and ERP by country of birth. The Characteristics of Migrants survey measures a different population. In DIMA visa statistics, the onshore component is not estimated by the ABS but the permanent arrival component matches the ABS count of permanent arrivals prior to adjustment for differences in stated and actual travel intentions.

#### **4. Policy relevance**

*Is the currently available migration data sufficient for policy development?*

14 The current range of flow migration data meets most national requirements for policy analysis, monitoring and development. However, there is an increasing policy focus on population change in regional areas of Australia, particularly as a result of an aging population. Several governments have the objective of reducing the rate of population decline in regional areas and better manage the impacts of high growth areas, especially in environmentally sensitive areas such as coastal regions. This has led to an emerging data requirement for detailed flow data on the number and characteristics of international and internal migrants to and emigrants from regional areas below the currently available state and territory levels. Collection of such data for international migrants would require the collection and coding of more detailed address data for both immigrants and emigrants when crossing Australia's borders, and perhaps more detailed information and coding of stock measures (e.g. address of former residence of former Australian residents in other countries' censuses).

15 An emerging data issue for Australia is that some countries (for example, New Zealand as well as Australia) have ceased to include country of birth in the machine readable section of

biometric passports issued by those countries. This was the primary data source for the country of birth variable for international border movements. The loss of this data source may require Australia to resume asking country of birth on incoming and outgoing passenger cards.

*Are data users (policy makers) consulted for the migration data needs?*

16 The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs convenes a meeting of key policy agencies with an interest in data collected on incoming and outgoing passenger cards (referred to as the Passenger Card Data User Group). However, the ABS meets on a bilateral basis with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs every few months to discuss data and other issues related to migration.

17 The Australian Bureau of Statistics participates and convenes several user groups which include discussion of migration and other population data needs. This includes:

Australian and New Zealand Population Workshop, an annual meeting of Australian, state and territory government demographers and planners together with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (demography and census programs) and Statistics New Zealand (again, demography and census programs).

Population Estimates Technical Workshop, an annual meeting convened by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to consult with state and territory government Treasury departments, statisticians and demographers on developments in estimating the population of each state and territory, which are used to distribute Goods and Service Tax (GST) revenue to state and territory governments.

The ABS also established the Demographic Statistics Advisory Group (DemSAG) in 2006 to fill a gap in user consultation arrangements. DemSAG includes representatives from Australian Government departments, demographic researchers and academics, national bodies and associations (for example the Australian Population Association).

The ABS has also established the Migrant Statistics Reference Group to advise on the work of the recently established National Migrants Statistics Unit. This Group includes various program representatives from the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

## **5. Dissemination**

*What is the mode and frequency of disseminating migration data?*

18 Net Overseas Migration is primarily disseminated every three months in the publication *Australian Demographic Statistics* (ABS cat. no. 3101.0). More detail on Net Overseas Migration is presented in *Migration, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 3412.0). ERP by country of birth is also released in *Migration, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 3412.0). The monthly measure of

permanent arrivals, by country of birth, not adjusted for changes in traveller intention, is published in *Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 3401.0). These three publications are available for free download from the ABS website <<<http://www.abs.gov.au>>>. As well, many ABS publications presenting the results of household surveys are available for download from this website, including *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Migrants, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 6250.0).

19 DIMA publications containing permanent addition and permanent arrival data are released on the DIMA website <<<http://www.immi.gov.au>>>. These include *Immigration Update, Settler Arrivals* and *Population Flows: Immigration Aspects*, released annually.

*Do you share your country's international migration data with other countries? If so, how?*

20 ABS includes aggregate migration statistics in annual questionnaires submitted to it from the UN Statistics Division and the OECD. The ABS has also participated in a joint pilot study arranged by the UNECE/Eurostat Task Force on measuring emigration using data collected by the receiving country. Data requests from other NSOs are also met when resources permit, e.g. a request from Statistics New Zealand was recently met through provision of relevant data in Excel spreadsheet format by email. Due to legislative requirements on privacy and confidentiality, the Australian Bureau of Statistics is not able to share unit record data except as provided for under legislative based arrangements.

## **B ON THE UPCOMING AUSTRALIAN POPULATION CENSUS**

*Is international migration topic included in the upcoming census questionnaire? If so, what are the questions that will be included under the international migration topic of the census questionnaire?*

21 The ABS conducted the Census of Population and Housing on 8 August 2006 (for more information on the Australian Census see the Census page on the ABS website [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)).

22 Planning for the 2011 Census of Population and Housing is currently underway and options are being formulated. Of relevance to international migration is whether the ABS will provide for the classification of countries in responses to the address one and five year ago questions, and whether responses other than Australia can be requested, collected and coded for country of citizenship (mindful that some Australian's may hold dual citizenship with other countries). The ABS will commence public consultations for the 2011 Census in the beginning of 2008. Representations from UNESCAP member countries would be welcomed and should be addressed to the Australian Statistician.

## C BEST PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

*What are your country's best practices and challenges that your country faces in terms of international migration data collection, data analysis and data dissemination that you want to share with the participants of the Expert Group Meeting?*

23 Australia's border control and measurement of border movement are of a very high quality. This is partly because Australia has no land borders with any other country and is relatively distant from highly populated countries. This enables DIMA to accurately capture information on movements into and out of the country. In particular, and in contrast to many other countries, the ABS utilises good data on departures.

24 The main challenges in measuring migration are increasing frequency of international travel and increasing complexity of trips. For instance, increasing prevalence of overseas students in Australia and people coming to Australia for business or employment on a long-term temporary basis has meant increasing numbers of long-term trips in Australia that are interrupted by brief visits 'home'. This impacts on Net Overseas Migration and ERP in two ways. Firstly, a decline has been identified in the relationship between duration of stay/absence reported by travellers on first leg of trip, and actual duration. Secondly, problems have been identified with the current definition of a long-term traveller that relies on an unbroken 12-month stay or absence, as the ABS has found that many travellers interrupt their trips.

25 The ABS is responding to this by changing its measurement of net overseas migration to the 12/16 rule. This is achieved by matching movement records for individual travellers to build up movement histories of travellers. In future, sequential international movements will be accumulated to determine time present in Australia or out of the country over a 16 month period. If a person was previously not in the Australian population, and stayed in Australia for 12 months out of the 16 month period, they would be added to the population. Similarly, an Australian resident who leaves Australia and is overseas for 12 months out of the following 16 months would be removed from the Australian resident population estimate (ERP) in the reference quarter. For more information, see *Information Paper: Improved Methods for Estimating Net Overseas Migration, 2006* (cat. no. 3107.0.55.003). An additional information paper outlining the statistical impacts of the improved method will be released in April 2007.

Demography Program  
Australian Bureau of Statistics

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **References**

ABS publications are available for free download from the ABS web site,  
<<<http://www.abs.gov.au>>>.

Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia (cat. no. 3401.0)

Australian Demographic Statistics (cat. no. 3101.0), published quarterly

Migration, Australia (cat. no. 3412.0)

Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Migrants, Australia (cat. no. 6250.0)

Information Paper: Improved Methods for Estimating Net Overseas Migration, 2006 (cat. no. 3107.0.55.003)

DIMA publications are available for free download from the DIMA web site,  
<<<http://www.immi.gov.au>>>.

Immigration Update

Settler Arrivals

Population Flows: Immigration Aspects

### **Abbreviations**

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

DIMA: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

ERP: estimated resident population. The key measure of population. Produced by the ABS.

NMSU: National Migrant Statistics Unit, within the ABS.

NOM: net overseas migration. Estimated by the ABS.