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PRODUCING MIGRATION DATA THROUGH HOUSEHOLD SAMPLE SURVEYS

PRODUCING MIGRATION AND MIGRANT DATA*

Submitted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is responsible for the lawful and orderly entry and stay of people in Australia. This is achieved through the management and provision of services for the entry and stay of people through the migration, temporary entry, refugee and humanitarian programmes. Information about migrant settlement outcomes is vital in the context of determining whether migrant settlement policies and programs are effective and delivering the outcomes desired by government. DIAC regularly publish information about the composition of arrivals and also undertake some survey activity to ascertain the effectiveness of their policies and programs, however, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) contributes to this demand for knowledge by collecting information about both the migration process and about migrants themselves.

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2. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the data sources for both migration statistics and migrant statistics. Migration statistics are concerned with the actual movements of people into and out of the country. Migrant statistics encompass the settlement outcomes of arrivals and the characteristics of migrants entering Australia. Several developments in the context of these statistics are also discussed.
3. The major vehicles that provide information relevant to migration and migrant settlement outcomes are:
 - a) the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing
 - b) monthly Overseas Arrivals and Departures administrative by-product collection
 - c) quarterly Net Overseas Migration statistics (derived statistics)
 - d) the triennial ABS Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Migrants Survey
 - e) 2006 ABS General Social Survey
 - f) longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (DIAC).

II. DATA SOURCES OF MIGRATION STATISTICS

A. OVERSEAS ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES AND NET OVERSEAS MIGRATION

4. The ABS has long used administrative by-product information from incoming and outgoing passenger cards completed by international travellers together with visa application and border passport transaction information for measuring international migration and all international border movements (long-term and short-term). These passenger cards (some 23 million in 2007 which is greater than the resident population of Australia) are collected at Australian air and sea ports by Australian Government department representatives (Australian Customs Service, Department of Immigration and Citizenship and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service). The data are captured, processed and provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to the ABS each month for statistical compilation, analysis and dissemination. As this data source meets ABS's ongoing requirement for migration flow statistics, household surveys and the Census of Population and Housing are not used as the primary source of data for migration flow statistics. For more information, see the ABS publications [Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3401.0), [Australian Demographic Statistics](#) (cat. no. 3101.0) and [Migration, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3412.0).

5. The ABS uses the monthly Overseas Arrivals and Departure movement data to compile quarterly Net Overseas Migration estimates by state/territory for use in the preparation of quarterly population estimates for Australia and its states and territories. Recent changes were made to the methodology used for determining which travellers were to be added to the population (immigrants including returning residents after a long-term absence) and which were to be subtracted from the population (emigrants including former immigrants leaving after a long term stay)¹. Increasing volumes of long-term temporary migrants, particularly students,

¹ See Working Paper 18, Impact of different duration thresholds of residence on migration statistics from the Joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics organised in collaboration with UNFPA Edinburgh, Scotland, 20-22 November 2006. <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.10/2006/wp.18.e.pdf>

temporary business visa migrants and New Zealand citizens, had presented challenges in accurately measuring the duration of stay and absence from Australia in determining the net contribution of long term immigration and emigration to Australia's population.

6. More details on the new methodology and the statistical implications are available in the following ABS releases:

[*Information Paper: Improved Methods for Estimating Net Overseas Migration, 2006*](#) (cat. no. 3107.0.55.003), and

[*Information Paper: Statistical Implications of Improved Methods for Estimating Net Overseas Migration, Australia, 2007*](#) (cat. no.3107.0.55.005)

B. POPULATION ESTIMATES BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH

7. The ABS compiles population estimates by country of birth using the results of the most recent Census of Population and Housing, estimates of net undercount from the Census Post Enumeration Survey, Births, Deaths and estimates of Net Overseas Migration. These are published annually in [*Migration, Australia*](#) (cat. no. 3412.0).

III. MAJOR SOURCES OF MIGRANT INFORMATION

A. CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING

8. The five-yearly Census collects information on a place of enumeration (de facto) basis with information about usual residence (de jure) asked of all persons. The self-enumerated questionnaire seeks information across a range of issues including: place of usual residence, place of usual residence 1 and 5 years ago, Australian citizenship, country of birth, and year of arrival. There are several other questions that encompass ethnicity issues - these include country of birth of parents, ancestry, language spoken at home, and religious affiliation.

9. Country of birth of person enables the overseas born to be identified within the Australian resident population while year of arrival in Australia is necessary to analyse changes in the characteristics of migrants over time. It also enables the separate identification of recent migrants (e.g. from Sub-Saharan Africa) compared with 'earlier' migrant groups (e.g. Southern and Eastern European), with the former generally requiring more services. The Australian government has placed a strong emphasis on skilled migration in recent years. The Census enables analysis of various aspects of migrant participation in the labour force although it does not provide information according to a migrant's visa class, which would add an extra dimension to any analyses.

10. Information is also collected with respect to citizenship, although currently the question only enables determination of whether one is an Australian citizen or not.

11. Data is analysed, tabulated and then presented in the form of on-line statistics, publications and spreadsheets on the ABS website: www.abs.gov.au .

B. LABOUR FORCE AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS SURVEY

12. The ABS Labour Force Survey is based on a multi-stage area sample of private dwellings (currently about 30,000 houses, flats, etc.) and a list sample of non-private dwellings (hotels, motels, etc.), and covers about 0.45% of the population of Australia. Persons aged 15 years and over are in-scope of the survey. Information is obtained from the occupants of selected dwellings by specially trained interviewers. Households selected for the Labour Force Survey are interviewed each month for eight months, with one-eighth of the sample being replaced each month.

13. Surveys supplementary to the Labour Force are conducted on a regular basis. These usually relate to labour market issues (e.g. job search experience; barriers to employment), however, several key data items relevant to being able to differentiate migrants from the total population form part of a core set of demographic data items that are asked of all respondents. These are Country of birth (which can be output by main English speaking country/non-main English speaking country as well as by major geographic region) and Year of arrival.

14. Hence data about the overseas born component of the Australian population is available from all Labour Force Supplementary surveys. The ABS has released the [Migrant Data Matrices](#) (cat. no. 3415.0) which contains information compiled from several of these supplementary surveys. Estimates for population sub-groups within the overseas born that are of interest to policy makers (e.g. arrivals from Africa; Humanitarian entrants; migrants living in non-metropolitan areas etc) often carry large relative standard errors meaning that users must employ a high degree of caution when using the data.

15. Every three years the ABS conducts the Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Migrants Survey (CoMS) as a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS). This survey focuses on those people born overseas who have arrived recently. Respondents to the LFS who were in the scope of the supplementary survey are asked further questions.

16. CoMS defines migrants as people who were born overseas, arrived in Australia after a designated year, were aged 15 (or 18 years for earlier surveys) 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. Data is also collected from New Zealand citizens who have arrived in Australia within the time frame of the survey. New Zealand residents do not require a visa to enter Australia.

17. The survey enables analysis of the labour force participation of migrants cross-tabulated by visa category, country of birth; educational attainment on arrival and whether occupation before migration was the same as current occupation. In addition, estimates can be cross-classified by labour force demographics such as state, sex, age and marital status.

18. Issues related to previous collections and development work for the November 2007 survey are discussed below.

C. GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY

19. In 2006, the ABS conducted the second General Social Survey (GSS); a multi-dimensional social survey that collects data on a range of social dimensions to enable analysis of interrelationships in social circumstances and outcomes, including the exploration of multiple advantage and disadvantage. The 2006 GSS is the second in the series, with the first GSS conducted in 2002. Each cycle of the GSS collects comparable information for the core dimensions to allow for analysis of changes over time. A flexible component is also included to collect additional information on emerging or important topics of social concern. The flexible component of the 2006 GSS included topics relating to social capital, voluntary work and visa category held by Australian immigrants.

20. It is important to be able to analyse data relating to the settlement outcomes of migrants along visa category lines. Understanding how differences in entry conditions affect the settlement outcome for migrants is vital in the context of developing and improving migration policies and programs. It is also important to understand whether good outcomes in one area (e.g. employment) are linked to good outcomes in other areas (e.g. housing, and financial independence).

21. The GSS enables analysis of migrant settlement outcomes by visa category with respect to a range of standard indicators such as education, employment and income but also to a suite of more subjective issues such as family and community involvement, crime and feelings of safety, attendance at culture and leisure venues, sports attendance and participation, social networks and social participation, and voluntary work. This information provides a different perspective on how well migrants have settled into Australia.

22. Survey results are available in [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2006](#) (cat no. 4159.0).

D. DIAC SETTLEMENT DATABASE AND THE LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF IMMIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA

23. The Settlement Database is a DIAC internal database developed to provide statistical data for government and community agencies involved in the planning and provision of migrant settlement services. The database brings together data from various sources within the department's administrative environment including the Settlement Details form (Form 886), as well as departmental systems used to process migration applications both in Australia and at overseas posts. The Settlement Database contains information about permanent arrivals to Australia as well as some provisional visas such as 'Spouse' visa. Data items collected include name, address, sex, age, date of birth, date of arrival, English proficiency, religion, and occupation. It is not mandatory to provide much of the information collected in the settlement database. This means that some items (such as religion) are not completed by some migrants and will be reported as 'Unknown' or 'Not Stated'.

24. The Settlement Database also provides the population frame for many of DIAC's surveys. Reports can be generated by members of the public via the Settlement Reporting Facility on the department's website.

25. While the Settlement Database contains information relating to migrants at the time of arrival it does not provide information about the settlement outcomes of migrants. The objectives of data sources such as the Census of Population and Housing and the Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Migrants Survey is to better understand these outcomes beyond the time of arrival and to be able to analyse the outcomes according to visa category, country of birth and period of arrival.

26. DIAC has conducted the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) several times over the past decade. The LSIA seeks to provide government and other agencies with reliable data to monitor and improve immigration and settlement policies, programs and services. The first three LSIA were:

- a) LSIA 1 surveyed migrants who arrived in Australia between September 1993 and August 1995.
- b) LSIA 2 surveyed migrants who arrived in Australia between September 1999 and August 2000.
- c) LSIA 3 surveyed migrants who either:
 - arrived in Australia between December 2004 and March 2005; or
 - were granted their visa onshore between December 2004 and March 2005

27. The samples were drawn from Primary Applicants (i.e. the person upon whom the approval to immigrate was based) on DIAC's Settlement Database. The composition of samples has changed as a result of migration policy changes (e.g. increasing the proportion of skilled migrants; excluding humanitarian migrants).

28. LSIA collects a range of information including: pre-migration experience; the immigration process; initial settlement and location; use of support services - government and non-government; ancestry, religion and ethnicity; English language proficiency and learning; qualifications and skills assessment; education and training; labour force activity; health; and housing arrangements.

29. More detailed information about the LSIA is available on DIAC's website:
www.immi.gov.au .

IV. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

A. 2007 LABOUR FORCE AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS SURVEY (COMS)

30. The survey requires that details are collected about a migrant's initial visa upon arrival in Australia and, in the case of Australian citizens, the visa they held immediately prior to gaining citizenship. For non-citizens details are collected about their current visa. The main challenge faced was designing a set of questions which would allow migrants to be coded to unique visa categories in cases where they were not able to provide an exact visa category name or code. This had to be done in a manner which imposed a minimal burden on respondents.

31. CoMS has been subject to changes in methodology over the course of its life. Surveys conducted up to and including 1996 were restricted to migrants who arrived in Australia after 1970, who were aged 18 years or more on arrival, and had obtained permanent Australian resident status. The 1999 survey was restricted to migrants who arrived in Australia after 1980, were aged 18 years or more on arrival, and had obtained permanent Australian resident status. For 2004, the survey included migrants who arrived in Australia after 1984 and people who were temporary residents of Australia for 12 months or more and who were aged 15 years and over on arrival. The scope of the 2007 survey was similar to 2004 except that it only included migrants who arrived in Australia in the last 10 years (i.e. after 1996).

32. In summary the differences between the various versions of CoMS have been the width of the 'migration window' (i.e. the time period in which arrivals were considered to be in scope of the survey) and the age of persons considered to be 'in-scope' (i.e. either 15 years and over or 18 years and over). These differences have diminished the capacity to compare results over time.

33. Another significant issue has been the ability of the survey vehicle to correctly determine the major visa category (e.g. Skilled, Family or Humanitarian) of in-scope migrants. When the data has been disaggregated there have been differences between the distribution of the in-scope migrant population as determined by the survey and the distribution obtained from DIAC's administrative systems.

34. The primary focus of the redevelopment of the 2007 CoMS was to provide high quality statistics using visa category as a classificatory variable to examine if there are different patterns to the settlement experience of recent migrants entering the country under different conditions.

35. A substantial amount of testing was undertaken prior to the survey. This took the form of several rounds of cognitive testing and a dress rehearsal. Testing revealed that most migrants had a relatively detailed knowledge of their visa arrangements, however, the quality of this information degraded significantly when obtained from other members of the household (particularly if those members of the household were not migrants). As a result of this finding the 2007 survey undertook personal interviews with all in scope persons. This was a departure from the usual Any Responsible Adult methodology used in earlier survey cycles and was also non-standard in terms of normal collection methodology for labour force supplementary surveys.

36. The 2007 survey went into the field in November 2007 with results available in late May 2008.

B. CENSUS DATA ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

37. On 26 April 2005, the ABS put forward a proposal to enhance the use of the Census of Population and Housing in [*Discussion Paper: Enhancing the Population Census: Developing a Longitudinal View*](#) (cat. no. 2060.0). This proposal included the creation of the Statistical Longitudinal Census Dataset (SLCD), by combining data provided in the 2006 census with data provided in future censuses and bringing together the SLCD with ABS and specified non-ABS datasets.

38. The project is currently investigating the feasibility of creating the SLCD. If feasible the SLCD will be:

- a) created by combining data from the 2006 Census with data from future censuses
- b) created by bringing together the data through statistical techniques rather than matching based on name and address
- c) based on a 5% random sample of the population.

39. As mentioned earlier the five-yearly census provides considerable information about Australian people, including the overseas born, families and households. The richness of the census data lies in the information it provides on topics such as: family composition; education and qualifications; labour force status (including hours worked, occupation and industry); income; and housing.

40. Patterns in individual experiences over time in these areas, and factors that might influence these experiences, would be those where the SLCD would provide most insight. Examples include studies of the changes in migrant family structures over time in Australia, labour force participation outcomes for children of migrant families, and the impact of factors such as family composition and household income on these outcomes. The value of the SLCD will grow as data are brought together from future censuses.

41. As part of the overall project and in line with the initial proposal and the statement of intention, the ABS is also undertaking several quality studies which involve linking specified datasets to the 2006 Census data. One of these studies involves using the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's Settlement Database which contains records of permanent arrivals. Only aggregate data will be disseminated from this quality study.

42. The aim of the quality study is to test the feasibility of bringing together the SLCD with DIAC's Settlement Database using statistical techniques rather than name and address matching. The 2006 Census processing period provides the opportunity to attempt to link the datasets using two approaches, both with and without names and addresses as matching variables, to assess the quality of the linking methods. Linking with names and addresses, while not perfect, provides a benchmark for assessing linkage quality when statistical techniques are used. This information will be used to determine if the datasets produced for the statistical study will be fit for their purpose, that is, useful for statistical analysis of aspects of the migrant population over time. After census processing is complete, all names and addresses held by the ABS are destroyed.

V. SUMMARY

45. The ABS collects a range of information about migrants in the context of stock/flow and their settlement outcomes. The Census of Population and Housing provides a wide range of information for population sub-groups at small area level, however, it currently cannot differentiate between the major visa categories and thus is unable to provide information that allows for comparison of settlement outcomes according to varying entry conditions.

46. The Labour Force Survey program provides information about the overseas born and, in selected surveys, information related to visa category. While this information assists policy makers the sample errors associated with the recent overseas born group make robust analysis problematic at times. Although the ABS has sought to make improvements in the effectiveness of its Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Migrants Survey the results are yet to be seen.

All ABS publications are available on the ABS website www.abs.gov.au