

Economic Benefits of Migration

Impact on Living Standards

There have been significant changes to migration policy since 1995–96. The main thrust of the changes has been to reduce the level of Family migration and to increase the level of Skilled migration. Such a shift has clear benefits to Australia.

A study conducted by Econtech found that the changes to migration policy since 1995–96 would lead to higher living standards. Compared to the 1995–96 Program, Econtech estimates that the 2002–03 Migration Program is expected to deliver improved living standards of \$344 per head by 2007–08. The improved living standard is attributed to the increase in the Skill Stream's share of the Migration Program to over 60 per cent in 2002–03 and to the higher skill levels, relative youthfulness, good English language skills, and greater levels of wealth of skilled migrants.

Impact on Commonwealth and State Budgets

Studies conducted by Access Economics demonstrate that migration benefits both Commonwealth and State Budgets. Put simply, the fiscal benefits of migration are derived from the tax revenue they generate. State governments generally do not benefit as much as the Commonwealth government, in part because their sources of revenue are less directly related to growth in income. The benefit to State budgets remain fairly constant at around \$1 million per year per 1,000 migrants over a ten year period. The Commonwealth impact on the other hand continues to grow to around \$7 million per year per 1,000 migrants by year 10.

A preliminary analysis by Access Economics, using 2002–03 prices, estimates that if the Migration Program is continued at the 2002–03 settings, the cumulative benefit to the Commonwealth Budget could be around \$30 billion over 10 years.

Impact on Incomes

A Study by Professor Ross Garnaut from the Australian National University compares the benefits of migration to Australia with migration to the USA. Australia has a managed migration program which is primarily focused on attracting skilled migrants to address skill shortages. Migration, in particular skilled migration, is placing downward pressure on the gap between rich and poor. The reason for this is that skilled migrants create work for lower-skilled Australians and cause a redistribution of income towards these workers. This contrasts with the USA where migration is relatively unskilled and, as a result, migration tends to depress the relative incomes of poor Americans.

Brain Gain

Immigration has also led to a brain gain for Australia. Some commentators thought that Australia was losing more of its skilled workers than it was gaining. This however has been challenged. A study conducted by Dr Bob Birrell of Monash University focused on the extent of the loss of skilled workers from Australia. The study showed that there are more people in major occupations that are coming to Australia than are leaving. Over the 3 year period from 1997–98 to 1999–2000, the brain gain for professionals was around 2 per cent of the stock of employed professional workers and 3.6 per cent for managers and administrators relative to the managerial and administrative workforce in employment. Other occupations that experienced a gain were computing professionals at 2.1 per cent, accountants at 2.9 per cent and 0.6 per cent for nursing professionals. Where demand for the skill in question in Australia was strong there was a relatively limited outflow of residents. One implication is that employment in Australia offers attractions other than high salaries.

Economic Benefits of Temporary Migration

Access Economics have also modelled the benefits derived from sponsored temporary business entrants on Australia's living standards as well as their impact on State and Commonwealth Budgets. Based on their model, the living standards of existing residents would ultimately rise by 5.4 per cent as a result of 20 years of the sponsored temporary business resident program at the 2000–01 (40,493) level of intake.

The impact of temporary business entrants on State and Commonwealth budgets is largely positive. State budgets derive a large positive impact as temporary business entrants provide more in own-source revenue than they consume in services. Similarly the Commonwealth derives a net positive impact as temporary business entrants pay large amounts in GST, but due to their limited use of Government services and programs, do not give rise to significant increases in spending by the Commonwealth. For every 1,000 long-term temporary business entrants, Access Economics estimates the Commonwealth budget nets around \$55.9 million over 4 years.

Students and working holiday makers also generate significant economic benefits. Students contribute more than \$5 billion in export earnings annually. Education is Australia's third largest service export industry after tourism and transportation. Students directly and indirectly contribute about 43,000 jobs for Australians. Working holiday makers create more jobs than they take. Based on 80,000 arrivals of working holiday makers, a net gain of about 8,000 full-year jobs is achieved, and an estimated \$1.3 billion is created in export earnings.