

SKILLED MIGRATION FROM EUROPE TO AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Britain and many other European countries have been important sources of settler migration to Australia for more than two hundred years. While the sources of settler migration to Australia have diversified in the last thirty years to include non-European countries, with the current emphasis on skills in Australia's migration policy, many skilled people from Europe are coming to Australia both as settlers and as temporary migrants. The United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland are among the top ten sources of skilled temporary migration to Australia.

This paper examines Europe as a source of both permanent and temporary skilled migration to Australia in recent years. It looks at the trend in migration from European countries to Australia from the 1960s to the present, noting the changes in patterns over time, both in terms of type of migration and source countries. It then focuses on European migration to Australia since the mid-1990s when Australia's immigration policy became more skill-oriented and a temporary skilled migration visa program was implemented to simplify the process by which employers could sponsor skilled migrant workers. While Europeans are not a large group among permanent migrants, many come as temporary migrants and then decide to apply for permanent residence. Survey data are used to examine their occupational skills, reasons for migration and residence/return migration intentions, comparing permanent skilled migrants with temporary skilled migrants. European migrants are more likely than other migrants to indicate lifestyle reasons for migrating or coming to Australia to work and then seeking permanent residence. However, differences are also observed among migrants from different regions in Europe. The paper examines these intra-European differences as well as differences between European and non-European skilled migrants. The implications of "brain drain"/"brain circulation" are discussed.

Key words: skilled migration, emigration, temporary migration, Europe, Australia

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Extended abstract

Introduction

This paper examines Europe as a source of both permanent and temporary skilled migration to Australia in recent years. While Britain and many other European countries have been important sources of settler migration to Australia for more than two hundred years, the sources of settler migration to Australia have diversified in the last thirty years to include non-European countries. However, with the current emphasis on skills in Australia's migration policy, many skilled people from Europe are coming to Australia as temporary migrants and then applying for permanent residence. The United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland are among the top ten sources of skilled temporary migration to Australia. In recent years, the Department of Immigration has held a number of skilled expos in European cities to recruit skilled migrants to Australia.

Migration from Europe to Australia

In the 1961 Australian census, nine out of the top ten countries of birth of the overseas-born population were European: United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Greece, Poland, Yugoslavia, Malta and Ireland. In the 2001 census, five out of the top ten were European: United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, Germany and Netherlands. In the 1960s, the top ten source countries of settler migration to Australia included the UK, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Germany and Netherlands. In 2005-06, there was only one European country among the top ten sources of settler migration: UK. However, there were three European countries among the top ten sources of skilled temporary migration: UK, Germany and Ireland. France and the Netherlands were among the top 15. Europe continues to be a significant source of migration to Australia, but the focus has changed from settler migration to temporary skilled migration. Recent survey data indicate that some of these temporary migrants are interested in becoming permanent residents after spending some time working in Australia.

The paper will examine in more detail the changing trends and patterns of European migration to Australia.

Data

The paper uses data from two surveys to examine recent European migrants in Australia. The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) was commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Immigration to track the settlement experiences of a sample of permanent migrants during the first few years of their residence in Australia. Information was also collected on their migration process, including the reasons for migration to Australia, and settlement outcomes, including employment outcomes and return migration and citizenship intentions. The paper uses data for the cohort of migrants who arrived in Australia during 1999-2000. There were 1400 migrants

from European countries among the total survey sample of 4218 primary migrants and 629 had worked in a skilled occupation before migrating. The second survey is of a sample of skilled temporary migrants that was conducted in 2003-04 with the collaboration of the Department of Immigration. There were 600 European migrants in the survey sample of 1174 respondents. This survey also asked the migrants about their reasons for coming to work in Australia and for those who had applied, or intended to apply, for permanent residence, their reasons for doing so. Temporary skilled migrants who intended to return home were asked about their reasons for not intending to seek permanent residence in Australia.

Characteristics of European permanent and temporary skilled migrants

The following demographic and human capital characteristics of permanent and temporary skilled migrants from Europe are examined: age, sex, marital status, country of origin, visa category of migration (for permanent migrants), level of education, qualification and occupation. Skilled migrants are also present among family reunion and Humanitarian migrants from Europe and they will be compared with the migrants in the skilled visa categories. Comparisons are made between European and non-European skilled migrants by migration status to see whether and how European migrants differ from other migrants.

Pre-migration experience and current employment

The pre-migration employment experience of the European migrants is examined and compared with their current employment in Australia to see what kinds of skills they bring to Australia and how effectively they are being used. Migrants are also compared on whether they had visited Australia before their migration for permanent settlement or temporary employment, and whether that has any effect on their employment outcomes.

Reasons for European migration to Australia

Data from the LSIA are used to examine the reasons for migration of permanent migrants and data from the survey of temporary migrants are used to examine the reasons for migration of temporary migrants. The questions in the two surveys are similar and allow for a comparison of the responses of permanent and temporary migrants.

Preliminary analysis of the data shows that lifestyle reasons are important for both permanent and temporary skilled migrants from Europe in deciding to come to Australia. A better future for the family is also important to migrants coming for permanent settlement. The preliminary analyses also indicate differences between migrants from Western Europe and migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe in their reasons for migration. Multivariate statistical analysis will be undertaken to examine these reasons further by migrant characteristics.

Residence and return migration intentions

Temporary skilled migrants from Europe are less likely than those from less developed regions to want to settle permanently in Australia. Temporary migrants intending to settle permanently in Australia also indicate the importance of lifestyle reasons, while those who do not plan to apply for permanent residence are likely to indicate the lack of relatives and friends in Australia as an important reason for wanting to return home. Multivariate statistical analysis will be undertaken to examine these reasons further by migrant characteristics.

Implications of “brain drain”/“brain circulation”

The implications of the research findings will be discussed in relation to the issues of brain drain and brain circulation for Europe and Australia.