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The Socio-Economic Status of Migrant Populations in Regional and Rural Australia and its Implications for Future Population Policy

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The Socio-Economic Status of Migrant Populations in Regional and Rural Australia and its Implications for Future Population Policy

Abstract

The migrant population living in regional and rural Australia has been growing, partly due to the introduction and expansion of a range of state-specific and regional migration programs by the Australian Government over the period since 1995. The programs were created in response to both the skill shortages in regional and rural Australia and environmental and social critiques of urban migration. This study uses data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing in Australia to compare five socio-economic measures, namely labour force participation, unemployment, income, educational attainment, and occupational status, between the migrant and Australia-born populations. The results reveal that the migrant population in regional and rural Australia now records similar values for the labour force participation rate, unemployment rate, median individual weekly income, and proportion in high skill level occupations to the Australia-born population. The most notable difference is that migrants have a substantially higher level of education, particularly university education. The differences between men and women on these socio-economic measures are wider for the migrant population than for the Australia-born. Recently-arrived migrants are significantly more educated, highly skilled and higher paid than their longer-standing counterparts. The study also discusses the differences between the larger migrant groups living in regional and rural Australia. The improvement in the socio-economic outcomes experienced by the migrant population of regional and rural Australia and their broad similarity to those of the Australia-born living in these regions strengthen the case for increasing the proportion of migrant settlers going to these regions.

Introduction

Over the period from 2000 to 2009 Australia's level of net international migration was consistently high by historical standards, with the figure for 2008 being the highest level ever recorded (DIaC, 2010, ABS 2010a). Although net temporary movement, including international students, became the larger component of net migration, the levels of permanent migration to Australia were also relatively high (Hugo 2006; ABS 2010b). Consequently, migrants represented 25 per cent of Australia's total population in 2009 (DIaC 2010).

The degree of urbanisation of the migrant population is far higher than that of the Australian-born population, with 2006 Census data showing that 83 per cent of the migrant population resided in major urban areas, and 53 per cent in Sydney and Melbourne alone. Over the period since the end of World War II the degree of concentration of the migrant population in urban areas, especially in Sydney and Melbourne, has increased (Hugo 2008). The influence of ethnic concentrations in major urban areas has played a significant role in the settlement location of new migrants. Wulff et al. (2008) argue that many major urban cities have already reached a 'critical mass' of migrants, meaning they act as economic and social magnets for migrants due to existing communities or services. Therefore, most new arrivals also choose to settle in large metropolitan centres to the exclusion of regional and rural Australia. Coinciding with the increase in Australia's migration levels in recent years has been a significant transformation of regional and rural areas within Australia. The globalisation process has resulted in a shift from an industrial-based economy to the new knowledge-based economy, which in turn has resulted in a growing divide between major cities and regional and rural towns (Withers and Powall 2003, O'Connor et al. 2001, Gray and Lawrence 2001). Previously, the benefits of economic growth were distributed amongst the many towns and cities involved in the production chain; more recently, economic prosperity has centralised to major cities where multinational corporations locate creating a cluster of high-income jobs. This has contributed to net outmigration from regional and rural areas to urban areas, particularly of young adults, a stagnation of economic growth within these areas and a substantial decrease of services and infrastructure available within regional and rural Australia, particularly within small rural towns (O'Connor et al. 2001).

Despite a recent "uptick" in total fertility, which has been more pronounced in urban areas, the fertility rate in regional and rural Australia remains above the fertility rates of the major urban (ABS 2010c). However, internal outmigration has partly offset the impact of natural increase on population growth.

In response to the high degree of urbanisation of Australia's migrants and the decline in regional and rural Australia the Federal Government has explored avenues for channelling newly arrived

migrants into the local economies of regional and rural Australia. A wide range of regional migration incentive schemes has been introduced over the past sixteen years. Collins (2009) notes that these schemes were created in response to both the labour shortages in regional and rural Australia as well as the emerging environmental and social critiques of urban immigration, headed by former NSW Premier Bob Carr and entrepreneur Dick Smith. Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008) and Hugo (2004a) have described this response as a paradigm shift in Australia's International Migration Program, while Collins (2008: 264) suggests that it is a 'watershed in Australia's immigration history'. International migration is now being viewed as an instrument for regional and local economic development rather than purely for national economic prosperity (Wulff et al. 2008).

The Federal Government strategies involve a raft of State-Specific and Regional Migration [SSRM] schemes aimed at addressing skill shortages in regional and rural Australia and encouraging a more balanced spatial distribution of migrants. The strategies also aim to counter the effects of low fertility, ageing and youth outmigration in regional and rural populations and thus promote regional development (Wulff and Dharmalingam 2008). The various SSRM schemes have differing geographical boundary definitions and include some major urban areas, as well as regional and rural locations. For example, the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme excludes Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, the Australian Capital Territory, the Gold Coast, Newcastle and Wollongong, but includes Adelaide as well as other smaller urban areas, whilst the Skilled Regional Sponsored State/Territory Nominated scheme and the Skilled Regional Sponsored (Provisional) scheme both exclude only Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle and Wollongong (DIaC 2011a). Thus the region we consider in this study is only a subset of the area in which the SSRM migrants initially locate: as well as excluding all the aforementioned areas which are excluded by the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, it also excludes Adelaide and all the other cities with populations of 100,000 or more.

All SSRM schemes require migrants to be skilled, locate in designated areas for a period of time and many also have health, character and language requirements (DIaC 2009). However, SSRM schemes also accept migrants who do not quite meet the stringent requirements of the Australian Points Assessment Scheme [PAS]. Overall, the numbers of migrants admitted under SSRM schemes have been experiencing a generally upward trend. In the 2009-10 financial year there were 33,474 visas granted under SSRM initiatives representing 29.2 per cent of the total skills stream and approximately 19.5 per cent of total migration (DIaC 2010, Hugo et al. 2010). In addition to the various SSRM schemes, the Federal Government has assisted the settlement of humanitarian settlers in regional and rural areas. Consequently the percentage of such migrants settling outside the capital cities more than doubled from 5 per cent in 1996 to 12 per cent in 2009 (Hugo et al.

2010). A significant number of temporary skilled migrants (457 visa holders) have also located in regional and rural areas, most notably in mining areas (Cully 2010 cited in Hugo et al. 2010).

Previous studies on migrants living in regional and rural Australia have focused on analysing the success of specific regional migration schemes (DIMIA 2005a; DIMIA 2005b; DIaC 2008; Wulff and Dharmalingham 2008) or the socio-economic status of migrants in specific regional areas (Gray et al. 1991; Hugo 2008; DIaC 2007a; Goel and Goel 2009). Nationwide surveys by Hugo et al. (2006) and DIaC (2007b) have provided cross-sectional analysis of migrants settling in regional and rural Australia. Collins (2009) uses a nationwide survey of 915 migrants randomly selected from all areas of regional and rural Australia who had settled within the last five years. His analysis reveals that employment was the most important factor in shaping the decision making process of migrants in regional and rural areas. In contrast to all other research, Withers and Powall (2003) discuss the future of regional migration programs in Australia by focusing on Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] data on regional population trends and regional migration programs rather than surveying a sample population. They argue that 45 per cent of new settlers should locate in rural and regional Australia to represent a fair population share and to facilitate economic development. Withers and Powall (2003) state that regional Australia is at a crossroads; globalisation has led to a decline in economic activity and population but it has also created a new potential mechanism for economic growth through the internationalisation of the labour market leading to higher migration levels.

The “Demographic Change and Liveability” Panel’s report to the recent Australian Government (2010) “Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia” issues paper identified the balance of international settlement between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas as an issue warranting consideration and careful investigation (Hugo et al. 2010). Clearly the success or otherwise with which the growing numbers of migrants are integrating into regional and rural economies is an important consideration. In response to the need for specific research, this study assesses the socio-economic characteristics of the entire migrant population living in regional and rural Australia. It does not disaggregate based on spatial distribution, rather it provides an overview of the whole of regional and rural Australia. The repeatability of the study means that comparisons between Censuses can be conducted to assess changes over time.

Data and Method

The data analysed are from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, and are based on the *Place of Usual Residence*. The data were accessed using the ABS’s Table Builder program and refers to question eight of the 2006 Census entitled ‘Where does the person usually live’. The instructions

state that temporary migrants, such as tourists and people on business trips, who are visiting Australia for less than a year be recorded as ‘another country’. Such short-term visitors have not been incorporated into this study. Students, temporary work visa holders and other visitors who are in Australia for more than a year are, however, included in the usual residence population (ABS, 2006a). Throughout, the values of the dependent variables have been adjusted for the age-specific undercounts but not the male or female undercounts due to limitations in the disaggregation of the Census Post Enumeration Survey results. In addition, the migrant population has also been adjusted for a weighted regional and rural Australia migrant undercount value. Using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification [ASCG] Section of State [SOS] structure (ABS 2010d) ‘the regional and rural Australia’ population is defined as the combination of the ‘Other Urban’, ‘Bounded Locality’ and ‘Rural Balance’ regions, and thus incorporates all populations of 99,999 people or less.

The study focuses on five aspects of socio-economic status; labour force status (labour force participation rate and unemployment rate), income (median individual weekly income), educational attainment (primarily the percentage of the population with university qualifications) and occupational status as defined by the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations 2 [ASCO2] (primarily the percentage of the population with high skill level occupations) (ABS 2006b). The results for the migrant population are disaggregated by:

1. Sex
2. Country of birth - specifically for the ten largest countries of birth groups in regional and rural Australia.
3. Year of arrival – disaggregated results into ‘recent arrivals’ who migrated to Australia in the five years before the Census and ‘long-standing migrants’ who migrated to Australia prior to 2002.
4. Language spoken at home– disaggregated into ‘English’ where the English language is the first and main language spoken at home and ‘Other Languages’ where any language other than English is the first and main language spoken at home.

All calculations have been directly standardised for age to the Australia-born population of regional and rural Australia. In addition, an index of relative difference has been calculated for each dependent variable to aid comparisons of the magnitude of difference between the migrant and Australia-born populations (Swanson et al. 2004).

Results

The Size and Characteristics of the Migrant Population of Regional and Rural Australia

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

After adjustment for undercount, the total overseas-born population living in regional and rural Australia is 791,948 people of which 392,029 are male and 399,919 are female (ABS 2007). The percentage of the migrant population (16.83%) who live in regional and rural Australia is less than half the equivalent figure for the Australia-born (38.77%). New South Wales has a larger number of migrants living in regional and rural areas than any other state. However the percentage of the regional and rural population who are overseas-born is significantly higher for Western Australia (19.97 %) than for any of the other states and territories. It may be noted that in 2009-10 New South Wales recorded the highest number of migrant arrivals in 2009-10. Western Australia, due to the state's resources boom, received the highest rate of population increase due to migration of 2.6 per cent (ABS 2011).

The age structure of the migrant population differs substantially from the Australia-born population (Figure 1). The migrant population pyramid has an elderly age structure with the largest proportions in the late working ages. The old age structure of the migrant population reflects the cumulative growth of migrant cohort size with age, the high levels of migrants who arrived in Australia following World War II in the 1950s and 1960s as young workers and who now would be aged dependents, the generally increasing urban bias of the location of migrant arrivals over time, movement to regional and rural areas among longer-settled migrants, and that the children born to migrant parents whilst in Australia are classified as Australia-born (ABS 2004; Castles and Miller 2009, DIaC 2010). The sex ratios of the larger migrant populations are within the range of 95-110 males per 100 females with a couple of notable exceptions. Firstly, the Indian and Italian populations both have significantly higher proportions of males. Secondly the Philippines population has a sex ratio of only 28.83. This indicates that the majority of the Filipinos in regional and rural Australia are female and reflects that they have largely migrated under family migration schemes (DIaC, 2011b).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

As is the case nationally, England is the most prevalent country of birth for migrants living in regional and rural Australia (representing 34.51% of the all migrants); followed by New Zealand (12.68%). The remaining countries all represent less than 5% each (Table 1). Germany, the

Netherlands, South Africa and the United States of America are in the top ten countries of birth in regional and rural Australia but are not in the top ten for Australia as a whole, whilst China, Vietnam and Greece are in the ten largest overseas country of birth groups for the whole of Australia but not for regional and rural Australia. The China-born, which is the 4th largest overseas-born for the whole of Australia, are particularly underrepresented with only 7,569 living in regional and rural Australia out of the total Chinese migrant population of 206,581 people nationwide.

Recently-arrived migrants are more likely to live in major urban areas of Australia than long-standing migrants. However, both recently-arrived and long-standing migrants are considerably more likely to live in major urban areas than the Australia-born population. Previous studies have identified the trend towards major urban location of migrants to be a consequence of the process of globalisation (Collins 2008; Hugo 2006). The percentage of recent arrivals varies widely between the overseas countries of birth groups, with smaller percentages of the European groups being recent arrivals. This pattern reflects the diversification of Australia's migrant intake over time, particularly since the abandonment of the "White Australia" policy in the 1970s (Khoo 2003).

Previous studies have shown that migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds experience higher unemployment rates, lower median incomes and work in lower-skilled occupations than English-speaking migrants (DIMIA 2005a; 2005b, DIaC 2007a). The proportion of migrants who are English-speaking migrants is 31.46% higher in regional and rural Australia than in major urban Australia (Table 1). This could be attributed to two causes: firstly, migrants in regional and rural Australia are predominantly from English-speaking countries, whereas major urban Australia receives higher proportions of migrants from countries like China and Vietnam, who are not English speakers. Secondly, it could represent the influence of SSRM schemes in regional and rural Australia. These schemes often require a certain International English Language Testing System [IELTS] score to be obtained before the visa is granted, which may favour migrants whose families speak English at home.

The socio-economic status of the migrant population of regional and rural Australia

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Labour force participation rates

Table 2 shows that after adjusting for under-enumeration and standardising by age the difference in labour force participation rates (LFPR) between migrants and the Australia-born living in regional and rural Australia is relatively small: migrants have a slightly LFPR than the Australia-born population. This pattern is common to both males and to females. The index of relative difference,

the overall mean percentage difference of the LFPR between the Australia-born population and the migrant population across all age groups, is 2.97% for males and 3.76% for females. The slightly higher standardised LFPR of the Australia-born is almost entirely due to their significantly higher rate in the 15-24 age bracket; the age-specific LFPRs are almost identical above this age. Other studies have shown, that the migrant population has a higher proportion of people completing tertiary education than the Australia-born (Collins 2009; Hugo 2008; DIaC 2007a). This would contribute to the migrant LFPR being lower. In addition, the majority of student visas, which are the most common visa granted to migrants aged 15-24, have restrictions on the number of hours a migrant is allowed to work per week. Previous studies on the migrant population on specific SSRM schemes showed extremely high labour force participation rates (DIMIA 2005a; 2005b; DIaC 2007a; 2008). Similarly, Collins (2009) in his nationwide survey found a high LFPR. The high LFPRs can be explained by the utilisation of skilled visas by all respondents surveyed. The LFPR for the 2006 census data is not as high as in these previous studies because the migrant population includes groups who arrived in Australia under other schemes.

Recently-arrived migrants have lower standardised labour force participation rates than longer-standing migrants, with the difference being noticeably greater for females (Table 3). Most of the difference for males is due to the 15-24 age range and thus would be due to the higher percentages of students among the recent arrivals and the restrictions on working which many would face. For females there are also lower LFPRs for recent arrivals across the 25-54 age range.

Migrants who speak English at home have a considerably higher LFPR than those who speak other languages at home (Table 4). The higher LFPR of the English-speaking migrants extends across all age groups below age 65. However, the gap is widest of all in the 15-24 age range, where differences in the proportions who are overseas students would be an important contributory factor.

Whilst the wide differences in age structures lead to large differences in non-standardised labour force participation rates, with the earlier-migrated European groups having much lower rates, Table 5 shows that after standardisation the differences are generally modest. For both sexes the South Africa-born and New Zealand-born have a higher labour force participation rate than the Australia-born. For both sexes the Italy-born and “Other Overseas-born” have relatively low rates. The Philippines-born females have the lowest participation rates of all the major country of birth groups.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Unemployment rates

The unemployment rate provides a short-term measure of an individual’s ability to acquire work, but does not account for under-employment within existing positions. Table 2 shows the

unemployment rate for migrants in regional and rural Australia continues to be slightly higher than for the Australia-born, although both populations have experienced a substantial decrease in their unemployment rates since the 2001 Census based on nationwide measures (Hugo 2004b). The unemployment rate difference between the migrant population and Australia-born population is larger for females than it is for males, indicating a relative disadvantage for migrant females. The index of relative difference shows the mean percentage differences of the unemployment rate between the two populations (10.76% for males and 14.68% for females) are considerably higher than for the LFPR. The age ranges in which the differences in unemployment rates are widest are those at the two ends of the working age range. In the younger working ages, higher migrant unemployment may reflect the difficulties of the newly-arrived in adjusting to the local labour market, whilst in the older working ages it may be a legacy of the lower skills and English-language abilities of earlier migrant cohorts (Birrell 2003).

The differences in unemployment rates between the migrant populations and the Australia-born are largely due to higher unemployment rates among the more recently-arrived migrants. Females who arrived in Australia between 2002 and 2006 have an unemployment rate which is more than double that for the Australia-born, whilst for males the unemployment rate for recent migrants is 35% higher than that for the Australia-born. For migrants who arrived before 2002 the unemployment rate is only very slightly above that for the Australia-born (Table 3). The unemployment rates for recent female arrivals are higher than those for longer-standing migrants across all ages, whereas for males it is only below age 25 and in the later working ages that recent arrivals have significantly higher unemployment. The lower unemployment among recently-arrived males aged between 25 and 44 may reflect a higher proportion that are the primary applicants under skills-related schemes.

Migrants who speak languages other than English at home have a higher unemployment rate than their English-speaking counterparts (Table 4). This is consistent with a range of previous studies on the migrant population (Collins 2009; DIMIA 2005a, 2005b; Marks and Fleming 1998). It may be that language difficulties are particularly disadvantageous in the still overwhelmingly English-speaking and mono-cultural regional and rural areas.

Among the larger migrant groups, the highest standardised unemployment rates are for females in the two largest Asian countries of birth groups, the Philippines-born and the India-born (Table 5). The high female unemployment rate for the former is in sharp contrast with a very low rate for males. For both sexes the Germany-born have a high unemployment rate. This may be linked to the relatively high percentage of this group who live in South Australia, where the unemployment rate was higher than that other states at the time of the 2006 census (ABS 2009a).

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Income

Individual weekly income provides a measure of financial remuneration received from the factors of production; it does not account for accumulated assets and wealth. The census data highlights the relative disadvantage the population of regional and rural population is experiencing with the median income and the overall proportion of high-income earners considerably lower than for the population of Australia as a whole. Moreover, there is a substantial difference in the proportion of males and females in the higher income workers categories. Overall the median income is \$47.63 per week higher for male migrants than for the Australia-born males and just \$7.94 higher for female migrants than for their Australia-born counterparts (Table 1). These small differences in median incomes disguise that both the male and female migrant populations have a larger proportion of people in the higher income workers classification than the Australia-born, due to the increased skills focus within the regional migration program. The Australia-born have a slightly higher median income than the Overseas-born in the younger working ages for both sexes. The widest differences are for males between the ages of 35 and 49; with the migrant median income being approximately 10 per cent higher.

Recently-arrived male migrants in regional and rural Australia have a higher standardised median income than their longer-standing counterparts. The higher incomes of the more recently-arrived males extend across all age groups, except those below age 30. However, for females in all age groups it is the longer-standing migrants who have the higher income (Table 3). This may indicate that recent policies promoting migration to the regional and rural areas are serving to favour males.

An English language background appears to be strongly related to migrant income in regional and rural Australia. For both sexes and all age groups migrants who speak English at home have a higher median income than those who speak a language other than English at home. Whereas migrants who speak English at home have significantly higher median incomes than the Australia-born, both for males and for females, those who speak languages other than English at home have lower median incomes (Table 4).

The similarity between the median incomes of all overseas country of birth groups combined and the Australia-born disguises a wide range of variation between different migrant groups. The median incomes show a clear positive correlation with the percentages that speak English at home (Table 1). Both for males and for females all the main English-speaking overseas-born groups have higher median incomes than the Australia-born, with the South Africa-born having the highest incomes of all. The high incomes of the South Africa-born would be linked to the large percentage in high-skilled occupations and the concentration of this group in mining areas of Western Australia and Queensland where the economies have been booming. The percentages of the England-born, Scotland-born and New Zealand-born regional and rural populations who live in Western Australia

are all also noticeably above average. The median income of the New Zealand-born, especially for males, is relatively high even though their levels of education and percentages in high-skilled occupations are not particularly high. The India-born (particularly males) is another group with relatively high median incomes, reflecting the high skills and education of this group. Except for Netherlands-born males, for both sexes all the larger continental European migrant groups have lower standardised median incomes than the Australia-born, a pattern also evident for the Philippines-born. The proportions of the larger regional and rural continental European groups who live in 'rural balance' areas are above average whilst the percentages in 'other urban' areas are below average. However for the Philippines-born the opposite pattern applies. The lower incomes of the Philippines-born may be related to the higher percentage who migrated under family migration schemes, particularly for females. Recently-arrived family migrants have been found to generally have lower incomes compared to both recently-arrived skilled migrants and the Australia-born (DIaC 2011b).

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Education

The most striking difference between the Overseas-born and Australia-born populations of regional and rural Australia is for the highest levels of education. Migrants have a substantially higher level of education than the Australia-born population. Table 2 shows that the standardised percentage of migrant males aged 20 and above with university qualifications is almost double that for the Australia-born, whilst the figure for migrant females is about 1.5 times that for their Australia-born counterparts. Disaggregation by age shows the differences tend to be larger for younger age groups than for older age groups. This would reflect the greater emphasis of migrant selection on the basis of skills and education in more recent years. Using an index of relative difference for university qualifications, the mean percentage difference across all age groups for males is 44.99% and for females is 22.97%. This is much larger than for the other measures considered. However, the level of educational attainment of regional and rural overseas-born is not high when compared to the whole population of Australia and the entire migrant population. The ABS's analysis of the 2006 Census (2009a) reports that 19% of the total Australian population and 25% of the entire migrant population aged 20 and above have university qualifications, a considerably higher proportion than the regional and rural migrant population (17% for males and 20% for females). This indicates a level of education disadvantage for the regional and rural population in Australia when compared to major urban Australia. Differences in the percentages with TAFE or equivalent highest education

between the Overseas-born and Australia-born are slight overall. The percentages of migrants with no tertiary education are below those for the Australia-born.

More recently-arrived migrants have much higher levels of education than longer-standing migrants, with the percentage who are university educated being almost double for recently-arrived males and approximately 1.5 times higher for recently-arrived females. The greater emphasis placed on selection on the basis of skills and education in combination with the effects of the overseas student population would explain this pattern (Table 3). The differences in the standardised percentages with university education between those who speak English at home and those who speak other languages are fairly small, with the English-speaking males being less educated and the English-speaking females more so than their counterparts who speak other languages at home (Table 4).

For both sexes all the major overseas country of birth groups have a higher standardised percentage with university education than the Australia-born, with the exception of Italy-born females (Table 5). The percentages of South Africa-born, Philippines-born, USA-born and India-born males and females with this level of education are particularly high. This pattern may be explained by the stronger emphasis on skills and education of recent migration, including selection under the SSRM schemes. The four overseas-born groups with the highest educational levels are also the four with the highest percentages of recent arrivals (Table 1).

Occupation

The changes to the migration program in regional and rural Australia over the ten years prior to the 2006 Census are most evident in the considerably higher proportions of employed migrants who are in the 'Professionals' and 'Associate Professionals' categories compared to the Australia-born population. When the ASCO2 occupational structure is recategorised into the three classifications of low, medium and high-level skill occupations, the higher representation of migrants in high-level skilled jobs is evident (Table 2). The standardised percentage of the migrant population in regional and rural Australia classified as high-level skill is 5.91% higher than the Australia-born population for males and 1.75% higher for females. The percentages of migrant males and females in medium-skilled occupations are only slightly higher than for the Australia-born, whilst the percentages in low-skilled occupations are lower. The only age groups where the percentage in high-skilled occupations is higher for the Australia-born than for migrants are those aged over 55 for males and those over 50 for females. Using an index of relative difference, the total mean difference at each age group between populations is 8.78% for males and 4.87% for females, showing a fairly small degree of difference. However, with the exception of migrant females, all the regional and rural subpopulations are still below the overall 20% of 'Professionals' recorded for the whole of

Australia (ABS 2009b). This highlights the relative shortage of high-end skill occupations in regional and rural Australia.

Another reflection of the increased emphasis on skills selection of migrants moving to regional and rural Australia (and to Australia as a whole) is that the recently-arrived migrants have a higher standardised percentage in high-skilled occupations than their longer-standing counterparts (Table 3). The differences between English-speaking migrants and those who speak other languages at home mirror those for education, with the males who speak other languages being the more likely to be in high-skilled occupations, whilst for females it is those who speak English at home that are the more likely to be in such occupations (Table 4).

Among the larger overseas-country birth groups the South Africa-born, USA-born and India-born have the highest standardised percentages in high-skilled occupations for both sexes (Table 5). These are highly educated groups in which high percentages have arrived in Australia relatively recently (Table 1). Despite their high educational levels, the Philippines-born have the lowest percentages in this type of occupation. This may be related to the high percentage who have arrived under family migration schemes, particularly among females (DIaC 2011b). The New Zealand-born males and females and Italy-born females are the only other migrant groups to have noticeably lower percentages in highly-skilled occupations than the Australia-born.

Conclusions

Despite improvements over the preceding ten years both the Overseas-born and the Australia-born populations in regional and rural Australia continue to experience relative disadvantage compared to the whole of Australia in terms of socio-economic variables, particularly labour force status, income, educational attainment and occupational status (Hugo 2004b; ABS 2009b). In contrast to their disadvantage of the past, this study shows that within regional and rural Australia, the migrant populations now record similar values for labour force participation rate, unemployment rate, median individual weekly income and proportions of the population in high-level skill occupations to the Australia-born (Table 2). Since the more recently arrived migrants in these areas are considerably more highly educated, more highly paid and more likely to enter high-skilled occupations than longer-standing migrants, the selectivity of recent migrants and the growth in the numbers of migrants locating in these areas may be seen as important contributory factors to the equalisation of the socio-economic status of the migrant and non-migrant populations. The raft of SSRMs schemes implemented by the Australian Government would appear to be one of the more important underlying reasons for the growth and improved outcomes of recently-arrived regional and rural migrants, although increased permanent migration to these regions under other schemes,

and the growth of skilled temporary movement to these areas would also have played roles. The prevailing strength of the Australian economy, increasing job opportunities and labour shortages in regional and rural areas, and improved institutional structures to assist migrant employment in these areas may also have assisted improved migrant employment outcomes (Hugo et al. 2010).

Moreover, in an increasingly integrated and globalised world the disruption to working careers resulting from migration may also have reduced over time, and this too may have served to promote improved migrant employment outcomes (Parr and Guo 2005).

The most notable difference in the socio-economic variables is that migrants have a substantially higher level of education, particularly university education, in comparison to the Australia-born residents of regional and rural Australia. The indices of relative difference that show the total mean percentage difference across all age groups is considerably higher for university education than all other socio-economic status variables measured (Table 2). The higher level of education could be directly attributed to the selectivity and growth in the number of arrivals under regional migration programs (and also other skilled schemes). It may also be the result of the increased number of foreign tertiary students who obtain permanent residence in Australia upon completion of their degrees, although the proportion of overseas tertiary students who locate in regional Australia is relatively small (Parr and Guo 2005; DEEWR 2010). Differences in educational attainment between migrants who arrived at young ages and attained most of their education in Australia and the local Australia-born population may also play a role (Parr and Mok 1995; Marks 2001).

Education is generally associated with better labour market outcomes (Marks and Fleming 1998). However, the higher levels of education of the migrant population do not appear to cascade into higher values for the other socio-economic status variables measured. The migrant population has slightly higher median incomes and proportions in high-level skill occupations than the Australia-born population, but the extent of the difference between the populations is substantially less than it is for educational attainment. Consequently, the migrant population of regional and rural Australia is more likely to be over-educated in their occupation than the Australia-born population, a pattern that has also been observed in the wider Australian population (Kier 2006, Green et al. 2006). The overall similarity between migrants' labour force attainments and those of the Australia-born in regional and rural Australia reflects the advantages of migrants' high levels of education cancelling out any disadvantages which may result from the process of migration, lack of informal networks, language difficulties, lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and overseas work experience, and, possibly, discrimination. The New Zealand-born is a notable exception to the pattern of migrant over-education. This group is not subject to the same selection criteria as other migrants. Their higher median income may reflect the lack of restrictions on the entry of New Zealand

citizens to Australia, a greater awareness of the opportunities in mining and other booming rural industries, and the absence of language and other cultural barriers to integration.

After educational attainment, the second largest difference between the socio-economic characteristics measured for the migrant and Australia-born populations is that of unemployment rates (Table 2). However, the difference is quite small compared to educational attainment and can mostly be accounted for by recently-arrived migrants, particularly recently-arrived female migrants, having considerably higher unemployment rates. The high unemployment rate of recent arrivals may reflect the negative effects of the disruption to the working careers resulting from migration, a lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, a lack of local experience and language difficulties (ABS 2004, McAllister 1995, Gray et al. 1991). However, the short-term nature of unemployment may distort the whole picture as Collins (2009) found that 35 per cent of migrants had no trouble finding employment in Australia and one in four people secured their first job within their first two weeks in the country. In comparison with the nationwide survey by Hugo (2004b) the unemployment rate for recent arrivals has fallen. Our study shows that, although they have higher unemployment in the short term, in the long term, the unemployment rates experienced by migrants and the Australia-born population of regional and rural Australia are virtually the same.

Policy Implications

This study has revealed that the migrant population as a whole in regional and rural Australia is not experiencing significant socio-economic disadvantage, rather it has attained strong labour market outcomes. The introduction of state-specific regional migration programs during the 1990s appears to be having a positive effect on all socio-economic status measures. The apparent success with which the growing numbers of migrants in regional and rural Australia are integrating into the local economies enhances the case for increasing the proportion of migrants being directed to these areas. With continuing concern about the impact of population growth on congestion and environmental sustainability within Australia's major urban centres, a renewed focus on regional and rural Australia could provide a more sustainable long-term population option (Hugo et al. 2010, Australian Government 2011a).

Increasing migration to regional and rural Australia may have a number of benefits. Firstly, the migrant population has the potential to fill skill shortages. The Australian Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics [BRTE] working paper (2006) identified skill shortages for health professionals, teachers, tradespersons and other professionals in regional and rural Australia. The BRTE also stated that immigration was seen as the solution but that the labour force outcomes of skilled migrants were mixed. This study sheds new light on the BRTE perspective by demonstrating

that the migrant population is no more disadvantaged than the Australia-born population. Secondly, the population and economic advantage created by increasing migration into regional and rural Australia could negate the Australian Federal Treasury's (2010) projected decline for specified areas of regional and rural Australia. In 2011, the Australian Government has responded by specifying 16,000 skilled migration places to Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme [RSMS] as part of Australia's Sustainable Population Strategy (Australian Government 2011a; 2011b). Hugo (2006) proposes that regional migration could reinvigorate economies and bring a new dynamism to regional and rural Australia.

In addition to the expansion of current SSRM schemes for newly-arrived migrants, the present findings also suggest that there is potential to establish regional programs for existing migrants. The over-representation of migrants in major urban areas is not solely applicable to recently-arrived migrants but also to long-standing migrants. New policies that involve attracting existing migrants to regional Australia to fill skill shortages by providing financial benefits and easy entry into Australia for the migrant's family could be considered.

The longer-term effect of migration to regional and rural areas will depend on the extent that migrants, especially those who are more highly skilled, are retained by these areas, as well as their fertility and mortality levels (Hugo 2008). A recent study by Hatton and Leigh (2011) in the US showed that long-term labour market outcomes for migrants depended on their interactions with the host community. For long-term effectiveness any expansion of regional migration programs will require a corresponding strategy to ensure long-term retention of migrants in regional and rural Australian communities. Hugo et al. (2006) described this as an even greater challenge than attracting migrants to regional areas in the first place. A number of previous studies (Collins 2009; DIaC 2007a; DIMIA 2005b) have found that migrants view employment opportunities as the most important factor in staying or leaving a community. The strong employment outcomes for migrants in regional and rural Australia, shown by this study, may enhance the prospects for attracting future applicants for migration to these regions.

The broad similarity between their employment outcomes indicates that neither the migrant population nor the Australia-born is being "left behind" economically. However, amidst the general improvement of regional and rural migrants' labour force outcomes, there has also been the emergence of some new pockets of disadvantage. In particular, there are high rates of unemployment and low labour force participation rates among India-born, Philippines-born and "Other Overseas" females. The Philippines-born also have lower incomes and occupational skills. These are groups in which high percentages have arrived in Australia relatively recently. It may be that a lack of established communities, networks and suitable post-arrival services hinder the employment prospects of recently-arrived women from these backgrounds or that these groups face

discrimination (Mahuteau and Junankar 2008; Hugo 2008). However, community-specific research is needed to establish the appropriate policies and programs to assist the economic and integration of these groups of women into regional and rural communities. Similarly, research based on more recent data than the 2006 Census could highlight the mining boom's growing impact on labour demand and migration to regional and rural Australia.

In conclusion, government policy has sought to encourage the growth of the migrant population in regional and rural Australia. This trend appears set to continue. Indeed, directing and supporting migration to regional and rural areas has become central to the Australian Government's population strategy (Australian Government 2011). The improvement in the socio-economic outcomes experienced by the migrant population of regional and rural Australia, and their broad similarity to those of the Australia-born living in these regions, in our view, bolster the case for increasing the proportion of migrant settlers going to these regions. Ongoing monitoring of and research into regional and rural migrant socio-economic outcomes, and of regional and rural population trends more broadly, is needed to provide an informed basis for future policy development.

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Tables

Table 1: Selected characteristics of the main overseas country of birth groups and the total migrant population in regional and rural Australia 2006

Country of Birth	Number of Persons Enumerated	Percentage of All Migrants in Regional and Rural Australia (%)	Median Age	Sex Ratio	Percentage of Migrants who Arrived From 2002 to 2006 (%)	Percentage of Migrants who Arrived Before 2002 (%)		Percentage who Speak English at Home (%)
Australia	5,445,412	-	35.72	99.29	-	-	-	96.56
All Overseas	741,160	100.00	52.97	98.39	10.55	89.45		76.36
England	255,802	34.51	56.52	96.40	6.31	93.69		98.60
New Zealand	93,951	12.68	43.74	104.86	13.21	86.79		95.86
Scotland	35,965	4.85	58.29	98.87	4.50	95.50		98.36
Germany	32,221	4.35	59.55	95.88	4.26	95.74		58.38
Netherlands	30,096	4.06	60.73	108.32	2.75	97.25		69.35
Italy	28,736	3.88	65.91	130.28	0.73	99.27		25.66
South Africa	17,564	2.37	39.21	96.13	32.76	67.24		73.04
Philippines	17,284	2.33	42.06	28.83	22.07	77.93		41.30
USA	14,830	2.00	45.76	97.57	21.67	78.33		96.06
India	10,804	1.46	44.11	112.66	29.98	70.02		48.67
Other Overseas	203,907	27.51	48.96	101.78	14.54	85.46		50.01

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Table 2: Selected measures of the socio-economic status of the Australia-born and overseas-born populations in regional and rural areas of Australia 2006

Birthplace	Standardised Labour Force Participation Rate (%)^a	Standardised Unemployment Rate (%)^a	Standardised Median Weekly Income (\$) ^a	Standardised Percentage with University Education (%)^a	Standardised Percentage of Employed in High Skill Occupations (%)^a
<i>Males</i>					
Australia	70.62	5.41	733.85	9.07	26.13
Overseas	67.84	6.11	781.48	16.91	29.04
Index of Relative Difference (%)	2.97	10.76	3.27	44.99	8.78
<i>Females</i>					
Australia	57.18	5.64	496.67	13.33	27.61
Overseas	53.80	6.96	504.61	19.56	29.36
Index of Relative Difference (%)	3.76	14.68	1.11	22.97	4.87

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Note: a. Directly standardised for age and sex using Australia-born adjusted for under-enumeration as the standard.

Table 3: Socio-economic status of Australia-born and migrant populations of regional and rural areas by time of arrival in Australia

Year of Arrival	Standardised Labour Force Participation Rate (%)^a	Standardised Unemployment Rate (%)^a	Standardised Median Weekly Income (\$)^a	Standardised Percentage with University Education (%)^a	Standardised Percentage of Employed in High Skill Occupations (%)^a
<i>Males</i>					
2002 to 2006	67.27	7.34	809.30	28.51	34.80
Before 2002	70.36	5.80	785.01	15.36	28.39
<i>Females</i>					
2002 to 2006	49.27	12.13	476.24	27.40	32.58
Before 2002	56.75	6.06	514.11	18.43	29.11

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Note: a. Directly standardised for age and sex using Australia-born adjusted for under-enumeration as the standard.

Table 4: Socio-economic status of Australia-born and migrant populations of regional and rural areas by language spoken at home: Australia 2006

Language spoken at home	Standardised Labour Force Participation Rate (%)^a	Standardised Unemployment Rate (%)^a	Standardised Median Weekly Income (\$) ^a	Standardised Percentage with University Education (%)^a	Standardised Percentage of Employed in High Skill Occupations (%)^a
<i>Males</i>					
English	71.04	5.63	819.12	15.10	27.67
Other Languages	61.02	7.35	676.36	18.92	30.70
<i>Females</i>					
English	57.61	6.25	519.84	21.94	29.14
Other Languages	48.16	9.16	466.65	21.02	28.33

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Note: a. Directly standardised for age and sex using Australia-born adjusted for under-enumeration as the standard.

Table 5: Socio-economic status by country of birth and sex for regional and rural areas of Australia 2006

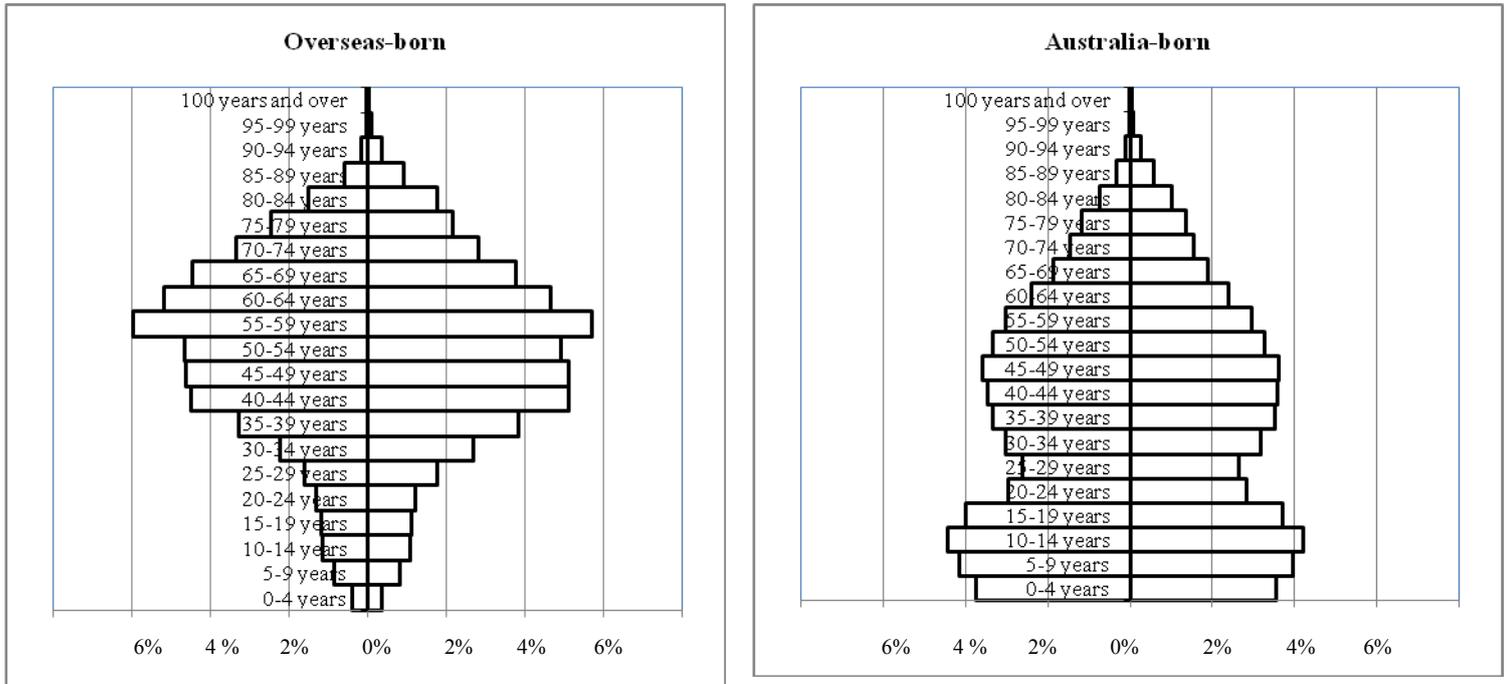
Country of Birth	Standardised Labour Force Participation Rate (%)^a	Standardised Unemployment Rate (%)^a	Standardised Median Weekly Income (\$) ^a	Standardised Percentage with University Education (%)^a	Standardised Percentage of Employed in High Skill Occupations (%)^a
<i>Males</i>					
Australia	70.62	5.41	733.85	9.07	26.13
All Overseas	67.84	6.11	781.48	16.91	29.04
England	70.56	5.43	806.76	14.89	27.45
New Zealand	73.90	5.69	819.17	9.59	21.34
Scotland	70.32	5.50	853.92	13.88	25.71
Germany	66.88	7.70	724.34	15.35	31.06
Netherlands	69.21	4.29	759.30	16.10	33.29
Italy	64.90	5.62	653.43	9.60	26.87
South Africa	75.54	4.32	983.15	32.21	44.31
Philippines	71.63	2.99	713.48	33.30	17.76
USA	68.05	6.78	837.42	41.15	46.89
India	69.83	6.84	819.99	45.16	46.29
Other Overseas	63.23	7.02	726.64	20.29	32.28
<i>Females</i>					
Australia	57.18	5.64	496.67	13.33	27.61
All Overseas	53.80	6.96	504.61	19.56	29.36
England	56.99	5.64	516.31	18.40	29.18
New Zealand	58.78	7.16	512.83	13.59	23.80
Scotland	57.37	4.90	546.29	18.68	29.78
Germany	54.52	7.20	488.97	21.23	31.17
Netherlands	54.06	6.14	489.11	19.57	29.91
Italy	53.58	5.58	458.94	11.14	24.87
South Africa	58.34	6.73	590.55	29.17	43.16
Philippines	49.20	9.08	451.32	30.19	14.72
USA	56.02	7.21	569.61	46.05	34.23
India	53.51	9.95	552.93	40.82	42.97
Other Overseas	50.13	7.74	493.15	21.17	31.69

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Note: a. Directly standardised for age and sex using Australia-born adjusted for under-enumeration as the standard.

Figures

Figure 1: Population pyramids of Australian born and migrant populations in regional and rural Australia 2006.



Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

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