

## 'Blokey' NT image may be a myth

The issue of population in Australia is nowhere as important as in the Northern Territory. **kate golebiowska** is working to understand one sector of the NT population: overseas-born migrants.

### text

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With a landmass of almost 1.4 million sq km, the NT represents one of the largest regions in the nation, but it has the smallest population - nudging just 220,000 people. This relatively small pool of people available to the Territory's workforce and economic development highlights the need to understand the make-up of the population.

A Research Associate with CDU's School for Social and Policy Research (SSPR), Dr Kate Golebiowska, has recently investigated immigration and employment experience of overseas-born nurses and midwives in the Territory. This sector of the workforce relies on recruiting overseas-trained professionals: in November 2007 about 13 per cent of this workforce in the Territory was overseas-trained.

### far right

Kate Golebiowska

From this initial interest, Dr Golebiowska has broadened her research to study the characteristics of international migration in the NT. She began her one-year, ground-breaking study in August 2008. "Essentially, I'm trying to identify what happens when overseas-born migrants come to the Northern Territory and what demographic and economic impacts their presence here have," she said. "Do they stay put, move around the Territory or move interstate? Finding answers to these questions will help to understand their role in the population growth of the Territory, which has typically been volatile."

Immigrants form a sizeable portion of the Territory's population. The most recent national Census (2006) by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that some 22 per cent of Territorians were born overseas. Further, in the week before the last Census was undertaken, 94 per cent of eligible Territorians were engaged

in work, suggesting that immigrants are critical to a robust NT economy, see W: [www.censusdata.abs.gov.au](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au).

Dr Golebiowska expects the results of her study will have twofold benefits. "It will help to fill in the gaps in the academic literature. In national publications, the NT rarely gets a lot of attention (because of a paucity of information), but more detailed answers should be able to be offered after this study," she said. Just as important, the research results will help to gain further insights into the regional dispersal of immigrants in Australia.

The study complements the work of SSPR's Population Studies Group which has studied, among other aspects, the mobility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Territorians, and has produced population projections for the NT. Dr Golebiowska is drawing on unpublished Census data from the ABS, unpublished information supplied by the Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and interviews with immigrants now living in Darwin and Alice Springs, to describe the volume of people coming to the NT from overseas including their ethnic origin, age, occupation and gender and visa type. She will compare these with figures from the rest of Australia.

Preliminary findings related to gender suggest that the image of the NT being "male and blokey" might need to be revised. "Analysis of the 2001 Census data shows that immigration into the NT is mostly women. I'm looking to see if the 2006 Census trends are the same. If the trend is confirmed in 2006 Census data, it could change perceptions of the NT," she said.

"I've found that the immigrants are coming for many reasons: to take up employment as skilled migrants, as family migrants and as refugees. We have the full spectrum in the NT," she said.

But how immigrants come to choose Darwin, Alice Springs, or the NT for that matter, may not be the immigrant's sole decision. Australian Government policy states that skilled immigrants entering the country on a temporary long-term 457 visa (which grants temporary residence for up to four years and requires a minimum two-year employment contract from the sponsoring employer) are required to remain in one location for the two-year duration of their job.

"When overseas-trained nurses sign up with nurse recruitment agencies, which are popular among those educated in Africa, they're made an offer and generally take the first offer. It's a matter of chance whether they end up in Canada, New Zealand or Australia", or Alice Springs or Melbourne, if they choose to come to Australia.

### web byte

For more information on the work of the SSPR Population Studies Group, see W: [www.cdu.edu.au/sspr/populationstudies](http://www.cdu.edu.au/sspr/populationstudies).



Dr Golebiowska's initial analysis of the Census statistics shows that the NT attracts more immigrants from south-east Asia than does Australia as a whole, which should not come as a surprise given the Territory's proximity to the region.

"But in comparison to the rest of Australia, we are also getting proportionately slightly more African immigrants, not from the north, but from other African countries," she said. While South Africans dominate in the national arena, in the NT it is Zimbabweans who dominate. The African immigrants may be attracted by the relatively strong Australian economy and the comparative safety of society.

Immigrant nurses and midwives from Zimbabwe who she interviewed said they would consider moving back to their home countries, but only in a family emergency. "They said they would not consider going permanently. Australia is home now." Most were interested in becoming Australian citizens.

Dr Golebiowska said many Alice Springs nurses arrived in the NT on the temporary 457 visas. "Most are happy to get away from Africa," she said. "Some nurses from Africa are told by the recruitment agencies that Alice Springs is much the same as Africa, but the nurses report that it is much hotter!" she said.

While some developing countries are concerned about the exodus of skilled professionals, others view skilled emigration as an opportunity. "Some institutions in the Philippines have made an industry of training nurses specifically to work overseas," Dr Golebiowska said. "They follow the US curriculum for registered nurses which is aimed at facilitating their employment there." As a result, remittances have become a big part of the Philippines economy. Likewise, many African-born nurses working in the Territory support their families in their homelands.

Dr Golebiowska said she hoped her research would seed further opportunities for both the immigrants and the Northern Territory.



## On the move

Kate Golebiowska has been more or less on the move since age 15. As a teenager in her native Poland, she spent many summer breaks taking up scholarships to study Italian in Italy, French in Switzerland and English in Scotland. But it wasn't until she undertook her Masters in political science at Warsaw University and wrote a MA thesis on international migration in Europe, in which she included a chapter on Australian immigration, that her interest in the area was fuelled.

In 2002 Kate moved to Canberra to take up a PhD scholarship at the Australian National University. It was here, at her first day at ANU that she discovered a distant family member working in the same building. The relative had been separated from the wider family by almost 50 years and 15,000 km. The discovery underscored the poignancy of emigration.

Once she submitted her thesis in 2006, Kate was free to move to Darwin where her partner lives. Now she looks forward to joining other overseas-born immigrants later this year in taking her citizenship test. And there are few would-be citizens who are happier that the cricket questions have been removed from the Australian test.

