

POPULATION STUDIES
RESEARCH BRIEF
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FINDING OUT ABOUT THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY'S OVERSEAS BORN
POPULATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) hold a wealth of data which we will use in investigating patterns of overseas migration to the NT
- Data is available about numbers and sources of immigrants, the various programs under which they arrive in Australia, and their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
- Differences in definitions, quality and accessibility of some older data sources present challenges when conducting time series analysis
- Qualitative data can be collected in interviews. These are time-consuming (preparation, running, transcription, analysis) but useful in explaining statistics and understanding policy context
- This research is critical to inform NT Government policy as overseas migration continues to make a substantial contribution to population change

RESEARCH AIM

To systematise knowledge about data sources available to investigate overseas migration trends in the NT

To outline questions that these data sources may answer, particularly in relation to the role of overseas migration in the NT population growth and productivity growth.

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This Research Brief was prepared by **Dr Kate Golebiowska**.

Background

The Population Studies Group has commenced a pilot project investigating selected aspects of overseas migration in the Northern Territory (NT). We see it as a first step towards a more comprehensive research program which will look at patterns of overseas migration and their social and economic implications for the NT. We are particularly interested in finding out how migration impacts on population growth and how it contributes to productivity growth. These issues are perceived as critical to Australia as a whole and they have been recently studied in a major national report (Productivity Commission 2006). No analysis at the State/Territory level has been offered in that report, making our research particularly timely.

Our research agenda requires us to analyse a range of quantitative and qualitative data sets which are collected and held by different institutions and individuals. This Research Brief attempts to systematise our knowledge about these data sources. Summary of the data sources in this Brief is by no means exhaustive and this remains a living document to be updated as we proceed.

Data issues

Quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to international migration in the NT are collected and held by different Federal Government Departments, some Departments of the NT Government, different local community groups (for example social clubs), NGO workers and, of course, individual immigrants themselves. The relative importance of various data sets depends on the research questions to be addressed. Our research will require matching datasets held by different Government Departments. We also know that pre-existing formal datasets may not enable us to answer all our questions directly and that alternative avenues may need to be used. For example, a recent study investigating mobility of nursing professionals in the NT was hindered by the registration data not showing whether a registrant was overseas-qualified. The research team was able to estimate the proportion of overseas-qualified professionals in the NT nursing workforce from their responses to a survey questionnaire.

We are also conscious of quality and accessibility issues regarding quantitative data. Principally, there are no problems (other than comparability across years or level of detail) with recent online statistics such as those made available by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), or the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). These statistics are publicly available and attract no charge. Older data are available in hard copies, which may not always be stored in Darwin, and they may be somewhat difficult to read due to low quality of print and paper (for example some Census statistics from the 1970s). Hence, gaining access to them, as well as their analysis, could be time-consuming.

Planning an analysis of more specific, unpublished information held by these institutions, as well by other Government agencies, requires careful planning for three reasons. First, before the requested statistics are obtained, the agency often needs to merge data from different databases and present them in a consolidated form. This means that time to obtain the data may be longer than expected. Second,

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data confidentiality issues may need to be dealt with – this is particularly likely to be the case in the NT given its small population size. Third, obtaining such data may also incur a fee.

Qualitative data can be collected in interviews and/or focus groups. This research method requires clearance from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee as well as appropriate handling of the collected materials. Interviews require careful preparation and peer-reviewing of questions. Our experience shows that two to three interviews per day is the optimal use of time of the interviewer without tiring the person too much, and that such a schedule also allows for some transcription time during the same day. That said, it is impossible to return from such a fieldtrip with all interviews fully transcribed and so time needs to be made for full transcription of all interviews once the interviewer returns to the office. While this is all time-consuming, interviewers often report the interviews to be the best part of the research process, as it enables them to 'get out there' and listen to real life stories of immigrants. If representatives of key stakeholder organisations are interviewed, the information they share may for example elucidate reasons for certain administrative decisions, or explain views of their organisation on a particular topic. This, in turn, may help the researchers to develop an understanding of a particular policy context, or a rationale for a particular policy direction. Depending on the number of interviews, their analysis may be time-consuming, despite availability of special software, such as NVIVO (which still requires time to code the information collected during interviews). Interviews complement and explain statistical information and are therefore highly useful in the sort of analysis we intend to undertake.

Data sources and questions they could address

Topic/Main question(s)	Data sources		Outcomes
	Quantitative	Qualitative	
<p>How does the mix of permanent (settler) migration streams in the NT differ from that of Australia as a whole? (composition of migration streams and country of origin)</p> <p>Could services be improved to better serve the needs of this mix in the NT (ie. humanitarian entrants)?</p> <p>Could these settlers' economic contribution be optimised?</p>	DIAC datasets	Interviews with immigrants to enhance interpretation of relationships between variables in quantitative datasets; interviews with key stakeholders ie. NT Department of Business, Economic & Regional Development (DBERD), NT Office of Multicultural Affairs	Updated knowledge of immigrants' characteristics in the NT; understanding of policy, economic, social & cultural implications of their settlement
<p>What is the length of stay of immigrants in the NT and in Australia as a whole?</p> <p>What is the contribution of net long-term movement to the population growth in the NT and in</p>	ABS and DIAC datasets, NT Treasury statistics	Interviews with immigrants to enhance interpretation of relationships between variables in quantitative	Understanding of demographic impact of overseas migration on the NT and its structural economic implications, particularly whether temporary migration does

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Topic/Main question(s)	Data sources		Outcomes
	Quantitative	Qualitative	
<p>other regional and remote parts of Australia?</p> <p>Does this long-term movement attract other forms of migration to the NT (ie. friends, family members to the NT?). Can we measure the demographic and economic impact of this additional movement?</p> <p>What is the economic impact of this long-term movement on the NT economy? Could it be enhanced?</p> <p>How does this long-term movement impact on the stock and quality of human capital available in the NT?</p> <p>How does NT compare with jurisdictions in other OECD countries with highly transient (including immigrant) populations?</p>		<p>datasets; interviews with key informants ie. staff of DBERD, NT Treasury, selected industry bodies</p>	<p>or could contribute to productivity growth (typically it is discussed in the context of net migration – this has recently been challenged by Tani (2008))?</p> <p>Possibly, policy lessons for the NT from other jurisdictions in OECD countries with similarly transient populations</p>
<p>Where are the Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) working in the NT?</p> <p>What actual skills do they possess; could they contribute to the NT economy beyond the fruit-picking, employment in hospitality, etc.?</p> <p>Could the NT become an attractive settlement option to them? Were this to happen, would the WHMs prefer a simpler immigration procedure?</p> <p>Do the WHMs return home after their experience in Australia, immigrate back here or emigrate to other countries? Why do they choose/ not choose Australia/NT?</p>	<p>DIAC datasets</p>	<p>Interviews with WHMs, their employers, industry bodies' representatives to understand the drivers of WHMs location in the NT and subsequent mobility</p>	<p>Understanding of mobility and settlement motivations of WHMs; competitiveness of NT and Australia as a holiday destination and a settlement option vs. other countries offering similar programs; possibly recommendations how the NT could increase its appeal as a longer-term settlement option</p>
<p>'Invisible migrants' – differences and similarities between the socioeconomic status of New Zealanders in the NT vs. Australia: annual inflows and outflows from New Zealand and interstate, maintenance of the trans-Tasman links, citizenship status, settlement patterns, demographic structure, household composition, labour market participation</p> <p>Data permitting, this analysis</p>	<p>ABS datasets, Statistics New Zealand, DIAC</p>	<p>Interviews with New Zealanders to understand their mobility patterns, settlement motivations & outcomes including at the labour market in the NT and elsewhere in Australia</p>	<p>Understanding of migration trends, demographic characteristics and economic outcomes of New Zealand immigrants in the NT vs. Australia as a whole</p>

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Topic/Main question(s)	Data sources		Outcomes
	Quantitative	Qualitative	
could compare the mobility, characteristics and labour market integration of Maori and non-Maori migrants			
<p>Mobility of professional workers in and out of the NT including the overseas-qualified: why do they move to the NT; for how long they stay and why; why do they leave the NT and where do they go to?</p> <p>How is their propensity to move related to their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (ie. age, household structure, etc.)?</p> <p>Do overseas-qualified and Australian-qualified professionals have different reasons to move to, stay and leave the NT?</p> <p>How could more professionals, including those trained overseas be recruited to work in the NT?</p> <p>Is there a difference in retention between the overseas-qualified and the Australian-qualified professionals? How could the retention of both groups be improved?</p>	<p>ABS, DIAC datasets, NT Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) datasets, registration data (if registered profession), survey covering issues relevant to the profession being studied</p>	<p>Interviews with the overseas-qualified and the Australian-qualified professionals complemented by interviews with the management including HR</p>	<p>A study examining questions from column 1 has been undertaken for overseas-qualified nurses and midwives in the NT. Methodology has been tested and mobility of another professional group, including the overseas-qualified workers (ie. teachers) can be studied.</p>

Conclusions

This Research Brief has outlined what data sources are available to study overseas migration in the NT. It has also elucidated potential issues of data quality and how these could be handled. Detailed and broader questions relating to the impact of overseas migration on the NT that can be answered from these sources have been listed. We are particularly interested in studying the demographic and structural economic impacts of this migration on the Territory. This Brief represents our first attempt to consolidate our knowledge about the data sources that are available for this purpose. It will be refined later in 2008 and in 2009 as we discuss our research interests with the key stakeholders and find out how our research could inform their policy agendas.

References

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