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Characteristics of older migrants to the NT

Comparisons between arrivers, stayers, and the older Australian population

KEY FINDINGS

- According to population projections, within 30 years those aged 55 plus in the Territory are set to grow from 13.3% of the population to 19.8% while the actual number of those aged 65 years and over will triple.
- Net migration for people aged 55+ in the Northern Territory was negative from 2001 to 2006. This indicates a trend of people moving away as they approach and enter retirement age.
- However, some 3,241 people in this age group moved to the Territory from elsewhere in Australia and overseas between 2001 and 2006. Understanding the characteristics of these people is critical to future population scenarios.
- The majority of the arrivers to the Territory were in the younger (55-64) age bracket, and there were far more males than would be expected given the larger proportion of women in these age groups in the Australian population in general.
- Arrivers were generally more highly educated than those already in the NT and than the total Australian population in these age groups.
- It is possible that many older migrants to the NT are planning to stay here for short periods of time only, and may not have the long term impact on the structure of the population that had previously been assumed.

RESEARCH AIM

To look at the characteristics of older people who move to the Northern Territory.

This research brief discusses the demographic characteristics of people who move to the Northern Territory as they either near retirement or are already retired. As a growing proportion of the Territory's population reaches retirement age, this may help shed light on who is likely to stay, go, or arrive from elsewhere, and what might influence these patterns. This research brief draws on data from the 2006 Census provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

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Territory in-migration – characteristics of older people who relocate to the NT.

Anticipated growth in the 55+ population in the Northern Territory

Background

Population projections for the Northern Territory suggest that the proportion of older Territorians (55+) in the population will reach 19.8% by 2036, up from 13.3% in 2006 (NT Treasury, 2009).

The projections anticipate that the absolute number of people aged 65 years and over will more than triple between 2006 and 2036, from an estimated 9,737 in 2006 to a projected 32,631 in 2036. The impact of such an increase and its relative benefits and burden on the economy need to be taken into account in public policy and planning for the Territory and its regions.

For the projected increase to eventuate however, a large portion of near-retirement aged people currently living in the NT will need make the decision to stay, or new groups of older people will have to migrate in from other parts of Australia or overseas.

Whilst “...the projections do take into account the departure of many retirees from the Territory” (NT Treasury, p. 17) and the numbers projected are based on an estimate of people expected to remain in the Territory post-retirement, an analysis of in and out migration at the last Census (2006) suggests that the migration patterns of people in this age group might be more volatile than previously thought. Of particular interest are the characteristics of those older people who moved to the Territory, as the projections assume that they become permanent additions to the population.

In this brief we examine 2006 Census data to depict the size and characteristics of pre and post-retirement age ‘arrivers’ to the Territory in terms of age distribution, sex ratio, Indigenous and marital status, and economic engagement. We compare them to ‘stayers’ in the same age group to see where they differ, where they possibly converge, and how arrivers might modify the make up of the older population in the NT. We also examine what differentiates older people who chose to move to the NT from other older people in the rest of Australia.

Methods

The 2006 Census provided data on what respondents considered their usual place of residence on Census night and what they considered their usual place of residence 5 years before the Census. Based on this we define NT in-migrants, or arrivers, as those whose usual place of residence in 2001 was outside the Territory (including overseas) and whose usual place of residence in 2006 was the Northern Territory. NT stayers are those who regarded the NT as their usual place of residence both in 2001 and 2006. Characteristics of these groups are compared to the ‘rest of Australia’, those who resided outside the Territory both in 2001 and in 2006.

Other data used for commentary are results from the Northern Territory Population Projections Model (as outlined in Northern Territory Treasury, 2009).

One of the limitations of this brief is that it fails to account for multiple movements – such as people who may have left the Territory after 2001 but returned before 2006, or people who came to the Territory for some time between 2001 and 2006 but have since left.

Furthermore, the number of people in our arrivers cohort, and in particular in the group aged 75 years and older, was quite low which makes it difficult to infer trends and draw conclusions.

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Contemporary migration patterns of older Territorians

According to the 2006 Census 3,241 people aged 55 years and over had moved to the Northern Territory in the five years preceding the Census. This included 2,864 migrants from interstate and 377 from overseas. In comparison 4,457 people in this age group left the Territory to go interstate over the same period (figures on people who moved overseas are unavailable through the Census). This provided a net interstate migration of -1,593 between 2001 and 2006 (Table 1), or 8.1% of the NT’s 55+ population at the 2001 Census. At the same time, the total number of people aged 55 years and over in the NT grew by 33.9% from 19,591 to 26,234 as a result of ageing. Within the 55+ group, those aged 55-64 years grew most in absolute size with a 38.0% increase whereas the 65-74 and 75+ age groups increased by 30.3% and 20.8% respectively. As a result, the 55-64 age group went from 62.7% of all people aged 55 years and over at the 2001 Census to 64.6% at the 2006 Census. However, it was also the group which registered the biggest movements and the biggest loss to interstate migration. In the people aged 55 years and over, the 55-64 year old accounted for 74.4% of arrivers and 72.8% of departers, about 10% higher than their share of the 55+ population.

There were gender differences in the net migration figures with a larger net loss of females than males in the 55-64 year old population (the negative net migration amounted to 11.6% of the 55-64 female population at the 2001 Census compared to 7.3% for the 55-64 male population), but a larger loss of males in the 65-74 year old (10.5% of the 65-74 male population at the 2001 Census compared to 7.7% for the female population). In the 75 years and older age group the balance of in and out-migrants was close to zero (the deficit represented 1.9% of the male population and 0.3% of the female population in this age group in 2001) but numbers in this age group were small for both arrivers and departers.

Table 1 – Net migration (interstate only) in the NT, 2001-2006

	Male			Female			Total		
	Arrivers	Departers	Net migration	Arrivers	Departers	Net migration	Arrivers	Departers	Net migration
55-64	1,189	1,698	-509	936	1,549	-613	2,125	3,247	-1,122
65-74	312	593	-281	214	379	-165	526	972	-446
75+	81	102	-21	132	136	-4	213	238	-25
Total 55+	1,582	2,393	-811	1,282	2,064	-782	2,864	4,457	-1,593

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006

Key characteristics of older arrivers

Age

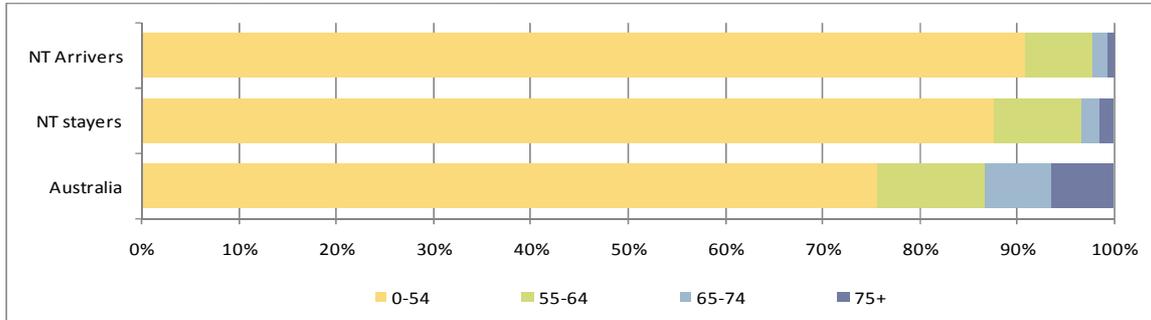
People aged 55 years and older represented 9.2% of all in-migrants to the NT whereas they accounted for 13.6% of the NT’s population and 24.4% of the Australian population at the 2006 Census.

Of the total 3,241 in-migrants to the Territory aged 55 years and over, a large majority (74.5%) were in the 55-64 age group, 18.2% were in the 65-74 age group and only 7.3% were in the 75+ age group.

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It is interesting to note that the age profile of the older arrivers to the Territory more closely resembled the older age group composition of existing Territorians than that of other Australians (Figure 1). Indeed, just over a quarter (25.5%) of older arrivers were aged 65 years and over, slightly less than for older NT stayers (27.6%) while in the rest of Australia the 65+ represented more than half of the older population (54.7%).

Figure 1 – Older age groups as percentage of total population, 2006



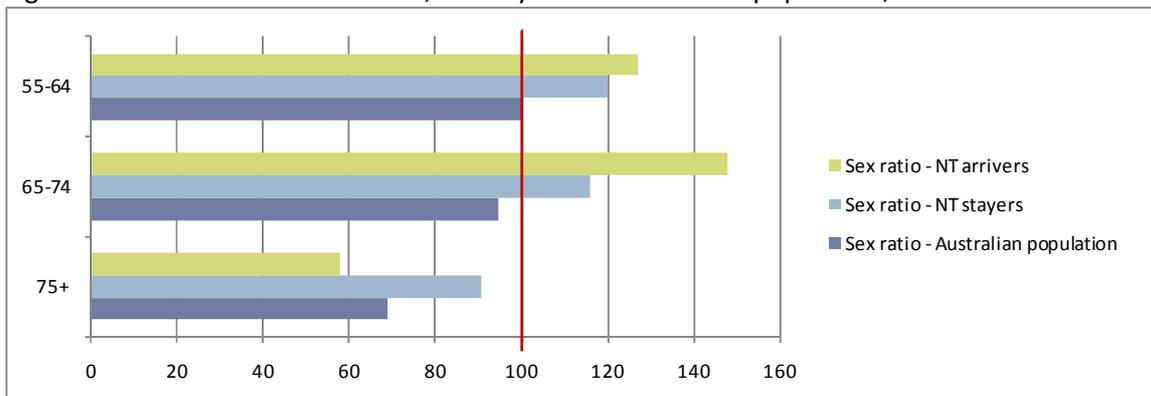
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006

Sex ratios

The sex ratio of older arrivers to the Territory was 124 men to every 100 women at the 2006 Census compared to 115 for NT stayers and 89 for the rest of Australia. In all three age groups under consideration the sex ratio was higher in the NT population than in Australia as a whole by about 20 percent. In both the NT and Australian population however, the older people were, the lower the sex ratio was.

For NT in-migrants, the gender imbalance was even greater for the 55-64 and 65-74 year old arrivers than for the NT stayers. Men outnumbered women by 127 to 100 in the 55-64 age group (the national and NT sex ratios were respectively 100 and 120 to 100). The difference was greater again for the 65-74 ear old arrivers for whom, contrary to NT stayers and other older Australians, the sex ratio increased to 148 males to 100 females (respectively 95 and 116 males to 100 females for Australia and NT stayers). However the pattern was the reverse in the 75+ age group for whom the sex ratio was lower for NT in-migrants than for either NT stayers or Australia as a whole (58 males to every 100 females for NT arrivers 75 years and older as opposed to 69 males to every 100 females in the Australian population and 91 males to every 100 females in the NT stayers) (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Sex ratios for NT arrivers, NT Stayers and Australian population, 2006



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006

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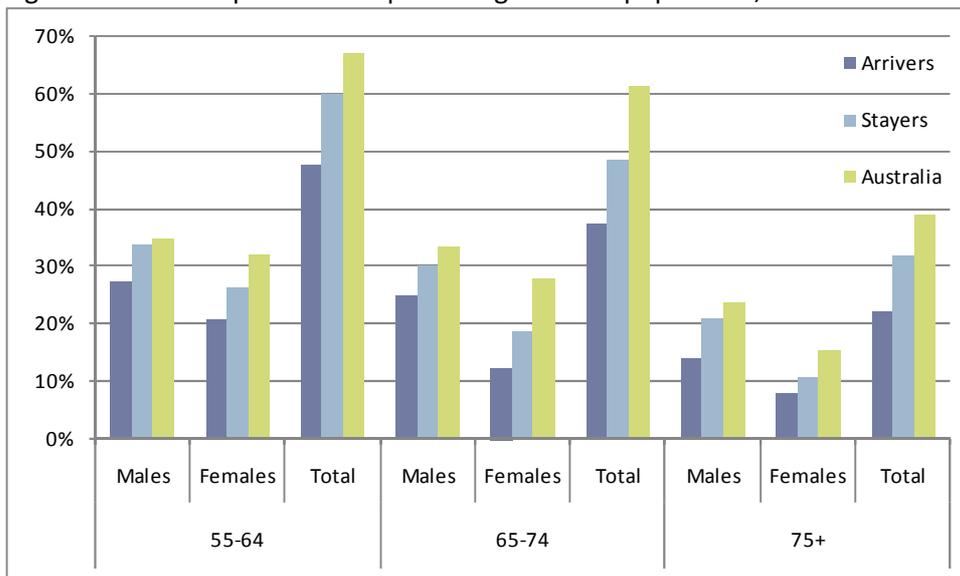
Indigenous status

Few (3%) older arrivers to the NT identified themselves as Indigenous. A higher percentage of female (4.2%) than male (2.0%) in-migrants aged 55 years and over said they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. This is lower than the percentage of Indigenous people in this age group in the NT (12.1% of males and 18.9% of females in the NT identified themselves as Indigenous at the 2006 Census) but is higher than the Indigenous representation in the rest of Australia for people aged 55 years and older at the 2006 Census (0.7% for both males and females). It is also higher than the percentage of Indigenous migrants to other states, which ranges between 0.4% and 0.6% for this age group. This seems to indicate that the Territory is more attractive to older Indigenous people than other states and territories.

Marital status

Less than half of the cohort under study (43.9%) were married (de facto or registered marriage) compared to 53.6% of NT stayers and 58.1% of other Australians aged 55 years and over and this distribution was consistent for the three age groups considered in this brief (Figure 3). The percentage of married people decreased with age, from 47.8% in the 55-64 age group, to 37.2% in the 65-74 age group and 22.1% in the 75+ age group. One constant for all age groups was the higher percentage of married males compared to females (27.1% and 20.7% respectively in the 55-64 age group, 24.8% and 12.4% in the 65-74 age group, and 14.2% and 7.9% in the 75+ age group).

Figure 3 – Married persons as a percentage of total population, 2006



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006

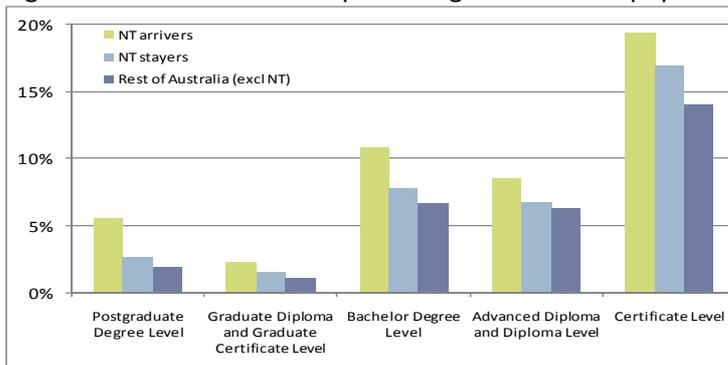
Overall, men accounted for 58.6% of all married arrivers while women accounted for only 41.4%. The gender difference was similar for NT stayers and other Australians for these age groups (married people in the 55 years and over consist of 58.4% males and 41.6% females for the NT, and 54.4% males and 45.6% females for the rest of Australia). Additionally, the total numbers of married males and married females across all ages were almost the same in both the NT and Australia, and the ABS marriage publications point to a difference of 2.6 years in the median age at marriage between males (31.6 years) and females (29.3 years). The lower percentage of married females in the older age groups was therefore more likely to be a reflection of the age difference between spouses as younger wives who had not made it yet into the age groups under consideration in this research would not have been counted in the results.

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Education

The older in-migrants to the NT were more likely to have finished year 12 or equivalent (35.5%) than both NT stayers and other Australians in the same age group (respectively 29.3% and 25.8%), and they were also more highly educated than both NT stayers and the rest of Australia for the same age group (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Qualification as a percentage of total 55+ population, 2006.

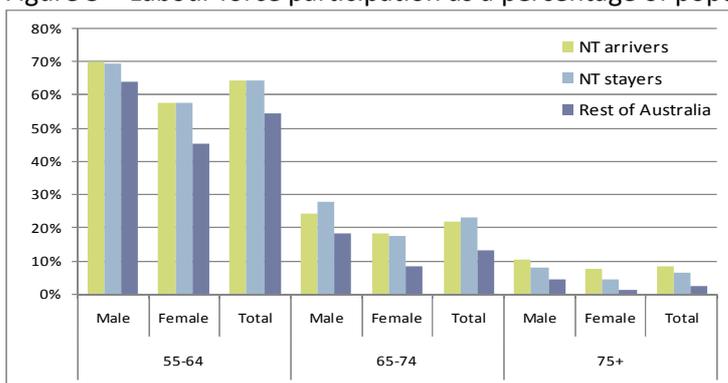


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006

Employment status

Large differences existed between the age groups with a majority of the 55-64 year old arrivers still in the labour force (64.7%) while a majority of the 65-74 and 75+ age groups were no longer in the labour force (respectively 24.6% and 15.6% in the labour force), marking the move into retirement. In all age groups the proportion of males in the labour force was much greater than females. Labour force participation was comparable for arrivers and NT stayers whereas the rest of Australia had much lower labour force participation in all three age groups (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Labour force participation as a percentage of population, 2006.



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006

Discussion

The characteristics and profile of older in-migrants to the Territory were different to those already here in a number of respects. Their age profile was slightly younger than NT stayers and considerably younger than the rest of Australia. Arrivers were also more male dominated than the rest of the NT population which itself already had a higher proportion of males than females whereas the opposite was true for the rest of Australia. The proportion of Indigenous people was much lower for arrivers than for stayers in the NT but it was substantially higher than the proportion of Indigenous people in the rest of Australia for these age groups. Thus, even though

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interstate migration rates for the Indigenous population are traditionally low (or inadequately documented), there was nonetheless a flow towards the NT in these age groups at least. The percentage of married people was lower in the NT older population than in the rest of Australia and lower again for the arrivers. This lower proportion of married people in the arrivers (14% less than the Australian population) doesn't allow us to draw any definite conclusions but we may theorise that if these people have less ties (i.e. no families) they may be less likely to form an attachment to the place where they live and may more easily relocate later on. Additional data on family composition would however be needed to comment further on this. As mentioned above it is unlikely that the higher percentage of married men compared to women in these age groups was due to geographical separations between husbands who had come to the Territory to pursue work opportunities while their wives stayed interstate. The arrivers were also more highly educated than other Territorians, themselves generally more educated than other Australians in the same age groups. Workforce participation among arrivers was similar to existing Territorians in all age groups and higher than the rest of Australia.

On the whole this picture would suggest a pull for men, unmarried, and with a relatively high level of education. As these characteristics are already what differentiates the Northern Territory from the rest of Australia, it seems that arrivers, though not great in numbers, tend to reinforce the existing population structures. This has enormous implications for aged care planning (among other things) as men (and single men) require different services to married couples and women.

The patterns described here also suggest that older Territorians will continue to be mobile – moving in and out of the Territory in relatively large numbers and probably on multiple occasions. Those aged 55-64 years appear to be (particularly the males) coming for work purposes, and so are likely to join the exodus of 65+ Territorians when they finish work. The older groups include a high proportion of single males, who may be attracted by existing ties to the Territory (perhaps having lived here in the past, or having children or grandchildren working here), or lifestyle values (fishing, climate, proximity to Asia, etc). However, the lack of gender balance has been cited as a reason for high population turnover in younger age groups, and may act as such for these older arrivers.

With the anticipated growth in older age groups a key feature of the NT population projections, it is critical that we understand the dynamics of these groups. Assumptions about how many will stay and go, who will stay and go, and where they will stay or leave from need to be better informed by analysis such as that presented here. Future research briefs will look at characteristics of older out-migrants from the Territory, and the spatial distribution of our ageing population.

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