
Research Brief 201301

Alice According to You: A snapshot from the 2011 Census

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(Image source: Alice Springs Town Council at <http://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au>)

Alice According to You: Summary of this research brief

Aim of the Research

To provide a snapshot of the changing population of Alice Springs town and the Central Australian region based on 2011 Census data.

Description of the Research

In this research brief we discuss the changing population of Alice Springs town and region, primarily since 2006. We also look at population estimates for Central Australian and other Shires from 2001 to 2011 to compare and contrast growth in the region to other areas.

The main topics covered in this brief are:

- Population size and growth
- Changes in age, sex and Indigenous composition in town
- Population turnover from movements to and from the region
- The emergence of 'new migrant communities'
- Changes in the housing stock and housing affordability

Key Findings

- Population growth in and around Alice Springs has been at best moderate from 2001 to 2011, at less than one percent per annum.
- The town continues to struggle to regain retirees and grandparents. There was also a large loss of women in their 30s to interstate.
- Emergent and rapidly growing 'new migrant communities' from India, Zimbabwe, the Philippines and New Zealand in particular have helped arrest population loss from interstate migration.
- The number of overseas born residents in Alice town is now the same as the number of Indigenous residents.
- Retaining the overseas born in the region might offer opportunities for future population growth and tourism.
- Levels of home ownership are relatively low in Alice town but, based on household incomes, both buying and renting is relatively affordable.

Future and related research

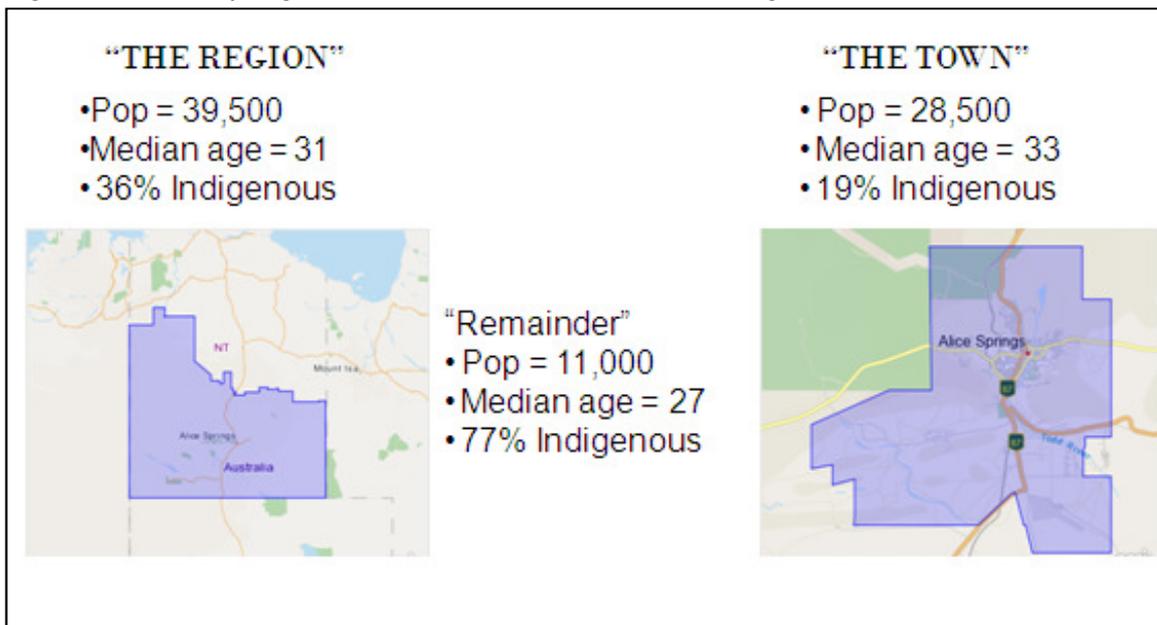
Extending the research presented in this brief, we are working with Flinders University and others to develop scenarios around population and economic change for small communities in rural and remote Australia. That research focuses on an 'inside-outside' model for incorporating local context and knowledge into scenarios on population futures.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been public and political focus on population change in and around Alice Springs. Among the many issues is whether and when the town might reach a population threshold of 30,000, Indigenous population movements and the changing industrial basis in the region as tourism continues to decline (see our research brief [Saving Alice Springs Tourism](#)). The release of information from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing provides an opportunity to review and update the population picture for Alice town and the Central Australian region more broadly. The Census is conducted every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), with the most recent held on 9th August 2011. It provides revealing and important information on the make-up and changing facets of communities and plays a critical role in planning for the future.

This research brief discusses recent population change for Alice Springs town and region with a focus on changes between 2006 and 2011. We also examine trends in the estimated resident population data, also provided by the ABS, from 2001 to 2011. The data for Alice and the region are compared in parts to other places, such as Darwin and the rest of the NT. Throughout the brief we refer to Alice Springs ‘town’ and ‘the region’. The ‘Remainder’ refers to ‘The Region’ minus ‘The Town’. The composition of these is shown in Figure 1, accompanied by some key population figures from the 2011 Census.

Figure 1 - Alice Springs town and the Central Australian region



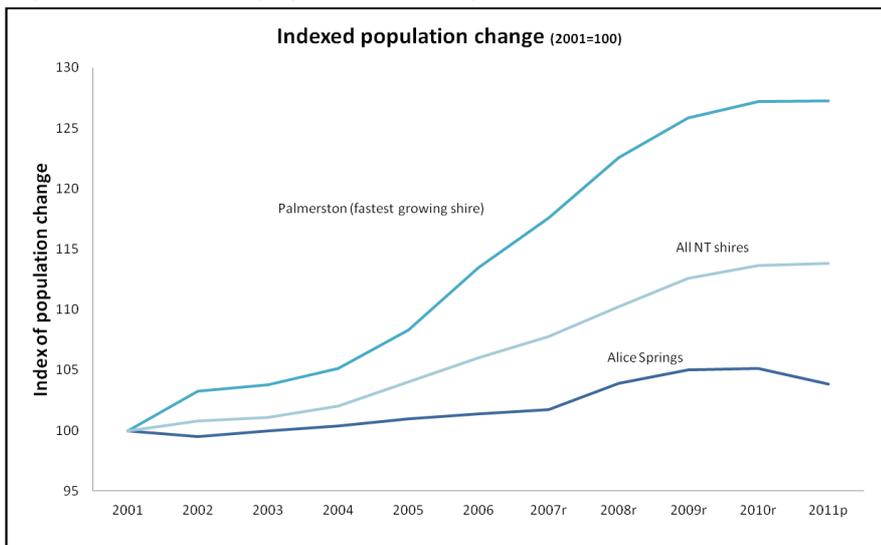
1. POPULATION CHANGE

2.1 The elusive 30,000 population

When discussing population change for Alice Springs the perennial question is whether and when a population of 30,000 might be reached, which would qualify it for ‘city’ status under the ‘Building Better Regional Cities Program’ (Alice Springs News, 2010). The census produces two main types of population data: one is based on where people filled out their form on Census night (Place of Enumeration), and the other on where people say they usually live (Place of Usual Residence). The former found there were 28,080 people in town on the night of Tuesday 9 August 2011, while the latter found there were 25,186 residents living in Alice Town, a difference of around 3,000 people who were visitors to town that night. Of these, 83 percent were visiting from interstate.

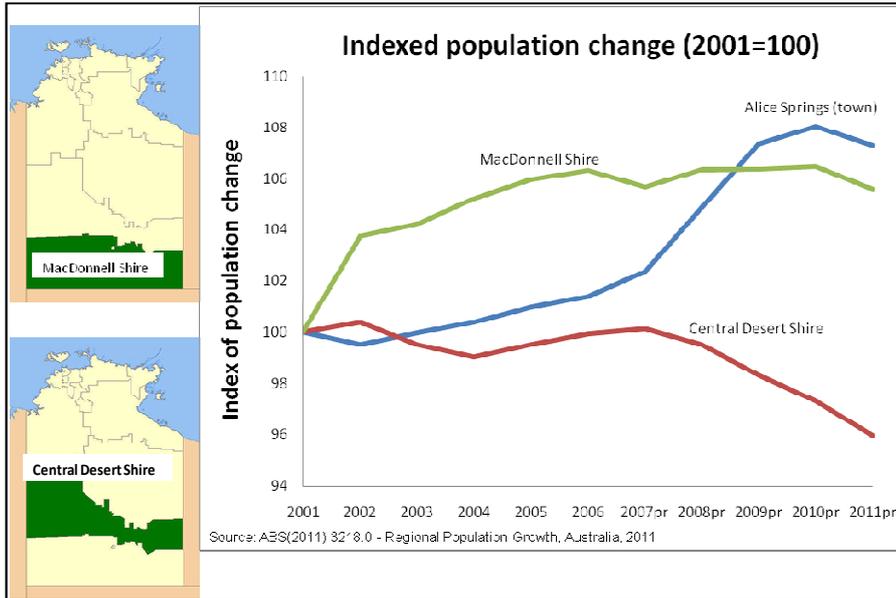
But to compensate for Census counting issues the ABS generates population estimates by adjusting Census counts for people being missed in the Census. The preliminary estimate for June 2011, the first based on the 2011 Census data, was released in late July 2012 (ABS, 2012). Figure 2 shows the estimated resident populations of Alice Springs, Palmerston and all NT shires indexed to 2001. Indexing allows comparisons of varying population sizes to be made on one chart. For Alice town the population grew marginally, by four percent between 2001 and 2011. Palmerston, by contrast, grew by 27 percent, while the combined population of all NT shires grew by around 13 percent.

Figure 2 – Indexed population change for selected NT shires, 2001 to 2011



Growth in the surrounding region, incorporating the MacDonnell and Central Desert Shires, was limited over the same period with the Central Desert Shire losing around four percent of its population (Figure 3).

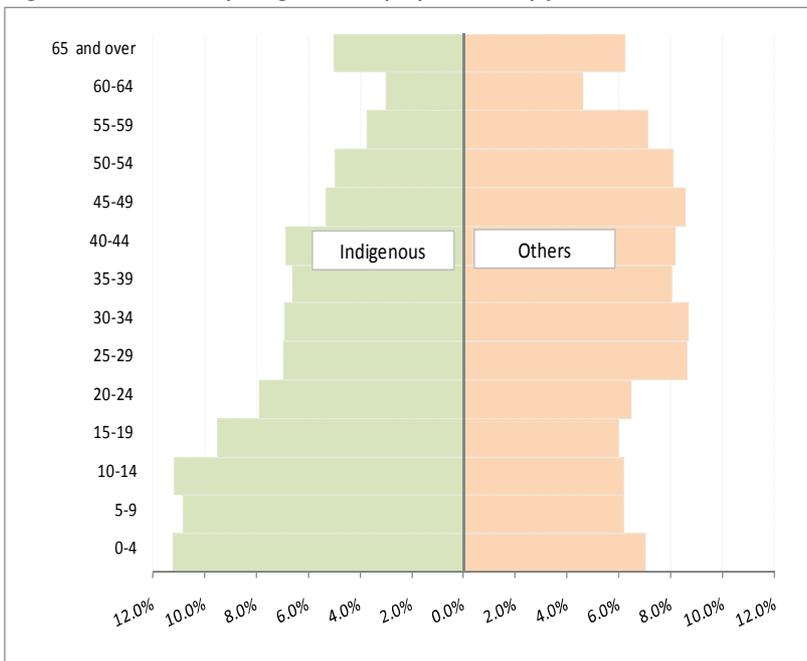
Figure 3 – Population change in the region, 2001 to 2011



2.2 Changes to age, sex and Indigenous compositions

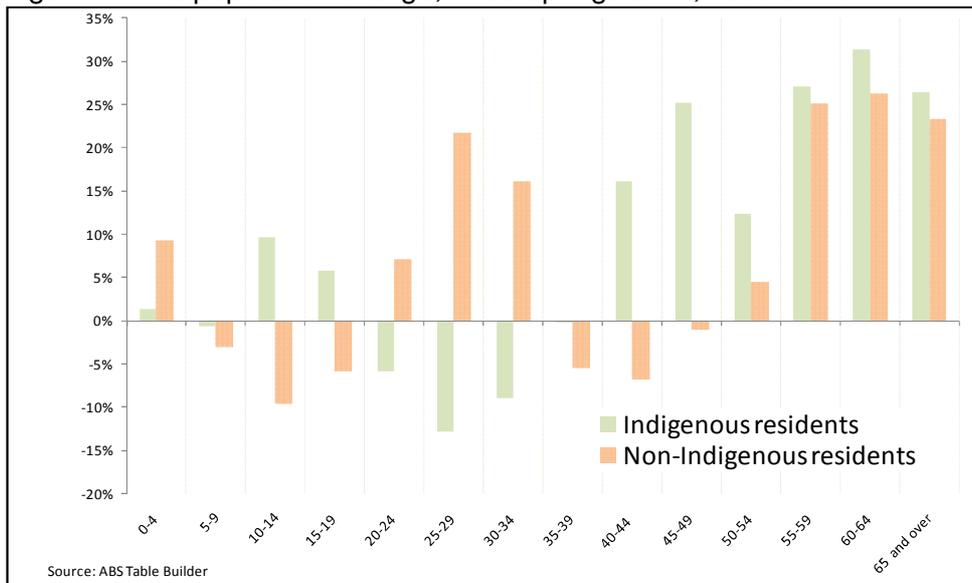
Indigenous people make up an important part of Alice Springs’s population and their age structure is well known to be different to other Australians, so the two are presented separately. Figure 4 is the age-sex pyramid for Alice Springs town at 2011 by Indigenous status. Demographers would notice the ‘coffin’ shape of the non-Indigenous population indicating significant proportions in working ages, which aligns well with what is known about employment in Alice Springs. The big ‘dent’ in those aged 60-64 years suggests many people leave once they reach retirement age and this too aligns with research for the NT as a whole (see our research brief [Will Retirees Choose to Live in the Northern Territory](#)). The Indigenous population is more ‘pyramid’ like indicating a youthful age structure, higher fertility rates and lower life expectancies.

Figure 4 - Alice Springs town population pyramid, 2011



By subtracting the 2006 town population for each age group from the 2011 population we can examine net population change by age, sex and Indigenous status (Figure 5). Three things stand out. First is the growth, albeit from a small base, in the Indigenous population aged 40 years and over. Collectively this group comprised 30 percent of all residents in 2011, up from 25 percent in 2006.

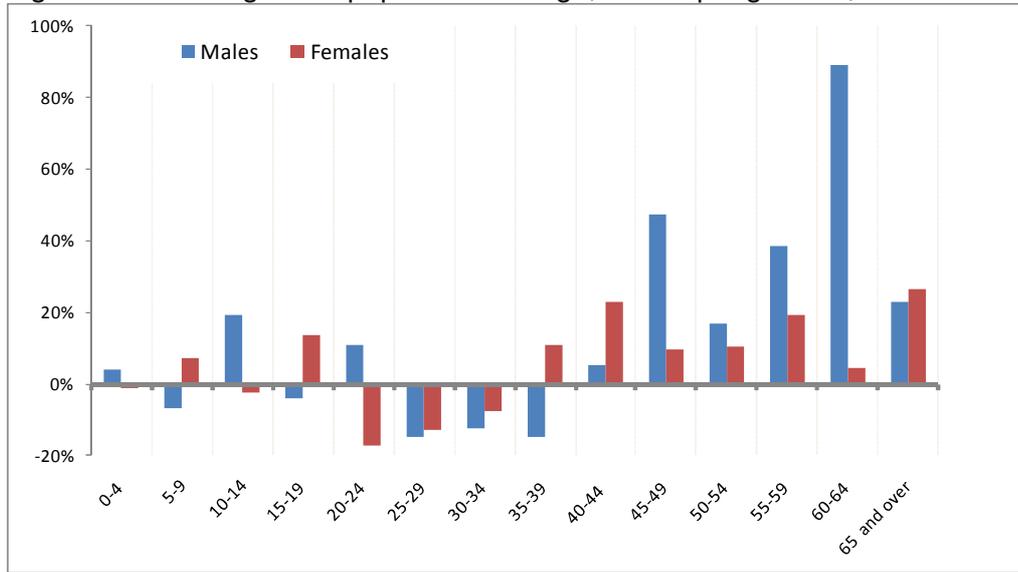
Figure 5 - Net population change, Alice Springs town, 2006 to 2011



Secondly, it is clear there has been large growth in the non-Indigenous working age population (Figure 6). Some of this might be related to the arrival of workers associated with expanded government services and programs, such as the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Later in this brief we will discuss the ‘new migrant communities’ who have also influenced growth in the non-Indigenous working age population. Given this, the reduction in 5-19 year old non-indigenous people is interesting. It may be that some of those who moved into Alice Springs to take up work chose not to bring their offspring and instead may have sent them to schools elsewhere. Equally, some new arrivals might be single or young couples without children, having replaced families with children.

Thirdly, there was an absolute decline in the numbers of young Indigenous people aged 20 to 39 years who were residents of Alice Springs in 2011. There were declines in males aged 15 to 19 years, slight increases for males aged 20 to 24 years and declines for males aged 25 to 39 years (Figure 6). Females declined across each age group within the 15 to 39 year range except for ages 15 to 19 (an increase of around 14 percent). Nevertheless, there was a large proportional increase in young Indigenous males aged 10 to 14 years (by almost 20 percent) while Indigenous males aged 45 years and over residing in town grew substantially.

Figure 6 - Net Indigenous population change, Alice Springs town, 2006 to 2011



2. POPULATION TURNOVER

The demography of the Northern Territory is characterised by high population turnover. Darwin, for example, turns over its entire population each five years. Turnover in the Alice Springs region is also high and is comprised of people coming and going from the rest of the NT, as well as people coming and going from interstate and overseas. Table 1 provides absolute numbers of residents who moved into and out of the Alice Springs region between 2006 and 2011 by each category. Interstate migration dominates resident turnover with the equivalent of 43 percent of the region’s population moving to and from other States and Territories in the five year period. Moreover, the region lost 4.5 percent (1,130) of its 2011 population, on a net basis, to interstate but this was offset by a large inflow of persons born overseas (at 9.3 percent of the 2011 population or 2,331 persons) during the period 2006 to 2011. The total turnover figure at two thirds of the region’s population is conservative since the number of former Alice residents now living overseas is not available.

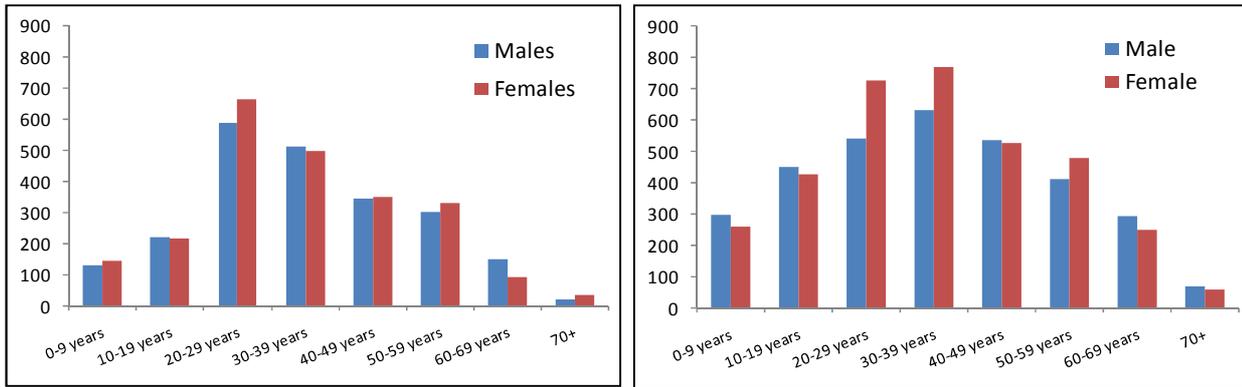
Table 1 – Population churn to and from the Alice region, 2006 to 2011

Turnover category	In	Out	Net	Turnover (*)
Intra-Territory	1,517	1,016	501	10.6%
Interstate	4,561	5,691	-1,130	43%
Overseas	2,331	Unknown	Unknown	9.8%
Total	8,409	6,707	-629	63.3%

(*) the sum of in and out migration divided by the resident population of the region at 2011.

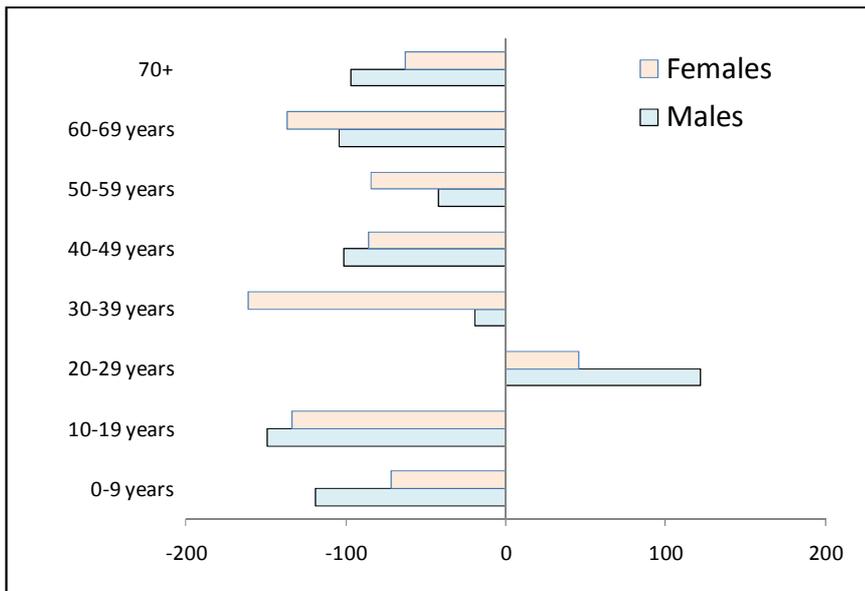
There was a large difference in the number of females moving out compared to males for ages 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 years (Figure 7). Across all age groups movements out were larger than movements into the region.

Figure 7 – Movers into (left hand chart) and movers out of Alice town, 2006 to 2011



Consequently, net interstate migration to the region (movers in minus movers out) showed a net negative for all age groups other than 20 to 29 years with those at retirement age are leaving in relatively large numbers and a big outflow of females aged 30-39 years when compared to males (Figure 8).

Figure 8 – Net interstate migration by age and sex for the region, 2006 to 2011



3. NEW MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Nearly 1,200 overseas migrants moved as residents to Alice Springs town between 2006 and 2011 (Table 2). By 2011 overseas born residents comprised 20 percent of the town’s population (up from 15 percent in 2001), the same proportion as Indigenous residents (whose resident population fell slightly), although some margin for Census count issues must be considered in relation to Indigenous resident numbers. The growth in overseas born was very much a town-based phenomenon with little in the way of overseas born settlement to the surrounding region over the same period. As a result the ratio of Australian born to overseas born residents has fallen from 4.7 in 2001 to 3.6 in 2011.

Table 2 – Growth in the overseas born population of Alice town

Measure	2001		2006		2011	
	Alice Springs town					
	No.	% of total	No.	% of total	No.	% of total
Total population	28,178	100%	23,892	100%	25,186	100%
Overseas born	4,255	15.1%	3,862	16.2%	5,019	19.9%
Indigenous (*)	4,523	16.1%	5,231	21.9%	5,077	20.2%
Australian Born	20,108	71.4%	17,837	74.7%	17,871	71.0%
Ratio residents to o/s born	4.7		4.6		3.6	

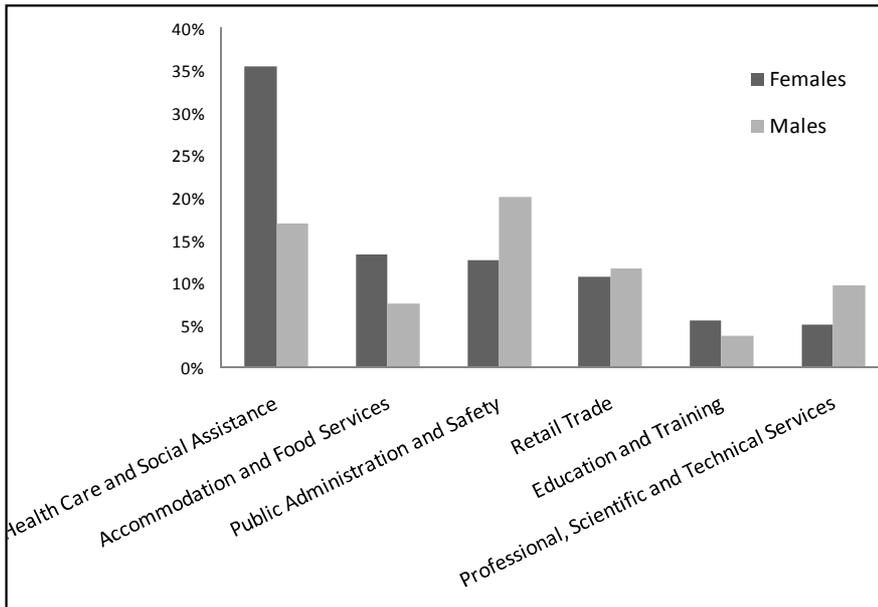
Driving the growth in the overseas born population are emergent and rapidly growing new migrant communities ('new' indicates only a very small presence from these sources prior to 2011). The countries shown in Table 3 are the top ten largest source nations for overseas born residents in town at 2011. While traditional sources like the UK and USA are still the largest they are declining in share. Meanwhile the new migrant communities, especially those from India, the Philippines, Zimbabwe and New Zealand are growing rapidly. Combined these communities are now larger than the most prominent source for the overseas born - the United Kingdom (UK).

Table 3 – Changing source nations for overseas born residents of the town

Rank	2001		2006		2011		% of o/s born 2011
1	UK	1,259	UK	980	UK	864	17.2%
2	USA	816	USA	710	NZ	665	13.2%
3	NZ	471	NZ	460	USA	623	12.4%
4	Philippines	147	Philippines	191	India	431	8.6%
5	Germany	155	Germany	125	Philippines	342	6.8%
6	Netherlands	110	South Africa	105	Zimbabwe	185	3.7%
7	Italy	95	Netherlands	85	South Africa	146	2.9%
8	PNG	72	India	80	Germany	122	2.4%
9	India	61	Italy	73	Ireland	95	1.9%
10	South Africa	57	Ireland	66	Netherlands	80	1.6%
	Top 10	3,243	Top 10	2,875	Top 10	3,553	70.8%

Employment appears to have been a major factor attracting new migrants to Alice town from 2006 to 2011. Around 60 percent of female and 77 percent of male new migrants aged 15 to 65 years were employed full-time compared to 44 percent and 66 percent for new migrants to the rest of the NT (Figure 9). More than a third (36 percent) of females worked in the health care and social assistance industry compared to 17 percent of males. Around 20 percent of males were employed in public administration and safety.

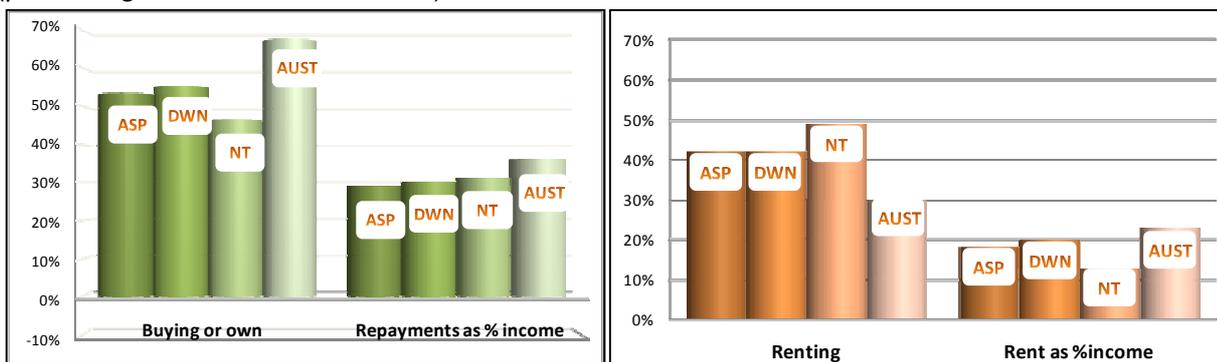
Figure 9 – Main industries of employment for new migrants



4. CHANGES IN HOUSING

Census data illustrates net additions to the housing stock by dwelling types as well as the relative costs of housing over time. Figure 10 below represents those who own or are purchasing a property in Alice Springs town (the green chart) compared to other jurisdictions, while the orange chart on the right is for renters. The left side of each chart compares the proportion of the population who own or are buying their dwelling or renting, while the right side of both charts compares house repayments or rent as a proportion of household income.

Figure 10 - Households owning/ purchasing (green) or renting (orange) and repayments or rent (percentage of household income)



The percentage of people buying or owning their own home in Alice Springs is lower compared to Darwin and Australia as a whole, despite it being relatively more affordable in 2011. Around the same proportions of people are renting in Alice Springs as in Darwin and both are much higher than the national average. Rents are a lower proportion of household incomes in Alice Springs compared to Darwin. This is reflective of relatively high wages for employed persons rather than low house prices and rents.

Additions to the housing stock during 2006 to 2011 are dominated by flats, units or apartments, while there appears to have been a large reduction in semi-detached housing (Table 4). There was also a large increase (by a third) in other dwellings (caravans, cabins etc) and an increase in people sleeping out or staying in improvised dwellings (by 80 persons), although it should be remembered that this figure includes a range of populations such as backpackers sleeping in cars. There will also be some influence from changed Census procedures for enumerating the homeless, but it is not possible to gauge the influence of this.

Table 4 – Changes to the housing stock in Alice town, 2006 to 2011

Type of dwelling	Net additions	Change 2006 to 2011
Separate houses	71	1.3%
Semi-detached, row or terrace house, townhouse etc.	-320	-21.1%
Flat, unit or apartment:	243	10.5%
Other dwellings (caravan/ cabin, sleeping out etc)	106	33.5%
Persons in improvised dwelling/ sleeping out	80	70.8%

5. CONCLUSION

Population growth in Alice Springs town and the region more broadly has been at best slow (at less than one percent per annum) during 2001 to 2011 with the Central Desert Shire having lost around 4 percent of its 2006 population by 2011. Net population change between 2006 and 2011 featured a decline in Indigenous residents aged between 20-34 and an increase of non-Indigenous residents within the same age range. Some of the latter are the new overseas migrants identified in this brief. Their arrival in significant numbers has grown the overseas born population in town to the same size as the Indigenous resident population.

The combined picture from net population change, population churn and changes to the housing stock in town indicates more childless couples, couples whose children are not living with them and singles now comprise a large part of the resident population in town. The town and region are continuing to struggle to retain retirees and this does not auger well for establishing inter-generational 'lock in' where successive generations remain in the region. Failing to retain retirees and grandparents means that young families are faced with the decision on whether to stay or move closer to the extended family once they have children. The departure of so many women in their 30s suggests this influence is at play and we know from other data for the Territory that there is a substantial 'baby effect' on out migration from the Territory. Counter balancing this, the net inflow of people in their early career ages, should they stay for the long haul, offers future birthing potential and future dividends for the workforce and developing social capital locally.

The arrival and growth of new migrant communities is perhaps the most significant story to come out of the latest Census data. They have gone some way to alleviating short-term population effects from the relatively large net interstate outflows across almost all ages, and particularly for women aged in their 30s. Without these new migrants the population of Alice Springs would have declined

by 5 percent between 2006 and 2011. New and larger communities of overseas born residents now calling Alice Springs home can have many long-term effects. First, fertility rates (in general) are higher for overseas migrants in Australia and, if the town can retain new migrants, they are likely to contribute to tourism through visits from family and friends. Some family and friends may move permanently to Alice Springs, again boosting population growth. Over successive generations new migrant communities have the potential to fundamentally change the composition of Alice Springs, particularly if growth in these cohorts continues at the pace observed between 2006 and 2011.

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