

Immigration to Australia During the 20th Century – Historical Impacts on Immigration Intake, Population Size and Population Composition – A Timeline

The Lead Up to Federation Pre 1901

In 1889 the population passed 3 Million.

The States administered their own immigration programs and actively competed for migrants until the Federal Government took full control. It was recognised as a matter of national significance that, when the colonies federated, constitutional responsibility for immigration would be transferred to the new Federal Government.

In the last decade of the 19th century Australia was experiencing depression after an economic boom in the 1880s. During this depression, small net migration was having very little effect on population growth.

The Early Years of Federation 1901–1914

Population passed 4 Million.

At the beginning of the century, support for immigration was widespread with the effects of the 1890s depression fading.

1901

Australia's six colonies came together as the Commonwealth of Australia, a federated self-governing member of the British Empire.

The States continued to administer their own immigration programs but the Commonwealth was beginning to assume responsibility for aspects of immigration policy.

The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* enabled Australia to eliminate non-European migration. This formal implementation of the 'White Australia Policy' was welcomed by most of the community. Implementation of the policy included the 'Dictation Test', which was used to exclude certain applicants by requiring them to pass a written test in a European language, with which they were not necessarily familiar.

1903

All residents who had previously been 'Naturalised'¹ under State Acts were given the same status under the *Commonwealth Naturalisation Act 1903*. Applicants for Naturalisation could not be natives of Asia, Africa or the Pacific Islands (except New Zealand).

1905

Australia grew rapidly until the onset of World War One. Between 1905 and the outbreak of World War One, approximately 390,000 new settlers arrived, principally from our traditional source, the British Isles, and the continent's population rose from 4 to almost 5 million.

¹ Naturalisation was the approximate equivalent to what we know today as Citizenship.

World War One 1914–1918

Population passed 5 Million

World War One meant a virtual cessation of immigration.

65,000 Australian men died in the fighting.

During the war antagonism towards ‘Aliens’² developed. In response, the Federal Government amended the *Commonwealth Naturalisation Act 1903*. This meant that Naturalisation would not be granted unless applicants renounced their own nationality, had advertised their intention to become naturalised, and could read and write English.

Between World War One and The Great Depression 1919–1929

Population passed 6 Million

The 1920s was a successful decade in terms of net migration gain.

More than 300,000 immigrants arrived, two thirds of whom were ‘Assisted’³. The majority came from Britain but there was growing interest from Italians and Greeks.



1921

The Federal Government took control of all immigration, and pursued it vigorously, after a virtual cessation during World War One. A major component in the resumption of immigration was the ‘Empire Settlement Scheme’ whereby Britain and its immigrant receiving dominions were to share equally in the cost of promoting migration from Britain.

² Prior to 1948 ‘Alien’ referred to those who were not British subjects and afterwards to those who were not Australian Citizens.

³ Assisted migrants were offered assistance with the cost of passage to Australia from the Australian Government. Until April 1981 assistance was offered to migrants from certain countries as an inducement to migrate. Since April 1981 assistance has only been given to refugees.

The Great Depression 1929–1937

The Depression brought assisted arrivals to a standstill.

The only significant immigration was that of refugees from Nazi Germany. More than 7,000 refugees from Germany (mainly Jews of German and Austrian origin) arrived before World War Two abruptly ended the program.

World War Two 1939–1945

Population passed 7 Million.

There was little immigration during World War Two. Towards the end of the war and just after, Australia experienced a net migration loss, losing 15,148 people in 1946.

The war brought home Australia's vulnerability. The acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde said after John Curtin's death in 1945: 'History will some day record how close Australia was to being overrun'.

Post War Resettlement 1945–1965

Population passed 11 million

World War Two marked a change in the pace of Australia's immigration history. The Australian Government planned an ambitious post-war reconstruction and expansion program. Australia showed an enormous potential for growth and could offer people who wished to leave war-torn Europe an optimistic future. The perception that Australia needed a larger population was emphasised by threats to Australia in World War Two. There was a feeling that such a small population in charge of a vast land could not defend itself. These perceptions gave way to the catch cry 'Populate or Perish'. The scene was set for an extraordinary post war immigration program supported by virtually all sections of the community and fuelled by the post war economic boom.

1945

Arthur Calwell, the first Minister for Immigration, established the Federal Department of Immigration.

In 1945, the Government launched the first 'Migration Program'. Immigration was intended to increase Australia's population by 1 per cent per annum, and thereby achieve an annual growth rate of 2 per cent. The Migration Program has been maintained by each succeeding government and is adjusted to take account of changing economic, social and political environments.

1946

Australia signed an agreement to provide free, assisted passage for British ex-servicemen and their dependents, as well as for other selected British migrants. Free passage was also extended to Polish ex-servicemen who were unwilling to return to their homeland after the war. Later schemes included ex-servicemen and freedom fighters from the USA, Netherlands, Norway, France, Belgium and Denmark.

1947

The Government partly relaxed the restrictions of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*. Non-Europeans admitted for business reasons, who had lived in Australia continuously for fifteen years, were allowed to stay, without applying for periodical extensions of permits.

Australia agreed to settle 12,000 displaced persons per year with provision to increase this number.

1948

In 1947–48, arrivals in Australia exceeded departures by 29,365, compared with a net loss of nearly 10,000 in 1945–46 and 6,500 in 1946–47.

The *Aliens Act 1947* came into force. It meant that all Aliens 16 years of age or older had to register and notify any change of name, address or occupation.

Peace treaties with Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary opened the way for migration from these countries.

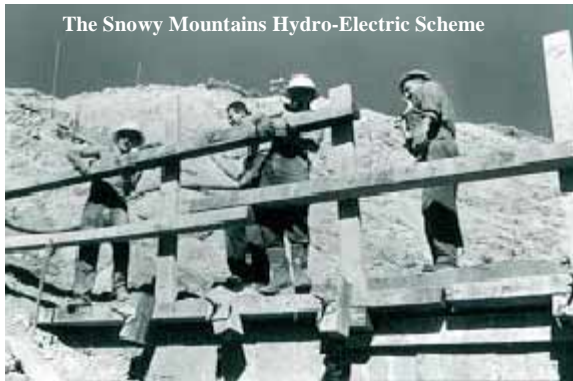
Availability of ships was a major problem. Australia spent millions renovating damaged ships and by the end of 1948, 10 ships were being used exclusively to transport migrants while commercial ships were carrying thousands of others.

1949

Assisted arrivals reached more than 118,800, four times the 1948 figure.

The *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* came into force on 26 January 1949. Before then the status of Australia citizen did not exist. It was Australia's contribution to the resolution of inconsistent citizenship laws of countries of the British Commonwealth. Citizens of all countries of the British Commonwealth were deemed to be British Subjects.

Work began on the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, which was to employ a considerable proportion of immigrants.

**1950**

Net Overseas Migration reached a record high of 153,685, the third highest figure of the century, only surpassed in 1919 (166,303) with troops returning from World War One and in 1988 (172,794).

Principles were set for the 1950s: to increase Australia's population at a rate of one per cent by immigration with the annual migrant intake balanced between assisted and non-assisted migrants, British and non-British migrants, and between northern and southern Europeans within the non-British intake.

1951

New assisted passage schemes were agreed with the Netherlands and Italy.

1952

The Government allowed Japanese wives of Australian servicemen to be admitted, under permits valid initially for five years. It also allowed entry for 800 non-European refugees. These were the first elements of immigration policy not focused on Europe.

For the first time since 1946 there was significant unemployment in Australia, resulting from a severe fall in prices of some Australian exports. There were major political repercussions and the Migration Program was revised to reduce the intake of workers and bring in more family groups. The 1952 immigrant intake, originally planned for 150,000 was curtailed and the 1953 program was reduced to 80,000. At the same time Europe was about to experience an economic upsurge and labour shortages.

The 'Displaced Persons Scheme' was terminated.

The *Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM)* was established in Geneva. As a member, Australia made arrangements with Austria, Belgium, Greece and Spain for assisted migration from these countries.

An Assisted Migration Agreement with West Germany was signed.



1954

General Assisted Passage Schemes were introduced for people from the USA, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

1955

Australia's millionth post-war immigrant arrived.

1956

'Operation Reunion', a scheme negotiated with the USSR and other East European countries, was designed to reunite settlers in Australia with relatives. The operation resulted in around 30,000 arrivals from the countries and regions of Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, USSR, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

Australia modified conditions for easier entry and stay for migrants of non-European descent.

An uprising in Hungary led to the arrival of 14,000 refugees in Australia.

1957

To encourage more British migration, the 'Bring out a Briton' campaign was launched. The community was encouraged to take responsibility for sponsoring particular British families and assist them to settle.

Non-Europeans with fifteen years residence in Australia were allowed to become Australian citizens.



1958

The *Revised Migration Act 1958* introduced a simpler system of entry permits and abolished the controversial Dictation Test.

In an agreement with Britain, British migrants were given equal rights with Australia-born citizens for social service benefits. Non-British migrants faced more difficult requirements for the same benefits.

Assisted passage agreement with West Germany was renewed. Agreement with Spain negotiated via ICEM.

1959

Australian citizens could now sponsor non-European spouses and unmarried minor children for migration.

The first migrants arrived under the 'Nest Egg' scheme. This scheme offered assisted passage to Britons who had more than 500 pounds sterling and were prepared to make their own accommodation arrangements.

1961

The Italian Government refused to renew the assisted migration scheme and it did not start again until 1967.

1962

Armenians in Egypt became eligible for unassisted migration but were entitled to post arrival assistance such as accommodation.

1963

The Spanish Government suspended assisted migration from Spain to Australia following unemployment problems in Australia. However, negotiations led to some limited movement of Spanish workers under specific conditions.

Eligibility for unsponsored unassisted migration was no longer restricted to certain nationalities, but was determined by the individual merits of the applicants.

1964

Conditions of entry for people of mixed descent were further relaxed.

1965

New migration agreements with West Germany and the Netherlands were signed and a new ICEM agreement was negotiated with Malta.



Australia bound families at Waterloo Station (1965)

A New Emphasis for Immigration Policy 1966–1977

Population passed 14 million.

1966

After a comprehensive review of non-European migration policy, the Government announced that applications from those wishing to settle in Australia would be considered on the basis of their suitability as settlers, their ability to integrate readily, and possession of qualifications useful to Australia. At the same time, a number of non-Europeans who had been admitted as 'Temporary Residents' could become residents and citizens after five years (ie. the same as for Europeans) instead of fifteen years. This enabled them to bring their families to Australia much earlier.

The introduction of a 'Special Passage Assistance Program (SPAP)' facilitated migration for guest workers who had finished their European work contracts. It included migrants from Scandinavia, Switzerland, France and the Americas. It became the largest single program outside the British–Australia scheme with 11,000 settlers in its first year.

1967

The British assisted passage agreement was renewed for another five years.

A new migration settlement agreement with Italy was signed.

A migration agreement for assisted passage of Turkish workers and their dependents was negotiated.

1968

Victims of earthquakes in Sicily came to Australia.

The Warsaw Pact Intervention in Czechoslovakia brought refugees.