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Leaving Australia forever?

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Leaving Australia forever?

International migration is an important population component influencing Australia's society, culture, labour force and economy.

Australians have a prominent travelling culture and although temporary travel is very common, permanently leaving Australia is less so.

Upon leaving Australia, a large proportion of people state that they are departing permanently, but return to Australia within the following year. This article looks at the characteristics of people who stated on their passenger card they are departing permanently and are still out of the country 16 months later. These people are referred to throughout this article as permanent departures. It should be remembered that some of these individuals could still return to Australia one day.

Global events can have a large impact on migration. The number of permanent departures over the last decade may have been affected by the Global Financial Crisis, world events such as the Bali and London bombings and natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and tsunamis in Asia.

Permanent departures?

Each year, many Australians plan to leave the country permanently but most return to Australia within a year of their departure. In 2010, of the 84,000 Australian residents who stated they were departing permanently, only 17,000 (20%) spent 12 months or more overseas.

Data sources and definitions

Most of the data in this article have been sourced from the ABS Travellers Characteristics Database.

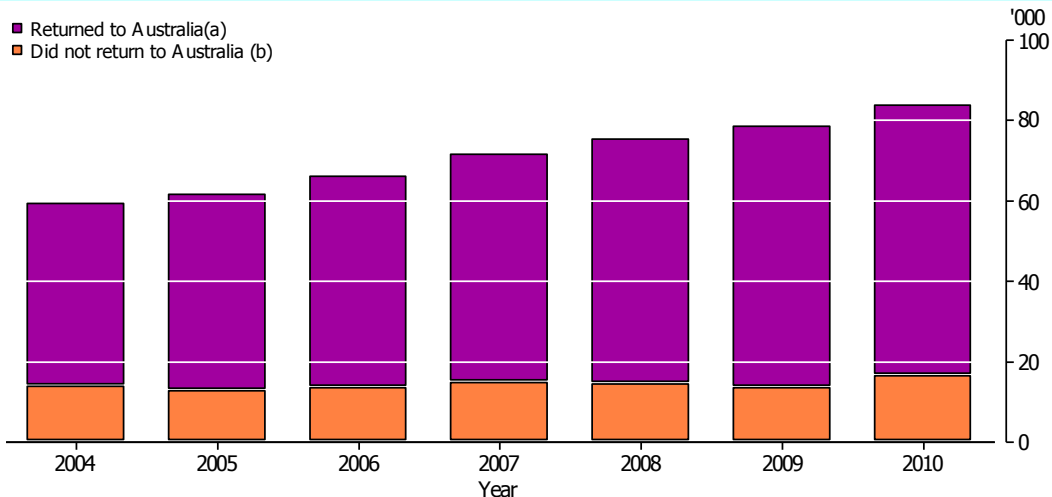
Under a '**12/16 month rule**', those travellers departing Australia (who are currently counted in the population) must be absent from Australia for a total of 12 months or more during the 16 month follow-up period are not considered part of Australia's estimated resident population. This takes into account Australians who live most of the time overseas but periodically return to Australia for short periods. Annual data based on this methodology is available from 2004.

Intended permanent departures are Australian residents who on departure state they are departing permanently, however, did not stay overseas for 12 months or more.

Permanent departures are Australian residents (including former migrants) who on departure state that they are departing permanently, and stayed overseas for at least 12 months out of 16 months.

The number of permanent departures from Australia has increased by 18% since 2004. The number rose from 14,000 in 2004 to 17,000 in 2010. Nearly all of the increase was observed in 2010. This change may have been influenced by more affordable international travel, a more global labour market or simply the prominent travelling culture of Australians.

Number of people who permanently departed from Australia – 2004-2010

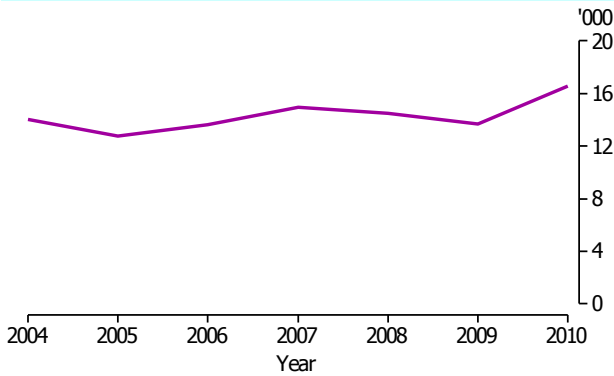


(a) Those that stated permanent departure but returned to Australia and did not stay overseas for 12 months or more.

(b) Those that stated permanent departure and did spend 12 months or more overseas.

Sources: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

Number of permanent departures – 2004-2010



Source: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

Declines were observed in 2005, 2008 and 2009. The decrease in the number of permanent departures in 2008 occurred at the time of the Global Financial Crisis.

When looked at as a rate, for every 100,000 of Australia's population, only 69 people departed permanently in 2004. Although fluctuating in between, by 2010 the rate had risen to a peak of 75 people departing per 100,000 of the population.

Although there has been an increase in the number of people departing Australia permanently, the level of permanent departures continues to be much lower than that of permanent arrivals to Australia, with 78,000 permanent arrivals in 2010 compared with 17,000 permanent departures.

Who is leaving?

The information on migration and permanent departures is collected from passenger cards that are completed when people leave Australia. This provides demographic information about the traveller but not the reason why they are permanently departing.

...by age

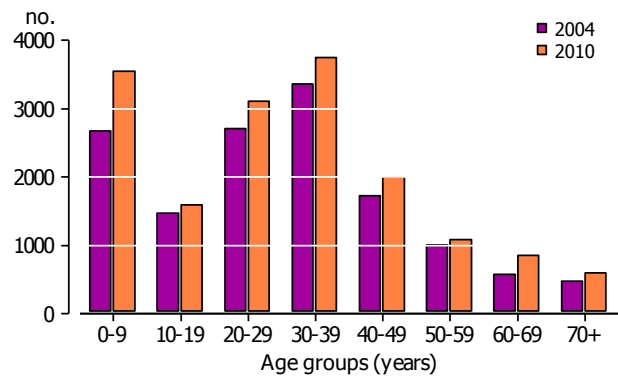
Permanent departures have increased across all age groups from 2004 to 2010. In 2010, younger adults (aged 20-39 years) were most likely to leave, often with young children.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of all people permanently departing in 2010 were aged 30-39 years, while 19% were aged 20-29 years. One in five permanent departures (21%) in 2010 was aged less than ten years.

In 2004, there were similar patterns, with both the 20-29 and 30-39 age groups most likely to permanently depart with their young children.

The relatively low number of 10-19 year olds departing permanently may be related to the stage these children are at with their education, as parents may not want to disrupt their schooling.

Number of permanent departures by age – 2004-2010



Source: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

...by sex

Proportionally, slightly more women depart permanently than men (51% on average between 2004 and 2010).

In 2010, of the 17,000 people who departed, 8,500 were women (52%). In 2004, 7,200 women permanently departed from Australia compared with 6,800 men.

The most popular age to permanently leave Australia was the 30-39 years age group.

...by state

The most populous states had the highest proportions of permanent departures in 2010 with a third (33%) of permanent departures previously living in NSW, 25% in Queensland and 20% in Victoria.

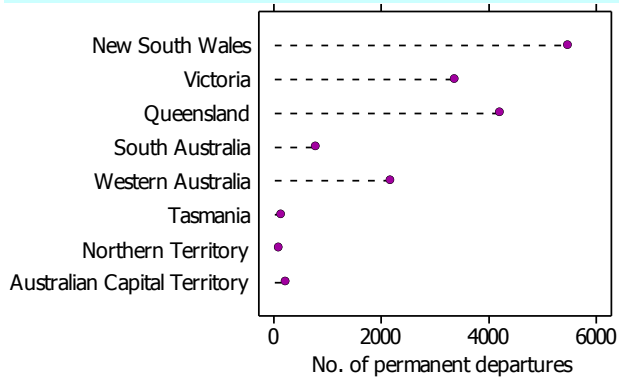
However, Queensland and Western Australia had the highest permanent departures relative to the number of people in those states, with 95 and 94 per 100,000 of their respective populations permanently departing in 2010.

Permanent departures by sex – 2004-2010



Source: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

Permanent departures by state(a) – 2010



(a) State of residence before permanent departure.
Source: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

Tasmania (30 per 100,000) and South Australia and the Northern Territory (both 49 per 100,000) had the lowest number of permanent departures relative to their respective population sizes.

In 2004, the ACT had the highest rate of permanent departures for its population size, with 91 per 100,000 leaving permanently for overseas, closely followed by Western Australia (87 per 100,000).

...by country of birth

People are more likely to leave permanently if they were born overseas. In 2010, of the 17,000 people who departed permanently, three out of five (61%) were born overseas. This was a small increase from 2004 (57%).

After Australian born residents, people born in New Zealand had the highest number of departures, with just under 4,000 of those departing Australia permanently in 2010. Australian residents born in the United Kingdom also had high levels of permanent departures, with 2,300 people in 2010 leaving Australia permanently.

Where are they going?

When comparing the years 2004 to 2010, the top

Number of permanent departures by country of birth – 2004 and 2010

Country of Birth	2004	2010
Australia	5,976	6,518
New Zealand	3,311	3,979
U.K.	1,532	2,252
U.S.A	330	374
China (excludes SARs and Taiwan)	201	324
Other	2,683	3,108
Total permanent departures	14,033	16,555

Source: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

destinations for those departing Australia permanently remained almost completely the same. More than half (53%) of all permanent departures in 2010 went to either New Zealand (29%) or the United Kingdom (24%).

The unique migration agreement between Australia and New Zealand allowing citizens to move freely means there is a constant flow of overseas arrivals and departures between the two countries. As a result, New Zealand continues to be the most popular country to move to permanently, with 4,900 Australian residents departing. It should be noted that the

New Zealand and the UK were the most popular destinations for Australians departing permanently.

vast majority of these were born in New Zealand.

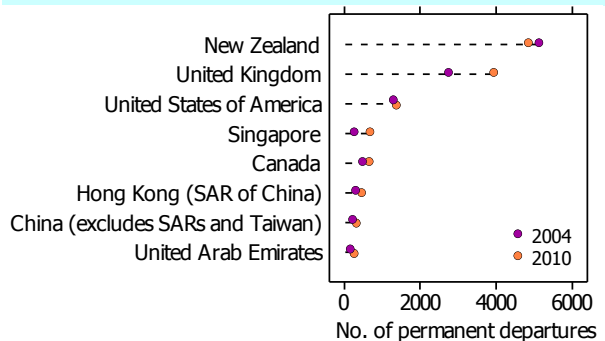
Many of Australia's permanent departures go to the United Kingdom, with a large increase from 2,800 in 2004 to 4,000 in 2010 (24% of all permanent departures). In 2011, 21% of all migrants in Australia were born in the UK, more than those born in any other country.¹

Return migration

Return migration relates to former migrants to Australia who depart Australia permanently to return to their country of birth. Traditionally, overseas-born residents departing Australia permanently are likely to be return migrants, those returning to their country of birth.²

Overseas-born permanent departures may return to their country of birth for a variety of reasons; some may simply be homesick, while others may not have been able to secure satisfactory employment. Younger migrants may return to their country of birth because they are needed by their family.³ Conversely, over the long-term, migrants may return after successful employment and increased wealth, for retirement, family formation and dissolution, or when conditions have improved

Top countries for permanent departures - 2004 and 2010



Source: ABS Travellers Characteristics Database

Short-term departures

Short-term departures comprise both Australian residents and overseas visitors who depart Australia and stay abroad for less than 12 months.

People who leave Australia for the short-term were most likely to be going for a holiday, visiting friends or relatives, or for business.

The most popular reason from 2004 to 2010 was a holiday. With 3.6 million Australian residents departing for a holiday in 2010, this made up over half (59%) of the total short-term departures. Visiting friends and relatives (18%) and business (6%) were also popular.

Many of the countries to which residents were permanently departing were also popular for short-term departures by Australian residents. New Zealand was the number one destination from 2004 (19%) to 2010 (15%). Other popular destinations in 2010 were Indonesia (11%), the U.S.A (10%), and the United Kingdom (7%).

within their country of birth.

New Zealand had the highest intake of Australian permanent departures in 2010, and of the 4,800 that departed Australia and migrated to New Zealand permanently, 3,500 (72%) were born in New Zealand. As the median age of arrivals from New Zealand was 23 years, and the median age for those returning to New Zealand was 31 years on average, New Zealanders stayed in Australia for approximately eight years before leaving permanently.

Looking ahead

With the increasing internationalisation of labour markets and global demand for skilled workers, both Australian born and overseas-born residents may choose to permanently depart Australia for employment.

With many Australian residents stating they would permanently depart, but then returning within 16 months, it is likely that some of the 17,000 who departed permanently in 2010 could return to Australia one day. However the exact number that return will be unknown.

Endnotes

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, [Cultural Diversity in Australia Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census](#), cat. no. 2071.0, <www.abs.gov.au>

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, [Permanent departures overseas – where are they going?](#), cat. no. 3412.0, <www.abs.gov.au>

3 Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009, [Fact Sheet 5 – Emigration from Australia](#) <<http://www.immi.gov.au/>>

Those that returned

Not all of those who plan to leave permanently do stay away. In 2010, 80% of those who had planned to leave permanently did not stay overseas for 12 months or more, and instead returned to Australia.

The highest proportion of people who returned were in the 30-39 age group (28%), outnumbering the 23% in the same age group who left permanently in 2010. Those aged over 40 were also more likely to return within 12 months, rather than stay away (40% compared with 27%).

Those who aimed to depart permanently but returned were most likely to do so in the first quarter of each year.

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