

Australia

Permanent immigration to Australia rose again in 2007. Entries under the 2007 - 08 migration programme were 158 630, the largest in more than a decade. The shift towards skilled migration, which began in the second half of the 1990s, continued, resulting in the largest number of skilled migrants (including accompanying family) ever admitted to Australia. The 2008-2009 programme, however, takes the worsening employment situation into account. The original target of 133 500 for the skilled migration programme was first turned into a cap and then lowered to 108 500.

Additional reforms are also taking place. Australia had already revised its skilled migration programme in 2006 to place more emphasis on the skill category (68 % of the total migrant intake, or more than 108 000 people). While employment figures for this group are high, changes were introduced from September 2007 to further enhance employment outcomes: a higher threshold level of English competence, additional bonus points for applicants with a high level of English proficiency (reflecting employer demand), and greater emphasis on work experience related to the field of qualification (in particular for former students). The skilled migration programme was further changed in 2009, and is now open only to those who have a job offer, are sponsored by a region, or whose occupation is on the Critical Skills Shortage List.

Accountants were the largest professional category entering in 2007-08 (21%), followed by business and computing professionals (7%) and science and engineering (6%). The top five source countries were the United Kingdom (19%), India (15%), China (13%), South Africa (5%) and the Philippines (4%).

International students represent a primary resource for skilled migration, their numbers expanding in response to migration opportunities. In 2007-08 a record number of 278 000 visas were granted, more than 20 % increase over the previous year, which had already been a record. India (39 000) led China (31 500) as the most important origin country, followed by the Republic of Korea (12 000). The boom in the vocational study sector continued - enrolments rose to more than 68 000 (from less than 30 000 in 2005-06), reflecting the growing range of trade occupations scoring points for skilled migration. On 26 April 2008, the two-step application process for students to gain work permission became a one-step process, reducing the administrative burden for both students and the authorities. 70% of students have work rights.

The number of migrants in Australia's Temporary Skilled Migration programme rose steadily in 2007-2008, reaching more than 80 000, before falling in early 2009. Conditions have been tightened for the programme: formal skills assessments and an increase in the English language requirement for trade occupations from 1 July 2009; the introduction of a market-based minimum salary for temporary overseas workers from mid September 2009; and a requirement that employers prove their efforts to hire local labour. The programme has been an increasing source of permanent migrants.

In terms of other migration categories, family reunification was steady in 2007-2008 (about 50 000).

A further 13 000 visas were allocated in 2007 - 08 to Refugee and Humanitarian entrants, with 14 % of refugees women at risk. Myanmar, Iraq Afghanistan, and Sudan were the main sources of refugees; 17 % were processed in Australia.

On 17 August 2008 the Australian Government announced a three-year Pacific Seasonal Labour Worker Pilot Scheme. This pilot scheme allows up to 2 500 seasonal workers from Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu to work in low-skilled jobs in the horticultural industry in regional Australia for up to seven months in a 12 month period. Workers will have the opportunity to return to Australia in subsequent seasons for the duration of the pilot.

Finally, employer recruitment of temporary workers from abroad had been steadily rising in recent years, and increased by a further 27% between 2006 and 2007 to reach 110 570. With the onset of the economic downturn employer applications for such workers have declined. Nonetheless, new regulations in 2009 are meant to further restrict access, and impose prevailing wage requirements on temporary workers in an attempt to encourage employers to hire Australian workers.

For further information:

<http://www.immi.gov.au/>