
UNIT 3 IMMIGRANTS

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Australia has been one of the most popular destinations for international migration. Its vast territory of approximately 7.6 million square kilometres, immense resources and a relatively small population make it very attractive to prospective overseas migrants. A continent in itself, more than half of Australia's land is designated as arid or semi-arid, yet it is believed that it has many natural advantages and mineral resources and that its population should continue to expand.

Since its racially discriminatory immigration policies of the earlier years, abandoned in only in the early 1970s, Australia has admitted increasing number of immigrants from the developing world and has become an important country of permanent settlement for refugees. The most important countries of origin of the immigrants have been United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Italy. Of late, however, the origin countries of the immigrants have shifted considerably from Europe to Asia and South Pacific. This is so because of the immigrant selection programmes put under two broad categories of Humanitarian and Migration (non-humanitarian) programmes.

Australian immigrants are numerous enough to be highly visible. Perhaps, Israel (has more), and Canada and Switzerland have almost as many. Moreover, Australia's immigrants are diverse although this diversity is recent and it is still a politically charged issue. This unit focuses on the quality and kind of immigrants who have been reaching Australia and the policies that Australia has followed over the years.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the origins and evolution of White Australia policy;
- describe the changes in the intake of migrants to Australia with decline of the White Australia policy;
- delineate the recent criteria outlined by the Australian Government for migrants ; and
- give a profile of the immigrants and the challenges the face in Australia.

3.3 MAKING A 'WHITE' AUSTRALIA

Australian immigration policies have evolved from the mid-nineteenth century itself, a time when the country was engaged in the task of nation building and constitution making. This was a period of the discovery of gold in Australia (1851) followed by the so-called 'gold rush'. With the opening of Hong Kong as a British port in 1842 and the advent of faster sailing ships, emigration from China became a viable and profitable enterprise for merchants or brokers who provided passage to Chinese labour in return for an agreement requiring the emigrant to work for a low fixed wage or to make regular repayment for both loan and interest. Like the other gold seekers, the primary motive for the Chinese emigrants was profit but for the immigrant families, to return back to China. So many Chinese returned to their homeland without seriously considering adjusting themselves to the local social environs in Australia. The professed attitude of the white diggers towards the Chinese was far from being congenial. Ignorant of Chinese history, customs and ways of life they regarded the Chinese as evil, dangerous and as a "yellow peril" that would stain the white countries of the Pacific. It was widely believed that the Chinese would be bearers of diseases like small pox, cholera, and leprosy. The thrifty, hardworking and orderly nature of the Chinese immigrants was ignored and as the numbers of Chinese immigrants increased, they became an overriding factor in the adoption of discriminatory immigration policies in Australia.

3.3.1 White Australia Policy

There are distinct phases in the evolution of the White Australia Policy:

- 1) Certain restrictive actions against Chinese immigrants in the 1850s and 1860s by individual colonies;
- 2) An attempt at concerted restrictive action by all the colonies in 1880s;
- 3) Adoption of a uniform restrictive action in 1888; and
- 4) The official adoption of the White Australia Policy in 1901.

In the 1890s the major issue and the vital concern in the formation of a federal union was what kind of a country Australia should be. The colonies desired the federation to be shaped according what was best in their British inheritance and this led to the idea that Australia should remain white and homogeneous. The Chinese were already being looked at with suspicion and distrust. At points of time it was even felt that the Chinese immigrants were perhaps a ploy on the part of the Chinese government to establish a colony in Northern Australia. As Australia became a centre of European and Asiatic activity it was felt that the Australian people should consolidate what they already held and safeguard their future development. By this time immigrants from

India and Japan too had begun to arrive in the Australian colonies. So it was increasingly felt that it would be wise to exclude non-white immigrants from the very beginning especially from a part of the world inhabited by people of alien religions, social customs and disease. The premier of New South Wales in 1896 even made a statement to that effect in the legislature that it would be more humane to legally stop immigrants of the coloured races rather than have them legally come in, which in turn led, later on, to a lot of dissension and even bloodshed. By 1901, Australia had more than 4000 immigrants from India and Ceylon as well as a few from Japan, Syria and Afghanistan. Quite a few from India and Ceylon were British subjects but even these were excluded.

The Constitution Act of 1900 of the Commonwealth of Australia was passed by the Commonwealth of United Kingdom Act of 1900 and came into force on 1 January 1901. The powers of the Commonwealth parliament included the power to make laws on peace and order and for immigration of people of any race excluding that of the aboriginals. The new Commonwealth parliament enacted laws ensuring that non-whites would not be permitted to work or live in Australia. It also passed the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. The first Australian government of Edmund Barton decided to adopt the "Natal method" of dictation test in order to decide which immigrants to exclude. This method had been adopted in Natal in 1897 to exclude Indians because it was very easy to manipulate. The Immigration Act thus stated that anyone who failed the dictation test held in a European language could be excluded. The White Australia policy remained in force for 72 years. The Migration Act of 1958 eventually replaced the earlier Immigration Restriction Act substituting the dictation test by ministerial discretion. But the policy of exclusion, however, remained unchanged. The discriminatory policy received unequivocal support in Australia. The white Australians firmly believed that the ownership of the Australian territory belonged to the pioneering efforts of the British. Besides, they looked up to Britain for its liberal political system, advanced technologies and as a trader and financier. No less was their anxiety and fear of invasion by Asians through infiltration given Australia's proximity to Asia.

3.3.2 Inter-War and Post-War Years: Assimilation and Integration

During the inter-war years, the major aim was to woo and attract British immigrants. Even the small number of immigrants from Italy, Greece, Malta, Yugoslavia, and a few European countries that were admitted to Australia caused hostility and alarm within the country. The Commonwealth government accepted responsibility for migrant selection and took over control from the states of all operations in the United Kingdom. Immigration to Australia had declined during the First World War but not as much as it did during the Second World War. During the economic depression of the 1930s Australia was very hard hit with its underdeveloped industrial sectors and its heavy reliance on imports for manufactures and export of grain and wool. Unemployment reached very high levels. Thus no one felt secure enough to allow or even propose a non-discriminatory policy or even any immigration at all.

The Second World War also posed a great threat to Australia's security. Following the invasion of China in 1937, Japan had proclaimed a plan for a greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere and signed a military pact with Germany and Italy. The Japanese occupation of Timor Island and its landing on the coast of New Guinea brought them very close to Australia. Under these critical circumstances, Australia felt that for its security it had to increase its population. Arthur Calwell, appointed as the first Minister for Immigration announced a programme of immigration designed to increase the population by one per cent per annum with the aim of bringing in immigrants of British and European origins in a ratio of 10 to 1. However, this proved to be unrealistic and many displaced Europeans were admitted. This led to a major change in the Australian immigration

policy. The 1961 census reflected this change. Out of a population of 10.5 million, 8 per cent were of European origin. The largest among them were Italians, Germans, Greeks, Poles, Yugoslavs, and Hungarians, with some Austrians, Latvians, Russians and Ukrainians. So keen was Australia's desire to keep up the immigrant inflow that they even had direct bilateral agreements with countries of emigrants securing an agreed flow of immigrants. These were negotiated with Malta, Netherlands, Italy, West Germany, Austria, Belgium, Greece, Spain, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The agreements were discontinued in the 1970s when large numbers of refugees began to arrive.

These post-war policy initiatives led to a sustained migration to Australia and a remarkable degree of population growth. The newly arriving Australians up until the 1960s were expected to merge with the mainstream Australian society including in respect of the language and gradually discard their respective European cultural baggage. In a sense, this policy approach during most part of the 1960s paved the way for a multicultural Australian society though the accent still was on integration or what may be described as prolonged assimilation process in the predominantly Anglo Celtic Australian society.

3.3.3 Decline of the White Australia Policy

In 1972, the Labor government led by Gough Whitlam was elected to power. Whitlam's major concern was foreign affairs and Australia's image abroad. He was of the view that being a predominantly European nation, Australia could not afford the "stigma of racialism". In a speech delivered in January 1972, Dr. A. J. Forbes, Minister of Immigration in the McMahon government (of the Liberal-National-Country-Party coalition) attacked the Australian Labor Party (ALP)'s immigration policies and stressed that what Australia required was a homogeneous society without any permanent minorities. In 1969, under John Gorton, then Prime Minister, one of the issues that had gained prominence was that of assisted passage to non-Europeans of British citizenship. Only British migrants selected for assisted passages (generally on the basis of having a specific trade or profession) were given assistance; not all British citizens were eligible for assistance. But there were number British citizens of West Indian and Asian origins that were denied assisted passage. Victoria's State Minister for Immigration even made a statement to the effect that "99 per cent of all people with dark blood were" were deliberately rejected by Australia. This discrimination did not last much longer with the Liberal National Country Party Coalition losing elections in December 1972.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) too had been a supporter of the White Australia policy for a long time. But by 1971, the ALP had decided to go for non-discrimination meaning thereby a universal immigration policy applicable uniformly to all and removal of all traces of preference for the British. But along with this major change there would be a reduction in the overall intake of migrants to Australia along with changes in the selection procedures, placing more emphasis on family reunion and less on deliberate government recruitment of qualified migrants. This meant that despite a non-discriminatory immigration policy, if the number of immigrants would be reduced, the migrants coming in from non-European countries would be reduced. And since the presence of non-Europeans already in Australia was small, the stress of family immigration would mean that the entry of non-European immigrants would also be small. The underlying strategy of the Labor government in respect of its revised immigration policy was to convince the hardliners in the party and outside that the revision would not encourage sudden increase in the Asian and other migrants to take away jobs from Australians. It was also meant that neither the changes in the immigration policy was intended to increase steadily the population of Australia. Whitlam's Labor government was more concerned with building a responsible and caring society and ensuring a high standard of living for all Australians. It was under these circumstances, with some Australians

like Arthur Calwell still touting for the White Australia policy that Whitlam took the decision to do away finally with the White Australia policy.

3.4 TOWARDS A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

3.4.1 Whitlam Years

It was during the Whitlam years (1972-1975) that the new immigration policy was formulated. A.J. Grassby, the administration's first Immigration Minister played an important role in promoting the cause of multiculturalism and racial equality in Australia. In 1973 he issued a statement called *A Multicultural Society for the Future*. In this, he set out the principles of ethnic heterogeneity and cultural pluralism. Emphasising the rich diversity of Australia's population, Grassby outlined his action programme on immigration in a report entitled: *Australia's Decade of Decision: A Report on Migration, Citizenship, Settlement and Population*. The report announced a new immigrants selection policy based on three categories: i) immediate family members sponsored by people already resident in Australia; ii) other sponsored migrants including non-dependent relatives and friends; and iii) un-sponsored migrants with the skills required to meet Australia's national needs. The highest priority would be given to the reunion of immediate family members. Thus a new 'Structured Selection Assessment System' (SSAS) was introduced to improve migration selection process.

There was growing concern in Australia about the settlement problems of migrants and about the high rate of departure of the settlers from Australia. This raised questions of the suitability of the settlers being chosen. The SSAS, which the government settled for in 1973, was found to be inadequate and so did not last very long. The Whitlam government ran into problems from 1974 onwards. With the mounting world recession and increasing unemployment, it was decided to reduce the intake of immigrants and encourage only recruitment of skilled labour.

3.4.2 Fraser and Multiculturalism

The succeeding Malcolm Fraser's new government evolved its policy priorities towards immigration that had been worked out during the final months of the Whitlam government when the Liberal and National Country parties issued a policy statement on immigration linking immigration to population policy and national development. It promised an active immigration programme and suggested a commitment to multicultural policies. Fraser's seven years as prime minister were important for immigration and ethnic affairs including management, selection and admission of immigrants, provision of migrant services and the whole area of multiculturalism. There was a firm belief that a large immigration would be important for Australian development and that multiculturalism, if kept under control, was in the interest of Australia. Much more, it would also fetch a large chunk of the ethnic vote.

Around the same time, it was reflected in policy debates that Australia was experiencing a period of fertility decline on account of the fact that the birth rate had slumped to a long term "no growth" level coinciding with a steady decline in immigration. Under these circumstances while the only major instrument available to the government was immigration, resorting to such an option called for a sound basis taking account of medium- and long-term implications for Australia. With these considerations in view the Australian Population and Immigration Council (APIC), set up by the Whitlam government, was reconstituted. Its major task was to come up with a Green Paper-a discussion paper on immigration and population matters.

The report of APIC, *Immigration Policies and Australia's Population*, was tabled in March 1977.

It examined the recent trends in and prospects for population growth in Australia. Examining the history of immigration and the present immigration policies, the report sought to explore the place of family reunion in Australia's immigration movement and balancing this with the need for skilled migrants and Australia's commitment to helping refugees. Not only the implications of immigration and its effects were discussed but also the options open to Australia were underlined. As for the long-run implications, the report was quite emphatic stating that there was no reason why Australia should not be able to absorb a larger immigrant population.

Initiatives regarding migrant services and programmes followed these policy overtures. The Fraser government in 1977 announced a review of the post-arrival services provided to migrants and appointed Frank E. Galbally, a criminal lawyer from Melbourne, as the chairman of the review group. The review was completed in a year's time and the government endorsed the recommendations. Among others, these recommendations included English language teaching for children and adult migrants, settlement services and setting up an Institute of Multicultural Affairs. The Galbally review was a statement by the Fraser government that Australia should be accepted as a multicultural society in which the migrants had the right to maintain their own cultural and racial identity if they wished to do so. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA), as recommended by the review, was soon set up with its aim being to develop an awareness of the diverse cultures in the Australian society that have surfaced as a result of migration; to promote tolerance, understanding and mutual esteem among different cultural groups; to promote a cohesive Australian society by assisting members of the Australian community to share with one another their diverse cultures; and to encourage an atmosphere in which the ethnic communities in Australia would have the opportunity to participate fully in the Australian society.

The Galbally review of the services for immigrants, the government's acceptance of its recommendations and its implementation followed by the creation of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA)-all these made a positive impact in evolving multiculturalism in Australia. If nothing, at least it made a modest attempt to define multiculturalism in the Australian context. Notwithstanding these constructive policy overtures, the Fraser government was unduly criticised for doing things in great hurry, all with a view to get as much political mileage and gain support from ethnic minorities. Yet Fraser government went ahead. By January 1979, a completely revised migration selection system called the Numerically-Weighted Multi Factor Assessment System (NUMAS) was announced replacing the SSAS. It was an amalgamation of the Canadian Points System and the Structured Selection Assessment system.

3.4.3 Hawke Government and Ahead

In 1983, the Labor government returned under Bob Hawke, a popular leader. In response to the world recession and unemployment, Australia reduced its intake of immigrants especially that of "skilled labour" who had no relatives to sponsor them and were admitted by virtue of their skills and talents. It was also based on the policy rationale of the Hawke government that immigration should not be a major supplier of skilled labour. Thus emphasis was on family and refugee migration and on business migration programmes. From 1985 onwards, Australia's recorded low fertility rate and prospects of population decline made the government opt for expansion in immigration. In 1986, the government initiated a review of multiculturalism. James Jupp, a political scientist, chaired the review committee. Notwithstanding the public outcry against multiculturalism, the Jupp's report reaffirmed multiculturalism as an appropriate policy to be followed by the government. It highlighted the disadvantages faced by the immigrants especially in the labour market and in areas such as education in Australia and argued in favour of removal of structural inequalities. The emphasis was on equal opportunity to all Australians to participate in all aspects

of life; equitable share of government resources; opportunity to participate in government policies and programmes; and the right to maintain one's own religion, culture and language in Australia. It was suggested that the existing immigrant services should be improved. The present government, without making any significant departure, announced what Prime Minister John Howard called the New Agenda for Multicultural Australia and reaffirmed his commitment to the policy of "Multicultural Australia" and added the phrase "United in Diversity".

3.5 RECENT IMMIGRATION

Though anyone from any country can apply to migrate to Australia, regardless of their ethnic origin, gender, race or religion, migration is dependent on the applicant's ability to meet the specific migration criteria, which are identified and related to Australia's national interest and needs. Since late 1990s, emphasis is on the stream of skilled migrants. At the planning level, the government has set the target of admitting at least 58 per cent of the new migrants from the Skill Stream. (The total migrant intake in any one financial year is made up by adding together the Migration and Humanitarian Programmes). Immigrants are admitted under two broad categories: Migrant programme and Humanitarian programme.

The Migrant Programme consists of Family Migrants, Skilled Migrants and special eligibility migrants. Family Migrants are those being sponsored by immediate family members who are already Australian citizens or permanent residents. These migrants do not require a points test. The Skilled Migrants are those who have specific skills and fulfill the requirements of having the skill that would be suited to Australia's current needs. They have to satisfy a points test in order to qualify for immigration. Even the skilled immigration has a number of categories like the Business Skills category for those who will go into business within a short time of arrival to Australia. The Employer Nomination scheme enables employers in Australia to nominate a person of their choice for permanent residence in Australia. The Skilled-Independent category is open to those who are not being sponsored by a relative or an employer. For them the points test is very important as it is based on factors that would help assist them to settle faster in Australia.

The Special Eligibility Migrants are former citizens or residents wanting to return to Australia as well as some citizens of New Zealand.

The Humanitarian Programme is designed for Refugees or Humanitarian Migrants. A major component of this programme is the offshore resettlement, which assists people in humanitarian need overseas for whom resettlement in another country is the only option. The onshore protection component is for those people already in Australia who arrived on temporary visas or without valid visa, and who claim Australia's protection.

All these different categories for these different visas must meet different criteria and all of them must meet Australia's rules on health and character. The Skilled-Independent category is selected on the basis of points awarded. The Points system takes into consideration age, language, skills and qualification (skills that are in demand in Australia fetch more points), and bonus points for spouse as well as education (if educated in Australia). In order to pass the test, a minimum number of points must be scored. On reaching this score or above, the migrant qualifies for migration. However, there is a second threshold level that is also the "pool" mark which is lower than that needed for the independent category. Applications which meet the points required for the pool are held in reserve for about a year or two in case the government decides to lower the minimum points required for immigration.

3.6 IMMIGRANTS AND AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

- i) **Demography:** Australia is one of the youngest post-industrial societies. Its high growth rate is due to the phenomenon of continued immigration. Its fertility rate is low. The proportion of those born outside Australia has remained constant ever since the 1950s but the composition as we have seen already has changed dramatically. In 1954, no less than 90 per cent of the children of immigrants were from European countries, 5 per cent from Asian countries and over 1 per cent from New Zealand. By 1990, about 30 per cent had come from European countries (UK and Ireland), 39 per cent from Asian countries and 14 per cent from New Zealand. By 1990-1991, the top ten countries of origin of immigrants in order of their proportion were UK/Ireland, Hong Kong, Vietnam, New Zealand, China, Philippines, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, and Lebanon (Borowski and Shu, 1992, p.42). By 2001-2002, the order of proportion according to the Government of Australia sources had changed according to the table below.

Major source countries

July 2001 to June 2002 settler arrivals, by country of birth		
New Zealand	15 663	17.6%
United Kingdom	8 749	9.8%
China	6 708	7.5%
South Africa	5 714	6.4%
India	5 091	5.7%
Indonesia	4 221	4.7%
Philippines	2 837	3.2%
Fed. Rep. Of Yugoslavia	2 082	2.3%
Sri Lanka	2 011	2.3%
Malaysia	1 939	2.2%

Source: Government of Australia, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, <http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/02key.htm#1>, accessed on 9 April 2006.

The age structure of the total foreign-born population is weighted towards the older population because most of the children are included in the Australian-born population. Only in the mid-1980s it was recognised that the ethnic communities do not enjoy equitable access to services and facilities. The Home and Community Care Programme was launched in 1985 as a response. Since 1987 there has been substantial growth in the provision of ethno-specific institutional accommodation.

- ii) **Racism:** We have seen in the preceding sections, that racism pervaded Australian society at its inception. To begin with, it was the Aboriginal population that bore the brunt of racist policies. With the increase in immigrants during the "gold rush" period, the Chinese too became victims of racial hatred and hostility just as much coloured labourers like the

Melanesians. Hierarchy of racial preference was reflected in the wages that the workers received. The Australian-born workers and the British immigrants received the highest wages, while the Chinese were perhaps only a shade better off than the Melanesians. By 1947, 90 per cent of Australians were of British origin and another 8.4 per cent of European origin. Soon after that East European refugees entered Australia. The Eastern, Northern and Southern Europeans who entered during the post-1947 along with the later day immigrants from West Asia, Indo-China and Latin America came at a time when the Australian society was rabidly racist. By mid-1960s the White Australia policy came under cloud and since then exceptions were made to the category of highly skilled 'coloured' migrants. Nonetheless non-English speaking immigrants were discriminated. Asians came to be accepted from mid-1970s and as late as 1988 there was a debate in Australia of reducing the intake of Asian immigrants and abandoning multiculturalism in favour of a 'one nation' policy. A National enquiry conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1991 found that racism permeated society. It also pointed out that the racism experienced by non-English speaking 'white' Europeans was similar to that experienced by people of colour from other regions including importantly Asia.

- iii) **Language and Economic Status:** Low levels of English language proficiency affect immigrants even after a long period of residence. A significant number of immigrants with low proficiency levels in English language persist in Australia. Through the different initiatives, which the government has launched to evolve, a multicultural society admittedly is facilitating individuals to live in minority linguistic communities.
- iv) **Education:** Given Australia's official status of being a monolingual country, population is generally seen in terms of English-speaking and non-English speaking as also in terms of overseas-born and Australian-born. This defines the needs of the society influenced largely by the priorities set in terms of education. Having established a policy framework to deal with diversity, institution of education is a significant area through which skill is assessed. The federal Immigration (Education) Act promulgated in 1971 which recognised the responsibility of the education system to provide special programmes to meet the special needs of the non-English-speaking immigrant children. It was a significant departure from the past practice of leaving it to the constituent states of the federation. Yet, there still persists certain challenges faced by the immigrant population in education in regard to communication; incorporating multicultural elements in curriculum (such as English as a second language, intercultural studies, migration studies, Australian studies etc.); levels of poverty among the immigrants (which may result in immigrant children dropping out of schools); and available resources to support these various activities at the school level.

3.7 SUMMARY

There is no gainsaying that Australia, is today a country of immigrants drawn from different parts of the world and, like the United States and Canada, it is recognised as a multicultural settler society. It is in the backdrop of its present demographic profile, we examined in this unit, at some length, how this transformation came about. Admittedly, when the six colonies joined to evolve what came to be known as the Commonwealth of Australia at the turn of the last century, it was predominantly a country of 'white' Australians. One of the very first laws passed by the Australian federation-Immigration Restriction Act of 1901-was restrictive in nature and content allowing only the people of Britain to enter as immigrants. At least for the next five decades Australia maintained its so-called White Australia policy. Several factors including importantly the irrational

fears and heightened anxieties of large-scale immigration from Asia along with the early settlers desire that Australia should remain as a land to settle only for the British were the over-riding factors that led to the White Australia policy. Under the threat of Japanese invasion during the Second World War, Australia realised its need for a larger population for its own security. Even then the effort still was to get in more British immigrants. But when it proved infeasible, Australia relented by admitting displaced Europeans in the hope that they would assimilate into the predominantly 'white' Australia. Ever since the influx of immigrants of different nationalities including non-Europeans in Australia eventually paved the way for a multicultural Australia. The successive governments beginning from 1972 revised further the immigration policy. In the process, non-discriminatory elements of its past policy were gradually removed reflecting a new universal immigration policy promoting multiculturalism.

3.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Give a brief description of the White Australia Policy.
- 2) What led to the decline of a White Australia and emergence of a multicultural society?
- 3) Describe Australia's Multicultural policy. What impact did it have on immigrants to Australia?
- 4) Explain the points system in Australian immigration.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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