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Charles Darwin University

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*Published in:*  
Research Briefs

Published: 01/01/2015

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Taylor, A., Payer, H., & Brokensha, H. (2015). A Demographic profile of International Migrants in Northern Australia. *Research Briefs*, (04), 1-8. [http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/research\\_brief-2015-04.pdf](http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/research_brief-2015-04.pdf)

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# Research Brief

Issue 4, 2015

## **A Demographic profile of International Migrants in Northern Australia**

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## RESEARCH AIM

*In this brief we profile overseas born residents in northern Australia based on demographic and socio-economic characteristics. This allows us to gain a deeper understanding of international migrants to this part of Australia in light of the Developing northern Australia policy which discusses increasing the population in northern Australia as a key issue and challenge for development.*

## KEY FINDINGS

- The top five source countries and regions for overseas born in northern Australia in 2011 were the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Maritime South-East Asia, Southern Europe and Western Europe.
- The results show a significantly older overseas born population and a considerably lower proportion of those aged less than 25 years compared to other residents in northern Australia.
- Investigating occupations suggests a lower proportion of overseas born residents were in professional, managerial or clerical occupations in 2011, while higher proportions were labourers, technicians and trade workers or machinery operators.
- Northern Australia struggles to retain senior and teenage overseas born residents. This is important in the context of the Developing Northern Australia agenda.

## **1. Introduction**

Despite covering almost half of Australia's mainland, northern Australia has a relatively small population of just over one million people. This translates to five per cent of the overall population in Australia. Increasing migration to regional and northern areas is a key pillar in the northern development agenda for the Australian and State and Territory Governments for their potential to increase the size of the population and to work in skilled jobs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014).

However, there is limited information on international migrants who have moved to northern Australia. In this research brief we profile recent arrivers as well as longer-term overseas born residents to the region by examining their demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The results allow us to obtain a more insightful understanding of important contributors to the realisation of northern Australia's development potential.

## **2. Methods**

We analysed data from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing from which we extrapolated custom tables using the ABS software Table Builder. We compare and contrast profiles of overseas born living in Northern Australia to those in the rest of Australia, as well as comparing recently arrived (2006 to 2011) to longer-term northern Australia overseas born residents.

Northern Australia is defined geographically in line with the Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014) and was built as a custom geographic area based on the Statistical Area Level 2 geography (SA2). For individual SA2s on the boundary of northern and southern Australia, we allocated these according to the location of the bulk of the population resident within the SA2. This approach did not affect the findings of the analysis.

## **3. Profiling international migrants to NA**

### **3.1 Size, distribution and sources**

In 2011, overseas born residents comprised 16% of the population of northern Australia in comparison to 27% in the rest of Australia. Of these, 23% were new arrivers (having arrived to Australia between 2006 and 2011) compared to 30% in the rest of Australia. The distribution of overseas born residents within northern Australia is relatively city-centric with around 30% living in Cairns and the Greater Darwin area. High concentrations, at around 40% of the total population, lived in the suburbs of Wagaman (NT), Brinkin – Nakara (NT), Cairns City (QLD), Palmerston – South (NT), and Darwin city (NT).

The top five source countries and regions for overseas born in northern Australia in 2011 were the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Maritime South-East Asia<sup>1</sup>, Southern and Western Europe (Table 1). The major differences to the rest of Australia were greater proportions from New Zealand (18% compared to 9%) as well as Maritime South-East Asia (10% compared to 8%) but a lower proportion from Southern and East Africa. In 2011, around 65% of all overseas born in the NT were from these sources, while in the rest of Australia a lower proportion were from the top five sources for that region (55%).

However, sources for overseas born in northern Australia appear to be changing markedly with large differences between those who arrived to Australia before 2006 (long-term residents) compared to those who arrived to Australia after 2006 (the ‘new arrivers’). This features a reduced importance for New Zealand and Europe as sources for northern Australia and the increased prominence of Asia. For example, a far greater proportion of long-term resident overseas born were from the United Kingdom and New Zealand (32%) than were new arrivers (21%) while sources for new arrivers featured Southern and East Africa (6% for long-term residents compared to 20% for new arrivers) and growth in Chinese Asia as a source (7% compared to 12% for new arrivers).

**Table 1 - Main sources for overseas born residents including long-term residents versus new arrivers**

Source country/region	All of Australia		Northern Australia	
	Northern Australia	Rest of Australia	Arrived before 2006	Arrived after 2006
United Kingdom	22.3%	20.8%	23.40%	12.09%
New Zealand	18.4%	8.9%	8.46%	9.70%
Maritime South-East Asia	10.4%	7.7%	7.12%	9.98%
Southern and East Africa	6.5%	4.7%	5.81%	19.69%
Western Europe	6.5%	4.6%	5.32%	2.19%

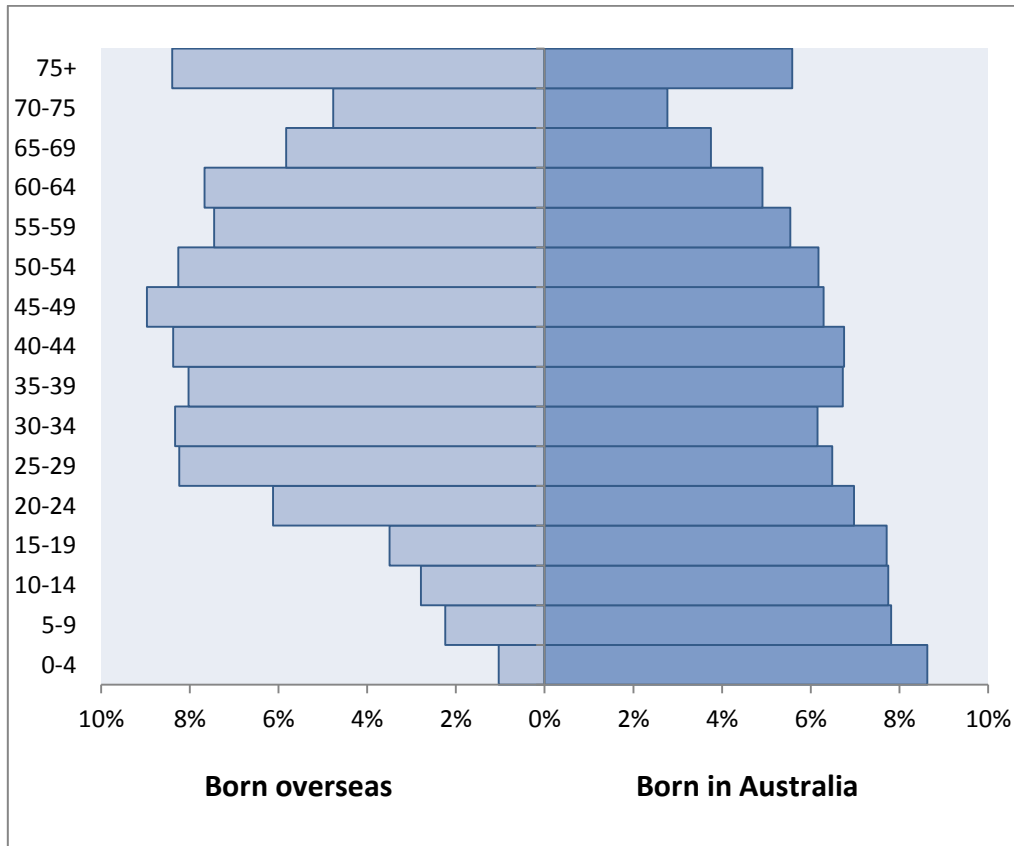
Source: Custom figure created from ABS TableBuilder

### 3.2 Personal and family characteristics

The age profile for overseas born residents of northern Australia is strikingly different to those residents born in Australia (Figure 2). These feature a markedly older overseas born population and a significantly lower proportion of those aged less than 25 years.

<sup>1</sup> Maritime South-East Asia includes Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Timor-Leste. Southern Asia incorporates Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**Figure 2 – Age profile for northern Australia residents born overseas and in Australia, 2011**



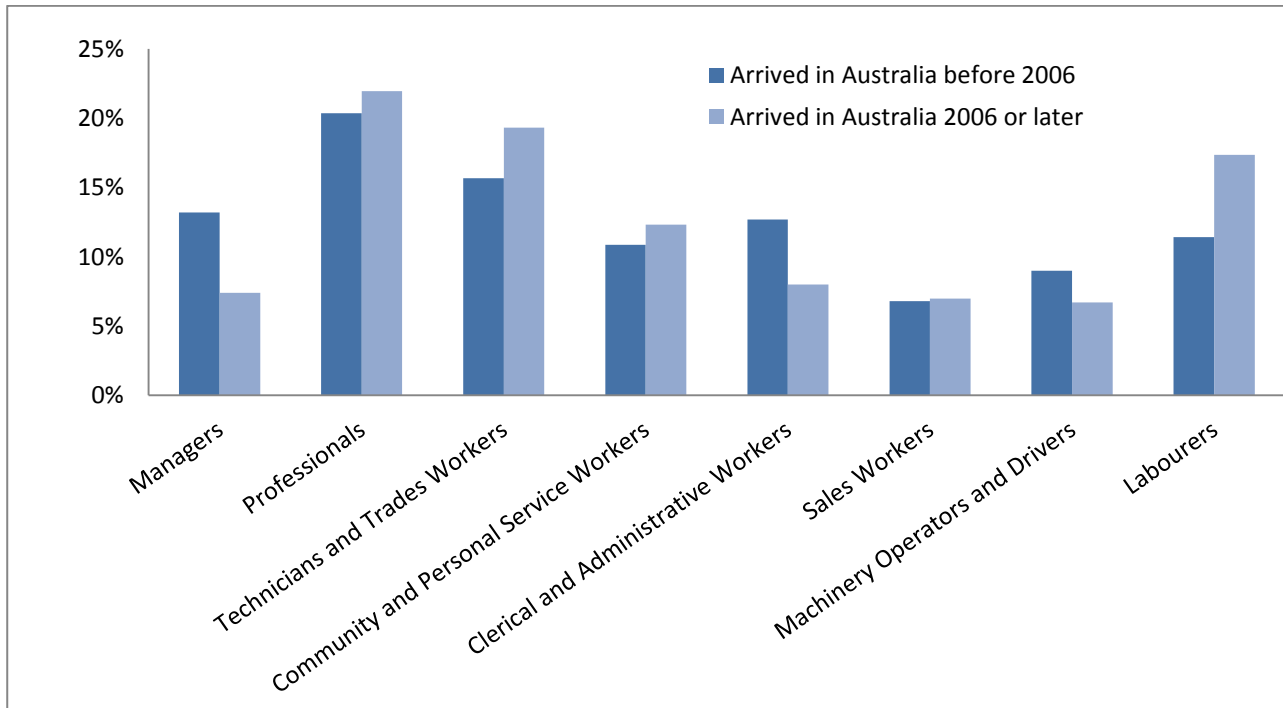
Source: Custom figure created from ABS TableBuilder

In terms of marital status, a greater proportion of overseas born in northern Australia were in a de facto relationship (14%) compared to the rest of Australia (7%), while fewer were married (52% and 58% respectively).

### 3.3 Qualifications and workforce indicators

Of those with a post-school qualification, a lower proportion of overseas born residents in northern Australia (43%) held bachelor degrees or higher qualifications compared to the rest of Australian overseas born residents (53%). Certificate level qualifications are more prominent in the north but, with growth in new arrivals under skilled migration streams in the last decade, a much larger proportion of new arrivals (53%) held a Bachelor or higher level qualification than for longer term residents (38%).

Investigating occupations suggests a lower proportion of overseas born residents were in professional, managerial or clerical occupations in 2011, while higher proportions were labourers, technicians and trade workers or machinery operators. However, new arrivals differ markedly to long-term residents with a greater proportion in professional occupations (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 – Occupations for overseas born residents in northern Australia, 2011**


Source: Custom figure created from ABS TableBuilder

The main industries of employment in 2011 for both northern Australian residents and those born overseas were Health Care and Social Assistance, as well as Accommodation and Food Services (Table 2). However, for new arrivers both these industries are far more prominent, while for longer term residents a higher proportion are employed in Public Administration and Safety, and Education and Training. Mining is comparatively more important in the north while manufacturing is more prominent in the rest of Australia.

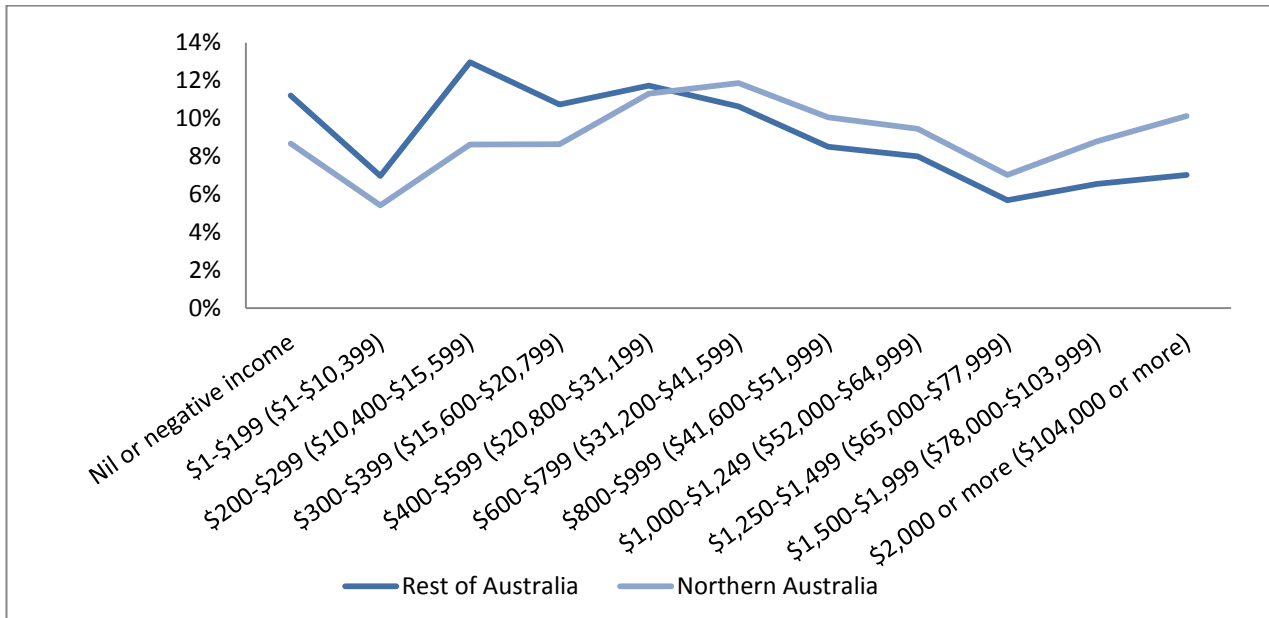
**Table 2 – Industry of employment for overseas born residents, 2011**

Industry of employment	Northern Australia	Rest of Australia	Long-term residents	New arrivers
Health Care and Social Assistance	13.2%	12.1%	12.8%	14.3%
Accommodation and Food Services	10.9%	12.1%	8.6%	16.3%
Construction	7.9%	5.7%	8.0%	7.8%
Retail Trade	7.7%	8.5%	7.8%	7.6%
Public Administration and Safety	7.7%	2.5%	8.8%	4.9%
Mining	7.4%	1.6%	7.4%	7.3%
Education and Training	6.7%	4.8%	7.7%	4.4%
Manufacturing	5.7%	9.6%	5.1%	7.0%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	5.2%	3.9%	5.6%	4.2%
Professional, Scientific/ Technical Services	4.8%	9.2%	4.8%	4.7%
Administrative and Support Services	3.5%	5.0%	3.5%	3.6%
Other Services	3.3%	3.2%	3.3%	3.4%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2.9%	1.3%	2.6%	3.6%
Wholesale Trade	2.3%	4.0%	2.3%	2.2%
Other	5.5%	8.3%	5.9%	4.4%

Source: Custom figure created from ABS TableBuilder

Incomes for overseas born residents in northern Australia were markedly higher than for those in the rest of Australia in 2011. For example, 35% in northern Australia stated they earned \$1,000 per week or more compared to 27% in the rest of Australia (Figure 3) nevertheless, a large proportion of new arrivals (15%) stated they usually earned no income at all.

**Figure 3 – Income profiles for overseas born residents of Australia, 2011**



Source: Custom figure created from ABS TableBuilder

### 3.4 Turnover and retention

It is possible to approximate interstate migration turnover rates and net interstate migration numbers for overseas born residents by examining movements into and out of northern Australia during the five years prior to 2011. For northern Australia, gross interstate turnover (2006 to 2011) for overseas born residents (the sum of movements in and out of northern Australia by overseas born Australian residents as a proportion of the 2011 overseas born population of northern Australia) was 3.8%. This compares to 1.5% for Australian born residents, indicating overseas born residents of northern Australia are relatively mobile. It is not possible to ascertain the numbers of overseas born residents of northern Australia who left to reside overseas.

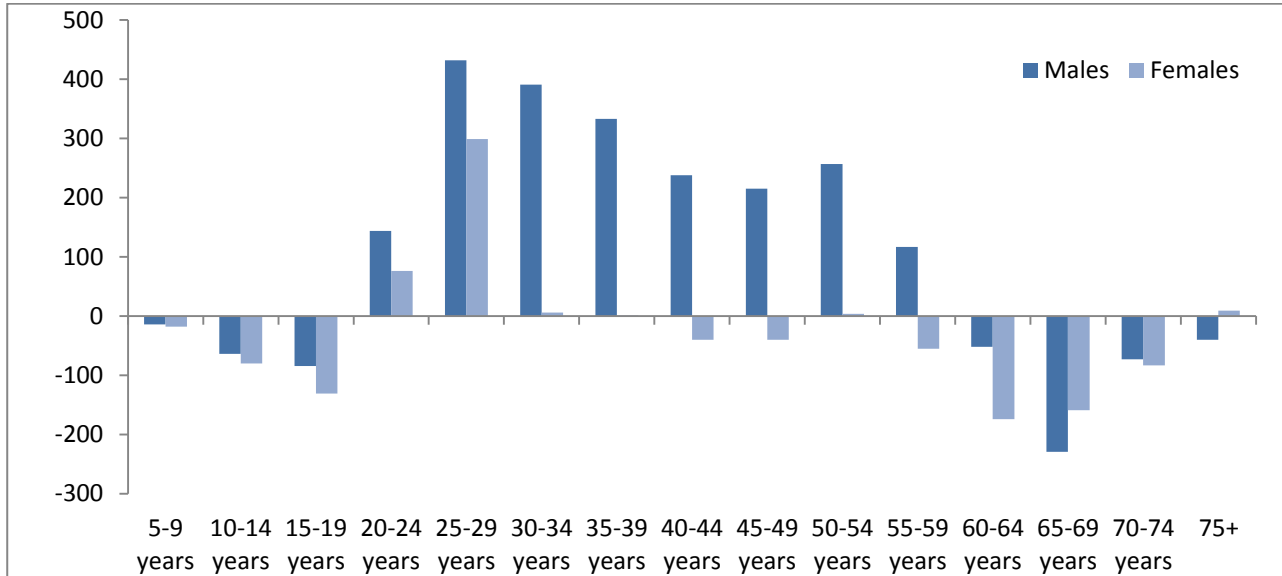
Net interstate migration suggests that overall there is a positive inflow to northern Australia of overseas born residents which, during 2006 to 2011, was the equivalent to approximately 1% of the 2011 overseas born population of northern Australia. However, net migration was only positive for males (at around 1,500 people) while for females it was negative on a net basis (around -360 people). This aligns with the resident sex ratio which indicates there are 104 male overseas born residents in northern Australia for every 100 females.

The age profiles for net interstate migration of overseas born reveal a domination of males in working age while positive net migration for females occurred only for those aged in their 20s



(Figure 4). It also suggests there is significant ‘leakage’ from northern Australia of residents, particularly females, approaching or in retirement, as well as a net loss of teenagers.

**Figure 4 – Overseas born net interstate migration, northern Australia, 2006 to 2011**



Source: Custom figure created from ABS TableBuilder

Note: These data show the net result of subtracting overseas born residents of Australia who lived in northern Australia then moved to the rest of Australia, from those who lived in the rest of Australia and moved to northern Australia during the period 2006 to 2011.

## 4. Conclusion

In summary, northern Australian overseas born residents are older and less likely to be married than their counterparts in the rest of Australia. New arrivals are more highly qualified and have higher incomes than longer term overseas born residents in the north. Employment is more likely to be in labouring or trade and technical occupations and the industries of healthcare, accommodation and mining feature more prominently in the north. The flows of overseas born residents to and from northern Australia are net positive, but only for males with the region losing significant numbers of female seniors and teenagers to the rest of Australia.

These findings highlight several challenges for the goal of growing the population in northern Australia, as well as for attracting and retaining overseas born residents. Northern Australia loses its youth and seniors to the rest of Australia. While we have specifically examined the overseas born residents, this is also true for all residents. Teenagers and seniors are vital members of the population for achieving demographic ‘balance’ and for a healthy social fabric. Retirees and seniors take with them significant social and economic capital as well as the support they provide to family and friends, and the tendency to undertake volunteer work.

Outflows for teenagers peak at ages 15 to 19 and are likely the result of young people leaving to undertake university ‘down south’ or pursuing careers. Achieving innovative capacity in northern Australia and ‘home growing’ skilled young workers should therefore be seen as an important

goal. Consequently, it is important that northern universities are funded to grow the size and quality of their northern focused research and education activities to encourage northern teenagers to go onto universities within the region, with the aim of retaining them once they have graduated.

## 5. References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2011), 2011 Census of Population and Housing viewed March 18, 2015, <http://www.abs.gov.au/census>
- Commonwealth of Australia (2014), Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia, viewed March 23, 2015, <http://northernaustralia.dpmc.gov.au/content/copyright>.