

## The Changing Dynamics of ASEAN International Migration

Graeme Hugo\*

*The University of Adelaide*

**Abstract:** South-east Asia is becoming increasingly significant in global international migration. This paper summarises recent changes in patterns of immigration and emigration in ASEAN countries. These data, however, do not detect the complexity of South-east Asia's migration system, and this is demonstrated by focusing on the ASEAN-Australia migration corridor. ASEAN migration relationships with other countries are complex, multi-directional and reciprocal, although this is not evident in traditional data. There are significant opportunities for international movement to play a role in economic development and poverty reduction in South-east Asia.

Key words: ASEAN, Australia, development, education, international migration, skilled migration

JEL classification: F22, I24, J15, O15

### 1. Introduction

With the imminent creation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, there is increasing focus on population movements in South-east Asia. In other regions of the world, breaking down barriers to trade and financial flows has involved some relaxation of migration constraints. While the Mode 4 provisions of Free Trade Agreements have rarely been operationalised, the connection between migration on the one hand and trade and broader diplomacy on the other remains an important discussion. Yet the understanding of the complexity of migration patterns influencing ASEAN remains limited and there is limited evidence base for its causes and consequences, all of which are a barrier to the formulation of an effective migration policy. As a recent World Bank report concludes (Tomas and Summers 2009: 1).

“The data on international migration that countries now collect and publish are so limited, however, that we know much less about how much and what kind of migration is happening in today's world than we know about international trade and investment flows. This leaves us unable to answer some of the most basic questions about how the movement of people interacts with the development process.”

This paper seeks to unravel some of the complexity of international migration in ASEAN. It first provides an overview of contemporary ASEAN international migration using traditional demographic migration data sources. The second part of the paper demonstrates the limitations of these data sources by focusing on a single corridor of ASEAN population movement for which we have comprehensive information – that between ASEAN countries and Australia. The final part of the paper briefly addresses some of the implications of these patterns, especially with respect to development in ASEAN.

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\* Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, The University of Adelaide SA, 5005, Australia.  
Email: [graeme.hugo@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:graeme.hugo@adelaide.edu.au)

## 2. International Migration in ASEAN

In 2013 the United Nations estimated that 232 million people (3.2% of the global population) lived outside their country of birth. Of these, 4.1 per cent were in ASEAN countries while 8.1 per cent had moved out of an ASEAN nation. This compares to ASEAN being currently home to 8.6 per cent of the global population. The United Nations' analysis further identified the South-east Asian region as having one of the fastest growing international migrant populations of any world region (Figure 1). Between 2000 and 2013, the number of immigrants in ASEAN nations increased by almost 80 per cent! Another important feature is that much of the migration is drawn from *within* the region. A World Bank analysis (Ratha *et al.* 2013: 13) depicted in Figure 2 found that while the number of people identified as emigrants from East Asia and the Pacific increased by 60 per cent between 2000 and 2013 to reach 35 million, the proportion moving within the region increased from 46 to 48 per cent.

The share of those emigrants who moved to ASEAN nations had increased from 42 in 2000 to 45 per cent in 2013 (Figure 2). It is interesting to note in passing that the proportion moving to Australia also increased from 15.7 to 16.5 per cent. Clearly, the ASEAN region is both an increasingly important destination and an origin of international migrants in the contemporary world.

Table 1 shows the number of persons born in ASEAN countries living outside their country of birth and the number of foreign-born in those countries in 2010 and 2013, with the number of emigrants being twice the number of immigrants. There is a clear contrast between countries in which there are a large number of immigrants (Brunei,

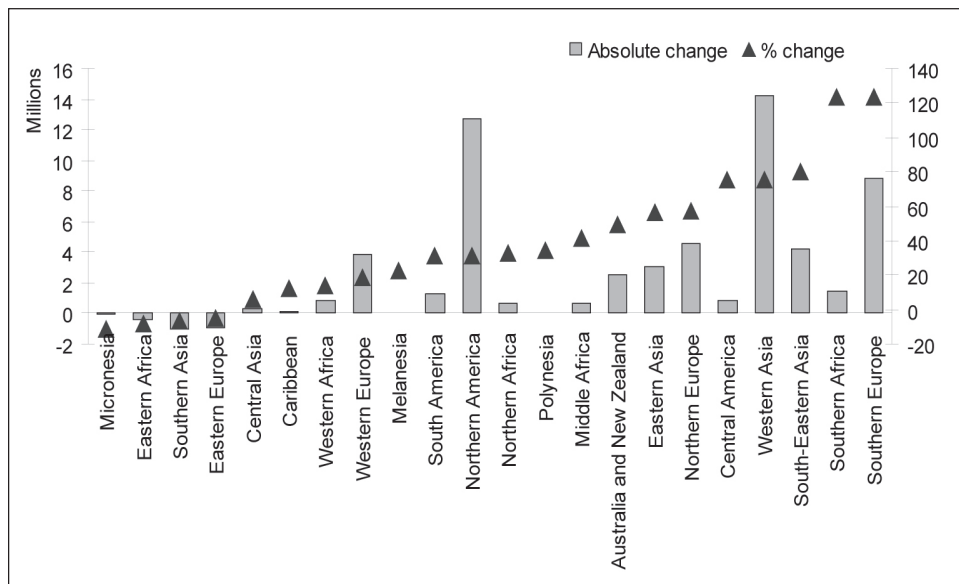


Figure 1. Number of international migrants: absolute change and percentage change between 2000 and 2013, by region

Source: Unpublished data supplied by United Nations.

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**Figure 2.** Number of people moving within the East Asia-Pacific region according to destination, 2000 and 2013  
 Source: Ratha et al. 2013: 13

Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand) and those which are significant sources of emigrants. The table indicates that this pattern aligns closely with the average income levels of the countries. In Malaysia and Thailand there is both significant emigration and immigration, especially the latter. It is striking that in each of the destination countries, there has been a rapid increase in immigrants between 2010 and 2013.

The significance of ASEAN as a global source of international migrants is indicated by the United Nations (2013: 13), identifying the Philippines, Myanmar and Vietnam as among the 10 countries in the world with the highest levels of net emigration in 2000-2010. The importance of intra-regional mobility is also underlined in that report, and two ASEAN migration corridors (Myanmar to Thailand and Cambodia to Thailand) are identified as being among the ten highest annual rates between 1990 and 2013 (United Nations 2013: 6).

The significance of intra-ASEAN migration in the inflows to the four main destination countries of the region is shown in Figure 3, which depicts the distribution of origin of immigrants to ASEAN nations in 2013. The five largest countries of origin are in fact other ASEAN countries (Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia) which together account for 64.5 per cent of immigrants in ASEAN. The other major sources of immigrants to the region are China (645,096), Bangladesh (432,101), India (347,746), Nepal (212,371), Pakistan (159,336) and Japan (156,496). Overall intra-ASEAN migration accounts for 68.9 per cent of all immigration to ASEAN countries.

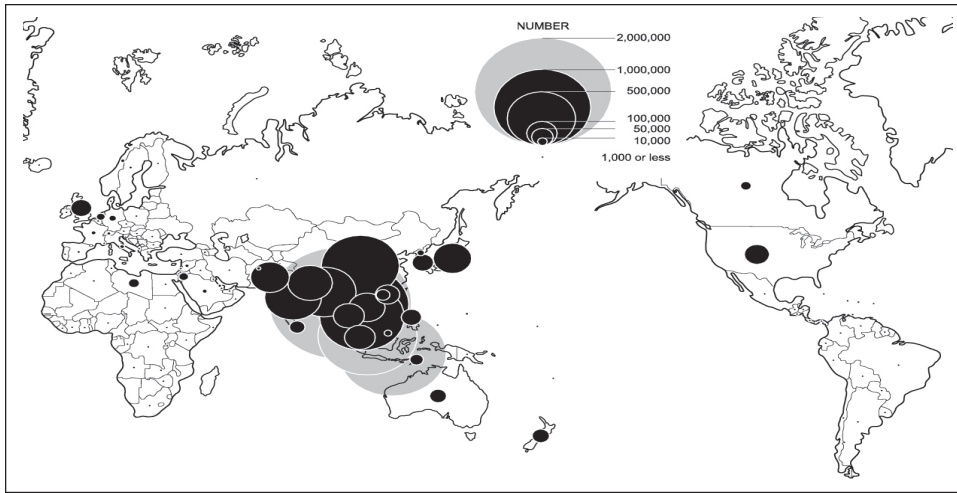
Turning to emigration, Figure 4 shows the destination of all emigrants from ASEAN in 2013. The most important single destination is the United States which had 4.32 million ASEAN-born residents in 2013, and this represents 23 per cent of the total ASEAN diaspora. Clearly, intra-ASEAN movement is also important with Thailand (3.6 million), Malaysia

**Table 1.** ASEAN countries: Emigration and immigration, 2010 and 2013

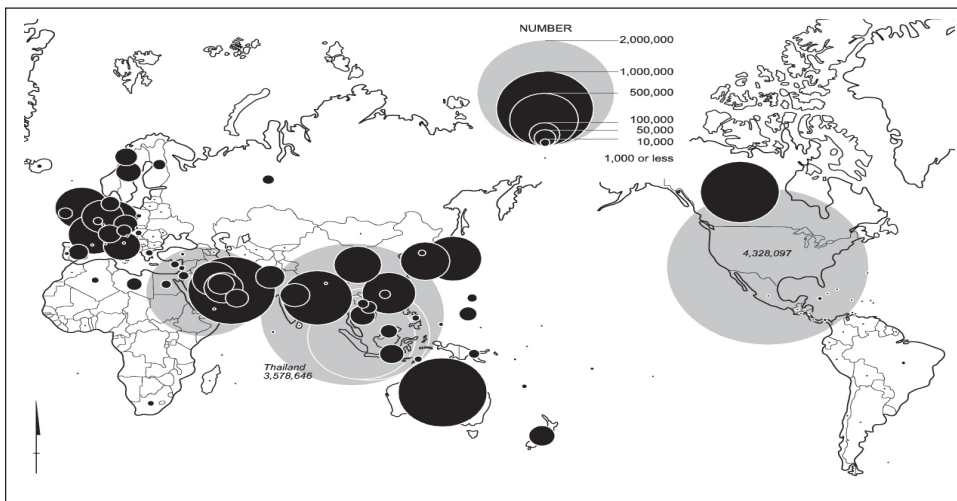
	Emigrants		Immigrants				GNP per Capita 2012 US\$	
	2010	2013	Growth		Growth			
			No.	% p.a.	2010	2013		No.
Brunei Darussalam	45,176	45,672	496	0.4	179,761	206,173	26,412	4.7
Cambodia	959,079	1,115,567	156,488	5.2	81,977	75,566	-6,411	-2.7
Indonesia	2,819,995	2,981,061	161,066	1.9	286,829	295,433	8,604	1.0
Lao People's Dem Rep	1,182,475	1,293,447	110,972	3.0	21,479	21,801	322	0.5
Malaysia	1,357,060	1,454,891	97,831	2.3	2,357,603	2,469,173	111,570	1.6
Myanmar	2,411,385	2,683,800	272,415	3.6	100,714	103,117	2,403	0.8
Philippines	5,172,826	5,491,607	318,781	2.0	204,896	213,150	8,254	1.3
Singapore	295,054	310,631	15,577	1.7	2,164,794	2,323,252	158,458	2.4
Thailand	799,329	852,649	53,320	2.2	3,224,131	3,721,735	497,604	4.9
Vietnam	2,476,901	2,593,942	117,041	1.6	61,756	68,290	6,534	3.4
Total	17,519,280	18,823,267	1,303,987	2.4	8,683,940	9,497,690	813,750	3.0

Source: United Nations 2013

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**Figure 3.** Origin of immigrants to Southeast Asian countries, 2013  
Source: United Nations (2013).



**Figure 4.** Destination of migrants from South-east Asia, 2013  
Source: United Nations (2013).

(1.5 million) and Singapore (1.2 million) being in the top five destinations. The flow of temporary labour migrants to the Middle East is also evident, accounting for 14.9 per cent of all emigrants from ASEAN. Australia (844,181) is the sixth largest single destination with Canada (664,628) the eighth. Europe is an important destination, the largest groups being in the United Kingdom (308,087), France (278,026), Germany (238,407), the Netherlands (186,438) and Italy (149,444), reflecting in part the connections developed during the colonial era.

**Table 2.** Estimated stocks of foreign labour in South-east Asian countries around 2010

Country	Year	Stock	Source
Singapore	2013	1,100,000	Press Trust of India/Singapore, May 13, 2013
Malaysia	2011	1,573,061	Baruah, 2013
Thailand	2012	1,700,000	<i>Migration News</i> , 1 January 2013
Brunei	2008	87,867	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 104
Vietnam	2010	80,000	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 159
Indonesia	2010	122,908	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 119
Philippines	2010	435,400	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 138
Myanmar	2010	88,700	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 107
Cambodia	2010	335,800	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 113
Laos	2010	250,000	Scalabrini Migration Center, 2012, p. 126
Total		5,773,736	

The migration data considered thus far have been derived from census enumerations undertaken in destination nations. However, the United Nations warns that this data is not complete. Moreover, it only includes migrants who are counted in censuses. It is apparent, for example, that many of the contract migrant workers from ASEAN countries are, for one reason or another, not counted in the census migration data. The Scalabrini Migration Centre (2012) has put together estimated stocks of migrant labour in South-east Asian countries around 2010 and these are given in Table 2, and must be regarded with a high degree of caution. However, they do make the point that the United Nations data may well underestimate the numbers of temporary worker migrants in ASEAN countries. Drawing on the same sources for emigration data, Table 3 shows larger numbers than the census data and may well exaggerate the flow, but again it is important to stress the uncertainty around the standard numbers and that the census data may underestimate the temporary migration flows which are the dominant form of international mobility in the ASEAN region.

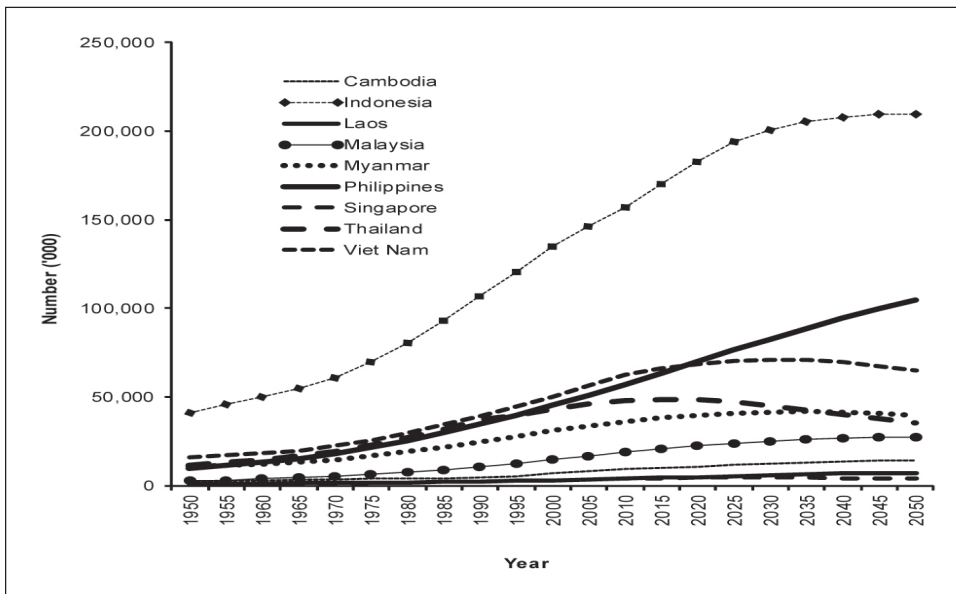
There are several drivers of the increasing tempo of international migration in ASEAN. The Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM, 2005) summarises the causes of increasing global migration as being the increasing inter-country disparity in the 'three Ds' – Development, Demography and Democracy. This certainly has some resonance in South-east Asia. The data on GNP per capita in Table 1 attests to the importance of neoclassical economic theory (Massey *et al.* 1993) in understanding flows into and out of ASEAN countries. Equally, too, demography has an important role. Figure 5 depicts past and projected trends in the growth of the working age population in ASEAN nations over the 1950-2050 period. In addition to the substantial disparities in absolute size of the national workforces in the region, the differential timing of fertility decline is reflected in the differences between countries when their workforce numbers peak. It is noticeable that in the major destination nations, the workforce is either growing slowly or declining as the impact of early fertility declines is felt. On the other hand, in Indonesia and the Philippines, the workforce is continuing to grow. While it is apparent that it is not simply labour shortages and surpluses which are driving migration, it is one element which will become more pronounced over time.

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**Table 3.** South-east Asian countries: Estimates of stocks of migrant workers in other countries

Origin Countries	Number	Main Destinations
Brunei	24,300	Australia, Canada, UK, US, Germany, Ireland, Malaysia, Netherlands, NZ
Myanmar	3,500,000	Thailand, US, India, Malaysia, Australia, UK, Japan, Canada, Korea, Germany
Thailand	810,000	Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Myanmar, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Cambodia, US, Germany, Japan, Korea, Australia, UK
Laos	366,600	Thailand, US, France, Australia, Canada, Japan, Germany, Belgium, Cambodia, NZ
Cambodia	350,400	Thailand, US, France, Australia, Canada, NZ
Vietnam	2,200,000	Korea, Japan, Malaysia, US, Australia, Canada, Cambodia, Germany, France, Thailand, UK
Philippines	9,400,000	Middle East, Malaysia, Japan, US, Canada, Australia, Italy, UK
Malaysia	1,480,000	Singapore, Australia, Brunei, UK, US, Canada, NZ, India, Japan, Germany
Indonesia	5,500,000	Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, United Arab Emirates
Total	23,631,300	

Source: Scalabrini Migration Center (2012); Karen Human Rights Group (2010).



**Figure 5.** Changes in size of working age population, 1950-2050

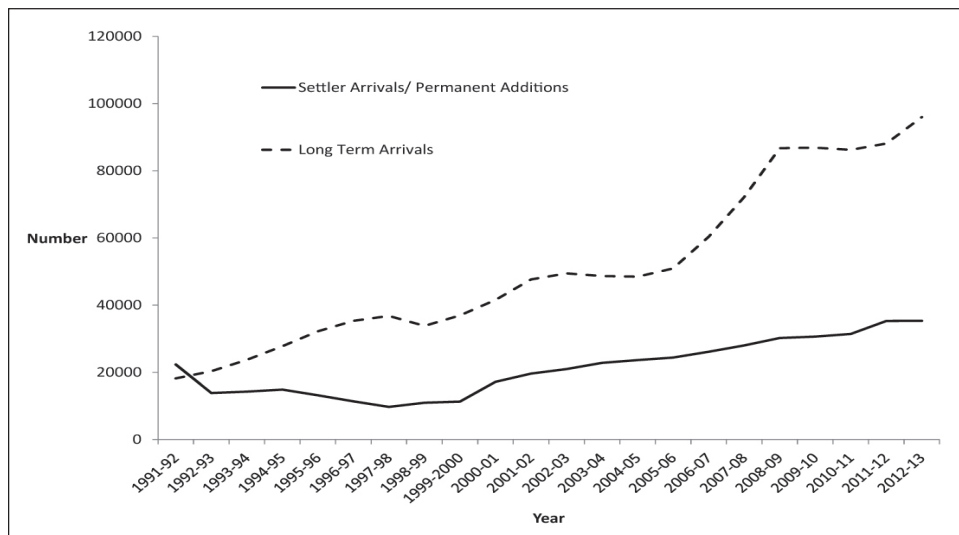
Source: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*, On-line database. [Accessed 17 March 2014]

Forced migration within the region is significant because of physical disasters like the 2004 tsunami but the bulk of it remains within national borders. Nevertheless the fact that Bangladesh is the seventh largest destination of ASEAN immigrants (432,101) largely reflects the flight of Rohingya refugees out of Myanmar. The forced migration of the Rohingya into Malaysia and Thailand is also becoming significant. Other factors such as the segmentation of labour markets, intensifying social networks linking ASEAN countries and the activities of a burgeoning regional migration industry are also significant.

This section has summarised the major international migration flows impacting the ASEAN region as is reflected largely in census stock migration data. However, this is only part of a much more complex pattern of international mobility which remains hidden in these sources but which is important in the development process within the region. We will now focus on one element in the ASEAN migration system in order to demonstrate this complexity – the movement to and from Australia.

### 3. Migration from ASEAN to Australia

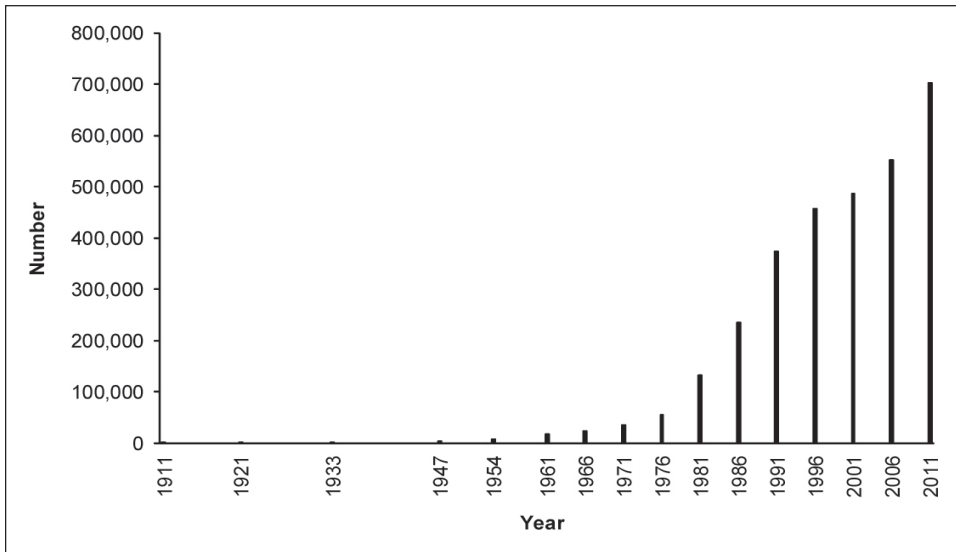
Inevitably because of geographical adjacency, there is a long history of migration between Australia and South-east Asia. Trempang fisherman from what is now Sulawesi in Indonesia were migrating seasonally to Australia’s northwest coast and intermarrying with the indigenous population before European settlement (MacKnight, 1976). Permanent and long term migration in more recent times is depicted in Figure 6 with numbers of both increasing around the last decade. In 2012-13 a record number of 35,357 permanent settler arrivals from ASEAN were recorded.



**Figure 6.** Australia: Long term arrivals from ASEAN countries to Australia, 1991-92 to 2012 13; settler arrivals, 1991-92 to 1999-2000; and permanent additions from ASEAN, 2000-01 to 2012-13  
 Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, unpublished data



In 2013 some 852,420 or 3.7 per cent of the Australian population were born in South-east Asia. It was only after the abolition of the White Australia Policy in the early 1970s (Jupp 2002) that the communities began to increase substantially (Figure 7). The tempo of movement has increased and the composition of the settler inflow has changed over the years. Indo-Chinese refugees were dominant in the 1970s and 1980s but Filipinos have increased most rapidly in more recent times while there have been fairly consistent flows for Malaysia and Singapore. Table 4 shows that the growth of the ASEAN born population has been growing at 4.6 per cent per annum, between 2006 and 2013, and



**Figure 7.** ASEAN-born population in Australia, 1911-2011

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Australian censuses, various years

**Table 4.** Growth of population by ASEAN birthplace country, 2006-13

	2006	2013	% growth p.a.
Myanmar	14,330	27,410	9.7
Cambodia	28,360	33,850	2.6
Laos	10,680	11,480	1.0
Thailand	34,090	57,550	7.8
Vietnam	178,030	215,460	2.8
Brunei	2,650	3,210	2.8
Indonesia	60,550	79,650	4.0
Malaysia	105,720	148,760	5.0
Philippines	141,930	210,760	5.8
Singapore	45,830	64,290	5.0
Total	622,170	852,420	4.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 and 2013 Estimated Resident Population data

this is three times the rate of increase of the total Australian population. Accordingly, the ASEAN-born population has increased by 37 per cent over the last 8 years. The most rapid growth has been of the Myanmar-born – primarily due to the influx of humanitarian settlers, mainly of Rohingya ethnicity (Table 5).

The Vietnamese remain the largest single South-east Asian community in Australia with around a quarter of a million persons. Much of their growth occurred through the influx of humanitarian settlers in the 1975-95 period, mainly on account of family migration. However, there has been an upturn in migration from Vietnam in recent years and Table 5 indicates that there is now a small skilled component, although family migration still predominates. Filipinos are the second largest group but are growing twice as fast as the Vietnamese. Since the 1970s, marriage migration has been of major significance so that female settlers have outnumbered males 2 to 1 over most of the period (Hugo and Maher, 1995: 108). Table 5 shows that skilled migration from the Philippines has been increasing such that at the 2011 population census, the sex ratio of the Philippines-born population (60.6) was the at its highest since the post-war period. Nevertheless, family migration remains important. It is interesting to note in Table 5, too, that a significant number of Filipinos came to Australia via the Trans Tasman Travel Agreement which allows more or less free entry to New Zealand citizens and residents. Another major flow of female marriage migrants from ASEAN is from Thailand which is the second fastest growing ASEAN birthplace group in Australia. However, unlike the Filipinos, marriage migrants continue to be dominant among Thai settlers. Moreover at the 2011 census, the sex ratio of the Thai population in Australia was 48.5 indicating that females outnumber males more than 2 to 1.

Malaysia and Singapore have a long tradition of migration to Australia (Hugo, 2011) and they are currently the third and fifth biggest ASEAN diaspora in Australia. A distinctive feature of their migration is that it is dominated by skilled migrants (Table 5). There are also a significant group who came to Australia by first settling in New Zealand and then moving across the Tasman. A significant number came to Australia first as temporary residents (students, 457s) and then successfully applying for permanent residency. Persons of Chinese ancestry are dominant in the group (Hugo, 2011).

Indo-Chinese migration to Australia has been dominated by the Vietnamese, while the communities from Laos and Cambodia remain small and growing more slowly than other ASEAN communities (Coughlan and Thatcher 1997). Their intake is dominated by family migrants although there is a Trans Tasman flow of Cambodians. Indonesia is Australia's largest neighbour and demographically dominant in ASEAN but its diaspora community is only the fourth largest ASEAN group in Australia although it is growing. The intake is quite balanced between skilled and family migrants, predominated by persons of Chinese ancestry.

Table 6 compares the mix of visa categories of permanent settlers from ASEAN over the last decade with settlers from other places of origin. Data show that half of the settlers from ASEAN qualify under the skilled migration category as is the case with the overall intake. However, it will be noted that there is an over-representation of family migration.

Until the mid-1990s Australia's immigration policy focused almost entirely on permanent settlement and temporary labour migration was eschewed. However, this has

**Table 5.** Permanent additions to Australian population by country of birth and eligibility category, 2012-13

Country of Birth	Family stream		Skill stream		Humanitarian programme		Special eligibility /Non-programme migration <sup>1</sup>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Myanmar	248	11.1	238	10.7	1,719	77.1	24	1.1	2,229	100.0
Cambodia	701	72.1	60	6.2	14	1.4	197	20.3	972	100.0
Laos	68	84.0	13	16.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	81	100.0
Thailand	2,474	71.8	670	19.4	152	4.4	149	4.3	3,445	100.0
Vietnam	4,087	68.8	1,534	25.8	21	0.4	298	5.0	5,940	100.0
Brunei Darussalam	15	19.5	47	61.0	0	0.0	15	19.5	77	100.0
Indonesia	1,246	48.9	1,156	45.4	29	1.1	117	4.6	2,548	100.0
Malaysia	1,062	17.7	4,458	74.2	259	4.3	232	3.9	6,011	100.0
Philippines	4,178	36.5	6,649	58.0	4	0.0	623	5.4	11,454	100.0
Singapore	423	16.6	1,571	61.5	0	0.0	561	22.0	2,555	100.0
East Timor	18	78.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	21.7	23	100.0
Total*	14,521	41.1	16,397	46.4	2,198	6.2	2,221	6.3	353,37	100.0

Mainly settlers qualifying because they are New Zealand citizens or residents.

\* Total includes South-east Asia that is not further defined.

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, unpublished data.

**Table 6.** Australia: Eligibility category of permanent additions born in ASEAN and other regions, 2002-11

Permanent Settlement Visa Type	ASEAN		Other origins		% of total ASEAN
	Number	%	Number	%	
Family	94,476	39.6	347,593	24.3	21.4
Skill	119,791	50.2	725,962	50.8	14.2
Special eligibility	685	0.3	4,029	0.3	14.5
Humanitarian	13,368	5.6	111,517	7.8	10.7
NZ citizen	5,323	2.2	230,764	16.2	2.3
Other	1,688	0.7	11,438	0.8	12.9
Total	238,654	100.0	1,428,012	100.0	14.3

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Immigration Update*, various issues

changed dramatically with the introduction of a skilled temporary worker visa (457) see Khoo, McDonald & Hugo 2009) as well as student and working holiday maker visas. There has been a paradigmatic shift in ASEAN migration to Australia. Accordingly, the next section examines the growth of temporary migration between ASEAN and Australia. However, before doing so, it is important to note that increasingly ASEAN migration to Australia is a two-stage process – entering the country as temporary migrants and subsequently successfully applying for permanent residence. In fact, over the last decade, the proportion of ASEAN permanent ‘additions’ to the Australian population who were ‘onshore’ migrants of this type increased from around a quarter in 2001-02 to 37 per cent in 2012-13, reaching a peak in 2010-1 when 42.9 per cent of permanent additions were ‘onshore’.

#### 4. Non-permanent Migration

Australia’s island geography enables it to be one of the few nations with comprehensive information on all movements in and out of the country. Australian international migration data distinguishes arrivals to the country into three categories:

- *Permanent movement* – persons migrating to Australia and residents departing permanently.
- *Long term movement* – temporary visa holders arriving and residents departing temporarily with the intention to stay in Australia or abroad for twelve months or more, and the departure of temporary visa holders and the return of residents who had stayed in Australia or abroad for twelve months or more.
- *Short term movement* – travellers whose intended or actual stay in Australia or abroad is less than twelve months.

Figure 6 shows that the numbers of long term arrivals (persons entering Australia as temporary residents but intending to stay for more than one year) has quadrupled over the last two decades with a marked upswing around 2006 at the height of the mining boom. It levelled off during the global financial crisis but has resumed growing in recent years.

**Table 7.** ASEAN stock of temporary residents in Australia

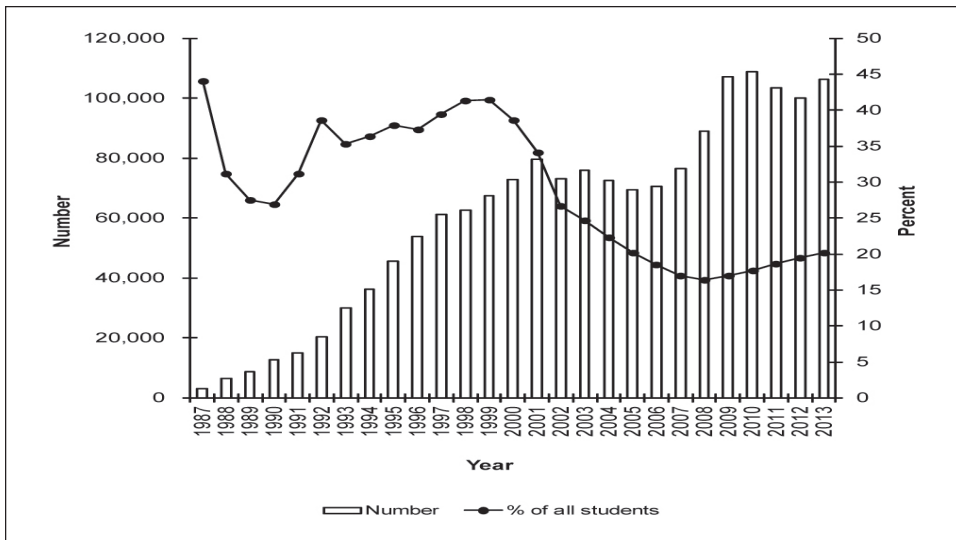
Year (at 30 June)	Other Temporary Residents	457s	Students
2011	4,383	17,551	66,697
2010	5,282	20,022	69,540
2009	2,711	23,006	64,762
2008	2,679	19,684	54,822
2007	2,571	13,292	45,676
2006	2,578	7,767	41,092
2005	2,763	4,779	39,989
2004	7,272		39,477
2003	6,799		38,641
2002	6,289		32,451
2001	6,145		28,488
2000	2,101	4,189	34,182
1999	2,784	3,382	44,733
1998		2,132	

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Immigration Update*, various issues; Khoo *et al.* 2009

The two main groups are students and skilled temporary workers (457s) and it can be seen from Table 7 that the numbers of both grew substantially during the last decade. To some extent, temporary migrants from ASEAN are highly skilled persons who prior to the existence of the 457 visa would have used the permanent migration avenue to enter Australia. However, it has also provided a channel for migration of other skilled workers.

Temporary skilled migrant workers (457s) are an increasingly important part of the migrant flow from ASEAN to Australia. The 457 program is similar to the HB1 visa in the United States and is entirely demand driven while the number of permanent immigrants is capped by government. Employers can apply to bring in workers for a period of up to four years and there are minimum skill and salary levels which apply (Khoo, McDonald and Hugo 2009). The 457 program is only available to highly skilled workers, in particular, occupational categories with a minimum salary level. Hence, as with the permanent settlement and student categories, there is a high degree of selectivity on the basis of skill. Table 7 shows that the numbers of 457s from ASEAN increased rapidly up to 2007. Thereafter the impact of the Global Financial Crisis and a Review of the 457 system saw a reduction in national numbers and in those from ASEAN. However, subsequently there has been a recovery. Two ASEAN nations are within the top 15 origin countries – the Philippines and Malaysia. The Philippines is becoming an increasingly important source of applicants for 457s – the fourth largest after India, UK and Ireland in 2012-13. These applicants include nurses and skilled technical workers.

An important part of the inflow of temporary residents is students. Australia has been an important destination of students from ASEAN since the Colombo Plan days of the 1960s when Malaysia and Singapore were especially important origins (Andressen 1997). They have continued to be large contributors, especially Malaysia where the



**Figure 8. Australia: Overseas students from ASEAN, 1987-2013**

Source: Department of Education, Science and Training, *Overseas Student Statistics*, various issues and *Australian Education International*, unpublished data

selective policy of prioritising Bumiputra groups in entry to public tertiary education institutions within Malaysia has been a factor for the disproportionate representation of Chinese and Indian origin in the student outflow. Figure 8 shows, however, that until the late 1980s the numbers were still quite small. The increase in the 1990s when the Australian government actively began to encourage student migration is readily apparent. Although the proportion of all student migrants coming to Australia who are from ASEAN has decreased over the last decade, the numbers have increased, reaching a peak of 108,902 in 2010. As with 457s, an increasing number of ASEAN students are applying for permanent residence in Australia.

## 5. The Characteristics of ASEAN Immigrants in Australia

Migration is always selective and this is certainly the case in the movement from ASEAN to Australia. This selectivity is strongly influenced by Australian immigration policy which over the last 15 years has become increasingly focused on selection of migrants who are skilled and can contribute to national economic growth and productivity (Hugo 1999). While Australian immigration statistics do not distinguish the ethnicity of arrivals from ASEAN, the five yearly censuses include a question on ancestry. This, of course, does not allow us to establish the ethnicity of the Australia-born children and grandchildren of the ASEAN-born.

The ethnic profile of ASEAN is particularly diverse but one important element in the migration to Australia has been the strong representation of ethnic Chinese who are the descendants of immigrants to South-east Asia from Southern China who mostly settled

there during the colonial years. Table 8 shows that there were 204,077 people born in ASEAN who in 2011 reported they were of Chinese ethnicity. In fact, this accounted for almost a third of the ASEAN-born population. The largest numbers were from Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore and their share of the birthplace group varied from almost 70 per cent of Malaysians to only 3.7 per cent of Filipinos. It is clear, however, that in Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam the proportion of Chinese in the intake is substantially greater than that in the home country. The restriction of opportunities for the Chinese in some of these countries together with other forms of discrimination clearly plays a role in their migration.

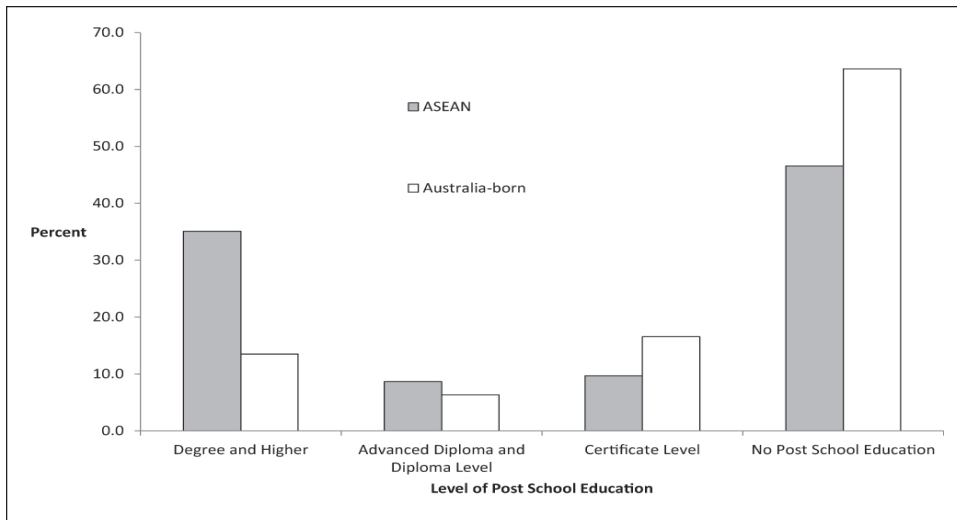
There was also significant Indian settlement in South-east Asia during the colonial era and this has been reflected in migration of some of their descendants to Australia, albeit at lower levels than the Chinese. Table 8 shows that they made up only 2 per cent of the ASEAN-born in Australia with most coming from Malaysia and Singapore.

The selectivity of ASEAN migration to Australia is also evident when we examine the educational qualifications of the Australian ASEAN community. Figure 9 shows that 50.1 per cent of the ASEAN-born population aged 15 years and over in Australia had a post-school qualification compared with 45.7 per cent of the total Australian population. However, the difference is most dramatic for those with a University degree or higher qualification where 35 per cent of the ASEAN-born are at this level compared with 15 per cent of the total Australian adult population. This points to a very high level of educational selectivity in the permanent migration from ASEAN to Australia and is of considerable relevance given the skilled labour shortages which some countries in ASEAN are currently experiencing. However, there are some important variations between different origin countries with high proportions with post-school education among immigrants from Malaysia (66%), Singapore (62.2%), Philippines (61%) and Indonesia (60.3%) but below

**Table 8.** Australia: Numbers of ASEAN-born who indicated they have Chinese and Indian ancestry, 2011

Country of birth	China		India	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Myanmar	2,176	10.3	469	2.2
Cambodia	10,444	38.3	4	-
Laos	1,628	10.9	3	-
Thailand	4,173	9.4	167	0.4
Vietnam	42,165	23.9	95	-
Brunei	1,656	63.8	109	4.2
Indonesia	28,222	45.8	206	0.4
Malaysia	79,715	69.3	7,495	6.6
Philippines	6,155	3.7	138	0.1
Singapore	27,743	57.6	4,774	9.9
Total	204,077	30.3	13,460	2.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census



**Figure 9.** Australia: Level of post-school qualification of total Australia and ASEAN-born population, 2011

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census

average levels among those from Vietnam (31.4%) and Cambodia (22.2%). This points to an important socio-economic distinction between the ASEAN communities in Australia from Indo-China and Myanmar, which are below the Australian average and the others which have higher levels.

The distinction within the ASEAN community in Australia is also readily apparent in Table 9. While Malaysians, Filipinos and those from Singapore and Brunei earn incomes above the Australian average, those from Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia have very low income. All have higher unemployment than the Australia-born but the rate is highest among migrants from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. Moreover, workforce participation rates are lowest among these groups. There is a clear distinction between the groups who predominantly come to Australia under the skilled migration program and those where the refugee-humanitarian settlers predominate.

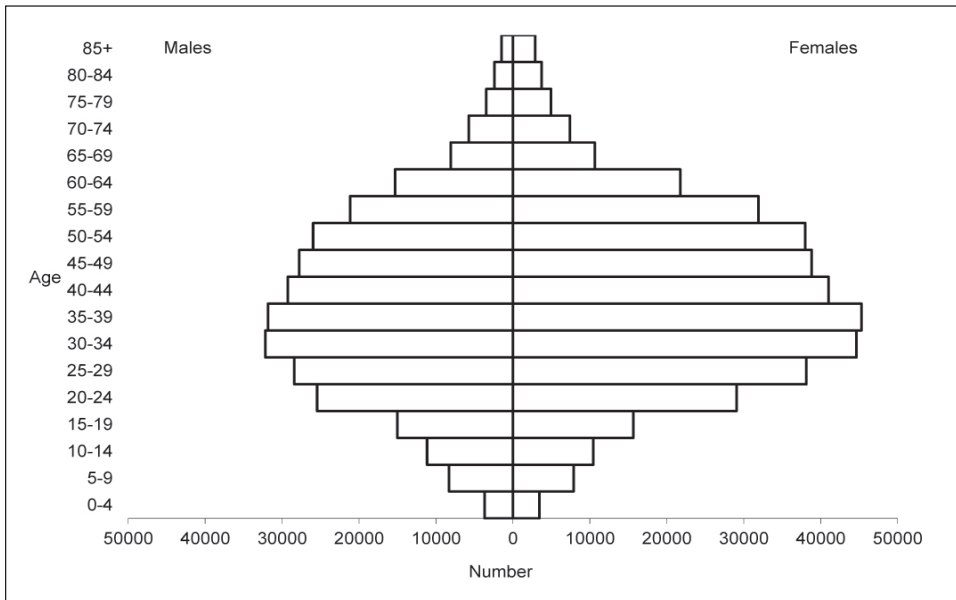
The age-sex distribution of the ASEAN-born community in Australia is depicted in Figure 10. It is immediately apparent that there is an over-representation of adult women and this, in part, reflects the importance of marriage migration of ASEAN-born women into Australia. The much publicised 'mail-order bride type' marriage migration, however, is only a small part of this. Much more significant is the fact that young Australians are travelling to ASEAN much more frequently in the last decade and inevitably forming partnerships. Similarly, increasing numbers of students from ASEAN meet their partners while studying in Australia. Spouses and fiancés are the main element in family migration to Australia, and ASEAN accounts for 27 per cent of all spouses and partners coming to Australia compared with 21 per cent of the overall migrant intake. Moreover, the numbers doubled between 2004-05 and 2012-13.



**Table 9.** Australia: ASEAN-born population labour force and income, 2011

Country of Birth	Percent unemployed	Participation rate	Median weekly income A\$
Australia	5.3	67.2	597.6
Indonesia	8.6	64.9	505.5
Malaysia	6.8	67.5	703.6
Philippines	5.3	74.8	673.7
Singapore	7.1	64.0	603.7
Thailand	8.0	66.4	390.4
Brunei Darussalam	6.7	66.4	702.6
Burma (Myanmar)	9.2	52.5	374.4
Cambodia	9.3	59.0	383.3
Laos	8.1	63.1	503.7
Vietnam	9.9	61.0	391.1
ASEAN	7.6	66.0	528.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2011 Australian Census

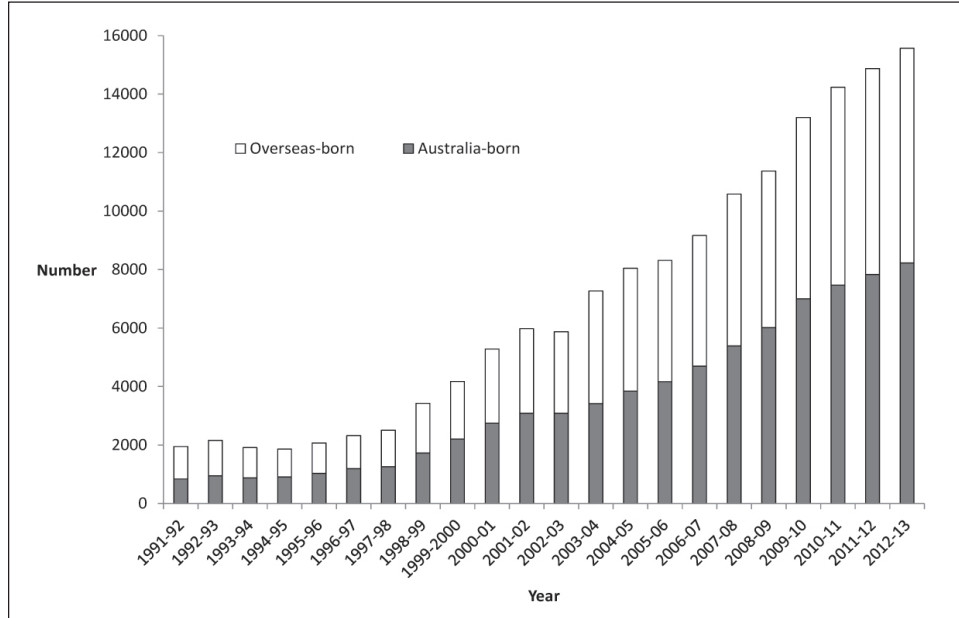


**Figure 10.** Australia: Age-sex distribution of population born in ASEAN countries, 2011  
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census

## 6. Return and Reciprocal Migration

One of the planks of the argument that emigration can deliver positive impacts in origin areas is that associated with emigrants returning to their homeland. Their development contribution accrues not just from the human capital which they emigrated with, but also the enhanced skills, experience and contacts that they accumulated while abroad. The extent to which return migration occurs, however, remains largely unknown because few countries collect data on emigration while immigration data systems rarely are able to identify return migrants as a separate category. Australia is one of the few countries where the international migration flow data collection system enables return migration to be measured (Hugo 1994; Hugo, Rudd and Harris 2001).

Focusing first on permanent movements, over the 1993-2013 period there were 148,738 Australian residents who left Australia to live permanently in South-east Asia compared with the 325,730 South-east Asia-born persons who moved permanently to live in Australia. There has been one permanent migration from Australia to South-east Asia for every two moves in the opposite direction. Moreover, Figure 11 shows there is a clear pattern of permanent relocation from Australia to Malaysia increasing substantially in recent years. The diagram differentiates between Australian residents leaving for Malaysia who are Australia-born and those who are overseas-born and it is apparent that the outflow is split more or less equally between the two groups. The striking feature of the diagram, however, is the upsurge in return migration in recent years.



**Figure 11.** Australia: Permanent departures to ASEAN countries by birthplace, 1991-92 to 2012-13  
 Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, unpublished data

Return migration is an essential element in all migration systems (Conway and Potter 2009). Australia is one of the few countries which allows us to establish the extent of return migration. Table 10 compares permanent departures from Australia to ASEAN countries over the 1991-2013 period with the numbers of permanent arrivals. This indicates that there is one permanent migration from Australia to South-east Asia for every two people from Southeast Asia settling permanently in Australia. This is a far cry from the stereotype of “South-North” displacement and shows that there is not only reciprocity in terms of temporary circular migration but also “permanent” flows in both directions. The table disaggregates the permanent migration from Australia to South-east Asia into a number of components. Around 30 per cent are persons born in South-east Asia and are returning. However, return migration is more substantial than this since a significant proportion of the Australia-born component of the flow is actually children born to South-east Asian return migrants during their period in Australia. There is also an Australian expatriate migration into the region associated with the rapid economic growth in several countries and the lack of skilled technical, management and administrative workers. The Australian expatriate presence in South-east Asia is substantial but is not captured in standard data collections like censuses. The Australian long term expatriate communities in South-east Asian cities are growing and Australian involvement in high skilled labour markets in the region is also important. It will be noted also in Table 10 that there were almost 30,000 emigrants born in countries other than Australia or South-east Asia. This points to an increasingly significant factor in global migration – whereby selected groups move away from their birthplace to another country but then subsequently move to a third, or more, other countries. The largest numbers of those ‘third country’ migrants moving between Australia and South-east Asia were born in United Kingdom, New Zealand and China. This element, then, is predominantly part of the skilled expatriate flow in which the Australia-born are the largest group. Hence the two dominant parts of the emigration from Australia are return migrants and their families and a skilled expatriate population working in technical, professional and management jobs. Both of these types of flow have the potential to have significant impacts on development in South-east Asian countries.

While there is insufficient space here to present full details of this emigrant flow from Australia to South-east Asia, a few key trends can be noted:

- Over the last 22 years, there has been a consistent increase in both the inflow from, and outflow to, South-east Asia. Between 1992 and 2013 permanent settlers increased

**Table 10.** Australia: Permanent migration from and to South-east Asia, 1991-2013

Permanent settlers from South-east Asia	467,371
Permanent departures to South-east Asia	152,171
Net migration	315,200
Australia-born departures	77,988
ASEAN-born departures	44,214
Other birthplace	29,469

*Source:* Calculated from unpublished Department of Immigration and Border Protection data

by 155 per cent to 35,312 while departures increased by 620 per cent to 15,271. While the number of return migrants increased by 425 per cent, the expenditure outflow increased by 870 per cent.

- There are significant differences between South-east Asian countries in the ratio of immigrants from Australia to the emigrants to Australia. It is highest in the fastest growing economies which are attracting the greatest number of expatriates (Singapore, Malaysia) but there is important return migration to Vietnam and Indonesia. It is extremely low in the Philippines and Myanmar.

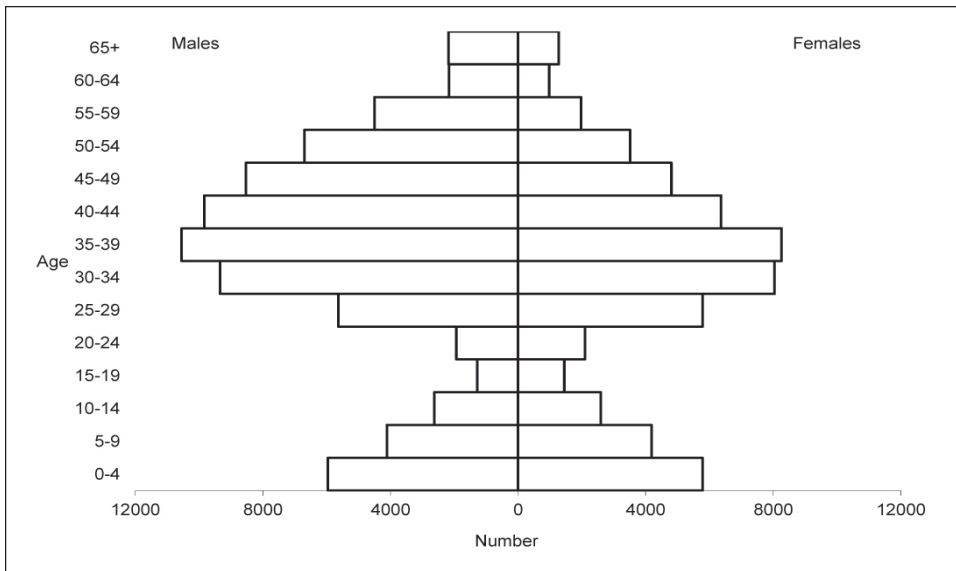
The flow from Australia to Malaysia, like the permanent flow in the other direction, is highly skilled. Interestingly, while professionals are the dominant skilled group in the inflow to Australia, it is managers who are largest in the outflow (Table 11). The age structure of the outflow shown in Figure 12 indicates that established families of adults with dependent children are an important component in the backflow from Australia to South-east Asia. There are also significant numbers in the younger and middle workforce ages. Conway and Potter (2009: 1) have shown that “To this point extant, scholarship on international return migration has commonly focused on elderly, first generation retirees” who return to their homeland after spending their working lives at their destination. The impact of such “retiree returnees” is hence limited. However, it is clear that in the Australia to South-east Asia flow, the dominant group are those in the economically active age groups and their children, and hence their potential for having a positive impact on development.

**Table 11.** Australia: Settlers arrivals and permanent departures ASEAN-born by occupation, 2010-11 to 2012-13

Occupation – Major group	Number		Per cent	
	Settler arrivals	Resident permanent departure	Settler arrivals	Resident permanent departure
Managers	3,319	1,793	14.8	20.9
Professionals	10,558	3,240	47.1	37.9
Technicians and trades workers	2,710	1,066	12.1	12.5
Community and personal service workers	1,360	558	6.1	6.5
Clerical and administrative workers	1,564	578	7.0	6.8
Sales workers	1,187	416	5.3	4.9
Machinery operators and drivers	380	252	1.7	2.9
Labourers	1,323	656	5.9	7.7
Total	22,401	8,559	100.0	100.0

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, unpublished data

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**Figure 12.** Australia: Age-sex composition of permanent departures to ASEAN, 1993-94 to 2011-12

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, unpublished data

Permanent return migration is not the only form of movement linkage South-east Asian expatriates in Australia maintain with their homeland. In fact, they can keep a significant investment in their homeland by frequently visiting and maintaining economic linkages with institutions and individuals. It is useful, therefore, to examine the pattern of temporary mobility of South-east Asians living in Australia. To do this we can use a special data set created by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. From July 1998, a Personal Identifier (PID) number has been assigned to every individual moving to and from the country. This enables the movement history of individuals into and out of Australia to be traced. In the context of the present paper, data on all Malaysia-born individuals arriving to, and departing from Australia over the 1998-2006 period which shows all the moves they make, are available. This has allowed us to construct the migration history of those individuals over the period. Hence, we can establish the extent to which permanent arrivals from Asia have returned on a permanent or temporary basis to their homeland and the extent to which they have moved to third countries. Table 12 identifies four types of South-east Asia-born individuals who were moving into and out of Australia on a temporary (either long term or short term) basis:

- (a) Settlers arriving between 1998 and 2006 – These are people who arrived in Australia as settler arrivals during the survey period, 1998-2006. Virtually all of them made at least one temporary move out of Australia since settling in the country and 40 per cent had made more than 5 trips.

**Table 12.** Australia: Number of temporary moves into and out of Australia made by ASEAN-born persons according to their resident status, 1998-2006

Resident status	Per cent of individuals				Number of movers
	1-4 moves	5-9 moves	10+ moves	Total	
New settlers	60	23	17	100	105,294
Visitors 1998-2006	22	31	46	100	563,255
Australian residents who settled before 1998	12	28	60	100	291,868
Australia residents settling before 1998 and who have permanently left Australia between 1998-2006	21	28	51	100	6,279

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, unpublished data

- (b) Visitors from Malaysia – These are South-east Asia-born people who are not residents of Australia and are entering the country under a Visitor visa. The numbers are substantial with 563,255 separate South-east Asia-born individual non-residents making at least one visit to Australia between 1998 and 2006. It is interesting, however, to observe that of this group 78 per cent made more than 5 trips.
- (c) The third category represents the temporary movement of 291,868 South-east Asia-born people who arrived in Australia before 1998 and are permanent Australian residents. Over the 1998-2006 period, 88 per cent of them made more than five overseas trips.
- (d) The final category is especially interesting. They include 6,279 South-east Asians who arrived as permanent settlers to Australia before 2006 but during the 1998-2006 period had returned to live in their homeland. The fact that they maintained strong connections with Australia is reflected in the fact that half of them entered Australia temporarily on 10 or more occasions during the survey period and another 28 per cent 5 to 10 occasions.

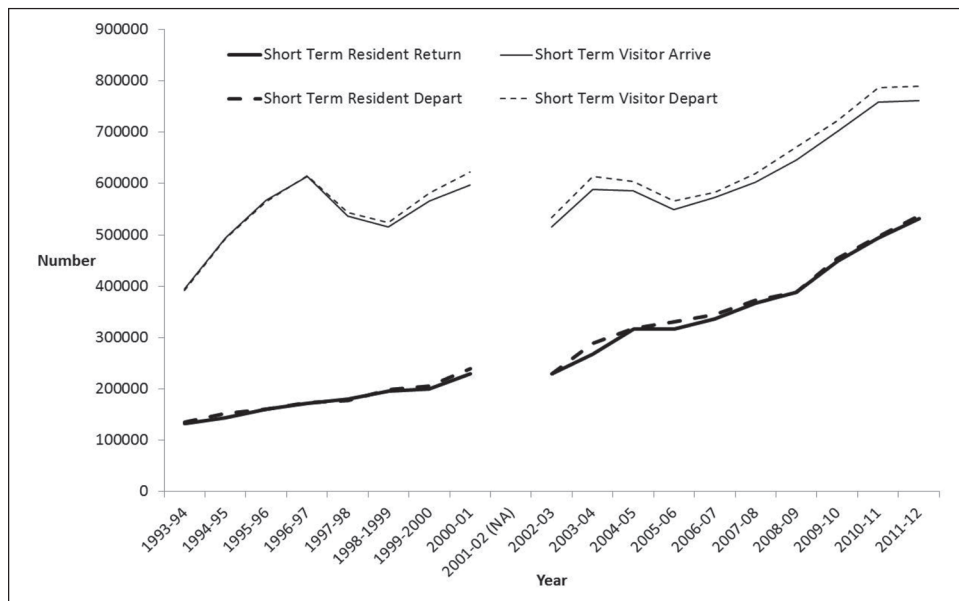
The overall pattern is of a massive amount of movement of South-east Asians on a temporary basis between their homeland and Australia, involving both people settled in South-east Asia as well as Australia. The reasons given by South-east Asians arriving as either long-term or short-term visitors to Australia are given in Table 13. It is interesting that while visiting family and holidaying accounts for two-thirds of short-term visitors, economic and education reasons are dominant for almost all long-term arrivals and a third of short-term arrivals. The developmental significance and potential of this temporary movement in both directions needs to be investigated in some depth.

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**Table 13.** Australia: Long term and short term visitor arrivals from ASEAN countries by reasons for travel, 2012-13

	Reason for travel		Percent	
	Long-term visitor arrivals	Short-term visitor arrivals	Long-term visitor arrivals	Short-term visitor arrivals
Other	6,493	40,710	8.4	4.3
Exhibition	85	2,149	0.1	0.2
Convention/conference	1,691	25,329	2.2	2.7
Business	2,362	125,062	3.1	13.4
Visiting friends/relatives	1,803	192,309	2.3	20.5
Holiday	1,699	439,604	2.2	46.9
Employment	16,669	34,113	21.5	3.6
Education	46,597	77,154	60.2	8.2
Total (not incl. NS)	77,399	936,430	100.0	100.0

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, unpublished data



**Figure 13.** Australia: ASEAN-born short term arrivals and departures, 1993-94 to 2011-12  
Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, unpublished data

The overall pattern of short-term movement (moves involving an absence of less than 1 year away from home) between Australia and South-east Asia also has implications for development. Figure 13 shows that there has been a strong increase both in South-east Asians visiting Australia and in Australians visiting South-east Asia, although the former is substantially greater than the latter.

### Conclusion

South-east Asia is assuming greater significance in global international migration, both as one of the major origins of contract labour migrants and skilled workers and as an increasingly important migrant destination. However, the standard sources of demographic data on international migration reveal only the “tip of the iceberg” of the complex international movement systems within South-east Asia and between it and the other parts of the world. This paper has first of all demonstrated some key features of the new position which South-east Asia occupies in the global international migration scene. However, by concentrating on movement between the region and Australia, it was shown conclusively that simple generalisations which classify South-east Asia as an origin of south-north immigrants to OECD countries misrepresent the actual situation. South-east Asian countries are engaged in complex migration systems involving considerable circularity, reciprocity and repeat movement. These complex movements have established active linkages, not only between the members of ASEAN but with other countries, especially OECD nations. Recognising that these linkages are much more than corridors to channel the brain drain out of the region is important. These linkages offer enormous potential to facilitate trade, finance, investment, knowledge exchange, tourism and other forms that can assist in economic development and poverty reduction in South-east Asia.

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