Population overview

In August 2006, the Census of Population and Housing counted 19.9 million people in Australia on Census Night. This figure provided a base count from which the estimated resident population (ERP) was derived (see box below). After adjusting for undercount and a number of other factors, Australia's ERP at 30 June 2006 was 20.7 million people.

Population growth

Between 2001 and 2006, Australia's resident population increased by nearly 1.3 million people. Natural increase (excess of births over deaths) and net overseas migration each contributed about half of this growth (see Glossary for more information about these terms).

Over the past 100 years Australia's population has increased steadily from 4.1 million in 1906 to 20.7 million in 2006. The only exception to this steady growth occurred in 1916 and 1917 during World War I, when the population declined slightly. This was because defence force personnel leaving Australia were regarded as emigrants and excluded from population counts.[1]

Some of the highest annual population growth rates were recorded in the period 1947–65, known as the Baby Boom. Annual growth rates over this period fluctuated between 1.6% and 3.3% with natural increase the main component. High levels of immigration following World War II also contributed to strong population growth in this period. Annual population growth rates then declined to a low of 1.0% in 1975 and have remained at between 1% and 2% since then. Between 2001 and 2006, the annual growth rate fluctuated around 1.3%.

Population(a)(b)(c) 1906 to 2006
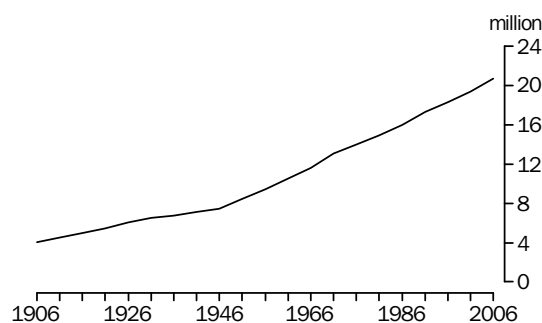
(a) Includes estimates of the Indigenous population from 1961 onwards.

(b) Prior to 1971, estimates of the population were based on the number of people actually present in Australia. From 1971 onwards the concept of estimated resident population (ERP) was introduced.

(c) Includes Other Territories from 1994.

Source: *Australian Historical Population Statistics*, cat. no. 3105.0.65.001.

Estimating Australia's population

The estimated resident population (ERP) is Australia's official population figure. It is based on census counts of usual residents, adjusted for undercount and the number of Australian residents estimated to have been temporarily overseas at the time of the census. Further adjustments are made for births, deaths and net migration in the period from 1 July to Census Night (i.e. 8 August 2006) to estimate the population at 30 June 2006. This chapter presents June 2006 ERP where available, and unadjusted census counts from August 2006 where more detailed information on population characteristics is needed. Later chapters only use unadjusted census counts. For more information on ERP see *Australian Demographic Statistics, Dec 2007*, ABS cat. no. 3101.0.

How the population grows

The growth of Australia's population has two components: natural increase and net overseas migration. Natural increase refers to the excess of births over deaths. Net overseas migration is the net gain or loss of population through immigration to Australia and emigration from Australia.

Population growth in the states and territories has a third component: net interstate migration. It refers to the difference between the number of persons who have changed their place of usual residence by moving into a given state or territory and the number who have changed their place of usual residence by moving out of that state or territory during a specified time period. Note that Urban Centres (see Glossary) with smaller populations may record high growth rates because the rates are calculated from a small base.

States and territories

In 2006, New South Wales continued to be the most populous state (6.8 million residents) followed by Victoria (5.1 million). Together they were home to over half (58%) of Australia's total population. Average annual population growth in both states in the 25 years to 2006 was 1.1%, below the national rate of 1.3%.

In the 5 years before the 2006 Census, the average annual growth was lower for New South Wales (0.7%) but higher for Victoria (1.3%) than in preceding years. Net overseas migration and natural increase were the main components of growth rather than interstate migration.

Between 1981 and 2006, average annual population growth was above the national rate in Queensland (2.3%), Western Australia

(1.9%), the Northern Territory (2.2%) and the Australian Capital Territory (1.5%), although the causes of growth differed. While natural increase was an important component of growth in each of these states and territories, Queensland was the only state to draw substantial numbers from interstate migration. In Western Australia, high levels of net overseas migration boosted population growth, allowing it to overtake South Australia in size in the early 1980s.

Both South Australia and Tasmania experienced low rates of growth in the 25 years to 2006. Losses due to interstate migration, primarily of young people, have resulted in older populations with lower proportions of people of child-bearing age and subsequent low levels of natural increase.

Population growth and distribution(a)

	2006	2006	Change 1981– 2006(b)	Change 2001– 2006(b)
	'000	%	%	%
New South Wales	6 816.1	32.9	1.1	0.7
Victoria	5 126.5	24.8	1.1	1.3
Queensland	4 090.9	19.8	2.3	2.4
South Australia	1 567.9	7.6	0.7	0.7
Western Australia	2 059.4	9.9	1.9	1.6
Tasmania	490.0	2.4	0.5	0.8
Northern Territory	210.6	1.0	2.2	1.3
Australian Capital Territory	334.1	1.6	1.5	0.9
Australia	**20 697.9**	**100.0**	**1.3**	**1.3**

(a) Estimated Resident Population as at 30 June.

(b) Average annual growth, see Glossary.

Source: *Australian Demographic Statistics, Dec 2007*, cat. no. 3101.0.

20 largest Urban Centres(a)

	2006	Change 1996–2006(b)		2006	Change 1996–2006(b)
	'000	%		'000	%
Sydney	3 794.8	1.1	Sunshine Coast(c)	197.6	4.3
Melbourne	3 517.6	1.6	Geelong	143.1	0.9
Brisbane	1 733.5	2.8	Townsville	137.5	2.2
Perth	1 322.7	1.5	Hobart	132.1	0.2
Adelaide	1 078.9	0.7	Cairns	105.4	2.6
Gold Coast-Tweed Heads	487.5	5.4	Toowoomba	101.6	1.6
Canberra-Queanbeyan	368.8	1.0	Ballarat	81.2	1.9
Newcastle	303.2	0.8	Bendigo	79.0	2.4
Central Coast (NSW)	289.2	2.0	Launceston	74.1	0.7
Wollongong	247.4	0.8	Darwin	71.9	0.7
Australia	20 697.9	1.2			

(a) Estimated Resident Population as at 30 June.

(b) Annual average growth, see Glossary.

(c) Sunshine Coast only existed in its own right as a UCL area from the 2001 Census. For the 1996 Census, the Urban Centres in 2001 from the equivalent area have been used to represent the population at that time.

Source: *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2005–06*, cat. no. 3218.0.

Urban Centres

Most of Australia's population live in urban areas. In 2006, just over two thirds (69%) of the population lived in the 20 largest Urban Centres and half the population lived in the 4 largest Urban Centres (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth). In the 10 years to 2006, population growth in Sydney (average annual growth of 1.1%), did not keep pace with the national average (1.2%). However, due to its large size, this city accommodated an additional 400,000 people, or around one sixth of Australia's population growth in this period.

High rates of growth in Queensland's largest Urban Centres contributed to a high rate of growth in the state as a whole. Between 1996 and 2006, population growth in Brisbane, Gold Coast-Tweed Heads, Townsville and Cairns was well above the national rate, with Gold Coast-Tweed Heads experiencing the highest average annual growth rate of 5.4%. Over this period the Sunshine Coast evolved from a number of smaller settlements to become the country's eleventh largest Urban Centre with a population of 198,000 in 2006. Other large Urban Centres with high rates of growth include Melbourne (1.6%), Perth (1.5%), the Central Coast of NSW (2.0%), Ballarat (1.9%) and Bendigo (2.4%). Of the 20 largest Urban Centres, Hobart experienced the lowest average annual growth rate (0.2%).

Mobility

In the five years prior to the 2006 Census, 6.6 million people, or 43% of the population aged 5 years and over, changed their place of residence in Australia. Of all the people who moved within Australia during this period, the majority (86%) moved within the same state or territory while the remainder moved interstate. People aged 25–29 years were the most mobile age group, with 62% having moved within Australia in the previous 5 years, while those aged 75–79 years were least likely to have moved (19%). There was little difference recorded between the mobility rates of men and women.

The mobility rate of immigrants is very high after arrival and for the first decade of their residence in Australia, reflecting that immigrants tend to move until they find a suitable place to work and settle into their new

Mobility rates by birthplace, 2001–06(a)

- ▮ Same SLA
- ▮ Other SLA, same SD
- ▮ Other SD, same state
- ▮ Interstate
- ▮ Total
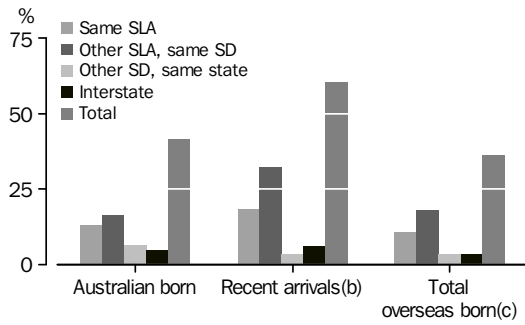
(a) Excludes children under 5 years of age in 2006 and people who were overseas in 2001.

(b) Who arrived in Australia between 1996 and 2000.

(c) Who arrived in Australia prior to 2001.

environment. Between 2001 and 2006, 60% of newly arrived migrants (who arrived in Australia in the 5 years to 2000) had moved residence compared to 42% of the Australian-born population, and their mobility rates were higher in almost every age group. However, over the longer term, the mobility rates of immigrants are lower on average than the Australian-born population.

Population distribution

Australia's population is mostly concentrated in two widely separated coastal regions. The larger of these by far (both in area and population) lies in the east and south-east of Australia, stretching in a crescent from Queensland through New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania to South Australia. The smaller region is in the south-west of the continent and is concentrated around the Perth metropolitan area.

Population density, Statistical Local Areas(a)

People per sq km

- ▮ 100.0 or more
- ▮ 10.0 – 100.0
- ▮ 1.0 – 10.0
- ▮ 0.1 – 1.0
- ▮ Less than 0.1
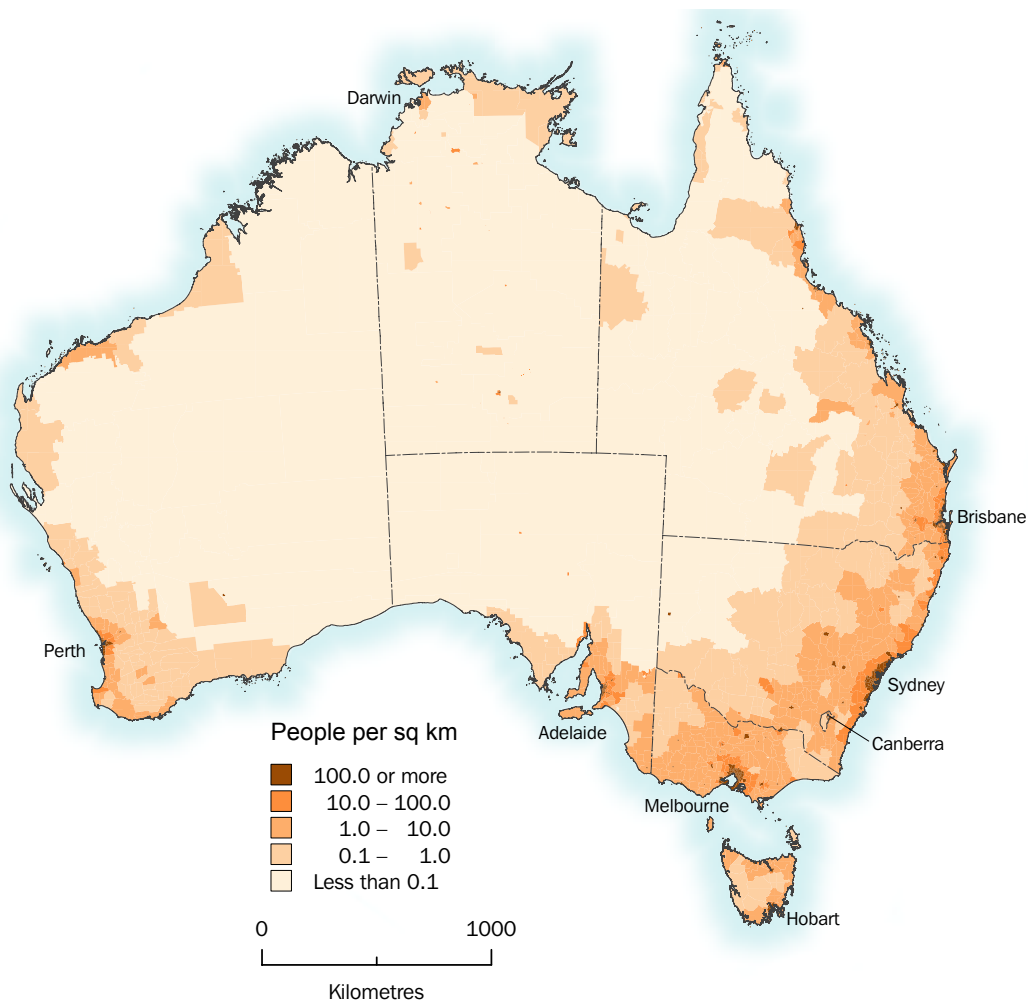
(a) Estimated Resident Population as at 30 June 2006.

Source: *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2005–06*, cat. no. 3218.0

In 2006, the vast majority of Australia's population (85%) lived within 50 kilometres of the coastline, reflecting the arid, inhospitable conditions of much of the Australian interior, as well as employment and lifestyle opportunities found in coastal areas and historical settlement patterns. The population was also highly urbanised. In Australia, an Urban Centre is defined as a population cluster of 1,000 or more people. At 30 June 2006, 18.3 million people, or 88% of the total Australian population were living in 730 Urban Centres.

Age and sex structure

In June 2006 the median age of the Australian population was 37 years. One in five Australians (20%) were children aged under 15 years, and 13% were aged 65 years and over. For most of the states and territories, the proportion of the population in each of these age groups varied only slightly. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of children aged under 15 years (25%) while South Australia and Tasmania had the highest proportions of older people aged 65 years and over (both 15%).

The age structure of Australia's population has changed considerably over the last century. During this time the proportion of children aged under 15 years declined from 35% in 1901 to 20% in 2006, while the proportion of older people aged 65 years and over increased from 4% to 13%. These changes reflect: increased life expectancy of infants in the earlier part of the century, resulting in the survival of more people into old age; declining fertility from the 1970s; and improvements in life expectancy at older ages in recent decades.

The sex ratio is the number of males per one hundred females. A sex ratio less than 100 indicates that there are fewer males than females. In 2006, Australia had an overall sex ratio of 99 males for every 100 females in the population. The sex ratio for children aged 0–4 was 105, as male births consistently outnumber female births, and declined with age reflecting lower female death rates at all ages and the resultant higher life expectancy of women. Among those aged 75 years and over there were 523,200 males and 757,200 females, equating to a sex ratio of 69 males per 100 females.

Age distribution(a)

	Total population	People aged 0–14	People aged 15–64	People aged 65 and over	Median age
	'000	%	%	%	years
New South Wales	6 816.1	19.6	66.9	13.5	36.8
Victoria	5 126.5	19.0	67.6	13.4	36.7
Queensland	4 090.9	20.4	67.5	12.1	36.0
South Australia	1 567.9	18.3	66.6	15.1	38.8
Western Australia	2 059.4	19.9	68.3	11.8	36.2
Tasmania	490.0	19.7	65.7	14.6	38.8
Northern Territory	210.6	24.5	70.9	4.6	30.9
Australian Capital Territory	334.1	18.8	71.7	9.5	34.4
Australia	**20 697.9**	**19.6**	**67.4**	**13.0**	**36.6**

(a) Estimated resident population as at 30 June, 2006.

Source: *Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, Jun 2006*, cat. no. 3201.0.

Population profile, selected years(a)(b)
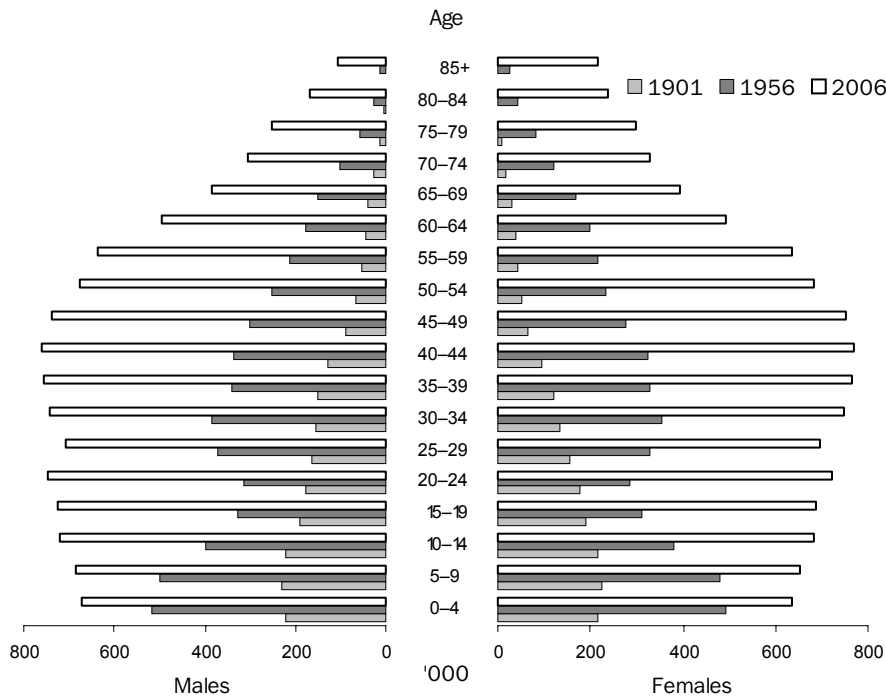
(a) Data for 1901 are census counts; data for 1956 are population estimates; data for 2006 are estimated resident population.

(b) In 2006, Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands are included as part of Australia.

Source: *Australian Historical Population Statistics*, cat. no. 3105.0.65.001.
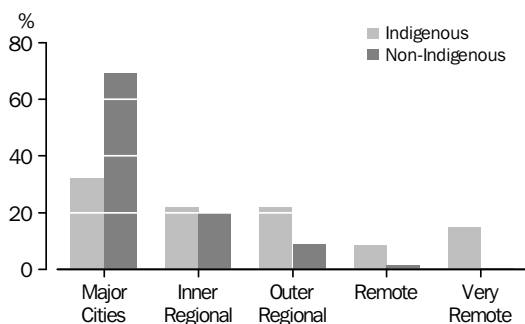
Indigenous population

At 30 June 2006, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was estimated at 517,200, or 2.5% of the total Australian population. Two states, New South Wales (29%) and Queensland (28%), contained over half the Indigenous population. While a smaller proportion of all Indigenous peoples lived in the Northern Territory (13%), it was the state or territory with the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples in its total population (32%).

Indigenous Australians were more likely to live in remote areas of the country than non-Indigenous Australians. Based on census counts, around one in four Indigenous Australians (24%) lived in Remote or Very Remote areas in 2006 compared with only one in fifty non-Indigenous Australians (2%). Conversely, 32% of the Indigenous population lived in the Major Cities (see Glossary) compared to 69% of the non-Indigenous population.

Birthplace

In 2006, a quarter (25%) of Australia's population was born overseas. This represents a slight increase in the proportion born overseas since 1996 (23%). People born in North-West Europe (including the United Kingdom) were the largest group of overseas-born residents in 2006, accounting for 7% of all residents nationally, and almost a third of all overseas-born residents. Those born in Southern and Eastern Europe were the second

Population by Remoteness Areas(a)

(a) 2006 Census counts.

largest group of overseas-born, comprising 4% of all residents nationally, followed by South-East Asia, accounting for 3% of the total population.

Based on census counts, the overseas-born population was more likely to live in Urban Centres than those born in Australia. In 2006, 85% of the overseas-born were living in Major Cities, compared with 63% of Australian-born residents. Those migrants who arrived in the past two decades were more likely than other overseas-born people to live in large population centres, reflecting the settlement patterns of migrants to Australia. In 2006, 9 out of 10 migrants who had arrived in the preceding 20 years lived in Major Cities (90%) falling to around 8 in 10 of those who arrived in 1986 or before (81%). For more information on the overseas-born population, see the 'Cultural diversity overview', p. 34–44.

Regions of birth of Australia's population(a)

	%	'000
Australian-born	75.4	15 608.1
Total overseas-born	24.6	5 093.4
Oceania and Antarctica(b)	2.7	567.7
North-West Europe	7.3	1 513.2
Southern and Eastern Europe	4.1	852.9
North Africa and the Middle East	1.4	295.4
South-East Asia	3.1	641.9
North-East Asia	2.3	470.1
Southern and Central Asia	1.6	322.0
Americas	1.0	210.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.1	220.2
Total	**100.0**	**20 701.5**

(a) 2006 Census counts.

(b) Excluding Australia.

Endnotes

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Population growth and distribution, 2001*, cat. no. 2035.0, p. 20–22, ABS, Canberra.