

## Immigration Economy of Australia and The United States

### INTRODUCTION

Immigration remains a topic of discussion in regards to national identity, economic development, and political discourse in countries across the globe. Among the most prominent nations prone to receiving high numbers of migrants are Australia and the United States. While both countries economically benefit from the labor, skills, and entrepreneurial spirit of immigrants, their immigration systems, selection criteria, and treatment of migrants differ significantly, which in turn impacts their economic contribution. Australia tends to emphasize a merit-based, economically driven immigration selection approach, while the United States features a more liberal system shaped by random selection, family vouching, and humanitarian considerations.

Despite these differences, immigrants in both countries face similar challenges, including labor exploitation, limited upward mobility, and systemic discrimination. This paper explores the economic impacts of immigration in Australia and the United States, comparing their immigration models, analyzing the role of immigrants in national economies, and examining the challenges that continue to shape migrant experiences.

### AUSTRALIA

Typically known for its natural beauty and bizarre wildlife, Australia is a hotspot for immigrants migrating away from their homelands. In fact, Australia is known as an immigration nation, where immigrants encompass a greater portion of the population when compared to any other major Western nation (Collins, "Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre"). Today, one in four Australians are first-generation, with both first- and second-generation Australians comprising around 50-60% of Australia's cosmopolitan cities, as well as half of Australia's

population and workforce growth. The Australian immigration cycle was initially designed to synchronize with business cycles, with immigration policy centering around filling labor shortages. This had led to patterns of high immigration intakes during post-war economic booms and cuts of immigration intakes after the recessions of 1974-1975, 1982-1983, and 1990-1991, when unemployment was on the rise. One thing to note about Australian immigration is the significant number of temporary work visas given to immigrants. As of 2001, the number of long-term work visas exceeded that of permanent immigrants. Typically, these temporary immigrants have assisted with the skilled employment vacancies the country relied on, which in turn generated economic growth for the country. New immigrants generated additional demand for products, which increased profitability in the short-term and capital stock in the long-term, positively impacting labor demands of all types (Ozcan). Economic theory suggests two competing effects in correlation to the impact immigrants have on the labor market. These being supply-side effects versus demand-side effects. Supply-side effects emphasize the presence of complementarity between native and foreign laborers. For instance, immigration may produce unemployment amongst natives who aren't willing to be employed at lower wages. Still, new inflows of immigrants would amplify productivity of native employees and raise wage levels as well as employment opportunities. Concerning demand-side effects, immigrants lower unemployment levels and increase wage levels for natives. Essentially, immigrants acting as consumers will demand their own labor. Immigrants provide demand for labor by contributing to collective demand and may not actually worsen unemployment issues. Ozcan touches on a crucial piece of information by stating that immigration has no significant impact on unemployment, rather, there is a high effect running from unemployment to migration to Australia. This supports Collin's implication that indicated unemployment decreases immigration, whereas immigration positively affects the unemployment rate. Furthermore,

Ozcan elaborates on how there is no substantial evidence found that immigration affects unemployment or wage levels, meaning the fear of “job stealing” that many citizens hold is quite unreasonable and inaccurate, with the truth being the opposite of what they believe. Foreign workers quite often accept jobs that are rejected by native workers and fill shortages in labor markets, which doesn’t lead to an increase in unemployment. Historically, immigrant men worked in steel, rubber, glass, etc factories, and the women worked factory assembly lines, clothing, textiles, etc. (Collins, “The Changing Political Economy of Australian Immigration”). Goot and Watson utilize the term “economic insecurity” when referring to those who feel threatened by immigrants “taking their jobs” (Goot and Watson).

Many migrants who come to Australia come via the Temporary Work (Skilled) (subclass 457) visa, or otherwise known as the 457 visa (Breen). Simply put, this visa allows for skilled workers to migrate to Australia long term but on a temporary basis, being designed to address labor shortages through the use of genuine skilled workers. With the 457 visa being more prevalent as compared to the permanent visas, this implies that the majority of these immigrants come to Australia to fill vacant and unwanted jobs as well as skilled labor the country requires, stimulating overall economic growth. The selection process for immigration in Australia is also determined by its points system (Collins, “The Changing Political Economy of Australian Immigration”). This points system is tailored to Australian needs and requirements and rewards points to potential migrants based on their characteristics. Points are awarded for characteristics such as English proficiency, skills, qualifications, education, as well as relevant employment experience and availability. Individuals with poor English proficiency and low formal education are less likely to have the opportunity to migrate to Australia. This requirement of skill and language proficiency essentially implies that the country only wants immigrants who will contribute and be a benefit to their society. However, this is often done without thought for the

conditions of the 457 immigrants. Luckily, in modern times, immigrants aren't solely relied on for factory work and other forms of employment that are undesirable and generally unsafe. The focus was placed on how immigration helped capital accumulation through exploitable labor. In previous decades, migration was strongly centered around migrant labor. Whereas today, the emphasis is not only on migrant labor, but also on migrant lives. The labor contributed by these individuals is crucial to the functioning of the Australian economy, but neglecting the care of these constituents can prove to be harmful for everyone.

Fidelma Breen examined several Irish 457 immigrants who came to Australia on a temporary work visa. One particular couple, Julie and Michael, have had their lives impacted by company focus on migrant labor rather than their lives and well-being. Simply put, Michael moved his family from Ireland to Australia through a 457 visa. After arriving, the company he was hired for informed him that he and the other 457 migrant workers were not up to Australian standards and had to pay for the \$5000 retraining course or choose to relocate back, in which they had to repay \$20,000 (Breen). After paying for his own retraining, Michael was away at work three weeks out of the month. Additionally, Michael and his family had to face the consequences of the company's failure to uphold their promised earnings whilst still being paid basic wages for extensive work. Following ongoing financial and familial struggles, eventually Michael and Julie's marriage fell apart, with Julie holding their choice of immigration responsible. Additionally, a similar situation occurred with Irish 457 migrant couple Natasha and Peter, whose relationship became domestically abusive due to Peter's extreme work stress. The unfortunate reality of the Australian 457 immigrant is that the companies and country reap the benefits of lower unemployment rates, higher wages for natives, and vacancies filled within companies requiring skilled labor. However, some instances with these immigrants result in them

getting the short end of the stick where they face financial and familial difficulties while in Australia.

Discrimination is defined as the distinction or preference based on forbidden groundings which serves the purpose of nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life (*Without prejudice: discrimination and refugees*). Being immigrants, discrimination is bound to occur in the lives of many Australian migrants at some point in their temporary or permanent stay in Australia. As mentioned previously, migrants will typically encounter hostility and constant accusation of job theft from native Australian born citizens (Goot and Watson). In fact, a recent survey shows that over half of all migrants feel unsafe at work, with 58 percent experiencing some form of wage theft (Convery). Many migrants experienced discrimination in the job application processes due to their visa status, despite having work rights, which ultimately pushed them towards exploitative employers. Only 26 percent of migrants were able to recoup stolen wages out of the 58 percent who experienced wage theft. Wage-theft practices included paying low rates cash-in-hand, not paying penalty rates for weekend or overtime, and illegal, unpaid “trial” shifts. For instance, Antonio Michell was a 36-year-old man who was employed as a physiotherapist for 8 years prior, in a Chilean hospital. But after struggling to find work as a temporary migrant, he resorted to jobs in construction, plumbing, hospitality, and cleaning. These jobs he began working were quite unsafe for him, and he too experienced instances of wage theft. In Australia it's also fairly difficult to obtain a permanent job in order to gain a permanent visa. Still, migrants tend to discover they are discriminated against for permanent jobs when they do not hold a permanent visa. Michell gives tremendous insight into this issue as well, stating, “We see engineers mowing lawns and doctors driving Ubers. That’s a huge disadvantage not only to the workers themselves

but to society that really needs the skills and experience that migrant workers bring to this country.” Discrimination against working migrants in Australia ultimately inhibits everyone, not just the migrant workers. It’s crucial for Australia to do away with economic insecurity and move towards fair treatment and compensation for migrants, especially migrants whose skills contribute a great deal to society.

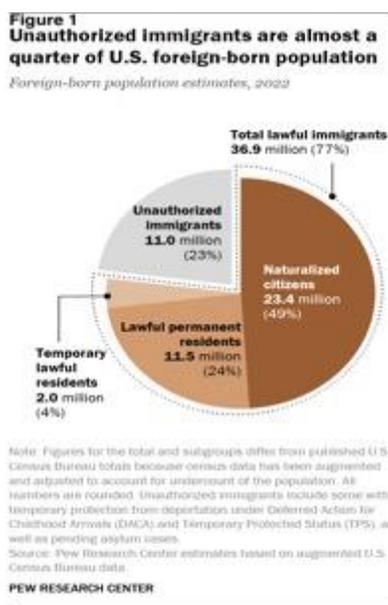
## THE UNITED STATES

With immigration being a consistent topic of discussion within the United States, it is important to elaborate on the topic of the economic benefits immigration has on the country. Nancy Foner of Hunter College discusses the distorted recollection of immigration history in the US. She states that north of a hundred million Americans today can trace their ancestry to a man, woman, or child who immigrated to the country through Ellis Island between the 1890s and 1920s (Foner). Unlike modern-day immigrants, these “older” immigrants are revered in modern times as the embodiments of the American dream, pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, working hard, and assimilating into American society. Nevertheless, their experience wasn’t as romanticized as it seems. Although many old immigrants were white, they were still subject to discrimination, as one could still be seen as white whilst still being racially inferior to other whites, which was the case for many Jews and Italians. Social mobility was also quite slow for the second generation of European immigrants, with some not moving up the ladder at all. It wasn’t until the mid-twentieth century that the second and third generation of immigrants gained social and economic mobility through social intermixing and acculturation, particularly following WWII.

The U.S. immigrant population reached a record number of 47.8 million in 2023, which was an increase of 1.6 million from 2022 (Geiger). Marking this as the largest annual increase in

immigrant populations since 2000. In simpler terms, 14.3 percent of the U.S. population consists of immigrants today. This remains as one of the highest immigrant percentages seen since 1890, where immigrants consisted of 14.8 percent of the population. As of 2022, the majority of immigrants, being 77 percent, were in the country legally. And as displayed in Figure 1, 49 percent of migrants were naturalized U.S. citizens, 24 percent were lawful permanent residents, 4 percent were legal temporary residents, and 23 percent were unauthorized immigrants. When it comes to unauthorized immigrants, virtually all entered the country without legal permission or arrived on a nonpermanent visa that remained in the U.S. following its expiration.

Approximately 3 million of these unauthorized immigrants have temporary protection from deportation. These include Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), and asylum applicants, among others.



In modern times, the US economy benefits from over 10 billion dollars in taxed income and wages from immigrants whose social security and tax identification numbers are misaligned (Kim). Anna Joo Kim from Georgia Institute of Technology touched on immigrant economic “enclaves” in America, particularly in Los Angeles. She elaborates on the subtle transformations

the “ethnic economy” has undergone to become a broader “immigrant economy” which later encapsulates more than just the immigrant population, becoming more of a necessity towards the “primary economy”. In fact, the Los Angeles economy, at its heart, is an immigrant economy. Researcher Kim studies a sample of multi-ethnic Koreatown workers in several industries and examines the role of this enclave in relation to facilitating employment pathways for immigrants. The term “enclave” refers to a portion of territory within a larger territory whose inhabitants are culturally or ethnically distinct. Kim interviewed both documented and undocumented immigrants in Koreatown and found two types of relational informality that are crucial for the employment experiences of both Korean and Latinx. The first being that the ethnic social network assisted in finding “informal” employment, when individuals hire similar individuals to work for their local ethnic stores due to an increased likelihood of them understanding the cultural implications the job entails. Secondly, informality allows for employees to be paid with both cash and check. Typically, they’d be on the book for part-time hours but work full-time for the rest of the cash for the week. In fact, diverse crowds of immigrants in an enclave such as Koreatown allows for employment from the supplier to the migrant and a service towards the diverse population of Los Angeles. These populations may not be ethnically the same, but can still hold similarities that drive them to purchase goods from an alternative source. In some cases, migrants bond over the similarity of their ethnicity. These bonds prove to be effective in the hiring process in these small companies. The common theme exhibited across all these migrants was the fact that they usually hail from a non-English speaking household. The remarkable nature of the ethnic economy is that it is able to provide employment to non-English speakers whilst also providing services that benefit all groups, not just their own ethnic enclave. However, Kim found in several of her interviews with Korean and Latinx residents of Koreatown that seeking better wages and promotions proved to be slightly more difficult. For

instance, Korean immigrant Nara struggles with her fluctuating immigration status without a green card. Working for a hair salon for 7 years, the base pay increased every six months but eventually plateaued, and ultimately, she was working the minimum wage. However, due to her immigrant status and her employer, it becomes increasingly difficult to seek out higher wages, especially in places outside of her ethnic enclave due to external employers being less sympathetic towards her status. Many of the interviewees that Kim interviewed came to the conclusion that finding work in larger establishments is possible but not preferred due to its difficulties and potential drawbacks. It was easiest to find jobs in smaller and immigrant owned businesses, which was particularly attributed to the familiarity and vouching that occurs, an environment that fosters non-English speakers, flexibility with formal/informal payment methods, and employers that were sympathetic towards varying immigration statuses. Many immigrants residing in ethnic enclaves hold similar experiences and difficulties with individuals like Nara, whose employment contributes a service to the functioning ethnic and primary economies with an occupation that benefits individuals of all backgrounds within and outside her ethnic enclave. Despite her contributions to society at large, individuals like Nara aren't exempt from experiencing strenuous difficulties, advocating for improved wages as well as social mobility without reliance and sole dependency on one's ethnic enclave.

Small businesses are the lifeline of the American economy. Responsible for two-thirds of net new jobs and approximately 44 percent of economic activity, small businesses drive the innovation and competitiveness of the U.S. economy (Advocacy). Although the small business share of GDP has dipped from 48 to 43.5 percent from 1998-2014, the GDP of small businesses has accrued by about 25 percent in real terms, or in other words, 1.4 percent annually. Large businesses still outpaced smaller ones by accumulating growth of 2.5 percent annually. Regardless, Major L. Clark, who assists in overseeing small-business policy, says this shows

small businesses are still major players. They keep inventing, hiring, and fueling growth, even if big companies have pulled ahead a bit. As of 2014, small businesses produced about \$5.9 trillion worth of goods and services. The three lead contributors of the small business sector are the real estate/rental/leasing industry, the wholesale and retail trade, and the manufacturing and mining sector. With this foundation of small businesses established, it is critical to understand the role immigrants assume in relation to small businesses. Studies have shown that immigrants generally manage to create new businesses at a higher rate than U.S.-born citizens (Cadenas et al.). They are immensely entrepreneurial and seize opportunities to create new goods and services whenever the chance is given. In fact, reports have found that as of 2024, 46 percent of all Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children, otherwise defined as “New Americans” (Hubbard). To name a few, there is Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, who was the son of a Syrian immigrant, as well as Tony Xu, founder and CEO of DoorDash, who is a Chinese immigrant. 224 New American businesses posted a combined revenue of \$8.1 trillion, which is an amount that exceeds the GDP of every nation other than the United States and China (“New Report Shows How Immigrant Entrepreneurs Create Jobs Across the”). Moreover, their total global workforce consisted of 14.8 million people. American progress thrives on immigrant success; the backbone of the United States economy is primarily comprised of immigrant businesses. These businesses, both small and large, provide vital services and employ millions across the country. For this reason, immigrants stand head and shoulders above the rest, being 21.7 percent of all U.S. entrepreneurs and consistently demonstrating a higher entrepreneurial initiative as compared to U.S. natives. Reports such as these display the profound economic impact of immigrants on the American economy and society. Still, even with an incredible drive to succeed, these entrepreneurs encounter slight setbacks in America.

There are still a plethora of socially oppressive barriers hindering immigrants from accessing higher education and transitioning into jobs with higher pay. Additionally, barriers can also include the increasingly hostile sociopolitical environment pitted against immigrants, federal limits on all forms of immigration, and inhumane immigration enforcement practices that brew psychological distress in immigrant communities. But despite the setbacks of being dealt an unfair set of cards, immigrants still display high resilience, perseverance, and psychological strength. One of the ways immigrants respond to these challenges is attending community colleges, which give them educational opportunities and workforce development in an affordable and accessible manner. The ambition and drive of wanting to succeed, a trait commonly found in their fellow immigrant business owners, supersedes the barriers and disadvantages dealt to them. Researchers Cadenas et. al. conducted a study of 11 immigrant community college student participants through the Poder program. The Poder program was essentially designed to support entrepreneurial development of low-income, otherwise historically undeserving, community college students. Poder fulfills gaps for analyzing educational interventions that observe collective strategies of mobility among people of color in America. One participant, Joel, a Cameroonian male, elaborates on the opportunities presented in America, saying that he is motivated to succeed entrepreneurially in America as a result of the success he had in Cameroon despite the severe corruption and shallow opportunities. Joel believes that if he was able to succeed in Cameroon, he is “200 percent confident” that he will excel in America thanks to the exceptional levels of opportunity and freedom. Furthermore, the role of family holds tremendous weight in entrepreneurial endeavors, as evidenced by Mexican female, Jade. Jade expounds upon the topic of family, stating that she was inspired by her grandfather's entrepreneurial attitude and wished her mother, who had a similar mindset, had been given the opportunity to flourish without the hindrance of poverty. Jade, has a strong foundation of family supporting her

ambitions in the business world. This support system is crucial for the success of small immigrant run businesses, as mentioned previously with the ethnic enclave/economy. The support of family members as well as members of one's own ethnic group allows for this supportive environment that fosters and encourages entrepreneurial growth despite setbacks and barriers.

## IMPLICATIONS REGARDING BOTH AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES

Australia and the United States alike are both attractive immigration hotspots, presenting great opportunities and benefits as well as drawbacks and barriers to those who decide to migrate to either country. Over the years, Australia has undergone profound changes in its immigration policies, emphasizing economic-based policies (prac case study). An instance mentioned earlier was the dominance of the 457 immigration visa as compared to the permanent resident visa. By investing in skilled labor from immigrants, Australia is able to find labor, fill vacancies, and reap economic growth. This seems to be the biggest difference between the two countries. Australia tends to selectively hand out 457 visas based on its points system, where there are extensive criteria to be met in order to have one's foot in the door. For the United States, there is no point distribution system guiding the selection process of immigrants, nor is the most common visa a work visa. The United States distributes the majority of its visas through random selection or lottery for those who apply (“Green card through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program | USCIS”). Unlike Australia, the United States gives visas out more liberally compared to the restrictions and requirements of Australia. Additionally, the U.S. has a significantly higher number of unauthorized immigrants who overstayed their visas, with approximately 11 million unauthorized immigrants compared to 70 thousand in Australia (Uibu).

On the individual level, the experiences of migrants in both countries are fairly similar. Immigrants in both societies tend to be sole contributors to the economy, like utilizing skilled labor in Australia or being a small business owner in America. However, immigrants in both societies aren't exempt from their respective challenges; rather, they contribute much to their economies but still bear the weight of financial difficulty, political pressure, and societal stigmatization. Instances of these can be seen in situations such as Michael and Julie's marriage failing in Australia and Nara's stagnancy in her mobility up the social ladder in the U.S..

In the political scene, immigration has always been a topic of profound debate, notably becoming more prominent in recent years. Following a poll done for a study, it was revealed that 28 percent of American participants find that immigration is the top issue facing America today (Roy). A separate poll also indicated that illegal immigration was a critical threat to national security. In terms of Australia, a new study suggests that the majority would like lower levels of migration but support increased skilled labor migration, and also oppose decreasing international student numbers. Still, in a sample of over 5,000 Australian individuals, over 50 percent believe that migration levels are too high. In fact, there is a movement in Australia known as Australians Against Further Immigration (AAFI) ("Australians against further immigration"). This was an Australian far-right political party which described itself as "eco-nationalist", and was opposed to mass immigration and aimed for zero net migration.

## CONCLUSION

In both Australia and the United States, immigrants have long served as vital pillars of economic and social development, despite their numerous challenges. While the roles of migrants in both countries slightly differ, with Australia emphasizing skilled labor through the 457 visa and the U.S. focusing on entrepreneurship and ethnic economies, migrants fill labor

vacancies, are the foundation of essential industries, and stimulate economic growth. However, this contribution is commonly paired with discrimination and barriers that hinder the well-being of migrant individuals. The selective nature of Australia's immigration policies may offer economic efficiency, but at times comes at the expense of migrant welfare, as seen in cases like Michael and Julie's. Furthermore, the U.S.'s more open immigration framework fosters entrepreneurial innovation, yet still leaves many immigrants vulnerable to exploitation and stagnation, as experienced by individuals like Nara. Ultimately, if both nations hope to continue reaping the economic benefits of immigration, they must address the disparities exhibited by migrants, viewing them as more than just their labor and skills, but also as human beings. Ensuring fair and just treatment whilst allowing societal mobility for migrants will not only benefit migrants, but also further their economic contributions and ultimately enrich the societies and countries they help build.

## DISCUSSION

Being a first-generation American who is the child of an immigrant family, I found the research and literature of this paper quite interesting. Though I cannot speak from an Australian perspective, I can definitely resonate with the entrepreneurial aspect of U.S. migrants. My parents immigrated to the U.S. in 2000 and we were quite poor due to my parents only completing high school in Fiji, low experience, and immigration status in the Bay Area. However, my parents took an initiative to start their own business dedicated to serving Fijian customers all over Northern California. This entrepreneurial step they took allowed for us to stand on our own two feet as a family and gave us the opportunity to serve our community. The economic benefit immigrants contribute as a result of starting small companies and working vacant jobs that citizens refuse to occupy proves to be of great value to the country. This

sentiment can also be applied to the migrants of Australia through the 457 visa. Although Australia isn't as open as the U.S. in regards to letting migrants in, its merit-based system still reaps great economic benefits given by migrants on work visas.

However, from the lens of the immigrants, there are still issues and drawbacks that need to be addressed. As shown in previous paragraphs, the well-being of migrant lives are often worn and burnt out as a result of their unique situations. For one, moving to an unfamiliar country and dealing with financial, cultural, and linguistic challenges proves to be tremendously stressful for these individuals who are trying to make ends meet. Additionally, the stigma of immigrants "stealing jobs" or being incompetent and unintelligent to keep up in society is a great weight upon their shoulders.

Regardless, I view the presence of immigrants in both countries as a great economic benefit. I feel that countries that are more conservative in letting in new migrants should look at the contributions and output of migrants in these countries and reconsider their current systems. Examining the significant impact immigration has had on the U.S. and Australia can allow for these countries to model what true freedom and opportunity looks like, even for those who are foreign.

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