

Preface

Australia has had a formal immigration program for more than fifty years. During this time immigration has contributed to nearly half of the country's total population growth. Today, nearly one-quarter of the population are foreign-born; most of them are either naturalised citizens or have rights to permanent residence. The immigration program has always emphasised permanent settlement for migrants. Therefore, besides the setting of numerical targets, immigration policy in Australia also includes the setting of immigrant selection criteria and programs to assist migrants in their settlement after migration. These immigrant selection and settlement policies have evolved over the years in response to demographic, social, economic and political considerations.

As an initiative to provide more information to better evaluate its immigrant selection and settlement policies, the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in 1993 commissioned a longitudinal survey of recently arrived immigrants. The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia tracked a sample of these immigrants, interviewing them about their settlement experiences three times over the first three and half years of their residence in Australia. A second group of immigrants who arrived some six years later were also interviewed twice during the first one and half years after their arrival in Australia.

In the interim period between the arrival of the two cohorts of immigrants, there were some changes to immigrant selection policy and criteria as well as changes in migrants' access to welfare benefits. Furthermore, economic and labour market conditions in Australia improved considerably. These changes in public policy and the economic environment provide an interesting case for comparing the two cohorts of immigrants in the longitudinal survey in order to provide important information on whether, and how, immigrants' early settlement experiences were affected. This is essentially the issue addressed by the chapters in this book.

The book is an outcome of a research project – Public Policy and Immigrant Settlement in Australia – funded by a Discovery Project grant from the Australian Research Council. The aims of the project were to explore the role of labour market conditions, income support policy and immigrant selection criteria in promoting immigrant settlement in Australia

through an examination of the two immigrant cohorts in the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia. Immigrant settlement outcomes to be examined included labour market participation, job search behaviour, language skills, health and housing arrangements.

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The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia was the first longitudinal survey of recently arrived immigrants to be undertaken in any country. Since the completion of this survey other countries, including the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand, have embarked on similar surveys. It is to be hoped that these initiatives will lead to similar studies of immigrant settlement as in this book. With many countries today being immigrant destination countries, knowledge about the factors contributing to the successful settlement of immigrants that emerge from such studies will be important for policy development in these countries.

Siew-Ean Khoo and Deborah Cobb-Clark
The Australian National University